

# Best of LessWrong: September 2015

1. [The Library of Scott Alexandria](#)
2. [Being unable to despair](#)
3. [See the dark world](#)
4. [Residing in the mortal realm](#)
5. [Choose without suffering](#)

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1. [The Library of Scott Alexandria](#)
2. [Being unable to despair](#)
3. [See the dark world](#)
4. [Residing in the mortal realm](#)
5. [Choose without suffering](#)

# The Library of Scott Alexandria

I've put together a list of what I think are the best Yvain (Scott Alexander) posts for new readers, drawing from [SlateStarCodex](#), [LessWrong](#), and Scott's [LiveJournal](#).

The list should make the most sense to people who start from the top and read through it in order, though skipping around is encouraged too. Rather than making a chronological list, I've tried to order things by a mix of "where do I think most people should start reading?" plus "sorting related posts together."

This is a work in progress; you're invited to suggest things you'd add, remove, or shuffle around. Since many of the titles are a bit cryptic, I'm adding short descriptions. See [my blog](#) for a version without the descriptions.

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## I. Rationality and Rationalization

- [Blue- and Yellow-Tinted Choices](#) ..... An introduction to context-sensitive biases.
- [The Apologist and the Revolutionary](#) ..... Do separate brain processes rationalize and question ideas?
- [Historical Realism](#) ..... When reality is unrealistic.
- [Simultaneously Right and Wrong](#) ..... On self-handicapping and self-deception.
- [You May Already Be A Sinner](#) ..... Self-deception in cases where your decisions make no difference.
- [Beware the Man of One Study](#) ..... On minimum wage laws and cherry-picked evidence.
- [Debunked and Well-Refuted](#) ..... When should we say that a study has been "debunked"?
- [How to Not Lose an Argument](#) ..... How to be more persuasive in entrenched arguments.
- [The Least Convenient Possible World](#) ..... Why it's useful to strengthen arguments you disagree with.
- [Bayes for Schizophrenics: Reasoning in Delusional Disorders](#) ..... Hypotheses about the role of perception, evidence integration, and priors in delusions.
- [Generalizing from One Example](#) ..... On the typical mind fallacy: assuming other people are like you.
- [Typical Mind and Politics](#) ..... Do political disagreements stem from neurological disagreements?

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## II. Probabilism

- [Confidence Levels Inside and Outside an Argument](#) ..... Should you believe your own conclusions, when they're extreme?
- [Schizophrenia and Geomagnetic Storms](#) ..... When bizarre ideas turn out to be true.
- [Talking Snakes: A Cautionary Tale](#) ..... Should we dismiss all absurd claims?
- [Arguments from My Opponent Believes Something](#) ..... Ten fully general arguments.

- [Statistical Literacy Among Doctors Now Lower Than Chance](#) ..... Common errors in probabilistic reasoning.
  - [Techniques for Probability Estimates](#) ..... Six methods for quantifying uncertainty.
  - [On First Looking into Chapman's "Pop Bayesianism"](#) ..... Reasons Bayesian epistemology may not be trivial.
  - [Utilitarianism for Engineers](#) ..... Are there good-enough heuristics for comparing people's preferences?
  - [If It's Worth Doing, It's Worth Doing with Made-Up Statistics](#) ..... The practical value of probabilities.
  - [Marijuana: Much More Than You Wanted to Know](#) ..... Assessing marijuana's costs and benefits.
  - [Are You a Solar Deity?](#) ..... On confirmation bias in the comparative study of religions.
  - [The "Spot the Fakes" Test](#) ..... An approach to testing humanities hypotheses.
  - [Epistemic Learned Helplessness](#) ..... What should we do when bad arguments sound convincing?
- 

### III. Science and Doubt

- [Google Correlate Does Not Imply Google Causation](#) ..... Peculiar correlations between Google search terms.
  - [Stop Confounding Yourself! Stop Confounding Yourself!](#) ..... A correlational study on the effects of bullying.
  - [Effects of Vertical Acceleration on Wrongness](#) ..... On evidence-based medicine.
  - [90% Of All Claims About The Problems With Medical Studies Are Wrong](#) ..... Is it the case that "90% of medical research is false"?
  - [Prisons are Built with Bricks of Law and Brothels with Bricks of Religion, But That Doesn't Prove a Causal Relationship](#) ..... Do psychiatric interventions increase suicide risk?
  - [Noisy Poll Results and the Reptilian Muslim Climatologists from Mars](#) ..... Skepticism about poll results.
  - [Two Dark Side Statistics Papers](#) ..... Statistical tricks for creating effects out of nothing.
  - [Alcoholics Anonymous: Much More Than You Wanted to Know](#) ..... Is AA effective for treating alcohol abuse?
  - [The Control Group Is Out Of Control](#) ..... Parapsychology as the "control group" for all of psychology.
  - [The Cowpox of Doubt](#) ..... Focusing on easy questions inoculates against uncertainty.
  - [The Skeptic's Trilemma](#) ..... Explaining mysteries, vs. worshiping them, vs. dismissing them.
  - [If You Can't Make Predictions, You're Still in a Crisis](#) ..... On psychology studies' replication failures.
- 

### IV. Medicine, Therapy, and Human Enhancement

- [Scientific Freud](#) ..... How does psychoanalysis compare to cognitive behavioral therapy?
- [Sleep - Now by Prescription](#) ..... On melatonin.
- [In Defense of Psych Treatment for Attempted Suicide](#) ..... Suicide is usually not a rational, informed decision.

