

THE SIX-SENTENCES TEST

Kalu

Cambridge 2016

Can you speak about your enjoyments for six connected-sentences?

Can you name six persons, from your monthly life, whom you believe are happy to hear you speak those six-sentences, regularly?

Can you name six persons, from your monthly life, whom you love or respect enough to hear them speak their six-sentences regularly?

Dare you fill in the table below?

CATEGORY	PERSONS WHO ASK YOU	PERSONS YOU ASK
Parent		
Blood-Kin-folk		
Life-Partner		
Friend		
Teacher/Mentor		
Work-Time Colleague		
Play-Time Colleague		

WHAT WOULD THE ENTRIES HAVE BEEN WHEN YOU WERE AGED 15, 25, 35, 50, 60,70 ?

A DIALOGUE

Rueti What the hell are you talking about !!!!

Draxl Let's start again. May I assume that you *know* what you *enjoy* doing, what gives you pleasure?

Rueti You may. But I don't want a lecture about it from you!

Draxl I am not *judging* what you choose to do - whether alone or with others, whether legal or illegal or immoral, or just watching. But I can assume, it seems, that you know *what* these activities are that you enjoy?

Rueti I've just said so, haven't I?

Draxl Can I also assume that you are the *world-expert* on speaking about what *you* enjoy : not about the activity as such - its techniques, or its moral worth - but the fact that you enjoy it in your special way: and no one else can speak about this better than you?

Rueti Yes, it's *my* life: so *I* speak best about it. As you say, I'm the only world-expert on me.

Draxl And can I assume that there is an additional enjoyment in speaking about your enjoyments to someone who is genuinely interested in the fact that you experienced such an enjoyment?

Rueti I'm like everyone else on the planet. I enjoy doing certain things : and I enjoy talking about it afterwards.

Draxl To those who are genuinely interested?

Rueti Well I'm hardly going to waste my breath on those who aren't interested, am I ?

Draxl Indeed, I hope not. And you are capable of *saying* what you enjoyed and why? You can find the best words?

Rueti Yes, I bloody well can! They might not be your lahdedah words, but they will be just right for me and for the person I'm talking to. I won't be ermming and ahing and I'll be able to tell a good story.

Draxl I did not doubt you could.

Rueti So I pass the first test : *Can* you speak about your enjoyments for six connected-sentences? Yes!

Draxl Yes, you do! Well Done!

Rueti But you obviously think some poor bastards can't.

Draxl Isn't that ordinary life: surely you've met grown men & women like that?

Rueti For sure! Losers!

Draxl That's what intrigues me. Perhaps "can't-speak" really means "daren't-speak! ". It is one of the topics I discuss below.

Rueti Good luck with that!

Draxl Thank-you. But there is still the second part of the test.
Can you name six persons, from your monthly life, whom you believe are happy to hear you speak those six-sentences regularly?

Rueti I'm rather busy right now.

Draxl And the third final part. *Can* you name six persons, from your monthly life, whom you love or respect enough to hear them speak their six-sentences regularly?

Rueti Extraordinarily busy!

Draxl I respect that. I won't press. Perhaps I might leave you with this very simple chart to fill in. You might call it your truth-proof.

Rueti I promise nothing. As I say, I am very busy.

Draxl Here it is! Twelve names, or more. It will take less than a minute. You're not being asked to recall medieval popes : but the best people in your life. Finally, I'm talking about *respectful and affectionate* asking and listening and speaking. We live in such viciously, inattentive times : perfectly illustrated by the cartoon in which a young woman who is staring at a screen and typing one-handed, with her other hand points her mobile at her 'friend' and says "*Keep talking: I've an app that pays attention.*" Very few people who live in cities are likely to have a genuine emergency in the next hour. But human curiosity and restlessness means that almost everyone who can check an

electronic device, by moving three inches or three feet, will feel compelled to check, no matter what the Speaker is saying. I take as my reference point for a human conversation, the absolute condition that all the interrupting devices - tv, mobile phones, pagers, laptops, i-watches etc - are switched off and ideally not in the room.

Reuti Alright! I get it! You don't talk to mobodies : people who can't detach from their telecoms. You think this is bad now? In twenty-years time, mobile-keyboards will be placed under the skin at the wrist, powered by one's beating-heart, video-camera facility by morse-blinking, audio direct to the inner-ear, and holograms in left-field. No one will ever be switched-off.

Draxl I can't wait. And you know why? Because that will return us to the innocent uncertainty of attention of the past: when you never quite knew if the Listener was listening to you or daydreaming. You couldn't look inside their heads. That's why old-Speakers, like your granddad said, after every few sentences "*Do you receive my meaning*" or "*Do you understand?*" or "*Yes?*". But a visible mobile is always proof of inattention, now or coming any second now. That is why young people resort to the use of Up-speak, inflecting every statement as a question: desperately trying to get the Listener's attention. Anyway, enough of all that. There is still the Test. Doesn't this table tell you more about a person than almost any other twelve words. And if you had kids you *actually* loved, as well as saying publicly that you did, wouldn't you want them to fill in all the boxes.

CATEGORY	PERSONS WHO ASK YOU	PERSONS YOU ASK
Parent		
Blood-Kin-folk		
Life-Partner		
Friend		
Teacher/Mentor		
Work-Time Colleague		
Play-Time Colleague		

Reuti Alright! Give me the pen!

(All the stories of the famous that I mention can be confirmed in libraries and on the web. All the other personal examples are, or are disguised as, clinical case histories. Reuti is an imagined Reader.)

COMMENT-1 : CONTEXT

Draxl You've named only five persons: three in one column, two in the other.

Rueti So?

Draxl Out of the six billion people on the planet : of whom you know personally a few hundred?

Rueti Are you calling me a loser?

Draxl Not at all. I congratulate you. And thank you for being so honest: and not faking names. Most people will barely be able to name three.

Rueti Really?!

Draxl Indeed! *If* they are telling the truth, as you seem to be.

Rueti Seem?

Draxl Is it really five or is it less? It's not ten!

Rueti Why, because I'm not clever enough?

Draxl It has nothing to do with cleverness, gender, age, health, sexuality, religion, politics, wealth or class or power.

Rueti So why can't or won't most people offer the six-sentences when asked the Enjoyment Question?

Draxl Because they don't *believe* that the person who is asking, is *really* asking in kindness and/or that they will pay attention to the answer, and not interrupt with a 'better' story, and not attack.

Rueti Who plays mean tricks like that?

Draxl Really, you're asking that - as if you haven't been tricked, mocked and humiliated by enough people. Why do you think you name only five persons?

Rueti Perhaps I've been unfair, too picky.

Draxl It's not complicated. The Good-Asker is the person who has proven they were the Good-Listener.

Rueti What do you mean?

Draxl I accept the barely believable invitation to spell it out! Even if one can, that is if one has the ability, to think of six good sentences to describe a recent enjoyment, that does not automatically guarantee that the Listener is a good, meaning kind & attentive, listener.

Rueti How does the Listener pass the six-sentences test?!

Draxl Again, it has nothing to do with cleverness, gender, age, health, sexuality, religion, politics, class, wealth or power : but everything to do with kind-heartedness and intellectual goodwill. The further proof is that Listener also asks the Speaker, and asks because it matters, *follow-up questions* to Speaker's initial six-sentence-speech.

Rueti So the listener has to produce six sentences?

Draxl It is not a machine-test or any kind of contest, tit for tat: or for showing one can make-up clever questions. The proof of listening and of goodwill is asking some follow-up questions which invite the Speaker to enjoy saying some more about their enjoyment.

Rueti No one dies having a chat ! Christ on a bike - you do go on! Really, you kill me!

Draxl What three things will a person die without?

Rueti Money, sex and drugs.

Draxl Long before feeding those appetites, one might have been permanently damaged by failing to get the other three.

Rueti Vitamin C, beetroot and trigonometry? Just joking! I know my flash quotes - *"A man may live three days without food, three weeks without water, but not one hour without poetry."*

Draxl During the Nazi occupation of Holland, the young Audrey Hepburn did get enough poetry and dance but not enough food. This caused permanent damage to her body, such that she could never be accepted as a ballet dancer.

Rueti Well, that makes her meagre breakfast at Tiffany's even more ironic.

- Draxl But even enough food and water are not enough to thrive. Consider the infant in its mother's / carer's arms. It looks round the room, enjoying the familiar or strange sights , and then looks at its mother. Being an 'in-fans', without-speech, it has no words yet with which to say it has enjoyed looking round : so it merely smiles. If the mother does not offer a smile and encouragement, the infant will be surprised, then troubled. If the mother holds a still-face for forty seconds, the child will become distressed. Should the mother repeat such withholding of response, the baby will go quiet, stop exploring, stop enjoying. Some will mistake this for being a good baby.
- Rueti But, once they can talk, kids never shut up - *Look at me, mum ! Look at me, dad! Listen! Why?! ever five, damn minutes till bedtime.*
- Draxl The parent still has all the power: to withhold interest, response, encouragement. It is a curious truth of human-animal life that even young children can tell if their parent is genuinely interested or not in what he/she is doing or saying.
- Rueti Even household pets can tell : and they protest. But few children, young or adult, would dare to challenge their parent's pretending.
- Draxl Indeed. It can get worse. here's a famous story. Flush with joy at his success at a society ball, Byron, no longer a child but a young Lord, approaches his dragon-parent and says "*Mother, I'm happy!*". Before he can say anymore, she instantly replies "*No you're not!*".
- Rueti I thought only his dad was mad.
- Draxl Many people, rich or poor, *expect* to hear inattention, indifference or even this kind of vicious negation of their story-sentences of enjoyment in every human conversation they are in. They expect it from everyone else in the world, because they had it enough in their family, who also insisted every day how much they loved them. So they learn to trim their tales of enjoyment, and eventually not even to begin them.
- Rueti What a life! But yes, it's true. I begin to recall my own examples that prove that you are not exaggerating when you say that many, many adults feel that other men & women, including their own kinfolk and friends will withhold genuine attention and interest: will not let him/her complete six sentences : or, if they let him/her complete, they won't have been listening or, if they were listening, their reply will prove that it didn't really matter to them what s/he said.

