**SUFFERING, WISDOM AND DEMOCRATIC LIFE**

## ARTICLE 1: PRAGMATIC BEGINNINGS

When thinking about the potential for the development of democracy framing it in terms of electoral cycles, or even several such cycles, is not very productive. Democracies cannot change substantially until the psychological capacity of their citizens has reached a level that can sustain democratic political processes and democratic forms of living. Unfortunately the vast majority of people in Western liberal democracies are a long way from realising their full psychological potential. The purpose of this article and the subsequent four related articles which are drawn from my forthcoming book *Suffering, Wisdom and Democratic Life* is to describe and explain the optimal states of personhood that would minimise suffering, fulfil human potential and sustain thriving democratic forms of life.

Approached non-reductively I am interested in the depth to which our psychology is based on fundamental evolutionary and pragmatic universal behavioural patterns. Having worked for many years in a psychotherapeutic setting and written an earlier book on psychotherapy (*The Purpose of Counselling and Psychotherapy*) this is a new direction for me. But if substantial psychological change is required then revealing the depth of our embodied conditioning indicates the magnitude of the instinctual and emotional factors that need to be worked through if we are to approach our psychological potential. Thus whilst I do not deny the possibility of psychological change it is just a lot more difficult than we might imagine.

Throughout the five articles I affirm the postmetaphysical premise that precludes access to any absolute or transcendental grounds - I have argued extensively for this and against relativism in my previous work (2004 and 2014). With this in mind I believe we should seriously consider that the phenomenon of human suffering is an empirically universal human experience of the very highest significance. My response to this 'fact' is neither moral nor ethical (as both would immediately raise the spectre of relativism); rather it is that the desire for relief from suffering is a universal and deep feature of the human condition. Consequently, the primary and appropriate response to this is *therapeutic* – that is, how might we relieve suffering? So my proposition is that *the relief of suffering is the most important universal human value and we should treat it as such.*

The basis for this proposition is not (i) rationalistic - it is not a logical necessity or an inherent property of rationality. Reason cannot ground itself according to its own principles of proof and argumentation; it cannot from within itself justify or prove a first principle. Reason can only work with values, issues or subjects that are external to it. The importance of suffering as a universal value cannot be deduced from reason rather it is a value to which reason can be applied. (ii) It is not moral - from the 'is' of the universal prevalence of suffering we cannot generate an 'ought'. Any morals or ethics that may stem from this observation derive their motivating power not from some kind of sanctity that might be inherent in the concept or fact of suffering, but from any pragmatic changes to behaviour that might be required if we are to practically relieve suffering in the real world. (iii) I am not arguing that suffering acts like a self-evident truth. Although I take it to be a fact it is not a pre-given truth which naturally presents itself to us a principle which is morally compelling.

Rather the proposition is an existential/empirical observation based on (i) the *absolute finality of death*. The brute fact that death comes to us all acts as the absolute guarantor of our

finitude. This empirically based universal is the source of our final and ultimate suffering – the loss of life. (ii) The *universality of suffering* – not just its empirical ubiquity but pain and suffering is plain brutish. When we are in severe pain we are utterly consumed by it. Its awfulness can be so real that it needs neither philosophical investigation nor scientific proof to 'verify' just how bad it feels. The experience of the sheer dreadfulness of unremitting pain is proof enough. This reaction to suffering is, I believe, both obvious and universal - as is the desire to avoid it. (iii) The *instinct to avoid pain* is universal and biologically fundamental. (iv) The Buddhist notion of *dukkha* (of which more in article four) reveals how suffering is inherent in the essential construction of our selfhood, such that only by changing the nature of the self can we reduce our suffering – a task with which Buddhist philosophy identifies. In the end perhaps all we need in order to ground the universality of the primacy of suffering is a *therapeutic* argument based on common sense. Suffering exists - everybody experiences it and that is a *bad* thing. Only a fool would not seek to avoid pain.

The concept of suffering is important because it is the *main obstacle to developing our full psychological potential and, for that reason, the prime obstacle to developing citizens capable of making democratic living work.*

An important element of my thinking on this subject is the philosophy of pragmatism. I find it valuable because (a) it avoids the illusion of the disembodied subject and gives due weight to the impact of our bodies (experience, emotions, feelings and sensations) on our behaviour; (b) it is fallibilistic in its denial of any absolute grounds for truth; (iii) it denies the complete separation of *fact* and *value*; (iv) it sees people as being active agents in the world pragmatically creating their world in relation to a practical purpose; and, finally (v) pragmatism enables us to recognise pluralism within the world without jettisoning the possibility of establishing objectivity in our inquiries.

