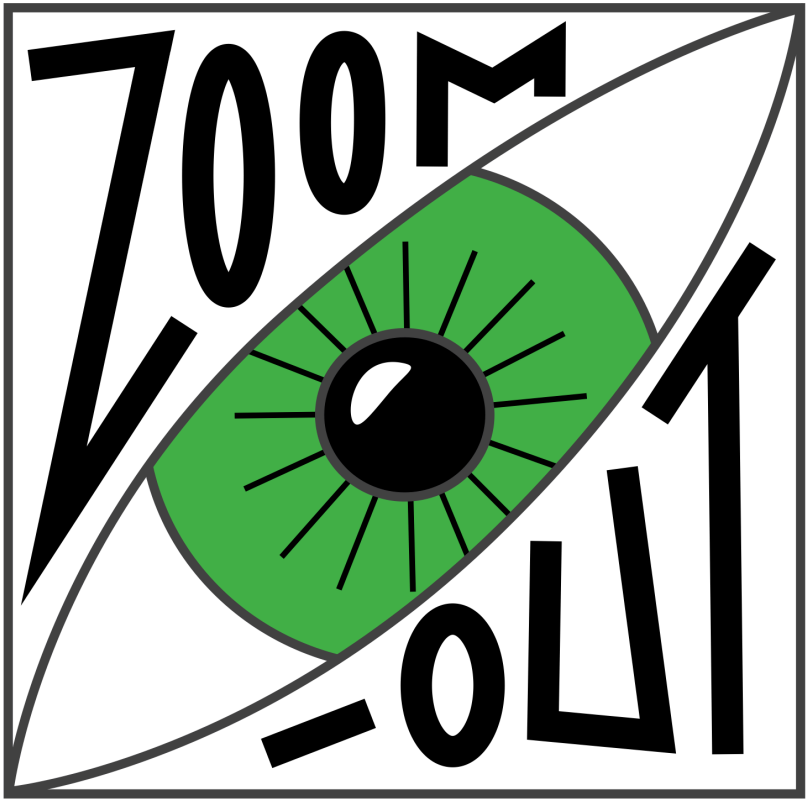


The Doors of Perspective

Zoom-Out Foundations

The art of zooming in and out
with our mind's eye

Rob Aston

Preview Draft: 8 Jan 2025

Welcome

(Welcome back? Skip to CONTENTS)

Welcome to the

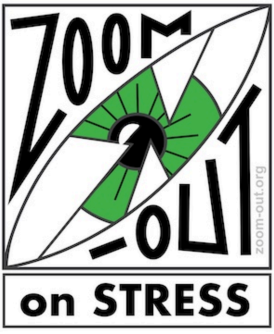
Zoom-Out Foundations

book aimed at helping us

find the most helpful perspectives

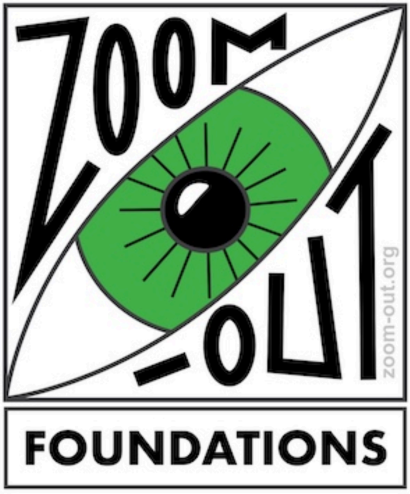
This book is an introduction to the world of zoom-in and zoom-out.

It acts as a foundation to other zoom-out content modules such as stress, conflict, emotions, collaboration, etc.



.....





You will find here lots of practical zoom-outs in the form of words, images, exercises, coaching cards, plus links to videos and other content found elsewhere.

"I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one that has to walk through it."

— Morpheus, "The Matrix" movie

This book came into existence to help us enhance our lives by:



"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern"

— *William Blake the the poem The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

The words that inspired Aldous Huxley's book title for The Doors of Perception; which led to the name of the 60's band The Doors; and now inspiring the title of this book.

Rob Aston – Zoomologist

England, The Earth, The Solar System,

The Milky Way Galaxy

2023



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<o> Funny Side

<o> Vujà dé

The Zoomologist's Way

Epilogue

Prologue

Have you ever owned a car or a bike or some other treasured mode of transport, and had to get rid of it because it got scratched? I know, how the hell are you supposed to get from A to B with a scratch!
Well I came very close!

The tragedy happened one fine summer Saturday morning. I came out of my house to go and get in my car

and there it was! A new 12 inch scratch along the side of the passenger side door. I could absolutely tell someone had done this deliberately! They ruined my car with a car key. Someone really had it in for me, obviously. I'm surprised they hadn't taken a blow torch to it and slashed every tyre while they were at it! I was livid. My head was spinning from the stress!

You may have guessed by now that I'm pretty good at getting zoomed in on

something unhelpful like this. After all, I've had decades of practice. And in hindsight, I don't think my schooling and the negative bias of the news media hadn't exactly helped. Neither had that natural process called evolution which has not optimised us for seeing reality clearly due to perceptual limitations, distortions and biases. I wonder if Charles Darwin ever got unhelpfully zoomed in like this – perhaps when his ship HMS Beagle got a scratch on it?

But today was an epiphany. I don't know how or why it happened at this particular instant but at the height of my distress, or perhaps because of it, I suddenly pulled back, saw the bigger picture in space, time, society and the universe.

That's a grand way of saying I realised I was being a bit silly!

I saw this man losing his sh*t over a scratch on a lovely car he owned, able to see and stand and walk, stood outside a house he owned, containing a family he loved, on a wonderful

summer's day morning, etc – you get the picture. Wow!

And then suddenly I zoomed back through time and was back at the car showroom the moment I was about to sign the paperwork for the car purchase. The sales lady said, "And finally you just need to sign this Guarantee From the Universe, this will guarantee your car will never get scratched or damaged in any way!".

Of course, that didn't actually happen. And that was the point.

If I'd been told this, "You are aware Mr Aston, that there is a risk the car will get scratched or damaged at some time in the future once you take the car from the showroom? Would I have replied, "Oh in that case, a car is not for me! Let's leave it here in the safety of the showroom". And then I was zooming out in space and society, seeing in my mind's eye all of the people that don't own a car and may never have that privilege. A scratch on a car door is a 1st-world problem indeed!

My grimace turned into a smile.
My distress turned into calm.
My anger turned into gratitude.

That moment was the start of my zoom-out adventures. Incorporating this simple but powerful idea into my life, my wellbeing workshops, and ultimately leading to this book which is written as much for my benefit as anyone else's.

Some years later, the following happened to me, not in a car, but on a train.

On the fast train home from work out of London Euston one day, I was sitting at a table by myself writing on my laptop. I was tired and keen to get home to my wife and kids.

A very large man comes along and dumps all of his things on the table very abruptly and roughly, sits down opposite me and kicks me with both of

his feet under the table. He then pulls out his broadsheet newspaper and it flops over my laptop screen covering a few inches of the corner of my screen.
Oh my word, he thinks he owns the place!

I instantly felt my adrenaline and stress chemicals flood my brain and body.

What a reckless and threatening git, I thought. He's sending me a message

that he wants the whole table and thinks he has more rights to the table than I have. He's also testing my boundaries. He wants a fight and if I don't push back and rise to it he will think he has dominated me and won!

So I pushed my feet against his to push him back and let him know that kicking me was not acceptable.

I then pushed the corner of his newspaper back over the edge of my screen with my most sinister sneer.

There, that showed him I thought! It felt good but at the same time really bad as now, my stress chemicals and adrenalin went to the next level as if someone had hit the "Nitro" button in my internal engine. The intense anticipation and uncertainty of his next move.

At this point, the guy looked up and for the first time really looked mean and angry. He pushed back with his

feet and flicked the corner of his newspaper back over my screen.

I pushed the paper back. He flicked it back.

Outraged, I grabbed the corner of his newspaper and tore off the corner – all the way through all the pages!

At this point, he jumped to his feet and towered over me. I then took in how big he really was. He was a good

4 inches taller than me and much heavier.

I saw his fist for a second.

The next thing I saw... were the faces of the paramedics staring down at me. They had stripped off my shirt, shaved my chest and had an ECG machine wired up to me. Crowds of commuters were leaning in to see what all the fuss was about.

Only, that's not the whole story...

It's only half true.

Only the first half of the above story is true... but all of that story could have happened years ago. It could have ended that way.

Let me rewind... to the point at which the large man kicked me with both feet and flicked his newspaper over my laptop screen.

My blood began to boil. The default perspective that had arisen in my mind was that he was an animal threatening me, trying to dominate me and invade my personal space

But then I took an intentional deep breath in with a slow exhale. I looked for other perspectives. Other possibilities. The very act of doing this started to calm me down.

I then had space to notice, to pay attention to this person. Not this

animal. I opened my mind to other perspectives.

I noticed he looked rather stressed. He was also very, very big and overweight. His shoes must have been a size 13 at least (mine are 11 BTW).

My thoughts were now in the realm of how difficult it must be to fit in seats when you are his size and get your feet under the table without kicking anyone. And how difficult it must be

to read a broadsheet newspaper in a space like this with a belly that big.

I also noticed how my laptop was taking up two-thirds of the table. And how my feet were stretched out way beyond the halfway mark under the table.

So I drew my feet back and my laptop. As I did so, his newspaper slid almost beautifully off the screen of my laptop.

As I did this I smiled at him and he caught my gaze and smiled back. I felt the connection. He was tired and wanted to get home too. I could sense in his eyes that he was worried about something. Maybe someone he loves is in trouble. Maybe he has just lost someone? Maybe he's the head of a firm that is about to go bust? None of this I knew for sure but they were in the realms of possibility.

The outcome?

I got home to my wife and kids on time.
And with all of my pride and chest hair intact!

Experiences such as this have fuelled my curiosity about perspectives. How perspectives envelop and dominate us. And the power of stepping back from our default perspectives to embrace alternative and more helpful viewpoints. To zoom-out when we are unhelpfully zoomed-in.

Zooming This Book

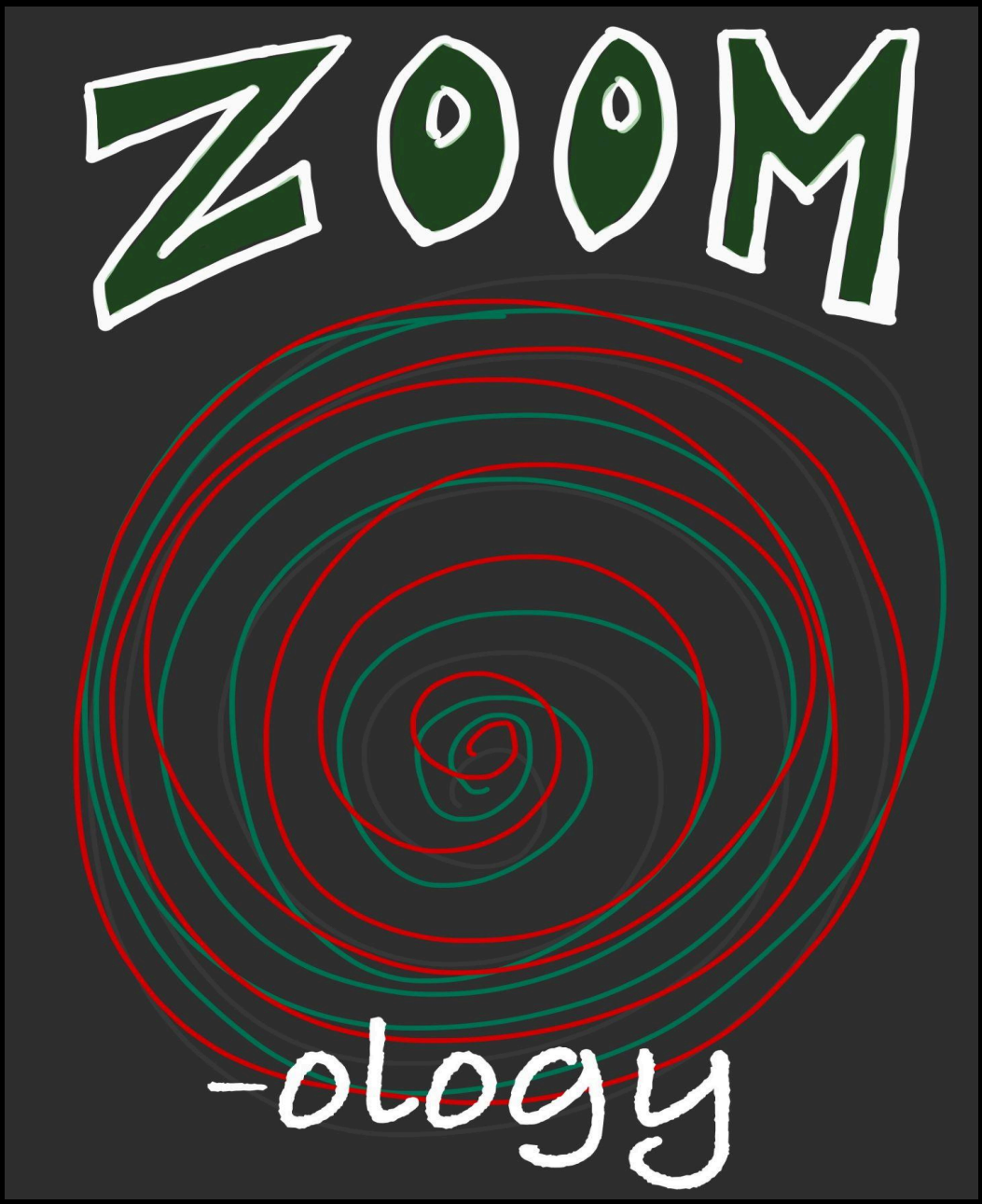
This eBook is intended to be a fast, light and fun read. It's meant to be read as a whole but can also be used as a reference manual.
Words are minimised and images are often used in their place.

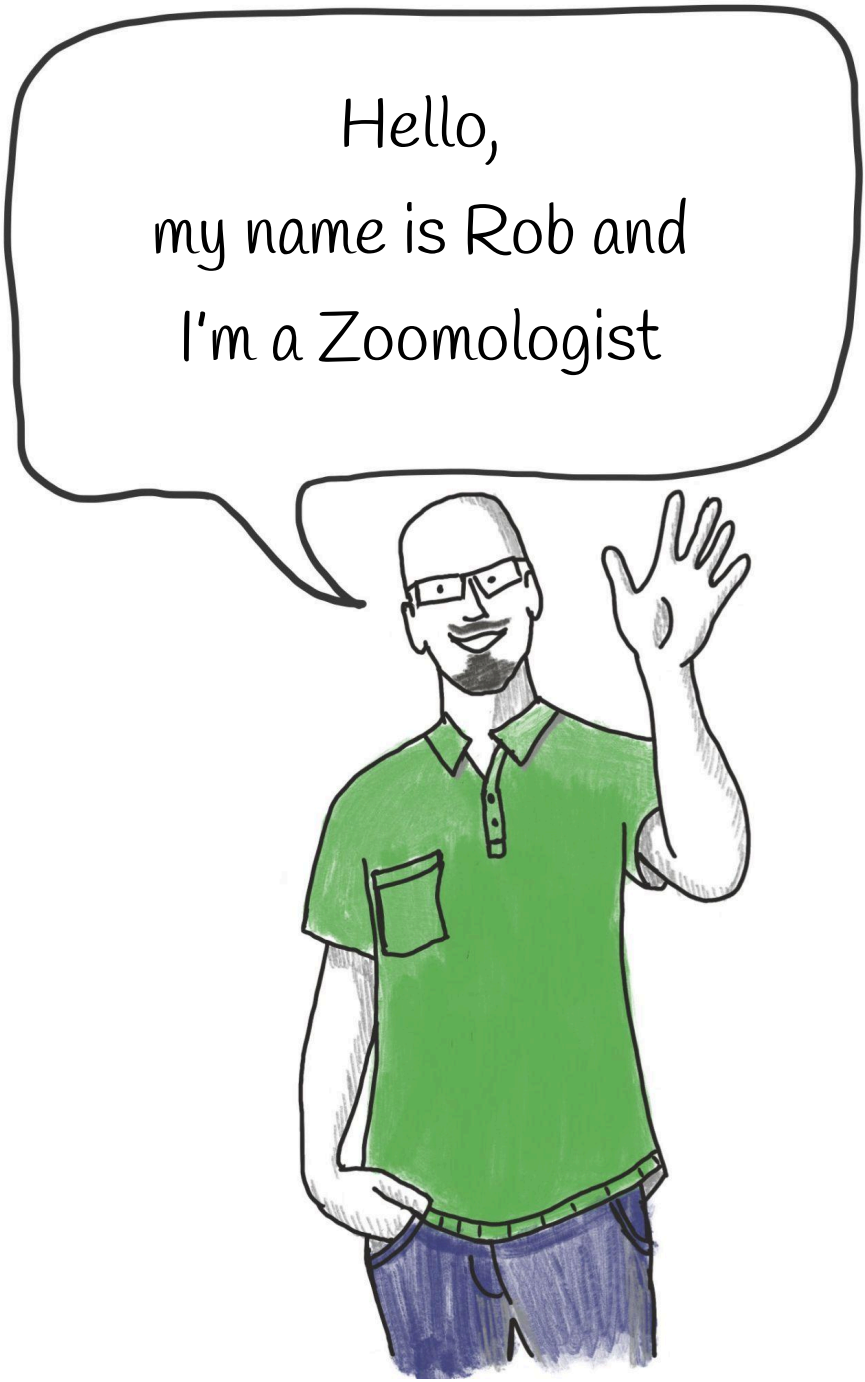
The format supports reading on a small screen such as a mobile phone or tablet. Zoom in when needed.
On a bigger screen, zoom out 🙂

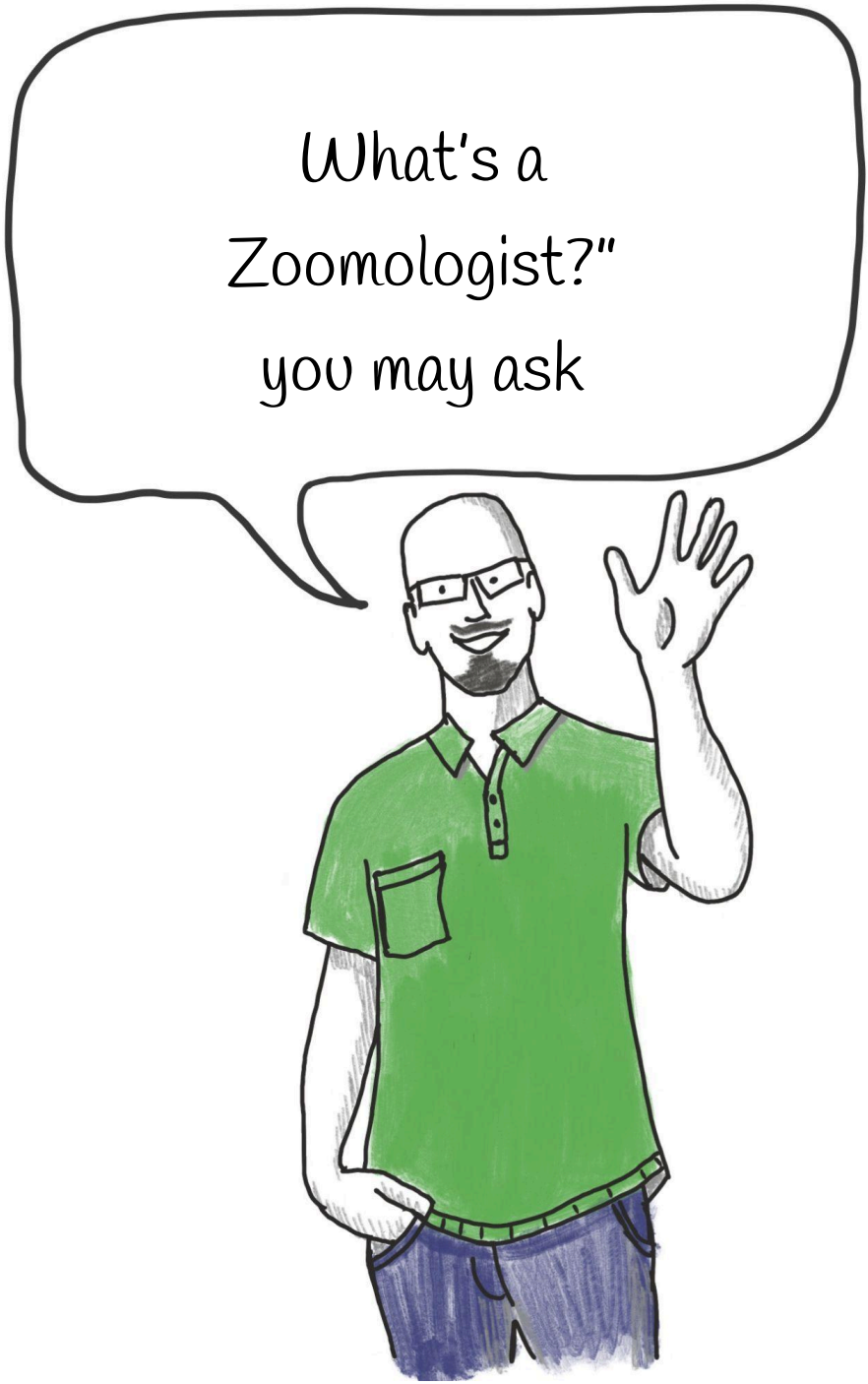
Use the Contents page to navigate.


Zoom
scrolling
not
Doom
scrolling

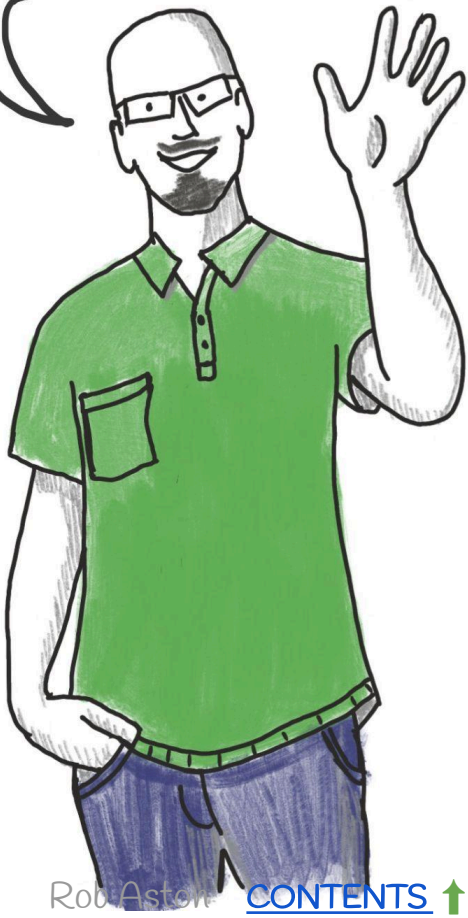
Zoomology



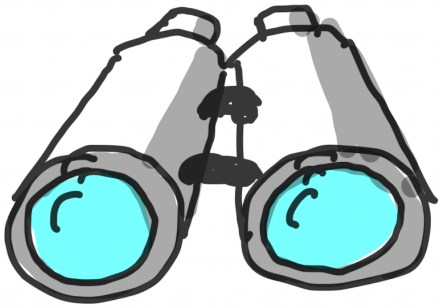

Hello,
my name is Rob and
I'm a Zoomologist


What's a
Zoomologist?"
you may ask

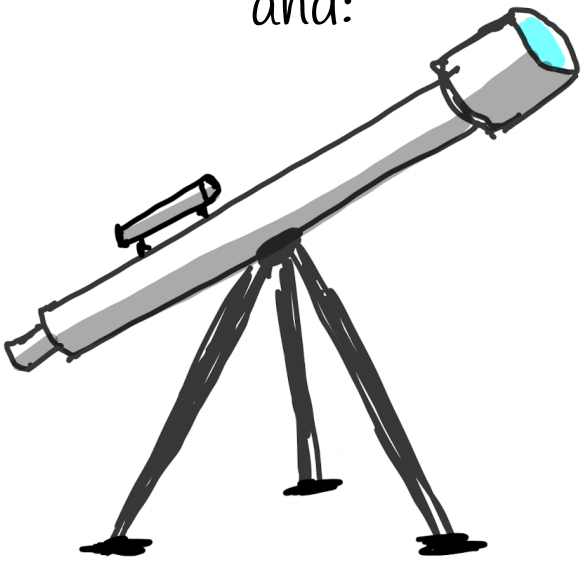
A Zoomologist is concerned with
awareness and perspective
and how we zoom in
and zoom out with our mind's eye



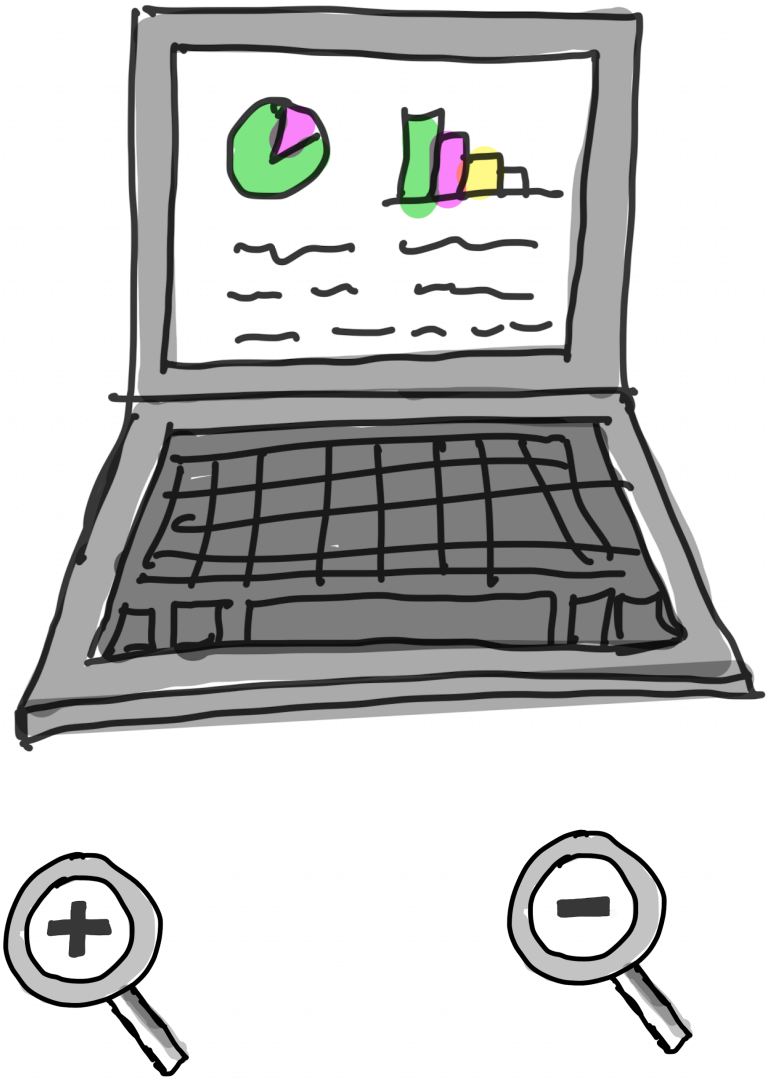
We usually think of zooming in and zooming out using:



and:



We also zoom in and out using:

