

INTRODUCTION

For most of my life, I've searched in vain to find a way to be at peace with myself and the world around me – in other words, to be happy.

It hasn't been for want of trying, or, for that matter, the outward markers of a good life. I have had, not just professional success and the wealth and possessions that go with it, but a loving wife, children, and grandchildren, in addition to a satisfying circle of friends. My health has been excellent. On the outside, I've been good.

On the inside, however, I haven't been good, but flooded with a torrent of distracting, unwanted fears and speculations and burdened by an inner inertia that kept me from doing the things I knew were good for me. It wasn't that I didn't know how I wanted to be, or what I wanted to do, but that there was something inside me that was actively working against me.

I've led two parallel lives – calm, collected and complete on the outside, and desperately trying to figure out what the hell was wrong on the inside. In the event, I had to come to grips with where “hell” was. And, when I did that, it became obvious what Heaven was.

What I came to realize is that hell is in my anxious, foot-dragging, drama-queen brain and that Heaven is what is left when I can keep that machine from doing what I don't want it to do and get it to do what I do want it to do. And that Heaven isn't just a relief, but opens the way to the

fantastic peace and beauty that religion, at its best, has always promised. Yet, unlike classical religious heavens, the one I will describe is not a permanent future residence, but a present hotel that I check in and out of depending on how well I can manage my brain.

I've also come to realize that my getting into Heaven does not require sitting on a cushion on a mountaintop, ascending to some superior realm, abandoning the messy, striving exterior world. I want to be an active participant in that world, which is interesting and fulfilling. I just want my achievements to be informed by the best part of me, and not the other way around.

These realizations have inspired me to write this book about how our computer brains limit our ability to be happy. It is not an easy subject to write about.

One difficulty is that we know from medical science that our brains are the indispensable actuator of our every thought and movement. How can happiness be somewhere else? My considered answer to that question is that science cannot explain everything, and certainly not the most important things, and it cannot be allowed to become another monotheism – an exclusive explanation for everything that is - and thus limit our view of what a human life can be, just as historical monotheisms have done.

There is, however, a crucial scientific element here. I will advance the notion that, for the first time in human history, we have the scientific knowledge to understand how our brains, for all their indispensability, are agnostic tools that don't care about their owners except at the most physical, existential level. I do this by calling on the science of evolution, neuroscience, and computer science to explain why and how our brains were purposely built to achieve a mission that is no longer our own. That mission – like the mission of lower animals today – was to put its owner on track to arrive at a narrowly-defined destination – surviving

long enough to reproduce in order to pass their genes on to the next generation. But our mission in the modern industrialized world is not to be on a track to a *certain* destination, but to discover happiness, which is a rolling, always changing, *uncertain* experience. So when we ask our brains to get off track, they're derailed. And that's why, I believe, our lives so often feel like a train wreck.

But the greatest difficulty in delivering this message is that I am trying to introduce the reader to a fundamentally different way to think about how to experience value in their life. That is sacred, closely guarded space, not easily penetrated. So, for example, when I call upon the teachings of religion, for the nonbeliever it can be a distracting reference to an archaic mythology that confuses more than it clarifies, and for the believer, the exclusive key to the kingdom, leaving my ideas irrelevant. I am trying to navigate a minefield of precious predilections and prejudices.

My way of getting past this difficulty is to speak in terms so intimately personal that conceptual ideas are bypassed. I do this by offering up the deepest, darkest parts of my interior autobiography, inviting the reader to do the same. My hope is that by the time you have finished this book you will know me in a way that you may not even know yourself. Mostly unwittingly, we shield ourselves and others from the madness within us and I want to rip away that shield. One of the main themes here is that life is lived on the inside, not on the outside, so that if you can bring yourself to go through the deeply humbling experience of acknowledging how crazy it is in there, you can get underneath your preconceptions and down to bedrock.

And what is that bedrock? It is what makes life worth living *at all*. It is at the heart of every decent religious tradition and self-help book and it is this: Each of us, independent of our genetic makeup or personal life situation, has the innate power to create happiness for ourselves and others. It is so obvious that it is reduced to platitudes. I will pick three: