

Why Do We Bother?

Mental health experts have developed many theories to explain why people should sometimes feel depressed: perhaps they weren't loved enough, or in the right way, when they were children; maybe they feel alienated by meaningless employment; perhaps they feel unappreciated by their partner. A more interesting question though, is why more of us don't have a sense of the futility of our existence more of the time. Why do any of us bother?

Religion doesn't seem to offer many answers. Okay, so maybe we should bother because some greater power wants us to, but then why do they bother?

What we tell ourselves is our reason for bothering and the real reason may be two different things. If I asked you why you bother, what would you say? I suppose you might say its because you want to enjoy and develop your personal relationships, or because you want to change the world, or realise your potential in some way. I suspect these and other justifications are post hoc rationalisations.

There is no point in giving a depressed person reasons why they should be more active in living. The truth is that happy people don't feel happy because they think about the meaning of their lives. In fact some of the most unhappy people have been philosophers who perhaps thought too much about the meaning of life. Joyous, purposeful living is not generated by having a life affirming philosophy, rather, people with purpose and joy develop life affirming philosophies.

Engagement in life seems to be fed by engagement in life. What helps people who don't feel like bothering to re-engage in their lives is not an intellectual debate but the visceral experience of living. Feeling at home in one's own skin, physical exertion, being in the company of others, having the stimulation of a challenge: these are the things which draw people back into the mainstream of life. Living with passion and enthusiasm is in our nature. People who don't feel their passion are suppressing it for it lies in everyone. Despite all the difficulties of life, despite all the bad things that happen, despite the fact that we know we will die one day, somewhere inside ourselves there is a source of courage and optimism which keeps us going. We just don't seem to be able to stop ourselves.

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.

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