

Useful Free Booklets Series

The Ape Who Pretends

Born to know, trained to deny

By Jean-Georges Estiot

This booklet has been created to encourage open discussion, thoughtful study and careful critical enquiry. It is intended as a resource that invites readers to question, reflect and explore ideas deeply, rather than accept them without consideration. Permission is given to reproduce the content of this booklet for any purpose.

My email is jgestiot@gmail.com and your feedback is welcome.

Welcom to the theatre of the mind

There is a difference between lying and pretending. Lying is what you do to others, while pretending is what you do to yourself. No creature on this planet engages in more pretending than the human animal, which pretends to be happy, to be in control, to matter, to understand. Most of all, it pretends to be honest while lying to itself so constantly and so effortlessly that it no longer knows where the lie ends and the self begins.

At the top of the evolutionary chain stands this strangely gifted ape, born to observe and question, equipped with a brain powerful enough to map the stars, split the atom, and dream of eternity. And what does it do with this gift? It builds fantasies and runs from truth as if it were poison. It edits reality like a bad screenplay, filtering, distorting, reframing, and denying. Inconvenient facts are buried under piles of story, emotion, dogma, and denial, then it looks in the mirror and says, "I am wise."

Every society that ever existed was a shared hallucination: religion, culture, law, money, fame, identity. None of it exists without agreement, and that agreement is not based on truth but on usefulness. If it feels good, it is true. If it makes life easier, it becomes sacred. Truth has no vote in this system; it is loud only when it becomes too painful to ignore. Until then, humans live in curated bubbles, telling themselves what they need to hear to keep functioning.

What makes it worse is that this pretending is not a flaw; it is the design. The human brain did not evolve to find truth but to survive. And survival, for a social ape, often means fitting in, being liked, believing what the tribe believes, and ignoring the obvious if the obvious threatens comfort. A brain that sees reality too clearly becomes depressed, while a brain that sees it just dimly enough, just safely enough, gets through the day.

This booklet is about that dimming. It is not about stupidity or about lies told to others. It is about the quiet, daily theatre that plays inside the mind of every person who wants to seem sane but is slowly losing their grip. It is about the myths people need to believe, the tricks they play on themselves, and the absurd things they pretend in order to stay upright in a world that never made sense to begin with.

It is not a celebration of the human mind but an autopsy, one conducted while the body is still moving, still talking, still pretending. And as you read, remember this: the

ape does not know it is pretending. That is the whole point. That is why it works. That is why it cannot stop.

The truth allergy

Most humans cannot handle the truth, not because it is too complex to understand, but because it is too unpleasant to accept. The truth does not care about feelings, stroke egos, or provide meaning, comfort, or hope; it simply exists, indifferent and unsympathetic. That, more than anything, is what makes it unbearable. Humans want a world that makes sense, revolves around them, and rewards virtue while punishing evil. Instead, they find a world that is random, unfair, and ruled by chance, so they reject it—not with reason, but with instinct. They treat truth the way a weak immune system treats a virus: as something dangerous, something to be destroyed.

This rejection of truth is not a rare malfunction; it is a standard feature of the species. Given the choice between a hard truth and a pleasant fiction, most people will embrace the fiction without hesitation and then call it strength. They say they are being positive, or hopeful, or faithful, but what they are really doing is running—from the weight of facts they cannot carry, from the emptiness that lurks beneath their beliefs, and from the mirror that shows them who they are instead of who they wish to be.

It is no accident that the most popular lies are the ones that feel good: that you are special, that life has a purpose, that everything happens for a reason, that there is a plan, that someone is watching over you. These ideas are repeated not because they are true, but because they soothe—even when they contradict each other or fall apart under scrutiny. The test is not logical; it is emotional. If it makes the pain go away, it must be right.

But the allergy goes deeper. It is not just about rejecting unpleasant facts, but about defending the lie with everything available. If someone points out a truth that threatens the narrative, they are not debated, they are attacked. Call them negative, call them bitter, call them broken. Create words like “toxic” and “problematic” to keep them out of sight. The goal is not understanding; it is preservation. The lie must be kept alive, no matter what.

