

Part of the experience of being human is always having something to worry about. The biology books may name our species *Homo sapiens* but the reality is always *Homo sollicitus*: the worrying man( as I used Google translate to get that phrase it might actually mean worrying goats). Anyway, even the invention of tranquillisers and sedatives hasn't stopped us worrying: we can always worry about whether the doctor is going to give us some more tablets when this lot has run out and then we can move on to fretting that we might be getting hooked. Evolutionary psychologists (ludicrous though it sounds, there is such a thing) don't believe in such common sense things as getting into bad habits and instead reckon that constantly fretting is what they call an 'adaptive trait', that is, something that ranks you in the fittest few in that great rat race of survival rather than being relegated as an also-ran. The logic is that if, when you're scraping around for roots and berries on the savannah, you're always worrying about becoming a lion's dinner then you're likely to spend a lot of time keeping an eye out for big kitties on the horizon, and will run away when you see one. Thus surviving to pass on your bad habits to your distant ancestors in Clacton. Unlike your more laid back cousins, for whom the lion is a long way away, not interested in eating humans and anyway, why spend your life worrying eh? who lived fast and, died very young in a lion's belly and without descendants.

Of course we're not completely slave to our instincts and it's entirely feasible for a modern human to get through the day in a state of mellow mindfulness: but evolution will always out. Because pretty much as soon as you've slipped peacefully into the comforting embrace of Sister Slumber you will be attacked by an anxiety dream. You know, those nightmares where you're giving an important speech and you can't stop coughing. And then someone hands you a P45. And the background slogan starts falling to pieces letter by letter. Or was that somebody else's nightmare? Very young I was afflicted by restless reveries about being trapped in caves: later it became about waking up to discover I had an exam to take and not only had I not done the revision I hadn't even taken the course. Nowadays those nocturnal nasties take the form of forgetting to write a sermon or not having the right book for a service or even an endless spiral staircase, though that latter might be less claustrophobia and more fear of bellringers.

Anyway, here we are, born to run... away scared to find a little corner to fret in, rattle our worry beads and check for the sixth time if the door's properly locked. It may be wearying but it's better than the alternative.

It used to be that we thought that technological progress would be the answer to all our worries. No need to worry about lions now we have guns and CCTV. No need to worry about going hungry now chemical fertilised industrial factory farming agribusiness has sorted that out. No need to worry about being cold, just turn the thermostat up. No need to worry about getting sick- biotech will sort that out. And yes, technology has very definitely wiped away many of our worries. But it gives with one hand and takes with the other. You might imagine, say, that your life would be transformed if you were the owner of that latest greatest of tech gadgets, the internet-enabled hairbrush. I haven't a clue why your permanent wave needs to be web-connected, but what do I know? What I do know is that without a doubt, it's one hundred per cent certain that not long after you've taken that latest technological marvel out of the box you'll be worrying about what your cyber comb was actually posting on the internet. Is it tweeting 'ooh, another grey hair' every time you use it? Or perhaps posting a cryptic message to your Facebook page 'Ha! less a miracle, more a chemical'? Might a hacker take control of your hairbrush and make it give you an Adolf Hilter parting and a blue rinse?

Even if you eschew electronica you're not going to be safe from tech-fretting, because right now what everybody apparently has to worry about is the onward march of automation. Not satisfied with washing your dishes, mowing your lawn, letting your partner know you're on the bus and keeping your food chilled, machines now want your job too.

You may scoff, but it's coming faster than you think: already some wag has made a robot that can give blessings in various languages- it can't be much longer before they add the capacity to drink tea and say 'vote Labour' and Robopriest will be born. I already use a computer algorithm to write my sermons. Still, even when perfected cyber-clergy will fail to live up to their flock's expectations. And no smugness please from those retired among the congregation: there's been an automatic Werther's Original dispensing machine for *decades*. You're already obsolete.

All of which means that in that blink of the evolutionary eye since we stood upright on the African plains we've smart-alecked ourselves out of a purpose. Worrying eh?

Truth is, though, it's not the potential perfection of robotics and artificial intelligence that will make us expendable. We've been that way been all along. Blink and you'll miss us: except you won't because when we take our hand out of that bucket of water it's exactly the same as before we put it in. Our boots are never cold because

there's always someone else to fill them. You can't even rely on the Church of England: go to evensong and sugar-coated in Anglican Chant you will be told that our days are like grass; we flourish like a flower of the field; the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. That puts you in your place. Surely you didn't come to church to get inanely happy? Try the one down the road.

The greatest of apes, the smartest of mammals, lords of all we survey and yet we are utterly ephemeral, supremely unimportant, and entirely expendable. We have no place in the world: however important we think we are, the wind blows over us and we are gone.

But. There is a paradox at the heart of our humanity. Utterly expendable, yet every hair of our head is counted (and this has nothing to do with the fancy hairbrush). No matter how lonely our ends, not one of us closes our eyes for the last time unnoticed. Because though the world can take us or leave us and will always in the end opt to leave us, God will not.

Worrying might be written in our machine code but we are so much more than our DNA. We are the ape that worries; but, uniquely, we are the ape that worships. We are made in the image of God and *that* makes all the difference.

There is a very rhapsodical part of Jesus' teaching where he talks about God's feeding the ravens and clothing the lilies of the field more finely than the greatest of all Israel's kings. The lesson ends as it climaxes with Jesus telling us 'Do not worry'. It's very poetic, but let's put this politely. Telling us not to worry? Didn't he read the DNA when he wrote it? We have to assume that when God created us- and evolution is part of that process- he knew what he was doing; and equally he's not going to contradict himself later by asking us to do something contrary to the nature he has himself created. So we should, perhaps, not wrap ourselves up in knots of worry if we find ourselves unable to live lives of holy, unconcerned insouciance.

You need to eat; you need to find clothing and shelter; warmth and companionship; you need to be aware if a lion that hasn't had lunch is coming your way; in short, to live life you need to worry. But you need to know that there is so much, so much more to being human than what we've been handed down from that frightened little ape ancestor on the plain. Like the tale of Mary and Martha, it's a matter of priorities. Part of us will always quite rightly be wanting to scan the horizon for troubles known and new; but there is a part of us that also quite rightly feels the pull to turn

our gaze upwards, towards heaven. It is that part of us, the part that is yearning for its creator, reaching out for God; that part that we must give prime place in our priorities. Mix the two in their proper proportions.

Paradoxically enough, it is when our worries overwhelm us we are most likely to forget what we need most of all. Which is not to stop worrying: the day you stop worrying is the day you die. What we need is just once in a while to wrench our gaze from our world of worries and rest it on the things of heaven.