

“Being alone”

Two essays

by

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The Loner

Introduction

People see loners, or those who predominately live life alone (or with a very restricted group of people) as individuals who have something wrong with themselves. However, some choose solitude for positive reasons, and others have circumstances thrust on them. In other words, they don't make some kind of flawed pathological choice.

People who avoid others are almost always viewed with suspicion, because we are a social breed of creatures. You could write a huge volume on the social/societal history of mankind alone. I'm taking these assertions for granted.

However, some people find existing outside of structures of people better for them. That doesn't necessarily make them a maverick, as described in my previous essay. It is more to do with

psychological needs such as anxiety management.

Depression

Everybody lives on a mood scale. You don't need to have mood disorders like bipolar, mania, or unipolar depression, to find relevance in such a metric.

People with diagnosed mood disorders manifest greater extremes on mood scales (from deep depression to severe mania) but we all have good days and bad days.

People suffering from depression tend to want to isolate themselves from others, whilst the hypomanic are more gregarious. It's quite self-evident, and again, out of the scope of this book why that might be.

So, given that mood is an indicator for mixing with others, it's probably fair to say that the aloof tends to be more on the depressed side of the scale than the elevated.

The saying "solitude is the school of genius" suggests that time spent alone and without external distractions can foster creativity and intellectual development. This idea, often attributed to historian Edward Gibbon, implies that reflection and inward thinking, free from social pressures and immediate demands, can lead to deeper insights and innovative ideas.

(Likewise, the manic extreme can lead to powerful thought.). It is no wonder creative brilliance is found in those with mood disorders. The psychiatrist Anthony Storr studied creativity in his book, "Solitude", and insisted that intimate relationships are not the only path to happiness.

Social behaviour

Arguably, the primary task of the parent is for them to make their children attractive to other children, so other children want to make friends and play with them. Taking it to its logical conclusion, that becomes an essential equivalent aspect for success as adults.

Broken homes, financial deprivation, poorly parented parents, etc., all get in the way of this happening. And again, this is yet another huge subject, but suffice to say, things go wrong with children, and they don't relate to other children easily. They have behavioural issues, fight, withdraw, self-harm, whatever; and without interventions they grow up to become adults with issues.

One of the problems a child may have is growing up with excessive pride. For a long time, I have suspected that being a motivating factor of the traditional tramp's lifestyle of avoidance.

Avoidance of any societal form may or may not be linked with alcohol, and a chicken and egg situation can exist there, as is the case with harder drugs and social isolation. Whilst drugs and alcohol don't always lead to the life of a loner, a subculture can be achieved of paradoxical mutual aloneness.

Healthier aloneness

Today, old and new options are available to people to channel their natural loner characteristics in much better ways than hedonistic ones. They just need to pass any self-destructive urges of retribution for what might have happened to themselves: so, fishing, pet ownership, musical instrument study, and these days, a social media presence, for example. I employed all of them.

Fishing is a particularly interesting pastime, because whilst fishermen and women look physically alone in nature, they don't appear as lonely. Music and dog walking are great social ice breakers, and the question as to whether social media is real socialising is being borne out relentlessly.

Psychology

One might presume the loner has achieved consciousness, because the natural mode is to be with people. That is going to initially manifest as aloofness, until greater social and self-understanding is achieved, at which point it becomes a choice, and ironically, greater integration may seem apparent (the being lonely in a crowd scenario, but even for loners, having some necessity to mix: possibly occupationally).

The loner tends to be introverted rather than extroverted, and as such, they can learn how to be with people, but need time alone to “recharge” afterwards, in contrast to the extrovert that “charges” up by interacting.

There’s a difference between a loner and an introvert. You might not relate to people, as in the loner, but need to hangout with them, as in the extrovert. That can be the position of the sociopath, which is not compatible with the

passivity of the loner, who may be happy to walk his or her dog, go fishing, play the piano, and post pictures on social media.

Conclusions

The loner may be viewed with suspicion, but their behaviour might, for example, be motivated by psychological needs fueled by anxiety and depression.

Solitude can be the school of genius for some, with mania sometimes playing a visiting part in that. Anthony Storr insisted that intimate relationships aren't the only root to human happiness. However, the primary job of most parents is to try to make their offspring as likeable as possible. Often is the case though, that we develop behavioural issues and enter subcultures as adults, sometimes abusing substances, etc.

