

# Pro(dia)logue:

## Fear and Love

### Without a Manual

*So, what are we going to talk about?*

This story is about fear and love. About how winding the path from one to the other can be – as a human being, in a body with all its limitations, here on earth. How we search for happiness and peace. How we try to open our hearts, but through clumsiness and no fault of our own, often end up closed again without even noticing. The accumulation of our experiences, which so often leads to fear and rejection – of ourselves and others.

Because, let's face it: life is not easy. It takes quite a lot to navigate this world. You arrive here without a manual, and from the moment you leave the womb – even while you're still inside it – you're bombarded with ideas and feelings. There's barely any time to sit still, because everything always seems to be in motion. Just try to hold on to the innocence and love within yourself in these circumstances, without becoming disillusioned.

Experiences can push a person deep into the depths, but also propel them to unimagined heights. The art is in seeing what role

you yourself play in that. How, even in seemingly dark times, you can still find glimmers of light – simply because you get to be here, and to experience this life, here and now, as it is. Nothing is as absolute as it seems, because we fill everything in ourselves, from our own perspective. I hope that what I'm trying to put into words here, as best I can, gives you a little nudge to look at things differently – to open your heart a little wider, and to forgive yourself and others for their fumbling. Or maybe you're already (almost) enlightened. That's entirely possible too..

### **Unwarranted Optimism and the Softer Volume Control**

Let's be honest, the only thing a person truly wants deep down is to be happy. That's true for me, but I think I see it in everyone. The pursuit of that, however, takes on the strangest forms. Our minds mess it all up. The thinking and the control we want to exert over our lives lead to the weirdest behavior. Purely because we want to avoid our fears and suffering by changing our circumstances, manipulating them, seeking happiness outside ourselves, and thinking that if the world bends to our will, we'll surely be happy forever.

I started writing my first book around the age of thirty. It was supposed to be a book about happiness, because I was going through a period at the time when I thought I was truly happy – the kind of happiness that feels almost tangible, as if it's in your bones and fills your lungs with every breath. I wanted to capture

that feeling, put it into words, so that it wouldn't just exist inside me but could also live somewhere outside of me. I thought: if I write it down, it will remain, even if the feeling itself fades again. A sort of bookmark for my feeling. That was the dream, anyway.

Apparently, I didn't manage to do that back then; several decades have passed since then. There are still a few notebooks lying around somewhere, and there are some loose documents on an old hard drive – fragments of chapters that never got beyond a few pages. It all came to nothing but good intentions and a handful of sentences that now, looking back, feel almost embarrassingly optimistic.

I always got bogged down straight away in all the technical stuff. How many chapters should it have? Which writing style suited me? Which font felt 'authentic'? Should I use quotation marks in dialogue, or not? And what about the layout, the indents, the blank lines? It all became exhausting very quickly. Actually, I did everything I could to put off the actual writing a bit, to drag it out. It was a form of procrastination that took itself very seriously: I called it 'preparation'. For a while, my ego thought it was all brilliant, until it lost interest.

Back then, I simply had less time than I do now, much less. A full-time job, a new relationship, social obligations, weekends that were already fully booked before they'd even begun. Life in top gear, with no pause button. I still had high expectations of myself (and of others). Now that I'm almost fifty, my mind is mainly occupied with replaying everything I've seen happen hundreds of times before. The same patterns, the same discussions, the same

human dynamics that recur time and again, packaged just slightly differently. It sometimes feels like an endless repetition of a play whose script I've known by heart for a long time.

That feeling as if you've seen it all before, experienced it all before. And the things you haven't seen yet... they matter less than they used to, back when everything still seemed new. You've already experienced them, so to speak, by extrapolation. Thanks to an intuition honed over the years – which people often develop naturally – you can see how things are likely to turn out: the same pitfalls, the same illusions, the same small victories and disappointments. It's almost soothing, but also a bit hollow.

I've reached the point where, through experience, I understand why people get worked up about things – a political debate, a career move, an argument, someone else's judgement. I get it, intellectually. But I don't want to get involved in it myself anymore. It takes too much energy, and for what? Everything is temporary, even the things we get most worked up about.

When you're young, everything matters; everything feels important and urgent. Every rejection is a disaster, every opportunity a turning point, every day a chance to change the world or, at the very least, carve out your own place in it. But there comes a turning point, even if it happens very gradually, almost imperceptibly. Then nothing really matters anymore, or at least much less so. It is as if the volume knob of life is slowly being turned down. Not out of gloom, but out of a kind of quiet acceptance.