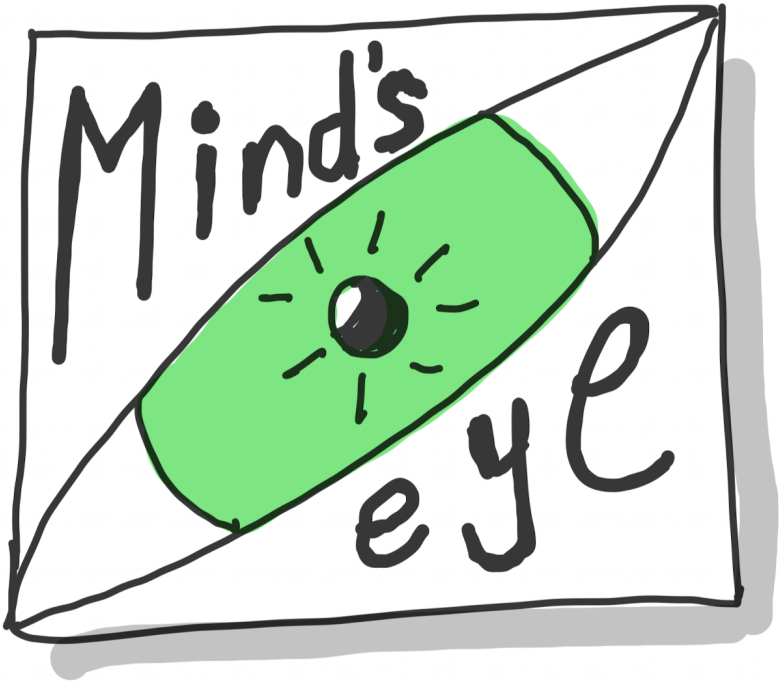


But we can also

zoom in

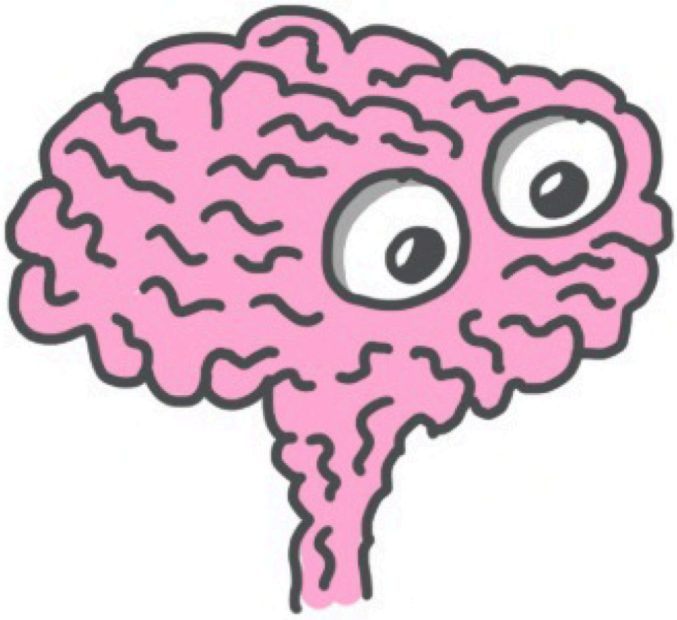
and zoom out

in our **mind's eye**



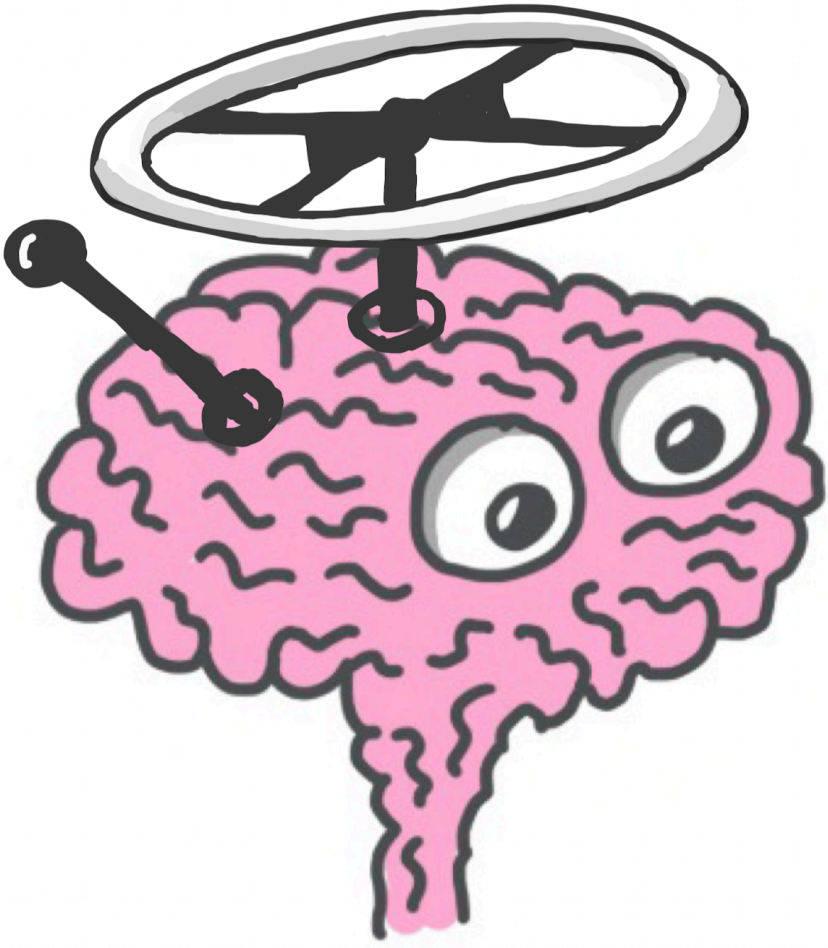
Zoom Machine

This is our powerful zooming device:

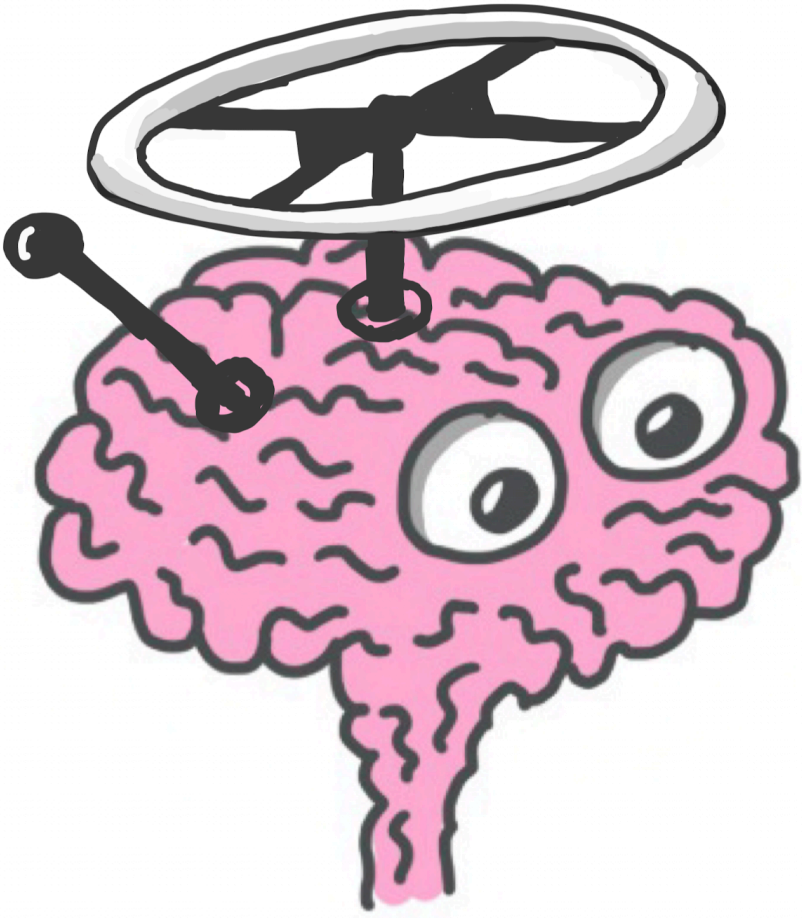


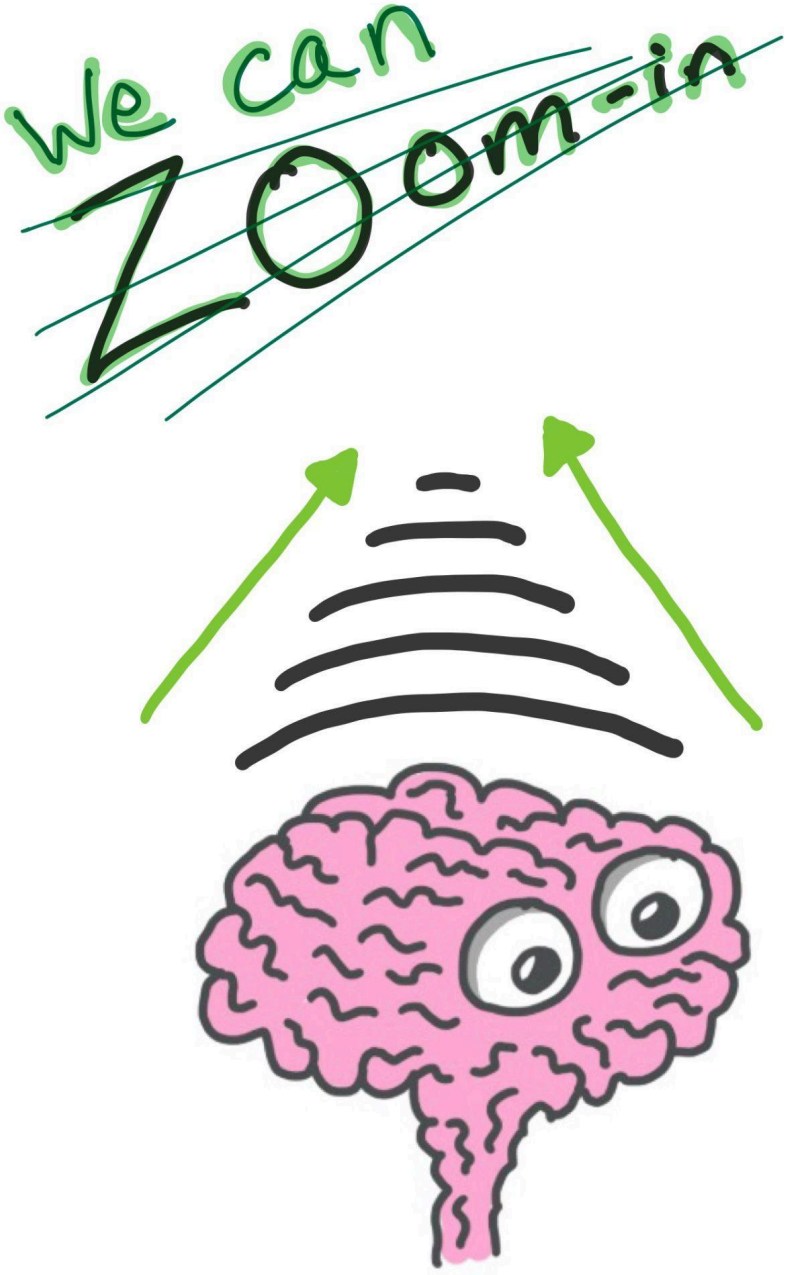
Our **"zoom machine"**

Controlling it requires insight, skill and practice!

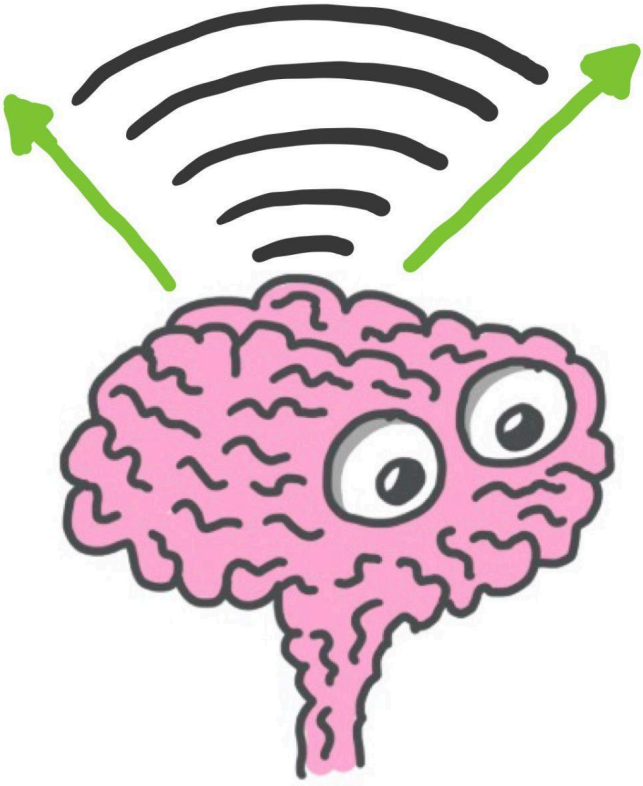


You could think of this book as an instruction manual for our "zoom machine"




We can
Zoom-in

We can ZOOM-OUT



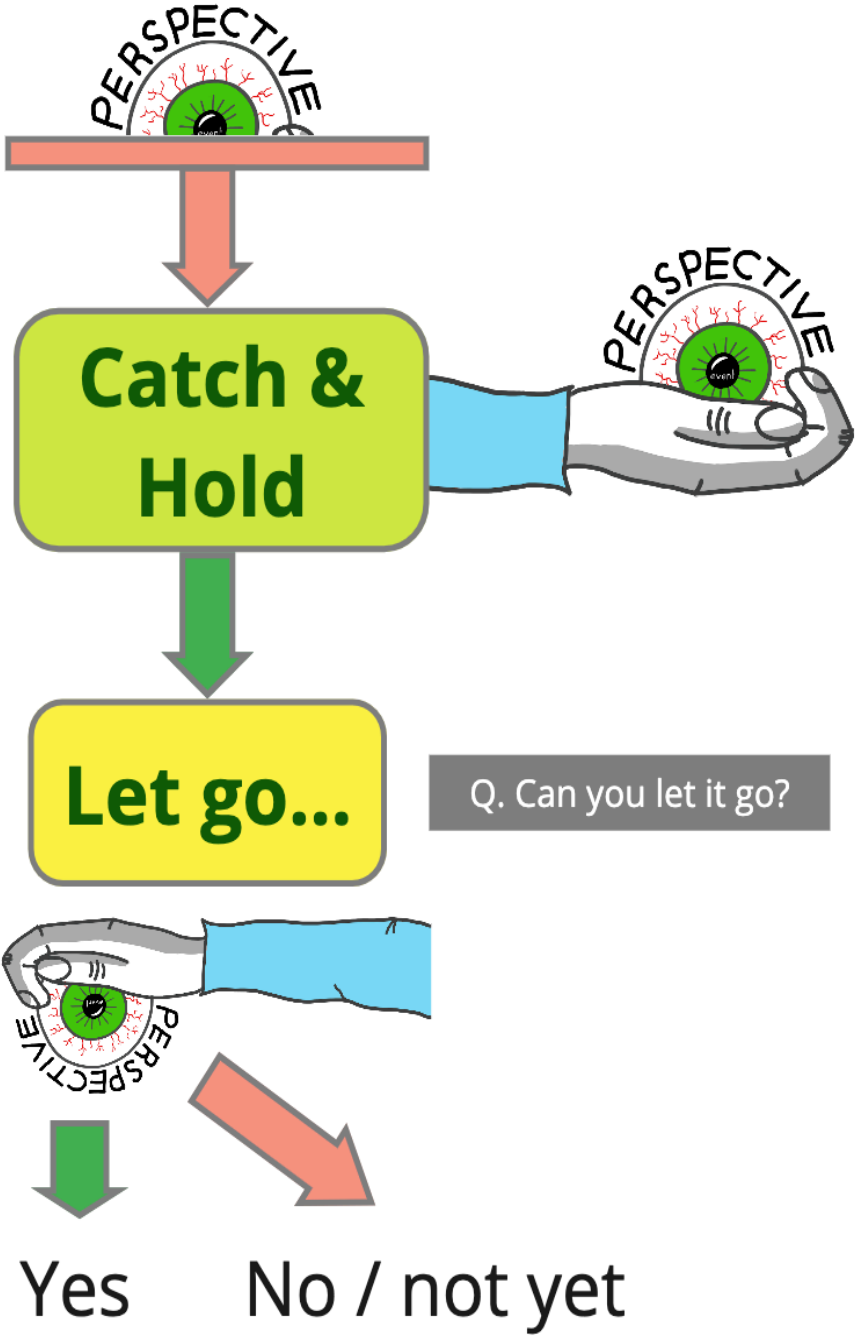
A critical skill in zooming in and out is
to first to loosen our grip
on our current perspective.

To catch ourselves being
zoomed in or out **unhelpfully**
and then being able to let it go.

This then gives us room to explore
and embrace new perspectives
more fully.



"Unhelpfully Zoomed-In"


PERSPECTIVE
Catch & Hold
PERSPECTIVE
Let go...
Q. Can you let it go?
PERSPECTIVE
Yes
No / not yet

This book serves as a

"zooming instruction manual"

As such it provides insights into the nature of perspectives and our default perspectives. With ways to zoom in and out to discover more helpful perspectives and positions of awareness.

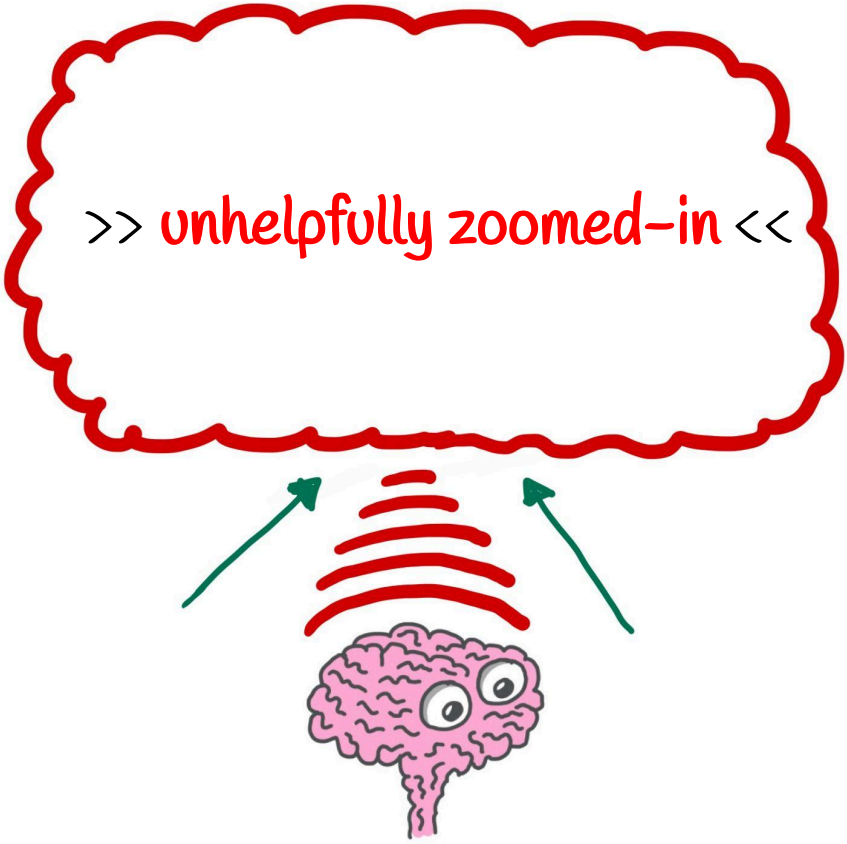
Unhelpfully Zoomed-In

The key reason zooming-out can be so helpful is summarised as follows:

"At times we can hold a narrow or limited view that is unhelpful to ourselves and others"

– The Zoom-Out Premise

In other words, we can get
unhelpfully zoomed-in on something.
This may be for hours, days,
months or even years!

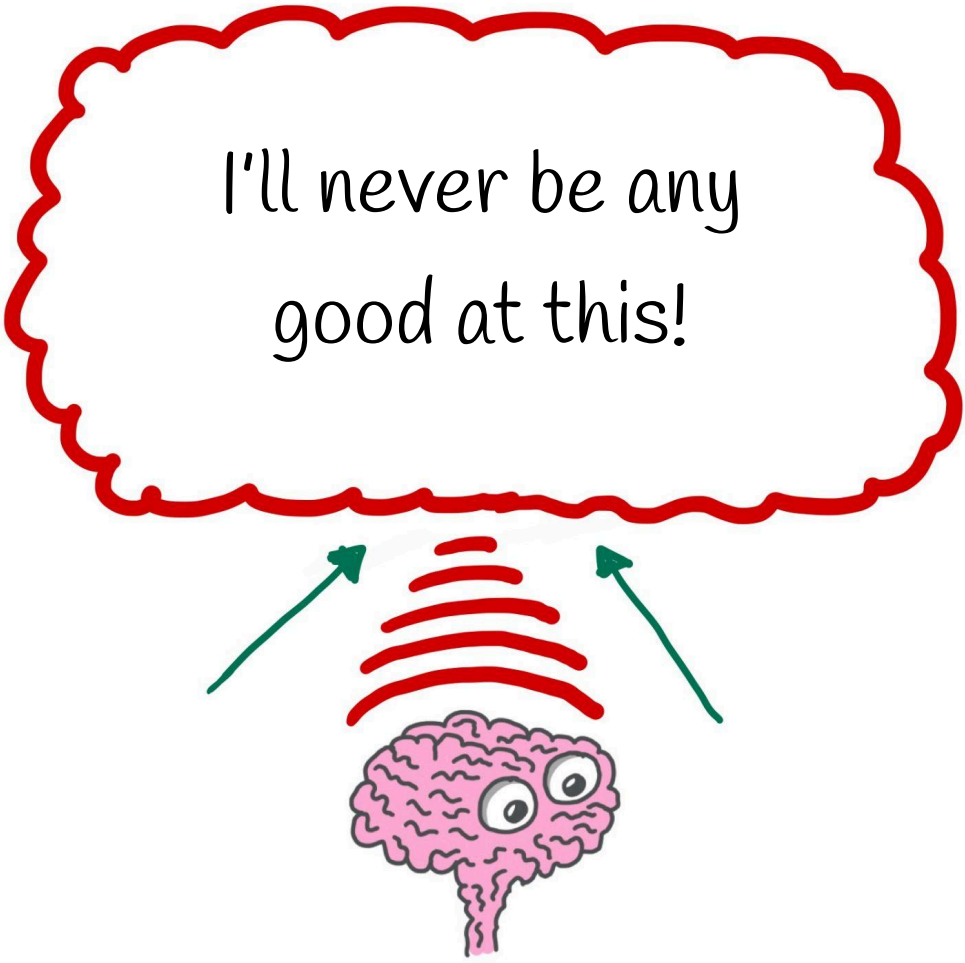


What do we get unhelpfully zoomed-in on?

Well, almost anything but can include:

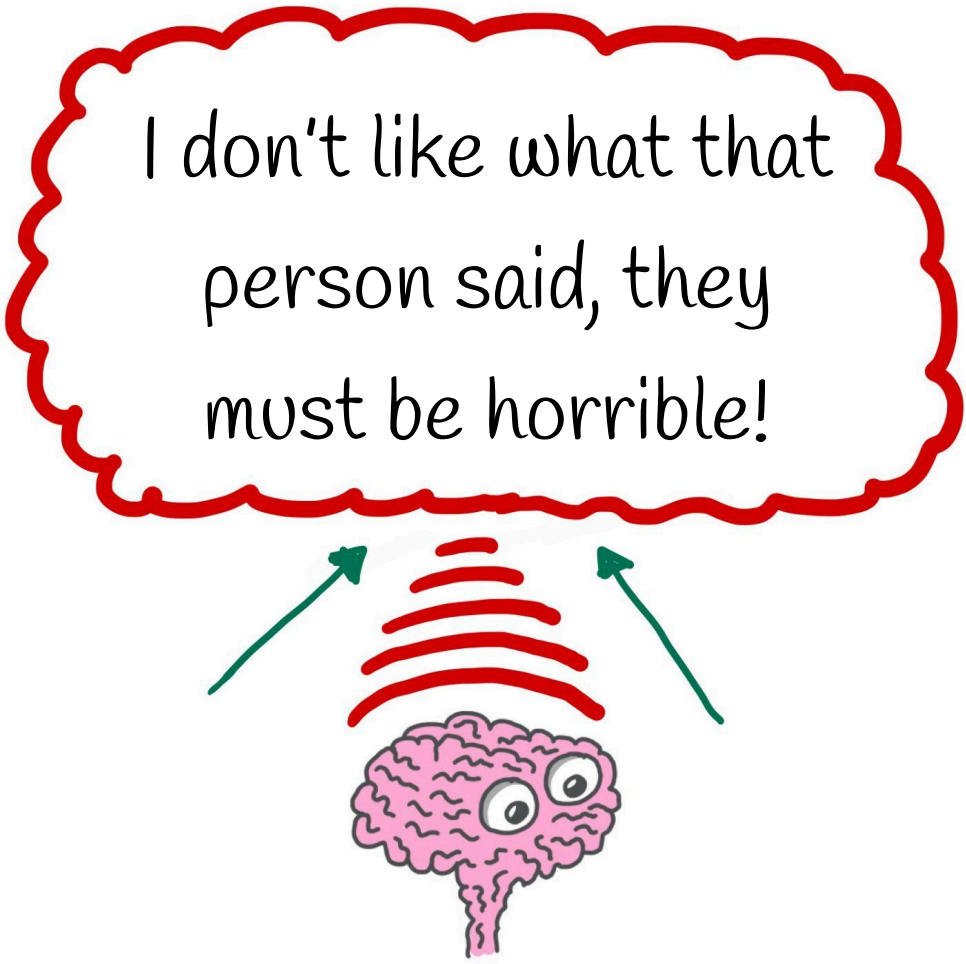
- A situation
- An event
- What someone did
- What someone said
- An aspect of ourselves
- An aspect of the world
- An aspect of a person
- An aspect of a group
- An aspect of a situation

Let's look at more specific examples...