Regarding objectivity, whilst I accept that reality is ultimately unknowable this does not preclude the validity of arguing for the *pragmatic necessity* of presupposing that such reality exists independent of our conceptualisation of it. We must learn to live with the *paradox* that the constituted world of *facts* which we inhabit is but a *fiction,* but that the fiction refers to something *real* – yet ultimately unknowable. The presupposition of a 'real' world is a heuristic device – as in Vaihinger's philosophy of *as if*. Here are some reasons for adopting this position.

- The possibility for a mistake in communication to be recognised as valid is dependent upon us being able to recognise and talk about the *same* object that exists within different contexts of interpretation. This is only possible if the object is independent of all of its representations.
- It offers an alternative to the consensus theory of truth which inevitably gets embroiled in the problems of relativism.
- *Fact* and *value* cannot be separated per se, but they can within the context of a defined pragmatic interest.
- It is a heuristic device which allows the fictions of science and the habits of our every lives to gain purchase in the world. It enables us to *act*.
- Postulating a real world beyond our representation of it opens up a gap between the fictional and the 'actual' worlds. This gap, this hiatus is the zone in which we can find our creativity to develop new ideas and to pragmatically find new ways to interact with the world and satisfy more of our needs and desires.

- Psychologically, once we can mindfully work through the anxiety, we can learn to be comfortable in this space and this enables us to be curious about ourselves and seek to develop those psychological competencies that promote wisdom and the ability to skilfully live our lives with as little suffering as is possible.
- To be able to hold the tension between our ordered everyday world and the permanent, if not always obviously present, capacity for the real world to break into our lives and create chaos is a psychological precondition for the development of the kind of authentic, reflexive self which, more than any other possible model of the self, is able to optimally operate within the stringent requirements for democratic deliberation in all forms of social activity. In other words it is the kind of personhood we need to enable democratic societies to run with maximum effect.

Objectivity is therefore not to be confused with metaphysical realism or with any sense that it is attempting to describe or verify the 'real' world in-itself beyond language and perception. Nor is it to be confused with the very particular sense with which I have defined the need to suppose an independent, separate world. Rather the most viable and practical usage of the term objectivity takes place within the framework of pragmatic philosophy. From this perspective we are now confining ourselves to understanding the world as it is presented to us from within the context of its social construction. Naturally this immediately throws up the problem that once we open the door to social construction we have immediately put ourselves back into the maelstrom of relativism. Thankfully we have not. If we take contextuality to its extreme then, in principle, there is an almost infinite number of possible interpretations of the world. True. The pragmatic point is, however, there is only a small number of them that are viable and an even smaller number that are universally viable for all people. We have, in fact, only a very limited number of *viable* possible interpretations of the world. That means just a few workable processes of generating knowledge. *Objectivity is an epistemological quality and process that operates from within a particular pragmatic universal interest*. So if we take the phenomenon of suffering and the pragmatic interest in reducing it, then the procedures of argumentation and the generation of empirical information can be directed at generating *objective* facts and knowledge within this frame of interest with a view to reducing suffering. This essay is an attempt to make a contribution with regard to this pragmatic interest.

Alongside philosophical pragmatism I am also interested in Buddhist philosophy which is largely ignored by mainstream philosophy yet, once we jettison some of its esoteric aspects, we find that it offers a deeply pragmatic orientation. Buddhist philosophy fully embraces the premise that *suffering is undesirable* and so the pragmatic purpose of philosophical reflection is not to seek some kind of pristine truth that is independent of any interest or value but to *practically* use philosophical reflection in the service of seeking relief from suffering. It is this interweaving of philosophical analysis, pragmatism and the foremost universal problem of suffering that, in my view, makes Buddhist philosophy interesting and germane. Its unique contribution is to problematise the nature of the self - about 2,500 years before the late twentieth century's similar concern. For Buddhism the main root of suffering (as opposed to pain) is in our relationship to our own self. This enables me to connect philosophy with suffering and with the nature of the self.

