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**Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat**  
**LIFE WITHOUT FEAR**

**Bertrand Russell**

The thing that above all others I have been concerned to say is that because of fears that once had a rational basis mankind has failed to profit by the new techniques that, if wisely used, could make him happy. Fear makes man unwise in the three great departments of human conduct: his dealings with nature, his dealings with other men, and his dealings with himself. I wish in this chapter to consider the ways in which the world would be better if we were exempt from the tyranny of ancient fears.

It is necessary first of all to distinguish between fear as an emotion and rational apprehension of danger as a piece of knowledge. It would be foolish to be unaware of dangers when they exist, but it is very seldom that a danger can be dealt with as adequately by fear as by rational apprehension. Fear is a reaction which we share with the animals. It is crude and slapdash. Sometimes it serves the purposes of self-preservation, but sometimes it does quite the opposite. The man who is not mastered by fear is much better able to think out what kind of action will minimize the danger. Fear frequently prevents people from admitting the danger which in fact they are fearing, and therefore causes them not to take precautions that wisdom would advise. Sometimes this takes very absurd forms, as, for example, when fear of death prevents a man from making a will. It is important to make this point clear, since otherwise it might be thought that in speaking against fear one is speaking against a clear view of real perils. Different kinds of dangers need different kinds of treatment. There are limitations to which human beings are subject owing to the physical facts of nature. These limitations are to a certain degree unavoidable, and to that degree must be accepted. On the other hand, the obstacles to well-being which arise from our relations to other people or to ourselves are to a very great extent unnecessary. There is nothing unavoidable about the misery that people cause each other through hatred or ill-will, nor about the misery that they cause themselves from a sense of guilt. Methods of dealing with the different kinds of evils are for this reason very different.

The limitations imposed by nature have to do with food and raw materials and with the physiological fact of death. These are not absolute; by more labour it is possible to produce more food, and by better technique it is possible to economize raw materials or make use of new substances that were previously thought worthless. Death can be postponed by medicine and wise living. But in all these three respects, although we cannot place an exact limit at one precise point, limits do exist. No amount of medicine will make a man immortal, and no amount of science could provide food if there were only standing room for the population. These limitations that are imposed by nature must be considered scientifically, in order that they may be met in the manner that will involve the smallest amount of suffering. In regard to food, the solution lies in birth-control; as regards raw materials, the solution will lie partly in a more scientific technique and partly in international control to prevent waste and secure just distribution; the postponement of death is a medical matter, but willing submission to it is a matter of psychology to which I shall return later.

In the past, the limitations imposed by nature have been dealt with superstitiously. There were gods or demons, or witches capable of invoking evil spirits, and if they were not placated, they caused bad weather. To this day, archbishops think that drought or excessive rain should be dealt with by prayer. Very often the methods demanded by superstition aggravate the evil. In the

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Middle Ages when there was a plague the population were encouraged to assemble in churches to pray; this, of course, provided an ideal method of spreading infection. Such evils, so far as they can be eradicated, can be eradicated only by science. The scientific attitude has the two-fold merit of causing willingness to admit the evil and intelligence in the search for means of mitigating it. There are still many evils in the world, of which over-population is perhaps the most menacing, in regard to which a large proportion of even the most civilized nations are wholly unscientific.

Fear of other human beings in the world as we have known it is often wellfounded, in the sense that there are those who will injure us if they can. But even when this is the case, it is not by fear, as a rule, that those who wish us ill can be best prevented from injuring us. If you have ever owned a dog that had a propensity to pursue sheep, you will have noticed that although he may remain well behaved so long as the sheep are stationary, he cannot resist temptation if they begin to run away. In this respect many of us are like the dog and many of us like the sheep. I once observed a purely psychological encounter between a Great Dane and a kitten three weeks old. The kitten stayed its ground, and spat and bristled and hissed. What went on in the mind of the Great Dane I do not know, but he behaved as if he thought the kitten had supernatural protection. After staring for a while, he put his tail between his legs and slunk away. If you have as much courage as this kitten, you will find it capable of protecting you against a great deal of aggression from which you might otherwise suffer. But this sort of behaviour is all within the capacity of animals, and I am more concerned with the sort of behaviour of which only human beings are capable. A great deal of the aggressiveness in the world is inspired by fear. We bark at our neighbour for fear that he will attack us, and he barks at us for the same reason. It happens not infrequently that you can cure aggressiveness by a display of friendliness. This is the element of truth in the doctrine of non-resistance, a doctrine which in its theoretical and absolute form I cannot accept, but which certainly contains a larger proportion of practical wisdom than most people would suppose. I think that every individual who does not display aggressive impulses does something to diminish some of such impulses in others. Even a mere external code of manners has its good effect in this respect, but when the nonaggressiveness is deeply rooted in character its effect is very much greater than it can ever be when it springs from a mere conventional rule.

