

Doctor Smith charges \$290.00

Marcelo Garbine

What sets us apart from the animals? Reasoning, of course. I value mine, because of its practical usefulness and because I recognize the effort and the millennia Mother Nature spent developing it through harsh penalties applied to our ancestors before delivering it to me, free of charge, as Charles Darwin tells us.

Are any descendants of the sweet-smelling goody-two-shoes Adam and Eve reading this?

I hope not, because I descended from dirty and smelly apes.

I had the luck to be born in the last quarter of the twentieth century and to reach the second decade of my life excitedly surfing the World Wide Web. But from then on, my friend, things were tough.

How many times did the already-sedentary primate man bang his head against the wall until he found that it was not prayer to the gods but sex that made his animals multiply in the corral?

And why on earth, then, do human prototypes resist using their brain so much, this brain that took thousands of years to come out of the oven? It is there, finished, cute, packaged up in a relatively safe cranial box, ready to be used at any time, whenever necessary. It doesn't waste electricity, doesn't pay rent, and its maintenance is extremely pleasurable. After all, who doesn't like to eat and breathe?

The fact is, the brain is under our command, like a watchman. And when we are always available, we lose respect. Women don't appreciate clingy and thoughtful men (I need to restrain myself) and pseudo-friends think we are idiots when they can count on us at two o'clock in the morning.

Perhaps that's why this subordinated brain is treated as a despicable doormat by a lot of people who are unaware of its evolution... Hey man, give me a break...

That's why they invented such chestnuts as: "he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword", "make do with what you have", "sow the wind, reap the whirlwind" and "he who uses proverbs is full of crap."

But, unfortunately, proverbs go beyond petrified popular wisdom that gets transmitted from generation to generation. There are many critters on the loose out there who need to install boxes with readymade speeches in the middle of their brains, releasing them like farts every time they talk with other bipeds.

Here I speak through my pen name Mingau Ácido, my unbearably annoying, ironic, and sarcastic alter ego, who I separated and gave another name so I can pretend it is not really me. But anyone who knows me knows that I'm sensitive, romantic, poetic, and that I believe in humanity and unconditional love. Ouch!

So now you have an idea of how much of my income I blow on different kinds of therapies and personal development courses. And the trade-off? Wait a minute... Is it going to rain? It is hot, isn't it? Ok, no need to look at me like that. I'll say it. This business of wasting money on promises of personal development, I try to hide from myself. The benefit yield is shit.

A renowned doctor of neurolinguistics and friend of a friend, who has published dozens of books, recommended a psychotherapist in Philadelphia (I live in New York).

Since it was a recommendation from an author I appreciate and whose entire written output I have devoured, I didn't think twice before committing myself to a

weekly visit to the sumptuous office of Doctor Smith, with its bookshelves crammed with books and its sunny balcony overlooking Fairmount Park. I also committed to spending \$290.00 per session, plus travel costs, to have my appointments with this cognitive behavioral psychotherapist.

“Doctor, any chance we could agree on \$250.00?”

“Go ask your mother for money.”

All right, you’ll see that short and crass answers, with more emphasis on the crass than the short, will be part of my treatment. Let’s begin.

“Doctor, I have a lot of admiration for that guy they call the ‘clown who ran away from the circus’, this circus boy who was born with a disability and when he was eight started his first business and... eighteen minutes later... There was an article about him in Forbes Magazine. He was named entrepreneur of the year.”

Her lips moved downward, but only the left side of her mouth, and, without moving her head, she directed her gaze to the ceiling:

“He is a CASE of success.”

“Doctor Smith, I admire another entrepreneur as well. He had only \$20.00 to buy medicine for his sick daughter, but he decided to buy candy to resell. In less than two hours, he had in hands his kid’s medication and another \$180.00. This happened a year and half ago, and today he gives talks to executives.”

She stopped looking at her fingernails and said:

“He is another CASE of success.”

“Doctor Smith... I dreamed that I was these two entrepreneurs simultaneously.

What does that mean?”

Almost imperceptibly, she shrugged her shoulders:

“It means nothing. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

“You know, Doc, I think I'm not a CASE of success.”

With her eyelids opened a bit too wide, she looked at me:

“Sad, isn’t it?”

“Doctor, what's the meaning of life?”

She tuned her voice, exaggeratedly, before uttering:

“Ah, eating something around three o'clock in the afternoon is very enjoyable.”

“Doctor, tomorrow is the D-day of my life. I'll have to make the most important decision that's ever been asked of me.”

“Mark, your time is up. Good luck. Next week tell me what decision you made. Let my assistant know if you want a receipt.”

“Dr. Smith... my name is Marcelo, not Mark.”

“See you next Thursday, Marcelo.”

I confess that I returned to New York a little annoyed. I don't like to complain about things but it wasn't quite what I was expecting. I tried not to think so much about what happened.

I remembered, then, an ex-girlfriend of mine that I lost, though I don't know why. We had everything going for us to work out together.

Everyone who gave me advice when she broke it off told me "what is to be must be." Ouch!

The spiritualists told me "it was you who asked to reincarnate in this condition"; the evangelicals, "it was the Lord's will", and the atheists told me "life rolls the dice."

But there were many spiritualists, many evangelicals, and many atheists who uttered the same revelations. Did they conspire? No, no, pushing too hard doesn't suit my style.

When I got home, I called my friend. That one who is the friend of the famous neurologist.

“Hey, Peter, man, I went to see that psychologist in Philadelphia, but I didn't like her that much.”

After half a dozen seconds of silence, he said:

“If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

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