

Thinking For Your Benefit

You think in ways of which you're unaware and don't control.
Learning to control your mind will change your life.

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"I'm a curious person. That, I think, is a quality that's necessary for education: if you're not curious then you're not interested, and if you're not interested then you're not going to learn."

— **Lynn Hill**, extreme athlete and professional rock climber

Curiosity or Discomfort?

It seems that the more creative I become, the more isolated I become. I don't want to be isolated but I do want to be creative. This creates a problem. Do I need to be more or less? Should I accept the consequences or be more average?

I equate creativity with honesty and knowledge, and I want them all. But being creative, honest, and insightful creates distance for most people, though not for everyone. My solution is to examine the distinction between what most people prefer and what I advocate. Through that examination I aim to

find a way to be creative and understood. As the saying goes, be the change you want in the world; and I want more creativity and honesty.

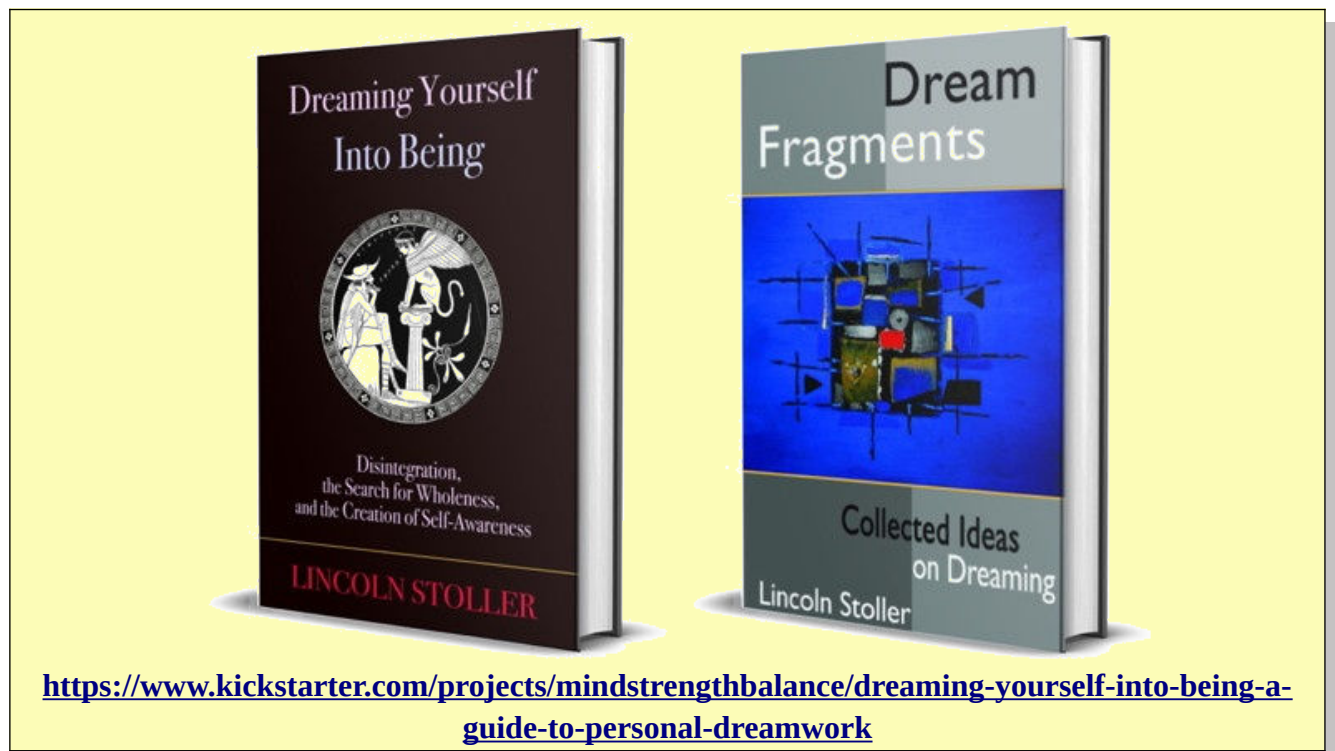
I roughly see three parts to our lives, at least for adults: the personal, the professional, and the social. Before you become an adult you have two, the personal and the social, but you're influenced by the same forces of honesty and creativity, and their opposites.

At a basic level, people are curious, and if you're going to be curious you need to be honest, or at least realistic. You need to be straight with yourself about what you're trying to do, how you're going about it, and what you expect to accomplish. If you're not curious, then you won't explore, and if you don't explore, then you won't discover anything new.