> narrow time sample

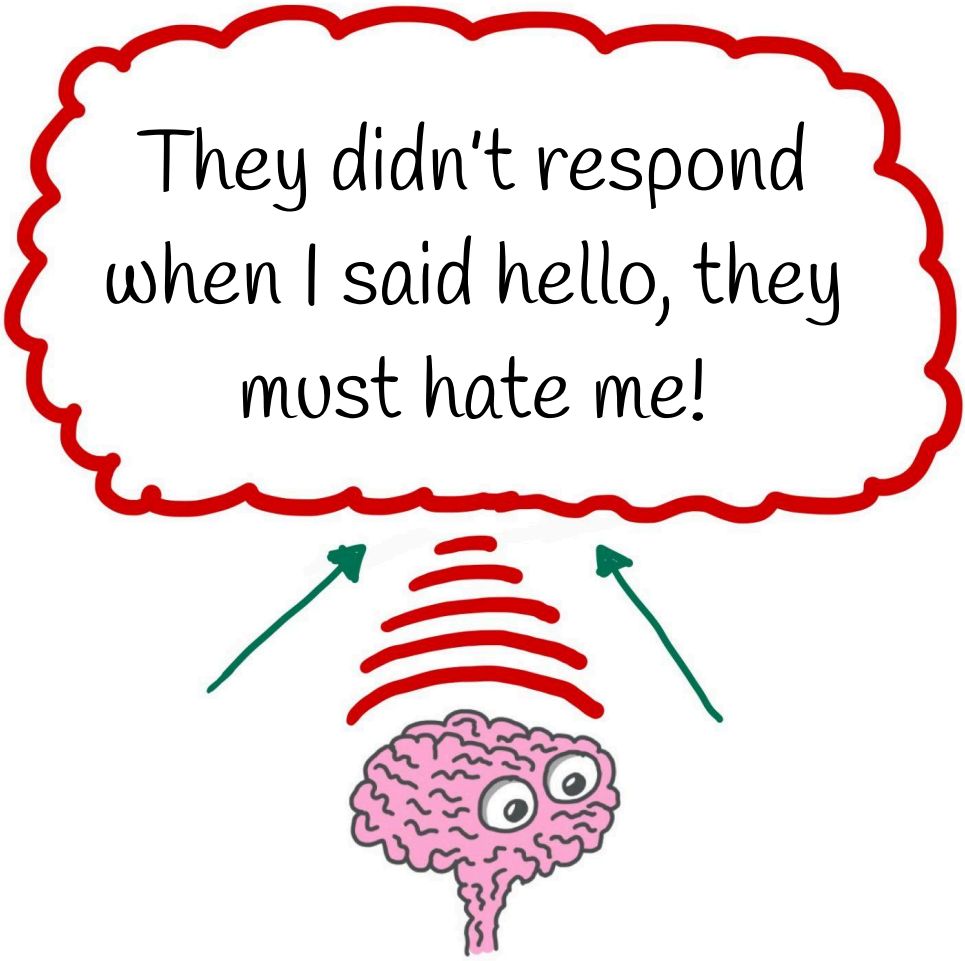
> narrow view of self



> narrow sample

> narrow view of other

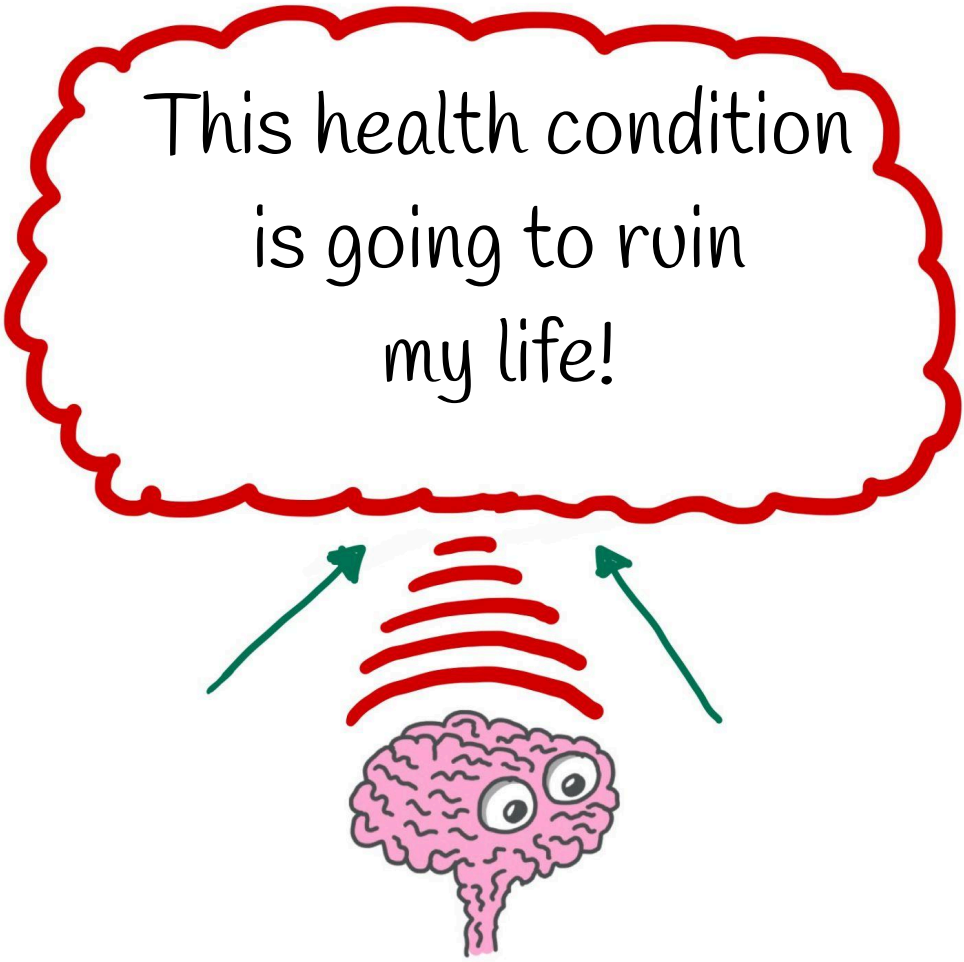
> self-centred view



> narrow sample

> narrow view of other people

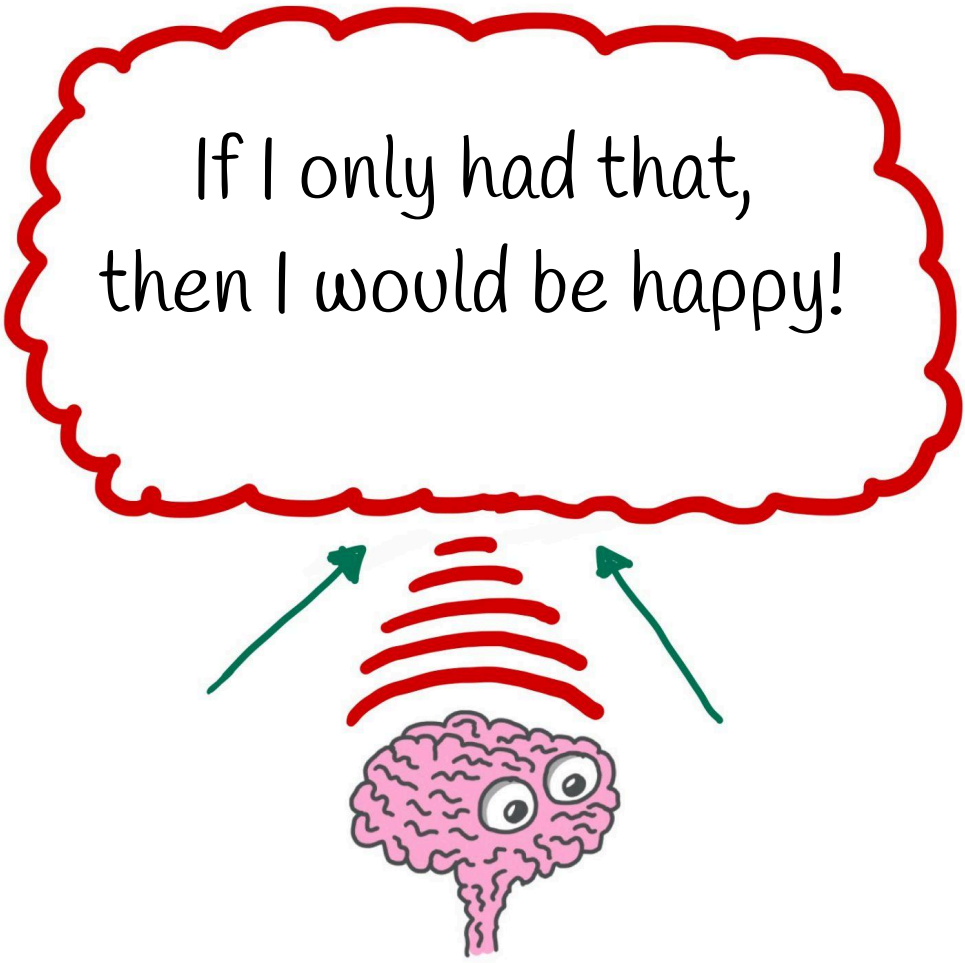
> self-centred view



> narrow view of life

> narrow view of possibilities

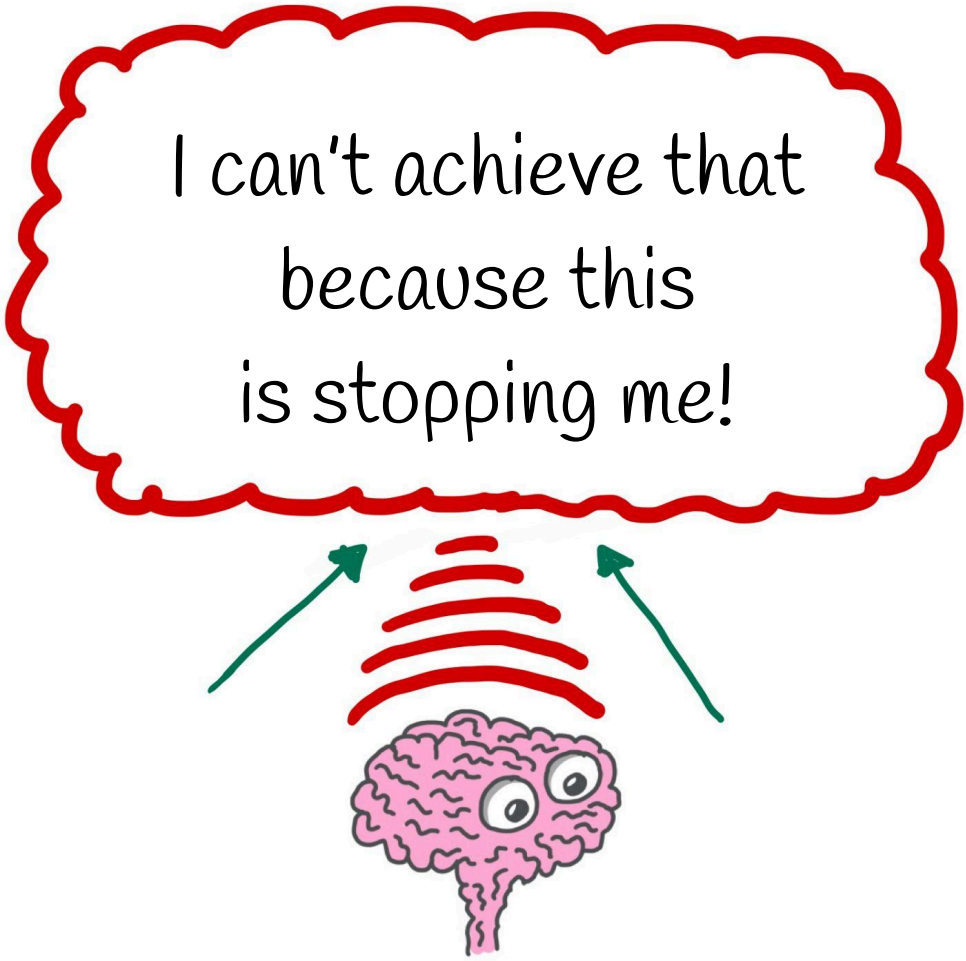
> narrow view of health



> narrow view of happiness

> narrow view of possibilities

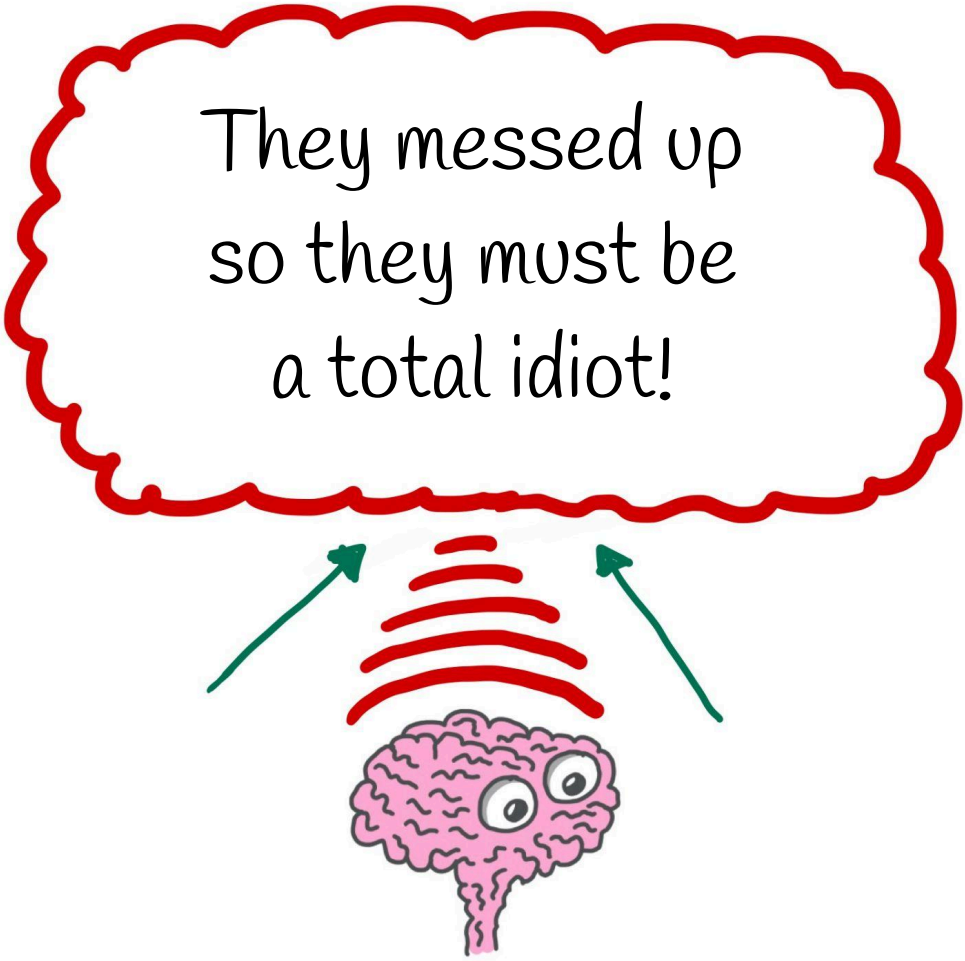
> narrow view of self



> narrow view of options

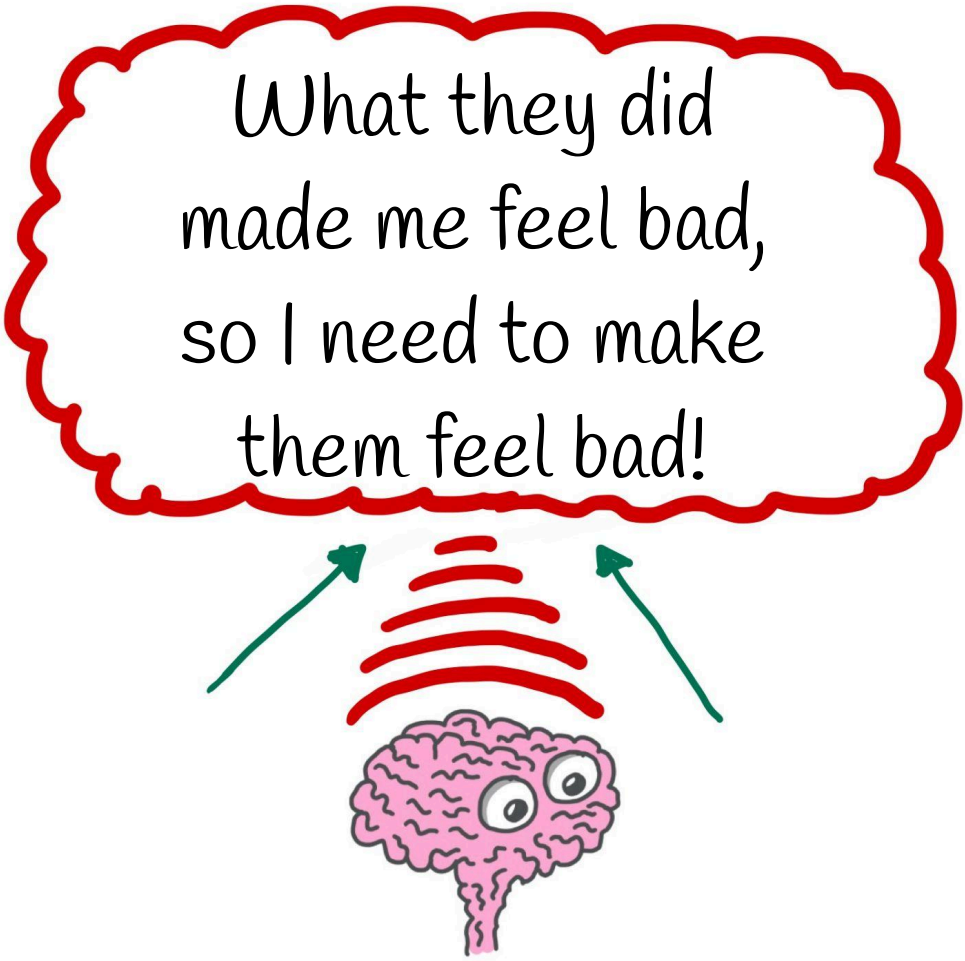
> narrow view of self

> narrow view of possibilities



> narrow view of others

> narrow of self

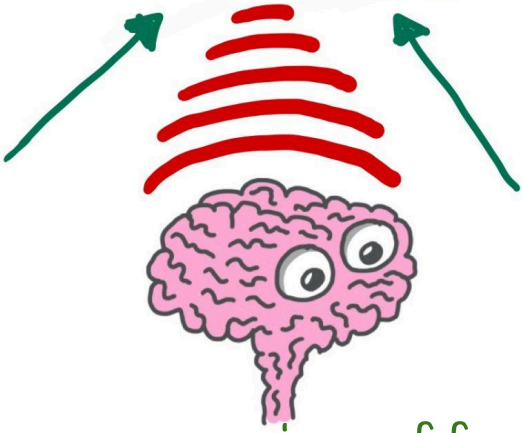


> narrow view of root cause

> narrow view of self

> narrow view of emotions

This train is always late so I need to find a different job!

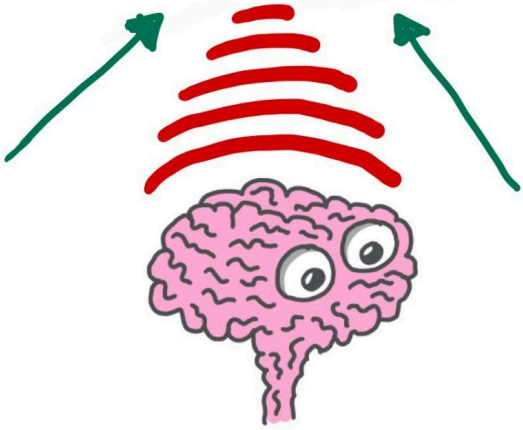


> narrow view of facts

> narrow view of numbers

> narrow view of event impact

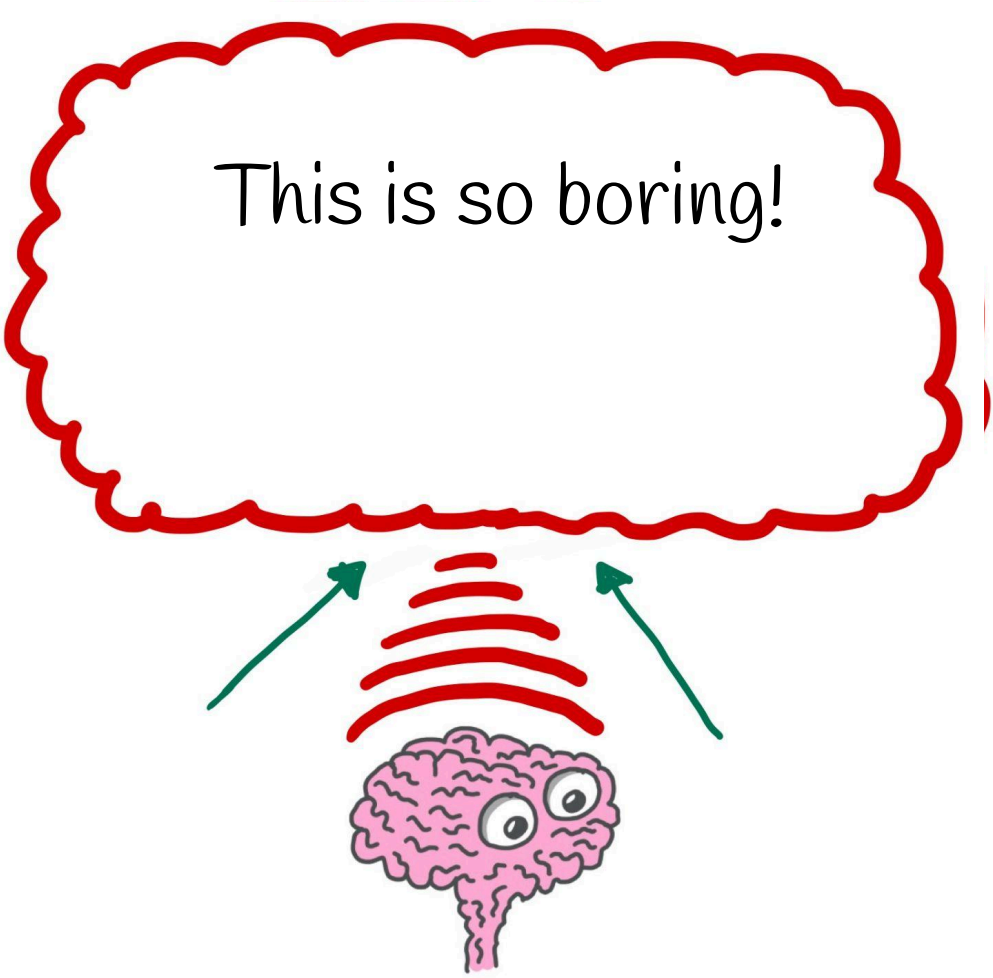
My appointment was 20 minutes ago and I'm still waiting, I can't bear this!



> narrow view of cost-benefit

> narrow view of society

> narrow view of time

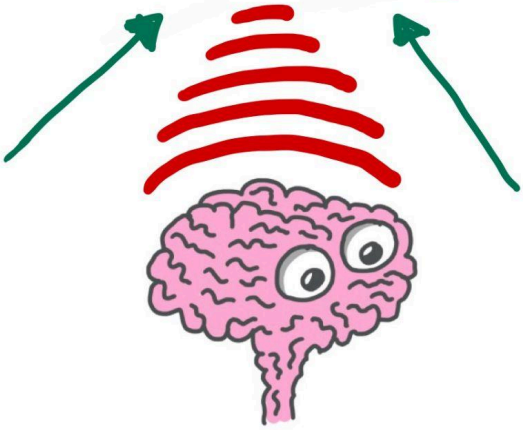


> narrow view of self

> narrow view of world

> narrow view of possibilities

I knew it was going to rain, so that's the holiday ruined!



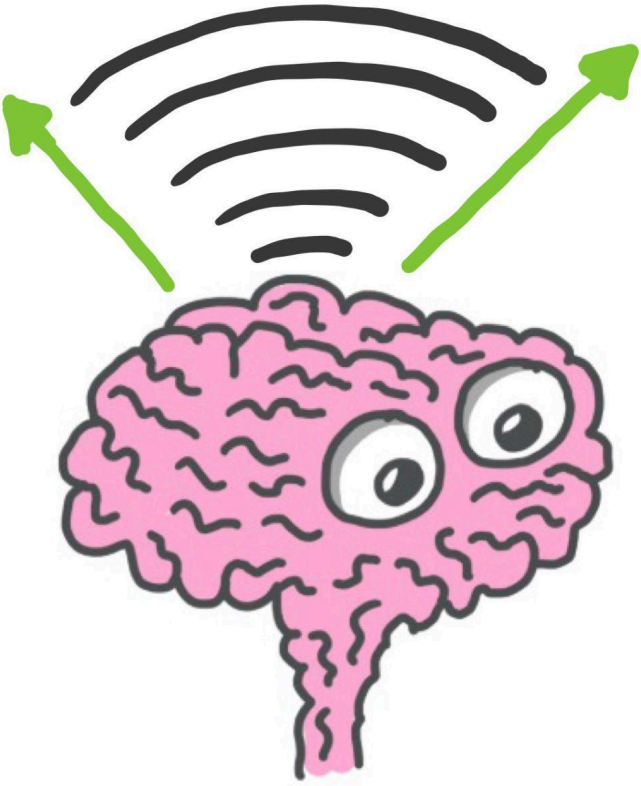
> narrow view of world

> narrow view of self

> narrow view of society

All of these examples can be natural default perspectives but can be replaced with much more objective and helpful perspectives when we...

ZOOM-OUT



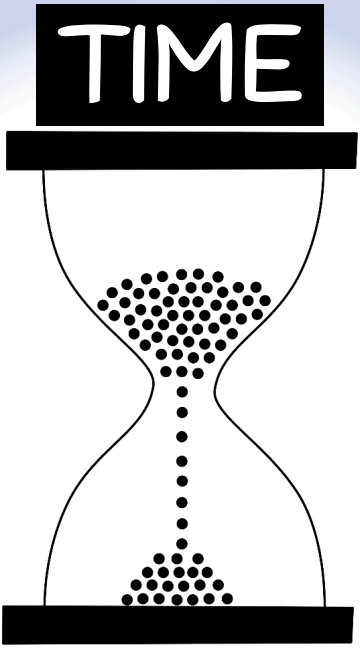
DIMENSIONS

We tend to think of zooming in and out in 2D or 3D space.

In our mind's eye, we are not limited to spatial dimensions but can zoom in and out in many more dimensions.

There are 8 zoom-out dimensions:

1. Time
2. Space
3. Odds
4. Universal
5. Self
6. Social
7. Life
8. Death



Broad/narrow time range

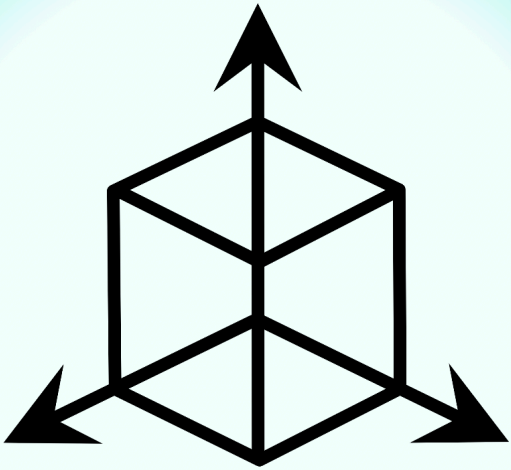
Past, present or future

Forwards or backwards

Time *is* change

DIMENSION

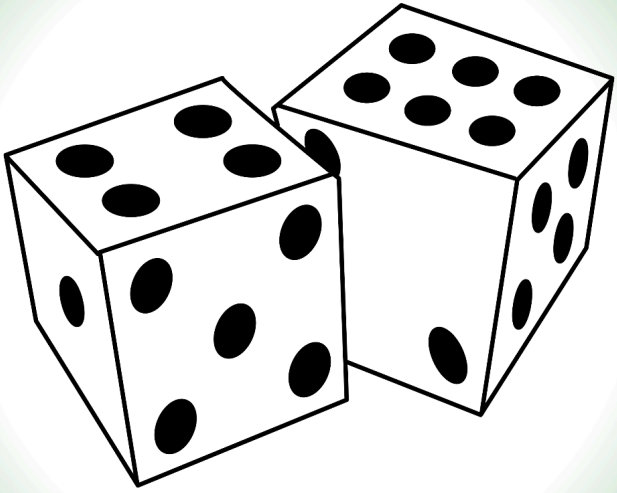
SPACE



Broad/narrow area
The environment or context
The whole is more than
the sum of the parts

DIMENSION

ODDS



Probability & numbers

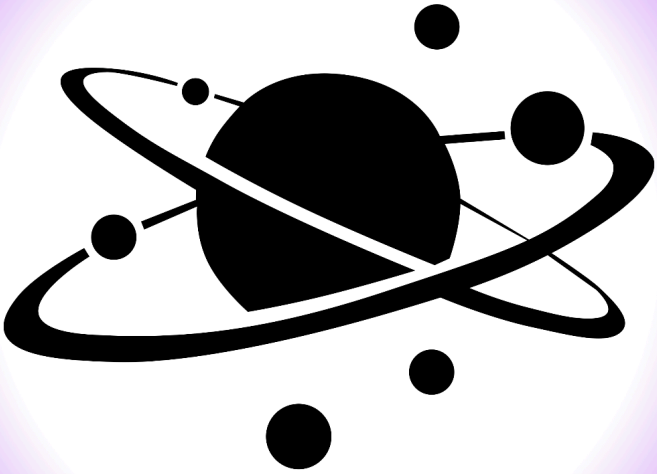
Chances of events

Distortions and biases

Limited samples

DIMENSION

UNIVERSAL



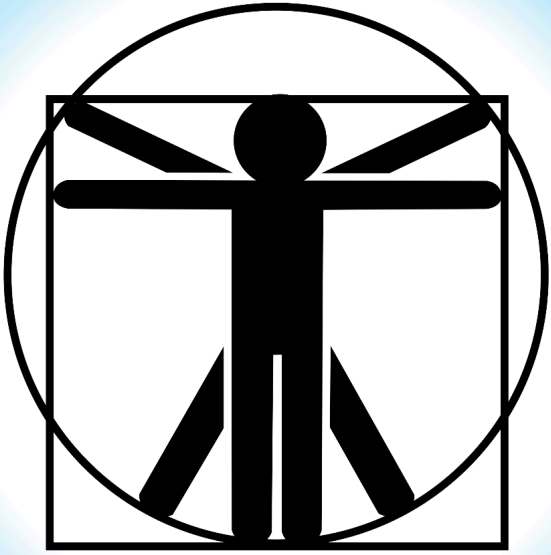
Laws of the universe

Nature of objective reality

Our place in the universe

DIMENSION

SELF



Broad/narrow view of self

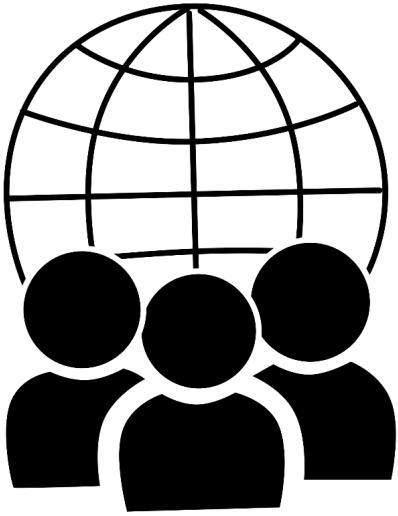
Self as an illusion

Self-centred v self-less

Seeing beyond the self

DIMENSION

SOCIAL



Society

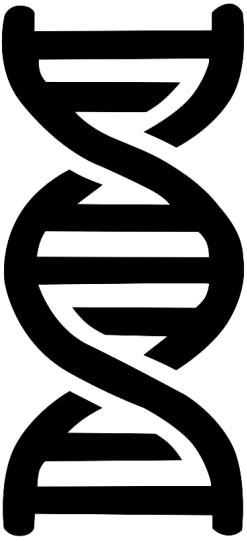
Diversity

Cost-benefit of society

Ourselves as social animals

DIMENSION

LIFE



Life in the universe

Life as a precious entity

Life paths

DIMENSION

DEATH



The end of life

The end of situations

The end of things

DIMENSION

With these dimensions in mind, we can ask ourselves questions such as:

Q. How can I zoom in and out in the time dimension?

Q. How can I see this from a universal perspective?

You will see the dimension symbols at the bottom right of many zoom-out cards in this book.

SIGNPOSTS



A physical singpost provides navigational information. On our journey through the world, signposts help us to get somewhere or avoid certain pitfalls.

Zoom-Out signposts help us to navigate our ***subjective reality.*** They point to some concept that assists us in navigating our lives and operating our zoom machine – our minds.

In different disciplines, schools of thought and ancient wisdom traditions, we often find principles or axioms (accepted truths) that essentially mean the same thing just expressed with a different frame of reference. They point to the same underlying concept about the nature of reality. Hence I prefer to describe zoom-out principles/axioms as signposts since they point to some wisdom and, importantly, it is up to the traveller whether to follow them.

This book uses title prefixes like this:

>> A zoom-out signpost

<o> A zoom-out

Many quotes in this book are principles or axioms from other sources and can be viewed as signposts to equivalent concepts.

The rest of this section examines each of the zoom-out signposts. (These underpin the zoom-outs that come later in the book.)

>> Perspective is everything

Zoom-Out Signpost

"Things are not what they are;
they are what we think they are"

— *Rory Sutherland*

There are people, situations and things, and then there are our perspectives on these...
which is what we *actually* experience.

"Every kind of ignorance in the world all results from not realizing that our perceptions are gambles. We believe what we see and then we believe our interpretation of it; we don't even know we are making an interpretation most of the time.
We think this *is* reality."

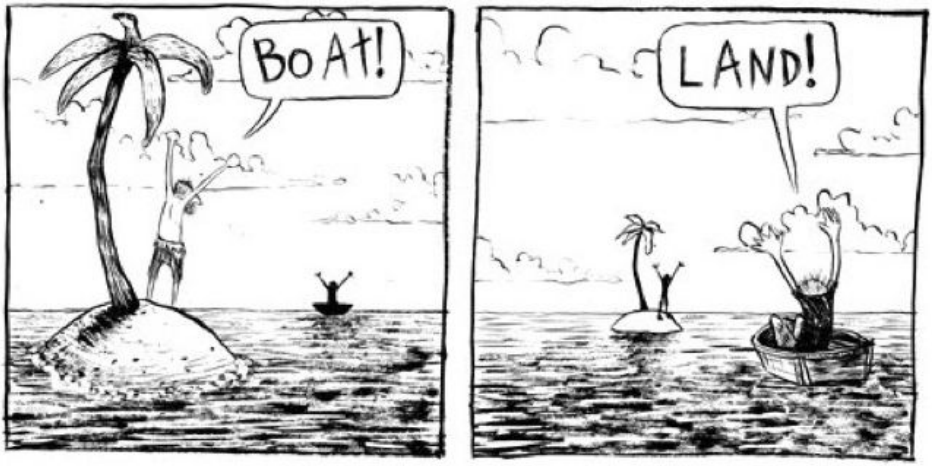
– Robert Anton Wilson, "Prometheus Rising"

Consider this scene:



Consider this scene:





There is reality, and then there is our perspective on reality. Our subjective reality – our perspectives on ourselves, others, events and situations in the world.

The Guardian's 1986 'Points of view' advert shows how the same event viewed from three points of view results in three dramatically different interpretations.

The Guardian's 1986 'Points of ...



OBJECTIVE reality versus SUBJECTIVE reality

OBJECTIVE reality = atoms + molecules + energy

SUBJECTIVE reality = attention + perspectives + emotions + stories

"The universe is made of stories, not atoms"

— *Muriel Rukeyser, American poet & writer*

By changing our perspectives and stories, we can change our reality.

"There are no facts, only interpretations."

