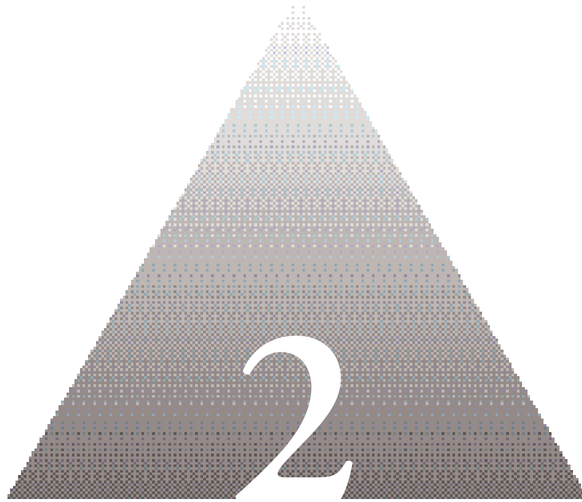

LUCIFER

Being liars and hypocrites, we socialize to our own advantage.
That doesn’t mean we don’t have feelings. Our feelings manner us so that we (liars and hypocrites all) can comfortably fit in with a group.
No love, no fear, no guilt , no shame, no loyalty = no fitting in.

Headroom: in humans, selection has favored imaginative liars who have feelings and emotions. When we are socializing, our self-conscious and not conscious fabrications protect us, and keep us safe. Meantime, our emotions tint our sensory experiences and assist us, competitively, as we whirl through the social vortex.

I’ll be honest. The first part of this chapter is meant to be a bit of a shocker. It’s about the gift of lies.

Truthfully, I can tell you that I would be horrified to learn that my friends think I'm a liar. Of course, as I will point out, I am a liar. Still and all, coming from Canada, I would be horrified to learn that I have that kind of reputation. Ho-hum. I'm sure you're totally bored by the question of whether or not my friends think I'm a liar. You know you're not a liar.

Hold it. Here's the bad news. You are a liar too. The shocker is really this: culture clubs are wrong about lies and liars. Individuals' being able to deceive each other is not a sin. It's a beautiful thing! It's liberalism at its best. It's a personal gift that enormously aids socialization. And, as I hope to convince you, if you use this gift in a way that exactly suits the manners of your dominant culture club, you will not merit a bad reputation with your peers. At least not for being a liar.

The second part of the chapter deals with our emotions, and the way, unbidden, our emotions and feelings color our computations when they wing their way into our consciousness. For most of us, using an objective methodology kind of goes against the grain.

Subjectivity and objectivity

Philosophers may endlessly bat this about, but for the sake of argument, let's suppose it's possible to look at something or someone more or less objectively. Being objective, this reasonable society informs us, is a good thing. We should aim for it.

The question to ponder then is this: why is it so tough for us to be objective?

Moreover, why is someone else's "being disinterested" or "objective" so difficult for us to deal with? Not impossible, but always problematic. Perhaps we find that objectivity and disinterest make an opaque socializing tactic. An objective individual leaves us guessing. What does this cold fish care about, anyway?

You are the empirical researcher. You are the cold fish. Without emotion, you describe the North Saskatchewan River. You describe it not as a thing of beauty, light or utility, but rather as a thing with measurable volume, length and mineral content. The results of your calculations make no difference to you. You are disinterested. Your only goal is to strive for total accuracy. If a fellow researcher questions your measurements and your methodology, you might meet the situation emotionally. You could get upset and be insulted, not on behalf of the object, the river. But on behalf of yourself. Let's say, however, that your measurements of the river are generally acceptable. Things go smoothly. In a word, your objective regarding the river is to be objective. And you are.

Science encourages disinterested research and objective methodologies. Further, the North American culture places great stock in disinterested empiricism. Fair enough. If you don't care about the external object (be it rat or monkey or river), and if the results of your research mean "nothing" much to you one way or the other—even when they thoroughly contradict your hypothesis—you're fulfilling an important cultural task. Public policy follows hard upon the results of your disinterested work. When you care nothing much about the object under the microscope and everything about your own accuracy (it's on the basis of your stunning accuracy that you will receive rave reviews from your peers), you will make your measurements as precise as possible. You are not vested as a player, as it were. The outcome makes no difference to you. How does that relate to the river? For one thing, you're not an interested party concerning disputes about its length.

Okay. You have kept your emotions about the river in check. You are not aiming to please anyone but the Saint of Accurate Measurements. It's sufficient to note that in the competitive world of the human, you have arrived in a very rarified state. Arriving at a state of scientific disinterest is enormously difficult, taking an effort that is supremely conscious and emotionally repressive.