Draxl We've all got our stories of living-room monsters. You'll know people like these.

Hortense, a 55 year old retired cello-teacher, once said to me :
"My mother has never let me finish a sentence."

Gerald, a 22 year old electrician, once said to me :
"My father never remembers anything I tell him. So I'm giving up my apprenticeship."

Alessandra, a 26 year old microbiologist, once said to me :
"My mother complained to me that she feels my elder sister is always chasing after her for something."

Giacomo, a 53 year old architect, once said to me :
"When I tried to tell my father that I was sleeping badly after my recent heart-attack, he interrupted straightaway, to say how badly he'd been sleeping and his reflux has worsened and this tea's cold..."

Li-Quan, 73, a retired fisherman, once said to me :
"I've known my daughter-in-law almost thirty years. She's never once asked me about my life! When I met her, she was such a wall-flower. If I hadn't introduced her to my son, she'd still be a spinster."

Rueti Yes, some people are so damaged that new people, other people, outside the family, can't invite or drag even three sentences out of them.

Draxl The saddest thing is the way that after expressing an initial sentence of great joy, they suddenly clam-up in front of you, as if afraid someone else has come into the room and will punish them, or you've magically become that punisher.

Rueti I can't recall the number of times in my adult life, even in the past year, someone has said to me: *"What a match / film / book / concert / dance... I've just had!"* : and I've responded by opening my arms with a smile, as if giving them the microphone for as long as they wish, five minutes, fifteen minutes of creative reflection on the object of their enjoyment. Alas, they barely get to sentence-four and dry up. And, what's worse, the first three were stuttering and flimsy. My personal horror is when people say *"It wasn't the best match / film / pasta / swim... I've ever had in my life"* without ever stating what the comparator was nor the criteria for its extreme award. So they've failed to tell two experiences properly.

Draxl Not everyone is as clever as you!

Rueti Ha! Ha! It's what I might have said to you in the past. Now, at least, I've learned it's not about cleverness.

Draxl But, by introducing the idea of comparisons you broaden the discussion enormously. You introduce the community: the people living and dead who have defined and done the activity that is enjoyed? These will always include human beings other than one's blood-kin.

Rueti I do? How?

Draxl We agreed a moment ago you are the world-expert on what you enjoy?

Rueti I still am.

Draxl Absolutely - you can say - *"I enjoyed, let us call it, activity-X."* And no-one else in the world - no King, no President, no Mafia-boss, not even your mean mother - can say, *"You didn't enjoy X!"*

Rueti I'm glad this is clear to all !

Draxl You can even add, *"I like X, because X is the sort of thing I like."*

Rueti That doesn't add anything though, doesn't explain anything.

Draxl Precisely! You don't always have to explain your pleasures, let alone analyse & justify them to other people. It might not be much of a conversation if that's all you say, but it's not a crime!

Rueti What a relief!

Draxl But everything changes the moment you say *"X is good"* or *"X is better than Y"* or *"Everyone should try to enjoy X"*.

Rueti Why?

Draxl Because these are fundamentally different kinds of statement from plain autobiographical ones : they are *comparative* and *evaluative* and *prescriptive* judgements which involve other people. All language is social, belonging to all, and all language-use, especially analysis, must be clear to all. Just recall how infuriated you feel when someone else, a child or worse a grown-up, says about an activity that you

have enjoyed, the four little words *"I think that's boring"* and no more. You almost beg them to say "Why" and they don't.

Rueti Describe, compare, evaluate, prescribe. That's a lot of work for six sentences, let alone one!

Draxl That's what subordinate clauses are for! Any human activity can be done in four ways - *badly, properly, well, and originally*. Everyone in the group that does them nowadays (and did them in the past) has a right to contribute to these judgements, to affirm received criteria of judgement or even to suggest new criteria.

Rueti Yes, we all say things like *"Anyone who knows about action-films / pigeons / chess / quilt-making / football and so on knows that such an object/action/activity has parts/elements (criteria) such as A* C* S* M* etc if it is to be of that kind. And this thing that I've just seen is one of the best of its kind. Check it out and you tell me!"*.

Draxl You see I don't have to teach you anything. You know enough. Two examples of an activity or an object, a tennis-match or a film-noir or a silk-dress or a garden or a soufflé , are compared by the way they use the required elements.

Rueti And we say one is better if it does the elements better.

Draxl That sounds a lot easier than it is.

Rueti Really?

Draxl Really really?! If most people are offering criteria and comparisons, most of the time, I'm obviously not going to the right places! My experience is also of people drying up after two autobiographical remarks : more about them than the film or the pigeons or the quilt.

Rueti You're saying they don't know the elements and criteria?

Draxl Sometimes people don't know, because they haven't bothered to find out. I'll talk about gob-shites in a bit. The tragic speakers I have been discussing with you are those who do know, who could give an informed and interesting account but who don't, perhaps daren't.

Rueti Perhaps they still don't trust you? It takes time to learn the knack.

- Draxl But not forever. One can get it in childhood. Imagine a kindly Uncle asking the enjoyment question to Skecz his seven-year-old niece : *"What have you enjoyed doing at half-term?"*
- Rueti Luckier than me at seven!
- Draxl She might say : *"Well firstly, I didn't have to get up early for school. So I saw the nightingale singing in our garden. Her throat is so white, it's like a tiny mirror of the moon. I got some new bangles from Gran. Oh yes, I bossed the conker match. That was Thursday afternoon at the Community Centre. Jo, Jan & Jem & I are going the pictures tomorrow. Dad took me fishing."*
- Rueti As I said luckier....
- Draxl Children can go on like that for ages, and *then* they suddenly stop. It's delightful. Imagine the Uncle asking the follow up question, *"Will you tell me some more about your conker match, please? It sounds very exciting"*.
- Rueti That's where Skecz falls apart!
- Draxl But imagine her saying : *"Yes, I beat two girls and three boys. Mine was smaller than Pat's in the final : but I had soaked it in vinegar the night before, baking Gas-Mark 2 and got a slightly elastic string with a double-reef-knot. His flick was all over the place. The Champ on the website says - Get some wrap round your thumb to get that parabola right. Pat got so impatient, he nearly took his own eye out with the recoil. I think it's going to help me with my fishing cast...."*
- Rueti Some 7 year old!
- Draxl But ordinary, not a trophy child. She might not know the words 'element' and 'criteria' : but she has worked out you can give simple answers to questions : or you can try to give more complex ones, if you simply believe that someone else is really interested. Imagine the Uncle smiling encouragingly, and then saying *"Can you show me how to do a double-reef-knot? I used to know when I was a Lifeboat Volunteer many years ago, but I seem to have forgotten so much."*
- Rueti Crikey, you're making me jealous of her now!
- Draxl Ha! Do you see the ordinariness of it? If her Uncle keeps talking to her in this style and rhythm, then should she ever have to fill in that form above, she could name him.

- Rueti Simple replies, complex replies. Easy peasy!
- Draxl Complexity and maturation are judged by the ability to form generalisations and to offer examples and counter-examples to them: and by the ability to use abstract concepts as well as words pointing to tangible things.
- Rueti We all get there in the end, like getting longer muscles & pubic hair and wisdom teeth.
- Draxl You'd be surprised how many people don't get to abstract operations. Just recall *Newsnight*, the BBC flagship programme of respectability and supposedly adult-thinking - how it devalues all its metaphors by illustrating them with tawdry images, as if it were speaking to pre-adults.
- Rueti You've proved through Skecz that it can start quite young, and the skill will gradually just get better and more creative. But you insist that it can only start with the believable enjoyment question? And it can get poisoned or fail to start without it? So you're not just over-defending lucky, lahdedah clever bastards?
- Draxl Let me state it as a creed. I do believe, it is my faith, that when the Speaker believes absolutely in the genuineness of the Asker's invitation to answer the enjoyment-question, then they will attain, spontaneously, their best eloquence : and again I say, regardless of education or wealth or power or position. Their muscles will relax - neck, eyes, stomach, hands : they will feel they have been granted all the time in the world to think and speak, the metaphorical microphone is theirs for as long as they wish, and it will not be snatched from them mid-sentence. Then, something lovely will happen to the Speaker's sentences.

- 1) They will become longer,
- 2) They will contain more clauses, main and subordinate: perhaps a total of thirty six!
- 3) Creative images and metaphors will be found.
- 4) They will express both concrete thinking and abstract thinking.
- 5) Nervousness about time & interruption will not make them feel they should counter-attack by resorting to weak generalisations and shallow argumentative phrases like 'not necessarily'.
- 6) They will radiate to the Asker / Listener waves of de-sublimation & sublimation : communicating delight, gratitude and an invitation to reply in spirit.

Rueti That is quite some creed to hold.

Draxl It is truer than most political and religious creeds. It is easier to prove than all of them. It is often seen in the psycho-therapy room. For some people, teens or geriatrics, that is the first time in their lives that they feel they can speak without interruption to someone who is genuinely attentive. I recall a Japanese patient who moved from almost silent, but not barren, sessions to producing an astonishing array of metaphors. There is a perfect fictional proof in Billy Fisher's speech on his kestrel in the film *Kes*. In the playground afterwards, the class bully - who has been utterly bewildered by and envious of this display by the class scrawny-kid of passionate sentences about an original pleasure, an experience he has never had - provokes a physical fight.