**Evolution and Pragmatic Anthropological Universals**

In order to describe and explain the optimal states of personhood that would minimise suffering, fulfil human potential and sustain thriving democratic forms of life I think it is essential to consider the evolution of pragmatically understood *universal* anthropological elements to our psychological make-up which will also (i) make clear the depth to which our behaviour is heavily influenced by our biology; (ii) show the strong connection between pragmatist theory and evolution; (iii) establish a small number of universal instinctual/behavioural/emotional inputs to our psychology; and (iv) show that this is neither reductionist nor deterministic.

Once evolution has established organic life further development is, as much as anything else, a *learning process* much of which is not conscious. It is a *pragmatic* form of learning with 'survival of the fittest' as the ultimate and sternest of teachers. In this context we must come to see a human being not primarily as a psychological entity nor as a social being but as a human organism. The organic basis of our human identity is primary in evolutionary terms because it came first, and primary in the life of any particular individual in the sense that it is a precondition for all other aspects of our identity. The natural evolution of the human species is one immensely long performance of an organism which, in interacting with its environment, develops ever improving problem-solving capacities. The phylogenetic development of the human species has created a number of emotional, mental and communicative structures that are universal and common to all its members. I shall now consider some of the key ones.

*1. Pleasure/Pain*

Even at the unicellular (the single cell) level there is some internal organisation that enables it to respond to its environment. With the singe cell we find the first universal behaviour patterns, namely approach and avoidance or pleasure and pain. All cells propel themselves towards food and withdraw when prodded with a sharp object or when they experience toxic substances. They move towards possible sources of pleasure and away from pain, in other words they seek rewards and avoid punishment. None of this requires consciousness let alone a mind, it is a blind, automatic and systemic response to the environment. In a sense there is a learned 'intelligence' that is non-consciously guiding the organism.

Prior to the appearance of the nervous systems the '…unbrained organisms already had well-defined body states that necessarily corresponded to what we came to experience as pain and pleasure.' (Damasio 2010: 258) Damasio suggests that the functional differentiation between pleasure and pain has a necessary quality – necessary in relation to the drive to survive. The feeling of 'pleasure' must have the quality of rewarding behaviour which maintains the organism's life-processes at their smoothest and optimal functioning, whilst 'pain' must deter those practices which create problems and reduce performance.

As primitive brain structures evolved this process became more sophisticated. The brain developed structures that could not only sense pain and pleasure but could also predict the likelihood of experiencing them. The brain would flag up the chance of pleasure by releasing dopamine or oxytocin and the threat of pain by releasing cortisol. This development had the survival advantage of optimising the success of behaviours to either approach or avoid a stimulus. Essentially the pain/pleasure axis is a detection system enabling an organism to successfully navigate its path through its environment. Damasio (56) doubts if a better one could be imagined.

Through millions of years of evolution from the simplest of organisms to the humans of the twenty-first century a primary aspect of behaviour is the pleasure/pain and approach/avoid axis. Just as we must accept the physical fact that the most ancient part of the brain is reptilian in nature so we must, I believe, come to terms with the fact that universal to all humans is this fundamental patterning of behaviour. This is one of the reasons why I take *suffering to be the most important and significant state of affairs* that, in order to avoid extinction, *demands that we change our behaviour and take remedial action so as to avoid suffering*. From this perspective, I propose that, irrespective of whether it is an individual making decisions about her life or the political steering mechanisms of a society making policy decisions, the *first principle when choosing a course of action is to avoid pain and relieve suffering*.

*2. Chaos*

The notion of chaos outside the study of mythology, with one or two exceptions, is largely ignored and under-theorised. Yet I feel an understanding of our relation to this extreme state sheds a different light on some aspects of our behaviour. Viewed pragmatically chaos acts like a negative universal influence on our actions. Chaos, in its role as the unknown facet of the real independent world, acts as the universally present aspect of the world that is forever beyond our working knowledge and so, in its role as an obstacle to our attempts to achieve our goals, acts as a spur to us to learn knew paths to success. So although logically unknowable it is inferred through its effects. Although the terms 'chaos' and the 'unknown' both refer to 'that which is beyond our knowledge' I feel that in a pragmatic and experiential context the term chaos is more useful because it carries a bite. We rightly fear chaos because when catastrophe, breakdown, trauma and disaster befalls us we do not feel it as some abstract, philosophical epistemological challenge, we experience it as a terror that threatens the viability of our world and our selfhood. Chaos creates a stimulus to learning in tooth and claw. Only if we learn to cope with chaos will we have the capacity to embrace our curiosity and learn from the awesome novelty that chaos throws at us. As suffering is often the fissure through which chaos renders void our everyday certainties then our pragmatic interest in relieving suffering steers our approach towards chaos in the practical direction of learning the psychological skills of how best to cope with the potentially traumatic impact of the unknown.