That said, while people do indeed want purely inductive, objective results, they're not all that keen on interacting with emotionally repressed individuals. To understand what is going on and where they stand in the socialization game, people instinctively feel better when they intermingle with individuals who discernibly care about things. You, the empirical researcher, feel a little hurt about this, because there are people and things you care about. Just not rivers. Just not this one.

From years of employing objective methodologies, you are an emotionally repressed river-measurer. Nothing matters to you more than the accuracy of your findings. What do you do, then, when the town pundits, who have commissioned you to measure the length of the river, want – and indeed long for – certain results? To win a competition with a sister city, they need their river to be longer, or have greater volume, than a certain river in Europe. You tell them to take a hike. You are honest and disinterested. Your measurements cannot and will not be fiddled for any cause.

This, more or less, is the motif of an early Hugh Grant film. If you changed river for mountain (or for hill, depending on whether you refer to a *before* or *after* scenario in the movie), you'd have *The Englishman who went up a hill but came down a mountain.*

In this gentle flick with a message about national stereotypes, the townsfolk and the scientist learn something. As a result, a symbolic blending of national characteristics takes place. The wistful, demonstrative townsfolk eventually learn to abide by hard and fast, albeit conventional empirical standards. The disinterested scientist, in contrast, learns how to play for a team. In the end, the town accepts the need for scientific objectivity and vows to meet the standard, and the scientist learns to care about the dreams of a people.

For reasons of pride and identity, the Welsh townsfolk want to be situated at the base of a mountain. The English cartographer has to tell the town that, according to his echoes and the current standard height of hills versus

mountains, the town is nestled at the base of a hill. The townsfolk sneer. They hate the results of objectivity. What else can one expect from a scientist and an Englishman? Since the mapmaker in question—Hugh Grant—actually acts a lot like Hugh Grant, and since the townsfolk are no fools, they figure that he can be won to the cause if he falls in love with one of their own. You get the picture, I'm sure.

But not so fast. The scientist won't easily be won to the cause through the falsification of his measurements, as much as he loves the fair maiden. The townsfolk come up with the answer to the mountain-hill conundrum themselves. Together the scientist and the community add enough dirt to the hill to make it qualify as a mountain, and well, you have the rest of the story in the title. The townsfolk abide by the rules; the scientist falls in love.

When it comes to valuing objective versus subjective methodologies on a case-by-case basis, I'm a disinterested party. Case number one. The river and the mountain. It is better to measure a mountain or a river according to objective standards than to fiddle the measurements to win a mountain-height or river-length competition.

Conversely, it is better to love the fair maiden and try to help her than to sit tight and preen your narcissistic feathers just because you're an accurate measurer. It's simply better from a socializing perspective to care about people and places.

The point I'm making here is that it's very easy for us to color our conscious calculations with feelings and emotions, because that's what Mother Nature means us to do to help us socialize with each other. It is very hard, and what a psychologist might call unnatural, to stick to a relentlessly objective methodology.

At some point you have to declare yourself on a team. O scientist, just in case you think you are not on a team, may I remind you that you take very seriously the respect of your peers. On account of your reputation, you

assiduously follow the empirical conventions set up by the dominant group in your field. Emotions and feelings are there for you too, wanting to creep into your consciousness, wanting to make you aware of them. They're there so you can be aware of yourself. Are you an excellent empiricist, a king among empiricists? Accepting praise for the accuracy of your calculations indicates just how much you desire to be important and respected in certain circles.

Always opting for an objective methodology, insofar as humans *can* be objective, takes lots of practice. Eventually, it seems, objectivity meets up with emotion. If you don't give a darn either about the river or the accuracy of your measurements, you'll not be doing that particular job for very long.

In short, if minds were clocks, I would say that the whole "being objective" thing runs counter-clockwise.

Liars, and the making of the good citizen

"Everyone hates liars." So begins an engagingly written piece by Charles Reeve. As Reeve sees it, Eugène Atget's largely people-less photographs of *le vieux Paris*, circa 1898-1926, present an affront to historical empiricists. In "Paris as you've never seen it,"[1] Reeve explains that old Paris was never without swarms of people. Never, Mr Reeve? Well, hardly ever. Since a photograph where you "hardly ever" see people on the bustling streets of old Paris isn't as accurate as a photograph where you see people "most of the time," Mr Reeve feels that Atget's work can be classified as lies. Hence, the opener – "Everyone hates liars." A very Canadian opener, in my opinion.[2]

That a work of art – and photography is an art – can be called a *lie* is a most interesting critical assessment. Good grief, even supposing that everyone in Canada does hate liars, it still seems rather a harsh charge to make against poor M Atget and his art. Still, therein lies the dilemma of the photographer. A photograph should be real, an accurate rendering of an

object, shouldn't it? The external object is there, ready to be rendered objectively. Does a photographer cheat if he allows stuff in his head – an ideology, for instance – to interfere with his empirical "duty" to be accurate? What is accurate? And what is duty? And whom does he cheat? Historians, artists and scientists will debate this epistemological/aesthetic puzzle till the cows come home, but it seems to me that triggering an emotional response to something is part of what art is, and part of what art does. The New Critics notwithstanding, artists are interesting people. The photographs may tell viewers as much if not more about the romantic reality that is M Atget as they reveal about the physicality of old Paris. Be that as it may, I can't get away from the opener, "Everyone hates liars."