Rueti It's hardly a revolution though is it?

Draxl It's far more than that! Because even if the Messiah were to appear : even if the King or President suddenly announced that every political and social policy and law you'd been fighting for in the streets and in meeting-halls for decades was granted, you might still enter your family lounge or your pub in absolute misery: because you know that there's still no-one to ask you such things, in a way you feel to be true.

Rueti My God! What does that tell you about the human capacity to withhold basic kindness, or grace, from those you say you love. I don't disagree. Look around you. Grown men and women return to and remain in lounges, pubs and staff-rooms, day after day after week after year, where ancient festering wounds are newly stabbed by silence and inattention by people who say that they love or respect them. Yes, the one question any adult, anywhere in the world, can answer immediately is therefore, *"How many people ask you the Enjoyment Question regularly?"*

Draxl Try asking it! But there is one other question even harder to ask. This question is one which will make such an adult want to kill you now: *"Why do you remain in that lounge, the so-called living-room : why daren't you leave and get some more genuine askers?"*

Rueti Because of course they have asked themselves it a million times. And they seem to know what the words 'Remain' or 'Leave' mean.

Draxl In a hotel bar, I chanced upon a 75 year-old mining engineer from Bucharest, who stayed once a month. Every such Sunday, for a year, it was the same conversational arc. He told me of an honourable life of political daring and commitment, far surpassing mine. Then he added that his family life was a sewer of failure and regret : so given this equation, he was wasting his time & pension on cheap whisky & lame horses. He looked dejectedly into his glass. Often he'd see Putin on the bar tv and launch into a tirade, which went on and on and on. He seemed most alive then, but still quite dead of spirit. One time, after such a bashing of a man, who did deserve much bashing, he suddenly stopped and said in a surprising tone of shame *"Oh God, I'm just using this rage at him as an excuse to not do anything about my family."*

Rueti Were you tempted to go another bar?

Draxl I was in a bar near the fanzone in Paris in 98 meeting a citizen that I knew . She introduced me to the others as a counsellor. A 30 year old pharmacist said, with almost pan-American pride that she was seeing a psychotherapist. Later, and for the first and only time in my life, I suddenly asked her, a stranger: *"How many people do you know who ask you the Enjoyment Question regularly."* She instantly asked what that was: but of course she knew, and then said : *"Why do you ask?"*.
"Because", I replied, *"If you had four people who ask you the question regularly: one parent, one partner and two friends, you wouldn't need therapy."*
She suddenly turned to her friend, and said accusingly *"You never ask me the Enjoyment Question!"*.
The friend was baffled. But I thought - how strange a thing is proof.

Rueti Families might fail: but so might psycho-therapy?

Draxl The training certainly does : as does the training in social-work, prison-work or religious work, or philosophy, what Freud called the 'impossible professions'.

Rueti A big gobful, even for a mouth like yours.

Draxl Psycho-therapists are professionally required to undergo their own therapy, as well as reading the theory of therapy. Priests & nuns are placed under spiritual directors. Civilians might reasonably conjecture that after all that study and all their own therapy & meditation, they would be saner and braver individuals than before they entered the therapeutic space or the holy space. Wouldn't you?

- Rueti Absolutely : though I do add the phrase - 'in an ideal world'. How do you judge *saner and braver* ?
- Draxl A realistic caution! I suggest that one way of being saner and braver is that one rearranges and renegotiates all one's relationships : so that in none of them does one ever again feel any sense of humiliation and violence. If the parent / partner / friend /colleague refuses to renegotiate, and if they are likely to repeat their subtle and brutal humiliations, then one leaves, silently. A monumental first step would be the six-sentences test. Very few psychotherapists, priests, prison-wardens, head-masters, social-workers or philosophers would pass this.
- Rueti That hardly reassures the civilians among us. So the helpers and healers remain quite damaged?
- Draxl Alas yes! The absence of each type of Enjoyment-Question-Asker - parent, partner, kinsman, friend, work-colleague, playmate - is a precise and separate wound, a sore that festers for decades. It might continue to fester after therapy.
- Rueti But doesn't having a loving wife - male or female - make up for having a vicious mother or father: or doesn't having a good-friend outside work make up for being surrounded by backstabbers at work?
- Draxl It "makes up" more at the intellectual level rather than the emotional level. One still grieves bitterly for each absence. One remains bewildered by why other adults, people who say they love or at least respect you, won't give you six-sentences of attention.
- Rueti But surely you must not mis-see the new, genuinely kind person because other people have been or remain beastly to you?
- Draxl Absolutely not!
- Rueti So why do some people withhold six-sentences of attention? How can they be such vicious bastards!

[Bell rings]

At last - the pizza boy!

COMMENT 2 : THE HEALTHY & THE DAMAGED

Draxl I feel full and satisfied.

Rueti As if you've spoken or listened-to six-good-sentences!

Draxl You're learning a new way of thinking. We've enjoyed sharing some good food.

Rueti Without the labour of having to prepare it or wash-up. Thanks for getting the bill.

Draxl You're welcome. Before I try to answer your question about the damaged people, I want to make a simple point about currency.

Rueti You know I'll get the bill next time!

Draxl Of course! You and I have never quarrelled about money. I'm trying to make a different point. Money is the last currency humans get. It's the fourth and the least important.

Rueti I must introduce you to my one-eyed, loan-shark. Alright - what are the first three?

Draxl From birth - milk, touch, words.

Rueti What about love?

Draxl Love is manifest in the action, the way the milk, touch and words are offered. All can be offered without love, even with hate. Even young babies know the difference. It is not until teen years that children begin to understand money. But infants know what it is to enjoy receiving an enjoyable thing and also enjoy giving an enjoyable thing.

Rueti Really!

Draxl Here is a human experience of more human value than having great riches or the routine smiles of monarchs and popes. You should try to experience this, or at least witness it, long before you go travelling round the world. A baby is being fed by its carer, spoon by spoon. Suddenly, the baby raises its hand to stop the feeder's hand. It then grabs the hand and turns it towards the carer's face, so the spoon-full of food is at the carer's mouth. The baby smiles.

Rueti So!

Draxl So *you've* never fed or seen such a baby! Consider what it means. Every day, every hour, from infancy to old-age, humans experience needs and desires of all kinds : and also varieties of anxiety and terror that they will not get what they want.

Rueti What is the difference between need and desire?

Draxl Blind-panic! The intensity of the need leads to a physical and psychological sense of falling apart. One can't see the solution or the helper : one does not believe help will arrive or that there will be enough of it. The ideas of *lateness* and *scarcity* paralyse one. When help does arrive, for the first few moments one still doesn't believe it, one can't taste it.

Rueti That's true. When you're absolutely parched, you can't actually taste the first few gulps of water. It is only when the most intense need is over, and when you can see there is plenty of water for all, that you can feel a desire for it, a sense of taste. A few moments later, and not until then, you can think about other people's thirst.

Draxl Yes. And it is such a simple point this: pleasure always has three stages & intensities - relief, joy, and release.

Rueti Release?

Draxl You're right - 'release' seems a strange word in this context. But it is perfectly apt. It means release from the prison of one's self into sociality, into sharing with others: this, after all, is the defining human characteristic.

Rueti That's some glass of water!

Draxl I'm stating it as an ethical principle and truth. If you don't share, can't share, you are not living a *human* life - however successful it is by other criteria, like money and power and sexual conquest.

Rueti And spoon-baby understands this: all these psychological and ethical propositions.?

Draxl The baby was hungry and perhaps whimpered or cried. Food arrives. She gobbles the first two spoons. Then she slows down, and now believes there will be enough food. She starts playing with the food or the spoon or the feeder's hand or face. At some point, when she feels

satisfied, which is distinguishable from feeling full, she is able to think about sharing the food, to make the feeder as happy as she feels.

Rueti The anxiety of scarcity-for-me, the perception of enough-for-all. Yes, it's not rocket science. though I guess to greedy, vicious bastards it always is.

Draxl There is one other crucial stage. And again it can be learned by six or not learned by eighty.

Rueti I hope I know this one.

Draxl In Philadelphia, on placement, I visited the home of Vincenzo, my supervisor. His six-year old, Della, invited me to play a board-game with her, her nine-year old brother and mum. The first rule was to take turns. A couple of rounds in, she said to her brother Maximilian, *"It's your turn."* He replied, *"No it's yours, after mum's"*. She paused and said *"Oh"* and took it. In the past, in Suffolk, I had occasionally seen her in grandstanding, foot-stomping me!-me!-me! mode, typical for any child. Here she now was, so immersed in a game that can only exist through sharing, that thinking about turn-taking had led her to forget it was her turn.

Rueti She believes there will be enough turns for her, for everyone, not a scarcity or famine. Yes it is absolutely impressive to get this at six : and it ought to be an ordinary maturational stage. I sense you had in mind an eighty-year old who still had not attained this?

Draxl Yes. I once made a pop-in-visit to some friends in Cadiz during Christmas time. Consuela, recently retired from nursing, led me into her dining-room. Seven faces looked up at me. Her 80-year-old mother, her partner, her sister & partner, and their children, the youngest girl still a baby. I smiled at everyone, and then knowing - and again not rocket-science - that the baby would be the most surprised by a stranger, I met its eyes with a broader smile and addressed it with some googoo compliments. All the others laughed and nodded appreciatively. Then the old matriarch said, in the tone of an abandoned seven-year-old in utter despair, *"Oh! everyone's interested in her now."*

Rueti The shame of it, saying it aloud. What had damaged her in her childhood in the 1920s? General Franco?