- [Who By Very Slow Decay](#) ..... On old age and death in the medical system.
  - [Medicine, As Not Seen on TV](#) ..... What is it actually like to be a doctor?
  - [Searching for One-Sided Tradeoffs](#) ..... How can we find good ideas that others haven't found first?
  - [Do Life Hacks Ever Reach Fixation?](#) ..... Why aren't there more good ideas that everyone has adopted?
  - [Polyamory is Boring](#) ..... Deromanticizing multi-partner romance.
  - [Can You Condition Yourself?](#) ..... On shaping new habits by rewarding oneself.
  - [Wirehead Gods on Lotus Thrones](#) ..... Is the future boring? Transcendently blissful? Boringly blissful?
  - [Don't Fear the Filter](#) ..... Does the Fermi Paradox mean that our species is doomed?
  - [Transhumanist Fables](#) ..... Six futurist fairy tales.
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## V. Introduction to Game Theory

- [Backward Reasoning Over Decision Trees](#) ..... Sequential games, and why adding options can hurt you.
  - [Nash Equilibria and Schelling Points](#) ..... Simultaneous games, mixed strategies, and coordination.
  - [Introduction to Prisoners' Dilemma](#) ..... Why Nash equilibria are sometimes bad for everyone.
  - [Real-World Solutions to Prisoners' Dilemmas](#) ..... How society and evolution ensure mutual cooperation.
  - [Interlude for Behavioral Economics](#) ..... Fairness, superrationality, and self-image in real-world games.
  - [What is Signaling, Really?](#) ..... Actions that convey information, sometimes at great cost.
  - [Bargaining and Auctions](#) ..... Idealized models of correct bidding.
  - [Imperfect Voting Systems](#) ..... Strengths and weaknesses of different voting systems.
  - [Game Theory as a Dark Art](#) ..... Ways to exploit seemingly "economically rational" behavior.
- 

## VI. Promises and Principles

- [Beware Trivial Inconveniences](#) ..... Small obstacles can have a huge effect on behavior.
- [Time and Effort Discounting](#) ..... On inconsistencies in our revealed preferences.
- [Applied Picoeconomics](#) ..... Binding your future self to your present goals.
- [Schelling Fences on Slippery Slopes](#) ..... Using arbitrary thresholds to improve coordination.
- [Democracy is the Worst Form of Government Except for All the Others Except Possibly Futarchy](#) ..... Like democracy, futarchy (rule by prediction markets) has the advantage of appearing impartial.
- [Eight Short Studies on Excuses](#) ..... When should we allow exceptions to our rules?
- [Revenge as Charitable Act](#) ..... Revenge can be a personally costly way to disincentivize misdeeds.
- [Would Your Real Preferences Please Stand Up?](#) ..... Are we hypocrites, or just weak-willed?
- [Are Wireheads Happy?](#) ..... Distinguishing "wanting" something from "liking" it.

- [Guilt: Another Gift Nobody Wants](#) ..... An evolutionary, signaling-based explanation of guilt.
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## VII. Cognition and Association

- [Diseased Thinking: Dissolving Questions about Disease](#) ..... On verbal disagreements.
  - [The Noncentral Fallacy — The Worst Argument in the World?](#) ..... Judging an entire category by an emotional association that only applies to typical category members.
  - [The Power of Positivist Thinking](#) ..... Focus on statements' empirical content.
  - [When Truth Isn't Enough](#) ..... It's possible to agree denotatively while disagreeing connotatively.
  - [Ambijectivity](#) ..... When a question is both subjective and objective.
  - [The Blue-Minimizing Robot](#) ..... A parable on agency.
  - [Basics of Animal Reinforcement](#) ..... A primer on classical and operant conditioning.
  - [Wanting vs. Liking Revisited](#) ..... Distinguishing motivation to act from reinforcement.
  - [Physical and Mental Behavior](#) ..... Behaviorism meets thinking.
  - [Trivers on Self-Deception](#) ..... The conscious mind as a self-serving social narrative.
  - [Ego-Syntonic Thoughts and Values](#) ..... On endorsed vs. non-endorsed mental behavior.
  - [Approving Reinforces Low-Effort Behaviors](#) ..... Using your self-image to blackmail yourself.
  - [To What Degree Do We Have Goals?](#) ..... Are our unconscious drives like an agent?
  - [The Limits of Introspection](#) ..... Are we good at directly perceiving our cognition?
  - [Secrets of the Eliminati](#) ..... Reducing phenomena to simpler parts, vs. eliminating them.
  - [Tendencies in Reflective Equilibrium](#) ..... Aspiring to become more consistent.
  - [Hansonian Optimism](#) ..... If ego-syntonic goals are about signaling, is goodness a lie?
- 