Evolution favors liars. Mother Nature loves liars. Charles Reeve and the rest of us epitomize "well mannered" when we reach the point of hating our human natures. I can hear my mother: "What on earth does that mean?" The answer isn't pretty. It is part of our human nature to lie, and some of us hate that idea.

Somehow, at some point in its development, the human child acquires a social survival skill—lying. We say that we try to eliminate this skill, but in truth it's part of growing a creative imagination. To talk, to sing, to dance, to run, to lie. The wonder of it all. Here's the paradox. As with all human skills, lying requires practice, but about the same time children discover the enormous personal value of deception, the dominant Canadian culture stomps on the overt lying thing with both boots. Suddenly, as a child, you're removed from the joy of unlimited lying, the delicious reveling in doing, again and again, something that only months earlier you had no idea you could do. Not only that. The very parents who have applauded your efforts to walk and talk and sing and paint the family with blue faces now clap their hands over your mouth when you reel off a whopper.

Honesty is the best policy. Lying is bad. Bad for what? Bad for you? No, lying is good for you. It makes you competitive. Truthfully, think how miserable your social existence would be if you couldn't lie.

What if poor Mr Parsnips heard the words of your pity? What if your boss, Lash McWhip, heard the words of your disdain? What if your friend Delicia knew how furious you were with her last week? What if she also knew how in your anger you gossiped about her to your other friend Malvolia? Not a good situation.

Nobody's perfect. Everyone gossips now and then—it's another survival skill. In any case, denying the truth is a viable social option for you, since, when you think about it, you recall that Delicia is a strong-willed, mean one. She wouldn't forgive you for gossiping about her to the weaker Malvolia. Lying has its uses. If you're being true to yourself, you know that all humans can—and do—lie. For good cause. If Mr Parsnips knew that you pity him, he would think you are a condescending creature, and someone to be avoided. This would never do at home and school meetings, because you need him to vote for your initiative on crosswalks. If Lash McWhip knew you didn't like him, he'd show you. He'd whip your name off the list for promotion. If Delicia caught wind of your disloyalty and your saying unkind things about her to Malvolia, she'd crucify your reputation.

Being acculturated, you and I appreciate and encourage honesty and directness in others, and we may even admire these qualities in ourselves. Mother Nature sees deception differently from us. MN likes deception. MN is right. Without some ability to dissemble, we'd all be sitting ducks in the survival game.

Lying suits the individual, but the individual's lying doesn't suit the group. No one wants to stay long in the company of a pathologically dishonest person. The group you're in wants to know when you're dissembling, because it simply can't function as a unit if everybody lies with an individual rule book. For the sake of social cohesion, your group will allow you to lie in certain instances. In others, you will be punished. Try lying to a jury, for instance. Not too bright. You could go straight to jail.

In this culture, this “honest culture” as a Canadian would describe it, it’s considered acceptable to lie to avoid hurting someone’s feelings, or to avoid breaking a confidence, or to avoid censure because you don’t wish to reveal your own feelings in a way that could bring you to harm. You don’t want your real feelings about your accomplishments to attract unnecessary and negative attention; therefore, false modesty, which is a dumbing-down kind of lie, is acceptable. With a cultured charm so sly, so cunning that it often goes unnoticed—sometimes unnoticed even by yourself the secret agent of it—you spin or withhold information to protect, hide, boost or diminish other people. Every day, you lie, lie and lie some more.

The individual’s lying style changes with age. As a mature person, you’ve likely lost the joy of lying for its own sake. Does that mean that you’ll stop practising the subtlety of the art? Heavens, no. Lying quickly turns into one of the most seriously mannered of the individual’s natural skills that every culture wants to get a grip on. And you there, the stand-on-guard Canadian, you will spend the rest of your life in training as to how, why, when and where your culture club will allow you to eliminate your wastes, tell lies, have sex, speak in public and turn violent. You simply cannot have this, you say. You don’t lie, you insist. Your culture doesn’t lie.

You know you’re wrong. Cultures thrive on lies. You do lie, and so does your group. Everybody lies. All the time. But because you lie according to what you’d call good manners, you don’t realize it because you have been scolded about lying since you were old enough to talk.

