

# MINIONS



***we can***



 **JOLT LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**  **2014**

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# CONVICTIONS

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## Don't be so sure...

You should never be sure. Of anything. At all. And I'm serious.

"What!" you scream. "Are you out of your mind? I'm sure of a lot of things!"

Don't care. You can't.

"But... the sky is blue! And  $2+2=4$ ! I can be sure of that, right?"

No.

"Why?!"

Do you even know what 'being sure' means?

"Um..."

Being sure means you give something probability 1. So, you're saying that  $P(\text{sky is blue}) = 1$ . Is that correct.

"Yes!"

Well, then that means nothing you ever see will change your mind. Even if an alien comes to you and says the sky is actually green but they messed up with everyone's brain, even then, you wouldn't change your mind. Even if you started seeing the sky green.

"Hold on... that's not what..."

Yes. Yes it is. Let's just remember Bayes' Theorem, shall we?

$$P(A|B)P(B) = P(B|A)P(A)$$

Suppose you observe the sky being green right now. But you said that  $P(\text{sky is blue}) = 1$ . Let's call  $A$  = the sky is blue and  $B$  = I see a green sky.

$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A)P(A)}{P(B)}$$

But hold on: just how much is  $P(B)$ ?

$$P(B) = P(B|A)P(A) + P(B|\bar{A})P(\bar{A})$$

You just said  $P(\text{sky is blue}) = 1$ , right? So  $P(A) = 1$ , and so:

$$P(\bar{A}) = 1 - P(A) = 0$$

Therefore,



$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A) * 1}{(P(B|A) * 1 + P(B|\bar{A}) * 0)} = \frac{P(B|A)}{P(B|A)} = 1$$

So, basically, you just said that  $P(\text{sky is blue} \mid \text{I see a green sky}) = 1$ . I just proved mathematically that if you give something a probability of exactly one, then NOTHING you can EVER see will change your mind.

(An important point is that  $P(B|A)$  may be exactly 0. In that case, the ratio is UNDEFINED, which makes it EVEN WORSE: what does it MEAN to get 0/0 without a sensible passage to the limit?)

"Alright! Geez! Then what if the probability is ALMOST 1, but not quite?"

That's exactly my point. You CANNOT, ever, be 100% sure of anything at all. That would mean that no observation at all could change your mind about it. And you don't want that, do you? You can be 99% sure of it. You can be 99.9% sure of it (though you'll start straining belief with that...). But never 100%.

What I just mathematically proved above is simple: you cannot be 100% sure of anything in your life. You must ALWAYS be open to new evidence, and to change. If there is anything you believe with full confidence, then nothing, no matter what you see, will change your mind.

I talk to a lot of people that have 'convictions' and that don't want to change their minds. No! That is wrong! You MUST change your mind as soon as you can! You know why? Because if you don't, you'll end up attached to that old belief. You'll create excuses why you don't have to change anything at all. And you will end up simply wrong. It's okay to feel attached to an idea that's true.

But if you find out it's not true, then you should abandon it immediately.

That is what I mean.

What is true is already so.

Owning up to it doesn't make it worse.

Not being open about it doesn't make it go away.

And because it's true, it is what is there to be interacted with.

Anything untrue isn't there to be lived.

People can stand what is true,

for they are already enduring it.

- Eugene Gendlin

❖ WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS ARTICLE?

## FINDING THE TRUTH

Mishlei Chapter 2	משלי פרק ב
If you seek it like silver, and like hidden treasures, then you will seek it out.	ד) אִם־תִּבְקֹשֶׁנָּה כֶּסֶף וְכִמְטֹמוֹנִים תַּחְפֹּשְׁנָה:

