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Disclaimer

The question is, 'Are you happy?'

There are other questions of course, questions it would be equally useful to dwell on, questions such as 'How can I be good?', or 'What do I need to know?', 'What can I forget?' (names? dates?), 'How often does a person need to told?'; 'Which way fate?', 'Is this really what you expected?', 'What more can I do to promote a just society?', 'Is more less?', 'I mean *really*, what you expected?', 'In what state, if there was such a thing, would I find my eternal soul?'

These are big questions; questions to which great minds have dedicated a lifetime's head-scratching, over which much tea has been slurped, and many a pair of shoulders hunched. Then there are others, smaller if in their own way no less pressing questions, questions such as, 'How hard should I work?', and 'Relative, say, to a butcher, how much money should I make?', and 'Who pays?', and then again, 'Who pays?', and 'If this is not what I expected, then what did I expect?', and 'How do I measure up?', and 'In what circumstances is it appropriate to discriminate?', and 'What price frankness?', and 'When is it appropriate to make an offering?'. A particular favourite of mine is, 'Should I choose my words carefully?', or rather, 'Should I choose my words carefully, or with great care?', or 'Jesus, how much does a person really have to put it up with?', and 'Who audits the auditors?', 'And then again, who pays?'. 'Trust: good or bad?' 'Sincerity: good or bad?' 'Weaselling out of things: how bad is that?' 'What, if anything, has poetry got to do with politics?' 'Should I choose my words carefully?' 'Do I deserve a big house?' 'What price frankness?' 'Does all that alters in fact persist?' 'Is it true that poetry never made anything happen?' It is true, of course, poetry never made anything happen. (Politicians at this point might want to turn to page 34.) 'How comfortable are you?' 'Do you feel relaxed in your universe?' 'Are there some days you feel more than a little hemmed in, like you can't quite breathe, as if there's no possibility of expansion?' 'Looking back at it now, is this what you'd been given to expect?' 'Do you fit the bill?' 'Does the bill fit you?' 'If you were drawing up the bill now, what would it look like?' 'Who pays?' 'How come some people pay more than others?' 'At what point in human history did it all go wrong?' 'If called upon to represent yourself, I mean really represent yourself, clothes and everything, what would you say?' 'Trust: good or bad?' 'Subtlety: good or bad?' 'Taking care: good? or bad?'

The trouble with questioning, of course, is that once you've started it's hard to stop ('Stopping: good or bad?', 'Being stopped?') But since one has to stop somewhere, and since only a madman would try to answer more than one question at time, it is best that for the moment we concentrate on the question we most owe it to ourselves to answer, the question, surely, we were put on God's earth to contemplate ('God: good or bad?') – 'What makes us happy?'

Sex is good. Or at least, good sex is good. Bad sex, it should be underlined, was never anything to write home about. Food also, although clearly here we enter the vexed arena of taste: chowder, say, or croute de pâtés fricassées. Breathing – we should not, and especially in this dark time, forget breathing – the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide with the external world. Circulation generally. The right to remain silent. The willing and unrestricted exercise of limbs. (Pleasure: good or bad?) The historic season of ardor. An acquaintance with bodies not one's own. [By which of course, I mean physical bodies, bodies of land say, or water: funding bodies can go straight to hell.] Freedom (good or bad?). At any rate some degree of autonomy. A small corner of one's existence not given over to getting through. Time (good or bad?). Solidarity (good or bad?). Light entertainment? Moral rectitude? Acting on a whim. Not acting on another person's whim. Trust (good or bad?). Sincerity (good or bad?). Communication: good or bad? 'What, even now, might be undone?' Not watching on as one's whole system of government is reduced to a flicker of personality. And I don't know about you, but I think that would really cheer me up, put the spring back in my step, the proverbial cock back in my hoop. As in cock-a-hoop. As in, 'Today I'm cock-a-hoop'. Not being lied to - although of course you can't ask for everything. Except that you can, actually, ask for everything, that is. It's just that on the whole people don't. What is to be done? Personality: good or bad? Having it all ways. Having stopped.

Not than anybody ever said it would be easy. Only the other day for instance, these and other issues on my mind - the timing of the tides, the strange disappearance of my passport, breakfast, whether, as some people insist, we get the politicians we deserve – I pushed my chair out, walked away from desk. And breathing [oesophagus, lungs, alveoli], I nodded to a neighbour, who sort of nodded back, made my way to the high street, because all that persists does in fact alter, past the florist and the bank towards the new building. Which it has to be said is coming on nicely. There are to be a number of houses above a row of shops, a hall where on Mondays and Thursdays people will be able to learn Pilates, Tuesdays cookery, Fridays ceroc; changing facilities; a meeting house; a forum for debate; a well resourced public library, featuring, in particular, extensive holdings in Greek and Roman thought - a first edition of Rabelais. [Whatever.]

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