



For too long, we've been slothful and indigent. But now, there's a crispness and purpose in the air, and we're ready for action. We're determined not to let doubts or complexities overwhelm us. We want to see tangible results. We're tired of being dreamers and shirkers.

Our practical mood is briskly impatient with perfectionism. We're not focused on how things could be, or might be, or what we'd do if money and time were of no concern. A lot of our previous procrastination was born out of fear: we didn't dare to make a start, in case we messed things up and let our ideals down. But now we're prepared to deal with the world as it actually is, and accept the constraints that reality imposes. Compromise doesn't sound like a bad word; it's a necessary and mature strategy for achieving results.

It might look as if we're a touch soulless; as if we can't comprehend the poetry or complexity of existence. This wouldn't be the time to play us a sonata or read us a passage of philosophy. But what we'd like people to grasp is that we may have come to this clear, energetic mood via quite a hard road. We know all about the temptations of idleness; we recognise perfectly well

the allure of meandering reverie. We know from the inside how endless speculation, perfectionism, and wishing things were different are the enemies of getting things done. We're not determined to find realistic solutions because we're bland or shallow, but because we've got so much intimate experience of aimless drifting. Now – after an age – we're at last ready to get down to work.

EMOTIONAL BAROMETER



We're not actually crying at the moment, but the tears are far closer to the surface than they normally would be. A whole host of relatively minor things threatens to set us off. Strangely, they aren't the grim things we might associate with crying; they're things that feel especially beautiful, tender or pure.

We might feel our eyes moistening at the sight of some delicate flowers breaking through the hard earth after a long winter; or a parent and child chatting animatedly together in a café (the kid is talking about a penguin they've seen in a book); or a friend who greets us in an unusually warm way; or a moment in a film when a moralistic father makes up with his wayward son.

The source of our weepiness is located in the place where the troubles of life collide with what is still kind and good in the world.

The loveliness we see (in a film, in a park, in a book) makes the actual ugliness of day-to-day life all the more vivid. We want to cry at poignant reminders of a kind of paradise that's ever more elusive, at what we crave and have been exiled from.

If we were to consider the unusual project of trying to create a robot that could feel weepy, we would have to do something apparently rather cruel: we would have to ensure that this robot knew about suffering; that it was able to hate itself and feel loss and confusion, for it is against this kind of background of pain that beautiful scenes become deeply important, rather than merely nice. Our weepiness is telling us something key: that our lives are tougher than they were when we were little, and that our longing for uncomplicated niceness and goodness is correspondingly all the more intense.

When we are weepy, we don't need to be cheered up or told to feel grateful for the good things we still have. Ideally, we'd like the sorrow in us to meet the sorrow in another person. It sounds odd, but perhaps we'd like to weep quietly for a bit with someone else who understands.

EMOTIONAL BAROMETER



The standard habit of the mind is to take careful note of what's not right in our lives and obsess about all that is missing.

But in a new mood, perhaps after a lot of longing and turmoil, we pause and notice some of what has – remarkably – not gone wrong. The house is looking beautiful at the moment. We're in pretty good health, all things considered. The afternoon sun is deeply reassuring. Sometimes the children are kind. Our partner is – at points – very generous. It's been quite mild lately. Yesterday, we were happy all evening. We're quite enjoying our work at the moment.

Gratitude is a mood that grows with age. It is extremely rare properly to delight in flowers or a quiet evening at home, a cup of tea or a walk in the woods when we are under twenty-two. There are so many larger, grander things to be concerned about: romantic love, career fulfilment and political change.

However, as time goes on, it is rare to be left entirely indifferent by smaller things. Gradually, almost all of our earlier, larger aspirations take a hit; perhaps a very large one. We encounter some of the intractable problems of intimate relationships. We

suffer the gap between our professional hopes and the available realities. We have a chance to observe how slowly and fitfully the world ever alters in a positive direction. We are fully inducted into the extent of human wickedness and folly – and our own eccentricity, selfishness and madness.