If we think of chaos epistemologically then it demarcates the boundary between the known and the unknown. As we proceed habitually in the world and are reasonably successful at achieving our goals we are operating in the ordered world of the *known*. Another way to express this is to understand it as *explored* territory. When our actions result in consequences that we did not predict then we have encountered the *unknown* or the *unexplored*. When our actions result in catastrophic failure (a violent attack, the sudden death of a loved one, diagnosis of a terminal disease) this creates fundamental doubt not just about our goals but the means we used to try to attain them and even the 'security' of our starting position comes into question. *Chaos* best describes this state of affairs. It is the epistemological state of complete ignorance – a state of literally no knowledge or information – it is the utterly unexplored territory right at the edge of the known world. This near infinite space of confusion and disorder does not gently enter into our life but crashes in creating mayhem.

Chaos is twinned with its opposite, namely *order* or explored territory. It is the habitual world of everyday certainty. In this reality all the objects in our physical world behave themselves. Our bodies are able to perform as we wish. There is a reliable social infrastructure and our relationships are secure and sustaining. Since life began our ancestors, through trial and error,

have slowly created more and more explored, predictable territory. This binary of chaos and order, the known and the unknown is not just theoretical – it is an *existential* binary that permanently and timelessly acts as a universal feature of human existence with a profound influence on our lives. It is the ontologically independent nature of the world that acts as the 'obstacle' or the 'problem' that we encounter as we pragmatically operate in the world and which stimulates the need to learn. Chaos is a constant source of much of our most miserable suffering and my approaching this subject in this way is naturally stimulated by the 'interest' in relieving suffering. But, of course, chaos is not always trouble for it also plays a very positive role for us because the instinct to survive and the steering mechanism of pain and pleasure stimulate *creativity*. Only by pragmatically and creatively seeking different means to attain our objectives do we slowly and incrementally expand the known world and gain reliable means to reach our goals. Of course our own internal world – the world of our psyche, our unconscious, our emotions, our instincts – can be as much terra incognita as anywhere else. Our anxieties, our depression, phobias, complexes and dissociations signify levels of inner turmoil and chaos every bit as strange as externally stimulated chaos. The unknown within us has the same potential to wreak havoc and chaos as anything that resides in the outside world. The existence of the unknown acts as a *universal and constant feature of our environment* – which is why our brain and nervous system has evolved distinct operations for dealing with order and for dealing with chaos.

*3. Orienting Reflex*

What is the significance of the unknown? The question seems to be contradictory. The unknown is unknowable so we have every reason to rest easy with this potential and have a completely neutral attitude towards it until such time as we can gain more insight into its nature. But we don't. Throughout evolution the constant presence of that which is unknown has had a strong influence on the development of our brain and of our nervous system. The reason for this is obvious – the unknown has the constant potential to invade our lives and create havoc. Our adaptive response has taken two different paths. One path is via the development of our cognitive and rational processes such that, in cooperation with others, we work to construct a social world that has order. When our goal-directed behaviour is in control and we operate within the known our actions become habitual and predictable.

The other evolutionary path has developed a system that can operate when the unexpected happens and our habitual responses are inadequate and often simply too slow. This is the *orienting reflex* which is part of the limbic system involving the hippocampus and the amygdala. This is the ancient system which, in the extreme case creates the automatic response of either fight, flight or freezing. At such pivotal moments the cortical system of trying to categorise the event, assess risk and contemplate a course of action is *too slow*. In unexpected circumstances the limbic system takes control and instantly prepares the body for fight, flight or freezing. Fear is the default response when the possibility of a positive valence is not immediately apparent. What seems clear is that the emotional responses of fear, curiosity or hope are not learned. They are instinctive responses that are generated by the amygdala when it is triggered by the unpredicted. Everything that is not explored is already loaded with valence and fear is the default reaction. The amygdala ensures, whether we like it or not, that our relation to the unknown is careful and respectful of what it harbingers.