- Draxl I will begin to try to answer your question. First can we agree that no adult is born shy, laconic, reserved, of-few-words, going-quiet-after-two-sentences!?
- Rueti Of course. Healthy babies babble merrily, young kids love to talk.
- Draxl So these are all defensive strategies, absolutely reasonable strategies, decided upon years ago - after one vicious, even violent, silencing by a parent or relative or teacher or priest : or after many interruptions of one's speech after two or even one sentence by them. The experience of dismay and humiliation is so great that one avoids provoking the other person by speaking at-length, viz beyond two sentences.
- Rueti What of stammers and stutterers?
- Draxl There may be a plain physical/neurological reason for a child or adult having a stutter. But there will be many instances where the hesitation is due entirely to disbelief in the genuineness of the invitation to speak, a fear based on years of misery that it is a trick, that the other person doesn't really want to know what you think and feel, that s/he will not pay attention to your answer, but will interrupt with a 'better' story, or even mock & attack. So you keep starting and stopping, sometimes in mid-word. This can happen as early as childhood.
- Rueti That's it? That's the simple cause?
- Draxl It's a good enough start for an explanation. Isn't it?
- Rueti I can't think of anything else - right now.
- Draxl Let's leave that for a moment then.
- Rueti Alright. But can I ask - *What do damaged people do?* And will it be any different from those lucky enough to pass the three six-sentence tests?
- Draxl It's got nothing to do with luck - but everything to do with human grace and love.
- Rueti You know what I mean!
- Draxl No-one has put it better than Josephine Hart in her novel *Damage*. She writes "*Beware of damaged people: they know how to survive.*"

Rueti The damaged must have many cunning strategies.

Draxl Yes, but they mostly have their source in a desire for revenge that is tragically crippled by cowardice, and even more shamefully by mere laziness.

Rueti You don't mince your words do you.

Draxl The integrity of the capacity for showing just-praise is surely connected to a like integrity in showing due-contempt. Or do you dispute this?

Rueti No! Onwards, dragon's breath!

Draxl Am I too hard? Everyone cites the psychological law - *The abused become abusers.*

Rueti Do you dispute this?

Draxl It's not like Newton's law of motion.

Rueti What's different about laws of emotion?

Draxl Other emotions! Many people who were abused as children - physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually - do become adults who abuse children, as a way of coping. But not *all* of them. Some of them seem to be driven by a different emotional law - *"I will not inflict upon others the pain that others inflicted on me. I will try to be kind instead."*

Rueti Where do they get the strength from to be self-restrained and kind?

Draxl I don't know. It is a psychological fact that courage is more mysterious than even love. Some utterly damaged people seem to manufacture it out of nothing, in the worst possible circumstances. No, that is too feeble and evasive. They decide on the basis of enough new-thinking from new conversations, books, whatever.

Rueti But like you said, few are courageous, most are cowards. Though this still seems harsh.

- Draxl It is not as harsh or unfair as attacking the innocent. Some people, who were damaged in childhood, go through their next sixty years of life being mean and spiteful to almost everyone. Let me clarify that in this discussion I am talking about one form of abuse only - not offering genuine attention to six sentences. Other forms of abuse are material for a different discussion.
- Rueti You clearly think inattention is a terrible form of abuse causing endless humiliation and often abuse of others.
- Draxl Isn't it? There are two forms of withholding genuine attention : absolute or partial. Absolute withholding is when an adult consciously and wilfully *never* asks other people - their own partner, child, parent, friend colleague - the enjoyment-question in a tone indicating there will be perfect attention, follow-up questions and remembering of what is said.
- Rueti Yes, these people are stupefying. Once on the bus home, I saw a girl whom I'd not seen since school, ten years earlier, even though she lived only two-stops away. I asked her how she was. She began a speech about her life which went on and on and on. I asked lots of follow-up questions but she gave me no entry to comment let alone to begin about myself. I kept thinking - she will pass the mike to me now, the halfway stop, now... now, before the penultimate stop. As you can guess, it didn't really feel as if she was talking to me. That was the first time I identified such a creature. Luckily I got off before her. Unluckily, I was to meet many people, young and old, strangers and kinfolk, like her.
- Draxl They are bad, but they are not the worst. The partial withholders are far more vexing.
- Rueti How can that be: isn't something better than nothing?
- Draxl Not if the motive is still the same : to withhold genuine attention. You might eventually dare to challenge the absolute withholder, saying to them - *"Ask me about my life you narcissistic bastard! Or at least have the decency to say you don't really care about what I do!"*. The partial withholder will, like a shyster lawyer or Catholic casuist, say - *"I asked something. I did something, didn't I What are you saying - that I'm ill-mannered?"*. It is very hard to reply *"It was worthless. I invited you to engage in conversation with me. Your response was to try to manage me."*. You both know that you both know this to be true.
- Rueti Gobshites!

Draxl The very word, covering wingers, skimmers and wrigglers. The genuine-speaker invites engagement from the listener and abhors management. The managing-speaker is too frightened of engagement, or at least too lazy to pay genuine attention and think, neither now nor before. But he/she is too vain to admit this and tries to wing it. Here's a winger.

Monday 9.15 am, Sally was first to arrive outside the seminar room. She could barely contain her apprehension about her first university seminar on German literature. Though she'd read the text, she also knew she was the least qualified in the group of major-hons. Fidelma sloped in, raised a glassy eye, and smiling said *"What's the play then?"* Sally held up her copy of *Arturo*. *"Whoops!"* Fidelma laughed. *"I thought it was Chalk Circle. I've not slept. And the way I've been drinking and schtupping, I feel I'd be torn in two "* Good-girl Sally tried to press her lips into a conspiratorial smile, but her nervousness was leaking into her palms. *"I'm not worried"* bragged Fidelma. *"All you gotta do in this situation is as soon as the first speaker has made their point, go in hard against them in a controversial way, and keep at that for five minutes. The tutor will leave you be for the rest of the time."* Sally wondered about this. Later, though she saw Fidelma had oscared it, she still felt it was a cheap, second-hand life.

Reuti Yes, you really ought to shed any admiration for the *fly* and supposedly *cool* or *hard* before adulthood.

Draxl Here's an absolute skimmer,

Malczmus, 23, spends hours in the library taking biographical notes from an encyclopaedia, writing in a small pocket-book.

"So" he explains, "when someone mentions an author at a seminar or a party or at the pub, I can mention a couple of books by them."
"That you've read?"
"No! But they'll think I have."

He would, of course, never get to the third sentence, let alone the sixth.

Reuti Like those lame losers who buy a fake Rolex of a fake Prada.

Draxl As the logically, sound axiom has it - *"Criticism is a discussion of the second reading of a text, [or experience of a film, play, song, football match, political speech...]"* .

It is only the second time of paying attention - and best if notes are taken - that one can see where the parts fit in the whole, and how and why. And for some books or ideas, genuine assimilation and sedimentation of their essence, takes time, it can't be hurried, it might take a year or so. Even if one is clever enough to get a basic understanding, the de-sublimation and sublimation necessary for a better/truer understanding can't happen until one has had certain other life experiences. Aristotle made this point 25 centuries ago! No one has invalidated it yet.

Reuti Everyone wants glory, mostly without effort.

Draxl Lots of adults, some very clever, accomplished, rich and successful even, quickly master the tricks of skimming what they should read, or listen-to, carefully and of then being controversial. The wriggler is the worst - because s/he has one, all-purpose reply to any other person's point of view and to any challenges to what s/he herself has said - *"not-necessarily"* or *"it's more complicated than what you say"*. But they very rarely offer a counter-example or a counter-argument.

Reuti Yes, they clearly can't be bothered to make the proper effort, but their narcissism & vanity won't let them admit this. Their envy & spite make them want, from deep-down, to say to the speaker/artist - *"What you've said or made is not so special that I must make a proper effort to understand it."* Doesn't that begs the question - *Why meet up with that person in the first place?*

Draxl The fundamental question! The manager and the narcissist do not really want genuine engagement with a few, predictably kind, conversationalists. They want to feel they are so brilliant at managing everybody, scores of people, talented and successful, or even shuffling losers, who will all say how likeable they are. They usually fancy themselves as good conversationalists, even as good listeners.

Reuti By God, you will provoke them if you ever imply they are not.

Draxl That's why they are far, far worse than the absolute-withholders. Because they occasionally will say *"So how are you?"* or *"What have you been doing?"* if not quite the clear enjoyment-question.

You immediately feel caught in a double bind. You know they won't be listening, they won't ask any follow-up questions, their face will show that they are not so much listening as waiting for you to stop talking : and soon they won't be able to bear the waiting and they will interrupt with their own stories.

Reuti Yes, you can't say *"Ask me truthfully for once and listen, damn you"*. Well not to your mum!

Draxl Of course you can. But only if you're ready for a fight to demand proper conversation or separation.

Reuti Very few people challenge a withholding parent.

Draxl As the Bible cautions - *"Whomsoever troubleth his own house, shall inherit the wind."* You realise that you either remain to be humiliated again : or you leave, despite the possible loss of legacy. Genuine thinking, alone or in conversation, usually leaves one with the slightly, frightening feeling that one must begin new behaviours and keep to them. Even gobshites know this: in fact, they fear this truth the most. They try to prevent the terror of required change by preventing genuine thinking : try to manage it by citing implausible exceptions or by claiming to be so exceptional themselves that the practical syllogism and social laws do not apply to them.

Reuti Very special people! They say they can find complexities which excuse them. The strangest thing about them is their desire to be known as serious thinkers.