Parents and teachers instinctively understand that a child’s offending the group can cause other members of the kiddy cluster to ignore the offender. When shunning happens to an adult it is more insulting to the dignity than any corner-sitting. Therefore, the most nurturing parents and teachers work with the philosophy that it’s better for their children to learn a few cultural lessons when young than to experience serious cultural shunning later, especially when it’s shunning that can be avoided with some primary

tutelage. You train kids. You talk about whether babies as young as three weeks old are "well behaved."

Walk into any rural or urban home in Canada where there are children and, trust me, after you leave that house you'll comment to somebody, somewhere, about how well or poorly behaved the kids are. When you talk about how good kids are, or how well behaved, you're giving a social assessment, not an individual assessment of the personality.

No lying, stealing, hitting.… However the communication occurs, your culture will signal, through means that aren't necessarily verbal, what behavior it accepts and what behavior it frowns upon. More often than not, your mother will be the one overtly given to the task of guiding you through the social land mines that could blow you away. She has a simple name for the map she uses. She calls it manners. As to the manners agenda, your guardian gives you just the blueprint of what your social soul is dying to soak up. Most of your manners training you're instinctively doing on your own, night and day, for as long as you want to stay in a particular club. Parents are there first. They *own* the first club you join. They get the first kick at the cat.

As for being bossy, parents can't help it. They have to train their kids to get along with others. Parents, especially those who enjoyed the most rebellious of youths themselves, know the pain of "time out." And they'll do nearly anything to spare their children that pain. That's of course when they themselves are not administering it.

No lying to authority. No stealing the property of others. No elbows on the table. No cussing in front of adults. No hitting in front of adults. Share your toys. Don't play doctor in front of adults. Wear the proper clothes for the occasion. Don't stick out your tongue at Grandpa. Don't say "ain't." Don't say "irregardless." Don't say "I sawed" or "feets." Don't scratch yourself there in public. Nod up and down when you mean yes, and nod side to side when you mean no. Speak when you're spoken to. Don't

interrupt. Don't pick anything, not your teeth, nose, ear or bottom. Don't get in my face. Don't argue with ME. Save your money. Be perfect. Don't think you're perfect. Be perfect and humble. Be perfectly humble. Save your enthusiasm for hockey. No hugging or handholding or kissing in public. Stand when an older person comes into the room. No, not for your brother…

And so it goes, on and on. These manners, these admonitions and conventions and paradoxes can get enormously complicated. If parents don't drill manners at home, teachers will do it in the classroom. And when parents and teachers can't give you the manners finesse you require for social membership, charismatic peers will serve as guides.

What do parents and peers want? Give us a healthy child to work on, they say. Parents and peers can't do their best mannering work on a robot. C-3PO most certainly can be programmed to obey the little conventions of society, but it's a chore that would require so much time to complete that the little conventions could well change before it's done. In any case, why teach a robot how to lie only to show it why and when it mustn't?

Obviously children aren't robots. They start to lie quite naturally. Children are real pros at dissembling and fabrication by the time they reach the age of three or four. Adults, being consummate liars themselves, know what to expect from their children in terms of deceit, and prepare themselves to act accordingly. Parents teach *cultural* honesty. Parents know that the children's new-found skills need channeling and acculturating. Children — self-centred, conscious and emotional creatures – soak up social admonitions like sponges. Being acutely sensitive to their feelings, children can be shamed and "guilted" into adopting the manners of their community. No robot could possibly acquire a child's finesse at managing deceit and getting superficially acculturated.

Children can be culturally diplomatic because they are conscious, self-centred and emotional. They know what emotions they are feeling. They

know when their background feelings are in an okay state. With no shame, guilt, love or fear to help place the admonition in the kid's head, what good does it do to wail to a defiant, lying and thieving ten-year-old, "But I gave birth to you!" What good does it do to ask a child to feel ashamed of herself for mocking the injured man who limps like Hopalong Cassidy, if the child has no capacity to feel shame in the first place?

The head is where it's at. If there's nothing in children's heads to grab the scolding, or appreciate the loving, or fear the powerful one—and hold all of the above for future reference—you're wasting your time. If the kids are functioning with a full deck, you can rub your hands together with glee at the prospect of mannering them. The children's own sense of shame, guilt, anger, love and fear will work wonders on the conduct of the little darlings, shaping their conduct into models of good citizenry. Let their shrinks unravel the psychological damage when good citizenship is accomplished.

Why is acculturation a good thing for the individual? Competitive creatures soon learn that offending the group(s) to which they belong will cost the offender status within the group. Ironically, but not strangely, in today's politically correct society people don't mince words about being offensive. Individuals who are offensive to the group get tagged as "losers." If you don't have a head for figures, you don't enjoy math, whereas if you don't have a head for picking up emotional nuances, you might find socialization hard going. Culture is all about status and politeness and giving offense, and having a head for culture means understanding what gives cachet to a particular group. Just ask my mom.