In closing though, it is probably fair to say that the loner is a psychologically advanced individual, because rather than finding their position by random chance, they are conscious, thinking individuals.

The Maverick

My earlier books

Much of my earlier work focused on the individual and ego. I sometimes described it as individualism, but it was sadly written off straight away by some as selfishness, but it wasn't related to that form of the word. Rather, I described an equally opposite and consequently respectful version of individualism, i.e., of being oneself and recognising that in others, so more like humility than anything greedy or unthinking. See for example my book, "I am - Conforming by nonconformity". You can find it on my website.

Ego was often talked about as a hinderance to individualism. It was linked more to identities that tended to pigeonhole people into a wide range of groups at every conceptual level.

Rather than cover the fundamental ground of the individual, and the point of being one, the current book talks about the ramification of such a mode of being. Primarily, that's the maverick stance. What is the maverick? What's the role of the maverick, the point of the maverick, the pros, cons and more?

Maverick or individual?

You can be an individual whilst not being a maverick. The word individual describes a mindset. It suggests a person who doesn't identify with groups, and doesn't assimilate group's thoughts, but rather they think for themselves, and see themselves as different from the crowd (but not in an arrogant manner, that's the position of the egotist).

A maverick goes further. Not only do they think for themselves, but they act in their own manner too. This is clearly expressed in the arts, and history has many examples of pioneers who were ahead of their time and otherwise special, often only being recognised for brilliance after their passing.

Franz Kafka - His works, including *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, were largely unpublished during his lifetime. His friend Max

Brod defied Kafka's wishes to destroy his manuscripts, ensuring his legacy.

Eva Cassidy - The soulful singer who performed in small clubs, only became famous after her death when her rendition of Over the Rainbow was played on British radio.

Vincent van Gogh - Despite creating over 2,000 artworks, he allegedly only sold one in his lifetime. His genius was recognised only after his tragic death.

It can be a fine line between the maverick and the egotist, because to be a maverick can clearly require self-belief, but self-belief can have to stand against broader public opinion. At best the maverick may be viewed as eccentric, or by the labelling and group orientated many, as an "eccentric".

However, a proactive individual path through life is not always a choice, and with sufficient

application, the subjective side of the mind can flourish and produce work, or aspects that are fresh, and may show little evidence of objective past influences. This relates to the sciences, arts and all disciplines, but essentially, I think a maverick is a sort of proactive individual, and one with healthy self-confidence.

How do you become a maverick?

This has already been alluded to, i.e., you develop free thinking and become active in a chosen field.

However, how do you become active in a chosen field whilst becoming free thinking? Mostly people study a subject academically and cover all the innovators that had historically been prominent, specifically, what they did. After thoroughly understanding the state of play of a current field, you might do something so different as to be considered a maverick. You've metaphorically "done your dues to the Blues", and you may be recognised for it, with respect and admiration in your lifetime. But you are more likely to be viewed as a "genius" than a "maverick". Of course, Albert Einstein studied physics before coming up with his **Theory of Relativity**. He studied at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic School in Zürich, Switzerland. Einstein enrolled in 1896 and graduated in 1900

with a diploma in mathematics and physics. His time at the Polytechnic was marked by his independent thinking and occasional clashes with professors, but it laid the foundation for his groundbreaking work in theoretical physics.

A maverick is more like “a natural” and perhaps could never be an “Einstein”. My own writing stems from life experiences with no formal studying of the humanities. That’s because I suffer from functional illiteracy. Whereas I learned how to write to a useful standard on a poetry course, I never became a proficient reader, so I don’t academically regurgitate other writers work, I just go straight from my life experiences. I may reinvent the wheel, but as I have pointed out before: it is valid because I strengthen the preexisting wisdom, and if everyone did so, it would lead to greater common sense for all.

Becoming a maverick, therefore, is a bit paradoxical. You need to study a skill to perform

a skill, but to study is academic, however, mavericks need to be quite adapted in their skills. There lies the secret though, I realised this most clearly after studying backpropagation neural networks on my 1993/94 MSc in computing course.