Even intelligence is no cure. Often, it makes the allergy worse, as smart people are simply better at hiding from the truth. They bury it under layers of argument, dress it in academic language, or drown it in endless questions. They become masters of

distraction and experts in misdirection. They do not lie less—they lie better.

Modern life has turned this into a cultural norm. From the moment people open their eyes, they are invited to escape. From self-help slogans to social media filters, from curated lifestyles to spiritual quick fixes, everything screams the same message: you do not have to face the truth. You can customise reality to fit your needs, block out anything that hurts, and be the hero of a story that is not even real. If it ever begins to fall apart, just smile harder, scroll faster, or find a new belief.

But the truth does not disappear. It waits, watches, and stays exactly where it always was: silent, cold, patient. Sometimes it knocks, sometimes it breaks the door, and sometimes it is only heard in moments of silence—when the pretending pauses and the mask slips. It is not loud, but it never lies, never flatters, and never goes away.

That is why humans fear it—not because it is wrong, but because it is right. And they know it. Deep down, buried under layers of pretending, the ape remembers. It knows what it is running from, and it knows it cannot run forever.

Memory: the story we rewrite

Ask a human to tell you about their past, and they will speak with confidence, describing events, decisions, and feelings while insisting they remember. But what they remember is not what happened; it is the version of the past they can live with. Memory is not a recording; it is a reconstruction, a story edited over time and shaped by needs, beliefs, guilt, and pride. The past is not preserved; it is reassembled, reshaped, and retold until it no longer threatens the present.

This rewriting happens quietly, and most people do not know they are doing it. They are not lying on purpose. They believe what they say, and that is what makes it so effective. They think their memories are sacred, when in fact they are tools of survival. A shameful act becomes a misunderstanding, a betrayal becomes a moment of weakness, and a failure becomes a lesson. The more painful the truth, the more urgent the rewrite, and over time, the real event is buried under layers of story until even the person who lived it no longer knows what actually took place.

Memory is selective for a reason. A perfect memory would be a curse that paralyses, filling the mind with guilt, confusion, and contradiction. So the mind edits. It deletes what it must, highlights what flatters, and reshuffles events to make the person seem wiser, stronger, and kinder. Entire relationships are remembered differently depending on how they ended, and whole years are smoothed over, with only the

safest fragments preserved. The rest is forgotten, or worse, rewritten so convincingly that the lie becomes the new truth.

This is not a rare condition. It does not affect only the old or the traumatised. It is universal. Everyone does it, even those who think they have perfect recall. Especially them. The illusion of certainty is part of the lie, and the more confident someone is in their memory, the more likely it has been revised.

Science has shown this for decades. Memories are not stored like books on a shelf. Each time one is recalled, it is changed, repackaged, and contaminated by present emotions and future regrets. Then it is put back, slightly altered. The next time it is recalled, it changes again. It becomes a photocopy of a photocopy, getting fuzzier each time. Yet people act as if their memories are facts. They argue based on them, define themselves by them, and judge others by the version of the past they have invented.

This rewriting is not just about protecting the ego. It also provides a sense of order. If the past can be shaped into a coherent story, then life seems manageable. A bad experience becomes a test, a coincidence becomes fate, and a regret becomes destiny. The story becomes more important than the truth because the truth is chaotic. It does not explain; it just is. And the human mind cannot tolerate that. It must narrate. It must connect the dots, even if the picture is fake.

So memory becomes myth: the myth of who you are, where you came from, and what shaped you. And like all myths, it has little to do with reality and everything to do with comfort. The ape does not want accuracy. It wants meaning, even if it has to invent it.

I am what I say I am

Identity is supposed to be something real, something stable, something that defines a person across time and place. But for most humans, identity is just another performance, a costume worn long enough to be mistaken for skin. When it is questioned, the mask tightens, and people cling to it as if their life depends on it. For many, it truly does. Without the story they tell about themselves, they have no idea what remains.

Ask someone who they are, and they will reply with titles, roles, and labels: I am a teacher, a mother, a survivor, a man, spiritual, neurodivergent, a free thinker. None of this is fixed. It is guesswork held together by emotion. These identities are not facts;

they are declarations, slogans meant to convey certainty. The more fragile the person, the louder they repeat them.