The competitive importance of our having arrived at this place, already equipped with primary and secondary (customized) emotions—love, fear, guilt, shame, embarrassment, et cetera. And background feelings.

Before analyzing the mannering process in detail, I want to think about what's in our heads that helps individuals socialize with each other. Emotions and feelings are there. We are born emotional. And the amazing thing is that we know it.

In *Paradise lost*, the Arch-Fiend, the lost Archangel, the being formerly known as Prince (of Light), says: "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heaven" (Book 1, line 254). Why does Lucifer make this reasonable assertion? Milton, a tricky poet, is no doubt trying to warn us about our proper relationship with a Puritan-type deity by tempting us with stuff like "I think and therefore I am." That said, what a great couple of lines.

Imagine my pleasant surprise to hear more or less the equivalent of this from a friend of mine who, as I believe from listening to her and reading her work, is no particular friend of the poet, or Descartes either for that matter. We seem to have a personality transfer for a couple of seconds. Visualize the irony of solipsistic me sounding off about the joys of the senses, and my friend, a statistics wizard and all-round empiricist, waving off the suggestion that the physical site of one's home has great importance. Place doesn't matter that much to her, she says. She shrugs and adds with her ever-charming grin, "You live in your head, after all."

The concept of living in your head is aptly illustrated by our feelings about place. We are at the lake. The party includes the husband (Mr Mighty-fine) friends Ani and the spectacular Ms Bunn, Dusty and Smudge and yours truly. From the northwest, a hot, dry wind is blowing with intense force over our trembling umbrella, and whooshing around the corner of the brand new deck, hunting out nooks and crannies the way a general might hunt for a deserter. As lakes go, Pigeon is just a wee bit of a thing. It clearly wouldn't be right to say later, "The sea was restless that day, my friends," but the waves are indeed whipped into a white-capped, mini-frenzy. A boat would find it a tough go. On shore, the air is bright under an intermittently searing sun and, after a long northern winter, that alone makes up for a lot. Resigned to the wind and soaking up the sun, we roll up our sleeves and sit outside. Ah, the lake.

Mighty-fine and I are well aware that our friends know water. Ani grew up spending her summers on Manitoulin Island. Plunked in huge Lake

Huron, apparently the largest island in a freshwater lake, Manitoulin is paradise. Speaking of paradise, the spectacular Ms Bunn comes from the West Indies. How do the impenetrable blue-gray waves of Pigeon Lake compare to the crystal-clear, aquamarine oceanic swirls around Harbour Island, spitting distance from delicious Eleuthera? The way blue spruce compares to palm trees. Not very well.

What are we doing out here on the deck, which, thanks to the wind and the sun makes us hot and cold almost at the same time? Central Alberta specializes in hot-cold days. Throw in a bazillion sand flies, and you get yourself feeling hot and cold and irritated all over. Why do humans bother about spots like this? Why is Mighty-fine so keen on "the lake"?

Is he keen on it because the mind is its own place, because we live in our heads? Our senses feed us information about our surroundings and tell us what being at the lake means to our physical bodies, to our eyes and ears and noses. The effervescent pings and the snap-crackle-and-pop of the water just after the ice breaks up in the spring. The yodeling loons nosily going about their affairs in the orange dawn. The crisp, willow-scented and turpentine draughts that scoot by your nostrils at night when you're out walking Dusty the Good and the wicked Smudge. Empirically we know what being at the lake means. It's a place that can be experienced and later described in a sensuous way. So, who cares?

Mighty-fine cares. But why? What makes people and places connect? What makes people connect? There seems to be no good computational accounting for it. Pigeon Lake is no great shakes in many respects. The way Ani and Ms Bunn tell it, Manitoulin Island and the West Indies sound a hell of a lot more hospitable, or, to be idiomatically consistent, lovable. Does Mighty-fine care about Pigeon Lake because on some level he thinks, "This cabin is mine, and by cracky, I love myself and the wife and the kids, and since this little piece of land belongs to me, I'll love it too"? Maybe he thinks, "This is the outlandish, charmed area, somewhere beyond the city,

where I spent many happy hours in my childhood. Being here gives me a sense of adventure, innocence and youth." Maybe that's it.

