

Editor's Note

Vicariousness - living through others - is generally seen either as lazy or smothering, and in many cases, this perception is justified. Parents who try to live out their dreams through their offspring are an example of the latter category. The issue is that owing to such people, this approach to life has in its entirety received a lot of bad press. As a result, few today recognise that there exist legitimate benefits to living vicariously.

On New Year's day this year, a friend handed me a copy of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself with a greeting (appropriate to context) scrawled hurriedly across its cover. After carrying it around unopened for a couple of weeks, I finally decided to give it a look. Though sceptical at first, I was soon drawn by the simple, unafraid honesty of Whitman's awkward rhythm. At one point, he writes of grass:

A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me
with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know
what it is any more than he.

[...]
I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
[...] Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the
same, I receive them the same.
And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair
of graves.

And so he goes on.

I remained on those two pages for a while before moving on. Every repetition was slower than the last. Those lines are beautiful enough in themselves, but I would not have read them the way I did if I had not known how much my friend loves the grass; how, in the midst of even the most frantic of his runs, he stops to look at a patch of it, brush his hands over it, before setting off again. Had I bought the book myself, I know for a fact that those lines would not have played out in my mind the way they did. The value of the piece - and of the book as a whole - grew exponentially by virtue of the experiences already contained in it, ready for consumption second-hand.

Don't get me wrong. It is fine - ideal, in fact - to focus on making something of oneself first; a life that has no purpose of its own is, put bluntly, a waste. Go out there, experience things yourself, live an original life. I oppose none of these ideas. However, we are generally raised, consciously or unconsciously, to hyperfixate on our own lives. The view that your life is and must be affected solely by what
reductive. I find that living through the people I care about is curiously fulfilling. If certain things in my life are meant to be experienced vicariously, so be it. I would rather have others to live through than live isolated and have no one to share my experiences with. This works both ways; opening yourself to others' lives and opening your own up to them breaks barriers that you perhaps had not even noticed were there.

A Few Good Men (And Women)

Honesty is the best policy. No, it really is. I wasn't being sarcastic.

We're just not built for it. Or rather, we know precious little about how to deal with it. Social interactions, consequently, are no smooth ride. Take, for example, the unjustifiably delicate act of expressing your discontent towards someone. Some would suggest that you say it to their face. Others would say that it is better to hide your real opinions and discuss them out of earshot of the subject (behind their back, in pejorative terms). Both schools of thought are equally infamous. Then there is the question of closeness. There are a fair few who, thumping their chest, boast, "If you've got a problem with me, I'd prefer it if you threw it straight at me", only to later prove that they would, in fact, have much preferred otherwise.

Further analysis shows that the closeness factor has the potential to complicate things further; do you go for honesty when you don't know each other enough to stake anything on your calling them out, or when you're close and therefore trust (or hope) that they will take your criticism in the right spirit? The answer may seem simple, until you remember that you have (as has everyone else), at some point, encountered the clapback, "Well, I didn't expect to hear this from you, of all people". One common rebuttal adults give kids who ask the wrong questions is that lying is "complicated" and "only causes further problems down the line". On the other hand, directness is no picnic either.

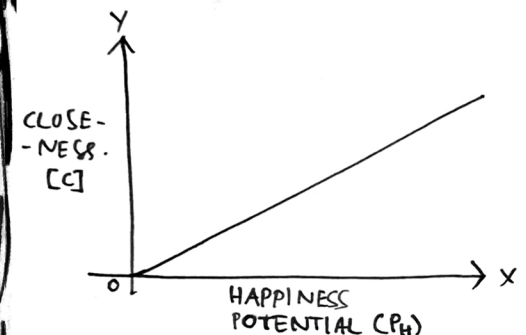


Figure 5: The YOU CANT HANDLE THE TRUTH Principle

Honesty - pure, unfiltered truth - is a social nuclear explosive, and we live in near-constant delusion as regards how capable we are of harnessing its potential. It is bad enough when we have to ask ourselves the abovementioned questions; bring in other pain-in-the-neck contingencies like a moral high ground into the mix, and we've got quite the potion.

So yes, honesty is lovely, and society wants us to believe so - but they whiten out the small print. For your sake and others', though, I implore you, *read it*. Read the small print.

*Nobel Prize in Chemistry

"All science is either
Physics or stamp collecting"
- Ernest Rutherford*

- by kabootar

The Accidental Philatelist

Spite in Verse

Writer's block, it seems
Shut yo first world problems ass
It's not that deep bro