## VIII. Doing Good

- [Newtonian Ethics](#) ..... Satirizing moral parochialism and sloppy systematizations of ethics.
- [Efficient Charity: Do Unto Others...](#) ..... How should we act when our decisions matter most?
- [The Economics of Art and the Art of Economics](#) ..... Should Detroit sell its publicly owned artwork?
- [A Modest Proposal](#) ..... Using dead babies as a unit of currency.
- [The Life Issue](#) ..... What are the consequences of drone warfare?
- [What if Drone Warfare Had Come First?](#) ..... A thought experiment.
- [Nefarious Nefazodone and Flashy Rare Side-Effects](#) ..... On choosing between drug side-effects.
- [The Consequentialism FAQ](#) ..... Argues for assessing actions based on how they help or harm people.

- [Doing Your Good Deed for the Day](#) ..... Doing some good can reduce people's willingness to do more good.
  - [I Myself Am A Scientismist](#) ..... Why apply scientific methods to non-scientific domains?
  - [Whose Utilitarianism?](#) ..... Questioning the objectivity and uniqueness of utilitarianism.
  - [Book Review: After Virtue](#) ..... On virtue ethics, a reaction against modern moral philosophy.
  - [Read History of Philosophy Backwards](#) ..... Historical texts reveal our implicit assumptions.
  - [Virtue Ethics: Not Practically Useful Either](#) ..... Is virtue ethics useful prescriptively or descriptively?
  - [Last Thoughts on Virtue Ethics](#) ..... What claims do virtue ethicists make?
  - [Proving Too Much](#) ..... If an argument sometimes proves falsehoods, it can't be valid.
- 

## IX. Liberty

- [The Non-Libertarian FAQ \(aka Why I Hate Your Freedom\)](#)
  - [A Blessing in Disguise, Albeit a Very Good Disguise](#)
  - [Basic Income Guarantees](#)
  - [Book Review: The Nurture Assumption](#)
  - [The Death of Wages is Sin](#)
  - [Thank You For Doing Something Ambiguously Between Smoking And Not Smoking](#)
  - [Lies, Damned Lies, and Facebook \(Part 1 of ∞\)](#)
  - [The Life Cycle of Medical Ideas](#)
  - [Vote on Values, Outsource Beliefs](#)
  - [A Something Sort of Like Left-Libertarian-ist Manifesto](#)
  - [Plutocracy Isn't About Money](#)
  - [Against Tulip Subsidies](#)
  - [SlateStarCodex Gives a Graduation Speech](#)
- 

## X. Progress

- [Intellectual Hipsters and Meta-Contrarianism](#)
- [A Signaling Theory of Class x Politics Interaction](#)
- [Reactionary Philosophy in an Enormous, Planet-Sized Nutshell](#)
- [A Thrive/Survive Theory of the Political Spectrum](#)
- [We Wrestle Not With Flesh And Blood, But Against Powers And Principalities](#)
- [Poor Folks Do Smile... For Now](#)
- [Apart from Better Sanitation and Medicine and Education and Irrigation and Public Health and Roads and Public Order, What Has Modernity Done for Us?](#)
- [The Wisdom of the Ancients](#)
- [Can Atheists Appreciate Chesterton?](#)
- [Holocaust Good for You, Research Finds, But Frequent Taunting Causes Cancer in Rats](#)
- [Public Awareness Campaigns](#)
- [Social Psychology is a Flamethrower](#)
- [Nature is Not a Slate. It's a Series of Levers.](#)
- [The Anti-Reactionary FAQ](#)
- [The Poor You Will Always Have With You](#)

- [Proposed Biological Explanations for Historical Trends in Crime](#)
  - [Society is Fixed, Biology is Mutable](#)
- 

## **XI. Social Justice**

- [Practically-a-Book Review: Dying to be Free](#)
  - [Drug Testing Welfare Users is a Sham, But Not for the Reasons You Think](#)
  - [The Meditation on Creepiness](#)
  - [The Meditation on Superweapons](#)
  - [The Meditation on the War on Applause Lights](#)
  - [The Meditation on Superweapons and Bingo](#)
  - [An Analysis of the Formalist Account of Power Relations in Democratic Societies](#)
  - [Arguments About Male Violence Prove Too Much](#)
  - [Social Justice for the Highly-Demanding-of-Rigor](#)
  - [Against Bravery Debates](#)
  - [All Debates Are Bravery Debates](#)
  - [A Comment I Posted on "What Would JT Do?"](#)
  - [We Are All MsScribe](#)
  - [The Spirit of the First Amendment](#)
  - [A Response to Apophemi on Triggers](#)
  - [Lies, Damned Lies, and Social Media: False Rape Accusations](#)
  - [In Favor of Niceness, Community, and Civilization](#)
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## **XII. Politicization**