The stimulus to learning which chaos and the unknown provide is not limited to the cognitive and linguistic parsing of the undifferentiated world into meaningful entities. Before this can happen – before we can think straight – we need to have some presence of mind or emotional equilibrium. We need, in other words, to have gained the psychological capacity to enable us

to have insight into the fact that our instinctual and emotional *reactions* to the unexpected will take temporal, and often affective, precedence over our ability to have a more considered, rational and 'objective' relation to the unexplored. If we are ever to gain the skill to approach the unknown – regardless of the valence of the reflex orientation - with a neutral curiosity and openness we have to learn how our instinctual and emotional reactions to chaos actually work. In the first instance we need insight (knowledge) as to how these processes work. But such abstract knowledge is insufficient. We also need to have the practical *experience* of having been in real situations of dealing with the unknown and, in the midst of such situations, experientially learn the fortitude, endurance and courage required to be able to feel the (sometimes immense) tug of the instinctual and emotional valence without letting this *reaction* determine our behaviour. We can use this psychological skill to break the necessity of engaging in reactive behaviour and replace it with a *chosen response*. This is an aspect of the pragmatic learning process which results not in knowledge but *wisdom*. *Before we can act pragmatically with success and achieve any goals we need a good understanding of the extent to which our bodies and our evolutionary biological inheritance influence our reactions to the unexpected problems that life throws in our path*. Only then, and only with considerable practical training, will we develop the psychological capacity to divert instinctual reflexes into chosen responses.

Trauma (PTSD) is an experience which graphically illustrates how epistemology (how we come to know the world) takes on a deeply personal and pragmatic dimension. Trauma robs its victims of the everyday certainties that make life liveable. The naïve pragmatic realism we need in order to enable us to function in a world experienced as stable and predictable is shattered by an experience sometimes aptly described as 'world collapse'. This massive and unsought deconstruction of our personal world exposes us to the brute, chaotic and inescapable contingency of a universe which lies very much closer to the veneer of everyday certainty than we ever could have imagined. The traumatised person literally *lives in another kind of reality*. Many never fully regain a foothold in the predictable world they have lost. Some do recover much of what was lost but it takes years of painstaking work to build an ego which can hold onto consciousness while suffering pain, fear and chaos. With the support of psychotherapy and mindfulness training the survivor is very slowly re-introduced to the deep fears associated with the trauma in such a way as to, bit-by-bit, construct a new world for herself. The survivor can consciously embrace in their being that which philosophers can only suppose – the ability to consciously walk along the knife-edge between order and chaos and look terror in the face the next time it invades their life. A reconstructed world is epistemologically real but is known to be a pragmatically viable construction on top of a reality that has an awesome power to assert its chaotic independence – this is true for everyone only they rarely either realise it or feel it.

*4. Curiosity*

A key feature of all action is that unexpected obstacles are encountered. Sometimes alternative habitual courses of action might prove successful but on other occasions nothing works which means that we have encountered a novelty and the unknown. This is by no means always chaotic and catastrophic but it always demands that we *redefine* the nature of the obstacle and find new modes of operation. The inevitability that we will come across the novel stimulates the need for the critical universal psychological competence of *curiosity*. Inquisitiveness is an open state of mind and is a very demanding capacity that is only possible when are able to maintain emotional equilibrium in the face of the potential anxieties and fears that the unknown can stimulate. But it is a precondition for the *creativity* we need in order to re-think our approach to the obstacle and generate new hypotheses concerning new

courses of action. The brain is especially keen about noticing the unexpected. So the novel instinctively gets our full attention. Once awakened our brain rewards us when our actions are successful. When we achieve a goal we receive a neurological bonus in the shape of a spike of dopamine which registers positively on our pain/pleasure system.

The instinctive emotional response to the appearance of new phenomenon is very likely to be fear. The likelihood of transforming this into the more positive stance of curiosity is related to the nature of the psychological posture we take when novelty makes its appearance. If we approach it and face up to our fear *voluntarily* we are much more likely to get a beneficial outcome. If we cannot manage our fear when the unknown renders obsolete our current understanding then the problem will appear to be more threatening than benign and success is less likely. The capacity to tolerate situations we don't understand increases the chance of success. The psychological ability, or strength of character, to face up to and thereby reduce the sense of threat is absolutely key to gaining success in our pragmatic interaction with an environment which always has the potential to confound our expectations.

