

The ISM of Drivers' Anger

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In this essay I will explain why drivers get so angry at their fellow-drivers, and I will offer you an understanding that may assuage that anger.

Drivers are upset because others behave stupidly in some way, mainly by driving too fast or too slowly. This isn't much of a problem on freeways or multiple-lane highways, where people can sort themselves into different lanes. The issue mainly arises on roads with just one lane in each direction. That's where the "ISM of Drivers' Anger" comes into play. Consider your own feelings on such roads:

I: Idiots who frustrate you by driving slowly and delaying your trip, or

S: Sensible people who are driving at the same speed as yourself, or

M: Maniacs who frighten you by driving much too fast for safety, hence following you impatiently until they attempt a hazardous overtaking.

Because the Sensible drivers are moving at more or less your pace, you're *much less aware of them* than of the Idiots you continually overtake and of the Maniacs who are continually overtaking you. Thereby you have a distorted and much angrier view of drivers in general.

So, my friends, when on those narrow roads, have a thought for all those unseen Sensible drivers. Calm yourself by thinking that they and you constitute a right-thinking majority, and the Idiots and Maniacs a tiny minority. Then regain your sense of humor by realizing that to the Idiots, you're a Maniac— and to the Maniacs, you're an Idiot.

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Now, in a way the Idiot and the Maniac are YOKED TOGETHER in tandem— one closely following the other, mile after mile.

It could go on for some time, during which each's opinion of the other is firmly formed: "ARRGH, what an Idiot!" "Omigod, that guy's a Maniac!" Finally that hazardous overtaking (or maybe the Idiot graciously pulls over to the side) and the awkward coupling comes to an end.

But soon enough another such encounter: for every Maniac there's likely to be an *even faster Maniac*, and for every Idiot there can be an *even slower Idiot*.

Anyway, in thinking about this essay, I was struck by the idea that *Awkward Yokings Ramify*.

Actually, the first Awkward Yoking is recorded in the Iliad, wherein Odysseus feigned madness by yoking a horse with an ox. Oh yes, it was awkward— the horse was eager and quick, the ox strong and slow, so Odysseus's plow went gradually off to one side. (Odysseus was trying to avoid the draft; it didn't work...)

But *Awkward Yokings Ramify* ["ramify": to branch out] that is, branch out and manifest in many different ways which, I would argue, have really vexed human relations.

It's basically the issue of speed: living life fast, or living it slow. The Maniacs in this life wants to hurry on and get to the next good thing; the Idiots wants to linger and savor what's in front of them. That's fine if they're going through life separately, but what if they are connected— yoked— for some time together?

I'll present three Ramifications of Awkward Yoking.

First, dining together.

Let's imagine two friends — Max (the "Maniac") and Izzy (the "Idiot")— out on the town one morning. They decide to have lunch at a restaurant.

As it happens, Max is one of those who "eats to live". For him, food is sustenance to keep the day going. Meanwhile, Izzy is one who lives to eat. Food!— oh so many diverse and splendid tastes in this world !

Izzy says, "I know some places— shall we have Italian, Mexican, or Chinese?"

Max: "I dunno— you choose, I'll eat most anything"

After Izzy's short, but learned, disquisition on the three very different cuisines, Max goes, "all right, all right!! Let's do Italian".

So, they go to Izzy's place, "Casa di Abruzzo".

They examine the menus. Immediately, Max says, "I'll have the spaghetti with meatballs".

Meanwhile Izzy: perusing the menu up and down, issues two precisely worded queries (in decent and practiced Italian) to the waiter, chooses an antipasto and then a pasta and goes, "After, maybe I'll try your take on tiramisu".

OK, you get the idea how this meal is going to go— Izzy sets his half finished *arroticini* aside so that Max's spaghetti and his own *fregnacce pasta Abruzzini* may be served. Of course Max is done in 12 minutes flat. Izzy lingers on and on, often with eyes half closed with pleasure.

[Notwithstanding: A restaurant for Max is *mighty fine*: no stuff to cook, food comes right to him, no cleaning up; in-and-out, all done. A restaurant for Izzy is *wonderful*: choose just the place for his culinary desires, try the very most intriguing items on the menu, carefully form a critical opinion for later use.]

So many questions arise from Max and Izzy's Awkward Yoking.

- Of course Max is vexed by Izzy's slowness, and Izzy is discomfited by Max's obvious impatience. Maybe they sulk quietly— or maybe they're friends enough to accommodate: Max talks of this and that while Izzy lingers, or pulls out a magazine to read; or perhaps Izzy keeps Max involved, "try a bite of this", "which did you like better?", et cetera.
- Did Max even notice how good— or not— his spaghetti was?
- If the place serves "European food with American portions", will Izzy ask for a doggy bag? Of course he will, if he liked it.
- And what's the view of the establishment? Maybe they want to turn over tables fast, so Max's plate will be taken away and Izzy will get prodded, "You still workin' on that?"

Max and Izzy's conflict could play out on a much bigger scale. What about the dinner party host, if he's confronted with guests of vastly different dining speeds? How should he cater to all these people, yoked together and at his mercy?

Maybe the dinner party host is the great gourmand Brillat Savarin— a quint-essential Izzy who proffered one course after another, savored, savored, savored—and oh, the French, who have not one dessert afterward but THREE— fruit or sorbet to “Cleanse the palate”— then the sweet— then a choice of cheeses— and AFTER ALL THAT coffee with some Petits Fours. Oh, the exasperating time had by guests like Max. He will not accept a second invitation. What torture, what waste of time!