— Friedrich Nietzsche

Hence, reality is:

Not fixed

We can change our perspectives of events even when we cannot control or change events.

Plural

Each person has their own unique reality even of the same event.

Contextual

Our interpretation of an event or thing is greatly influenced by context.

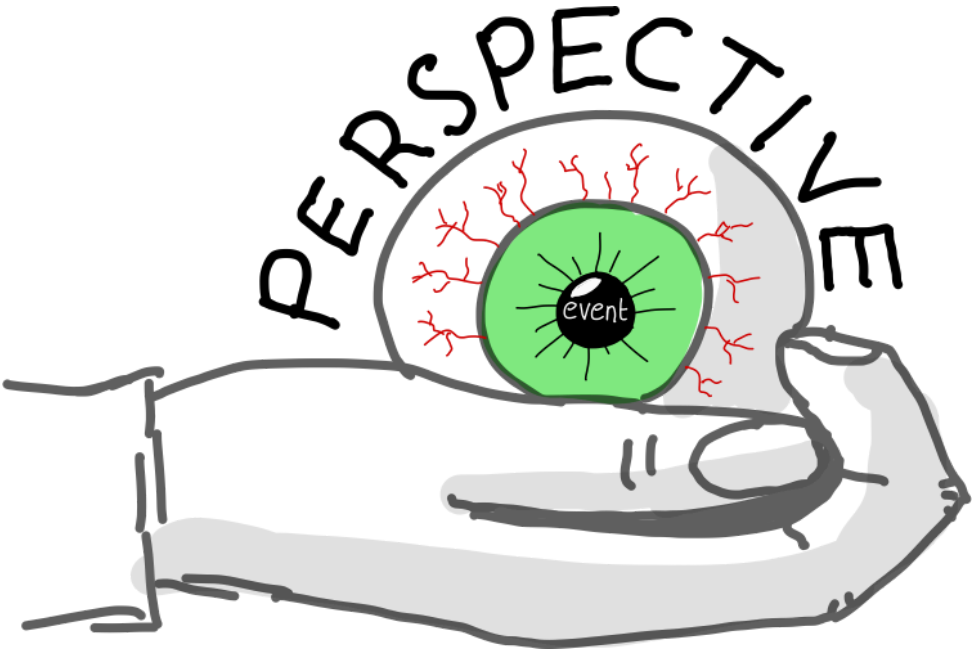
Just as objective reality influences our subjective reality, changing our subjective reality can change objective reality.

Visualisation, manifestation, cosmic ordering or the law of attraction all leverage this fact.

So does Zoomology.

"You have to put it in perspective. Otherwise you have perspecve."

Perspective is...



... in the eye of the beholder

The perspectives we hold can have a profound impact on ourselves and those around us.
For example, did you know that:

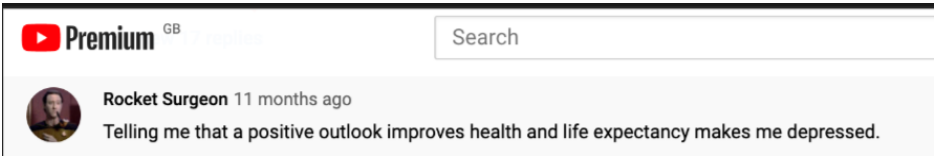
- Our perspective on stress influences the extent to which stress is beneficial or harmful.
- The way we view stress can have a significant impact on our life expectancy.
- The perspectives we adopt of ourselves and others have a huge

impact on our experience of conflict and our ability to deal with conflict effectively.

- Our perspective on our own emotions can have a great impact on the extent to which our emotions control us.
- The ability to shift our perspective on an emotion rather than suppress the emotion is a powerful emotional intelligence skill.

"Telling me that a positive outlook improves health and life expectancy makes me depressed."

— Rocket Surgeon
(YouTube commenter)



SIGNPOST

Perspective is everything

Q. In what ways are your current beliefs, assumptions, or emotions shaping the way I'm seeing this situation?

>> All perspectives are wrong but some are helpful

Zoom-Out Signpost

Consider some famous perspectives from history:

- "This ship is unsinkable" - The Titanic
- "This will be a swift and decisive victory" - Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812
- "Japanese cars are low-quality and no threat to American

dominance" – The U.S. automobile industry in the 1970s

- "Film photography will remain dominant" – Kodak, despite pioneering early digital photography
- "In-store video rentals will remain the preferred method of movie consumption" – Blockbuster
- "Smartphones like Apple's iPhone are no threat to our phones" – Nokia
- "The Maginot Line (a fortified defensive barrier) will protect

against a German invasion" – The French military during WWII

- "Powered human flight is impossible" – many experts at the time of the Wright brothers
- "The future of computing is in hardware, not software" – IBM in the 1980s, allowing the rise of Microsoft

History is littered with such examples of perspectives which were believed to be true with certainty, only to be proved wrong with dramatic negative consequences.

Time is full of examples on a much smaller and more personal scale. I invite you to consider your own perspectives and those of others.

Once we assume a perspective to be 100% correct, we close our minds to other possibilities and will even ignore

information that contradicts our perspective.
We can become enslaved to a perspective.

"Convictions cause convicts. Whatever you believe imprisons you"

— The First Law of Discordianism, Malaclypse The Younger

Any perspective we hold is ultimately a manifestation of what is in our mind, rather than what is purely "out there".

A perspective is a mental model of an aspect of reality constructed by our brains.

A perspective is:

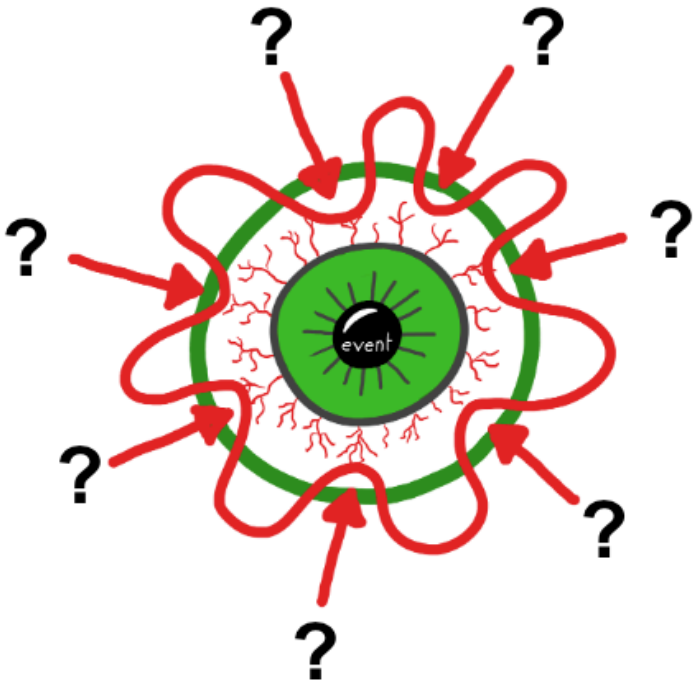
- in our mind
- a mental model
- our responsibility

Perspectives are shaped by:

- inputs from our senses
- our beliefs
- our emotions
- cognitive biases
- fallacies
- assumptions
- our conditioning

A perspective is therefore:

- an approximation
- partial
- distorted
- unique to the individual



This is ancient wisdom!



"We are what we think. All that we are arises from our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world."

— Buddha, 563 - 483 BC

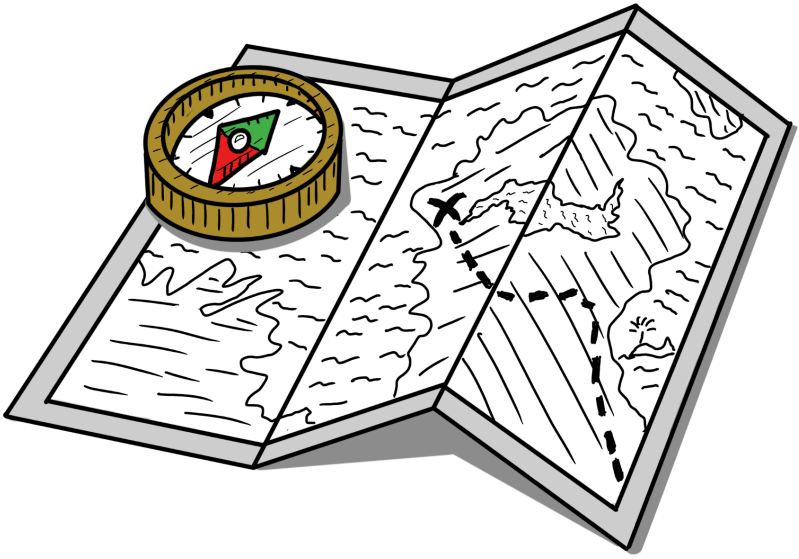
"People are not disturbed by events, but by the view they take of them."

— Epictetus, Greek Stoic philosopher, 55 – 135 AD

This idea is expressed via another well known assertion from philosophy:

"The map is not the territory"

— Alfred Korzybski, 1933





"The Perfect Map"
Zoom-Out

This zoom-out signpost is inspired by the following assertion:

**"All models are wrong,
but some are useful"**

*— George E. P. Box, Statistician,
18 Oct 1919 – 28 Mar 2013*

It asserts that models by their very nature are incomplete approximations.

Since a perspective is a model in our mind, this assertion applies to our perspectives.

Perspectives, as models, can help us explore, grapple with and intervene in the world. However, we should remain aware of their limitations and suited context.

> **>> All perspectives are wrong, *but some are helpful***
> *- Zoom-Out Signpost*

Acknowledging this signpost should not be disheartening, quite the opposite.

Embracing this signpost unlocks an incredible amount of potential, personal flexibility and power over our realities. It reminds us to be vigilant for potentially unhelpful perspectives we adopt and not to assume they are accurate or true. This opens the way for us to challenge such perspectives perhaps by zooming-out.

"We are happy when people/things conform and unhappy when they don't. People and events don't disappoint us, our models of reality do. It is my model of reality that determines my happiness or disappointments."

— *Stefan Zweig, Chess Story, 1941*

I often refer to this signpost metaphorically as:

"A crowbar, to prise open the cracks of our reality."

Or even:

"A hacksaw blade, to cut through the bars of our mental prisons."

Applying this signpost can be very liberating. It provides us with more degrees of freedom by opening the doors to many more helpful perspectives.

We first need to loosen our grip on any given perspective by acknowledging that all perspectives are wrong to some degree.... but some can be helpful!

"Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum" ("I *doubt*, therefore I think, therefore I am")

— *Antoine Léonard Thomas*

"SOCRATES: What do you think? From the beginning people like this have never managed, whether on their own or with the help of others, to see anything besides the shadows that are [continually] projected on the wall opposite them by the glow of the fire"

— *Plato, The Allegory of the Cave, 380 BC*

SIGNPOST

All perspectives are wrong but some are helpful



Q. How might I be seeing this incorrectly and what's a more helpful perspective?



>> Default perspectives can be overridden

Zoom-Out Signpost

In any given situation, we have a default perspective. The one that our mind first serves up to us.

This may not necessarily be the most helpful perspective.

Instead of taking our default perspective as a given – our reality – we can develop our ability to assess and replace this perspective with a more helpful one.

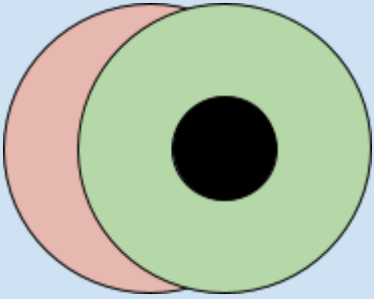
We can override our default perspectives.

Seeing that a perspective is a default perspective is a zoom-out.

We can then use other zoom-outs to find more helpful perspectives to replace our default one.

SIGNPOST

Default perspectives can be overridden



Q. Is there a more helpful perspective than my default perspective?

>> Attention control is power

Zoom-Out Signpost

Once upon a time there was a dot.



This dot is very proud and loves to be stared at and takes offence if you ignore it. If you don't believe me, stare at it now. Be sure to give it your full attention or it might think you are rude and get upset.



How long did you manage? It's likely that it wasn't very long at all.

You probably managed it for several seconds before your mind wandered onto something else. This is totally normal and the dot is used to it. You seem like a cool person so the dot won't be too hard on you.

Now try again. But this time, really notice it. Notice the colour. Is it pure black or dark grey? Is it smooth or can you discern texture?

Is it reflecting the light equally all over? Is it solid or a tunnel? Is it hovering slightly off the page?



How did you do that time? Did you find it easier to pay attention for longer?

Becoming more aware of how our attention system works helps us to take more control of our attention. This is a key aspect of zoomology.

We can also benefit greatly from developing our **meta-attention**. That is, paying attention to what we are paying attention to.

Let's break down how meta-attention looks in action.

>> IN ACTION <<
Meta-attention

1 Awareness

Become aware of what we are paying attention to in a given moment.

2 Assessment

Assess whether our attention is helpful. Does it align with our values and goals? Are we unhelpfully

zoomed-in or unhelpfully zoomed-out?

3 Redirection

Take control of our attention and redirect it where we would like it to be. If this is challenging then identify strategies that can help or cultivate the conditions to make the redirection more practical.

The various foundational zoom-outs in this book are designed to help with all of the above aspects of meta-attention.

Meta-attention examples

1 Mindless reading

You are reading a book and become aware that you are not really taking in any information. You redirect your focus to taking a short break. You

then return to reading with mindfulness and comprehension.

2 Poor conversation

You are in conversation with someone. You become aware that your attention is on what you want to say and not on what the other person is saying. You assess that this is not helpful and not serving the goals of your conversation. Your redirect your attention to the words and non-verbal communication (tone of voice, facial expression, body

language) of the person you are in conversation with.

3 Unfocused meeting

You are in a meeting and you become aware that you are not really focusing on the content of the meeting. Your attention keeps wandering elsewhere. You assess this is unhelpful. You redirect your attention to the meeting by making eye contact and make notes where needed to focus your attention on key points quickly before re-engaging in discussions.

4 Road rage

You are driving and become aware that your attention is on the unsociable driving of another car which enrages you and fixates your attention on that car. You assess this as unhelpful. You refocus your attention on your own driving and the broader picture of the road and surroundings.

5 Performance anxiety

You are about to perform or speak in public. You become aware that your attention is on a mistake you made last time. You assess this as unhelpful. You redirect your attention to visualising this one being a success and trusting the process.

Below are some ways in which you can develop your meta-attention skills.

Meta-attention power-ups

1 State management

Look after the basics such as getting good sleep, eating well, exercising and staying hydrated. Stress and fatigue can undermine our ability to zoom-out on our attention and redirect it.

2 Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness meditation enhances our awareness of our attention and our

ability to self-regulate it. Bringing more mindfulness to the present moment as we go about our day and as we perform activities will also help develop this. For example, mindful eating, mindful (active) listening, mindful walking, etc.

3 Triggers

We can become aware of triggers that tend to direct our attention in unhelpful ways. Seeing an advertisement for cake might direct our attention to a craving for sugar.

Talking to a negative person may direct our attention to negative aspects of the world. Food shopping when hungry can direct our attention to the high-sugar foods in the store. Having our phone on our desk and many application windows open when on a video call can trigger us to become distracted from the call. By becoming aware of such triggers we can take steps to avoid them or limit their impact.

We can also actively design and utilise triggers to bring our attention to our attention.

A trigger could be a timer or a signal in our environment. We could set a repeating timer to bring our attention to our attention and redirect it to our posture when working at a desk for long hours. We could use a well placed sticky-note to trigger us to pay attention to what we are paying attention to as we are about to start a particular activity.

4 Attention "muscle" building

Engage in activities that help you build your attention "muscle". Mindfulness is a powerful way. You can also do activities or play games that require you to stay focused and in control of your attention.

The more control we have over our attention, the more power we have over directing our lives and building habits that serve us well.

Paying attention to what we are paying attention to is a key skill in spotting when we are unhelpfully zoomed-in or unhelpfully zoomed-out.

SIGNPOST

Attention control is power

Q. What am I focusing on, and how is it shaping my experience or outcome?

Q. Is my attention aligned with what truly matters at this moment?

Q. Who or what is in control of my attention, and is that serving my purpose?

>> Context is everything

Zoom-Out Signpost

If you got bored of staring at a dot in the previous section, how about some lines instead?

Go on, feast your eyes on these:



A pleasing set of lines? What did you notice about them?

The colour? That they are horizontal and parallel?

How many lines? Two?

Did you see the 3rd line?

Take another look:



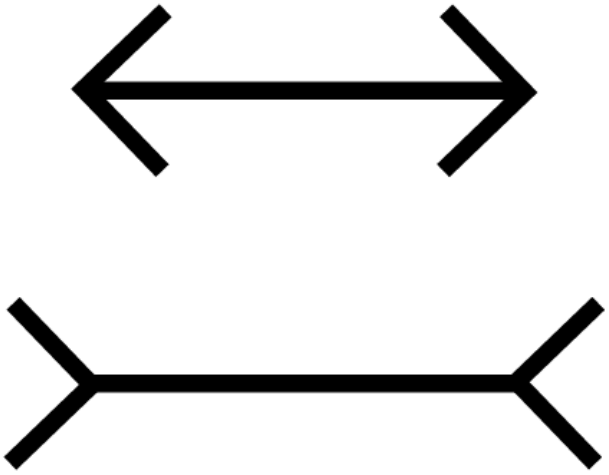
Do you see it?

In the space between the penned lines, there is clearly a third line. This is known as figure-ground perception in psychology. In the art world, this is referred to as negative space.

But not every mind will see it at first. It may need pointing out or require revisiting. Does this also prove that 1 + 1 = 3?

Who thought some simple lines could be such fun and thought-provoking?

Here are more lines.

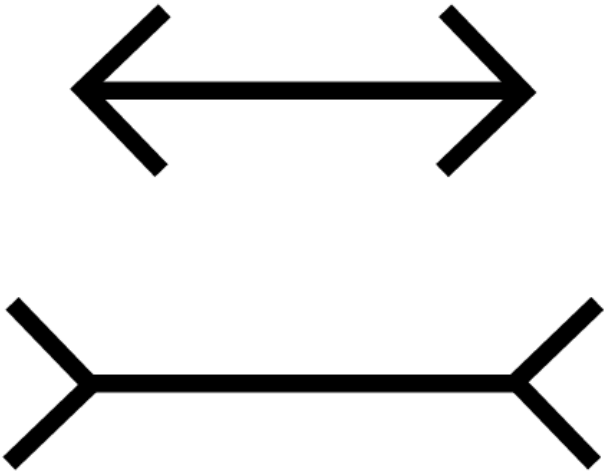


What did you notice?

You noticed the arrowhead shapes on the ends of each horisontal line.

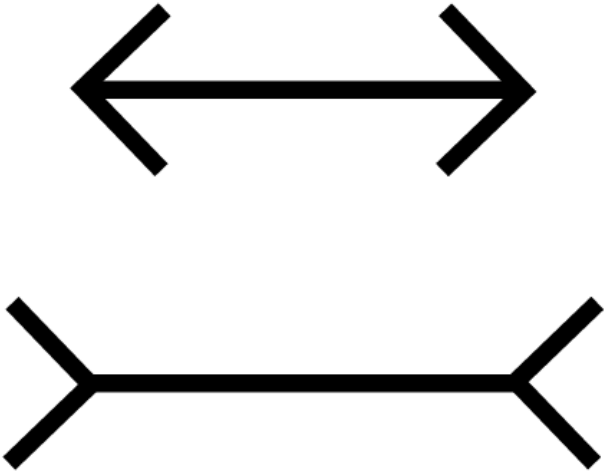
And you probably noticed that the bottom line was longer than the top one. Only, it isn't.

Take another look and make a vertical line with your finger or a ruler and convince yourself that the lines are indeed the same length:



OK *see?*

Now take another look:



What do you notice now? Two lines of the same length?

You know they are the same length but that's still not what you see. The lines still appear to be of different lengths.

This is the famous Müller-Lyer illusion.

What do you make of this line?



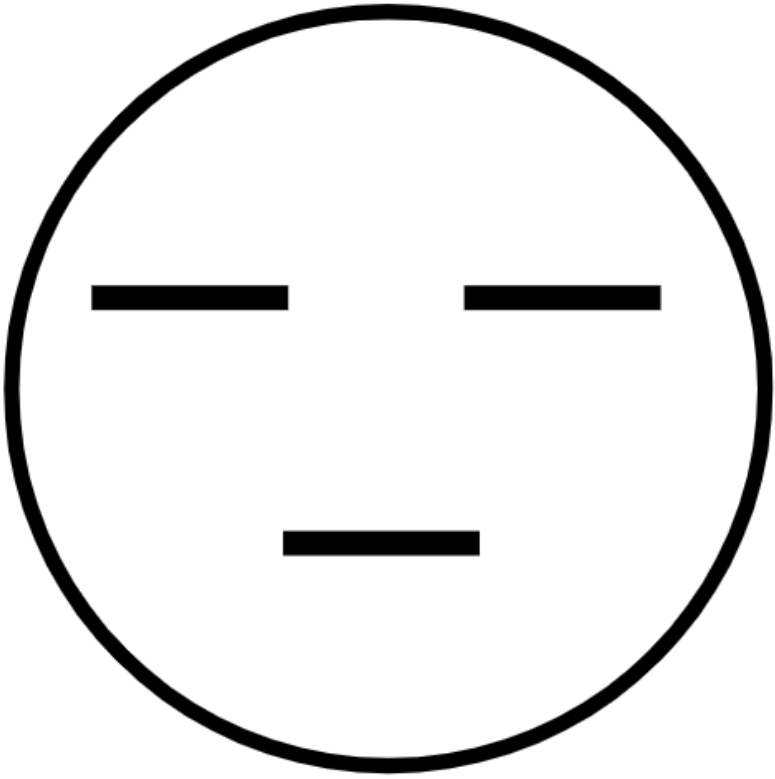
How about now?



And now?



And this:

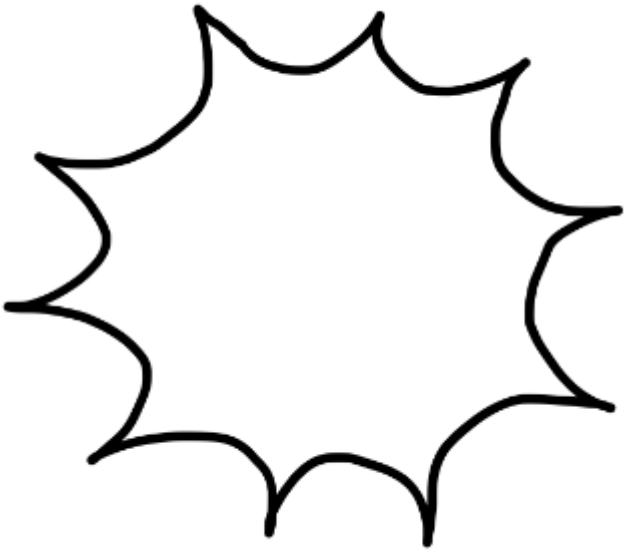


Just a set of lines, right?

Did you see more than lines?

Were any emotions evoked?

What do you see here:



Again, did you see more than lines?

Were any emotions evoked?

Consider this configuration of lines:



Nothing unusual to report home about here?

As simple as ABC.

Well what about this:



What do you see here?

And now you've seen this, what do you now see here:



What can we learn from a simple dot and a few lines? What does this tell us about ourselves?

I invite you to consider the following questions:

Q. To what extent are we in control of our attention?

Q. Do we always see reality clearly, as it *actually is*?

Q. Do we see things that are not really there but imagined?

Q. To what extent are our interpretations influenced by context and the surroundings?

Q. Is there only a single interpretation of a situation?

SIGNPOST

Context is everything

Q. How might the surrounding context be influencing how I see this situation?

Q. How might I see this differently when I consider the broader context?





>> The whole is more than the sum of its parts

Zoom-Out Signpost

...

TO DO - content

...

>> Zoom-Out to find the most helpful perspective

Zoom-Out Signpost & Motto

As we have seen, at times we can hold a narrow or limited perspective that is unhelpful to ourselves and others.

We can become focused on a particular detail or aspect of a situation, person or ourselves that is unhelpful.

We can be zoomed-in to our detriment and often to the detriment of those around us.
We can remain unhelpfully zoomed-in for far too long, sometimes for years.
We may not even realise we are zoomed-in. The cost and damage can be enormous.

To zoom-out is to step back from a current or default perspective and find the most helpful perspective.

>> Zoom-Out to find the most helpful perspective

- Zoom-Out signpost & motto

Note that the most helpful perspective may be an alternative zoomed-in perspective.

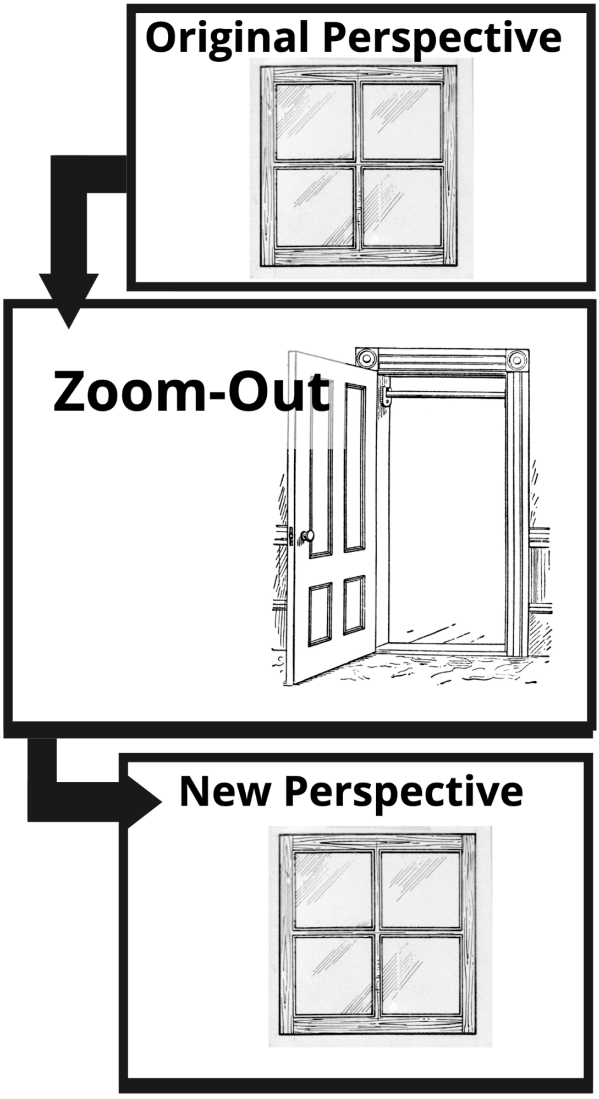
Consider if you were zoomed in on London on a world map and wanted to find and zoom in on another city. How would you do it?



Let's say you want to find and zoom-in on Istanbul:


Aylesbury
Hertford
Harlow
Hemel Hempstead
St. Albans
Chelmsford
Watford
Loughton
Billericay
High Wycombe
Brentwood
Rayleigh
Basildon
Maidenhead
Slough
London
Windsor
Grays
Bracknell
Rochester
Chatham
Maidstone
Guildford
Zoom-Out
SWEDEN
NORWAY
FINLAND
RUSSIA
North Sea
DENMARK
UNITED KINGDOM
IRELAND
BELARUS
POLAND
UKRAINE
KAZAKHSTAN
FRANCE
AUSTRIA
ROMANIA
ITALY
Black Sea
UZBEKISTAN
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
GREECE
TURKEY
TAJIKISTAN
Mediterranean Sea
SYRIA
MOROCCO
IRAQ
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
ALGERIA
LIBYA
EGYPT
SAUDI ARABIA
OMAN
INDIA
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
SUDAN
YEMEN
CHAD
BURKINA FASO
Zoom-In
Besiktas
Demirören Istiklal Shopping Ce...
Beyoglu
KARAGÜMRÜK
UNKAPANI
GALATA
MALTEPE
TOPKAPI
Fatih
EMINÖNÜ
Üsküdar
MEVLANAKAPI
Medical Park
Istanbul
Istanbul University
Fatih
Topkapi Palace
SALACAK
Narven Termal A.Ş.
Istanbul Photography Museum
Avrasya Tüneli
KOSUYOLU
BELGRATKAPI
Tarihi Hacı Evhaddin Hamamı
YEDIKULE
Kadikoy

In a similar way, a zoom-out can act as a doorway to a new and more helpful perspective:



The challenge in executing this simple idea is two-fold:

1 Catching when we are unhelpfully zoomed-in.

2 Zooming-out and optionally zooming-in on something more helpful.

SIGNPOST

Zoom-Out to find the most helpful perspective

Q. ...?



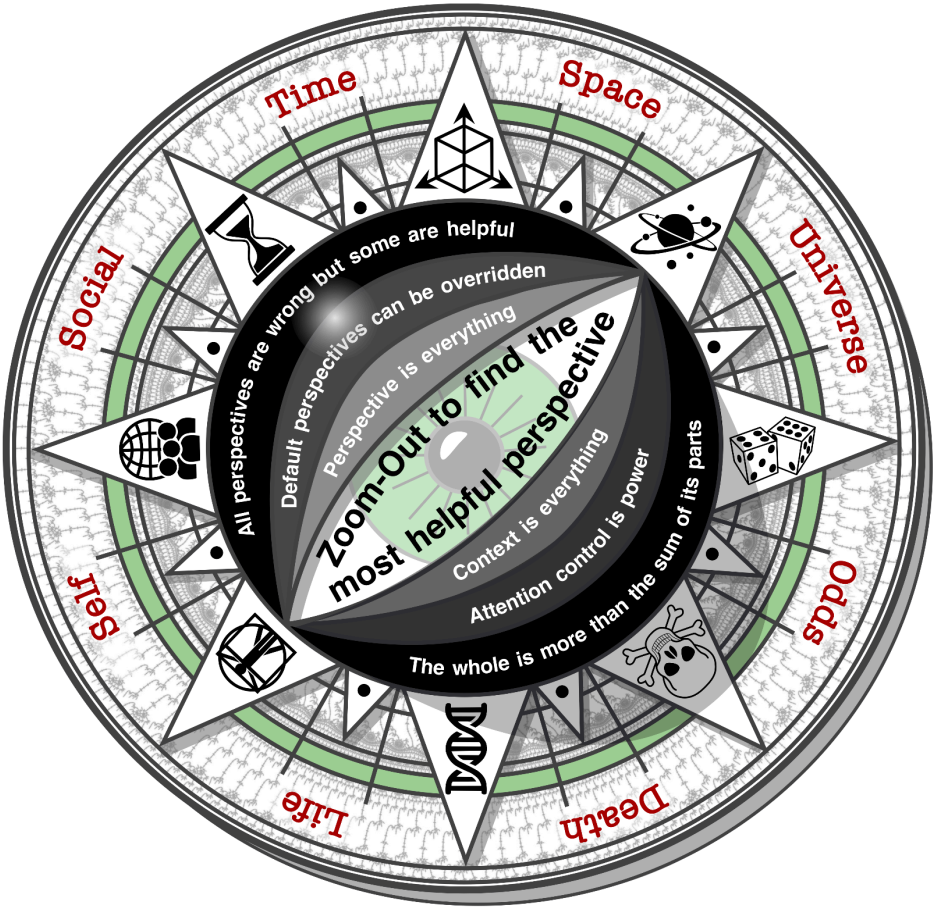
COMPASS

The zoom-out compass is a visual summary of the zoom-out dimensions and signposts.