One thing missing in this picture of change is motivation. Curiosity is a form of motivation and so is discomfort. Both drive change in different ways: curiosity is a carrot while discomfort is a stick.

As a counselor who charges for my time, most people I see are motivated by discomfort. The reason is that unaddressed discomfort gets more uncomfortable, while unaddressed curiosity pretty much stays the same. So I naturally see more people motivated by discomfort than curiosity.

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Intellectual or Evasive?

Reason employs deductive and inductive logic. These usually lead to what's true, but they do not guarantee it. Deduction accepts two facts and then concludes that an idea that shares some aspect of

both is also true. For example, if there are swans and swans are white, then if Jane is white, Jane is a swan. The error lies in being too general.

Induction establishes two truths that share something in common, and then concludes one implies the other. For example, because people eat ice cream at the beach, and people drown at the beach, then ice cream leads to drowning, or drowning to ice cream. This error is famous, it boils down to thinking that things that appear together are related.

A rational proof is different from a conclusion, and it's worth considering what a rational proof could be. A conclusion would be proved if there was no rational alternative. This would require you to know all the alternatives and establish them to be irrational. We could do this if we knew everything, could consider all the alternatives, and rationally appraise them. We might get closer to this goal if we tried, but it's too hard.

We make rational errors all the time. Most of our rational conclusions are wrong in some way. I would argue we rely on emotion more than logic, and we're weakly reasonable at best. We believe rational conclusions because they support our biases, not because they're compelling.

It's only by being critical of our conclusions that we can see this, but there are many reasons to be uncritical. One is that it's easier not to give things a second thought, and another is that leaving our comfortable fallacies unquestioned is less disruptive to our beliefs.

Our intellect comes to conclusions by being reasonable, but reason requires neither accuracy, truth, honesty, or morality. For a deranged person, anything can seem reasonable. What I see, both as a researcher and a therapist, is that people twist their notion of what's reasonable to suit the conclusions they wish to believe.

This is obviously true in emotional situations, and that's no mystery, but it's also true in what people pretend are entirely rational situations. In fact, I claim that the world's greatest problems result from poor thinking that is prejudiced, illogical, uninformed, dishonest, and immoral.

In Western culture we present reason as an argument for everything, but the results are often just as prejudiced, illogical, uninformed, and immoral as the theocratic and aristocratic politics of centuries past. You might argue this is because people are poor rational thinkers, but I suspect it's the opposite: people are skilled at finding reasons to justify their bias, misinformation, and dishonesty.

Most Christian sects subscribe to the notion of original sin, especially the followers of Calvin whose beliefs in their own corruption are self-fulfilling. They will say that faith will redeem them, but it does not appear to. A reliance on faith rather than honesty leads to depravity.

Despite my distaste for this self-abnegating doctrine, my appraisal of most people's inclination to avoid, distort, and dissemble resonates with it! While people do tend toward dishonesty, I think this is a matter of convenience not pathology. People want to defend what they prefer, so they make up reasons for it. This is not a failure of human nature, it's a failure of thought and circumstance. It's the consequence of accepting poor options and then defending them. In psychotherapy, this is called Stockholm Syndrome.

There is a cure, and it's not confession or self-abnegation, it's honesty and alternative thinking. By alternative thinking I mean creative thinking, as in seeing one's flawed means and goals. The cure for intellectual dishonesty is intellectual honesty. It doesn't take the fires of Hell, a higher power, or revelation.

That being said, it seems that some people are morally irredeemable, and it is best to remove them. Such is the case with Donald Trump and his minions. They should be gone, but not forgotten.

Emotions Use Fuzzy Logic

Inductive reasoning is always fuzzy, as is any reasoning that relies on uncertain truths, vague understanding, and preconceived conclusions. Any reasoning that can't be traced back to unbiased evidence, or reasoning that cannot be traced back at all, is fuzzy. Emotion, by its nature, requires little justification; all our emotional decisions are fuzzy. That does not mean they're wrong, just questionable and untrue in general.

Not only is there a place for fuzzy logic but it's necessary. That's because we're usually forced to make decisions without enough knowledge to make the right ones. It would be nice to wait, but life doesn't. Not only do opportunities vanish, but circumstances require participation and action. The best we can often do is guess, and the best guesses are those that use all the information available. Emotion serves us well to slice through clouds of uncertainty, but it does not make a clean cut.

Most of us take our emotions at face value, and we'll often pile several emotions on top of each other. Consider love, anger, fear, suspicion, attraction, anxiety, or sadness. They tend to have either positive or negative valence, and the positives mix well with the positives, and the negatives with the negatives. When they do mix together they leave us feeling more certain. More circumstantial evidence makes us feel more conclusive.