In the past, identity was mostly assigned. You were what your family, tribe, or religion said you were. Today, identity is treated as a personal invention. You choose your label, announce it, and expect the world to agree. If enough people validate your claim, it becomes sacred. If anyone questions it, they are labelled hateful, ignorant, or dangerous. The new rule is simple: I am what I say I am, and you must say it too.

This can escalate into absurdity. A person born male can declare they are female, and society is expected to comply. Biology is no longer considered reality; it has become a matter of opinion. Gender, once understood as a biological fact, is now treated as a personal mood. Questioning this is not seen as reasoned disagreement, but as an act of violence. A society that claims to value truth now punishes those who simply describe what they see.

This issue extends beyond gender. It reflects a broader pattern in how identity is handled. It is treated like a product that can be customised. Choose a trauma, a belief, a preference, or a cause. Wrap your personality around it, announce it, and demand recognition. If anyone hesitates, accuse them of denying your existence. This is not self-knowledge; it is performance shaped by pressure.

Some of the most aggressive defenders of identity are also the most insecure. That is why they cannot tolerate questions. Their sense of self is a house of cards. Apply too much pressure, and it all collapses. So they guard it constantly, demanding validation, controlling language, reshaping conversations, and even adjusting reality to keep the performance intact.

Meanwhile, the self continues to change. What someone believes at twenty may embarrass them at forty. What they call authentic today may repulse them tomorrow. But they do not notice the contradiction. Each new version is presented as the true one, until the next one replaces it with fresh clothes, new beliefs, and updated slogans.

People say they are discovering themselves, but most are simply inventing new versions to suit the moment. They imitate, absorb, and rehearse. Their identity is not a truth. It is a strategy. It does not reveal who they are. It only shows how they cope.

And still the ape insists, I am what I say I am, as if repeating it often enough will make it true, as if rewriting the self might one day uncover the soul hidden beneath the mask.

The world owes me meaning

One of the most powerful lies humans tell themselves is that life must mean something, not just anything, but something personal and profound, something written just for them. They believe they were born for a reason, that their pain has a purpose, and that their journey is part of a larger plan. When that meaning is not immediately obvious, they invent one, because the thought that life might be random, indifferent, or meaningless is too much to bear.

This is not a matter of curiosity or a search for truth. It is a demand: the world owes me meaning. I am not just a bag of cells that happened to form. I am part of a design. I matter. My actions matter. My suffering matters. People cling to this belief with religious intensity, even if they have no religion. They will find purpose in anything: work, family, country, diet, trauma, identity. Meaning is no longer something discovered. It is claimed, like a reward.

For many, suffering becomes the strongest proof that they must matter. If I went through all this pain, there must be a reason. Something greater must be watching. Something must make it count. This is not logic. It is bargaining. It turns pain into currency and meaning into compensation. It says, I did not cry for nothing. But sometimes people do. Sometimes tears are just tears, and nothing follows them but silence.

In modern culture, meaning has become a commodity. Life coaches, influencers, spiritual gurus, and corporate slogans all offer packaged purpose. Find your calling. Live your truth. Unlock your potential. Discover your why. Everything is dressed in capital letters and sold as salvation. The result is a population chasing significance like a drug. They want to be seen. They want to be chosen. They want to believe their life is not just happening, but unfolding. Not a sequence of events, but a meaningful arc.

Even death must be turned into narrative. It is not enough to say someone died. We must say they lost a battle, fulfilled a purpose, taught a lesson, or became an angel. The truth, that death is just the end, is too empty. So the ape rewrites it again. Every funeral becomes a performance. Every tragedy must be explained. Every loss must be turned into a gift. And if you dare suggest that nothing deeper lies beneath it, you are dismissed as heartless, because honesty in the face of death is considered offensive.

The belief in meaning is not passive. It drives behaviour. People marry for

meaning. They have children for meaning. They take jobs they hate because they are told it matters. They suffer for causes they do not understand just to feel noble. And when the results fail to match the promise, they double down. They search harder for signs, invent new goals, and look for patterns where none exist. The idea that it was all noise is too devastating. It must be music, even if they have to hum the tune themselves.