As with any compass it helps us navigate, although in this case it helps us to navigate our subjective reality in many dimensions.

Zoom in for a closer look!

The Zoom-Out Compass



Navigate your 'world' with the Zoom-Out SIGNPOSTS and DIMENSIONS

zoom-out.org

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ZOOM-OUTS



The rest of this book provides some zoom-outs we can use when we are unhelpfully zoomed-in.

They are inspired by various fields of thought including psychology, philosophy, and various ancient wisdoms.

The zoom-out titles are intended to be memorable phrases, or hooks, with as few words as possible which can be

used to overlay situations we face and nudge us to zoom-out when zoomed-in unhelpfully.

Like labels on doors we can open to find other more helpful perspectives.





<o> Catchphrase

Zoom-Out

Before we explore this specific zoom-out, let's recap a few things.

The key reason zooming-out can be so helpful is:

"At times we can hold a narrow or limited view that is unhelpful to ourselves and others"

– The Zoom-Out Premise

To counter this we:

"Zoom-Out to find the most helpful perspective"

– The Zoom-Out Motto

And the challenge in executing this simple idea is two-fold:

1. Catching when we are unhelpfully zoomed-in.

2. Zooming-out and optionally zooming-in on something more helpful.

Zoom-Out Catchphrases can help us with both of these challenges.

A Zoom-Out Catchphrase is a short phrase we use when we catch ourselves zoomed-in unhelpfully.

The catchphrase zooms us out and points us in the direction of a more helpful perspective.

You could think of these as mini-signposts.

Zoom-Out signposts can be used as a type of catchphrase as well.

Zoom-Out catchphrases are similar in usage to "positive affirmations". Positive affirmations such as "I accept myself for who I am" or "I will do my best" are intended to boost self esteem and wellbeing.

Zoom-Out Catchphrases are intended to help you **label unhelpfully zoomed-in patterns** and provide a **nudge to zoom-out** to a different and more helpful perspective.

You could use a stock phrase, such as an affirmation, mantra or aphorism, however, a zoom-out catchphrase often works best when it is of your own design and rooted in prior personal experience.

Let's dive in and see how we create and use a zoom-out catchphrase.

>> IN ACTION <<

Zoom-Out Catchphrase

1 First, you need to prepare yourself in advance so that you are ready for action when the opportunity arises.

2 Secondly, you are then ready to catch yourself in the moment and apply the catchphrase.

1 Prepare

1.1 Identify the situation

Think of a situation where you often find yourself unhelpfully zoomed-in. That is, when viewing a person or thing in a narrow and unhelpful way.

1.2 Choose a catchphrase

Think of a phrase that encapsulates how you want to see this situation and feel about it. The phrase should be something short and memorable that encapsulates the spirit of the desired

perspective and desired feelings. The more personalised you can make it, the better. Try making the phrase humorous or linked to a favourite line from a film or a song lyric.

1.3 Associate a helpful memory

Optionally, associate a positive and helpful memory with the catchphrase. This helps to conjure positive and helpful emotions in the moment. The memory also serves as evidence that you have felt and behaved in helpful ways before that can help here.

2 Catch & Apply

Armed with your catchphrase, you are ready to deploy this when you catch yourself unhelpfully zoomed-in.

Unhelpful perspective

▼

Recall relevant catchphrase

▼

More helpful perspective

▼

More helpful emotions & actions

▼

Desired outcome more likely

Let's bring this to life with some examples.

Example Zoom-Out Catchphrases

These are some of my own catchphrases and you are encouraged to create and write down your own following the steps above.

Example 1: Public speaking

UNHELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

People are waiting for me to make a fool of myself.

CATCHPHRASE

"Charm the birds from the trees!"

ASSOCIATED MEMORY

Speaking to a group of people where I was relaxed, enjoying the moment and charming.

HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

Trusting myself to be my charming self and enjoy being in the moment with people. Also, trusting that people want me to do well.

Example 2: Demanding situation / task

UNHELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

I can't do this!

CATCHPHRASE

"To infinity and beyond!"

ASSOCIATED MEMORY

A time when I smashed a difficult task I had previously doubted I could do.

HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

I have more potential than is often apparent to me. I can do this!

Example 3: Personal conflict

UNHELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

I need to avoid this as I can't handle it.

CATCHPHRASE

"Conflict is my middle name!"

ASSOCIATED MEMORY

A time when I approached some conflict with an open mind and heart, and constructively resolved it.

HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

Seeing conflict as a natural, creative challenge and an opportunity for growth.

Try creating a catchphrase of your own using these top tips:

➜ Make the catchphrase personal (only you will hear it in your head)

➜ Make the catchphrase short and catchy, i.e. highly memorable.

➜ Use inspirational lines from movies or songs or other works of art

➜ Who are your heroes? What have they said or what might they say that you could use as the basis of a catchphrase?

➜ Associate the catchphrase with a memory that:

- is specific & clear – an actual event or situation you can clearly recall
- induces positive emotion
- is empowering
- had an outcome of the sort you want to repeat.

Example X: ...

UNHELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

...

CATCHPHRASE

...

ASSOCIATED MEMORY

...

HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE

...

Catchphrases work because:

- It's difficult to hold two competing perspectives about a situation at the same time – so conjuring up a helpful perspective will block out an unhelpful one (while it matters).

  For example, thinking "I'm empowered" will block out thoughts of "I'm helpless".

- Using memory associations helps also to induce positive and helpful emotions that can displace any negative and unhelpful emotions.



<o> Intentional Breathing

Zoom-Out

Something so simple, so taken for granted and literally right under our noses. Breathing is a superpower when used intentionally and deployed at the most opportune moments.

It's a foundational skill as a zoomologist.
Why? Well, there are a few reasons.

1 More self-control

Taking control of our mind's eye is a conscious activity engaging our cognitive capabilities. When we are stressed or tired, we need to give ourselves a boost, to breathe more life into our conscious awareness and cognitive muscles (our brain's prefrontal cortex).

2 Less stressed and more rational

When we are stressed or anxious our "fight, flight or freeze" response is activated (sympathetic nervous system) which diverts blood and oxygen from our cognitive muscles making it difficult to think clearly. When we intentionally breathe slowly and deeply this activates our "rest and digest" response (parasympathetic nervous system) which helps us be more rational and see things more objectively.

3 Better attentional control

We can leverage our breathing to direct the spotlight of our attention. To zoom-out from whatever situation is gripping us, then zoom-in on our breath before zooming-out to see a broader perspective or one or more alternative perspectives. We may then zoom-in on something more helpful.

4 Anxiety to excitement

When combined with some other zoom-outs (see "Catchphrase" Zoom-Out) we can turn situational anxiety into excitement.

"Anxiety is excitement without breathing."

— Fritz Perls

In general terms, mindful breathing helps to reduce stress and anxiety, reduces blood pressure, slows the heart and improves your immune

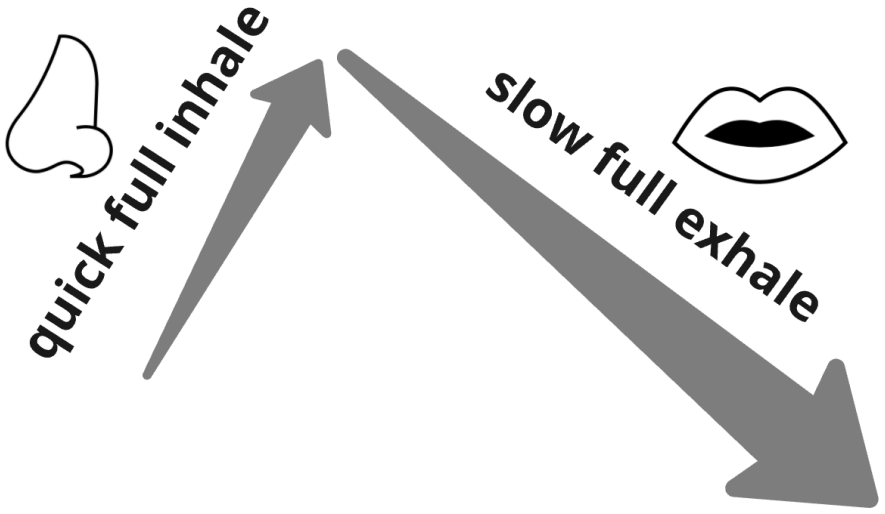
response – all of which have health benefits.

>> IN ACTION <<

Mindful Breathing

In its simplest form, we just take a deep breath in and then exhale slowly. Paying attention to the sensations of the breath in our body (nose, throat, chest, belly).
Repeat until you feel a sense of ease and perspective.

The key here is for the exhale to be longer than the inhale. It's also advantageous to inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth.

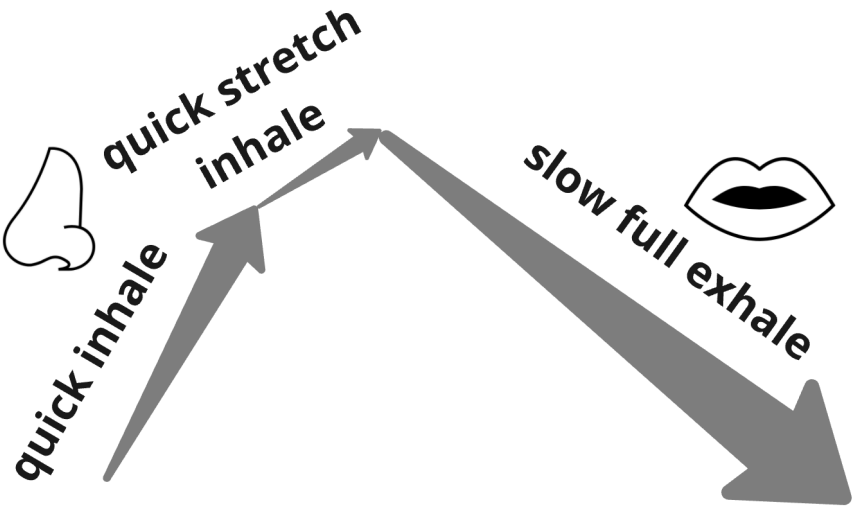


>> IN ACTION <<

Physiological Sigh

This is reminiscent of the inhale-on-top-of-an-inhale that can occur after someone has been crying and can be soothing.

1. A quick, deep inhale through the nose
2. A further short 'stretch' inhale through the nose
3. Long exhale through the mouth - the "sigh"
4. Repeat one to three times



This is calming, soothing
and dampens your stress response.

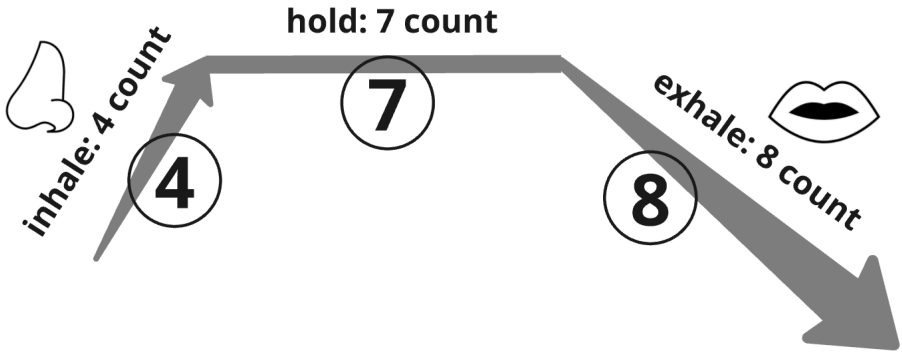
Source >> *Stanford Medicine research group: David Spiegel, Andrew Huberman and Melis Yilmaz Balba*

>> IN ACTION <<

4-7-8 Breathing

Repeat the following several times.
The power in this again comes from
the exhale being longer
than the inhale.

1. Inhale for a count of four
2. Hold for seven
3. Exhale for eight

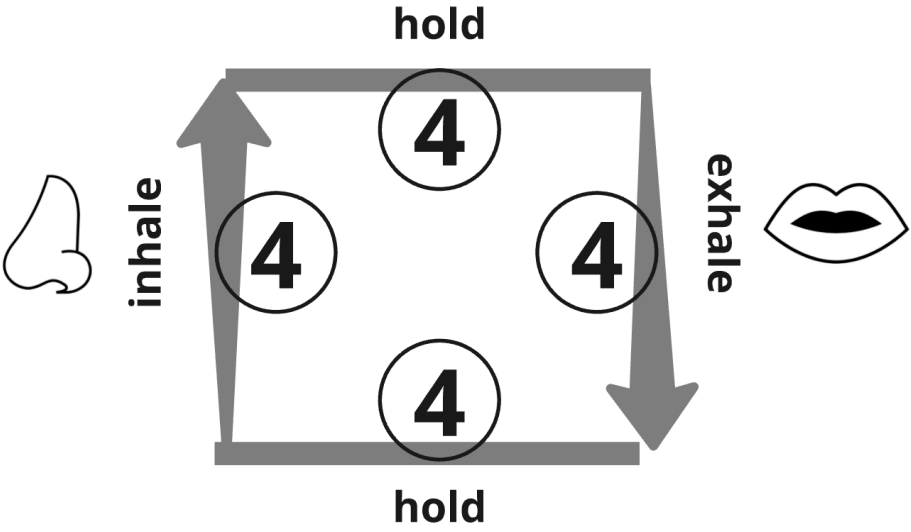


>> IN ACTION <<

Box Breathing

Imagine moving along the sides of a box for a cycle of breath:

1. 4 seconds inhale
2. 4 seconds hold
3. 4 seconds exhale
4. 4 seconds hold; repeat



There are many apps to guide you in different patterns of breathing and to help you cultivate a mindful breathing habit.

Intentional Breathing

...

Q. ...?





<o> Present Moment

Zoom-Out

I was never very superstitious until I discovered Gremlins exist!

I've not actually seen one but they are great at hiding and sneaking around behind our backs.

So where's my proof?

Well buckle up!

Let's start with hot beverages.

I take my coffee black with half a sugar (my attempt to cut down!). My partner loves tea with milk and no sugar. She claims I'm a great "Tea Boy", an accolade I take very seriously. However, on more than one occasion, I've ended up with milk in my coffee and handing my partner a black tea! Those damn Gremlins!

How about socks? I wash my socks, dry them and put them away neatly in pairs (some may dispute my definition of neatly). But low and behold, when I

go to put on a pair, they are an odd pair! Pesky Gremlins again!

Things get really serious when it comes to domestic security. I will exit my house and be at the garden gate when I think, hold on, I didn't lock the door. So I go back, put the key in and find it's locked! Well at least the Gremlins haven't unlocked a door so at least that's something.

What's that I hear you shouting? "It's behind you!". What?

Oh no, you said, "It's you!".
OK I admit it, you didn't fall for the Gremlins story obviously. Neither did my partner with her sub-standard cup of tea! The "Tea Boy" had to work extra hard that day!

Incidents such as these are a result of ***mindlessness***.
You can probably point to your own examples. Do any of these seem familiar?

- Repeatedly checking the same train ticket.

- Walking into a room and forgetting why you went there.
- Driving and not being able to remember the previous minutes of the journey.
- Misplacing your keys.
- Looking for your spectacles only to realise they are on your head.
- Putting the recycling in the rubbish bin or vice versa.
- Rereading the same sentence multiple times until it goes in.
- Saying "yes" or "no" to a question which you didn't actually register.

- Thinking "did I turn off the oven?"
- Scrolling through social media without realising how much time has passed.

Mindlessness can be defined as:

Mindlessness is a state of inattention or distraction, where actions, thoughts, or behaviors occur automatically or without conscious awareness of the present moment.

This brings us to the *antidote*.
We catch ourselves in this state of inattention or distraction – this "autopilot".
It's as if we are unhelpfully zoomed-in, actually, zoomed-*inside* our thoughts and emotions.
We can zoom-out from this state and zoom-in on the present moment.
We can zoom-out our awareness to the broader experience of the present moment. What's actually occurring here and now, in all of its richness.

Mindfulness is defined as:

Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and aware in the moment, observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment or distraction.

The "without judgment" aspect is important. Judgement is more thought that we can get wrapped up in and that distorts our perception of the present.

"Make the present moment your friend and not your enemy"
—Eckhart Tolle

When we are wrapped in our thoughts, dwelling in our head, we are often living in the past or living in the future. Reflecting on past events or imagining what the future may bring. Mindfulness helps us zoom-out in time from the past or future and return to and embrace the present moment.

"Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present."

—Bil Keane

There are many mindfulness metaphors that act as signposts. Many have a zoom-out theme. One or more may resonate with you.

Mindfulness Metaphors

The Camera Lens

Your awareness is like a camera lens that you can zoom in and zoom out. Mindfulness is adjusting the lens to see and experience things with more clarity and less distorted by our thoughts and emotions.

The River

Your thoughts and emotions are like a river flowing by. Mindfulness is sitting on the riverbank, watching the water flow by without getting swept along in it.

The Sky and the Clouds

Your mind is the sky, and your thoughts and emotions are the clouds. Sometimes the clouds are dark and stormy, other times light and fluffy, but the sky itself remains still, vast,

and open. Take in the whole sky and watch the clouds go by.

The Snow Globe

Your mind is like a snow globe. When it's shaken, the flakes are swirling everywhere, making it hard to see clearly. Mindfulness is the act of stepping back and letting the flakes settle.

The Ocean and the Waves

Your mind is the ocean, and your thoughts and feelings are the waves.

Sometimes the surface is rough and stormy, sometimes calm, but deep down, the ocean is always still.

The Lighthouse

Mindfulness is like being a lighthouse, watching the waves of the sea. The lighthouse is steady, simply observing, regardless of how rough or calm the sea is.

So how do we cultivate less mindlessness and more ***mindfulness*** in our lives?

Cultivating Mindfulness

1 Focus on your breath

Pay attention to the sensation of air entering and leaving your nostrils or the rise and fall of your chest. Your breath serves as a constantly present anchor to the present moment. Note that unlike <o> Intentional Breathing, make no attempt to change it - simply observe non-judgmentally.

2 Practice mindful eating

Eat slowly and intentionally. Savor each bite, and notice the textures, flavors, and smells of your food. Avoid distractions like TV or your phone. At a mindfulness workshop once, I was given a Belgian chocolate to eat mindfully. The best chocolate I've ever had!

3 Use mindfulness cues

Identify triggers in the day to remind yourself to be mindful. For example, when your phone buzzes, you wash your hands, hear a specific sound, or between finishing one task and starting another.

4 Take mindful walks

While walking avoid getting lost in thought. Notice the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the sights and sounds around you, or the feel of the sun or air on your skin.

5 Do a body scan

Focus on the tip of your head then slowly move down your body parts to your feet (or from your feet to your head). Notice bodily sensations without judgment.

I've found this is also a great way to get to sleep when my mind is racing.

6 Use guided meditations

Find a class, audio/video or use a mediation app. There are many to choose from. These are great for the beginner and also for regular practice longer term.

7 Meditate

There are many forms of mindfulness meditation. The guided meditations help you tap into the experience so it's more familiar to the point you can do them on your own.

The zoom-out signposts and many of the zoom-outs in this book help you to build metaperspective - perspectives on your perspectives. They will help you recognise when you might be unhelpfully zoomed-in. Increasing the level of mindfulness in your life will help you to zoom-out and be less reactive, less on autopilot. Ultimately gaining more choice over which perspectives you hold. And how tightly they grip you.

Present Moment

"The present moment is all there ever is"
- Eckhart Tolle

Q. In what way might you be unhelpfully living in your head and how can you embrace the present moment?



<o> State Optimisation

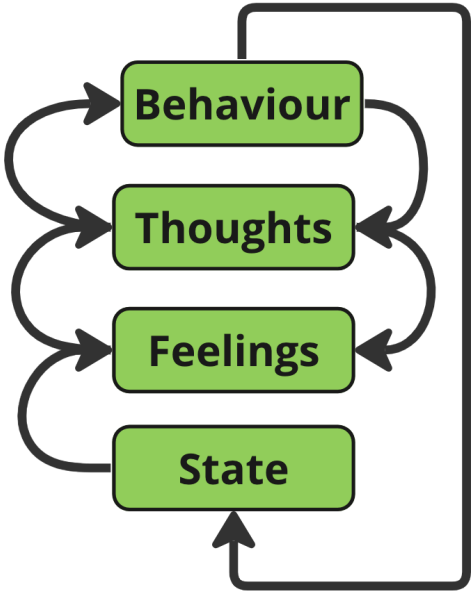
Zoom-Out

"We've got to start to look more broadly in terms of the human system as a system"

— Dr. Alan Watkins (Being Brilliant Every Single Day part 2)

Our physical, emotional and mental states greatly influence how we see situations - our perspectives. Our perspectives influence how we think and feel. How we think and feel

influences our behaviour.
Our behaviour in turn influences our state. You can see how this is cyclic and can result in either a downward spiral (unhelpful) or an upward spiral (helpful).



We often try to exercise control over our behaviours and even our thoughts. However, we can sometimes neglect to exercise some influence and control over our state.

The "Mindful Breathing" zoom-out is one way of influencing our state in a given moment and situation.

The following are other ways in which we can cultivate helpful states:

Sleep

Get good sleep to minimise fatigue and "brain fog"

Food

Eat foods that cultivate steady energy and vitality

Water

Drink plenty of water. Fatigue can stem from dehydration

Exercise

Exercise promotes health and vitality.

The list is very long so I will stop here. Perhaps you can extend the list by considering everything affecting your state hour-to-hour and day-to-day.

Then see what steps you can take and habits to cultivate to optimise your state.

Oh and don't forget to breathe!

State Optimisation

"..."

-...

Q. ...?



<o> Blind Men and the Elephant

Zoom-Out

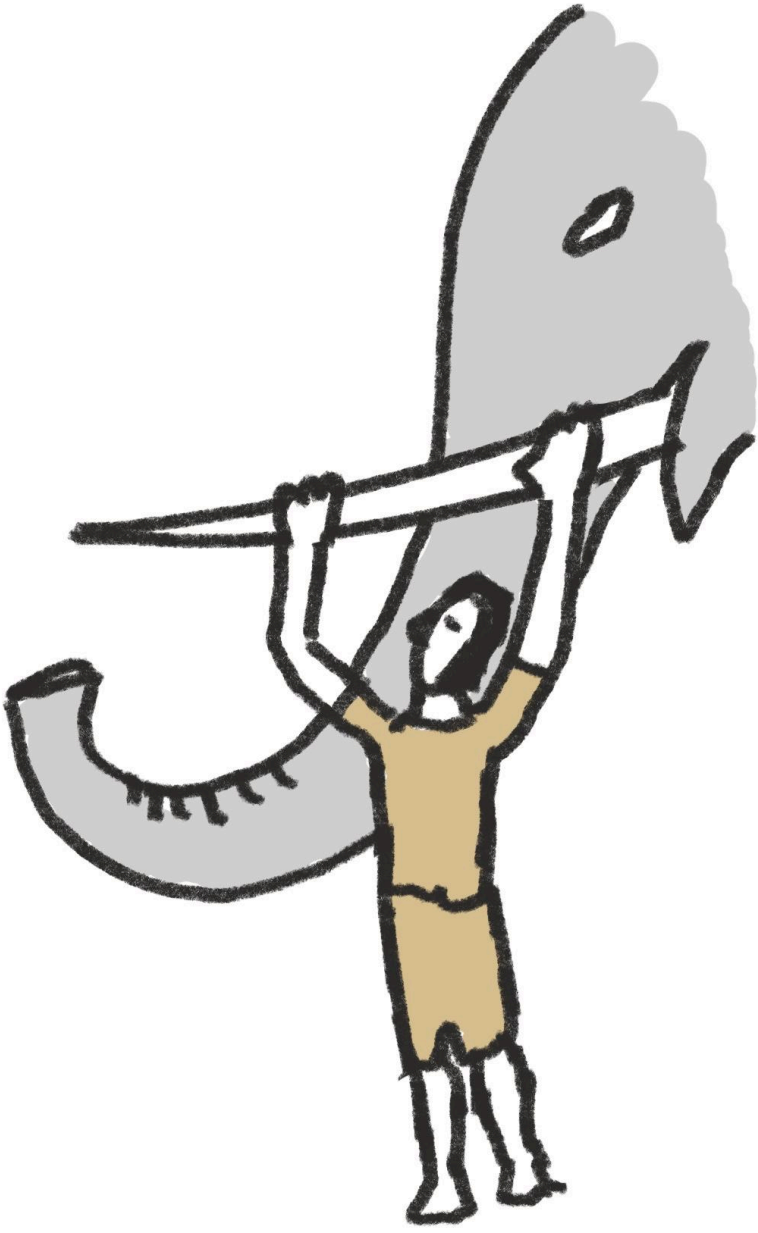
This is the story of a group of blind men who have never encountered an elephant before.

Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant's body, but only one part...

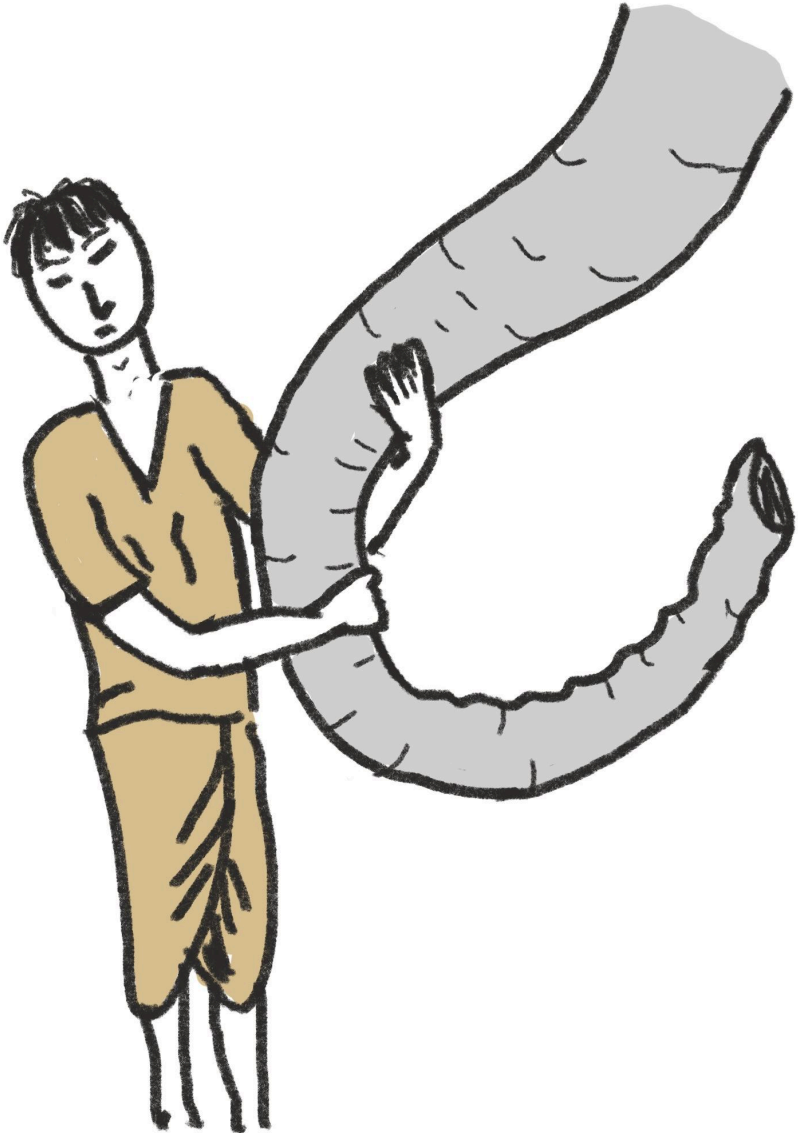
"The elephant is nothing but a wall!"



"The elephant is like a spear!"



"The elephant is a writhing snake!"