Malbim Commentary	מלבי"ם משלי פרק ב
Seeking silver is through purchasing merchandise, for he profits with his commerce or with his handiwork, and seeking treasures is done through digging in the depths of the ground or in the depths of the sea. And seeking silver is compared to one who forgoes all of	ד) אם תבקשנה כסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה, בקשת הכסף הוא על ידי מסחר, שמרויח במסחרו או במעשה ידיו, וחפישת המטמונים הוא על ידי חפירה במעמקי האדמה או במצולות ים, ונמשל בקשת הכסף הוא על שמחליף ונותן כל תאות העולם הזה בעבור החכמה, ונמשל חפישת המטמונים הוא היגיעה שמתניע להעמיק בדברי החכמה

the desire of this world for wisdom, and seeking hidden treasures is compared to the exertion with which one exerts himself to uncover the depths of the deep wisdom, to bring out the hidden treasures in its depths, and the concealed parts of Torah and counsel.	העמוקים להוציא הפנינים הצפונים במצולותיה וסתר תורה ותושיה:
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❖ WHY DO YOU THINK SEARCHING FOR TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE IS LIKE SEARCHING FOR TREASURE?



The Duties of the Heart, Introduction	ספר חובות הלבבות הקדמה
<p>If you are a person of intellect and understanding...you are obligated to use your faculties until you gain a clear and definite knowledge...In order of time, instruction based on tradition must necessarily precede knowledge obtained by the exercise of reason, since learners must rely on what they are taught before they can obtain independent knowledge. Yet it would show a lack of willingness for anyone to rely on tradition alone who can obtain certainty by the method of rational demonstration. Everyone who has the requisite capacity is obligated to investigate with his reason whatever can be acquired, and to bring evidence which deliberate judgment would support.</p>	<p>אם אתה איש דעת ותבונה, שתוכל לעמוד בהם על ברור מה שקבלת מהחכמים בשם הנביאים משרשי הדת וקוטבי המעשים, אתה מצווה להשתמש בהם, עד שתעמוד על הענין ויתברר לך מדרך הקבלה והשכל יחד. ואם תתעלם ותפשע בדבר, תהיה כמקצר במה שאתה חייב לבוראך יתברך. וזה יתבאר משני פנים :</p> <p>האחד מהם ממה שאמר הכתוב כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט בין דם לדם בין דין לדין וגומר ועשית על פי הדבר אשר יגידו לך וגומר. וכשאתה משתכל במה שכולל הפסוק הראשון מעניני הדין, תמצאם דברים שצריכים לפרוט אותם ולחלקם ולדקדק בהם בדרך הקבלה לא בדרך אותות השכל. הלא תראה, שלא הזכיר בכללם ענין מן הענינים, אשר יושגו מצד השכל, כי לא אמר, כשתסתפק בענין היחוד איך הוא, או בשמות הבורא ובמדותיו ובשרש משרשי הדת, כעבודת המקום ובטוח עליו והכנע לפניו, ויחד המעשה לשמו, ולברר המעשים הטובים מפגעי ההפסד ועניני התשובה מן העבירות, ולירא ממנו, ולאהבה אותו, ולהתבונן מפניו, ולחשוב עם הנפש בעבור שמו והדומה לזה, ממה שיגיע אליו האדם בדרך השכל וההכרה, שתאמין בהם על ידי חכמי התורה והסמך, ותסמוך על דברי קבלתם בלבד, אבל אמר שתשוב אל דעתך ותשמש בשכלך במה שדומה לזה, אחר שתעמוד עליו מצד הקבלה, שהיא כוללת כל מצוות התורה ושרשיהן ופרקיהן, ותחקור עליו בשכלך ותבונתך ושקול דעתך, עד שיתברר לך האמת וידחה השקר, כדכתיב וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך וגו'. וכן אומר בכל מה שנוכל לעמוד על ברורו מדרך השכל, כמו שארז"ל: כל דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא מן הכלל ללמד לא ללמד על עצמו יצא אלא ללמד על הכלל כולו יצא, מפני שדעת ענין היחוד כענף מן הדברים שיובנו בדרך השכל, ומה שיתחייב בו, יתחייב בכלם.</p>



## TEST

# TAKE THE TEST

Identify the inconsistencies in your thought processes. Are you a coherent thinker or are your beliefs incompatible?

### TO TAKE THE PHILOSOPHICAL

**HEALTH CHECK.** go through the statements below, deciding for each one whether you agree or disagree. At this stage, simply mark your answers as you go along or jot them onto a piece of paper. Do not look at the marking grid or analysis that follows until you have answered the questions.