This belief also breeds endless disappointment. If life is supposed to have meaning, then anything that feels pointless becomes intolerable. People begin to resent their jobs, partners, and routines—not because they are unbearable, but because they are uninspiring. They were promised fulfilment. They expected a grand arc. When that arc does not appear, they spiral, not from hardship, but from unmet fantasy.

What gets lost in all this pretending is the possibility that meaning is not given, not assigned, not waiting to be discovered like treasure. It might not exist at all. Or it might be small, fragile, and temporary: a kind word, a brief connection, a moment of clarity before the noise returns. But that is not enough for the ape. It wants more. It wants destiny. It wants myth. It wants to be the hero in a world that was never written for anyone.

So the pretending continues. People look at the chaos around them and call it part of a larger plan. They see coincidences and call them signs. They look in the mirror and see not just a person, but a mission, as if the universe has a script and they are playing the lead. As if the clouds shift and the winds blow solely to support their character development.

The ape does not ask whether this is true. It only asks whether it helps. And if the answer is yes, then truth is forgotten, meaning wins, the fantasy is secure, and reality, once again, is quietly edited out.

Happiness by pretending

Human beings claim to want happiness, but what they really seek is relief, a break from anxiety, boredom, or meaninglessness. They call this happiness, though it is usually just distraction with a smile. And since real peace is rare and fleeting, most settle for the next best thing: the appearance of happiness. It is not about feeling better, but about looking like they do.

Modern life has made this easier than ever. It no longer matters how a person

feels, only how they present. A carefully edited photo, a caption crafted for effect, a laugh timed perfectly. These are now the markers. You can be falling apart, but if you post a sunset and smile for a selfie, people will say you are glowing. In that moment, you might almost believe it yourself.

This is the era of curated emotion. People no longer live their lives; they manage their image. They do not ask whether they are happy. They ask whether they look happy, whether they sound happy, whether others would describe them that way. It is a performance. The audience is everywhere: friends, strangers, followers, family. Even the performer becomes their own audience, watching themselves through the lens of how they want to be seen.

The real emotions are buried. You are allowed to be anxious, but only if it is presented fashionably. You are allowed to be sad, but only in a poetic or inspiring way. Grief must be profound. Struggle must be noble. No rawness. No honesty. No silence. Always a caption. Always a lesson. Always a silver lining.

This pretending extends beyond social media. It infiltrates relationships, work, and even solitude. People stay in bad marriages and call it stability. They work meaningless jobs and call it ambition. They tell themselves they are fine, just tired, just busy, just distracted. Anything but broken. The lie becomes routine. The mask becomes second skin.

Sometimes the pretending works, at least for a while. Repetition creates belief. If you tell yourself you are happy often enough, you may begin to believe it. But this is not healing. It is rehearsal. You are not growing. You are learning your lines.

The worst part is that others play along. People compliment each other's pretend lives, not out of cruelty, but out of habit. Everyone lies together. No one wants to say it feels empty, that the joy looks forced, that the inspiration sounds scripted. It would be impolite. It would ruin the show.

But deep down, the truth remains. Most people are not happy. They are distracted. They are entertained. They are occasionally excited. But happiness, the kind that needs no proof, no audience, no performance, is rare. When it comes, it does not announce itself. It simply exists, quiet, undemanding, and unnoticed.

That kind of happiness cannot be performed. It cannot be posted. It cannot be turned into content. That is why most people never find it. They are too busy pretending to feel something louder.

The myth of control

Humans want to believe they are in control, not just of their lives, but of their choices, their futures, and even their minds. It is one of the oldest and most comforting lies: I am in charge, I make the decisions, I shape my destiny. This idea gives people courage. It gives them dignity. It also gives them something to blame when things go wrong.