- [Right is the New Left](#)
  - [Weak Men are Superweapons](#)
  - [You Kant Dismiss Universalizability](#)
  - [I Can Tolerate Anything Except the Outgroup](#)
  - [Five Case Studies on Politicization](#)
  - [Black People Less Likely](#)
  - [Nydwracu's Fnords](#)
  - [All in All, Another Brick in the Motte](#)
  - [Ethnic Tension and Meaningless Arguments](#)
  - [Race and Justice: Much More Than You Wanted to Know](#)
  - [Framing for Light Instead of Heat](#)
  - [The Wonderful Thing About Triggers](#)
  - [Fearful Symmetry](#)
  - [Archipelago and Atomic Communitarianism](#)
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## **XIII. Competition and Cooperation**

- [The Demiurge's Older Brother](#)
- [Book Review: The Two-Income Trap](#)
- [Just for Stealing a Mouthful of Bread](#)
- [Meditations on Moloch](#)
- [Misperceptions on Moloch](#)
- [The Invisible Nation — Reconciling Utilitarianism and Contractualism](#)
- [Freedom on the Centralized Web](#)
- [Book Review: Singer on Marx](#)
- [Does Class Warfare Have a Free Rider Problem?](#)



- [Book Review: Red Plenty](#)
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If you liked these posts and want more, I suggest browsing the *SlateStarCodex* [archives](#).

# Being unable to despair

This is a linkpost for <https://mindingourway.com/being-unable-to-despair/>

Sometimes, when people see that their life is about to get a lot harder, they start buckling down. Other times, they start despairing, or complaining, or preparing excuses so that they can have one ready when the inevitable failure hits, or giving up entirely and then [failing with abandon](#). These next few posts assume that you have the former demeanor, and they might not be helpful to people who are inclined to respond to new difficulties with despair. Remember the law of [equal and opposite advice](#)! (For every person who needs a certain piece of advice, there is someone else who needs the opposite advice.)

With that said, I'm going to spend a few words giving some tips about how to have the former demeanor, if you want to. The first piece of pertinent advice is that the way you respond to challenges is context dependent; even if you've already been known to respond to some problems by despairing, there are likely other problems that you respond to by buckling down.

There is a specific mindset that, in my experience, makes it much easier to adopt the "buckle down" demeanor. This is the mindset where "not doing anything" doesn't seem like an available option in the action-space. I've written a bit before about how I think [many people think there is a default "rest state"](#), and this is a related concept: many people seem to think that there is a privileged "don't do anything" action, that consists of something like curling up into a ball, staying in bed, and refusing to answer emails. It's much easier to adopt the "buckle down" demeanor when, instead, curling up in a ball and staying in bed feels like *just another action*. It's just another way to respond to the situation, which has some merits and some flaws.

So this is my second piece of advice, if you want to be the sort of person who buckles down in the face of hardship: see the world in terms of possible responses. See curling up in bed and ignoring the world as just *one possible response*, rather than an escape hatch. Dispel the illusion that some actions are labeled "do nothing," and notice that those, too, are responses. There is no privileged null choice.

(That's not to say that it's *bad* to curl up in a ball on your bed and ignore the world for a while. Sometimes this is exactly what you need to recover. Sometimes it's what [the monkey is going to do](#) regardless of what you decide. The point is that when nature offers you a choice, there is no "don't choose" option. There are only the options that nature offers, and all you can do is pick the best of them.)

My third piece of advice is to remember that you [reside in the mortal realm](#). If you get new information or a new way of looking at the world and you start to feel despair, or hopelessness, or helplessness, or impotent, then it is *perfectly OK* to respond by curling up in a corner and feeling sad and scared and small for a little while. That's a fine response. It doesn't mean that you're not up to the task. Nor does it mean that you are condemned to despairing forever. You're allowed to feel small sometimes, and then get back up and keep going, without any need to pretend that things are fine. We're monkeys. Feeling helpless happens.

Rising to the challenge doesn't mean never feeling helpless. It means pushing on *anyway*, even if you feel helpless sometimes.

In my experience, tapping into internal drive often requires tapping into a deep desire to *make the world be different*, in a world that's very large and very hurting and very hard to change. When trying to do this, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by the odds stacked against you — regardless of their scale. (In fact, I have often found that the cards stacked against me personally — when I feel isolated, lonely, or friendless — induce as much despair as the cards stacked against anyone who tries to change the world at large.)