We know that you will not always agree or disagree 100 per cent, but almost always you will tend more towards one answer than the other.

The Philosophical Health Check, taken from *Do You Think What You Think?* by Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom (£7.99, Grant), does not judge what's right or wrong, so please answer honestly.

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>1 There are no objective moral standards; moral judgements are merely an expression of the values of a particular culture.</p> <p>2 The right to life is so fundamental that financial considerations are irrelevant in any effort to save lives.</p> <p>3 There exists an all-powerful, loving and good God.</p> <p>4 There are no objective truths about matters of fact; 'truth' is always relative to particular cultures and individuals.</p> <p>5 The environment should not be damaged unnecessarily in the pursuit of human ends.</p> | <p>6 So long as they do not harm others, individuals should be free to pursue their own ends.</p> <p>7 Voluntary euthanasia should remain illegal.</p> <p>8 World War II was a just war.</p> <p>9 Having made a choice, it is always possible that one might have chosen otherwise.</p> <p>10 Homosexuality is wrong because it is unnatural.</p> <p>11 It is not always right to judge individuals solely on their merits.</p> <p>12 Severe brain damage can rob a person of all consciousness and selfhood.</p> | <p>13 It is quite reasonable to believe in the existence of a thing without even the possibility of evidence for its existence.</p> <p>14 Judgements about works of art are purely matters of taste.</p> <p>15 The government should not permit the sale of health treatments that have not been tested for efficacy and safety.</p> <p>16 Acts of genocide stand as a testament to man's ability to do great evil.</p> <p>17 Governments should be allowed to increase taxes sharply to save lives in the developing world.</p> <p>18 To allow an innocent child to suffer needlessly when one could easily prevent it is morally reprehensible.</p> <p>19 The Holocaust is a historical reality that took place more or less as the history books report.</p> <p>20 People should not travel by car if they can walk, cycle or take a train instead.</p> |
|--|---|--|

Agree

Disagree

Agree

Disagree

- |  |
|--|
| <p>21 The possession of drugs for personal use should be decriminalised.</p> <p>22 Individuals have sole rights over their own bodies.</p> <p>23 It is always wrong to take another person's life.</p> <p>24 The future is fixed; how one's life unfolds is a matter of destiny.</p> <p>25 Proper sanitation and medicines are generally good for a society.</p> <p>26 In certain circumstances, it might be desirable to discriminate positively in favour of a person as recompense for harms done to him/her in the past.</p> <p>27 On bodily death, a person continues to exist in a non-physical form.</p> <p>28 Atheism is a faith just like any other, because it is not possible to prove the non-existence of God.</p> <p>29 Michelangelo is one of history's finest artists.</p> <p>30 Alternative and complementary medicines are as valuable as mainstream medicine.</p> |
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## How to score

COMPARE YOUR ANSWER for each question to those in the grid below. Each time your answer matches the answer in the grid, put a tick in the column. For each row where you have a tick in both columns, put a tick in the end column.

	TICK IF MATCHES	TICK IF MATCHES	
Q1 agree	Q16 agree	tension 1	
Q2 agree	Q17 disagree	tension 2	
Q3 agree	Q18 agree	tension 3	
Q4 agree	Q19 agree	tension 4	
Q5 agree	Q20 disagree	tension 5	
Q6 agree	Q21 disagree	tension 6	
Q7 agree	Q22 agree	tension 7	
Q8 agree	Q23 agree	tension 8	
Q9 agree	Q24 agree	tension 9	
Q10 agree	Q25 agree	tension 10	
Q11 agree	Q26 disagree	tension 11	
Q12 agree	Q27 agree	tension 12	
Q13 disagree	Q28 agree	tension 13	
Q14 agree	Q29 agree	tension 14	
Q15 agree	Q30 agree	tension 15	

For every tick you have in the 'Tension' column, we have identified one tension in your belief system. Count up your ticks to find out how consistent your thinking is.

### NO TENSIONS

Your opinions on the issues we asked you about are totally consistent.

### 1-2 TENSIONS

You seem to be an admirably consistent thinker, if not entirely so.

