

## **I've started so I'll finish**

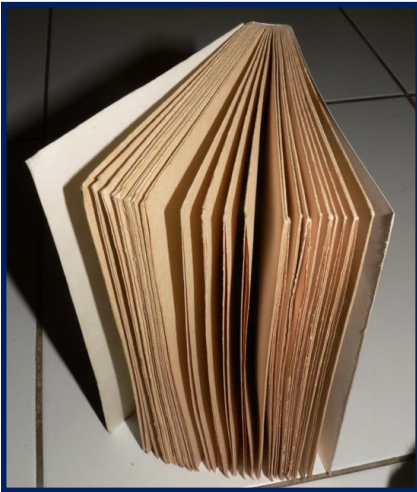
Good reasons to stick with bad books – and other lessons in resilience

Edmund Dudley

Budapest, 23 August 2018



# Frustrating experiences



a boring book

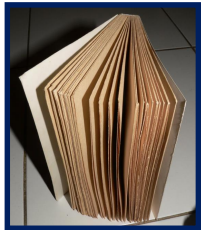


a delayed  
flight



last-minute  
cover

# The fruits of frustration



- Feeling of being stuck
- Feeling of injustice
- Feeling of apprehension and gloom



Road rage

- ...ready to hit someone?
- road rage is “the quintessential example of misspent energy” – Sam Harris

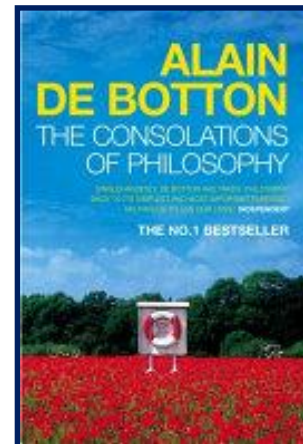
# Angry? You're too optimistic!

According to the Stoic philosophers, anger and frustration are caused by having expectations which are **too high**



“We will cease to be so angry once we cease to be so hopeful”

Alain de Botton *The Consolations of Philosophy*



# When rain is forecast, there are four options

Which one would you advise?

- Accept it  
get an umbrella
- Ignore it  
get soaked
- Escape it  
get away
- Rage about it  
get an ulcer

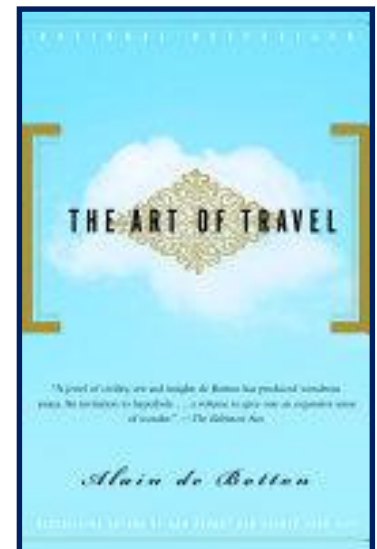


# The problem with holidays

How do you get away from yourself?

“It seems we may best be able to inhabit a place when we are not faced with the additional challenge of having to be there.”

Alain de Botton *The Art of Travel*



# Lessons in resilience

1/7

**I can't get away from myself.**

# Getting used to ourselves

Concerning ourselves with what we can control

## Under Our Control

Our thoughts

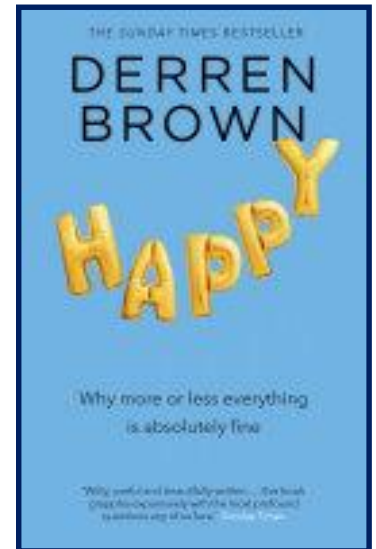
Our actions

## Not Under Our Control

Everything else

Epictetus *Enchiridion*

(paraphrased in Derren Brown *Happy*)





# Lessons in resilience

2/7

I can't get away from myself.