In the next few posts, I'm going to talk about tapping into that internal drive, and this will entail trying to see the situation for what it really is: which means owning up to everything stacked against you. If you aren't careful, this might cause you to buckle. But if you do it right, it can cause you to buckle down instead, and provide a source of drive.

# See the dark world

This is a linkpost for <https://mindingourway.com/see-the-dark-world/>

Consider fictional Carol, who has convinced herself that she doesn't need to worry about the suffering of people who live far away. She works to improve her local community, and donates to her local church. She's a kind and loving woman, and she does her part, and (she reasons) that's all anyone can be expected to do.

Now consider fictional Dave, who failed a job interview. When telling his friends the story, he emphasizes how the interviewers were biased against him, and how they asked stupid questions.

Meanwhile, driven by hunger, a fox tries to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine but is unable to, although he leaps with all his strength. As he goes away, he remarks "[Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes.](#)"

All of these reactions — and many others — share a common kernel. Carol, Dave, and the fox are all inventing reasons why an unpleasant state of affairs is acceptable. They're not inventing reasons why the world is *good*, by any means; but they are putting forth cognitive effort to make it seem *tolerable*.

Carol would surely tell you that it's terrible that children are suffering abroad — but only after convincing herself that her duty to help them had been discharged.

The fox would tell you that the world is worse for being full of sour grapes — and yet, he still had to work hard to assure himself that he didn't live in a far worse world, where the grapes were both ripe and inaccessible.

There's a certain type of darkness in the world that most people simply cannot see. It's not the abstract darkness: people will readily acknowledge that the world is broken, and explain how and why the hated out-group is responsible. And that's exactly what I'm pointing at: upon seeing that the world is broken, people experience an impulse to explain the brokenness in a way that relieves the tension. When seeing that the world is broken, people *reflexively* feel a need to explain. Carol can acknowledge that there is suffering abroad, but this acknowledgement comes part and parcel with an explanation about why she bears no responsibility. Dave can acknowledge that he failed to pass the interview, but his mind automatically generates reasons why this is an acceptable state of affairs.

This is the type of darkness in the world that most people cannot see: they cannot see a world that is *unacceptable*. Upon noticing that the world is broken, they reflexively list reasons why it is still tolerable. Even cynicism, I think, can fill this role: I often read cynicism as an attempt to explain a world full of callous neglect and casual cruelty, in a framework that makes neglect and cruelty seem natural and expected (and therefore tolerable).

I call this reflexive response "tolerification," and if you watch for it, you can see it everywhere.

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The [sour grapes fallacy](#) is a clear example of tolerification, but it's only one instance of the broader class. Tolerification occurs *any* time you see something bad in the world

and feel an impulse to explain, especially if that explanation relieves pressure that would otherwise be placed on you.

Consider, for example, Alice and Bob in my [allegory of the dragon](#). Both have recently learned that the market value of a life is only a few thousand dollars. Both are uncomfortable with this, and they reflexively tolerify the information in different ways.

Bob denies the information, protesting that one can't make decisions by attaching dollar values to lives, because lives are sacred. This declaration of a sacred value allows Bob to deny the discrepancy entirely, reject the implied responsibility, and restore tolerability to the universe.

Alice, by contrast, accepts the data and denies the intuition that lives are sacred. She notes that if you act like lives are worth *more* than a few thousand dollars then you'll save fewer lives than you could, and thus anyone who acts otherwise and wants to save lives is inconsistent. Therefore, she concludes that she can't treat the intrinsic value of a life as worth any more than the market price, and grows cynical — not only are lives non-sacred, she realizes, but they're not worth that much more than a few thousand cans of coke. Now she can worry less about saving lives: they weren't worth as much as she thought, anyway. Tolerification successful.

Notice how their gazes slip to one side or the other, both of them failing to see the dark world — the one where lives are *both* nigh invaluable, *and* priced at \$3000. The one where it's *reprehensible* to pretend that a life is worth only as much as a few thousand cans of coke, *and* this is how you have to price a life if you want to save as many lives as you can. The world with a grim gap between life's price and life's value. This is the world that both Alice and Bob both reflexively tolerify away from.

In me, tolerification is toxic to intrinsic motivation. If you want intrinsic drive, I suggest you train yourself to notice when your gaze slips to one side or the other. When that happens, focus, and stare directly at the dark world.

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*Content note: the remainder of this post encourages you to contemplate and acknowledge significant difficulties in your own life. I assume that the reader is [resilient in the face of adversity](#). If acknowledging adversity in your life is currently liable to harm you, consider skipping the rest of this post.*

My favored tool for subverting the impulse to tolerify the intolerable (and thereby stare directly at the dark world) is to pose myself a "what if" question.

What if I lived in the world where it was *both* the case that lives are nigh invaluable, *and* it costs only a few thousand dollars to save a life?

What if I lived in the world where it was *both* the case that I failed the interview *and* it was because I lacked the requisite skill?