But the truth is far less flattering. Most human decisions are reactions. Most plans are guesses. Most outcomes are shaped by forces far beyond understanding or reach. People do not choose their parents, their brains, their upbringing, or their instincts. They do not choose the time or place of their birth. They do not choose the weather, the economy, or the cells dividing inside their body. Yet they are told that success or failure is up to them. They are told they are in the driver's seat, when most of the time they are just along for the ride.

To cope with this lack of control, humans invent rituals. They build systems. They make plans. They set goals. They track their habits. They create rules for productivity and charts for progress. They organise their chaos into to-do lists and treat them like spells. If I wake up early, if I eat this food, if I follow this schedule, life will go well. This is not strategy. It is superstition with spreadsheets.

Religion does the same. Pray this way, follow this rule, say this word, and you will be protected, guided, and blessed. It is control wrapped in obedience, a bargain with the universe: do your part, and the rest will fall into place. Until it doesn't. Then you are told you lacked faith, missed a step, or doubted. The fault is always yours, never the system's.

Even those who reject religion still need to feel in control. They turn to science, therapy, fitness, wealth, or ideology. They act as if understanding something means mastering it, as if naming a problem solves it, as if control is just a matter of effort. But understanding is not control. Control is mostly an illusion, and the stronger the need to feel it, the more elaborate the lie becomes.

This illusion gets people through the day, but it also breaks them. When life goes wrong, they blame themselves. When illness strikes, when loss comes, when plans fail, they do not accept randomness. They search for fault. They replay every step. They analyse every choice. What did I miss? What did I do wrong? Sometimes the answer is nothing. Sometimes life just hits. But that truth is unbearable. It is easier to believe you failed than to believe the world does not care.

Control is a story people tell to avoid panic. Without it, the world feels too big, too wild, too cruel. So they pretend. They buy planners. They set alarms. They meditate. They visualise. They chant affirmations. None of it changes the deeper truth. The steering wheel is not connected to anything.

And still, the pretending continues. Because the alternative is silence, chaos, powerlessness. And for the ape who thinks, that is the most frightening truth of all.

The Escape industry

If humans were able to face reality, there would be no need to flee it. But reality, for most, is either painful or disappointing. It is not heroic, not fair, not beautiful. It does not reward kindness or punish cruelty. It does not care. So people escape, not with passports, but with screens, substances, routines, and beliefs. Wherever there is suffering, there is fantasy. And wherever there is fantasy, there is profit.

This has become one of the most successful industries on Earth, a vast, well-funded, expertly engineered enterprise dedicated to helping humans avoid the present moment. It wears many masks: entertainment, wellness, therapy, spirituality, education, self-help. It offers not solutions, but sedation. Not freedom, but forgetfulness. Not insight, but illusion.

Start with entertainment. Endless hours of curated drama, noise, violence, romance, and magic. The plot does not matter. The truth does not matter. What matters is the escape. People binge stories of other lives to forget their own. They cheer for heroes, weep for strangers, and then return to the dull repetition of work, bills, fatigue, and quiet despair. The stories are not about discovery. They are about delay. Let me feel something that costs me nothing. Let me pretend I am alive without having to change anything.

Then there is social media, which does not just provide fantasy, but allows you to become it. You can create a version of yourself that is always smiling, always witty, always improving. You can hide your loneliness behind likes. You can hide your emptiness behind filters. You can curate your identity like a display cabinet, showing only the pieces that sparkle. The result is a world of people comparing their real lives to other people's edited ones and feeling like failures for not measuring up to a fiction.

Next comes the wellness industry, where escape wears a robe and speaks softly. Crystals, yoga, clean eating, mindfulness apps, herbal teas, scented oils. You are not

escaping life. You are healing. You are aligning. You are raising your vibration. None of this is measurable. None of it needs to be. The goal is not clarity. It is comfort. A spa for the soul. And like any good spa, it is not there to fix you. It is there to relax you while the damage continues.

Spirituality, once rooted in awe and discipline, now markets itself as lifestyle. Believe in something vague. Repeat mantras. Observe the moon. Call yourself a lightworker. No effort. No challenge. No sacrifice. Just vibes. The more obscure the belief, the safer it is. No need to prove anything. No risk of being wrong. Just float in mystery and call it wisdom. It is not a path to understanding. It is a shelter from having to try.