Life inevitably involves walking the tightrope between order and chaos. We certainly need cognitive skills to be able to parse the unformed and undifferentiated – cleverness is definitely a virtue. But one that is often overestimated. It is hard to be clever when our legs tremble with fear. If we wish to learn from experience we have to accept that we are always vulnerable beings and that anxiety will be our companion. But if we wish to transform the unformed and unexplored we need to be curious and curiosity is an *open* state of mind. Openness is only possible if we consciously accept our vulnerability and proclivity to anxiety. As I shall discuss in a later article psychotherapy and the Buddhist practices of mindfulness and meditation provide the best supports enabling us to come to terms with new experiences in an open and creative state of mind without being unduly anxious. With both we learn to *metabolise*, process and contain anxiety thereby facilitating an approach to life which has more openness and curiosity. These are skills that we can learn. They increase our capacity to *tolerate that level of suffering which is an inevitabl*e part of living a meaningful life whilst *eliminating unnecessary suffering*. It is a matter of confidence. Not a confidence that we will encounter the unknown painlessly, but confidence that we have the ability and resilience to face it without being overwhelmed. When we can do this we open the door to pleasure. When we can manage to be curious we can experience joy and satisfaction in the act of discovery which encourages us once again to explore.

*5. Emotions and Feelings*

In looking at emotions and feelings I want to appreciate the depth and strength to which they are embodied and not easily open to conscious moderation so that we can understand both their universality and the scale of the problem involved in gaining some conscious leverage in relationship to them. So far I have worked with the basic dispositions of pain/pleasure and approach/withdraw and the orienting reflex. At some point in our evolution and pragmatic interaction with the environment our development made the qualitative jump to consciousness. There seems to be some consensus that this process of *emergence* is a natural outcome of systems that get increasingly complex.

Consciousness allowed the organism to become aware of itself and its surroundings. It was no longer limited to just drives and feelings, these processes could now be *known*. Before consciousness came on the scene the regulation of the organism was entirely automated; with consciousness this regulation retains its autonomous nature but comes under the influence of conscious deliberation. However, the degree to which autonomic systems govern our

behaviour is the degree to which our activity in the world is a matter of reflex or *reaction* as opposed to consciously *chosen* action. Although, with considerable training, we might marginally influence our autonomic processes we can never control them. It is this gap between the complete freedom to choose our actions (and shape the world as we please) and the substantial limitations placed on us by autonomic processes that generates much of our dissatisfaction (*dukka)* and suffering. Whilst we cannot stop our autonomic processes the elimination of unnecessary suffering is directly related to our ability to create a break between reflex and behaviour such that our driven *reactions* are transformed into *chosen responses* to autonomic processes. This is far harder to achieve than might initially be imagined and requires the high level psychological capacity that I will later describe as *wisdom*. In my view much social, psychological and political theory ignores or glosses over this issue.

Emotions and feelings are the compass that we use to navigate our way in the world. They are derived from the basic instincts of pain/pleasure and withdrawal/approach – adding a more nuanced character to this basic detection system of scanning the environment for threats and opportunities they nevertheless retain the core function of attraction and avoidance. Whilst feelings are distinguishable from emotions they are both derived ultimately from instincts.

Looking at emotions first I shall restrict myself to the core emotions (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness and surprise) not the social emotions (shame, guilt, love and so on) which come later in evolutionary terms. The fact that the core emotions are not learned but are reflexive and automatic and not restricted to humans indicates their origin at a relatively early stage in our ancestry. That these instincts have remained constant up to the present day signals that they are essential for the maintenance of life. The core emotions are closely related to the orientation reflex and the reward and punishment instincts such that they all constitute an integrated system monitoring the positive and negative valence of our interaction with our environment. Unlike feelings emotions are largely reactive and automated and are in the main expressed directly in our bodies in such forms as: changes in heart rate, facial expressions, churning in our guts, posture (stooped, cowed, upright) and the secretion of various chemicals in the body.