Draxl No-one wants to be called common, or thick or thoughtless. They try to find at least one person, a life-partner who will always think they actually are special and never say to them - *"My God, you're dull and dumb and a complete hypocrite!"*

THIRD COMMENT - HALF-LIFE PARTNERS

Reuti But why does your partner fail you, the very partner you chose and who was supposed to repair the wounds caused by parental withholding?

Draxl Are you asking - Why do people lie during dating & wooing?

Reuti Connections are felt between two people, and relationships begin when both persons say "*Wow!*" to the same report of pleasure, and invite each other to say more : even your six sentences, and then six more... : or at least resist saying "*Meh!*" or "*Urrgh!*" straightaway.

Draxl "Wow!", "Meh!", "Urrgh!". It's interesting that all languages have such perfect words, or rather sounds, for these moments when words fail you. But we all know exactly what they mean in themselves and as signs of intimacy or estrangement or rejection.

Reuti But surely wooing a potential life-partner is one of the few occasions in life when everyone tries to pass the six-sentences test. Just as it is the time when almost everyone from every culture tries to write poetry or at least love-letters carrying all one's truth and hope.

Draxl Some agonise for hours over the right words. Alas, they mostly write bad poetry and they sometimes lie. Perhaps they don't mean to.

Reuti Unusually generous of you!

Draxl Steady tiger! Here are some more stories.

WOW - WOO - TIMES

1: **Bao & Lin** [Tokyo : 1968]

Bao I really like the classic Japanese films from the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s. Do you?

Lin Oh Yes!

Bao I've been mad about them since my aunty took me to my first, when I was 10. Which was your first?

Lin I can't remember. Ozu, I think. Yes, it was *Ojōsan*. Young Miss!

Bao (*blushes*) But you do like them?

Al Who couldn't like those landscapes?.

Bao Oh yes! Wow!

2 : Ailen & Padraig [Cork : 1975]

Ailen I do think it's important to have a sense of science. I've read some of the better popular works.
Padraig Fantastic! So few people do. It annoys me so much.
Ailen If technology is going to shape politics, one mustn't be tricked by experts.
Padraig *(laughs)* That's me in my place!
Ailen *(laughs)* I didn't mean it like that. I'll never catch up with you, but I'll try. I'm so lucky that though I was studying English, my big brother was dropping all sorts of books in my lap : anti-psychiatry, even feminism! That's the course I'd have done if it existed. Do you rate Foucault?
Padraig I've read bits in the paper, seen him on tv. He's out there alright!
Ailen *(sings)* Baby It's not cold outside!
(they laugh)

3 : Barry & Meg [Liverpool : 1955]

Meg *(joshing)* Is that your posh-school blazer?
Barry *(laughs)* There's no college better than Anfield! I'm on parade at the turnstile every other Saturday. I began on my dad's shoulders, but I can stand on my own two feet now.
Meg I like a man who can walk the talk.
Barry Which side's your family then?
Meg Dockside! Boys have got to be scrapping. On the pitch or in the pub. Wears me out.
Barry I've nearly done my apprenticeship. You'll be the first to get a three piece suite.
Meg I only want two kids.

4: Gaddio & Fraileza [Abuja : 1992]

Gaddio You're so gentle. I can't believe he was so cruel to you. A doctor.
Fraileza Every girl's dream. Or at least her mother's!
Gaddio Homeopathy!
Fraileza Is that a joke? I am not clever enough for jokes. Was your first wife?
Gaddio She wasn't enough of anything in the end. What a waste!
Fraileza But she was more special than me - a white Philippina.
Gaddio Not that special.
Fraileza You are. You could marry a clever Buddhist girl, woman. Why me?
Gaddio They're too modern. You are so gentle.

5: Jonas & Patouli [Vancouver : 1992]

Patouli *(laughs)* Wow! Jonas-like-Jack-like-Kerouac! We might've been hitching on the same B-roads in 1970.

Jonas *(laughs)* I nearly got kicked in by neo-Nazis. It wasn't Route 66.

Patouli I did the A525 the following summer. I was just trying to get to Rhyll. Now I can't remember why. What were you doing?

Jonas The Summer Festival at Stratford.

Patouli *(laughs mockingly)* Really! Men in tights! And I thought you were a biker!

Jonas You got me! I was a Bard-boy, a very bad boy: quite dangerous. I'd been dreaming of going for two years. I had more LPs of poetry at 14 than by the Stones.

Patouli Now them's what I called relevant. Still do. Lahdedah drama is a mystery to me. It never took.

Jonas Getting anything good at school is a lottery.

Patouli I hated it. Still do. I like heavy metal best. Men with beards you can hang from.

Jonas *(stroking chin)* Lucky for me!

Patouli Not for Shakespeare.
(they laugh)

6: Lauren & Alan [New York : 2012]

Lauren It's a bit cheesy to ask, but what's your favourite tv programme?

Alan *Ellen*

Lauren *(splutters)* No!

Alan Have I failed the audition?

Lauren No! It's my absolute favourite programme since High School: from the first show.

Alan Wow! Me too. High School. Thirteen seasons now.

Lauren Wow! But really - you're not just doing a number on me?

Alan Would I? *(laughs)*

Lauren Wood-eye Iron-side ! *(laughs)*

Alan I can name every one in the closing credits.

Lauren You've got my pillow kiddo!

MEH - & - UGGH - SEQUEL-TIMES

DECADES LATER But first a tragic tearing after barely a few months

Rosamond Do you know, Tertius, I often wish you had not been a medical man.

Lydgate Nay, Rosy, don't say that. That is like saying you wish you had married another man.

Rosamond Not at all; you are clever enough for anything: you might easily have been something else. Still, I do NOT think it is a nice profession, dear.

Lydgate It is the grandest profession in the world, Rosamond. And to say that you love me without loving the medical man in me, is the same sort of thing as to say that you like eating a peach but don't like its flavour. Don't say that again, dear, it pains me.

Rosamond Very well, Doctor Grave-face I will declare in future that I dote on skeletons, and body-snatchers, and bits of things in phials, and quarrels with everybody, that end in your dying miserably.

Lydgate No, no, not so bad as that.

I leave it to the Reader to recall - or reread *Middlemarch* - the wooing scenes between Lydgate & Rosamond. In fact, in the novel, Eliot describes two of the most disastrous marriages in literature. Lydgate now knows his wife will *never* ask him the question about his highest enjoyment. Rosamond imagines vainly that she will be able to *manage* her husband's intellectual, and social, passion. He can't even see that in a pre-feminist, monarchist society, a woman might feel that her physical beauty is her best and in fact only currency : that she needs this to be affirmed by the aristocratic gaze of courtiers, and even more frequently as it fades. She'd have felt this terror of bodily decline & decay whoever she married: but a medical man's desire for conversation about it would be unbearable. Dorothea will come to see that her husband has long lost the capacity for intellectual fellowship, even from an absolutely willing disciple-wife. It should be added that the times were absolutely against the women: in a different century, Dorothea might have been a don at Girton , and Rosamond editor of *Vogue*.

But, what happened to the other couples?

1 : **Bao & Lin** : [Sweden 1993]

Draxl I didn't know your parents then. But have I got that first-date sort-of-right ?

Xiu Yes, it's like I said - my mum told me when I was sixteen. My father was lying! She'd felt almost embarrassed to say how much those films had meant to her right from childhood. So she thought it was fantastic when he said he loved them too. It turns out he didn't. Not that he hated them. He just wasn't fussed about them. He certainly never wanted to go to the pictures with her or to read the film magazines or talk about the actors : like my mum had long dreamed of doing with her husband. She felt cheated.

2: **Ailen & Padraig** [Dublin 2011]

Draxl I didn't know you then. But have I got that first-date sort-of-right ?

Ailen Yes, it was magical.

Draxl (*impressed*) That's quite unusual then to find a science-major with an interest in psycho-sociology of literature like you. How you must have looked forward to regular thrilling conversations in your marital home about both humanities and science.

Ailen (*bitterly*) It didn't quite work out that way. I was and am genuinely interested in science, but he wasn't really interested in humanities at all. He tried for a bit. But very soon he stopped pretending.

3 : **Barry & Meg** : [Liverpool 1980]

Draxl I didn't know you then. But have I got that first-date sort-of-right?

Barry Referee!

Meg (*pettishly switches off the tv-footy*) Always Anfield! Liverpool! The Kop! Day & Night! Sometimes I think you love that bloody team more than you love me.

Barry Listen, I love Everton more than I love you!

Draxl (*Turns to Camera/Reader*) Yes, folks. This is a very old joke!

4 : Gaddio & Fraileza : [Reykjavik 2006]

- Draxl I didn't know you then. But have I got that first-date sort-of-right?
- Gaddio It was such a relief for both of us then. Ten years and four kids on.
- Draxl Hungry heart or what?
- Gaddio I'm a Professor in three continents now but I wish I'd been in love. I've got this demented Viking in the Physical Therapy Department throwing herself at me. But I daren't jump into that fire.
- Draxl So jump the life to come.
- Gaddio I wish my wife was more exciting. I say to her - "*Oh why can't you be more exciting?!"*

5 : Jonas & Patouli [Caracas 2011]

- Draxl I didn't know you then. But have I got that first-date sort-of-right?
- Jonas Bias-tread long-gone man! My first Ducati. That's what we called our first kid. Hers is 11, called Lazlo after Gramps.
- Draxl What was your VSO gang called? Amadeus-Go-By? Don't they just! Get to see any of them leash-boy?
- Jonas Last Autumn but one, I was having a drink with a couple of them, doing what old men do, talking a storm - about the last time I saw Vanessa Redgrave on stage. As Kowalski lifts his glass, Patouli says, like we really needed to know this, to be clear on it - '*I hate Shakespeare!*'. It killed the groove for a while. I got my own back though. The following year, I dragged her kicking and screaming to *Troilus* in Verona. She left after Act One and went to the bar to kvetch. But she'd got the message.