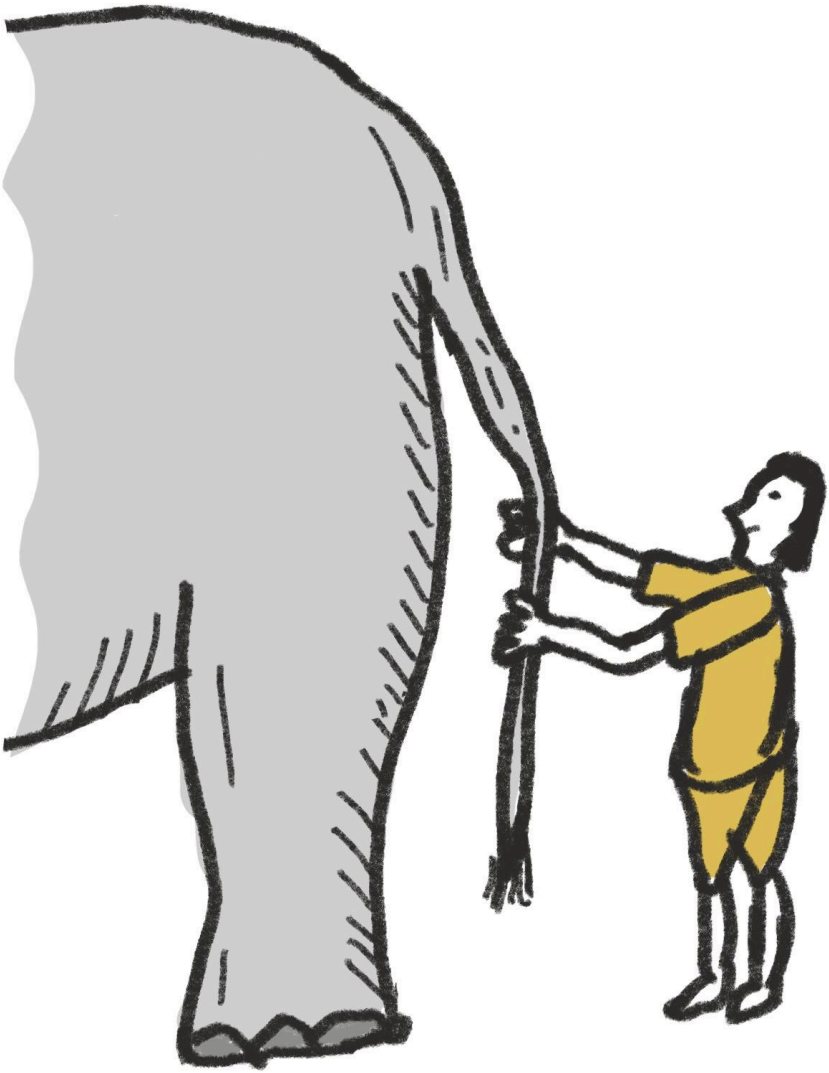
"The elephant is a tree!"



"The elephant is surely like a fan!"



"The elephant is actually a rope!"



"And so these men of Indostan,
disputed loud and long,
each in his own opinion, exceeding
stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
and all were in the wrong!"

– from the poem by John Godfrey Saxe

Are all events somewhat like the elephant in this story?

Remember, all perspectives are wrong... as all perspectives are partial.



"The Blind Men and the Elephant" Zoom-Out

Blind Men and the Elephant

"..."

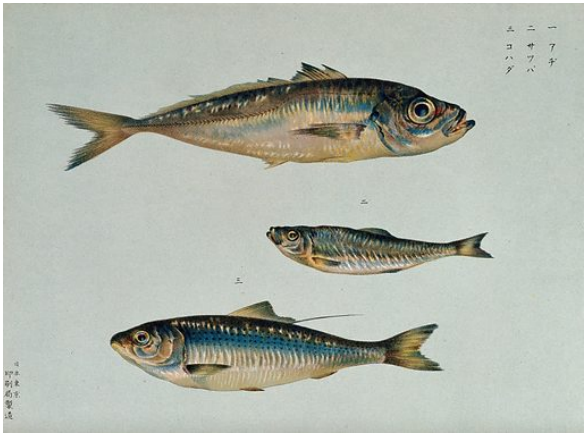
-...

Q. ...?



<o> How's The Water?

Zoom-Out



David Foster Wallace (1962 - 2008) was considered the finest American author of his generation. He was also a university instructor in the

disciplines of English and creative writing. In 2005 he gave a lucid and inspirational commencement speech to the graduating class at Kenyon College in the US on finding your purpose and living a meaningful and compassionate life. The speech was made into a thin book titled ***"This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life."***

There are so many Zoom-Out gems in his speech, the first time I heard it I was jumping out of my seat. I humbly

consider him to be an honorary Zoomologist.

He starts his speech with the following "little parable-ish story":

"There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes "What the hell is water?"

— David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), Writer

He goes on to say:

"The point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about. Stated as an English sentence, of course, this is just a banal platitude, but the fact is that in the day to day trenches of adult existence, banal platitudes can have a life or death importance, or so I

wish to suggest to you on this dry and lovely morning."

— David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), Writer

He later highlights the importance of taking control of our cognitive abilities - our thoughts and our focus of attention:

"... the really significant education in thinking that we're supposed to get in a place like this isn't really about the capacity to think, but rather about the choice of what to think about. If your

total freedom of choice regarding what to think about seems too obvious to waste time discussing, I'd ask you to think about fish and water, and to bracket for just a few minutes your scepticism about the value of the totally obvious."

— David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), Writer

If you've not heard the speech before I highly recommend a listen, in fact I come back to it from time to time to help cultivate my zoom-out mindset.

The audio of the speech can be found online along with the full transcript.



This is Water

How's the Water?

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?





<o> The Matrix

Zoom-Out

After graduating from university and landing my first salaried job as a Software Engineer, my first contract

was working in central England, inside a hi-tech warehouse with no windows. Now I was seasoned at writing code in my bedroom with the curtains closed and into the early hours of the morning. But I had not been expecting this. So began my immersion (pun intended) into the world of Virtual Reality (VR).
I was working for Virtuality, a VR games developer and manufacturer.

Jaron Lanier, an American computer scientist, artist, and musician, coined

the term virtual reality in the 1980s. His company was one of the first to sell VR hardware and software. The virtual reality experience centers around stereoscopic vision of a 3D computer generated world usually via a headset (aka goggles). This provides a sense of being immersed in a virtual world. This sense of immersion is increased by movement tracking in the headset so as the head is moved the virtual world viewpoint changes to match the new head position and direction of gaze. The effect is of

having the real world replaced with a virtual one. Gloves and other peripherals add to the sense of immersion in and sensing of the virtual world.

Virtual reality was popularised in cyberpunk novels such as Neuromancer by William Gibson (1982) and the film The Lawnmower Man (1992). In 1999, at the close of the millennium, the film The Matrix hit the big screen.

In the movie (spoiler alert!), the virtual reality inhabited by humans since birth is so compelling that the human inhabitants do not even realise it is virtual. To them, it is just reality. The one and only reality.

Reading Robert Wright's "Why Buddhism is True, I discovered his link to the movie as an Evolutionary Psychologist (Keanu Reeves being given one of his books to read by the movie's directors/producers) and that some Buddhists referred to the movie

as the "Dharma movie". Why? Because as many others have pointed out, The Matrix is a powerful metaphor for the subjective reality we inhabit. We think we see the true reality but in fact everything we experience is through the "VR headset" of our mind's eye.

Just like Neo, we can "wake up" to the presence of our own Matrix by taking the "red pill". We can then enhance our skills in navigating the Matrix and bypassing some of its

constraints. This takes patience, persistence and practice. This book is here to assist and to provide signposts for navigating our own subjective realities.

So it appears that VR has been with us all along. We are all creating our virtual reality every single moment.

"I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one that has to walk through it."

— Morpheus, "The Matrix" movie

The Matrix

" "
...
-...

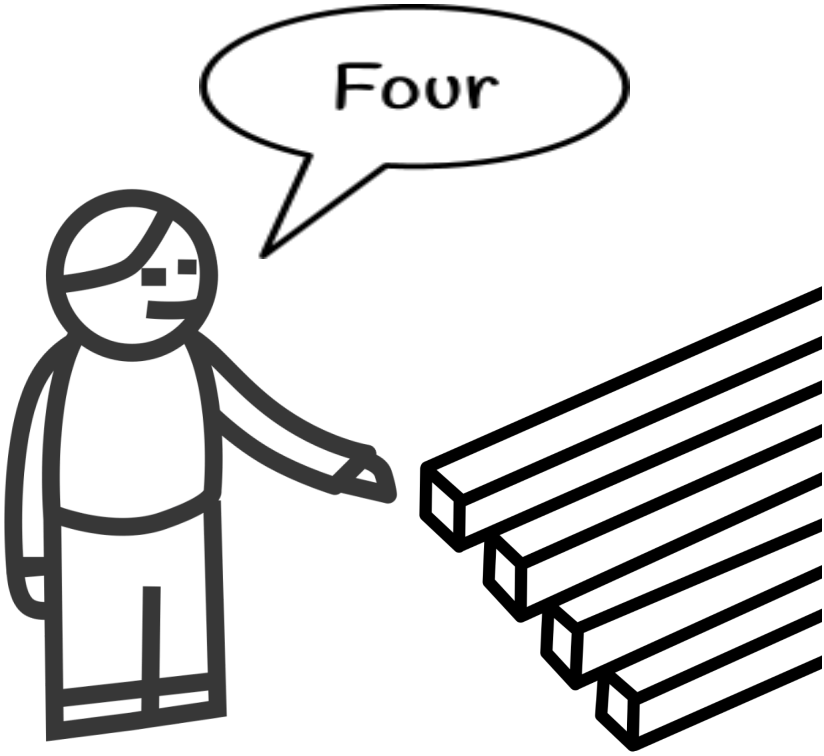
Q. ...?





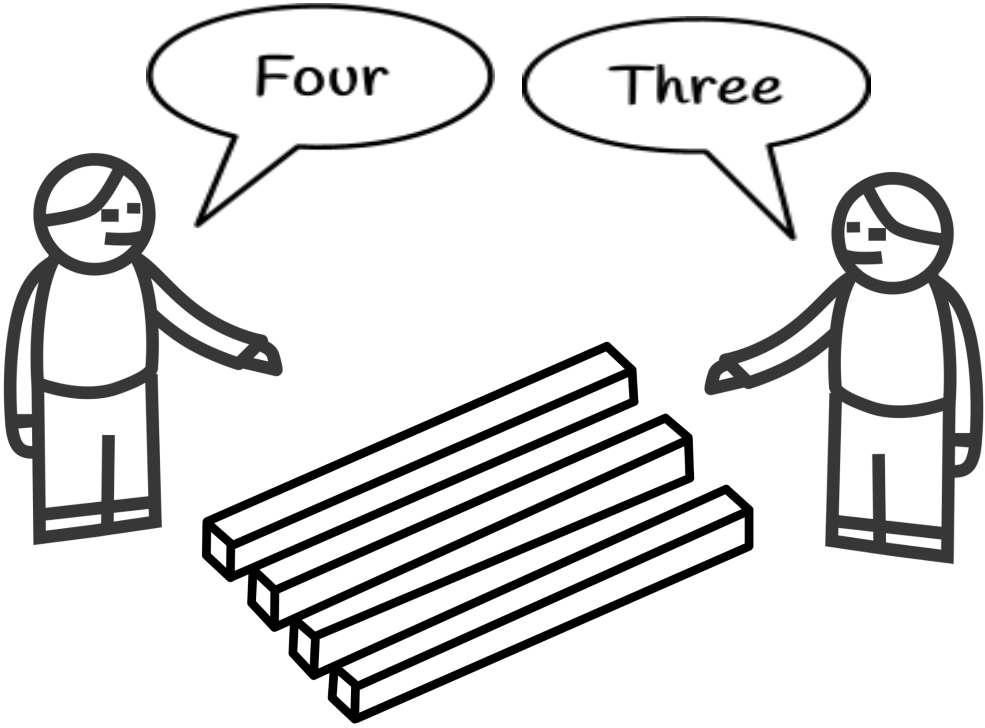
<o> Conflicting Truths

Zoom-Out



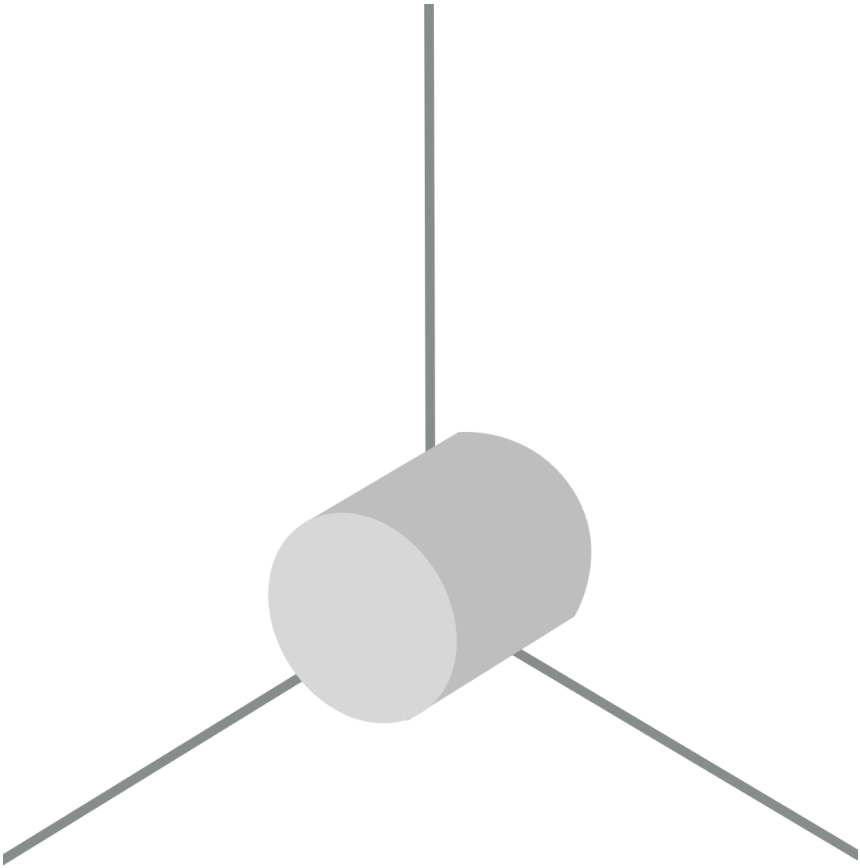

Three

We derive different and unique perspectives from the same objective reality.

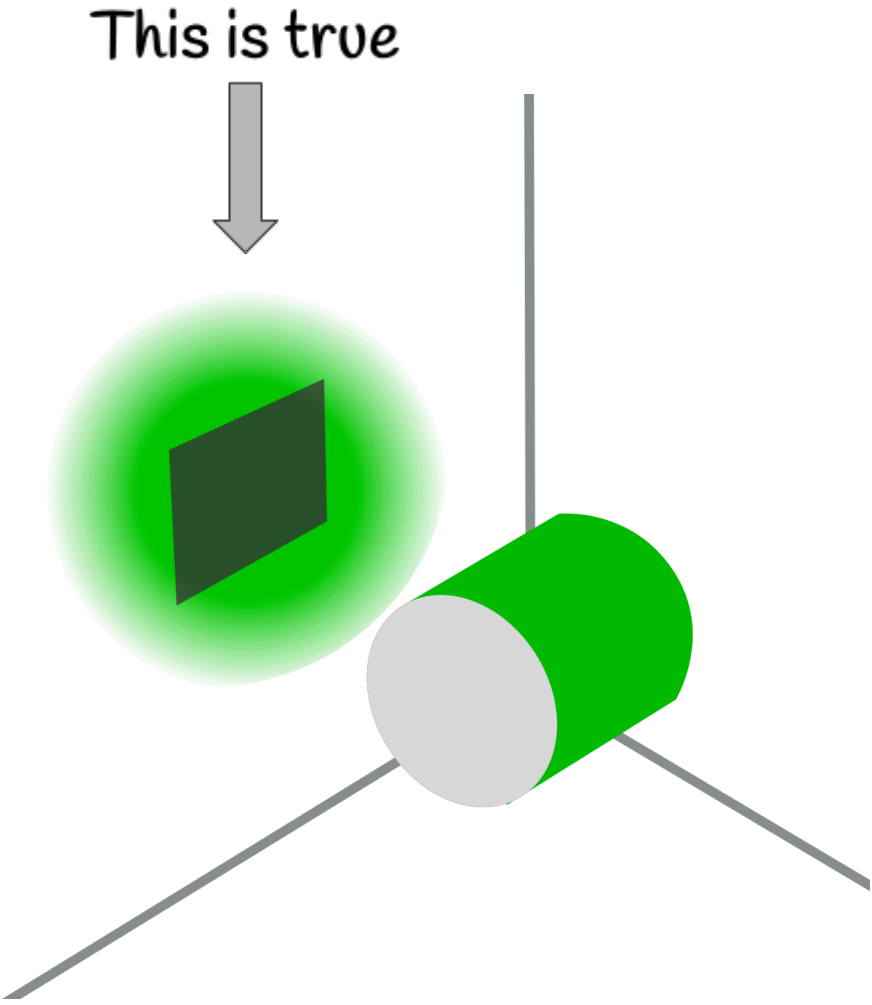


Perspectives may be conflicting and indeed contradictory.
Yet both may be valid truths.

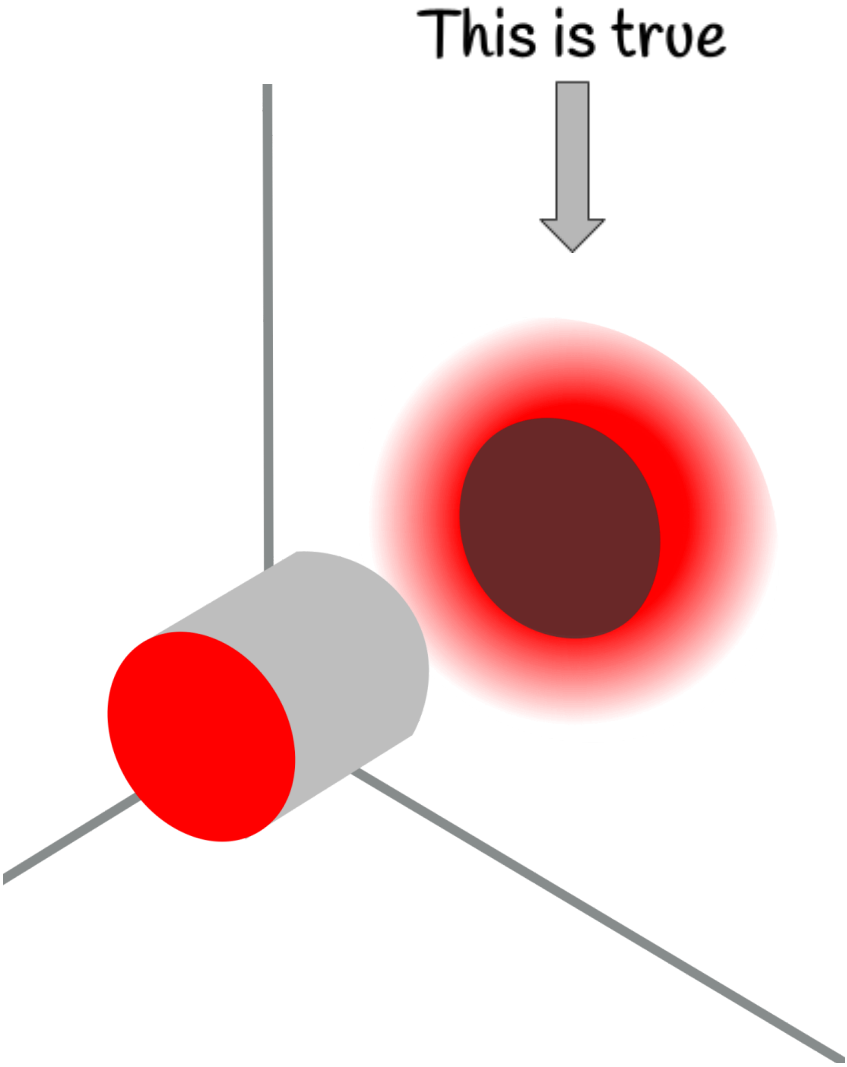
Let's shine some more light on the subject.



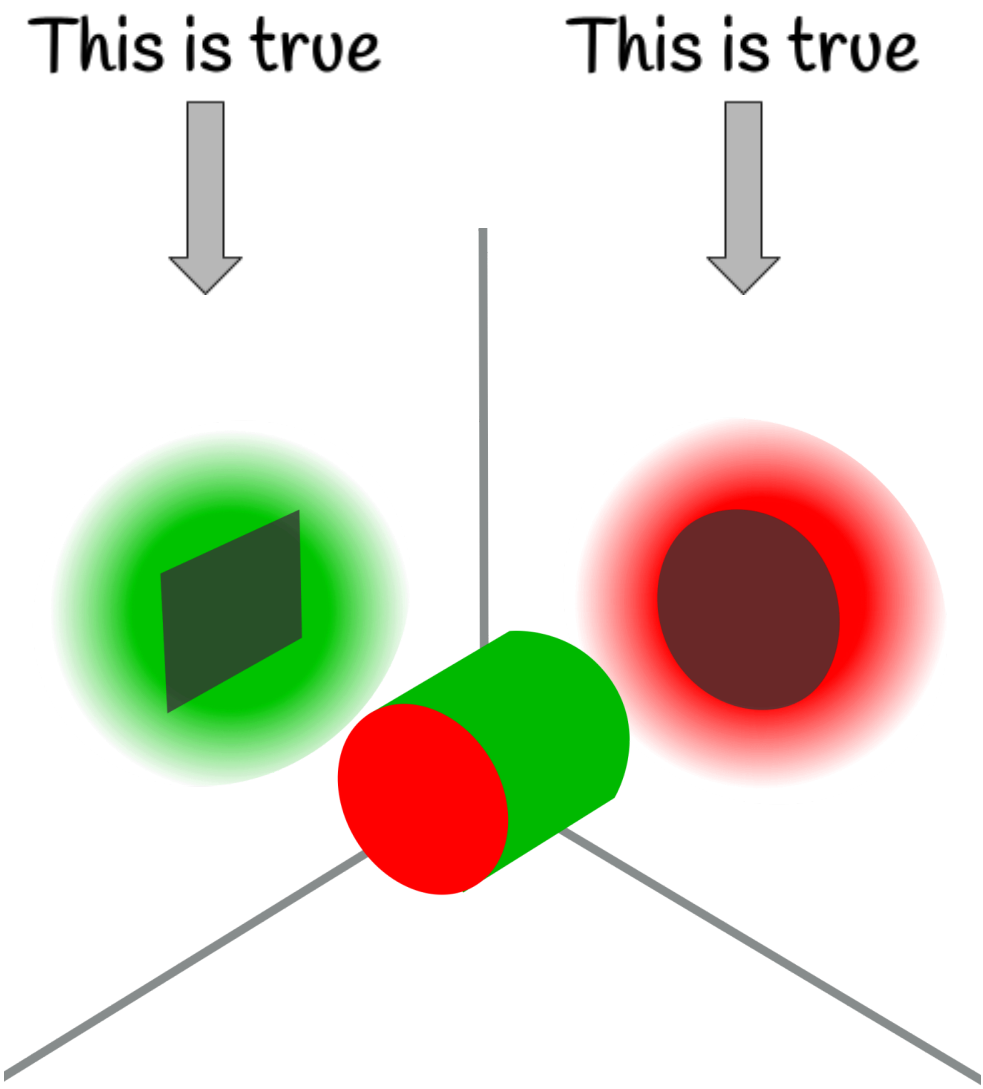
Some green light.



Some red light.



Both can be true!



Let's be mindful of thinking

"I am correct so

you are wrong!"

It's just possible that you both

may be correct.



"The Conflicting Truths"

Zoom-Out

Conflicting Truths

" "
...
-...

Q. ...?





<o> Self-Observer

Zoom-Out

This is also a foundational zoom-out.

This is the ability to step back from ourselves, from our thoughts, sensations and emotions and observe them non-judgmentally.

This requires insight, intent and practice.

"I am my thoughts, sensations and emotions, so how can I step back from them?"

I invite you to consider and reflect on the following questions:

Q. *Did you choose your last thought?*

Q. *Will you choose your next thought?*

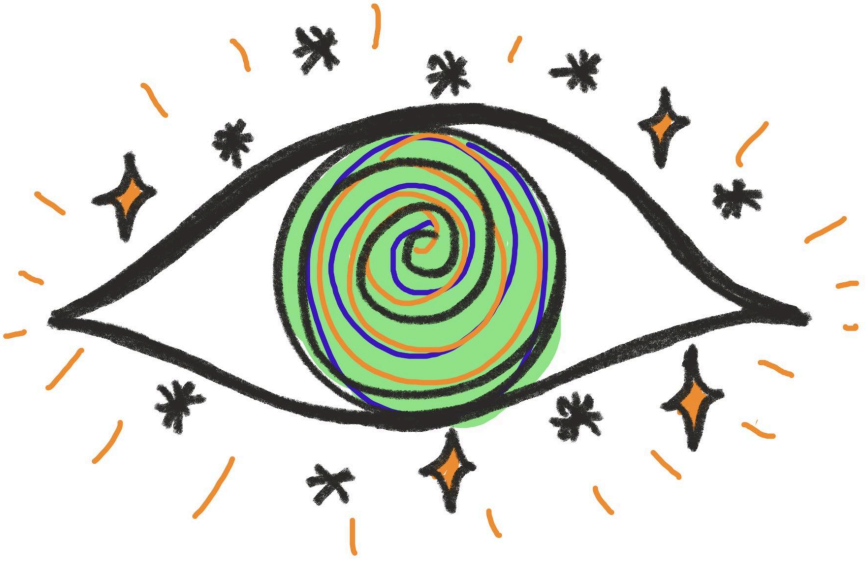
Q. *Where do your thoughts come from?*

Q. *Where do your thoughts go?*

You most likely concluded that you don't choose your thoughts even though it feels that way.

We like to think we are the master of our thoughts rather than vice versa.

Yet still, a thought feels like it is you. This identification with your own thoughts and feelings is precisely the spell we are trying to break.



"It is extremely difficult to stay alert & attentive instead of getting hypnotised by the constant monologue inside your head."

— David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), Writer & speaker

The following steps will help you to develop your self-observer zoom-out skills.

Self-observer Skills

1 Acknowledge

Acknowledge the nature of your thoughts – how thoughts arise in consciousness – and that it is possible to observe a thought.

2 Catch

Catch yourself when you are having an unwanted thought or are lost in thought.

3 Observe neutrally

Observe the thought non-judgmentally.

4 Watch it go

Observe as it goes away.

Do not cling to it in any way.

5 Build the habit

Maintain the intent to get good at this and keep repeating. Practising mindfulness and mindfulness meditation can help.

Self-Observer

"..."

-...

Q. ...?





<o> Storyteller

Zoom-Out

Consider a prominent memory of a place you once visited. Perhaps it's one of the wonders of the world such as the great pyramids or the Grand Canyon. Perhaps it's a remote valley or a hike up a mountain.
Or it may be something less dramatic. But it should be a prominent memory.

Dwell on the memory for a minute or two and notice what comes up. Then return here.



You will no doubt have pictured the place and possibly some objects – i.e. the atoms that physically constitute that place. However, I expect that

what is much more prominent is the context of that time and place. The people you were with, why you were there, how you got there, how it all made you feel, and perhaps what else was going on in your life at the time. These are your stories.

"The universe is made of stories, not atoms"

— Muriel Rukeyser, American poet & writer

I love this quote for reasons beyond it being beautifully poetic.

The wisdom in these words is incredibly powerful and inspiring. This phrase reminds us of our inherent ability to change our reality by changing our stories even when we cannot change the atoms.

Atoms can exist in configurations that are undesirable to you.
These atoms may comprise your possessions, your dwelling, your environment, the weather or your own body. You may not be able to change these atoms.

However, changing the stories you tell yourself about these things is within your grasp.

The same can be said for events.

Events can feel like they are happening around us and to us with zero say on our part. Interest rates go up, inflation rises, wars break out, companies go bust, politicians deceive us, friends betray us, others leave us, and the list goes on. Yet again, when we cannot control events we can take

control of the stories we tell ourselves about these events.

"What happens is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens. Events matter little, only stories of events affect us."

— Rabih Alameddine, The Hakawati

We can recognise and observe our inner storyteller.

We can leverage it to the benefit of ourselves and those around us.

We can ask ourselves questions such as:

Q. What stories am I telling myself about myself?

Q. What stories am I telling myself about this person?

Q. What stories am I telling myself about this situation?

Your stories will manifest in your thoughts and when you speak.

Story Teller

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?





<o> Golden-Eyed Monster

Zoom-Out

Consider these story extracts:

"As the city slept, a single light flickered in an old, forgotten library..."

"Tom locked eyes with Sandra across the room and he felt like she could read his mind..."

"Just at the crucial moment, it slipped from her hand to be lost forever..."

"Harry's deep sleep was broken by the sound of his phone ringing – who was calling him at 3 am and why?"

What did your mind do as you read these short passages?

It comprehended the words.
But what else?

Did your mind paint a picture of the situations and characters?

Did your mind add extra details?

Did your mind jump to conclusions as to what was happening more broadly?

How much control did you have over any of that?

Take a look at the following pictures.

What do you see?



This is a Rorschach inkblot I created randomly in a few seconds for a Zoom-Out card.

Zero intentions.