### 3-5 TENSIONS

Like most people, your opinions probably don't hang together as well as they might.

### 6+ TENSIONS

You're either an incredibly subtle thinker or a mass of contradictions.

## General analysis

The Philosophical Health Check is designed to identify tensions between various beliefs that you have. It does not aim to identify which of your beliefs are true or false, but potential incompatibilities in the set of beliefs you hold.

Each tension we have identified indicates either that (1) there is a contradiction between the two beliefs or (2) some sophisticated reasoning is required to enable both beliefs to be held consistently. In each case, there are reasons that make holding both beliefs at the same time very difficult. Should you be worried about the tensions identified? If you care at all about being consistent, then you should either (1) give up one of the two beliefs or (2) find some rationally coherent way of reconciling them.





# THE TENSIONS EXPLAINED

Read on to understand each of the tensions in your beliefs, and the traps that you may have managed to avoid – but your friends might fall into. Also, find out what proportion of the 80,000 people who have taken a version of this test online have each tension in their beliefs

## Tension 2:

### CAN YOU PUT A PRICE ON A HUMAN LIFE?

Around a quarter of people had this tension. If financial considerations are irrelevant when it comes to saving lives, then that must mean we should always spend as much money as possible to save lives. But if this is true, then surely the West should spend as much money as possible saving lives in the developing world. If you do not think so, this suggests that although financial considerations are relevant, there is a limit to how much one should spend to save a life.

## Tension 3:

### IS THERE AN ALL-GOOD, ALL-POWERFUL GOD?

If God is all-powerful, loving and good, that means He can do what He wants and will do what is morally right. But surely this means that He would not allow an innocent child to suffer, as He could easily prevent it. Most attempts to explain this apparent contradiction conclude that God allows suffering to help us grow spiritually and/or to allow the greater good of human freedom – however, these are in debate. Around a third of the people in our research had this tension in their beliefs.

## Tension 1:

### IS MORALITY RELATIVE?

Nearly half of our respondents exhibit this tension. The tension between these two beliefs is that while one of them claims that morality is just a matter of culture and convention, the other condemns acts of genocide as 'evil', a claim that seems to go beyond culture and convention. If moral judgements really are merely the 'expression of the values of a particular culture', then how are the values which reject genocide and torture superior to those which do not?

## Tension 4:

### ARE THERE ANY ABSOLUTE TRUTHS?

If truth is relative then nothing is straightforwardly 'true' or 'factual'. Everything is 'true for someone' or 'a fact for them'. What, then, can you say to those who deny the Holocaust is a fact? Are they not as entitled to their view as you are to yours? How can one both assert the reality of the Holocaust and deny that there is a single truth about it? This intellectual tension causes many to conclude there are objective truths after all. This is a tension more than one third of online respondents exhibited.

## Tension 8:

### IS KILLING ALWAYS WRONG?

Someone who has this tension must either give up the idea of a just war or get rid of the 'always' in the principle 'It is always wrong to take another person's life'. It is very difficult to add a clause which starts 'except', so that it both allows the kind of killing many feel is justified, yet keeps out that which is felt to be unjustified. For example, 'except in self-defence' might seem reasonable, but this would mean an army could only fight when attacked. Only around one in nine had this tension.

## Tension 11:

### IS POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION JUSTIFIED?

Less than one in 10 of our respondents had this tension. Positive discrimination means that factors other than the actual abilities of a person are taken into account when deciding how to treat them. So in order to support positive discrimination, you have to accept that it is sometimes right not to judge individuals on their merits. Alternatively, if you want to maintain that individuals must always be judged on their merits, you must give up your belief in positive discrimination.

## Tension 9:

### IS THE FUTURE FIXED?

Around one in eight people revealed this tension. If what will be, will be 'no matter what we do, then how can we have freedom? For example, imagine I am in a shop, deciding whether to buy one of two coats. If one believes in fate or destiny, then it must be true that it is inevitable which coat I buy. In which case, it must be an illusion that I have a genuine choice. I seem to be making my own mind up, but forces beyond my control have already determined which way I choose. So reconciling belief in destiny and free will is a tricky task.