What the curious observer does know for sure is that the lake—loved or not—has an empirical existence that is separate from Mighty-fine's feelings for it. Quite frankly, it's his enthusiasm for the lake that paints the place rosy for the rest of us. He mythologizes the lake and because of this our kids—Beulah, Sade, Hepzebah and Lars—see the wonder of it all. For me, it ain't naturally so. What Mighty-fine and the kids can do with ease takes more effort from me. The lake doesn't easily stimulate my feelings of connectedness. Instead, mystique clings to particular parts of the city. There are some corners of Edmonton where the enchanting thing happens and the environment outside the head connects to the environment inside the head. There's a certain seat atop the hill that overlooks the Whitemud Stable. You can see the river from there. That's for me. I honestly prefer the river to the lake so I'm very grateful to Mighty-fine's passion. It's catching. It makes the lake and me "connect."

Ani is right. Mighty-fine is keen on whatever it is the lake is because he lives in his head, which is to say that he is intelligent and a normal, emotional fellow. Our emotions tint our sensory experiences. Have Ani and Ms Bunn left their respective hearts in Manitoulin and the West Indies? For Ani, does the feel of Manitoulin sand squishing between her toes and the taste of wild strawberries bursting in her mouth capture a lost innocence? For Ms Bunn, perhaps a lime doesn't smell perfectly limey unless it is savored at home on the island when she is sitting down to eat with her warm and boisterous family. What is this feeling of caring all about? Be it place or family that we love, what is love? Normal emotional people take the feeling of person-to-person or person-to-place connectedness for granted. We say we "love it," or "love you," on a daily basis.

Love, fear and other emotions

For the sake of simplicity, I choose to use the word love in this discussion. Love, the way I'm applying it, is more like a good, fragrant curry than a single spice. Love is a compound of many noble ingredients that is hard to describe. Even the intellect of Charles Darwin has some trouble pinning down a good and precise definition of love. Darwin says, "The feelings which are called tender are difficult to analyse; they seem to be compounded of affection, joy, and especially of sympathy" (*The expressions of the emotions in man and animals* 214).

Public love-talk can get a bit too personal for private comfort. Individuals give themselves away and lose their competitive edge when they bring into open view the people and things they love. Consequently, some of the more rationally mannered among us don't like to get into it. Whereas a discussion about fear can readily turn into discourse on oppression, a discussion about *love* can quickly reduce a sane exchange into something fairly mawkish and sentimental. Yet, as Machiavelli was well aware, love, when it works, brings about compliance as well as, and maybe even better than, fear.

Some groups entirely dismiss love as a topic of public conversation. We know this because they have no comparable word for it in their language(s). Love, so I'm told, isn't going to be a topic of public discourse in Beijing. To assume, however, that a group that doesn't discuss love is made up of members who do not experience love (and sympathy, empathy, compassion and so forth) is to commit a monumental deconstructive error. We all expect that feelings of love are universal. Of course, I am not speaking of just chivalrous love, but a subtle tincture, blending all loves: chauvinism, narcissism, compassion, charity and sympathy, and the best of all, empathy. Familiar to all of us, love is devilishly tough to describe.

Will love, like happiness, claim its own gene? Or is love too complicated for that? Jonathan Weiner, referring to the concerns of geneticist Sidney

Benzer, urges caution. Benzer is sure that “when the picture of genes and behavior begins to fill in, there will be no such thing as ‘the gay gene’ or ‘the curiosity gene’ or ‘the happiness gene’… Students of genes and behavior will dissect vast complexes and constellations of genes that work together, as in the clockwork in the fly” (Weiner, *Time, love, memory* 237). Benzer’s opinion that genes likely work together to effect certain behaviors complements Antonio Damasio’s explanation about the “thrifty” and “tinkerish” nature of evolution. Damasio explains that natural selection operates “by conserving something that works, by selecting other devices which can cope with greater complexity [and] rarely involving entirely new mechanisms from scratch” (*Descartes’ error* 190).

This means that we who are Puritans aren’t quite as purely rational as we want to be. For good and ill (and Damasio gives persuasive examples of each) our computational selves and our emotional selves are *not* grounded in two entirely independent systems. In decision-making, emotion directs reason but reason can also double check emotion. Damasio explains why it is that emotion has such ready access to reason:

> The lower levels in the natural edifice of reason are the same ones that regulate the processing of emotions and feelings, along with global function of the body proper such that the organism can survive. These lower levels maintain direct and mutual relationships with the body proper, thus placing the body within the chain of operations that permit the highest reaches of reason and creativity. Rationality is probably shaped and modulated by body signals, even as it performs the most sublime distinctions and acts accordingly (200).

But how then does the emotional side of the mannering process work? How does the individual’s being able to recognize, for instance, his or her feelings of love, fear, prestige, shame and guilt assist grouping up and, subsequently, aid the survival of the individual?

I might as well discuss fear. It's the easiest place for me to make the argument for and offer evidence of a mannering process. It takes me back to the child the memory of being a sensitive child.