One way of understanding the reactive and fundamental nature of the core emotions is offered to us when we can actually see the topographical distribution of the emotions in the body. By means of a fascinating series of experiments Nummenmaa et al (2014) show a series of images which graphically display how our emotions are deeply embodied (and thus not open to simple conscious mediation). From brain imaging and behavioural studies they are able to show within the body where each of the six emotions is located and conclude that '… emotional feelings are associated with discrete, yet partially overlapping maps of bodily sensations, which could be at the core of the emotional experience.' (650)

With emotions, like instincts and reflexes, we are still in the domain of the body and the direct impact of our genetic and evolutionary inheritance on our behaviour. Because the human species has, thus far, survived then natural selection has done its job and provided *all* of us with the *same* inherited skills that enable us to instinctively and emotionally make pragmatically successful assessments of the world. In response to any relativist objections I believe that it is clear that the innate behavioural stimuli up to and including the emotions are *universal*. By that I mean the mechanism or process involved is universal even though our responses will have some cultural and individual variation. The emotion of fear will work in the same way but you and I may fear different things.

Thus I am describing universal patterns of behaviour that have a deep, fundamental and sustained impact on our current psychological make-up and behaviour. Consequently, when I come to discuss how we might develop the psychological capacity and competences required to live with a minimum of suffering and also successfully maintain democratic forms of life the main reason why this is so difficult is because much of our core selfhood rests on this rudimentary innate conditioning. It is much more than we seem willing to readily accept and yet full acceptance of this fact is a precondition for any successful release from its control. And because, at this level, these instincts and emotions are universal then, I believe, that the general approach that I shall outline in the next article, regarding the means by which we may gain a moderate level of release from this determination (and suffering), has a universal relevance and application.

Most of us use the terms 'emotions' and 'feeling' interchangeably. Yet although they are highly related they do in fact represent different phenomena. Emotions are hard wired neuro-physiological reactions set in train by external or internal stimuli. They are automatic and innate and also present in animals. A feeling follows after and is a reaction to an emotion – we *feel* an emotion. An emotion is largely an action accompanied by certain modes of thinking, a feeling is a conscious awareness of the emotion. With a feeling we perceive our state of mind whilst being conscious of what our bodies are doing when experiencing an emotion. Thus feelings are images of actions rather than the actions themselves. Because of this direct link between them feelings, whilst distinct, carry within them something of the character of the associated emotions so that feelings are principally variations on the themes of the core emotions.

Whilst emotions are universal feelings are more flexible and varied (there are a lot more of them) and represent the introduction of both cultural and individual factors into the instinctual process. Feelings present us with more opportunity for freedom. Our job, as it were, is to place a conscious interface between emotions and feelings. We can't stop an emotion (though I believe that we can influence its intensity). Feelings bring a certain level of conscious awareness to the reflexive nature of an emotion. And, with experience and training, we can interject high levels of conscious deliberation with the result that we can learn to *choose* our response to the feeling.

*6. Communication*

The last universal of human behaviour under consideration, that is related to our evolutionary inheritance, concerns the subject of communication. Later, in article five, I shall discuss the merits of the deliberative model of democracy with regard to how it provides the best fit with that form of selfhood which has both the capacity to sustain such a model and also provides the best practical political structure for reducing suffering. The deliberative type of democracy is essentially about the pragmatic principles and processes of argumentation, that is, how to communicate in a rational way in order to reach agreement about a course of action. An absolute presupposition of the possibility of reaching an agreement about anything is the belief that the parties involved share the *same meaning* about the subject under discussion. In order to put an early stake in the ground in the face of the relativist claim that unforced agreement is not possible in a world of hegemonic power structures accompanied by a cacophony of incommensurable cultural and linguistic identities, I want very briefly, before we leave the subject of evolution, to mention how it becomes difficult to understand the pragmatic development of communication and language ( and the ensuing possibility of successful communication in democratic deliberation) without taking into account the

proposition that there are some universals inherent within them. The presence of such universals enables the participants in communication to know that they share common meanings.

It is clear from an understanding of the genesis of communication that it could not have started out as a fully developed socially constructed system of abstract signs. Human communication could not have originated with an instantaneous linguistic code. Language as a symbolic communicative code must rest on an already existing form of communication – it must have evolved from something else. Thinking pragmatically human communication grew out of the particular nature of the human body and the practical demands of human cooperation in relation to satisfying common needs through shared practical ways of surviving in the world. It is out of this common developmental process that we can identify a number of pragmatic universals which enable us to share our intentions and find common meaning.