As I write this down, I realise that this isn't the absolute truth. Because I can well imagine that there are still things that certain-

ly matter. If I make the effort, if I invest in them. I feel that at times I have closed my heart, fuelled by disappointments in my life, and it is very easy to give up. Exactly what I was talking about at the start of this chapter. The path from fear to love is a winding one.

*I started off so positively and now I sound a bit down... See, that's what life does to me. One moment I think I'm the epitome of wisdom. The next, my ego has completely taken over again with its thinking.*

### **The Techno-Optimist and the Machine**

*On a slightly different note. Let's get a bit meta and see if it cheers me up. So, I wanted to write a book about happiness when I turned thirty. Back then, that was understandable and commendable, but does writing a book myself actually still make sense these days? Isn't that a bit naive? With all this artificial intelligence and whatnot.*

In this age of AI, I do sometimes wonder whether writing by hand still has a future. What if a machine can generate everything I come up with much faster and in endless variations? It sometimes feels unfair that people who used to struggle for hours can now produce a perfect text in seconds. It's as if the finish line has moved closer for everyone, except for those who actually enjoy the journey. We seem to be caught in a bizarre repeat of the Industrial Revolution: in the past, we built machines to lighten our

physical workload; now we build machines to take over our creativity.

I can't help but think of a meme I saw somewhere on X a few years ago (back when it was still called Twitter): ultimately, we – flesh-and-blood humans – end up doing all the boring chores around the house. Cleaning, washing up, folding the laundry. And AI? It takes photos, paints, writes books, composes music and makes stunning videos.

It seems we've really got ourselves into a bit of a mess. We've handed over the fun, creative tasks to machines, leaving the 'crap jobs' for ourselves. And just as with the Industrial Revolution, many people don't feel liberated, but rather redundant.

But I'm a techno-optimist. Or at least, that's what I like to call myself – although I'm not really one for the constraints of labels. If I do have the freedom to choose between the two camps, I'd rather be an optimist than a pessimist. That in itself makes me feel better, regardless of the outcome. So I expect that this whole development will ultimately work out well for us. Not because AI will replace us, but precisely because it will force us to dig deeper into what is truly human. What a machine cannot replicate, no matter how good it becomes: the unique, messy, inconsistent, sometimes painful, sometimes hilarious lens of a single life. The scars, the scent of a memory, the broken sentences you only type when you're lying awake in the middle of the night, the smell of coffee still lingering on your fingers as you write about a lost love. That sort of thing.

AI can repeat, combine and optimise patterns. But it has no history of a grandmother who always put a little too much sugar in her tea, no shame over a failed relationship, no nostalgia for a home that no longer stands. And it is precisely those kinds of things that ultimately make a story human. Not perfect, not flawless, but true.

So I reckon it's still perfectly fine to write a book the 'old-school' way. Especially if you're doing it mainly for the sake of writing itself. If the process gives you pleasure. If you feel you're drawing something out of yourself that would never have emerged otherwise. And if you don't really mind whether anyone ever reads it or not – or at most a handful of people, friends, a few strangers who happen to come across the text and recognise something in it.

That's how I see it for now, anyway. I don't see AI as a competitor, but as a tool. A really good pen, an endless thesaurus, a quick first reader. But the story? That remains mine. The doubt, the shame, the pride, the clumsy sentences that I leave in anyway because they feel like the truth – you can't train that on a dataset.

Perhaps this story won't be published in the end. Perhaps no one will read it. Perhaps it's rubbish. But I've written it, with good intentions. To share my experiences, in the hope that someone might find it useful. With my own hands, in my own time, in my own way. And that alone feels like a small victory over the machine. Over the blank page. Over myself.

And that's enough. For now.

## Arrogant Happiness

So, I once wanted to write about ‘being happy’ in order to share that feeling with everyone. That’s what happy people want to do, I realise in hindsight. They’re arrogant enough to think it’s contagious. Whereas, as I’ve since learnt, their behaviour can actually be extremely irritating. And – worse still – they underestimate the transience of their happiness; they have no idea that it won’t last forever.

Because happiness – that physical state as we experience it as human beings – is not a lasting emotion at all. It’s simply a combination of chemicals in the brain that make us feel good. A dopamine rush. As soon as I realised that, I was disappointed, but also, in a way, liberated. I could stop striving, stop chasing ego-driven goals. And it inspired me to look for the underlying essence of everything, a deeper layer. Perhaps absolute, lasting happiness or a constant sense of peace within oneself, to see if that exists.

*And did I find it?*

Yes, but it was completely different from what I’d expected. We’re going to talk about it – about fear, love, and what it’s like to be almost enlightened, but never quite.