The default impulse, upon learning that I failed the interview, might be to tolerify. Someone prone to tolerification might automatically, reflexively, start listing ways that the interview was stacked against them, or reasons why the questions were stupid, or reasons why they didn't want the job anyway. Then they might jump directly into the next interview, with excuses already in hand for when they fail that one too. This illustrates one major way that tolerification can be harmful: it might prevent you from seeing what really needs to be done. The person who refuses to tolerify can seriously consider spending more time practicing, or switching careers. If necessary, they can

acknowledge that they really need to get a job while still dramatically unqualified, and decide to play the numbers with full knowledge of what they're doing. If they tolerify, they have to act indignant when they fail. If they don't, they can face what needs to be done.

Refusing to tolerify in this situation can be *really really hard*. Saying "It seems I am not yet be skilled enough to get a job in this field" can be *tough*, especially when your livelihood depends upon the opposite being true (and double-especially if you think that past failures make you a "[bad person](#)").

The nice thing about the "what if" question is that I don't need to *believe* that that's the actual world when pondering the "what if". I don't need to *acknowledge* that I am unqualified for the job, I can simply ask what *would* do if I were. This makes it easier to plan out what I would do if I could see the dark world, and having a plan often makes it easier to acknowledge that the world I'm living in is dark. (See also: [leaving yourself a line of retreat](#).)

So, let's run through some what ifs.

What if we lived in the world where it was *both* the case that (a) unwanted pregnancies could ruin the lives of both mother and child *and* (c) unborn children were moral patients with a right to life? What would you do then?

What if we lived in the world where it was *both* the case that (a) people are living and dying in extreme poverty *and* (b) you really need a new car soon if you want to keep your job, but you could spare a few thousand dollars if you really had to. What would you do then?

What if we lived in the world where people do have souls, but they're implemented on brains made of meat that rots when you die?

What if we lived in the world where evolution built conscious predators, and conscious prey that suffers as it gets eaten alive?

What if almost nobody was evil, but almost everything was broken anyway? What if the hated out-groups *aren't* responsible for all the suffering?

I'm not claiming that these what-ifs are accurate. Rather, I offer this as a tool for staring the dark world directly in the face. Imagine the world that is as bad as it might be. Imagine the world were full of intolerable injustices. What would you do then?

Can you look upon those dark worlds and feel a sense of despair, of the world being harder to fix than seems acceptable? Do you get a feeling of bracing yourself for making terrible tradeoffs, because there are too many problems and you can't handle all of them? If so, that's good: that's what it feels like, to see the dark world.

The question is, what would you do *then*?

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I'm not here to offer answers. Maybe your answer is "well in that world I'd stop trying so hard and move to a cabin in the woods and try to forget how screwed up everything was." Or maybe your answer is "in that case I'd rise to the challenge, no matter how terrible the odds." More likely, it's something else entirely. I'm not trying to feed you answers. I'm trying to help you refuse to tolerify, because there is a source of resolve that comes only when you see the dark world.

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*I have to believe this falsehood, because otherwise I would be unable to go on.*

This is something that I hear fairly frequently, either to my face, or in popular media. "I have to believe in God; otherwise there would be no meaning in my life." Or "It's a good thing humans are unrealistically optimistic; we wouldn't be able to handle reality." Or "I have to believe that I'm going to get this job; otherwise I wouldn't be able to continue trying." Or,

*"All right," said Susan. "I'm not stupid. You're saying humans need... fantasies to make life bearable."*

*really? as if it was some kind of pink pill? no. humans need fantasy to be human. to be the place where the falling angel meets the rising ape.*

*"Tooth fairies? Hogfathers? Little—"*

*yes. as practice. you have to start out learning to believe the little lies.*

*"So we can believe the big ones?"*

*yes. justice. mercy. duty. that sort of thing.*

*"They're not the same at all!"*

*you think so? then take the universe and grind it down to the finest powder and sieve it through the finest sieve and then show me one atom of justice, one molecule of mercy. and yet—Death waved a hand. and yet you act as if there is some ideal order in the world, as if there is some...some rightness in the universe by which it may be judged.*

*"Yes, but people have got to believe that, or what's the point—"*

*my point exactly.*

— Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

People say they *need* to tolerify, because otherwise they wouldn't be able to handle the intolerable world.

But that's false. Acknowledging that the world is unacceptable will not kill you; the world is *already* as unacceptable as it is. Remember the [litany of Gendlin](#).

So face the dark world. See the intolerable.

Take up the burden that is supposed to be unbearable. Don't excuse the world, don't come up with reasons why it's OK. *Let it be not OK.*

What happens then? What do you feel then?

Is there a sense of despair or helplessness? Is there a sense of hot fury or cold resolve? Is there a sense of being tiny in the face of a problem that is large?

Live *there*, in the face of the intolerable. Don't struggle to make it acceptable, just live with the bad world, while [buckling down rather than buckling](#).