Those systems take in information, and each piece of information has an output, or result. Initially you train them. You say if I give you X I want you to give me Y. And you do that a lot. Then, when training is over, you give them Z. They've never seen that before, and you ask them their thoughts.

The brain is similar, and this is how the maverick's skills can evolve. Given enough objective information, related skills, and general experience, a skill set, or empirical knowledge, can emerge from the overall primordial soup of the whole.

Pros and cons

The pros of becoming a maverick are an even greater sense of individuality than that which is achieved by not being a maverick, and with the satisfaction of having something tangible to demonstrate one's uniqueness. So many people these days resort to buying tattoos or other skin-deep declarations of difference.

The main drawback of being a maverick is that most others don't recognise your skills, or difference. Logically, if anyone or anything from academia validates you, then they or it necessarily also say that the academical is not really needed, i.e., it is unnecessary and can therefore be passed by. Frankly, if nothing else, that does not make economic sense.

Study, courses and degrees, are in fact part of the broader system. However, universities do recognise work done as opposed to exam experiences in mature applicants. And the Royal

Academy summer exhibition is the world's oldest open submission opportunity for visual artists.

Other chances appear, for example, in the main poetry prizes of the Forward, Bridport, Poetry society, and others. They allow a similar open chance for poets each year, and lesser-knowns occasionally triumph. Caleb Femi won the Forward in 2021 with little experience and a debut collection called *Poor*, written in the previous year.

You might ask, “is it better to be a maverick than not?”, and the simple answer is that it's not a choice as such. Much like the neural network doesn't get to decide its training, the maverick doesn't choose. Life just happens for most people, and by making the best out of what you get (the *Forrest Gump's* mother box of chocolates analogy), some great stuff can happen.

Having said that, we're all born with different potentials, and some are gifted, whereas others slog. Some are both at once!

Would you want to be a maverick?

This is where we get circular. How long is a piece of string?

I certainly view myself as a maverick. Suffering from severe depression, and on paper an out-and-out scientist, I started piano from scratch soon after my first graduation.

I took me four attempts to pass O level English language, yet I had the audacity to enroll on a poetry course in my early thirties.

I succeeded in both music and poetry, even earning two science degrees that complement those arts subjects.

My mother still maintains to this day in my late fifties, that piano saved my life. I even taught many others, some successfully at advanced levels.

I overcame my depression by restarting my life from scratch. For me, depression manifested as fundamentally living a very incompatible life for my soul.

Such a story alone made me unusual, and coupled with my functional illiteracy, I was on a path for an interesting skill set: science, music, poetry, mental health recovery, and religion in fact.

My writing gained a voice, and even if I have reinvented the wheel at times, I've done so in ignorance of that, and I feel I'm nonetheless for it, because I've reaffirmed wisdom from first principles, and therefore added credence to it. That's made my work feel worthwhile to me. And every time I see any of my thoughts echoed by another writer/thinker, it boosts me. I've not plagiarised, because I wasn't aware of other's work.

So, yes, be a maverick, unless you want a standard career!

Conclusions

You don't set out to be a maverick. You can more easily manufacture eccentricity though. There's a place for mavericks, but the workplace tends to play safe and hire traditionally educated and qualified academics.

There are some paths into academia, and the system, for mavericks, but they are limited to the likes of anonymous competition and privileges of maturity.

Some of the greatest creatives were mavericks who in their own lifetimes were not recognised for their work. One of the most obvious and extreme examples was Vincent van Gogh.

Some people would be belittled if you called them a maverick. Albert Einstein, for example, argued with his college professors, and ultimately developed the Theory of Relativity. He explained the intractable relationship between mass and

energy, $E=mc^2$), and he has affected us all ever since. That's genius not maverick behaviour.

Even when mavericks discover the already discovered, due to lack of formal training, it is worthwhile, because it strengthens their own sense of being, and that existing wisdom's credence.

Not enough people investigate subjects in a more informal manner. People in westernised countries are programmed to formally study disciplines. They are made to feel it is the only way to learn something. The ultimate certificate validating their study seems an essential element in the process. For that reason, ironically, academic institutions stifle, as well as educate. Or put another way, they monopolise.

In a simpler scenario, you would assume learning is freer, and its results are better received, in poor countries. If something works,

then it works. It's certainly not about money, a system, or academic pride/egos.

Fine