Even therapy has joined the parade. What began as a method of self-examination has often become a mirror for narcissism. People come not to confront themselves, but to be told they are enough, they are doing their best, they are brave for surviving what they sometimes created. Therapists who challenge this are called insensitive. The new role is to listen, affirm, and never interrupt the client's carefully constructed story. Insight becomes optional. Growth becomes offensive.

Self-help books sell the same fantasy in different covers. One week it is about your inner child. The next, your morning routine. Then your money mindset. Your boundaries. Your limiting beliefs. A carousel of pretend progress. Read this. Follow that. Repeat a phrase into the mirror. You are improving, even if nothing changes. You are growing, even if your life is shrinking. The only real growth happens in the bank account of the person selling the dream.

Then there is education, which once offered the shock of reality. Now it often delivers the comfort of ideology. Students are encouraged to feel safe, not to think freely. Questions are dangerous. Ideas must come with warnings. Entire universities tiptoe around uncomfortable truths, afraid someone might be disturbed. But truth, by its nature, disturbs. That is its function. If education is designed to protect feelings, it becomes not just another escape, but a quieter form of entertainment, dressed in seriousness.

There is no escape from pain. But there is endless distraction. And that is what the industry sells. You can avoid your past. You can avoid your choices. You can even avoid your reflection. Just keep swiping, chanting, journaling, training, relaxing, shopping. Do whatever it takes not to stop. Not to sit in silence. Not to ask, what am I doing and why?

The worst part is that this machinery of escape is praised. It is called wellness, productivity, empowerment, resilience. It is rewarded, promoted, sold in bulk. No one asks whether it leads anywhere. The point is to keep people busy. And a busy ape is an obedient ape.

Reality is still there, of course. Beneath the noise. Beneath the rituals. Beneath the image. But it is quiet. It waits. And the longer it is avoided, the more terrifying it becomes. That is why the distractions must never stop. Because the moment the pretending ends, the ape is forced to notice that the cage was never locked. It was just easier to pretend it was a palace.

Identity on demand

In a sane world, identity would be shaped slowly through experience, reflection, and honesty. But in the world humans have built, identity is now chosen the way a child picks an outfit. It is no longer about what fits, but about what feels exciting, different, or validated by the crowd. It is not something discovered. It is something declared. Say it loud enough and it becomes untouchable.

Modern culture treats identity like a menu. You can select your gender, your sexuality, your neurotype, your trauma category, your philosophical tribe, and your political alignment. Add a flag to your profile. Add pronouns. Add a story. These are not just labels. They are shields. Once you declare an identity, criticism becomes attack. Disagreement becomes violence. You are no longer a person with ideas. You are a sacred category. And sacred categories must never be questioned.

In this climate, identity has become a game of inflation. The more labels you collect, the more special you become. It is not enough to say, I am a person with preferences. Now you must say, I am queer, non-binary, ADHD, demisexual, vegan, trauma-informed, intersectional, polyamorous, and chronically misunderstood. Each label is a badge. Each badge is a defence. The more badges, the more protected you are from challenge.

This is not identity. It is theatre. A carefully constructed role built for applause, validation, and insulation from doubt. It may start with something real, but it quickly becomes exaggeration. A fleeting feeling becomes a core trait. A passing struggle becomes a permanent status. An online quiz becomes a diagnosis. The person is gone. What remains is a collection of slogans wrapped around a shrinking self.

What drives this is not confidence, but confusion. In a world stripped of stable

meaning, people are desperate to know who they are. But instead of looking inward, they reach for whatever gives them belonging. If a label gets them attention, they wear it. If it gets them community, they defend it. If it gets them immunity from criticism, they weaponise it. It does not have to be true. It just has to work.

This has created a culture where identity can change by the hour. A teenager can wake up one gender and go to sleep another. A person can redefine their personality weekly depending on trends. And every shift is to be celebrated, no matter how shallow or self-contradictory. If someone questions the logic, they are called a bigot. If someone asks for consistency, they are accused of erasure. The point is not coherence. The point is freedom from scrutiny.