This probably makes sense to you, but it should not. These uncertain feelings were never independent to begin with. They all share the same prejudice and their concordance is more a reflection of your bias than your insight.

Emotion is both a useful and necessary tool, but we often use it poorly. At what point were you ever taught how to use emotion? In what cases did you actually learn the right emotions through experiencing the wrong ones?

You don't learn the error in your prejudices when you profit from them, that simply gives you more evidence to equate ice cream with drowning. You'll only learn when you see the errors in your emotional inclinations, and experience the consequences of coming to the wrong conclusions. How often does that happen?

Sometimes we have both positive and negative feelings about the same things. Feeling opposites simultaneously is disturbing, so we'll convince ourselves to feel one way or the other, expressing the stronger and repressing the weaker. This leaves us with a sense of unfinished business, but the show must go on!

With feelings being so different, how do you understand how others feel, and how can you effectively critique your own feelings? I don't think there's a formula but there are some guidelines: be open, honest, and discard your preconceptions. Don't withhold your feelings.

“Never apologize for showing feeling. When you do so, you apologize for the truth.”

— **Benjamin Disraeli** (b.1804-d.1881), UK Prime Minister

It may sound contradictory, but you must learn how to be wrong. Guesses, errors, accidents, explorations, and reconsiderations are how you learn. Learning follows from being creative, not from doing what you're told or doing what others say is right.

The Conclusion You Must Come To

Your thinking sucks. You must embrace that conclusion if you're to question the way you think. If you don't, you'll continue to accept the tools you use and the ways you use them. This does not mean that you personally suck or that you're incapable. It's a purely logical conclusion. It applies to the decisions you make without sufficient evidence, which is all of them.

Most likely you're a racist. You may deny it but how could you help it? You live in a racist society in which the races live, act, and are treated differently. Even the attempts at equality are contrived and inaccurate as people of different races are geographically, economically, culturally, and linguistically segregated.

There are exceptions of course. There are people who don't fit the stereotype and some of us are blind to race either because we don't know or can't see. But on the whole, people of similar types group together and, in their segregation, develop different habits. Different religions, tastes, and ways of talking, thinking, acting, and doing business.

From my experience in living in different cultures, the way you overcome bias is by admitting it and accepting the differences. If you are white and North American, like me, then living among Asians, Africans, Native Americans, or Indians is an experiment in ignorance and humility. You cannot simply equate wearing a turban with a baseball cap, belly beads with ear rings, or underwear with a loin cloth. You might try wearing a turban or belly beads, but you'd fool no one.

You cannot equate a Caribbean community with a suburban Boston neighborhood. If you rented an apartment in Mongolia it would come with a framed picture of Genghis Khan. Do you know what that means? Would you know what taking it down would mean?

Symbols

Much of our world is built on symbols; these carry thoughts and feelings. We accept these symbols with little question and rarely violate their meanings, except in our dreams. Our dreams are a playground of symbols. Creating conflict between your symbols is the purpose of dreams, and the results are always disconcerting.

Symbology underlies our thoughts and feelings, and this is why an exploration of symbols is essential for changing your mind. It's both intellectually and emotionally challenging. It cannot be otherwise.

Symbols do not exist separately. Their meaning exists in their relationships and they create the web of our beliefs. This is a topography on which there are high and low points, landmarks we celebrate, and symbols we avoid.

I explore this in depth in my two books, *Dreaming Yourself Into Being*, and *Dream Fragments*. Both are available through January 2026 on a prepublication sale at Kickstarter. Go to the campaign webpage for samples, details, and the chance to purchase them at cost.

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<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/mindstrengthbalance/dreaming-yourself-into-being-a-guide-to-personal-dreamwork>

Exploring symbols is what counseling is about. Symbols anchor your thoughts and feelings, and until you raise these anchors you cannot move. Naturally, they're deeply buried. I dare say you're not conscious of your symbolic anchorage.

How well do you remember your dreams? How comfortable would you be if you had nighttime-like dreams throughout your day and remembered them? I want this to be your objective because this is how you see and change the future.

When you do this, you'll find that you'll create in your imagination the whole scope of dramas that you can now see in theaters, serials, novels, and headlines. These all will mean much more to you, and have more of an effect on your thoughts and feelings, when they come to you in your dreams.

This is the aim of these two books, and I encourage you to support them through the [Kickstarter campaign](#). I'm offering them at cost, which is less than half their retail price. I'm also offering enrollment in an online dream therapy course that will cover exactly these topics. If you have any interest in changing your mind or changing the world, get these books.