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Class of 1998

“If you want to attract a man,” I type. “There’s a few things you should know.”

I rest my left hand on the keyboard and use the other hand to pick up a book. I smile. I loved this book. I can’t wait to share its insights with my readers.

This book—*Habits of a Happy Brain* by Loretta Graziano Breuning—is just one of the books on neuroscience I’ve devoured over the past few years. Neuroscience plays an important role in decoding the chemistry of attraction and attachment.

Once we know that novel experiences give us a hit of dopamine, for example, we can begin to untangle the reason we can’t stop scrolling through screens of attractive faces on online dating sites. Once we know that sex gives women a boost of the bonding hormone, oxytocin, we can see why it might pay for a woman to hold off on sleeping with someone if she doesn’t want to fall in love.

I didn’t learn this in philosophy class.

My philosophy professors were completely uninterested in what makes men fall for women—on a professional level, at least.

What they taught was epistemology, how we know what we know. Back in the 1990s, when I was a student, this debate centered on language. Language gives us the words to express what we know, thereby shaping it as surely as a physicist’s act of observation shapes the outcome of his experiment.

I liked epistemology. I liked the feeling of standing in a mental wind tunnel, using what I knew to question how I even knew anything at all.

But then, after a fruitless semester discussing feminist epistemology, the question of whether women know the world in a fundamentally dif-

ferent way to men, I'd had enough. Surely these were not philosophical questions. Surely someone just had to analyze female brains and male brains in enough quantities to notice any differences. And for that, technology was needed.

PET scans. fMRIs. EEGs.

Luckily, researchers were doing just that.

Dr. Louann Brizendine's book *The Female Brain* came out in 2006, nearly a decade after I graduated. As I inhaled its pages, I heaved a sigh of relief. At last, I could put that part of my undergraduate degree to rest. I didn't have to wonder about feminist epistemology any more.

Then I got to thinking...What other philosophical questions was neuroscience answering? Such as for, example, the existence of God?

Dr. Andrew Newberg was studying those questions as I was sitting in class, only he was scanning the brains of meditators and nuns. He discovered that, during what we would normally call mystical experiences—the experience of being one with the universe—something very specific was happening in the brain. The right parietal lobe was shutting down. The purpose of this part of the brain is to distinguish us from our environment, so we know where we end and the chair beneath our bottom begins.

I was gob smacked. Why had I spent my undergraduate degree studying Plato, when I could have been on the frontiers of a brand-new science? For one simple reason: I liked the questions more than I liked the answers.

I was a natural-born philosopher. The mystic in me believes it's all down to my star sign. I'm a Sagittarian wanderer. I live in my head. I'm not interested in everyday questions, like what the best series on Netflix is or whether One Direction is better than the Beatles. I want to know what it all means. How I can get outside my head. How science is finally giving us a user manual to the human body.

I was always going to be a philosophy major. It was a done deal by the time I was 12. I snuck books on Buddhism and dream interpretation and self-actualization out of the library. I wanted to know what else there was, beyond what we knew. Philosophy seemed like the only discipline where I could indulge all those interests.

In fact, two of my favorite classes turned out to be the philosophy and history of science. There I learned that that many of the most important fields of human endeavor—medicine, music, science, politics—had

roots in philosophy. Philosophy can be applied to everything, even the scientific method.

At a basic level, philosophy is the art of asking ever more insightful questions. Why? And how does this connect to this? What assumptions are being made here? Does this logically follow? If you keep asking those questions, they lead you back to the Big Four: What's real? How do I know? What should I do? Any faults in my thinking?

Those questions are pretty darn good preparation for any field in which you have to think for a living. And that's what I do: I think for a living. I get to think about interesting questions, like what makes men attracted to women (or vice versa), and write about it.

If I can pose a question clearly enough, and get my head around my research clearly enough, then chances are I'll write a clear, useful, informative book or article that will get other people thinking. When you think clearly, you help other people think clearly, which helps them act more clearly. That's the gift of philosophy. It's useful in writing, law, politics, marketing ... really *any* field where you want to people to follow you so that you can influence their behavior.

The world needs more people trained in thinking. The world needs more people who can ask probing, insightful questions. The world needs more philosophy graduates.