But freedom from scrutiny is not the same as freedom. It is a cage with soft walls. It protects you from challenge, but it also locks you into roles you may not understand. People end up trapped inside identities they adopted in moments of confusion or pain. They must keep performing them to stay accepted. The label becomes the person. The costume becomes the skin.

This obsession with identity also fractures society. Instead of seeing others as individuals, people are trained to see categories. Speak as a woman. Listen as a neurodivergent person. Respect the lived experience. Everyone must declare their identity before speaking, as if truth depends on labels. It is not what is said that matters, but who says it and what group they claim. This does not build empathy. It builds resentment and fear. People walk on eggshells, terrified of using the wrong word. Not because they are cruel, but because identity has become sacred and blasphemy is punished.

At the root of all this is a simple fact: humans no longer know who they are. They were once told they had a soul, a purpose, a role. Now they are told they can be anything, and the result is not freedom. It is panic. So they cling to whatever identity gives them certainty, even if it is fake, even if it is borrowed, even if it changes next week.

And through it all, the ape insists, this is the real me, as if a sticker on a name badge could explain the depths of a confused and frightened animal still searching for meaning in a mirror.

When reality bites

For all their posturing and pretending, humans have fragile egos. They spend

much of their lives building illusions, and when those illusions crack, the response is rarely reflection. It is attack. Reality is not allowed to win. When things go wrong, it cannot be the system, the choices, or the beliefs. It must be someone else's fault. The moment reality becomes painful, humans do not retreat quietly. They lash out.

This is where victimhood becomes a weapon. If something hurts, reframe it—not as consequence, but as injustice. Not as cause and effect, but as persecution. If you feel bad, it is because someone harmed you. If you failed, it is because someone oppressed you. If you are wrong, it is because others refused to understand you. This is not honesty. It is defence, a way to shift the burden outward and protect the fragile self from responsibility.

Modern culture has turned this into an art form. There is almost no statement so absurd that it cannot be defended by appeal to trauma or identity. Say something reckless, get called out, and claim you are being silenced. Be challenged, and say your lived experience is being denied. Be criticised, and accuse your critic of emotional harm. The truth of the claim no longer matters. What matters is how loudly and convincingly you can present yourself as the injured party.

This is not limited to activists or the chronically online. It is everywhere. In the workplace, mediocrity hides behind office politics. In relationships, toxic behaviour hides behind childhood wounds. In public life, corruption hides behind public service. No one does wrong anymore. They are just misunderstood, provoked, or under pressure. It is a world of people who never make mistakes, only suffer them.

The result is a population trained to see accountability as attack. If someone questions your decisions, they are shaming you. If they point out a contradiction, they are gaslighting you. If they expect consistency, they are being unreasonable. You must always be protected. You must always be validated. Because once you admit you were wrong, the whole story begins to unravel.

But reality does not care about your narrative. It arrives anyway. It knocks, enters, and stays until you acknowledge it. The people who cannot face this tend to burn bridges, break friendships, sabotage careers, and then tell themselves they were brave for walking away. They were not defeated. They were disrespected. They were not exposed. They were liberated.

It is a performance of strength masking deep fear. Because admitting fault means dropping the illusion. And the illusion is all many people have. They would rather destroy relationships, reputations, and communities than admit they are not the

person they pretend to be.

Children are taught to say sorry. Adults are taught to never look weak. Apologise only if it increases status. Accept blame only if you can frame it as growth. Everything must be narrated in a way that keeps the ego untarnished.

And so, when reality bites, humans bite back. Not at the problem, but at the mirror. They break the reflection, not because it is false, but because it is clear.

The last refuge: hope

Hope is the most respectable lie of all. It is dressed in warmth, praised in songs, quoted in speeches, and sold in every form imaginable. To question hope is considered cruel. To live without it is seen as tragic. And yet, for most people, hope is not a light in the dark. It is a curtain, a soft, reassuring veil placed over a reality too brutal to face.

Hope is what people reach for when nothing else makes sense. When the system fails, when the cure does not come, when the dream dies, when the truth stings too sharply, hope steps in. It does not fix anything. It does not provide a plan. It simply says, maybe. Maybe things will get better. Maybe it will all work out. Maybe, someday. That word becomes sacred. It fills the silence, delays despair, and gives the mind something to hold when everything else slips away.