Your being a *sensitive* child suggests, sometimes derogatorily to your mates, that you are ready to react emotionally to any given situation rather than overriding your emotions with your reasoning equipment. Notwithstanding the fact that separating logic from emotion has proven to be a thorny problem, you know what I mean. Someone criticizes your drawing of your family, and your heart sinks in shame. Someone accuses your mother of wearing army boots, and you get mad. It doesn't occur to you to be grateful about gender equity in the military. Someone sneers that your dad, being a politician, is inevitably corrupt. Instead of considering the source of the insult, you feel guilty about the new bike he just gave you. Someone laughs at your new haircut, and you feel embarrassed and heartily sorry that you ever thought the Doofus Hair Salon was cool in the first place. In our conscious state, we take emotions and feelings for granted, but they are amazingly complex and always ready to allow an empirical experiences to make an impression on us.

Damasio characterizes emotions on two levels, emphasizing both a distinction and a connection between what he terms primary and secondary emotions. He explains their connectedness and distinctiveness this way: "Nature…did not select independent mechanisms for expressing primary and secondary emotions. It simply allowed secondary emotions to be expressed by the same channel already prepared to convey primary emotions" (139). As for primary emotions (for instance, love and fear), Damasio himself asks the evolutionary question, "To what degree are emotional reactions wired in at birth?" And then he graciously replies:

> I would say that neither animals nor humans are, of necessity, innately wired for bear fear, or eagle fear (although some animals and humans may be wired for spider fear and snake fear). One possibility I have no problem with is that we are wired to respond

> with an emotion, in preorganized fashion, when certain features of stimuli in the world or in our bodies are perceived, alone or in combination. Examples of such features include size (as in large animals); large span (as in flying eagles); type of motion (as in reptiles); certain sounds (such as growling); certain configurations of body state (as the pain felt during a heart attack).... Note that in order to cause a body response, one does not even need to 'recognize' the bear, or snake, or eagle, as such, or to know what, precisely, is causing pain. All that is required is that early sensory cortices detect and categorize the key features or features of a given entity (e.g., animal, object) and that structures such as the amygdala receive signals concerning their conjunctive presence (131-132).

One supposes that adult fear could also be included among Damasio's list of specifics (bear fear, snake fear, eagle fear), which is not preorganized in offspring. You might suggest that fear of falling is hardwired in some of us, and I would agree. That may be why flying is much harder than driving. Because adults—having not an insignificant arm span—are at times large and growling and fast moving (to say nothing of clumsy enough to drop an infant), children must find that certain mature people can fit the bill of horror quite nicely.

Thanks to a combination of fear-stimulating features in the adult, a child quivers. Each of us can remember, as a child, feeling afraid of some adult or another. I was so afraid of Miss Shhh, the grade five-six teacher at Alexandra School, that the very sight of her made me physically ill. What she would do to me if she ever caught me in her clutches was too dire to picture, so I never did come to grips with my fear. She probably wouldn't have risked homicide, but at that time you could have fooled me. Fear remained a vague misery that clutched at my heart and rolled around in my stomach like poison. To me, Miss Shhh was not exactly real. Since at the time I was a rather giddy promoter of sprites and woodland elves and

fairies and such, I considered the options open to me. Possibly, she was a witch. Certainly, she was a public screamer, and since witches and public screamers are not to be trifled with, I was accustomed to treating her with enormous and ingratiating deference. My toadying smile hurt me, body and spirit. The anxiety Miss Shhh inspired didn't seem particularly special, only colossal.

However, "feeling afraid" and being able to recall that feeling is, according to Damasio, *a special conscious thing*. On the teeter-totter of life, *feeling* safe sits opposite *feeling* special.

What makes us feel unsafe? The answer to this question varies from person to person, but we'll paint our colors with a broad, universal brush. Whether the attacker is human or animal, we all know that an imminent assault on our person or persons we love will engage our physiological responses for fight or flight.

It isn't just the great big things that scare us, though. We fear being caught. Most of us—if we have normal, functioning, emotional mechanisms—fear the shame that comes from being publicly exposed or thought of as someone who is socially despicable: a liar or a cheater a nymphomaniac or a pedophile or a murderer. In North America you likely could grade the ladder of shame, running down from worst to bad. Shame the worst is the pedophile. Shame the worse is the liar. Shame the bad is the murderer. In some quarters nymphomania may not even have a rung. For North America, I place the cultural badness of liars ahead of murderers, because some murderers (neither serial killers nor child murderers) may have an aura of frustrated innocence about them that liars rarely have.

We fear being humiliated. We don't mind deferring to the stronger game player as long as we aren't humiliated in losing the competition. Being humiliated and forced instead of choosing to comply to the dominance of another player makes a recipe for revenge.

We fear the loss of language. We fear the loss of our folkways. We fear the loss of the things we own.

