

101  
ESSAYS  
*that will*  
CHANGE  
*the way*  
YOU  
THINK

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BRIANNA WIEST





## THOUGHT CATALOG BOOKS

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# INTRODUCTION

In his book *Sapiens*, Dr. Yuval Noah Harari explains that at one point, there were more than just *Homo sapiens* roaming the Earth<sup>1</sup>. In fact, there were likely as many as six different types of humans in existence: *Homo sapiens*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, *Homo soloensis*, *Homo erectus*, etc.

There's a reason *Homo sapiens* still exist today and the others didn't continue to evolve: a prefrontal cortex, which we can infer from skeletal structures. Essentially, we had the ability to think more complexly, thus were able to organize, cultivate, teach, practice, habituate and pass down a world suited for our survival. Because of our capacity to imagine, we were able to build Earth as it is today out of virtually nothing.

In a sense, the notion that thoughts create reality is more than just a nice idea; it's also a fact of evolution. It was because of language and thought that we could create a world within our minds, and ultimately, it is because of language and thought that we have evolved into the society we have today—for better and for worse.

Almost every great master, artist, teacher, innovator, inventor, and generally happy person could attribute some similar understanding to their success. Many of the world's 'best' people understood that to change their lives, they had to change their minds.

These are the same people who have communicated to us some of the longest-standing conventional wisdom: that to believe is to become, that the mind is to be mastered, that the obstacle is the way<sup>2</sup>. Often, our most intense discomfort is what precedes and necessitates thinking in a way we have never conceived of before. That new awareness creates possibilities that would never exist had we not been forced to learn something new. Why did our ancestors develop agriculture, society, medicine, and the like? To survive. The elements of our world were once just solutions to fears.

In a more cerebral context, if you consciously learn to regard the “problems” in your life as openings for you to adopt a greater understanding and then develop a better way of living, you will step out of the labyrinth of suffering and learn what it means to thrive.

I believe that the root of the work of being human is learning how to think. From this, we learn how to love, share, coexist, tolerate, give, create,

and so on. I believe the first and most important duty we have is to actualize the potential we were born with—both for ourselves and for the world.

The unspoken line of everything I write is: “This idea changed my life.” Because ideas are what change lives—and that was the first idea that changed mine.

*Brianna Wiest — July 2016*

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<sup>1</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. 1st Edition.* 2015. Harper.

<sup>2</sup> Holiday, Ryan. *The Obstacle Is The Way.* 2014. Portfolio.

SUBCONSCIOUS  
BEHAVIORS  
*that are*  
KEEPING YOU  
*from* HAVING  
THE LIFE  
YOU WANT

Every generation has a “monoculture” of sorts, a governing pattern or system of beliefs that people unconsciously accept as “truth.”

It’s easy to identify the monoculture of Germany in the 1930s or America in 1776. It’s clear what people at those times, in those places, accepted to be “good” and “true” even when in reality, that was certainly not always the case.

The objectivity required to see the effects of present monoculture is very difficult to develop. Once you have so deeply accepted an idea as “truth” it doesn’t register as “cultural” or “subjective” anymore.

So much of our inner turmoil is the result of conducting a life we don’t inherently desire, only because we have accepted an inner narrative of “normal” and “ideal” without ever realizing.

The fundamentals of any given monoculture tend to surround what we should be living for (nation, religion, self, etc.) and there are a number of ways in which our current system has us shooting ourselves in the feet as we try to step forward. Here, 8 of the most pervasive.

01. You believe that creating your best life is a matter of deciding what you want and then going after it, but in reality, you are psychologically incapable<sup>1</sup> of being able to predict what will make you happy.



Your brain can only perceive what it's known, so when you choose what you want for the future, you're actually just recreating a solution or an ideal of the past. When things don't work out the way you want them to, you think you've failed only because you didn't re-create something you perceived as desirable. In reality, you likely created something better, but foreign, and your brain misinterpreted it as "bad" because of that. (Moral of the story: Living in the moment isn't a lofty ideal reserved for the Zen and enlightened; it's the only way to live a life that isn't infiltrated with illusions. It's the only thing your brain can actually comprehend.)

02. You extrapolate the present moment because you believe that success is somewhere you "arrive," so you are constantly trying to take a snapshot of your life and see if you can be happy yet.  
You convince yourself that any given moment is representative of your life as a whole. Because we're wired to believe that success is somewhere we get to—when goals are accomplished and things are completed—we're constantly measuring our present moments by how "finished" they are, how good the story sounds, how someone else would judge the elevator speech. We find ourselves thinking: "Is this all there is?" because we forget that everything is transitory, and no one single instance can summarize the whole. There is nowhere to "arrive" to. The only thing you're rushing toward is death. Accomplishing goals is not success. How much you expand in the process is.
03. You assume that when it comes to following your "gut instincts," happiness is "good" and fear and pain are "bad."  
When you consider doing something that you truly love and are invested in, you are going to feel an influx of fear and pain, mostly because it will involve being vulnerable. Bad feelings should not always be interpreted as deterrents. They are also indicators that you are doing something frightening and worthwhile. Not wanting to do something would make you feel indifferent about it. Fear = interest.
04. You needlessly create problems and crises in your life because you're afraid of actually living it.

The pattern of unnecessarily creating crises in your life is actually an avoidance technique. It distracts you from actually having to be vulnerable or held accountable for whatever it is you're afraid of. You're never upset for the reason you think you are: At the core of your desire to create a problem is simply the fear of being who you are and living the life you want.

05. You think that to change your beliefs, you have to adopt a new line of thinking, rather than seek experiences that make that thinking self-evident.

A belief is what you know to be true because experience has made it evident to you. If you want to change your life, change your beliefs. If you want to change your beliefs, go out and have experiences that make them real to you. Not the opposite way around.

06. You think “problems” are roadblocks to achieving what you want, when in reality they are pathways.

Marcus Aurelius sums this up well: “The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.” Simply, running into a “problem” forces you to take action to resolve it. That action will inevitably lead you to think differently, behave differently, and choose differently. The “problem” becomes a catalyst for you to actualize the life you always wanted. It pushes you from your comfort zone, that's all.

07. You think your past defines you, and worse, you think that it is an unchangeable reality, when really, your perception of it changes as you do.

Because experience is always multi-dimensional, there are a variety of memories, experiences, feelings, “gists” you can choose to recall...and what you choose is indicative of your present state of mind. So many people get caught up in allowing the past to define them or haunt them simply because they have not evolved to the place of seeing how the past did not prevent them from achieving the life they want, it facilitated it. This doesn't mean to disregard or gloss over painful or traumatic events, but simply to be able to

recall them with acceptance and to be able to place them in the storyline of your personal evolution.

08. You try to change other people, situations, and things (or you just complain/get upset about them) when anger = self-recognition. Most negative emotional reactions are you identifying a disassociated aspect of yourself.

Your “shadow selves” are the parts of you that at some point you were conditioned to believe were “not okay,” so you suppressed them and have done everything in your power not to acknowledge them. You don’t actually dislike these parts of yourself, though. So when you see somebody else displaying one of these traits, it’s infuriating, not because you inherently dislike it, but because you have to fight your desire to fully integrate it into your whole consciousness. The things you love about others are the things you love about yourself. The things you hate about others are the things you cannot see in yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Daniel. *Stumbling on Happiness*. 2007. Random House.

