

# ON NOT DOING

by Vivian Milroy

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I was introduced to the idea of 'not doing' by Carlos Castaneda who, I think it was in *The Road to Ixtlan*, described being taken into the Mexican desert by his sorcerer instructor Don Juan to learn how to break his fixation to the Western addiction to 'doing'. Although I had no intention of going through the discipline and privations of learning how to do this, I liked the idea of 'not doing' and adopted it as a way of life. And very relaxing it was, and is.

Not that this means retiring into a catatonic stupor. You can actually go on doing the same things - only you don't do them in the same way. Or rather, you do them physically in the same way but your mind/will/concentration is just a little removed. Instead of driving on the motorway at an eager eighty miles an hour with your foot pressing on the accelerator and your hands gripping the steering wheel leaning forward with your jaw clenched, you can relax, lean back against the seat, lift your foot off just a whisker and let everything go on doing what it was, only YOU are no longer actively doing it, just being part of the experience. And likewise with the hundreds of other daily activities that we are all so busily and over actively DOING.

There are however some disadvantages: particularly in my case where having officially retired from active life, things are tending to slow down a bit anyway. Although Castaneda's theory tells me to go on doing the same things but in a different way, I am noticing that quite a few things take the message of 'not doing' a bit too literally. I have a number of letters to editors that I have really 'not written'; a large number of bargains and opportunities that I have missed; many invitations to social occasions that I have failed to attend.

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I also have an impressive list of publications that I have not written. For example an extremely useful book of hints on how to live a healthy full life by learning how to intuit your inner physical state so that you always know if you need to visit a doctor or whether your own organism can deal with the problem. This would also have the merit of completely reforming the NHS by allowing doctors to deal with serious complaints that they can do something about rather than the thousands of routine physical ailments about which they can do nothing, and which will clear up in time.

Another book is on dealing with one's genetic inheritance. I show how, as primates recently come down from the trees, we need to keep our inherited aptitudes and skills in running, jumping, hunting, reading the signs of the natural world, integrating into smaller and larger groups, and trying to make meaning from earthquakes, eclipses and the stirring into consciousness of one's own inner emotions.

And another unborn best seller is *The Importance of Accepting the Reality and Rightness of Death*. As opposed to the medical obsession with trying to prevent it at any cost - not only to the NHS, but also any cost to the patient's dignity, comfort, integrity, and quality of life. In some cases of illness and of life experience, I might have written that death could be the medically preferred option.

And talking of doctors, there was a hard hitting non-letter to the editor of *Self and Society* (God bless him, and all who sail in him) about the latest muscle flexing of the AHPP as reported in the report of the recent non AGM. I queried why they should be asking for a special status, and for closer links with the AHP. They are a sub-section of AHP, correctly organised under the constitution. If they want closer links, they could volunteer to join the main committee and turn up to meetings that deal with the concerns of the members as a whole, rather than just their own small corner. However, as it never got written, these great thoughts also float wasted on the desert air.

So, while I am not giving up the concept of 'not doing', I am pointing out that there are negative aspects. I am of course assuming that the human condition might have been fractionally improved if I had written all my books and letters, and seen all the people I might have seen, and done all the things I might have done. But then I might well be wrong about this, in which case the Castaneda 'not doing' has only positive aspects, which is a cosy thought to end on.

## References

- Castaneda, Carlos, *The Road to Ixtlan*, Bodley Head, 1972  
Milroy, Vivien, *The Doctor Inside you* (unwritten)  
ibid, *Listen to you Ancestral Genes* (unwritten)  
ibid, *Death the Universal Comforter* (unwritten)