

What I'm Reading (May 28)



By Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA — May 28, 2020

The satisfaction of handwork; as we reconsider our economy, is there still a place for small, rather than large; a musing on addiction's social component, and can the outliers of the herd teach us about how to return to social mingling.



Image courtesy of Ana J on Pixabay [1]

As a surgeon and woodworker, I have always found sustenance in using my hands. I think it touches, for me and many others, on a primal need to literally embody our feelings. That said, I am often drawn to articles at the interface of our physicality and inner needs.

“The satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through manual competence have been known to make a man quiet and easy.”

From the blog of Cal Newport, a computer scientist writing about that same intersection, and author of Digital Minimalism, [The Lost Satisfactions of Manual Competence](#) [2]

I have been reading about small economies, where work does not scale well. Then I stumbled across a perfect example, tea

“Planters and overseers won these productivity gains in part through clever organisational tactics, and in part through the beating, whipping and

surveillance of the unfree workforce. As a result of these extraordinary efforts and transformations across Asia, tea became, after water, the world's most widely consumed beverage – a status it has never relinquished.”

From Aeon, [Tea, and Capitalism](#) [3]

Next to consider, smoking cigarettes. As a physician, I recognize that smoking involves two addictions, the first to a chemical, nicotine, the second, to an experience. Smokers who try to quit are often defeated more by the latter than the former. I suppose the same might be true for vaping.

“Today, as a very occasional smoker who was never addicted, I like to think of smoking as a freely chosen pleasure. But is it really? Smoking is beset with moral issues. If it pollutes the air of nonsmokers and is often the result of an addiction, it's not free, and it can't be good. The fleetingness of a cigarette, as it burns and frazzles away, adds to its hook and tease, its indulgence, but it also proves its folly, the pointless extravagance of it. The smoker is never satisfied.”

From Psyche, [Cigarette! Exquisite fiend, ephemeral friend, how I miss you](#) [4]

The return to social mingling is well underway, proceeded by leaps and bounds, by its politicization. How best to achieve herd immunity? By remaining in or out of the herd? There is no clear answer, and much of our scientific effort has involved studying the herd, not the outlier.

“We've spent a long time trying to understand how things synchronize,” Tarnita said. “No one has really been [as] interested in the single cells that don't seem to do anything, or the lazy ants, or the wildebeests that for some reason decide not to migrate, or the locusts that peel off. We've just never really paid attention.”

Maybe now we are.”

From Quanta, [Out-of-Sync 'Loners' May Secretly Protect Orderly Swarms](#) [5]

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Links

[1] <https://pixabay.com/photos/glasses-spectacles-reading-472027/>

[2] <https://www.calnewport.com/blog/2020/05/22/the-lost-satisfactions-of-manual-competence/>

[3] <https://aeon.co/essays/the-china-tea-trade-was-a-paradox-of-global-capitalism>

[4] <https://psyche.co/ideas/cigarette-exquisite-fiend-ephemeral-friend-how-i-miss-you>

[5] <https://www.quantamagazine.org/out-of-sync-loners-may-secretly-protect-orderly-swarms-20200521/>