## Tension 12:

### WHAT IS THE SEAT OF THE SELF?

This tension is shared by nearly one in three of our respondents. The two beliefs are not strictly contradictory, but they do present an awkward mix of world views. On the one hand, there is an acceptance that our consciousness is dependent on brain activity, yet there is also the belief that the self is independent of the body. This seems to presume wider, contradictory world views: one where consciousness is caused by brains and one where it is caused by something non-physical.

## Tension 10:

### IS THE UNNATURAL WRONG?

The connection between these two statements may not be obvious. Most people believe that sanitation and medicine are good. But aren't they unnatural? What is natural about sophisticated sewage systems and the domestic supply of clean water? What is natural about chemotherapy or other medical treatments? So the problem here is that it is simply not true that most people think all things unnatural are bad. If you believe homosexuality to be unnatural, that is no reason for it to be wrong.

## Tension 13:

### WHAT IS FAITH?

People seem reluctant to admit this is a real tension, yet it was found in around a quarter of respondents, in disagreement with the first statement. A person supports the principle that states that in the absence of good grounds for believing something, it is not rational to believe it. Asserting that atheism is a faith just like any other, because it is not possible to prove the non-existence of God, contradicts this. In short, belief without evidence (a form of faith) is not the same as non-belief due to lack of evidence (rational refusal to assent).

## Final thoughts

Most people seem happy to accept that they're probably not consistent in their opinions and that there may be big holes in the arguments they use. Yet should we be so glib about accepting these failures? We are not so forgiving when it comes to government inconsistency, branding it hypocritical if one policy runs counter to another. Perhaps it is the case that being reasonably, if not perfectly, consistent is hard work. When you consider that, on average, we found people had four tensions among this narrow selection of beliefs alone, it seems probable that inconsistency is the norm. Is that something we should be sanguine about, or do we all have a responsibility to think our opinions through more carefully?

## Tension 5:

### HOW MUCH MUST I PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT?

This is the most common tension we have uncovered, held by around half of those surveyed. If you choose to drive, you are guilty of unnecessarily damaging the environment. The problem here is the word 'unnecessarily'. You might want to argue that much of your use of cars or aeroplanes is necessary for a certain quality of life. Then it becomes hard to be critical of others, for it seems that 'necessary' simply means what one judges to be important for oneself.

## Tension 6:

### CAN WE PLEASE OURSELVES?

In order not to be in contradiction here, you must make a convincing case that the personal use of drugs harms people other than the drug user. More than this – you must also show that prohibited drug use harms others more than legal activities such as smoking, drinking and driving cars. As alcohol, tobacco and car accidents are among the leading killers in Western society, this case may be hard to make. Although this tension is less common than some others, nearly three respondents in 10 had it.

## Tension 7:

### CAN I MAKE CHOICES ABOUT MY OWN BODY?

Only around one in eight of our respondents had this tension. Why, if individuals have sole rights over their own bodies, should voluntary euthanasia be illegal? It might be argued that euthanasia is different because it requires third-party assistance. Yet if I want a tattoo, I need third-party assistance. But, assuming I can find a willing tattooist, this doesn't mean I don't have the sole right to decide whether or not I am tattooed.

## Tension 14:

### HOW DO WE JUDGE ART?

Nearly half of respondents felt prey to this tension – the result of the fact that most people don't believe the status of Michelangelo is in doubt. Yet, if this is true, how can judgements about works of art be purely matters of taste? The tension here is between a belief that works of art can be judged, in certain respects, by some objective standards and the belief that the final arbiter of taste is something subjective. This is not a contradiction, but a tension nonetheless.

## Tension 15:

### WHAT SHOULD BE LEGAL?

Most alternative medicines have not been tested as rigorously as 'conventional' medicine. For example, St John's wort has been found to cause complications, yet the product is available without medical advice. Why do so many believe alternative treatments need not be as extensively tested as conventional ones? The fact that they use natural ingredients is not in itself a good reason, as there are plenty of naturally occurring toxins. A little under half of our respondents had this tension in their beliefs.