Whenever a fear is well grounded in the sense that the danger apprehended is real, there are two different things that need to be done: one is to create in the individual that kind of fortitude that makes him able to face possible misfortunes calmly, and the other is to ameliorate the social system in such a way as to cause the danger to disappear. This applies, for example, to the fear of destitution, which is very widespread and very deep seated in all competitive countries. A very great many people who seem otherwise sane are quite irrational about money. There are men who, though they are willing to write large cheques, cannot bear to part with loose cash, and rather than do so will face black looks from untipped waiters. Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger, throughout a completely successful business career, continues to be haunted by fear of the workhouse. To prevent such fears there are three different sorts of things to be done. There is first the purely Stoic method of persuading a man that he should face misfortune calmly, and not let himself mind too much even when misfortunes occur. The supreme example of this is Milton's Satan. Then there is the method of persuading him that he is not very likely to become destitute; in mild cases this may be done by economic arguments, but in extreme cases it is a

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matter for the psychiatrist. Lastly there is the political method of coping with the whole problem of destitution, and making it no longer one of the things that befall the unfortunate. All these methods should be pursued in all such cases. The Stoic method is admirable when nothing better is possible, but although a man may face misfortune bravely, it would still be better if he did not have to face it. And it is clear that fear, when it exists to a morbid degree, is a product of a society in which real misfortunes are not unusual. Methods which deal only with the individual, therefore, useful as they may be, can never be substitutes for methods that remove the evil wholly by political means. It is important to realize this, for there are those who have so passionate an admiration for courage that they rejoice in opportunities for its exercise. This is absurd. You may admire a man who endures a long and painful illness without repining, but clearly it would be better if he enjoyed good health. You may admire a soldier who dies nobly in battle, but it would be much better if he did not die. In this respect the Stoics were to blame, since they praised endurance so much as to make cruelty seem almost a good thing, for cruelty was a necessary means to what they considered the highest good. It used to be a custom to praise the patient endurance of the poor, but that was before they had the vote.

Social dealings in private life are filled with fear, especially in Britain. People take pains not to wear their heart on their sleeves for daws to peck at. As far as they can, they keep their emotions to themselves. They will behave in exactly the same way to you whether they like you or dislike you, provided they have no motive of self-interest for making up to you. They are stiff and shy and unspontaneous. They wear armour designed to conceal the frightened child within. The result is that social intercourse becomes boring, that friendships have little life in them, and that love is only a pale shadow of what it might be. People quote with approval Browning's remark:

God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures  
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,  
One to show a woman when he loves her.

I am not a psycho-analyst, but I think that if I were I could find something to say about Browning's thankfulness on this point. The side that he faces the world with is the one that he feels he can exploit without the fear of being hurt, the one that gives no handle for ridicule and no knowledge that may be used to inflict pain; the other 'soul-side', the one that he shows a woman when he loves her, contains all the vanity and conceit and bombast that he dare not show to the men at his club. It is almost as much a product of fear as the other, because the other prevents him from letting fresh air into the inner chambers of his ego, and no one can be admitted to these inner chambers except in a relation of mutual adulation. The outer world is bleak, the inner world is stuffy. This is not how human relations should be. They should be free and spontaneous. Vanity should be less touchy and envy less widespread. The habit of reserve not only makes it easy for self-deception to flourish secretly, but also, owing to the energy spent in the purely negative occupation of preventing self-expression, greatly diminishes the fruitful outflow of energy in useful ways. It has the further defect that men are particularly anxious to conceal friendly impulses, since these especially, if known, make them feel that they are vulnerable. Hours of tedium and years of ossification result from this reign of social terror.

