

FS News Winter? Edition

Hello Everyone!

I truly hope you are doing okay. I've been hearing grim news from folks in various locations, sharing stories of extreme challenges, and I just want you to know that I think about you a lot. In 2016, it seemed like we were turning a corner and prisons were becoming more humane. Now I hear that folks are suffering greatly in many locations.

I've heard it said that democratic leaders will bring about the change and care that we need, but that is not what I'm seeing today. (this is NOT to claim that any party is better, just to refute the supposition that dem's automatically 'care')

In WI, under our democratic governor's watch, three people have died, within four months, in one of our state's prisons. From a November article by Isiah Holmes, I learned that "The DOC says the lockdown has been in response to staffing shortages and behavioral issues among prison residents. The DOC's vacancy dashboard shows that Waupun has a 52.8% staff vacancy rate." Things are so bad that "a Federal lawsuit has been filed in federal court against the Department of Corrections (DOC), blasting conditions at the Waupun Correctional Institution (WCI) as "cruel and unusual conditions of confinement." The article can be found here: <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/third-death-at-waupun-prison-reported/>

Under a democratic president's watch, a recent article by Stephanie Sandoval had this headline: "Justice Department report finds federal prison failures lead to deaths." The report notes "several problems, like lack of security cameras and staffing shortages forcing health care workers to work guard shifts, and a number of inaccurate mental health screenings for inmates who ultimately died by suicide." In fact, "of the 344 inmates in federal prison who died between 2014 and 2021, more than half of those deaths - 187 total - were suicides." I found this article here: <https://www.tmj4.com/justice-department-report-finds-federal-prison-failures-lead-to-deaths>

Even the National Reentry Resource Center has "discontinued the directory"!

Since, clearly, there is no longer a broad commitment to reform, we will just have to do what we can from wherever we are.

In utter defiance of our mandatory schooling, we can build on the few tools that we were given, like reading, to obtain the critical information necessary for life - in a democratic society. We can learn to understand ourselves, we can learn how to listen to and work with others, we can learn how to think critically so we can make good decisions, and we can learn how to drive our destiny. We can also learn how to jujitsu emotions so they better serve us, and we can focus on seeing the world we want to live in, and what role we can play in making it a reality.

I believe the two neuroscientists below can help us. They both have TED talks, so if you are in a facility that offers opportunities to watch these recordings, you may wish to check them out. I will list them first with a link to the TED talk followed by titles of the books they've written. (Start a new message to me with FREE BOOKS in the subject line if you need the list of free book programs.)

But before I do that, I have to give a SHOUT OUT TO THE DONORS! Fair Shake's donors are the best. They send support in all shapes and sizes, including stamps and stamped envelopes so that we, together, send flyers of support to the folks in state prisons and jails, all around the country, who are not able to connect with me here. Thank you!! Ubuntu!!

Now to prepare for the future! The scientists below can help us become stronger, more flexible and better able to adapt to change by understanding how we make sense of ourselves, others and the world. These could be our most valuable tools to deal with the challenges that lie ahead, and to create a satisfying life.

LISA FELDMAN BARRETT - TED talk: You aren't at the mercy of your emotions <https://tinyurl.com/mvj8h86w>
(If you would like to read the transcript, please start a new message to me with LFB as the subject)
BOOKS: How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain & 7½ Lessons About the Brain

Lisa Feldman Barrett studies how our brains predict the external world to make sense in our internal world, and how we interpret feelings and experiences to make meaning and emotions.

ANIL SETH – TED talk: How your brain invents your “self” <http://tinyurl.com/3b566xh4>
(Sorry, I don't have the transcript for this TED talk)

BOOK: BEING YOU: A New Science of Consciousness

Anil Seth explores how we experience consciousness and how our brains evolved to regulate our bodies which became the way we understand our sense of 'self' and our inner and outer worlds.

Drive your future by understanding How Emotions Are Made!

Lisa Feldman Barrett, PhD has been studying emotions for 25 years and is one of the top-cited scientists for her revolutionary research in psychology and neuroscience. She has made fundamental contributions to understanding that anger, sadness, fear, and other emotions are flexible biological categories, challenging conventional wisdom that emotions are innate and universal. Her research completely flips established beliefs about emotions and about our brains.

Barrett tells us “You have more control over your emotions than you might imagine. You have the capacity to turn down the dial on emotional suffering and its consequences by learning how to construct your experiences differently which will help you get control of your life.” She encourages us to try new things and learn new things because “the actions and the experiences that you make today become your brain's predictions for tomorrow.” Giving our brains more options to choose from, can expand our beliefs about the world around us.