Or maybe the host is an autocrat, like Napoleon, the ultimate Max who famously was done in 15 minutes max? All the officers present had better be likewise quick. Picture the *indigestion* of all those Izzy officers!

Ah, there’s an aspect of social class here, represented by the words chosen for the midday meal.

Is it a “Lunch Break”: the blue collar worker pulling out his lunch pail. Sandwiches devoured in a quarter hour, then back to work.

Or is it “Lunch”: as for of us white collar people. Maybe three courses, maybe a full hour if taken at a cafe.

Or is it “*Luncheon*”: an upper-class setting, in an elegant home or an indulgent restaurant. Course after course after course, then those three after, then coffee, all in a calm and pleasing setting— conversation sliding easily from English to French to Italian then back to English, nobody really noticing. It’s 4 o’clock before everyone *finally* rises and saunters off for a late afternoon nap.

Does this mean that working people are Maniacs at table, who eat to live; and aristocrats are Cuisine Idiots, who live to eat? Is being in a hurry in life, or slowly savoring, simply a matter of wealth and leisure or lack of such?

Is social class sorting simply about some people *escaping awkward yokings*?

The poor kid who finds he likes to take his time with his food?

The rich kid who’s tired of it all this sluggish formality?

The second branch of Awkward Yokings Ramifying is in the art museum.

Yoked together by their friendship and interest in art, Max and Izzy visit their local museum. As with their lunch, Max checks out each room, and soon satisfied,

moves on to the next. Izzy hangs back— examines favorite pieces, reads the Museum notations carefully, steps back for a fuller view, maybe returns for a second look.

Max worries: will we even get *done* before we need to catch the ferry back home? Izzy frets: oh this piece is so fine, where's Max gone, I want to share this piece with him.

Here the Sensible people are easily noticed (by Max, and a different set by Izzy) because there they are!— arriving in the same room at about the same time.

Maybe Max and Izzy reach a friendly compromise— maybe Max waits in the last room, reading his magazine— ah, Izzy, there you *finally* are!

Again, what the “House’s” point of view? Maybe this month’s show is really popular, and as with the restaurant the Museum staff want to cycle people through to make room for the next batch. Or, having taken the expense and trouble to assemble this show, maybe they hope for some *sincere appreciation* and take pleasure in observing the lingering of connoisseurs.

Ah, but keep in mind: maybe Max at the restaurant becomes Izzy in the museum, and Izzy at the restaurant is now Max in the museum. Is it not possible that a gourmand for food has only a cursory interest in things visual? And vice versa?

A third branch of Awkward Yokings Ramifying in traveling abroad.

Let’s imagine Max and Izzy have three weeks to discover Italy.

Oh yes, Max has his Bucket list: Florence, Siena, Rome, get down to Capri and Pompeii and then Sicily; back up to Venice and then must DO Milan and Genoa and the Amalfi coast. Onward! Onward!

But oh no, Izzy is insisting on four more days in this lovely rented villa with its glorious view overlooking Florence. “Let’s take a sunset walk”— “Oh, we have a kitchen— let’s pretend we’re locals and go shopping”

Both Max and Izzy have a dilemma: a Bucket List for Italy, much less the whole world, may be essentially infinite— that is, more places than can be packed into a lifetime.

As for Izzy, the Buddhist in him would find that in there is “infinity in this Tuscan villa”, “eternity in just one golden afternoon”. Such a place, rich with Renaissance civilization and redolent with beauty! It’s sublime beyond measure, it’d take a lifetime to fully appreciate. For Izzy, beneath the depths of his experience lie *further depths*. The afternoon light— the bird life— the smells— the flowers—

Thinking about their travel experience, perhaps it comes down to Max being a Type A temperament and Izzy a Type B.

Oh really? Can’t we imagine a type B Max serenely and calmly allowing himself to be swept from one place to the next, and a type A Izzy with nervous energy assembling yet another Tuscan dinner in the terrace?

Do keep in mind that it’s all relative— it’s not that Max is fast and Izzy is slow, but simply that Max is *faster* than Izzy, each different enough for one to vex the other.

There are plenty of other Ramifications of Awkward Yokings—

In the **workplace**, some learn the new stuff quickly but not fully right. Others get it right but *take their time*

Then the **foursomes for golf**— yoked together some are slow, some fast, both between foursomes and *within a foursome*.

Or in **exercise running**. Last year at the Bay to Breakers I saw a group that was literally yoked together (I mean roped together) to make some fine joke. The slowest set the pace....not fun for true joggers!

Ah, but now I must touch upon one more yoking, this one meant to long endure and for vital a evolutionary reason:

We’ve got to yoke **husband and wife** together to produce a new generation, in lovemaking which is *seriously fun*. Ah, but what if they’re badly mismatched in the matter of *pacing*? Can Maximilian and Isabella resolve an initial mismatch?

My personal view is that loving couples will eventually work out a happy compromise. But what if they don’t— what would that be like? Maybe it’s an

enduring Awkward Yoking, in bed and lots of other places. As in preparing to go out: “Dear, what’s taking you so long to dress? We’ll be late!”

Perhaps some couples take wry humor in their Awkward Yoking, while others endure an eternity of little vexations. Can one discern just by looking which couple is which? *That’s* something to think about!

But now I have to realize: maybe some of you are eager for more of my thoughts on this delicious subject, while others are thinking, “Oh, when will this Idiot stop blathering on?” So I’ll stop here—