6: Lauren & Alan [Tv-land 2016]

I only know the first -date of these two: as they told it on *The Ellen Show*. It's a true story that can be checked on-line. They're both twenty-something, and both are primary teachers, who love their jobs. At one point they whoop to the camera - "*Yeh teachers!*" Their abiding, innocent, teen-joy was quite charming. I wish them well. *The world will always welcome lovers, as time goes by...*

TRUE LOVE ON TRACK

This section began with Eliot's description of marriages full of spite and envy. Her own ethical marriage to Lewes was a model of sublime companionship : shared reading, writing, travel and conversation : and child care. Equally sublime was the marriage between the man and woman who appeared on a tv documentary about model trains. We are shown a model of a French village station that they had worked on for seventeen years.

FOURTH COMMENT : BEARING FALSE WITNESS

Reuti The Gods laugh at the promises of lovers.

Draxl Once upon a time, only fifty years ago, women could take men to court for breach of promise to marry. I don't know why the law was first passed. It does seem something was lost when it was repealed.

Reuti Laws don't make people good or kind or truthful. Do you wish you could you sue for breach of promise of interest? Should there be another commandment?

Draxl There are enough, if you can think beyond the obvious.

Reuti Ooh clever you!

Draxl What does the 9th commandment mean?

Reuti "*Thou shalt not bear false witness.*" It means - Don't lie about other people in court. Perhaps - Don't lie about them even outside court. Don't lie!

Draxl I don't disagree. I think it also means - Don't bear false witness about *yourself* to your neighbour, to anyone.

Reuti Don't be a hypocrite, pretend to be more virtuous than you are?

Draxl Yes. But another way to bear false witness about oneself is to claim to share the other person's passion for an activity, or to pretend to enjoy their report of enjoyment. To echo Wow! when you feel Meh! or even Urgh! is such a shameful way to treat others. It is wicked.

- Reuti People think they will be able to *manage* their partner's passion for something they don't care for. But as your stories show, it is hard act to keep up the pretence after the early dates or the early months of marriage: and the pressure to do so usually leads to spite. This is usually given the respectable cover of busyness and lack of time : long hours at work, kids to bathe & put to bed, gutters to clean.... Later, the withholding of attention and interest, Moping or silence, or voiced spite, become common weapons in other common domestic quarrels.
- Draxl Yes, they become acutely aware of signs that their partner might still be happy about their pre-marital passions. Signs such as fluency and eloquence and flushed delight terrify them. As I have said again and again, it is not about cleverness : so, everyone who feels the enjoyment question has been asked genuinely develops fluency and eloquence : they don't feel rushed, they take their time to form thoughts and to find the best words. They don't erm and ahh, but move into sentences and paragraphs.
- Reuti Which can be even more infuriating to some people, even their partner. This helps me understand a famous exchange with Gore Vidal. The interviewer, who was an admirer, asked "*You draw an extraordinary amount of shallow criticism, even spite. Why do you think some people hate you so much.*" Vidal replied: "*Because I speak in sentences.*" It is the stuff of comedy cliché for a character to keep finishing his/her partner's sentences to get the credit for the good story from the dinner-party guests. But if they hate the partner's activity, they can't speak sentences about it, so they must sabotage him/her completely, especially when s/he is becoming eloquent.
- Draxl Some adults, 20 or 60, who hate their partner's enjoyment-activity, will still interpose in it : insisting on being with them, alone or with the person who does like the activity - a friend, or even their own child.
- Reuti Some enjoy the spoiling. Some fear their partner might run away.
- Draxl Most people don't run away. They accept daily humiliation. They find their own ways to be spiteful.
- Reuti That's a hell of a conversation in the lounge or the bedroom!
- Draxl "Hell" is the right word. Nobody forgets the stab-wound created by their partner withholding the enjoyment-question about their favourite activities. All other talk proceeds under the cold shadow of this omission. There can of course hours and hours of speaking : but it is

too frightened and too uncommitted to deserve any better word than "chat". By its very insubstantiality, chat is neither filling nor liberating: but ultimately quite wearying. Many people are glad of it only because it prevented the ever-feared fight breaking out.

Reuti But can a marriage only succeed if both partners are like the Eliots or like the Train Modellers, saying Wow! to *all* the same things?

Draxl No, that is not what I am saying. Though that is the ideal, which I am sure all lovers dream of, a good-enough marriage or friendship is one in which each person has some activities which make them feel Wow! : and that when they say this Wow! to their partner, and wish to speak of their enjoyment, the partner never, ever, says Meh! or Uggh! And one should make the obvious point that any one can learn the ABC of any activity, the first one-page of information about it, in less than fifteen minutes.

Reuti Such as the offside rule! We've had a good conversation. I've enjoyed talking about talking about enjoyment. I didn't think it was that complicated. Or that simple. Is it home-time yet?

Draxl In a moment. Thank you for your good company. I close with an observation and question. Ancient Greek seems to be the best (or near-best) language humans ever invented to speak with. Any speech is saturated with the "men / de" particles : which head clauses of comparison - explicitly invoking contraries, opposites, spectra. Remarks are forever being qualified to do justice to the complexities of human judgement and preference. If you add to this, the mercurial fluidity of word order and inflection - then it is the speaker who is ascendant: the listener can't quite know where the sentence is going and how it will end: and so must have the humility and intellectual grace to wait. The power of memory of conversation they seemed to have is astonishing. How did this happen, and how was it lost?

Reuti I'm lost. And tired. Goodbye.

EPILOGUE : THE NEXT DAY

Draxl So it was au revoir !

Rueti I'm glad we could meet again before you leave. I just wanted to make sure I had grasped at least the basics of what you were saying. Not the grammar and Greek stuff!

Draxl Ask what you like.

Reuti I was thinking about that image you paint of the good, perhaps even holy, citizen, who is a political activist, maybe also a preacher, who goes to a demonstration where the Government Authorities and Religious Authorities seem to grant all her - & her group's - wishes. Then she comes home to the family lounge - first family of parents : or second family of her partner and own children : where nothing has changed and it seems nothing ever will. What's going on? Tell me more.

Draxl Let me try a different way in, through numbers.

Reuti You're being mean. You know I'm hopeless at maths.

Draxl I think even you might get this first question right. What are the first four numbers that a child learns?

Reuti Now you're mocking me!

Draxl No I'm inviting you to think.

Reuti Alright - but I know you've set me up. One, two, three, four.

Draxl Close.

Reuti Told you - trap!

Draxl *Nothing, Scarcity, Enough, Surplus.* It's moot to say which is 1,2,3 4.

Reuti I don't know what you're on about. So I seriously doubt a child would.

Draxl One of the first things an infant learns to do is measure.

Reuti Oh back to that unknown genius - spoon-baby.

- Draxl Spoon-baby is the ordinary child of ordinarily sane and kind carers. But every infant learns how to distinguish between these four measures - *nothing*, *scarcity*, *enough*, *surplus*.
- Reuti That's all wrong. Children get words before numbers, and they don't speak more than point-to-thing words until aged two or three. You're imposing upon them a level of thinking/abstraction that they are not capable of. I've no idea why you're doing this..
- Draxl I'm referring to easily observable actions. It is true that babies don't use words like 'scarcity' to their carer. But it is easy to for the carer to distinguish four responses to the breast/bottle that would indicate that the baby is aware of four distinguishable measures. Spoon-baby has arrived at the awareness of 'surplus', and feels satisfied and happy and generous enough to turn the spoon to her feeder.
- Reuti I concede a baby indicates that it thinks and feels or, by your theory, calculates, different amounts of milk. And yes, a kid might whimper if it feels there's not *enough* milk: or it might start screaming in distress or terror if there's *nothing* coming out of the breast/bottle. But you're trying to get too much mileage out of this kid!
- Draxl She'll soon be out of the picture. But you've given me all I need. What babies fear most is a *scarcity* or *nothing* of the things they need and desire. They are disposed to and able to measure present resources and so they do calculate.
- Reuti But they aren't doing this consciously like in their first maths lesson.
- Draxl I agree. But it is happening somewhere in their consciousness, and the measuring informs behaviour that the carers interpret.
- Ruetl Alright!
- Draxl There is one other measure or rather judgement that the baby manifests.
- Reuti I'm not having kids if they're that litigious from infancy.
- Draxl To reprise. An infant is able to distinguish four measures of the thing it wants - *nothing*, *scarcity*, *enough*, *surplus*. Assuming that there is not-nothing, an infant will feel after feeding, after every single feed, one of four experiences, psycho-physical sensations.

Reuti You do love exact and parallel numbers don't you! Six, six, six and four & four !

Draxl As much as you love magical thinking?

Reuti Touche!

Draxl Would you agree, and do take your time, that there is a difference between *feeling-full* and *feeling-satisfied*?

Reuti After school-dinners you feel neither! Yes, I agree there is a difference. Fullness seems to be more of a physical sensation, a comfortable stretching of the belly: whereas satisfaction is more of a psychological experience, though you might nod your head, as if to someone else.

Draxl So, to calculate, there are four possible outcomes: full-&-satisfied, not-full-but-satisfied, full-but-not-satisfied, neither-full-nor-satisfied.

Reuti No wonder babies sleep so much, if they have to do that much maths.

Draxl You may be right. For they will be calculating continually, if not continuously, about the first three currencies they get.

Reuti If I've remembered correctly, they are *milk*, *touch*, *words* : which I assume is shorthand : 'milk' for food, 'touch' for embrace-by-eyes and embrace-by-skin, and 'words' for kind-conversation. A smiling baby can be reduced to terror by its carer holding a still-face for a mere minute. Money doesn't really arrive in any meaningful way until many years later.