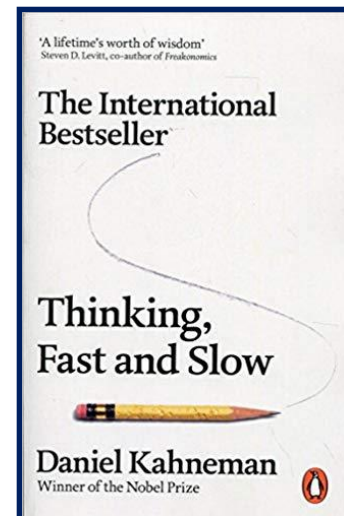
**I can only control my thoughts and my actions.**

# At the time – and thinking back

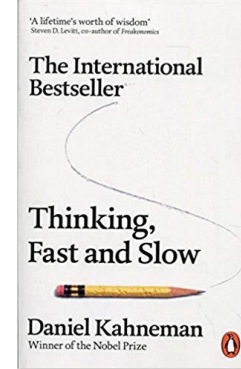
## Experience and memory

- Experiencing self
  - in-the-moment sensations of experience
  - transitory
  
- Remembering self
  - how we experience events retrospectively
  - permanent, influential

Daniel Kahneman – *Thinking, Fast and Slow*



# Remembering pain



Which two of the three factors below influence how we look back on a painful experience (e.g. a medical procedure)?

Which factor has **no** effect on our memory of the experience?

Duration of  
pain

Peak pain-  
level

End pain-level

# Lessons in resilience

3/7

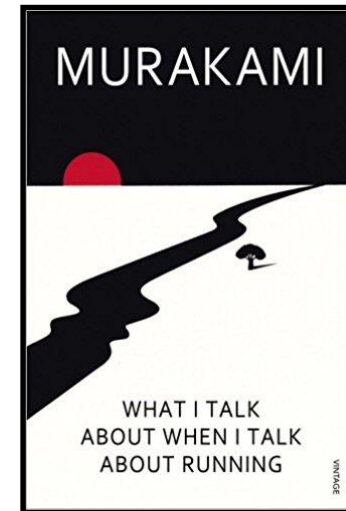
I can't get away from myself.

I can only control my thoughts and my actions.

**If I have some control over how I experience an event, I can change the way I will remember it.**

# Why suffer?

“Pain is inevitable.  
Suffering is optional.”



Haruki Murakami - *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*

## Back to School 😊

How are you right now (this minute)?

How was the last school year?

The new school year is about to begin.

How do you think will you look back on it this time next year?

The Past

The future

**NOW**

# How important is the present moment?

- Is it a narrow segment of our overall experience?
- Or is it all we have?



## Looking back on next year

Remember when Hermione Granger managed to be in two places at once in Hogwarts?



We can't go back in time

But we can bridge time in another way:

Using the present moment to shape future memories



# What did Dumbledore say to Harry?

Was he right?

**It is our choices, Harry,  
that show what we truly are,  
far more than our abilities.**

*Harry Potter and the Chamber  
of Secrets*



# Lessons in resilience

4/7

I can't get away from myself.

I can only control my thoughts and my actions.

If I have some control over how I experience an event, I can change the way I will remember it.

**My choices matter more than my abilities.**

# The Harry Potter books

What are they actually about?

- a) The power of magic?
- b) Wizarding techniques?
- c) Hardship, sacrifice, courage, love?



# JK Rowling's legacy

What her characters teach us



- Life is a constant struggle – against ourselves
- Human qualities are more powerful than any magic
- The finest people are full of doubts and insecurities...
- ...they also value friendship, loyalty, courage, sacrifice and learning
- There are no shortcuts for study and hard work
- Good teachers leave you with more questions than answers
- We should probably read more

# Reading survey

## Part 1

- When in your life did you spend the most time reading?
- Did you read more when you were twenty or do you read more now?
- What accounts for the differences?
- Would you like (ideally) to spend more time reading?
- Why (not)?