I do not imagine a world without fear as an anarchic world. There will be freedom in certain directions in which now freedom is much restricted, but in other directions where now there is

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freedom there will instead be law. There will be laws regulating the food supply and the distribution of raw materials. Above all, there will have to be laws for the prevention of war. I think, also, that it is impossible to have a world in which there is much freedom without excessive anarchy unless certain things are taught in the process of education. Where man's relation to physical nature is concerned, there is to be scientific discipline, that is to say, a habit of trying to ascertain the facts and admitting them when they have been ascertained. The world at present is full of sentimentalists who, when they find a fact unpleasant, merely refuse to admit that it is a fact. This habit of mind is capable of doing untold harm, because the unpleasant facts will have their unpleasant effects all the more fully for having been not recognized. Intellectual discipline, in the sense of willingness to admit facts, should result from education. It is merely stupid not to acknowledge the power of nature in so far as this power exists. Any attempt at self-assertion in this sphere is a failure of sanity.

Owing to the power of physical nature, certain habits, which only education is likely to create, are very useful for survival. I do not believe that any child brought up without discipline will brush its teeth. Indeed it is unlikely that the child will be sufficiently cleanly in its habits to be free from vermin. The preservation of health demands physical discipline which it is not likely that children will acquire through mere exhortations addressed to self-interest in later years. I think a certain amount of discipline in education is necessary, not only for reasons of health, but also to produce those habits of social behaviour which make perpetual quarrelling unnecessary. We do not at meal-times snatch the food from our neighbour, but the reason that we do not is that we were taught not to at a very early age. Long before we are grown up, the habit has become so engrained that we have ceased to be conscious of it. Punctuality at meals, though it is a tedious virtue, is important, since it minimizes the amount of service required. For such reasons, I think that habit-formation must be an important part of early education. Some modern educators have perhaps carried freedom in education somewhat too far in this respect. There is, however, a kind of freedom which education should preserve, though it seldom does so. I am thinking of emotional freedom. The reasons in favour of emotional freedom are various: on the one hand, too much control over the emotions is deadening, and causes loss of vitality; on the other hand, emotions which are not allowed an outlet turn bad, and find other outlets much more harmful than those that have been forbidden. There is also a third reason, which is that wherever a society is much bound by conventional rules, many emotions will be considered undesirable which in fact are harmless. I think, therefore, that while discipline is necessary in regard to scientific fact and in regard to certain habits without which social life becomes difficult, there should in education be as little as possible of discipline over the emotions. Above all, there must never be any attempt to cause the expression of emotions which are likely to be insincere.

Educators in the past tended too much to believe in original sin, and to think that the child ought to be made into something quite different from what nature would make it. The extreme example of this occurs in St Augustine's account of his learning Latin and Greek. Latin, he says, he learned without difficulty at his mother's knee, and, of course, in the end he knew it well; Greek he learned from a cruel schoolmaster with many beatings and much harshness, and with the result, so he tells us, that he never knew it well. Nevertheless, he thinks better of the method by which he was taught Greek, for this, he says, cured him of 'pernicious blithesomeness'. This is the exact antithesis of what an educator ought to feel. An educator should think of a child as



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a gardener thinks of a plant, as something to be made to grow by having the right soil and the right amount of water. If your roses fail to bloom, it does not occur to you to whip them, but you try to find out what has been amiss in your treatment of them. If your children fail to bloom, you should treat them as you would the roses. With few exceptions, what is wanted is positive, not negative. The important thing is what the children do, not what they do not do. And what they do, if it is to have value, must be a spontaneous expression of their own vital energy. You can, if you think fit, prepare children for a military life by teaching them all to do the same thing at the same moment when they hear the word of command. If you do, they will grow up thwarted and stunted and full of a deep-seated anger against the world—no doubt useful emotions if they are to be soldiers employed in killing, but not if they are to be happy citizens of a world at peace.

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