The fact that there is not a universal language, indeed there are thousands of languages, and that there are, and have been, billions of people clearly indicates the obvious observation that we are not absolutely identical nor do we share an absolutely identical world. The universal aspects of communication that I am trying to articulate do not have this kind of logical, absolute identity. The universals in communication are *pragmatic*. We only need to share a world with sufficient commonality to be able to share intentions, understand each other and get things done. There are many reasons why there are these kinds of universals in communication but they do not reside in the formal structure of language. Here are some reasons for such universals:

a. the earliest form of cooperative communication takes the form of gestures. McGilchrist (2009: 119) argues that the language of gestures goes beyond the denotative function of nouns with the result that there is a close relationship between bodily gestures and the language of syntax so that '… even the most apparently formal and logical elements of language … originate in the body and emotion. The deep structure of syntax is founded on the fixed sequences of limb movement in running creatures.' We all share this bodily structure.
b. all people share the same vocal and auditory systems and process such information in the same way
c. if we return to the ideas of the pain/pleasure and approach/withdraw instinct and the orienting reflex we can see that all humans share a broadly similar approach to the world in terms of trying to get their survival needs met. Long before we reach the dizzy heights of language we all share these utterly fundamental orientations whereby the potentially infinite range of interpretations of the world is narrowed to a very limited number of ways of *successfully approaching* the world. The world is parsed into only that which is relevant. Our instinctual approach has an inbuilt valence.
d. irrespective of language we conceptualise the world in similar ways such as '… agents acting on objects, objects moving from and to locations, events causing other events, people possessing things, people perceiving and thinking and feeling things, people interacting and communicating with one another …' (Tomasello (2008: 310)
e. every single person shares a common evolutionary heritage including the origins of communication in gestures
f. people speaking in any language draw the attention of others to matters of interest in similar ways

g. all linguistic communication operates within the constraints imposed by the way all people learn and process information based on '… visual perception, categorization, analogy, automatization, working memory, and cultural learning…' (Tomasello: 310)
h. we share similar cooperative intentions to share things with others, make requests of others and inform others
i. the natural world with which we interact and upon which we expend our labour follows the same physical laws.

Put simply there are universals of communication because all people have the same kind of communicative jobs to be done and we share sufficiently similar bodies, cognitive skills and forms of social interaction with which to complete them. The basic *process of world constitution* is the same. We share a common ground which enables common meanings which in turn facilitates each person to break out of their solipsistic perspective.

From this evolutionary understanding of the practical processes which promote the communication of identical meanings it is not too long a stretch to connect this to Habermas' theory of communicative action. By analysing the structure of the process of by which we come to a common understanding at any given moment Habermas proposes, given the universals generated by evolution, that a successful communication is based on four conditions: all participants must act sincerely and authentically, all have the same right to express themselves, there must be no coercion and all relevant participants should be included. This is how identical meanings can be secured in practice which in turn facilitates the possibility of legitimate agreement or disagreement as a prelude to action. Like the universals already mentioned these conditions are universal in the sense of being *fixed presuppositions* that are indispensable to any communication aimed at reaching an understanding. Habermas has also called them "necessary presuppositions" or "unavoidable assumptions" or "quasi-transcendental". They all refer to the same thing - their "necessity" is not a function of theory or reason, but is, as it were, simply a fact of life if we wish to communicate which is made possible by our evolutionary development.

From this consideration of evolution and its generation of a number of pragmatic universals I think we can clearly see that the pragmatic interest in suffering gains part of its prime importance as a universal value from the pivotal role that it plays in our evolution as a species. Hopefully we can, without succumbing to reductionism and complete determinism, now comprehend the depth and strength of some core biological determinants of our behaviour. This, in turn, explains why gaining a measure of freedom from them is so difficult – *but by no means impossible*. In the next article I shall address this issue by considering the key psychological competencies we need to acquire to: avoid biological determinism; live without unnecessary suffering; and make a success of democratic forms of living. As a support for all of this the establishment of a small number of pragmatic universals helps to find some solid ground in the face of strong cultural currents of relativism.

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There are four further linked articles to follow in due course.