It is there, while staring the dark world in the face, that I find a deep well of intrinsic drive. It is there that my resolve and determination come to *me*, rather than me having to go hunting for them.

I find it amusing that "we need lies because we can't bear the truth" is such a common refrain, given how much of my drive stems from my response to attempting to bear the truth.

I find that it's common for people to tell themselves that they need the lies in order to bear reality. In fact, I bet that many of you can think of one thing off the top of your heads that you're intentionally tolerifying, because the truth is too scary to even consider. (I've seen at least a dozen failed relationships dragged out for months and months due to this effect.)

I say, if you want the intrinsic drive, drop the illusion. Refuse to tolerify. Face the facts that you feared you would not be able to handle. You are likely correct that they will be hard to bear, and you are likely correct that attempting to bear them will change you. But that change doesn't need to break you. It can also make you stronger, and fuel your resolve.

So see the dark world. See everything intolerable. Let the urge to tolerify it build, but don't relent. Just live there in the intolerable world, refusing to tolerate it. See whether you feel that growing, burning desire to *make the world be different*. Let parts of yourself harden. Let your resolve grow. It is here, in the face of the intolerable, that you will be able to tap into intrinsic motivation.



# Residing in the mortal realm

This is a linkpost for <https://mindingourway.com/residing-in-the-mortal-realm/>

The last sevenish posts describe the main tools I have for removing guilt-based motivation. The common thread running through them can be summed up as follows: *Reside in the mortal realm.*

Many people [hold themselves to a very different standard than they hold others](#). They hold themselves accountable for failing to do the [psychologically impossible](#). They fret over past mistakes and treat themselves as failed gods, rather than [ambitious monkeys](#). This condemning-of-the-self can lead to great guilt, with all its negative effects.

My suggestion for dealing with guilt, roughly speaking, is to first [focus your guilt](#), by dispelling the guilt that comes from [not doing what other people think you should](#) or from [from false obligations](#), and shifting all your guilt into guilt about the fact that you have not yet made the future how you want it to be. Then, once your guilt is focused there, remember that you are a denizen of the mortal realm.

In the past, you have failed to act as you wished to act. You have failed to make the best available choices. But these facts have little bearing on what you do next. They have some bearing, insofar as your memories still hold lessons that can teach you about how to [better steer yourself to steer the world](#), but they [do not say anything about the color of your soul](#). They are simply the background knowledge against which you move forwards, from here, [looking only towards the future](#).

You are a mortal, who often struggles to follow their own will, and your actions set the course of the entire future. Instead of berating yourself for your shortcomings, figure out how to do the best you can *given* the shortcomings — sometimes by spending time and effort to fix them (mere willpower seldom suffices), and sometimes by taking them as given and working around them.

Be a mere mortal, and do the best you can anyway. Learn everything you can from your mistakes, and then forgive yourself your sins, and look only to how much better you can make the future (knowing what you know now about how you perform in different situations).

Guilt has no place among mortals: we already *know* we're fallible. We don't need to suffer over that fact: our failings provide only information about what to do next, if we want to steer the future.

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Over the last few months, three different people have informed me that I broke their motivation systems. In short, one found themselves less able to care about what they were working on, another found themselves unable to force themselves to work, another found themselves unable to continue spurring themselves on with guilt.

In part, this is working as intended: in the long run, I think that guilt-based motivation can be harmful. However, my goal is not to simply remove existing motivation systems: my goal is to replace guilt with something else.

So the question is, without guilt, what can you use for drive? And this brings us to the penultimate arc of my "replacing guilt" series of posts.

I've already given partial answers to the question "whence internal drive?", when talking [on caring](#), or about [the value of a life](#), or about [caring about something larger than yourself](#). Those posts are intended to inspire you and remind you that there's something *worth* fighting for, and that you can fight for it even if you lack a burning passion. That's not the whole picture, though, and in the upcoming arc, I'll touch upon a different aspect of intrinsic motivation.

I think many people are motivated by an intrinsic (often subconscious) desire to be virtuous, or perhaps by a strong aversion to "being bad." I think many other people are motivated primarily by whatever obligations currently sit on their plate. They don't need to ask themselves what they are doing or why; they simply continue fulfilling the obligations in front of them so that life continues proceed. They fulfill obligations at school, they fulfill obligations at their jobs, they find a spouse, they start a family, they fulfill obligations to their family. The obligations keep flowing in a steady stream, and there is never any need to soul-search in a grand quest for some sort of deep intrinsic drive (except, perhaps, during the occasional "midlife crisis," which is a fine distraction that they're expected to eventually overcome).

Yet here I stand, suggesting that you ditch the notion "being bad" and drop your obligations entirely, keeping only what remains. But dropping an existing framework is a far cry from creating a new one, and dropping guilt does not often reveal a blindingly virtuous non-obligation that you're supposed to pursue instead of what you were currently pursuing.