A pebble I found in my garden:



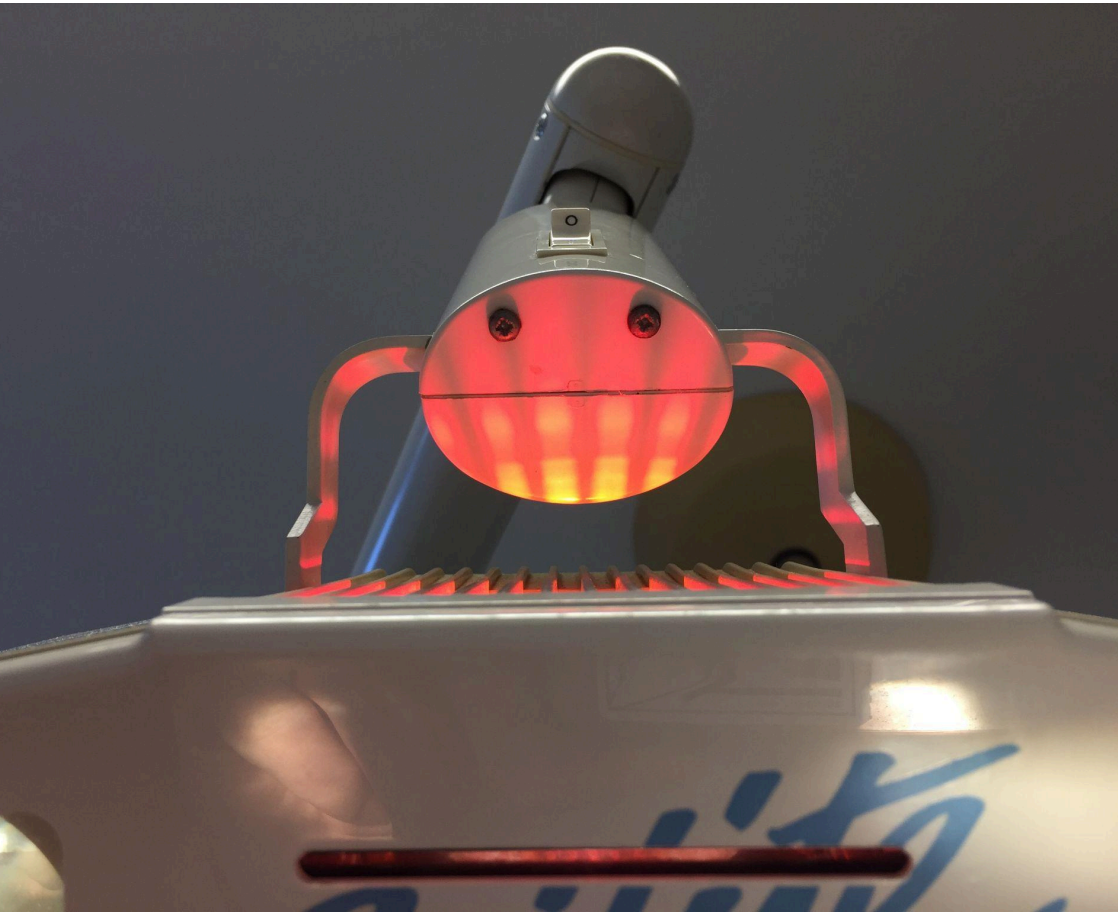
A laundry sack that confronted me in the corridor of a restaurant one New Years Eve:



Part of a climbing frame my kids were playing on in a park:



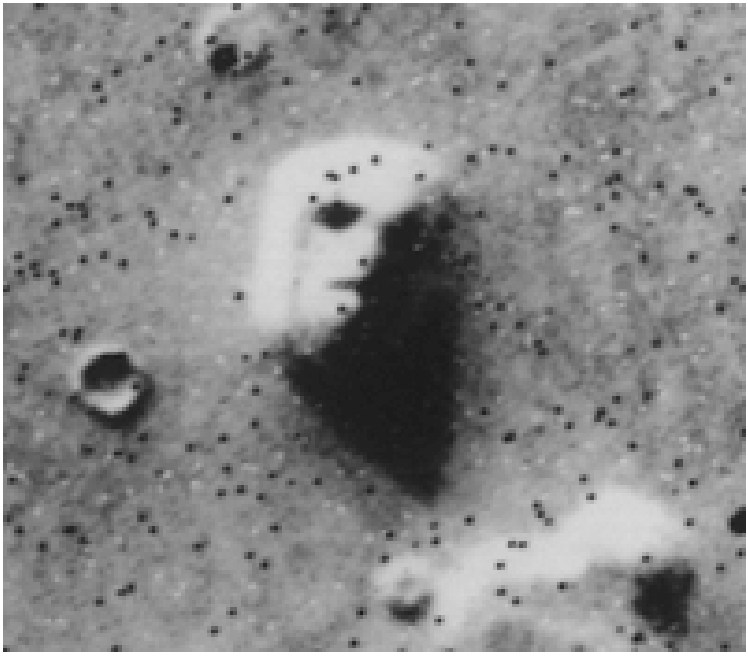
Reclined in a dentist chair, I found this curious creature staring intently at me:



Here are some examples other people have shared on the web:



A very famous example:



The "Face on Mars"

People cited this as evidence of martians!

The technical term for this human tendency to see things that are not really there is called Pareidolia.

"**Pareidolia** is the tendency for perception to impose a meaningful interpretation on a nebulous stimulus, usually visual, so that one detects an object, pattern, or meaning where there is none" – Wikipedia

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Pareidolia is a type of apophenia.

"**Apophenia** is the tendency to perceive meaningful connections between unrelated things." - Wikipedia

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Here are some more fun examples.









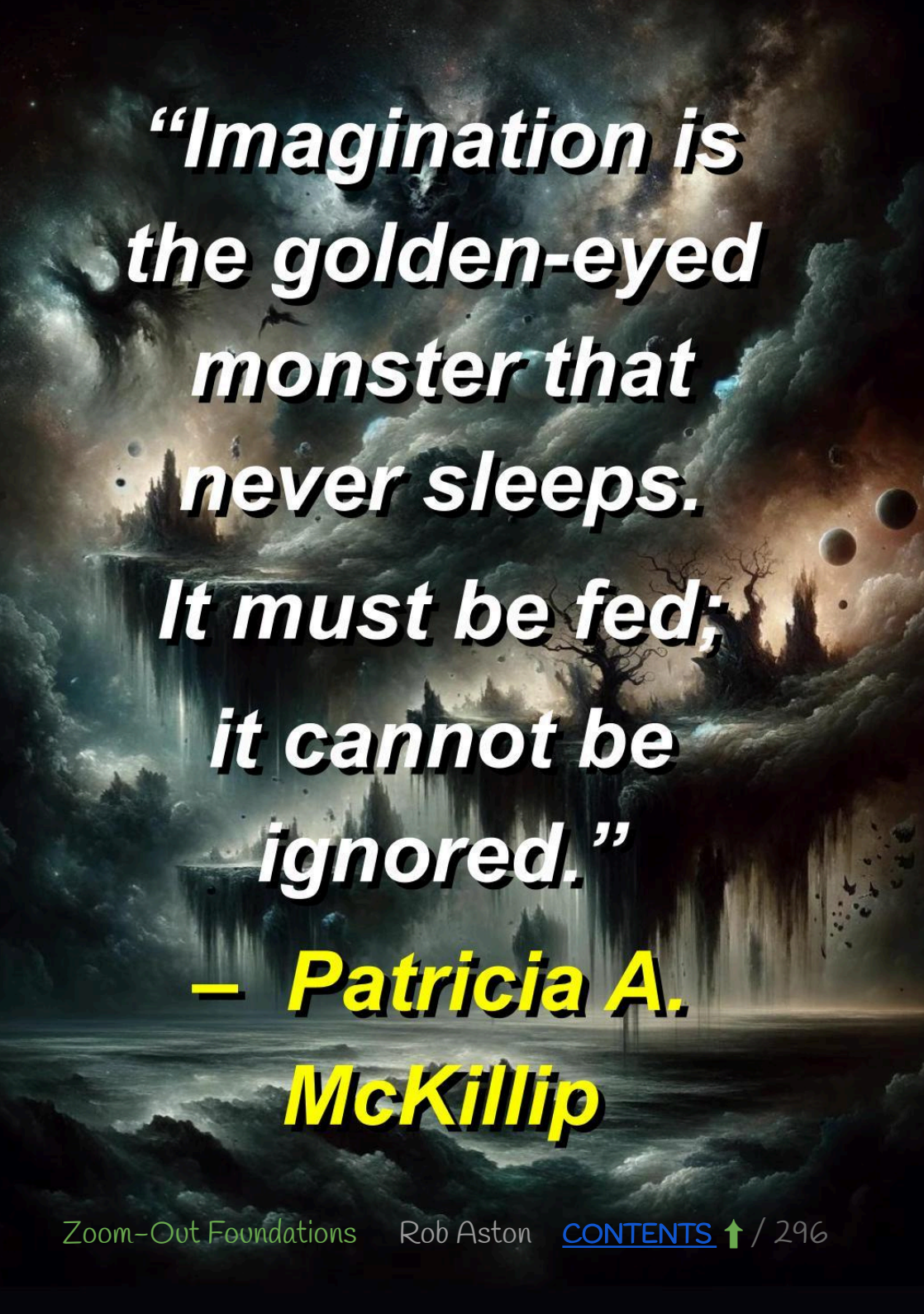
These examples demonstrate a human superpower.

This is the power of our imagination.



"Imagination is the golden-eyed monster that never sleeps. It must be fed; it cannot be ignored."

– *Patricia A. McKillip*


“Imagination is the golden-eyed monster that never sleeps. It must be fed; it cannot be ignored.”
– Patricia A. McKillip

Our imaginations can run wild in ways that do not always serve us well.

"I have suffered a great many misfortunes in my life, most of which never happened"

– Mark Twain

Our imagination can take us to a fictional future or a fictional present or past.

Our bodies, subconscious mind and emotions respond to imagined situations as *real* situations.

Become more aware of your imagination at play and learn to harness its power.

Imagination is the source of perspectives but we can also harness our imagination to create more helpful perspectives.

Tame your golden-eyed monster!

Taming Our Imagination

1 Self monitoring

Notice when your imagination is being unhelpful. Journalling can help increase your awareness and ability to spot this.

2 Mindfulness & meditation

Meditation and mindfulness help us to step back and be less reactive to our imagination.

3 Thought stopping

when you notice your imagination generating unhelpful thoughts, visualise or say to yourself "Stop!" or "No Thanks!

4 Reality check

Check the reality your imagination is creating against hard facts.

5 Creativity

Channel your imagination into creative pursuits.

6 Limit exposure

Limit your exposure to things that fuel unhelpful imagination.

7 Visualisation

Harness your imagination to visualise success and helpful outcomes.

"Because when you are imagining, you might as well imagine something worthwhile."

– L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

▶ Exercise ◀

Try this quick exercise:

1 What have you got coming up tomorrow?

2 How are you currently imagining it?

3 How can you reimagine it so that it goes more effectively for you?



"The Golden-Eyed Monster" Zoom-Out

Example Visualisations

1 The presentation

You are due to give a presentation.

Your imagination on auto-pilot.

You imagine your turn to present to an audience that wants you to fail and messing up will be a disaster.

Instead you imagine and visualise that people want you to be successful as they want an informative

presentation. You imagine any mistakes being no big deal at all – people won't judge.

2 The job interview

You have a job interview coming up.

Your imagination on auto-pilot.

You imagine other candidates that are better than you going for the interview and how could you possibly compete against them?

Instead you imagine and visualise yourself as a unique individual and that you may be the best fit for what these unique interviewers are looking for.

Inkblot



"The universe is a giant Rorschach ink-blot" - Alan Watts

Q. What might you be seeing that is not really there?

zoom-out.org



<o> Focusing Illusion

Zoom-Out

Imagine that someone tells you:

"Hey, I'm moving to California for the sunshine"

What comes to mind when you think about this person's life after they move?

When something is the focus of our attention, it takes up a special place in our universe at that moment. The problem is that it can all too easily take on too much significance.

"Nothing in life is as important as you think it is,
while you are thinking about it"

– The Focusing Illusion, Daniel Kahneman



"Focusing Illusion" Zoom-Out

TO DO - expand content; more examples; take some from my video; revisit section in Kahneman book

Zoom-Out card goes here

TO DO - card





<o> As We Are

Zoom-Out

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are"

— Anais Nin

This poetic quote reminds us to consider that when we form a perspective on a situation we are not necessarily seeing things as they are but as we are. That is to say, we are

projecting ourselves onto the situation.
Our beliefs, world views, biases, values and the sheer uniqueness of our personalities and personal experiences shape and colour every perspective that forms in our mind.

This happens all the time from moment to moment for every person on the planet.

Here are some common examples.

1 Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism, a form of anthropocentric projection. This is the innate tendency of projecting ourselves onto non-human entities such as objects, animals and natural phenomena. We imbue them with human qualities such as personality, emotions, intentions and desires. We may describe a pet dog as looking guilty or a cat as looking devious. We give human names to hurricanes. We can get emotionally attached to

non-living objects including cars and robots feeling they have a personality or even a spirit in some cultures. We personify supernatural beings.

2 Being triggered

Specific events and situations can stimulate strong emotional reactions rooted in past negative or traumatic experiences. For example, if a person has a fear of loss or abandonment, and their friend or partner says they need some time to themselves, this may be

interpreted as a hurtful rejection and make them feel insecure.

3 My boss hates me

In a work setting, an employee walks past their boss in the corridor and cheerfully bids them good morning. Their boss says nothing in return and does not even make eye contact. The employee is now running all sorts of personal projections... my boss does not like me... my boss is upset with me for something I have done... my boss is going to fire me!

TODO – more examples?

The tendencies described here are ingrained and we cannot just eliminate them. They are part of the rich tapestry of the human condition. However, by being more mindful of them and how they come into play in our daily lives, we can cultivate our ability to spot when such projections of ourselves may not be serving us well or doing a disservice to others.

As We Are



'We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" - Anais Nin

Q. How might you be seeing a projection of yourself rather than what is really there?

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<o> Confirmation Bias

Zoom-Out

Just after midday in a park in Paris, I stood there, one of thousands, transfixed by what was unfolding before us. Daylight had departed along with the sound of birds and in their place an eerie gloom and damp chill.

No one spoke.

Let me back up a little. As a keen amateur astronomer one summer, I became an 'eclipse chaser'. The year was 1999 and the moon was going to pass in front of the sun on 11 August. The Moon was due to completely obscure the surface of the Sun, turning day into night and revealing the sun's prominences and corona – a spectacular total solar eclipse. This profound experience is limited to within a narrow band of the earth's surface, approximately 100 miles wide. The placement of this 'path of

totality' varies per eclipse. Total eclipses occur on average around every 18 months but from any particular region through which totality passes, you could be waiting 375 years for the next one!

This time the path of totality will pass along the south western coast of England, my home country. I was excited and dismayed in equal measure. Years of star gazing and meteor shower observing events could more accurately be described as 'cloud gazing', such is the British

climate. This total eclipse would be my first proper experience of one and I was not going to risk this becoming a cloud eclipse of the sky! So I booked a coach trip to Paris for some family and friends. There were 11 of us, on a number 11 coach, with the eclipse due on the 11th August and my hotel room number was... 11 of course.

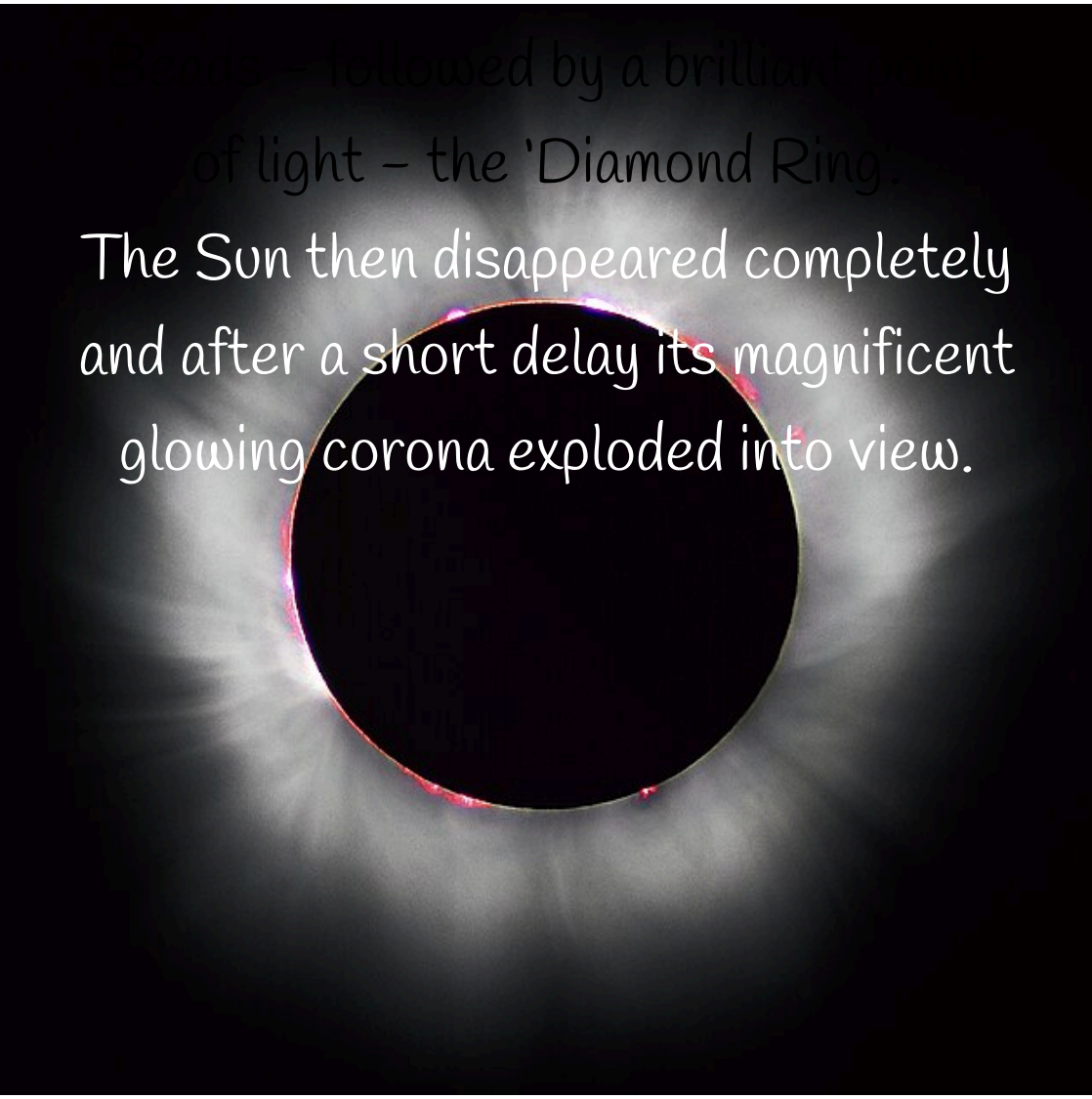
Synchronicity?

An hour before the eclipse was due to occur, we arrived in the aforementioned park in Paris with thousands of other people. There was

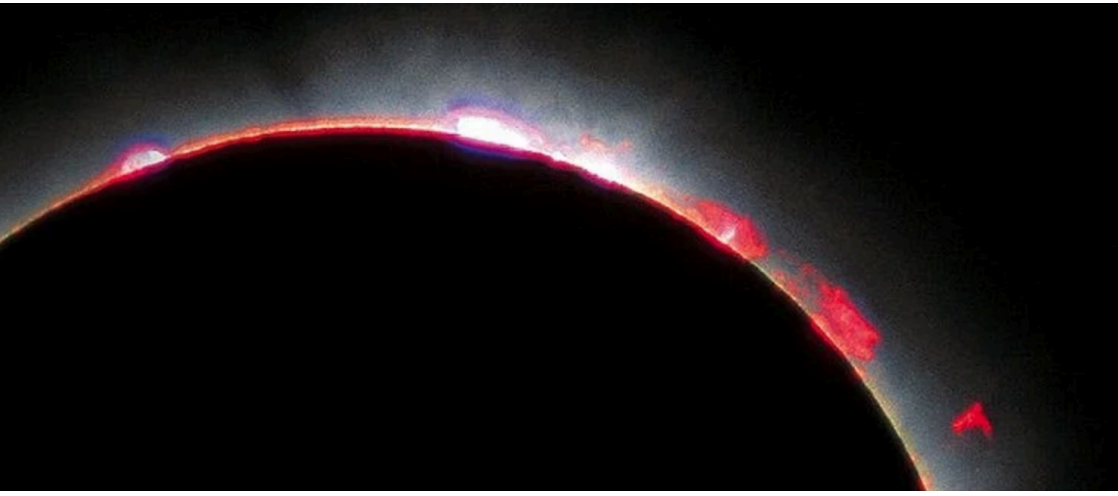
an incredible buzz of anticipation. Except, the sky was a total blanket of clouds! We counted down the minutes. Just clouds. It got darker and darker. The wind fell away and the birds stopped chirping. The temperature dropped.

And above us, just clouds.

And then, 2 minutes before totality, a window opened up in the clouds to reveal the Sun which had now been reduced to a thin crescent of light. This was replaced by a crescent line of scattered points of light – Bailey's


'Beads' - followed by a brilliant point of light - the 'Diamond Ring'.
The Sun then disappeared completely and after a short delay its magnificent glowing corona exploded into view.

This is the only time the Sun's corona is visible to the naked eye.
For 2 minutes and 23 seconds we experienced the magnificence of the spectacle. At times we used binoculars to get a close up view, eclipse glasses put to one side. This is the only time of course one can look through binoculars in the direct line of sight of the Sun without being blinded.



Then after the allotted period, a diamond ring appeared again, followed by the return of a crescent Sun. This widened as the Moon very slowly exposed the full disc of the Sun once more.

After the excitement of our group subsided, I listened to some of the conversations going on around me.

I heard some people commenting on the incredible precision of the laws of physics, acting on such a cosmic scale.

The "clockwork universe".

I heard others stating how the experience proved the existence of their God.
"God's grand design"

On one hand, a total solar eclipse demonstrates the precision of the mechanics of the universe and the power of scientific predictions. On the other hand it provides absolute proof of God's existence

I was struck at the time how such an intense and unambiguous event could

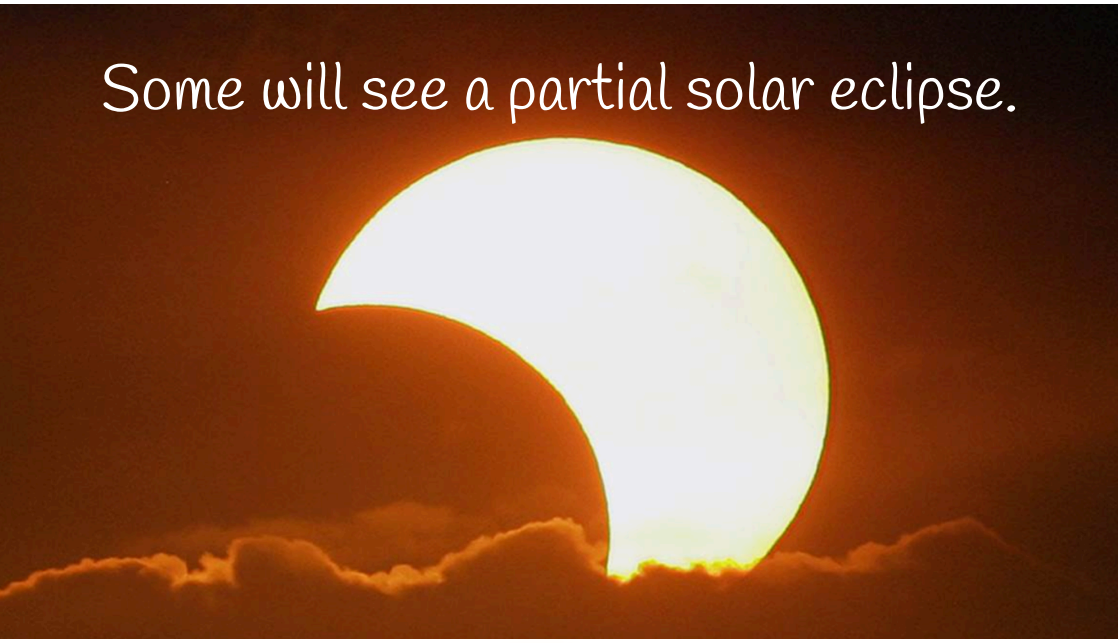
be interpreted in two radically different ways. How a person's beliefs influenced their subjective experience. This is confirmation bias in action. Interpreting an event in a way that confirms our pre-existing beliefs.

A total solar eclipse is a doubly interesting case because it can only be witnessed in our solar system like this from Earth. This is because the Earth, Moon and Sun line up but not only that, totality occurs because the Sun is 400 times further away from

us than the Moon and is 400 times larger than the Moon. Thus the Moon blocks out the Sun perfectly.
Some people describe this as an incredible cosmic coincidence. Others describe this as an example of God's design and our special place in God's universe.

Also of interest is that the experience of a total eclipse, as with many things in life, is dependent on your point of view. Your perspective in the spatial dimension. Someone observing from

outside the path of totality will not witness a total solar eclipse at all.



Others will see just the Sun.

Others will see clouds as they did in Cornwall, England on 11 August 1999. I'm so glad we went to Paris!

Confirmation bias is at play all the time in our lives and is not limited to such cosmic events.

The next time you are holding a perspective that is unwanted and/or unhelpful, step back and ask yourself:

"Is the true reality here being ***eclipsed*** by my confirmation bias?"



Keep in mind that your existing belief will act as a filter reinforcing data that confirms that belief and filtering out anything that contradicts it.

So to counter confirmation bias, seek out any evidence that contradicts your underlying belief.

Remain open to doubt and new information.

>> All perspectives are wrong but some are helpful

Confirmation Bias

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?

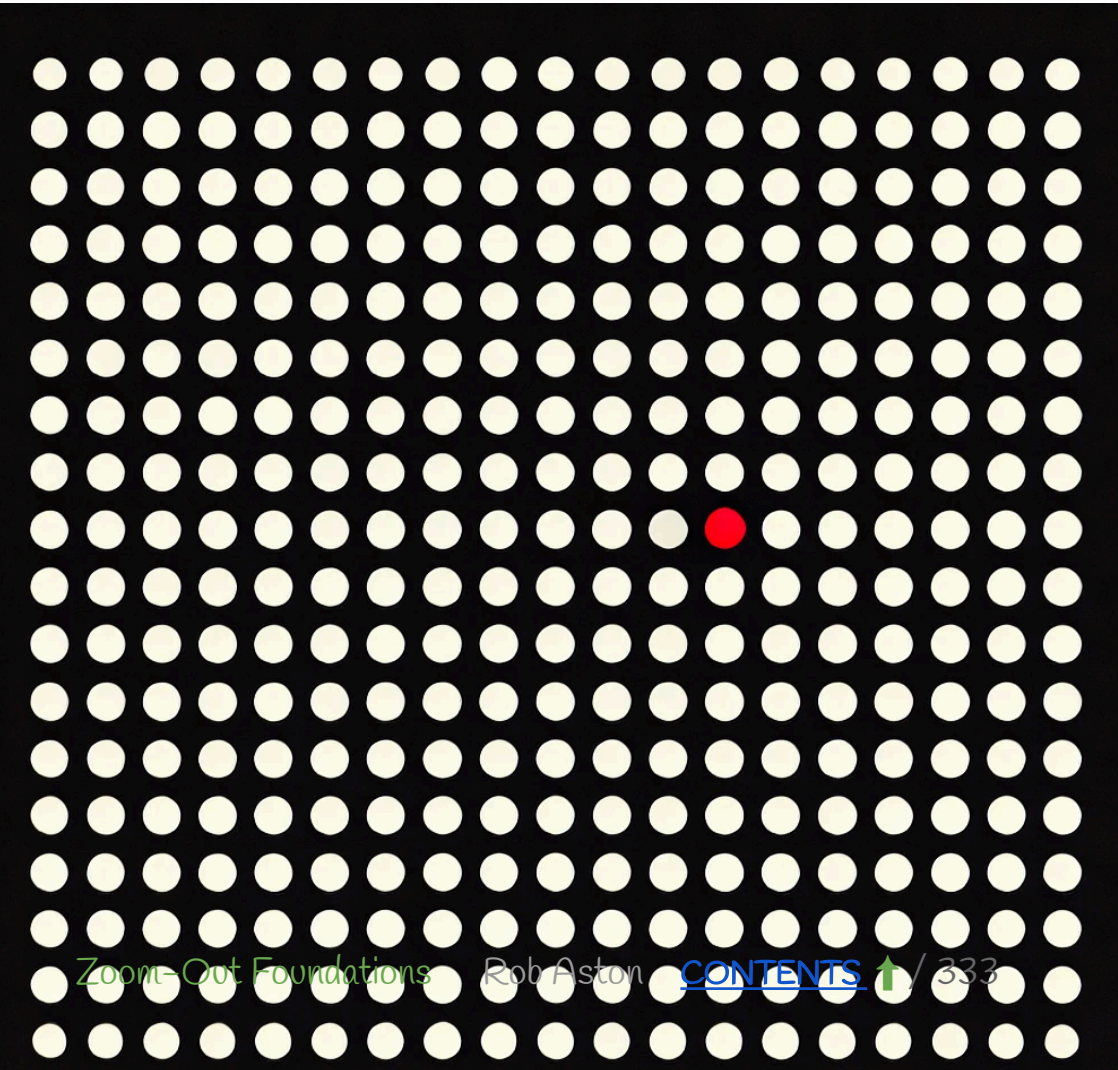
TO DO - card



<o> Negativity Bias

Zoom-Out

Examine the following scene:



What did you notice?

Consider the following news headlines:

"Local Community Garden Produces Record Harvest for Families in Need"

"University Announces New Program for Online Education"

"Pollution Levels Spike, Raising Concerns About Public Health Risks"

"New Restaurant Opens in Downtown District, Offers Unique Menu"

"Young Inventor Wins International Science Award for Sustainable Solution"

"City Park Renovation Creates New Spaces for Recreation and Wellness"

"Weather This Week Expected to Be Mild, with Some Rain Showers"

"Severe Storm Causes Widespread Power Outages Across the Region"

Studies have shown that people remember the negative headlines more than the positive or neutral ones. Which ones stood out for you?

In the dots exercise above, what were you drawn to? No doubt the red dot despite there being many more white dots.

Take a look at this collection of faces:



Which ones stood out?
The angry negative ones?

Reflect on compliments you have received in the past.
Reflect on criticisms you have received in the past.
Which stand out the most and linger in memory longer?