Barrett tells us that being ‘responsible’ for something doesn't mean we are to blame for our emotions, it just means that we are the only ones who can change them. She says “You can get your “butterflies” flying in formation by shifting the arousal (anxiety, self-doubt, etc) into determination. The more concepts your brain can construct, the more you'll be able to reduce the negative effects from your past experiences. Everything that you experience today becomes a past that your brain will draw on in the future to make predictions that automatically and effortlessly control your actions and construct your experience. If you invest effort today - to give yourself new experiences, to try new things, and learn new things - you're basically seeding your brain to predict differently in the future.”

She says “We invest in exercising and we invest in learning skills. With practice, effortful things become effortless and automatic. If you cultivate new experiences, curate new opportunities to learn, you're investing energy in changing your behavior, changing your way of looking at things and change your abilities, potential and life!”

Even if something bad happened to us, we may not be culpable for the event, but we are the only one who can change how we feel about it...and how we will feel in the future. If you have experienced something traumatic in your life, it's like you're victimized twice: first the actual bad thing happened to you, and then you continue to suffer the consequences in the future. Learning that we're the only one who can fix those long term consequences feels unfair...and it is unfair...but it's also kind of inspiring because it means that you can take the reins of your own life.

Anil Seth's work runs along a similar line. He studies consciousness and the experience of being you. Very much like Barrett, he understands that the brain is a “prediction machine” that is constantly generating best-guess causes of its sensory inputs. He says ““We don't perceive the world as it is, we perceive it as it is useful for us to do so. The purpose of perception is to guide action and behavior – to promote our prospects of survival. The self is not an immutable entity that lurks behind the windows of the eyes, looking out into the world and controlling the body as a pilot controls a plane. It may seem as though the self – your self – is the ‘thing’ that does the perceiving. But this is not how things are. The self is another perception. From the sense of personal identity – like being a son, or a scientist – to experiences of having a body, and of simply ‘being’ a body, the many and varied elements of selfhood are best guesses, designed by evolution to keep you alive.” His research also shows that we are much more likely to perceive things we expect.

I share the work of Seth and Barrett because we are going to need the best tools we can find to make sense of the world in the coming years. With an increased understanding about ourselves, we can make better choices, expand our capabilities, handle continuous learning and growth, and help those around us to do the same. I know I don't have to tell you that a tidal wave of fakeness is rising on all sides - from network news – with it's

partial stories, and magazine articles - many written by AI, and hackers with deep fakes, and yakking podcasters telling us what we 'should' do - we're going to need to be strong to say no to their demands to distract us! We're going to have to be good listeners, to help our children resist the soul-crushing effects of social media. And we're going to have to help our communities see that we will be stronger together. We can start our training right now.

WISCONSIN SUBSCRIBERS:

Sadly, Fair Shake will not be able to send the newsletter through the 'Getting Out' email service. I tried to find out if I could send the newsletter without signing up but they don't offer that information. So I signed up, found out how limiting they are, and now I cannot even delete my account. ("ViaPath must deny your request to delete the personal information.") Moving forward, if you have outside supporters, they can print and mail, or copy and email (!) the newsletter from the Fair Shake website (fairshake.net/fair-shake-newsletter) and send it to you. If you'd like to continue to receive it from me, please send a S.A.S.E. every 2 months or so and I'll pack it full of the latest news and any articles that were offered with it.

FREE subscription to the College Inside newsletter!

Write to : Open Campus 2460 17th Avenue #1015, Santa Cruz, CA 95062

PRISON SCHOLAR FUND

From their website: "Our nation's prisons are full...full of potential! At The Prison Scholar Fund, we believe that incarcerated individuals deserve a second chance at a better life. The Scholar Fund provides education and employment assistance to help incarcerated people succeed and thrive in society while avoiding homelessness and the revolving door of reincarceration. If you're interested in receiving more information, write your responses to the questions below and mail them, with a SASE, to:

The Prison Scholar Fund
1752 NW Market Street, #953
Seattle, WA 98107

REQUIRED INFO: Date Last Name First Name Middle Name ID Number
Address: Location (e.g. Prison Name) Mailing and Shipping Address, City State Zip Code

OPTIONAL questions to answer:

How did you hear about the Prison Scholar Fund?

Why are you interested in contacting the Prison Scholar Fund?

Gender, Education level to date, Age, Heritage

QUOTES

"The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes". - Marcel Proust

You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The cure to boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity." ~ Dorothy Parker

"Never confuse education with intelligence, you can have a PhD and still be an idiot." - Richard P. Feynman

"Color is the place where our brain meets the universe." - Paul Cezanne

"It takes courage to be free." Faith Ringgold

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." - Teddy Roosevelt

"The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones." John Maynard Keynes

To our successful transitions and brighter futures!

Ubuntu, ~ sue

As always, remember to find support in your phone-gizmo: Fairshake.net & National Reentry Helpline (24/7): 844-916-2577

FREE REENTRY BOOK: "Mapping Your Future" Write to: Education Justice Project 1001 South Wright Street Champaign, IL 61820

Newsletters are available at FairShake.net for your family and friends to read or print.

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