Draxl Very good. So what the baby fears most is - firstly that there will be *nothing* or *scarcity* of what it wants : and secondly that getting what it wants will leave it feeling *neither-full-nor-satisfied*.

Reuti It could be a definition of hell.

Draxl Indeed. It would be mark of rationality to try to avoid it.

- Reuti Are we *finally* going to leave the nursery and get to the bar?
- Draxl Yes, after a small detour. Spoon-babies and all other babies eventually become adults : after being children and teenagers.
- Reuti Don't tell me, I'm going to meet spoon-child and spoon-teen?
- Draxl If you haven't already. Years ago, in Earls Court, I had these Aussie friends. One day I called round. Shirley was alone with Toran, their five-year-old. So, there we were, sitting in the lounge with a cup of tea, chatting away. Or rather trying to - for the little man kept interrupting, mithering, sulking, shouting. "*Now Toran*" said Shirley patiently, "*I told you mummy's friend was coming. Mummy would like to talk with him for a little while. Then you and I can play with your pirate ship. Please be a good mate, and look at your picture-book quietly for a while.*" It made no difference. In fact, Toran behaved worse. I smiled and said I'd get going.
- Reuti I'm surprised an Aussie didn't give him a boomerang wallop.
- Draxl I didn't mind. I was impressed at the utterly ordinary manifestation of unconscious envy & spite.
- Reuti Spite ?
- Draxl I could see that young Toran was at the limits of anxiety. In *his* continuous present, all he could tell was that he had had his mother's undivided attention a minute earlier, and now he didn't: and he couldn't tell when it would return, if ever. Someone, who meant nothing to him, else had it. He had to attack that connection.
- Reuti He believed and felt there was a *scarcity* of his mother's attention. There might soon be *nothing* left. He felt *neither-full-nor-satisfied* of it.
- Draxl Yes exactly. I felt neither anger nor blame at him, a child. It was a very ordinary developmental phase. I knew it would pass, because he had excellent parents. A couple of years later, in exactly the same circumstances, he didn't need to be told anything, explained-to or cautioned : he quietly read his book, while Shirley and I talked.
- Reuti Now he believed there was not only *enough* mother's attention for him, but surplus - he could share her.
- Draxl And two years after that, when he was nine, he could believe that I felt goodwill towards him, and he would occasionally join in the conversation : even when his mother left the room briefly.

- Rueti You're right these six simple words, I've known all my life, - *nothing, scarcity, enough, surplus, full and satisfied* - do give one a new way of thinking about what's going on in every living-room in the world. But can they be used to judge every experience we have? Do we really ask ourselves ten times a day, after each various and very different experience - "*Do I now feel full and satisfied or what?*"
- Draxl You scepticism is understandable. Not all experiences are like eating and drinking, taking-in *things* which are countable & weighable. But surely that pair of words is useful for talking about sexual experiences, which involve fillable orifices and even hand-fulls. Satisfaction might sometimes include the sense of thrilling membrane-stretching but it is surely not only that, in fact that is mostly dependent upon the shared emotional meaning of the action. The latter criterion is key. After stopping any action one might usefully think - *What have I taken in and what is it worth for sharing?* Some youngsters (aged 11- 40) spend hours surfing the web or texting or playing games, after which they feel still restless.
- Rueti Perhaps that is one way of thinking about addiction of whatever kind. The shared/social aspect of satisfaction has been so corroded that it feels impossible, and only a miserable filling with things is left. It's quite something to have understood that by aged ten like Toran. Yes, I haven't forgotten Conseula's 80 year-old mother who was jealous of her own 3 year-old granddaughter - "*Oh! everyone's interested in her now.*" It seems some people spend their whole lives, a hell of eighty years, utterly unable to believe there will be *enough* of what they want, let alone *surplus* that might be shared: but rather a sense of terrified certainty that there will either be *scarcity* or *nothing*. Other people getting something can only mean that the precious commodity is running out and so they better act right away, attack now.
- Draxl What can one do but weep at such stories? If you're ever in any kind of room, with other human beings, however physically adult, or socially successful, then you can be sure that in each person's head, and yours, there are calculations in progress about what might be scarce right now, or what might become scarce, any time soon. Even with the cleverest people, there is likely to be much misperception of scarcity.
- Reuti Food, drink, drugs, sexual availability and your going to add - ?

Draxl Uninterrupted time answering the Enjoyment Question, and finally praise for one's answer.

Reuti Really - a shortage of praise?

Draxl Where have you been living? The anticipation of humiliation from the fact that other people, in this room now, will receive praise is what stops lots of people asking the enjoyment question.

Reuti It does seem that genuine-conversational-attention is the rarest currency in the world.

Draxl It is literally priceless. Once one has money, one can buy anything - food, drugs, the touch of other people's bodies and power of all kinds. One can buy companions, crews, packs : and one can buy people, scores of them, who are willing - for a price - to act as if they are interested. But one can't buy genuine-conversational-attention. If you didn't get it in your first family from your parents and siblings, or your college or work-pals, then your partner has a frightening amount of compensating to do.

Reuti Then why are so many people mean to their partners?

Draxl I can't answer the question about volume. It is a crucial moment in every civilization/creed when companionate/romantic marriages begin to displace arranged/functional marriages.

Reuti The simple idea of a union of freely-speaking souls : of being with someone who says 'Wow!' to the same things as you have done & do and a shared future of discovering in their company new things to which you both might say Wow!

Draxl But as you know better than me, people lie. Some couples seem to have children only to stop their partner's going on and on about their premarital enjoyment-projects.

Reuti Might it not also be shame at failing to maintain one's own cherished pre-marital enjoyment projects?

Draxl Sure.

- Reuti There is great revenge in making happy people go-quiet by uttering a non-word like 'Meh!' or 'Uggh!' More than a checkmate, it is like throwing a bucket of cold vomit over them. Consider the distance between your home and the far side of the universe. The distance between 'Wow' and 'Meh!' or 'Uggh!' is far greater and colder. It is one of the maturational moments of childhood when you first hear the saying "*One man's meat is another man's poison*". You quickly understand it is not just about food. The echoing aphorism, that one might get in adolescence, is harder to fathom, "*One man's revolution is another man's platitude*". For these are differences in the affective meaning of actions, fundamentally, how to live. It feels wounding enough when you say to a friend "*This book/song/film/idea is so rich, so great, so revolutionary*", and they say "*It's not so revolutionary*". If they said "Meh", without offering complex reasons, you'd feel crushed and bewildered, and shiver, as at the beginning of an eclipse. Some marriages are unremittingly Alaskan.
- Draxl Indeed, envy and spite are boundless. As is the anxiety which feeds them. The misperception of *scarcity* becomes a character trait. An elderly man might find himself on a cruise paid for by his children or his colleagues. Though he learns on Day One that food is endlessly available and free in ten restaurants and in his cabin, for the next six weeks - that being the plain public-reality of the conditions of this cruise - in his internal psychic-reality he still can't quite believe there is *enough*, let alone *surplus*. He is forever calculating the possibility of *scarcity* or *nothing* : even stopping his wife take an extra bread-roll.
- Reuti She should get off at the next port and fly home, and then sell the marital house.
- Draxl Adult-Dickens could not believe he had enough money. He so feared re-becoming his poor & abandoned child-self, he overworked himself to death. He also tormented his children with abandonment 'games'.
- Rueti Surely those who crave attention so badly, because they can't quite believe there will be *enough*, will never be *satisfied*, however *full* of microphone hours.
- Draxl Indeed, alas. I began by saying that everyone, man and woman, adult and child, has a theory of pleasure and conversation, that he/she will be prepared to argue and fight is the best. No-one will have no theory. Yet most of these theories will not have the subtlety and generosity of Lewis Carroll's Alice.

- Reuti One thing I've learned from this conversation is how feeble or complex these theories can be. Some people's theory is applicable only to themselves talking into a mirror. I didn't realise, or perhaps I did but always erased the fact, how viciously withholding and uninterested people can be to those they say they respect or even love. I'd make excuses for them - *"They were busy, they were tired, they're old, they've got dementia* (when I knew they hadn't), *they're not good at expressing themselves, they're shy"* and so on and on and on for years.
- Draxl It's a start to admit this. It is worth making the point one more time. When you, the Speaker, make an enjoyment-statement, over six or sixty sentences, you are implicitly saying to the Listener - whether your parent or your kinfolk or your friend or your colleague - *"I felt most alive doing this action"*. The person who refuses to listen to these sixty or even six sentences is implicitly saying *"I don't care if you're alive."* The person who replies *"Meh!"* or *"Urrgh!"*, is implicitly saying *"I hate you!"*. The person who withholds asking the Enjoyment Question is implicitly saying, *"I wish you were dead"*.
- Reuti Yesterday, that would have sounded so fierce and thus so false. Today, it sounds like a truth I have always known but would not let myself know consciously. For I see that the admission of this truth means I have to act differently henceforth. If I want to have any sense of adult dignity and self-respect, I might have to protest & renegotiate or protest & leave. Thinking about that table you asked me to fill in, of twelve names, it does seem absolutely right to suggest that the names one enters after one's prison sentence, or after one's therapy, or after one's probation, or after one's spiritual retreat, or after one's philosophy degree, or after one's SAS training, will be different from what one initially entered : in fact, must be different.
- Draxl Absolutely! Otherwise, it can hardly be said that the person has been *thinking* during all that supposed effort at development. It is easier to endure SAS training than it is to be brave in the family lounge. It ought not to difficult to see, but few people do see clearly, that Primo Levi's very own testimony shows that he always felt that being in a death-camp was less punishing than being with his bitter and twisted mother.