# Reading survey

## Part 2

You're reading a book. After about 50 pages you realise that you're not enjoying it.

What do you do?

- a) Stop reading it and start a new book
- b) Come back to it later (next month, next year...)
- c) Read it through to the end

Why?



# Reasons to finish the books you start

Here are the difficulties:

- I'm not enjoying it
- I'm tired
- I'm distracted
- There's no time
- I'm afraid of failure

Here are the solutions:

- Don't read to enjoy;  
read to read
- Just five pages
- Airplane mode
- Read instead of ...
- This is about choices,  
not abilities

# Reasons to finish the books you start

## The Peak-End Rule in action

- *Experiencing Self vs Remembering Self*

When you give up on a bad book:

*Experiencing* self: feels impatient/annoyed/judgemental

*Remembering* self: feels dissatisfied (with book + self!)

When you persevere with a bad book:

*Experiencing* self: feels challenged/self-conscious

*Remembering* self: feels worthy/stronger



# Lessons in resilience

5/7

I can't get away from myself.

I can only control my thoughts and my actions.

If I have some control over how I experience an event, I can change the way I will remember it.

My choices matter more than my abilities.

**If I finish all the books I start, I'll think harder about my choices, feel better about my reading – and read more.**

# Grit

The importance of effort

Two components:

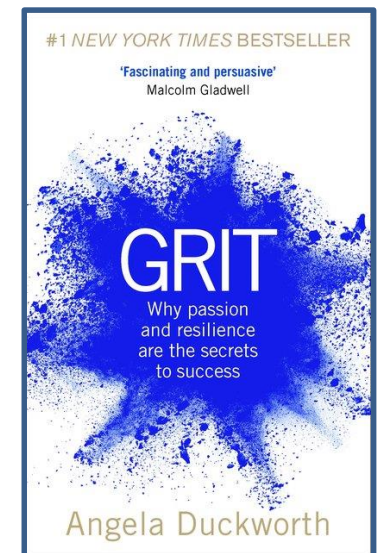
**passion** (staying focused)

**perseverance** (bouncing back from setbacks)

talent x **effort** = skill

skill x **effort** = achievement

Angela Duckworth *Grit*



# Lessons in resilience

6/7

I can't get away from myself.

I can only control my thoughts and my actions.

If I have some control over how I experience an event, I can change the way I will remember it.

My choices matter more than my abilities.

If I finish all the books I start, I'll think harder about my choices, feel better about my reading – and read more.

**When perseverance leads to success, it becomes a habit**

# Frustrating experiences?

“for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”  
*Hamlet*

This book is really boring! ☹️

In 10 pages, there will only be 15 pages left in the chapter!



I can't believe the stupid flight is delayed! ☹️

What's the best way to spend the next four hours?



Not again! ☹️

Time try out some of those activities from the OUP intensive course!



# Lessons in resilience

7/7

I can't get away from myself.

I can only control my thoughts and my actions.

If I have some control over how I experience an event, I can change the way I will remember it.

My choices matter more than my abilities.

If I finish all the books I start, I'll think harder about my choices, feel better about my reading – and read more.

When perseverance leads to success, it becomes a habit.

**Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.**

## References

Brown, D (2016) *Happy*

de Botton, A (2002) *The Art of Travel*

de Botton, A (2000) *The Consolations of Philosophy*

Duckworth, A (2016) *Grit*

Kahneman, D (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

Murakami, H (2007) *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*

Rowling, JK (1998) *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Sam Harris on road rage: <https://samharris.org/podcasts/the-lessons-of-death/>

## **I've started so I'll finish**

Good reasons to stick with bad books – and other lessons in resilience

Edmund Dudley

Budapest, 23 August 2018

Slides here:

[legyened.edublogs.org](https://legyened.edublogs.org)



edtothemund

DOMI

MINA