These examples all demonstrate how we are wired to elevate the negative over the positive. A fact well exploited by news publishers and

other organisations trying to sell us something - consider Insurance companies as another example.

We have been wired this way by evolution. People born with a tendency to overreact to threats were more likely to survive and pass on their genes to the next generation. Genes which may encode the tendency to overreact.
The person that overreacts to a rustle in the grass may be wrong most of the time but the one time it is

indeed a poisonous snake or other dangerous predator, they just lived to see another day and potentially pass on their genes.

Countless iterations of natural selection bring us to where we are today as a collection of drama queens, doom-scrollers, over-thinkers, worrywarts, bad-news magnets, perfectionists, self-doubters, panic-preppers, guilt-hoarders, awkward moment archivists and criticism trophy collectors!

Criticism hurts and sticks so badly because for most of our existence as humans, any negative evaluation was perceived as a potential threat of being excluded from the tribe. An act that would lead to certain death on our own.

Do any of the following scenarios sound familiar?

Boss: "You're doing great on 99% of tasks." Employee: "Wait... what's the 1% !?"

"I could win an award, and my brain would say, 'Yeah, but look at that stumble as you collected it.'"

I could save a kitten from a tree, but I'll still lose sleep over the time I waved back at someone who wasn't waving at me."

"At the office: 20 emails saying 'great job.' One says, 'Quick typo correction.' Guess which one haunts me at 3 a.m.?"

"I heard 'You're amazing!' in a text. Then saw the dot-dot-dot typing bubble disappear. Now I'm spiraling about what they didn't send."

"Posting online: 99 likes. One person says, 'This is cringe.' Guess which one I printed and framed—in my mind."

A friend compliments your outfit: "You look amazing!" But later adds, "Not sure about the shoes, though."

Your brain: "I need to throw these shoes away immediately."

I can certainly relate to such examples. I have a special place in my mental scrapbook for such things.

One time working at the BBC, I sent an email out to some key stakeholders on the status of a project.
I was proud of the email because it was succinctly informative, tailored to the audience and goal focused.

Out of the 25 people I sent it to, many replied with a thank you, except for one! Their reply was an educational seminar on how to use possessive apostrophes correctly! Due to a single typo in my email. That was 15 years ago and it still burns brightly in my memory.

Another time as a consultant, I was working with a client and had a meeting at their London office. On the way out I heard a voice call out "Rob!". I looked around and recognised

a man I had worked with some 4 years before. I replied, "Hi Martin, it's great to see you! What are you doing here?". We spoke for a few minutes and then I left. I noticed his initial excitement at seeing me had quickly subsided and he was not as warm to me as when we worked together. And then it hit me like a tonne of bricks... I got his first name wrong! His name was *Andrew* Martin! Shock, horror! I got his first name and surname the wrong way around. I no doubt embarrassed him in front of his client

by getting his name wrong I concluded! The shame!

I could go on. I've had quite a few jokes that landed badly or were misinterpreted. But I have made countless jokes that made people laugh, helped solve a problem and boosted relationships. Guess which ones I can remember?

So what can we do to counter our negativity bias and limit it from holding us back, impacting our relationships

and making us feel sh*t? Here are some things we can do:

Countering Negativity Bias

1 Zoom-Out

When you find yourself unhelpfully zoomed-in on some negativity, pull back and acknowledge that your negativity bias may be at play.

2 Reframe negative thoughts

Ask yourself, "Is there another way to look at this?. Individual Zoom-Outs in this book are designed to help you do just that.

3 Third-person perspective

Zoom-Out from yourself and view the scenario from the perspective of an independent observer. You will likely find that the negativity is far less prominent or possibly even non-existent from their point of view.

4 Speak with a trusted person

Talk to a friend, family member or someone else you trust. Describe the situation to them and see how they respond - really listen and take on what they say. This is another great way of zooming-out from yourself and from the situation. *Caveat: make sure this person is not a negative person!*

5 Balance the positive

Balance the equation by listing out all of the positives. Write them down if helpful. Anything to help these take a

balanced place in your mind and lasting memory. This will help you zoom-out to see the fuller picture.

6 Practice gratitude

Keep a gratitude journal and write down 3–5 things you're grateful for each day. Reflect on these before sleep. This will build the muscle of zooming-out to see the things we often take for granted.

7 Savour positive moments

Notice and savour positive events and situations. Build this as a habit.

8 Practice mindfulness

Cultivate mindfulness by focusing on the present and by meditating. This helps to zoom-out from our thoughts and reduce our reactiveness in the moment and experience things in a more balanced way.

9 Celebrate small wins

Appreciate your accomplishments and fortunate events. Tick them off in your to do list and capture them in a journal.

10 Practice self-compassion

Notice any negative or overly critical self-talk. Zoom-Out and talk to yourself as you would to a dear friend.

11 Positive visualization

You can positively visualise a situation before or after it has happened.

Re-imagine an event you perceived negatively and visualise the positives.

12 Limit negative exposure

We can become over exposed to and ultimately overwhelmed by negativity. Then one small negative event can get blown out of proportion – the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Limit your exposure to negative news sources and negative people. Strengthen your leaning to the positive to counter your inherited negativity bias.

Negativity Bias

" "
...
– ...

Q. ...?

TO DO – card

<o> Black Swans

Zoom-Out

A little over 3 miles from me as I write, is the charming town of Dawlish, located in South Devon on the south west coast of England. Well known for the scenic train line that separates the sea from the town.



Dawlish is also well known for something else, as proudly displayed on road signs and highlighted by the town council:



Interestingly, and particularly to a Zoomologist, the significance of black swans goes far beyond being a local tourist attraction.

Here's why.

European explorers of the late 17th century embarked on expeditions to explore distant lands.

One such explorer was Willem de Vlamingh who led a Dutch expedition along the uncharted western coast of Australia in 1697.

What he discovered came as a great surprise to the crew and to European society more widely when the news was relayed back. It would also play a part in advancing philosophical reasoning and the scientific method!

Before this moment, Europeans believed, without question, that all swans were white.

Yet here before the crew, gracefully gliding across the surface of a river were black swans!

You can imagine the surprise and how this became a societal talking point.

But how did it play a part in philosophical reasoning and the scientific method?

Science once largely operated on the idea of ***verifiability*** where the acceptance of a scientific theory was based on repeatable observations. The more observations that matched the theory ,the more this confirmed the theory was correct. In this way, a scientific theory came to be ***proven***.

David Hume, a philosopher and historian of science, in the 18th century, used the example of black swans to highlight the limitations of

drawing universal conclusions from a set of observations.

Karl Popper, one of the 20th century's most influential philosophers of science, was also not satisfied with this approach. The alternative to verifiability espoused by Popper and others is that of refutability. This proposes that any scientific theory must be refutable. If it cannot possibly be refuted then it should not stand as a scientific theory.

Scientific theories should therefore be formulated in such a way that leaves them open to being falsified through rigorous empirical testing and not simply through a finite set of observations.

For example, no matter how many white swans could be observed, this should not lead to an absolute proof that all swans are white.

A human perspective has this in common with a scientific theory.

A perspective is built up through one or more observations.

The more observations that appear to confirm this perspective the more weight and certainty are given to that perspective.

The verifiability of a perspective.

As Hume and Popper inspire us to consider, we should hold our perspectives under the light of refutability.

The refutability of a perspective.

To be open to the fact that any perspective we hold may indeed be wrong, no matter how strong our conviction is that it is true.

It encourages us to look for ways in which we can test our perspective in a way that could show it to be false.

To be actively open to new evidence that would shift our perspectives. (This is counter to confirmation bias.)

A couple of hundred years after the discovery of black swans by Europeans, a local Dawlish resident Nicholas Way led an initiative to import black swans from Western Australia and give them a home in the local waterways, most prominently Dawlish Water. Hence, arriving in the town visitors are welcomed with the sign "Home of the black swan" and of course, the sight of black swans gracefully gliding across the surface of the river.

I wonder if there is town in a neighbouring galaxy that welcomes visitors with the sign:

"Home of the purple swan"?



The next time we are holding a perspective which is not serving us or others well, let's remind ourselves of black swans.

Or indeed, purple swans.



<o> Strong Opinions, Weakly Held

Zoom-Out

We have explored the idea of doubting and disputing our perspectives.

Taken to an extreme, we would not hold any perspective with respect or value.

And let's face it, life without opinions and debates would be very boring!

Fortunately, there is a middle way!

In the same way that a refutable scientific theory is still put to good use when helpful, a perspective should be put to good use when helpful.
It's fine to have a strong opinion about something (a perspective) in this case.

With a scientific theory, advancement comes from actively seeking new evidence that may refute and disprove that theory.
Which in turn can lead to an updated and more helpful theory.

On a personal level, advancement comes from actively seeking new evidence that may refute and disprove a perspective we hold.
Which in turn can lead to an updated and more helpful perspective.

"Strong opinions, weakly held"

— Paul Saffo,

Weakly Held



"Strong opinions, weakly held"
- Paul Saffo

Q. What strong opinion are you holding that is not serving you or others well?

zoom-out.org

<o> Bolted Horse

Zoom-Out



The following Taoist story helps to illustrate this zoom-out and is the inspiration for its title.

There was an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbours came to visit.

"Bad luck!" they said sympathetically.

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

The next day, the horse returned, bringing with it three beautiful wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbours rejoiced.

"Maybe," replied the old man.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses and was thrown to the ground, breaking his leg. Once again, his neighbours expressed their sympathy for his misfortune.

The farmer just said "Maybe".

The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the farmer's son's leg was broken, they rejected him and moved on. The neighbours congratulated the farmer on his extremely good fortune.

"Maybe," said the farmer.

This ancient Chinese Taoist story can help us to see beyond our instant judgements of good or bad.

The flow of experience and the chain of cause and effect is incredibly complex and at times chaotic.
This is the nature of things.
What we judge in one way at one time may transpire to be viewed differently later.

"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

– William Shakespeare

On a more fundamental level, the notions of good and bad are human concepts – they are human judgments.

Events in and of themselves are not good or bad, they just are.

One of the core themes of this book is that the meaning of an event is the meaning we create and attach to it.

By recognising this fact, we can free ourselves of such rigid "good/bad" perspectives that are unhelpful to us and those around us.

Let's consider and formulate our own questions such as these:

Q. What events in our life have we labelled as "bad" only to later think of them as "good"?

Q. How can we embrace events without labelling them as "good" or "bad"?

Q. How can we avoid projecting into the future the "assumed bad" impact of an event?

Q. Is it better to live with the physical impact of an event OR to live with the physical impact + the fear of what it may result in later?



"The Bolted Horse" Zoom-Out

Bolted Horse



“There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”
— William Shakespeare

Q. How can we embrace events without labelling them as “good” or “bad”?



<o> Flow Rider (Wu Wei)

Zoom-Out

At the age of 11 one day, I found myself being held down forcibly by three men. The leader had his hand on my shoulder and in the other he held a black rubber mask pumping gas to render me unconscious.

I was screaming and kicking for all I was worth.

The harder I pushed back, the harder the men held me, digging their fingers into my arms, shoulders and torso. Being so young and fighting against three adults you can probably guess the outcome. Within a minute or so the mask was placed firmly over my nose and mouth. I held my breath at first but the stress and panic resulted in me taking gulps of the gas. The world and the faces of the men receded into a dot of light before total darkness.

Minutes before I'd been sitting in the waiting room of the dentists with my mum. I knew I had to have a tooth removed but had no idea what was in store, this being my first time. I was called into the dentist's treatment room, all very alien and stark. The dentist told me he needed to put me under for the procedure and said it was painless and just like having a short sleep. As soon as I saw the black rubber gas mask coming towards me all I could think was "Get that thing away from me!".

When I resisted he looked somewhat shocked, especially when I pushed the mask, and then him, away. After a few similarly failed attempts, he left the room. Thank goodness! Moments later he came back in with two other adults and that's where our story began.

There are at least two ways this tale could have unfolded. In one version, the dentists put the mask on me, I counted down from 10 and fell into a deep sleep. Awaking almost instantly (to me) in the recovery room. Drowsy

with one less tooth but calm and happy.

The way the tale actually unfolded was as described – full of stress, suffering, panic, pain and ultimately long-lasting trauma as well.

On a procedural level, the results were the same, I had a general anaesthetic and awoke with a bad tooth removed. So what was the cause of the stress, suffering, panic, pain and trauma? Was it the procedure?

At various times in my life when I've found myself rejecting a situation or resisting something that was happening to me that I didn't want, I'd think back to those three men holding me down and forcing the gas mask onto me. If I hadn't resisted and kicked back against the world, it would have been OK.

"The soft overcomes the hard; the weak overcomes the strong."

– *Laozi, ancient Chinese Daoist/Taoist philosopher*

A central concept in Daoism (Taoism) is that of Wu Wei which means "effortless action" or "inexertion". It emphasises living and acting in alignment with the flow of life and the universe - "The Path" or "The Way". At times we can try to force a desired outcome and fight against The Way. This can be counterproductive and waste effort and energy in the process. Consider the way a bird utilises the wind currents to fly rather

than fighting against them. Have you ever noticed how birds fly with hardly a flap of their wings? In a similar way we can acknowledge the nature of a situation, embrace the bigger picture, trust our instincts and focus on what we can truly effectively control.

Let's consider some scenarios.

Wu Wei examples

The job interview

We are stressing over trying to control every little detail.

Wu Wei: Instead we can relax and be ourselves.

This is the way to maximise our chances of making a connection with the interviewer(s).

A friend in need

A friend talks to us about a problem.

We try to "fix" their problem.

Wu Wei: Instead be present with them, listen and empathise. This is the way to allow them to feel heard and to find their own optimal solution in their own time.

The performance

Consider a sportsperson, musician or actor giving a performance. They try to control every thought and every muscle movement.

Wu Wei: Instead they practise mindfulness and go with the flow of the moment, trusting the process and

the results of their prior practice. This is the way to their best performance.

"Thought is the enemy of flow"

– Vinnie Colaiuta, one of the world's greatest drummers

The leader

We try to micromanage a team to get the best results.

Wu Wei: Instead, empower the team to make decisions. This will lead to a more innovative and motivated team.

"Superior leaders get things done with very little motion. They impart instruction not through many words, but through a few deeds. They keep informed about everything but interfere hardly at all. They are catalysts, and though things would not get done as well if they were not there, when they succeed they take no credit. And, because they take no credit, credit never leaves them."

-Laozi, ancient Chinese Daoist/Taoist philosopher

Creativity

We force ourself to write a story or a song, trying to control the words.

Wu Wei: Instead we cultivate the conditions for being in flow and letting the words emerge.

This is the way to greater creativity.

The party

We are at a party we are convinced we won't enjoy due to a person or other aspect.

Wu Wei: We stop obsessing, relax and be present and open to what could occur.
This is the way to enjoy the situation for what it is and not what we would like it to be.

The conversation

We have an agenda going into a conversation and try to control it and just wait for opportunities to make our points without properly listening.
Wu Wei: We loosen our grip on what we want and truly listen to the other

person and go with the flow of the conversation.
This is the way to much richer conversations and enhanced relationships.

Here are some general tips on applying Wu Wei in our lives.

Wu Wei tips

1 Zoom-Out for a universal pov

Zoom-Out in a general sense to acknowledge the broader picture and the "The Way" of things. Take a systems view and see how actions fit into the wider context.

2 Present moment Zoom-Out

When exerting ourself, ask, "Am I trying to force this?" Pull back and be mindful and tune into the flow.

3 Zoom-Out on self

Recognise when action is ego-driven. Are we trying to shape the world unnaturally (and/or without chance of success) to our will? Zoom-Out to see the situation from outside of yourself or from the viewpoint of an independent observer.

4 Obstacle Zoom-Out

Not every obstacle needs to be removed, especially with brute force. Some obstacles remove themselves

over time. Some obstacles are not blocking the way if viewed from another perspective. Or may even be sources of value to be embraced.

5 Personal agility

Recognise that change is constant and we are better adapting rather than sticking rigidly to a plan of action.

6 All perspectives are wrong...

Our perspectives are partial and incomplete. We are not seeing reality

clearly. Loosen our grip on what we believe is the truth and we will be more open to the forces at work and opportunities that are available.

Flow Rider (Wu Wei)

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?

TO DO - card





<o> Instance Fixation

Zoom-Out

"You can't let one bad moment spoil a bunch of good ones."

– Dale Earnhardt, iconic racing driver

Sometimes we can become fixated on a single instance of an event, behaviour or thing.


One bad day
doesn't make
all days bad!

One late train doesn't make all trains late!



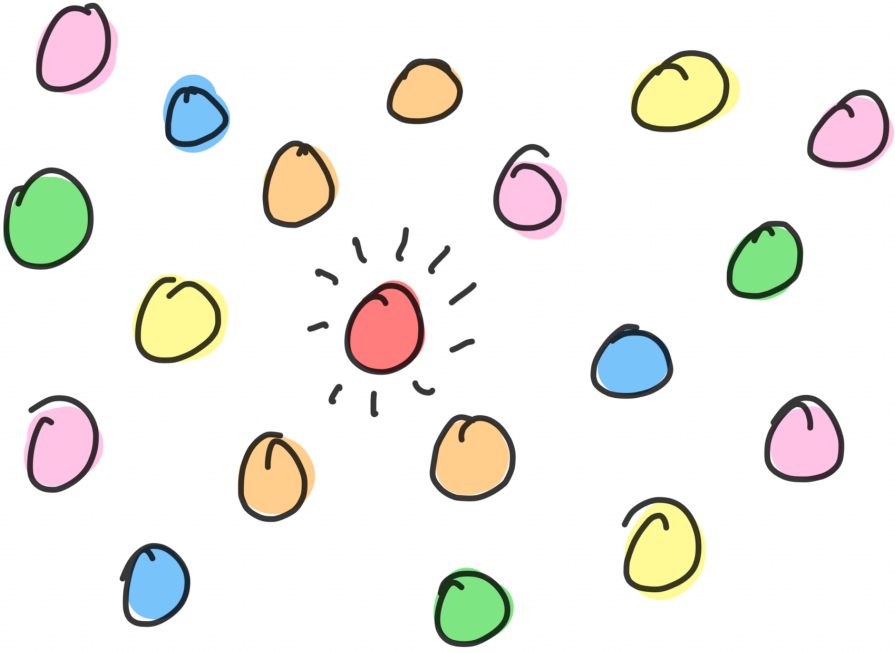
One bad behaviour doesn't make a bad person



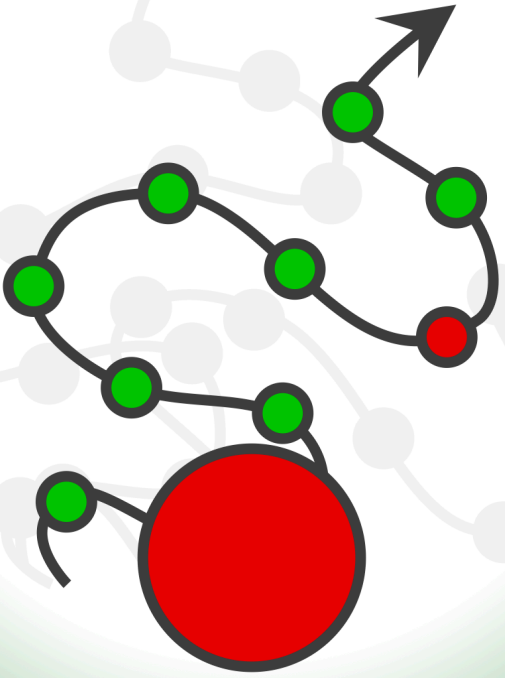
One _____
doesn't make a _____

You fill in the blanks!

Consider all instances when you find yourself fixating on one

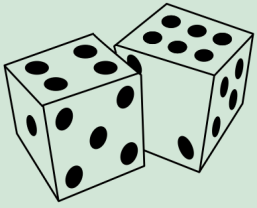


Instance Fixation



Consider other instances
not just this one

Q. Does this instance deserve
so much attention?





<o> Silly Circus

Zoom-Out

"Roll up, roll up!"

"Come on in and enjoy the show!"

A clown appears balancing on a rolling ball of rock that follows a circular path around a giant ball of fire in the middle of the ring.

How amazing!

The clown's facial expressions flicker from bemusement to shock, to fear, to joy and every emotion in between.



Welcome to the Silly Circus!

Isn't this just a human year of life condensed into 30 seconds?

"I wish I loved the Human Race; I wish I loved its silly face; I wish I loved the way it walks; I wish I loved the way it talks; And when I'm introduced to one I wish I thought What Jolly Fun!"

– Sir Walter Raleigh, Wishes of an Elderly Man (1914)

This poem reminds us of the power of humour as a way of keeping a balanced perspective.

Of not getting too zoomed-in on the unhelpful intricacies of life
and of humans in particular.
Life and humans often don't make sense.

We cannot always fully understand or explain specific events, actions or behaviours.

Life is simply too complex.
Life is absurd.
Life often deviates
from our expectations.

However, life can contain wonder,
joy and fun regardless.

**"Life is a jest;
and all things show it.
I thought so once;
but now I know it."**

*–My Own Epitaph,
John Gay (1685–1732)*

Time for some jokes 🙂

"Why don't some people trust atoms?
Because they make up everything!"

"I asked the librarian if the library had any books on paranoia.
She whispered,
'They're right behind you...'"

"I have a phobia of
over-engineered buildings.
It's a complex complex complex."

"I used to think I was indecisive,
but now I'm not so sure."

"I'm reading a book on anti-gravity.
It's impossible to put down"

"Why did the scarecrow become so successful? Because he was outstanding in his field"

"I told my friend there was a spider in his house. He moved out."

"I told the doctor I felt like a pair of curtains.
He told me to pull myself together."

"I meditated for an hour to understand
the meaning of life.
All I realised was that
I forgot to buy milk."

Silly Circus

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?

TO DO - card





<o> Funny Side

Zoom-Out

Life is...

Unpredictable	Amazing
Challenging	Unfair
Short	Mysterious
Beautiful	Precious
Joyous	Fragile
Tragic	Exhilarating
Complex	Overwhelming
Absurd	Profound
Messy	Ironic
Bittersweet	Adventurous

I'm sure you can add many more adjectives about our lives.
And let's not forget that life can be:
Funny

More than that, even in the dark, absurd, even tragic moments, we may be able to see the funny side if we look for it.

And in so doing, bring a little joy and light to the situation, broaden our perspective and boost relationships at the same time.

"Humour is just another defence against the universe."

– *Mel Brooks*

I was at a social event and a blind man arrived, feeling his way towards the door with his white stick.

Lady: "Hi John, I expected you earlier".

John: "Oh, I've been strangling a cat".

Lady: "Strangling a cat?"

John: "Trying to learn the violin!"

I recall another time when a friend of mine's dad was in hospital for a risky major operation. He asked the nurse:

"Will I be able to play the piano afterwards?".
The nurse replied reassuringly,
"Of course you will, absolutely!".
"Oh great! I always wanted to be able to play the piano!"

I use examples like this to inspire me to look for the funny side even when life's dice have not been rolled in my favour.

>> IN ACTION <<

Seeing the Funny Side

Here are some comedic devices to help find the funny side in challenging or tragic situations.

1 Embrace Absurdity

Highlight the bizarre.

e.g. "Who knew trying to install a shelf would end with me locked in the bathroom?"

2 Leverage Irony

Find the irony; the difference in expectation to reality.

e.g. "My doctor told me to get more exercise so I went for a run and broke my foot!"

3 Exaggerate

Playfully magnify an aspect of the situation; take it to an extreme.

e.g. "I had to wait so long for my coffee that I had time to grow a beard".

4 Reframe the Narrative

Turn it into a funny story for others and for your own memory.

e.g. Original Situation: You send an email to the wrong person. Reframe: "I'm just networking in unexpected ways."

5 Self-Deprecation

Poke fun at yourself.

e.g. "I'm so unfit I get out of breath jumping to conclusions!"

Caution: Be careful not to damage your credibility.

6 Puns & Wordplay

Look for puns and other plays on words.

e.g. "My new watch is great; it's about time I got one!"

7 Sarcasm

Use mock praise or statements that clearly mean the opposite.

e.g. "Great, the printer jammed again – I was really in need of extra stress"

8 Juxtaposition

Combine two wildly different ideas or images for comic effect.

e.g. "I like to go for a walk amongst people when I feel lonely but my dog gets all the attention!"

9 Understatement

Use a statement that would be used in a far less serious situation (opposite of exaggeration).

e.g. "I got hit by a car and ended up in hospital for a week. Which was slightly inconvenient."

10 Incongruity

Look for something that is out of place; or make it seem out of place.

e.g. "I got my best plates and silverware out to serve dinner... instant noodles!"

Spot the Comedic Device

In the following historic examples of seeing the funny side, can you spot the comedic device being used?

When George Mallory was asked why he intended to take the risks of climbing Mount Everest, he replied,

"Because it's there."

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." – Søren Kierkegaard on the absurdity of life

"It's déjà vu all over again." – Yogi Berra, baseball player, manager and coach – after losing an easy game

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"I don't want to belong to any club that would accept me as one of its members." – Groucho Marx on being rejected from an exclusive club

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When a Space X rocket exploded on the launch pad, Elon Musk declared, **"Well, we had an unscheduled disassembly, but the data we collected was fantastic!"**

Oscar Wilde nearing his death in a dingy hotel room said, **"This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. Either it goes, or I do."**

"Die, my dear?
Why, that's the last thing I'll do!"
– Groucho Marx on his deathbed

When accused of being two-faced, Abraham Lincoln replied, **"If I had two faces, would I be wearing this one?"**

"That must be why we're not shipping it yet." - Bill Gates reaction to the Blue Screen of Death appearing during a Windows 98 demonstration

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"I'd been rejected, but I was still in love, so I decided to start over." - Steve Jobs after he'd been fired from Apple

"I wish to be buried face down so that the world can kiss my ass." –

Benjamin Franklin when asked about his burial preferences

"I told you I was ill!"

– Spike Milligan's famous epitaph carved into his tombstone.

Funny Side

" "
...
- ...

Q. ...?

TO DO - card





<o> Vujà dé

Zoom-Out

The term ***déjà vu*** is widely used, referring to the experience of a new situation seeming oddly and powerfully familiar.

That *"I've experienced this before"* feeling which feels odd as you are sure this is the first time.

George Carlin (an honorary Zoomologist), as far as I can discern,

coined the term vujà dé as a joke in one of his comedy routines when he introduced the notion of "the strange feeling that, somehow, none of this has ever happened before ...". Since then this has taken root as a term and has come to mean:

Vujà dé - something familiar viewed with a fresh perspective

Comedians tend to be very good at seeing mundane situations in fresh new ways - this is a key style of

comedy – showing us, for example, how something we all do every day can appear quite ridiculous.

Stated in zoom-out terms, vujà dé expresses our ability to see beyond the default perspectives, or more precisely, to broaden the possible range of perspectives, ultimately influencing the default ones to be more varied.

How do you cultivate and strengthen a vujà dé mentality?

Bob Sutton is a professor of management science at Stanford University and a researcher in the field of evidence-based management. He's also a bestselling author (and the author of one of my favourite books, "The No Asshole Rule"). In his book "Weird Ideas That Work: How to Build a Creative Company", he writes:

"No matter how it is accomplished, the vu ja de mentality is the ability to keep shifting opinion and perception.

It means shifting our focus from objects or patterns that are in the foreground to those in the background, between what psychologists call "figure" versus "ground". It means thinking of things that are usually assumed to be negative as positive, and vice versa. It can mean reversing assumptions about cause and effects, or what matters most versus least. It means not travelling through life on automatic pilot."

— Robert I Sutton, 'Weird Ideas That Work: How to Build a Creative Company'

That's a pretty great summary and endorsement of the zoom-out mindset, right there.

It's about constantly challenging our default perspectives and seeking more helpful ones.

Being flexible and innovative in our thinking based on how we see the world around us and ourselves.

Vujà dé

" "
...
- ...

Q. How can I see this with fresh eyes, as if for the first time?

TO DO - card



The Zoomologist's Way

A Zoomologist values
and strives to be the following.

Mindful

Control of our awareness and attention; attentive to what we are paying attention to (meta-attention).
Embracing the present moment.
Living less on autopilot.

Holistic

Seeing and embracing the bigger picture, the wider context and the whole system.

Tolerant

Being open-minded to diverse perspectives different to our own.

Skeptical

Questioning of our own perspectives, thoughts and beliefs.

Selfless

Less egocentric in our points of view. Embracing outside perspectives. "Allocentrism".

Grateful

Appreciating what we have .

Hopeful

Realistically-optimistic about the future. Focusing on what we can control.

Creative

Finding creative solutions to challenges. Thinking outside the box.

Constructive

Taking positive action
and feeling empowered.

Resilient

Bouncing back from setbacks.



If these values resonate with you,
I invite you to be a Zoomologist 🙂

Epilogue

There's an old joke that goes like this:

Patient: "Doctor, it hurts when I do this!" *(raises right arm)*

Doctor: "Well don't do it then!"

When I first heard this joke as a boy it made me laugh out loud. Now, decades later, it takes on a deeper metaphorical significance.

As human beings, we often think and behave in ways that hurt ourselves and all we need is to stop doing it to ourselves. Of course, it's rarely that easy. Interestingly, it's not always obvious... until someone points it out to us - ***"don't do it then!"***

Zoom-Out (and Zoomology) is all about awareness and perspectives. How we see the world, others and ourselves.
It's about how we zoom-in and zoom-out in our 'mind's eye'.

We could reword the "Don't do it then" joke as:

"It's unhelpful when I zoom-in on this."
"Well, zoom-out and zoom-in on something else then!"

"Try not to react merely in the moment.
Pull back from the situation.
Take a wider view.
Compose yourself."
— Epictetus, Greek Stoic philosopher, 55 – 135 AD

May we open many new inspiring and helpful doors of perspective!



For more Zoom-Out and Zoomologist content visit:



The Zoom-Out YouTube channel

TO DO: other links, www, fb, li, etc