Reuti If you withhold the Enjoyment Question, or if you don't attend to the six-sentences of the Enjoyment-Statement, you are a soul-murderer. If you don't protest against your soul-murderer, you will remain broken and poisoned at your core - however successful in worldly terms - and you yourself might become a soul-murderer. There's a thought! Can there be another as utterly depressing about humanity? Is there any hope for anyone?

Draxl There's always hope. But it can only be truly seen and felt after the audit of pain! Just look at that table again.

CATEGORY	PERSONS WHO ASK YOU	PERSONS YOU ASK
Parent		
Blood-Kin-folk		
Life-Partner		
Friend		
Teacher/Mentor		
Work-Time Colleague		
Play-Time Colleague		

I'm saying that your *life-spirit & hearts-ease* depends upon there being people who ask you to speak six-sentences about your enjoyment : but your *humanity* depends on you asking other-people: even if no-one asks you, and you feel wounded to hell. Anyone who says they can't fill in this table is lying. After you've done it, you might think about hope. Here is a hope-full story, about Della.

Reuti The kid from Philly?

Draxl Well-remembered! A couple of years later, my company sent me West again to work with Vincenzo. His wife Ambroasia was still at the labs when I called round. He'd told me Maximilian was learning trumpet and that Della, now nine, had a little herb-garden. I asked her to show me her favourite herb while Max helped his dad in the kitchen. She was a little hesitant at first, but was soon talking merrily about her tiny, green friends : and was happy to carry on when we were on the sofa, back in the lounge. Maximilian offered me the cake-plate, which held multiples of three types of cake. I took one each of two types, but not the almond. Vincenzo brought in the coffee. I was sipping his top espresso when Della quietly said "*Draxl, Would you like some almond cake?*", and she presented to me her own plate which included two portions of the almond. I was surprised and touched.

I smiled and said *"Thank you for offering Della. But it was these cakes I chose that I wanted most. They're all very nice."*

We all carried on eating and talking. I asked Vincenzo about his golf handicap. Ambroasia arrived home just as I was getting ready to leave. By then we'd all drifted into the kitchen. Again, I heard my name spoken quietly. *"Draxl"*. Della was standing by me, with the main cake-plate. She must have gone to the lounge to get it. *"Would you like some more cake?"* This was even more touching.

Reuti What good manners in a child. Rare enough nowadays.

Draxl Yes, but it was more subtle than that. She wasn't merely following family rules & obligations, which follow class or society rules : *Be a good child, be polite to guests, offer refreshment*. Her brother had met that obligation on behalf of the family. She was watching me, thinking about me, and a bit puzzled about why I didn't take the third type of cake. She was in no doubt that there was *enough* cake, in fact *surplus* cake. Perhaps she wondered if I hadn't seen the third type, or was a bit shy about taking it. She might have picked up the main cake-plate and offered me a piece from that: but she offered me one of hers. There was no terror of *scarcity*.

Rueti Same genotype as Spoon-Baby!

Draxl Indeed! It was a supererogatory action. As was the second offer. The latter wasn't really about cake at all. She'd have known that food isn't usually offered when coats have been put on. It was an unconscious offer of her best-Self's quiet affection. This might have been to thank me for her earlier pleasure of talking about her herbs. Young children have few resources, or currencies, from which they can offer to grown-ups : neither money or grown-up words. But there can still be the desire to offer something, to share the experience of offering. It was a wonderful experience for me. As I have repeatedly said, this sublime human characteristic can be present in a child under ten : and absent from over half of the adults that one will meet. Having been capable of that kind of observation and attention and grace, Della will not need sophists or priests to teach her how to *manage* people. All she will need to do is to continue to reflect on how different human objects and human activities feed and nurture people of all ages and how *engaging and sharing* is the best human experience.

Reuti Yes there is some hope.

ALLUDING

*I used to be cruel to my woman
I beat her and kept her apart from the things that she loved
Man I was mean....*

*Lately you've started to stutter
as though you had nothing to say.*

How old were you before you realised the very simple truth that, in the scale of cruelty, a physical beating leaves less permanent scarring than being kept apart from the things that you love? This confession by Lennon is probably the most honest lyric in rock history. The second quote is from Cohen. It is spectacularly wrong: people, not lamed by physiology, stutter only when they have either too much to say, or too much emotion, most of which will be doubt about the listener's honesty.

& RE-RE-STATING

Recently, I enjoyed doing action-X.

means

I felt the most alive doing action-X.

I don't want to hear you saying such things.

means

I don't care if you're alive.

Meh! or Uggh!

means

I hate you.

I will never ask you about such things.

means

I wish you were dead.

I keep going back into the conversational-space, where, for the millionth time, someone, who says they respect and love me, doesn't ask me about my enjoyments.

means

I am a liar, a masochist and a wretched coward.

SIX WRITTEN SENTENCES

Speaking and writing both use words, in various types of sentence, but feel very different from each other. Neither is privileged, neither is better than the other, but rather, both are necessary. It is a mark of maturation to learn to do both well - not at the level of clever argument or poetry but at the level of honesty & dignity.

Words and symbols describing material phenomena and scientific laws are precise: in fact they are the reference point for precision. Words and emoticons describing human emotions (thoughts/intentions etc) are intrinsically ambiguous, the reference point for imprecision. As the poet Eliot put it:

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion.*

This has been both difficult and enjoyable to write : part of the joy is from trying to solve a structural difficulty. Even though I have thought in these terms, and lived & fought by them, for decades, it wasn't written quickly, but slowly over some weeks. It is exactly the same when friends ask me to comment on what they have written. And like anyone else, I have occasionally had to write a difficult personal letter or speech. By definition, difficult writing is difficult to write : as much for me as for anyone else. But I will put in the hours and with good-grace. I have learned that it takes six hours over three days to produce one good A4-side of writing : whatever the task or subject. Because I know it takes a good while to write a dozen personally honest sentences, if I sense I don't have the grace to do it for this or that person, I will decline. Nor will I comment on other people's writing in gob-shite speech, as a winger or skimmer.

But also, quite a few people have asked me to write a difficult letter or speech *in their voice*. One month I had two wedding speeches and one funeral speech to write for others, older than me. Why didn't they try? They certainly try when they are in love and wooing. Most people, even very educated ones, fear writing. Why should this be, Reader? Why do they privilege their spoken-word, even when they know it is often ad hoc, unrehearsed, unshaped, stuttering and ill-fitting to their thoughts about their life: let alone about what I've said or written?

After a year's silence, my older cousin left a phone-message of barely a dozen words. Then he sent an email of even fewer words. A week later he repeated both actions. Finally he spent seven hours making the round trip to Cambridge : left another note of forty words and then a brief phone-message. A week later he sent yet another email: slightly longer, but still very guarded and evasive. He was trying to manage me rather than engage with me.

If he'd spent those seven hours, at home, over a few days, writing and rewriting what was deep and clear in his heart, it would have been a more honourable effort. Even if he had decided not to send me those written words, the fact they had been written would mean they would continue to resonate in his mind in a firmer shape, and so would be available to form better connected spoken words when he visited. His IQ is higher than mine and he was a successful City Councillor, who would have had to both write and speak clearly in public, for decades. Knowing him to have become a mobile-text junkie, I doubt he was thinking about me on the train. But like all such text-junkies, he was surely thinking carefully about what lol-words to send to others.

In an excellent article on competitive swimming - and other human actions - called *The Mundanity of Excellence*, Chambliss writes : *A willingness to spend ten minutes a year writing a Christmas card can maintain an old friendship for decades; At the lowest levels of competitive swimming, simply showing up for regular practices produces the greatest single speed improvement the athlete will ever experience; and at the lower levels of academia, the sheer willingness to put arguments down on paper and send it away to a journal distinguishes one from the mass of one's colleagues in the discipline.*

Note the repetition of the word 'willingness', the second instance qualified by 'sheer'. It affirms my observation about a fundamental pervasive fear, anxiety, resentment... about writing. The Reader won't be surprised that I add that an annual card - how many sentences do people write in such - has no amity-ethical value : it is only the vain tidying up of ones autobiography as always-nice-to-all-and-liked-by-all. The annual newsletter that some families send is felt, by most recipients, as an insult.

Daily genuine, conversational-attention is a limited resource which is seriously depleted rather than unaffected by many minutes or hours of chat, in person or electronic, if undiluted by a significant period of fallow-time. I'd conjecture most smokers can't even name the concept of *fallowing* which purified their solitary fag-breaks in grim office car-parks and doorways : now lost forever as their thumbs fibrillate across their mobile screens. I know from complaints from many middle-aged persons, or older, that their genuine desire to enjoy writing good sentences in a personal idiom, is seriously thwarted by the professional responsibility to form staggering daily volumes of machine-prose to answer superfluous emails and linked-in requests, most born of professional anxiety and some of personal revenge.

For a few people, such an 'external' demand becomes a most welcome, socially accepted excuse for not-being-arsed to spend a few hours of their free-time on the self-re-creation of writing a proper personal response - on paper or in email.

Wouldn't it be one of the best and highest wishes for one's own child that they will always have a few, other people to offer & to receive the spoken six-sentences of the enjoyment statement, and to offer and receive them sometimes also in written form?

To the Reader asking the unspoken question, I say : I have often left, never-to-return, the Unliving-Room in which sat a person who denied me those six-sentences : many kinfolk, a dozen friends of more than a dozen years, and many more of lesser effort. It was always difficult, painful and tragic, but it was never regretted. No one who puts an end to repeated ambivalence & humiliation regrets it. They only regret not leaving long ago.

These three questions and six words are not the last word, but I feel and I hope that they are at least a fruitful way of supplementing received ways of thinking. Reader?