Therefore, 'little things' start to seem somewhat different; no longer a petty distraction from a mighty destiny, no longer an insult to ambition, but a genuine pleasure amid a litany of troubles, an invitation to bracket anxieties and keep self-criticism at bay, a small resting place for hope in a sea of disappointment. We appreciate the slice of toast, the friendly encounter, the long hot bath, the spring morning – and keep in mind how much worse it could be.

EMOTIONAL BAROMETER



Anxiety is a fundamental and endlessly recurring state for well-founded reasons: because we are intensely vulnerable physical beings, a complicated network of fragile organs all biding their time before eventually letting us down catastrophically at a moment of their own choosing. Because we have insufficient information upon which to make most major life decisions. Because we can imagine so much more than we have, and live in ambitious mediatised societies where envy and restlessness are a constant. There is no need to be anxious that we are anxious. The mood is no sign that our lives have gone wrong; merely that we are alive.

We should be more careful when pursuing things we imagine will spare us anxiety. We can head to them, by all means, but for reasons other than fantasies of calm – and with a little less vigour and a little more scepticism. We will still be anxious when we finally have the house, the love affair and the right income.

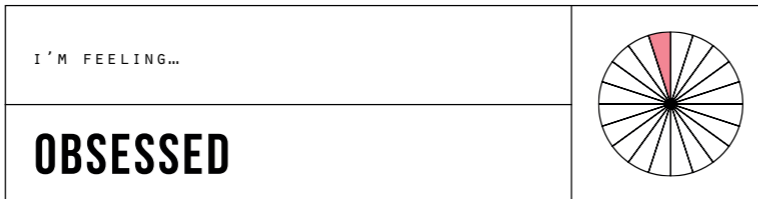
We should spare ourselves the burden of loneliness. We are far from the only ones with this problem. Everyone is more anxious than they are inclined to tell us. Even the tycoon and the couple in love are suffering. We've collectively failed to admit to

ourselves how much it is customary to panic.

We must learn to laugh about our anxieties – laughter being the exuberant expression of relief when a hitherto private agony is given a well-crafted social formulation in a joke. We must suffer alone. But we can at least hold out our arms to our similarly tortured, fractured and, above all else, anxious neighbours, as if to say, in the kindest way possible: 'I know...'

Anxiety deserves greater dignity. It is not a sign of degeneracy. It is a kind of masterpiece of insight: a justifiable expression of our mysterious participation in a disordered and uncertain world.

EMOTIONAL BAROMETER



We aren't just mildly, casually intrigued by someone. We aren't quite in love either. We have a crush. Without anything sinister in the term, we are a little obsessed.

We would tell everyone we met if only it didn't sound so silly. We want to explain where we came across them, what we discussed, the small details about them. Simply talking about the desired person alleviates our anxious desire. Our minds constantly circle the idea of the beloved: how clever, kind and witty they seem to be, how our lives might unfold together (already we've married them and had many children – though we may not yet even have gone on a date or so much as addressed a word to them).

Our obsession represents in pure and perfect form the dynamics of a romantic philosophy: the explosive interaction of limited knowledge, outward obstacles to further discovery, and boundless hope.

The cynical voice wants to declare that these enthusiastic imaginings at the conference or on the train, in the street or in the supermarket, are just delusional. But the error of our obsession is more subtle. It lies in how easily we move from

spotting a range of genuinely fine traits of character to settling on a recklessly naive romantic conclusion: that the person across the train aisle or pavement constitutes a complete answer to our inner needs.

We should enjoy our obsessive moods. To obsess well is to realise that the lovely person we sketch in our heads is our creation: a creation that says more about us than it does about them. But what it says about us is important. The obsession gives us access to our own ideals. We may not really be getting to know another person properly, but we are growing our insight into who we really are.

EMOTIONAL BAROMETER