Primary emotions are hardwired, but, says Damasio, "feelings have a truly privileged status" (159). "[F]eeling your emotional states, which is to say being conscious of emotions, offers you flexibility of response based on the particular history of your interactions with the environment. Although you need innate devices to start the ball of knowledge rolling, feelings offer you something extra" (133). Feeling the secondary emotions, Damasio explains, customizes the emotional process. They make you, you. You dread public speaking, but addressing a crowd invigorates your extroverted buddy Marc. Marc is inordinately afraid of snakes. You, who are not, could cleave asunder a pit viper without drawing a bead of sweat. In any case, Damasio asks us to seriously consider our primary and secondary emotions and feelings, reminding us to recognize something that most of us know from first-hand experience. There are "many varieties" of them (149).

Now, I dare say that happiness, sadness, anger, fear and disgust, as Damasio lists them, are "the most universal" emotions (149). Their universality being acknowledged, there would be no reason to expect that a child from, say, Blueberry, England, or Chongqing, China, would have no idea what, for instance, anger or happiness is. Nor would a child from Blueberry or Chongqing be exempt from fear and trembling in the face of adult wrath—especially Miss Shhh's if they ever had the bad fortune to run into her.

Says Damasio, "When you do studies across cultures you find an enormous stability. You find certain repertories of behaviors that obviously have been placed in our biology during the history of evolution because of the challenges in the environment" (*New York Times* magazine, May 7, 2000). Being conscious of my emotions and feelings, I can honestly say that my fear of Miss Shhh made me comply with her wishes. And when I read the world according to Miss Shhh, she usually didn't bother about me. Good. When she didn't bother with me, I read my mind and my background

feelings like this: keep up the compliant behavior because it makes all systems okay.

What are background feelings?

> More restricted in range than the emotional feelings described previously, background feelings are neither too positive nor too negative, although they can be perceived as mostly pleasant or unpleasant. In all probability it is these feelings, rather than emotional ones, that we experience most frequently in a lifetime….The background feeling is our image of the body landscape when it is not shaken by emotion. The concept of 'mood,' though related to that of background feeling, does not exactly capture it. When background feelings are persistently of the same type over hours and days, and do not change quietly as thought contents ebb and flow, the collection of background feelings probably contributes to a mood, good, bad or indifferent. If you try for a moment to imagine what it would be like to be *without* background feelings, you will have no doubt about the notion I am introducing. I submit that without them the very core of your representation of self would be broken (*Descartes' error* 150-151).

Background feelings seamlessly tell us from minute to minute and year to year who we are as individuals, no matter where our environment takes us and no matter how much our environment changes. "Our individual identity," says Damasio, "is anchored on this island of illusory living sameness against which we can be aware of myriad other things that manifestly change around the organism" (155). We feel our overall sense of self thanks to background feelings. Furthermore, below language, deep in ourselves, we always know how we are doing (our body state), owing to our background feelings. We may tend to answer the polite, "How are you?" with the even more polite, "Fine, thank you." Still the fact that the question is asked at all presumes that the asker knows the respondent has

the answer, even if he or she doesn't want to admit that things are bad, or thinks it's impolite to come clean with the terrible truth. "I feel lousy, thanks."

We each have a self-centred consciousness that recognizes primary and secondary emotions and background feelings. What other ready-for-action tools does the individual bring to competitive socialization? The individual is a manipulator and a liar. Societies don't appreciate manipulators and liars, but, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, natural selection does. Come to think of it, these attributes are handy on the simplest level, those times when you don't want to "come clean" after someone has greeted you with, "Hi, how are you." You reply, "Fine, thanks." You feel awful because nothing in your life seems to be going well, but who needs to know that?

Lying to and manipulating others aid socialization, but the individual has to keep track of the game plan: when is it okay to dissemble in this society?

Lucifer says that the mind is its own place and Ani decides that she lives in her head. So what? What good is living in our heads? What good does it do us to be the conscious and self-centred users of primary and secondary emotions, and background feelings? In a nutshell, the answer is this: without all of the above, culture clubs couldn't manner us. If we couldn't get mannered, we'd never fit in. If we couldn't fit in, we'd never feel safe.

Notes

1 Charles Reeve, "Paris as you've never seen it," *Literary review of Canada*, May 2001.

2 The mental convolution of both lying and truth telling is superbly expressed by David Nyberg:

> No lie is just a lie. It is a lie told to somebody about something for some reason at some time with some more or less probable results intended. Lying, like telling the truth, is complex and fraught with difficulties. There is a treacherous transition from believing something, thinking it through in one's own mind, to saying it out loud to someone else. Even though we may not always experience fully the complexity of this transaction, to speak a simple truth is an impressive mental accomplishment. (*The varnished truth: truth telling and deceiving in ordinary life.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).