But hope is not free. It comes with a price. It postpones action, excuses denial, and allows people to stay passive while they wait for something outside themselves to change. Governments are corrupt, but we hope they will improve. The planet is dying, but we hope technology will save it. The relationship is toxic, but we hope they will change. The job is soul-crushing, but we hope the next promotion will make it worth it. People stay stuck not because they lack strength, but because they hold on to hope like a drug.

Even when hope fails, it survives. If one dream collapses, another is invented. If one prophecy dies, a new one is born. It is never the fault of hope itself. The timing was wrong. The world was not ready. The signs were misread. But the next one will be different. The next miracle. The next saviour. The next breakthrough. Hope keeps failure from being final. It paints over it, rebrands it, and reissues it with better packaging.

Religion thrives on hope, not just for comfort or community, but for eternity. The ultimate promise that no matter how unfair, how brutal, how meaningless this life

appears, the next one will make sense. Justice will be done. Rewards will be given. Wrongs will be reversed. Even the worst horrors can be endured if you believe they are temporary. Even death becomes negotiable if hope is strong enough.

But this kind of hope is not a light. It is a leash. It keeps people obedient. It keeps them enduring things that should not be endured. It keeps them silent when they should scream. It keeps them praying instead of acting. It is sold as strength, but often functions as sedation.

Some forms of hope are noble. The hope that someone might recover. The hope that peace might be possible. But most hope is not noble. It is noise. It fills the space where clear thought should be. It cushions the mind against the sharp edges of life. It keeps people from asking the hard question: what if this is it?

What if there is no rescue, no reward, no next time? What if the mess is all there is, and the meaning must be made right here or not at all?

That kind of clarity is rare because it strips away comfort. And without comfort, the ape feels naked. So it wraps itself in the final disguise, the one lie no one wants to expose, the lie that says it will all be fine.

Hope is the most beautiful excuse ever invented. And as long as it whispers, the pretending continues.

The ape who still pretends

So here it is: the creature with language, memory, and reason. The builder of cities and launcher of satellites. The dreamer of gods and guardian of myths. The one who wrote poems to explain pain and designed machines to deny death. This ape, with its enormous brain and endless imagination, spends most of its life inside a story. Not a story about the world, but a story about itself. And that story is mostly false.

It is not just that humans lie. That would be too easy. It is that they construct entire lives around the lies they tell themselves. They imagine purpose where there is none. They rewrite memory to soothe guilt. They project meaning onto chaos. They filter every fact through emotion and then call the result truth. This is not deception by accident. It is deception as a way of life.

People claim to seek truth, but truth is not what they want. Truth is awkward. Truth is lonely. Truth is cold. What they want is comfort wrapped in the illusion of honesty. They want a mirror that flatters, not one that reflects. So they invent selves, beliefs, dreams, and enemies. They rehearse the role until it feels real. And if anyone

threatens the story, they are removed. The performance must go on.

The ape does not know it is pretending. That is what makes the act so convincing. It smiles, suffers, argues, worships, and posts. It builds temples and screens. It asks big questions and accepts small answers. It survives not by facing reality, but by painting over it. And every time the paint begins to crack, it reaches for more. Another label. Another hope. Another escape. Another lie.

There are moments, rare and quiet, when the pretending falters. When the story slips and something raw comes through. A silence too deep to ignore. A grief too sharp to reframe. A truth too simple to dismiss. Most people panic when that happens. They run. They explain. They joke. They distract. Anything to avoid standing still in what is real.

And so the pretending continues. As necessary as breathing. As automatic as blinking. The ape must believe it matters. It must believe it knows. It must believe there is more. Without that, it would fall apart. And so it keeps going, eyes wide, heart trembling, mask firmly in place.

The world burns. The noise grows. The lies get louder. But the ape who pretends does not stop. It cannot.

More free booklets can be found at:
https://github.com/jgestiot/free_books/blob/main/README.md

Revision 1.1