In fact, the new framework can't contain "supposed tos" at all. Obligations have been jettisoned.

So in the upcoming arc, I'm *not* going to give you something to pursue. Rather, I'm going to do my best to give you a different way of looking at the world. I'm going to describe a vantage point from which guilt motivation seems quaint, and something else — maybe cold resolve, maybe hot desire, maybe a different drive — guides your actions instead.

From that vantage point, guilt is alien — and it is only once it seems foreign (rather than evil) that it be fully replaced.

# Choose without suffering

This is a linkpost for <https://mindingourway.com/choose-without-suffering/>

Imagine Eve, who works a service industry job. Her manager tells her, at the last minute and without warning, that she has to staff an event tomorrow in a town a few hour's drive from where she lives, and she has to wake up at 5am to get there on time.

Let's further suppose that she's on shaky footing with her manager as it is, and so she is posed with the following choice: she can either wake up at 5am tomorrow and go to work, or she can lose her job.

Imagine Eve's demeanor, upon learning this fact. It's likely dour, to say the least. She's probably grumpy and annoyed and malcontent, and she's likely to vent and complain all evening. She'll likely spend a lot of cognitive effort [tolerifying the situation](#), convincing herself either that it's not going to be that bad to wake up early, or that her manager is a terrible person.

This is a common occurrence, I think: if you give humans the choice between bad and worse, they get *grumpy*.

When people find that none of their options cross a certain "acceptability" threshold, they get *frustrated*.

This, I think, is part of why tolerification is such a common human response to unfortunate situations. In an intolerable world, *none* of your options seem acceptable: so you tolerify, until at least one option (perhaps indignance, perhaps cynicism, perhaps doing nothing differently) passes the acceptability threshold. Only then are you able to act.

This behavior won't do, for someone living in a dark world. If you're going to live in a dark world, then it's very important to learn how to choose the best action available to you without any concern for how good it is in an absolute sense.

When given a choice between bad and worse, you need to be able to choose "bad", without qualm.

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I think that one of the big reasons why people get annoyed when none of their options pass the "acceptable" threshold is they're often failing to see a hidden third alternative, and some part of them knows that this might be the case. In this setting, the frustration might even be *useful*, if it puts them in a mental state where they search more fervently for an escape hatch.

Furthermore, by acting flustered, people may well be able to draw other humans to their aid, and the additional assistance can often help make the situation better.

So frustration in the face of a choice between bad and worse may be a useful response in many situations. (At the least, it was useful enough to our ancestors.) Indeed, when you're offered the choice between bad and worse, the first thing to do is *look for a third option* and the second thing to do is *ask for help*. Find shortcuts. Try to cheat. Call in the cavalry, if you can.

But once you determine that you really have been offered a choice between bad and worse, and that there are no other options —

Then it is useful to be able to choose "bad," without suffering over it.

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The first step to being able to choose the best option available without suffering, is to simply understand the distinction. Next time you find yourself feeling flustered because none of your options pass an absolute acceptability threshold, pause and reframe, and look at the *relative* acceptability of your actions instead. Simply knowing the distinction and watching out for it in real life may well be enough.

For me, another useful tool for choosing without suffering is to ask a "what if" question about a hypothetical universe, before making a choice in the real world. Let's say I'm trying to eliminate extreme poverty, and none of my actions seem good. I might say to myself, "imagine you lived in a world where all your choices led to bad outcomes; what would you do then?" I can improve the lives of these three people, and then a million people will die of preventable disease anyway. Or I can try to alter the flow of politics, and then a million people will die of preventable disease anyway. Or I can put money into researching preventable diseases, and then a million people will die of preventable diseases anyway. No matter what I do, at least a million people will die of preventable diseases. What would I do in *that* world?

Clearly, the answer is "whatever action saves the *most* lives." I sometimes find it easier to frame my real problems as if they were hypothetical, identify the answer *there*, and then apply that to the real world.

In the hypothetical worlds where there are no third alternatives and all the actions before you, it doesn't matter that all the actions lead to bad outcomes. The best choice is still quite clear: take the action that leads to the best outcome, and take it without remorse. In the hypothetical, confident that there are no alternatives, it's quite easy to imagine selecting the least bad option from a terrible lot. In fact, it's easy to imagine doing this without any impulse to complain or struggle, but instead only a grim resolve to do the best you can in a bad situation.

So in the real world, do the same. Notice when you're measuring your options against what you think *should* happen; notice when you're measuring the futures you can attain against the futures you *want* to attain; and treat that as a cue to reframe. Look at your actions available options again, and stop measuring them against an objective ideal, and start measuring them against each other. Look for cheats, look for third alternatives, look for ways out...

...and then, when you're done and you've considered all available options, simply take the best action available.

Take it, without suffering, no matter how bad it is.

That is all there is to do.