

**Passage 1.** *Leon F. Seltzer comments on the wisdom of spontaneity.*

- 1 Technically at least, the terms "spontaneous" and "impulsive" are synonyms, but only rarely can they be used interchangeably. Spontaneity "arises naturally rather than resulting from external constraint or stimulus", a definition infused with positive connotations. Impulsivity? Just the opposite, characterized as "a sudden urge or feeling not governed by reason". Those free to act spontaneously are "blessed" and those driven to behave impulsively are "bedevilled," "accursed," or "ill-fated". Those others, unable or unwilling to act in ways either spontaneous or impulsive, are in a class of their own – neither "blessed" nor "bedevilled," but not happy or fulfilled either. 5
  
- 2 Ultimately, the pivotal differences between these two terms makes obvious how each has psychological ramifications worthy of careful consideration. Although they may both have embedded in them the notion of "without conscious thought," impulsive behaviour clearly implies thoughtless behaviour in a way that spontaneous behaviour does not. There is a fairly complicated thought process underlying spontaneous behaviour that no one has ever adequately addressed. Those who oppose spontaneity often confuse it with impulsivity. Spontaneity is not detrimental, impulsivity is. 10
  
- 3 Impulsivity results in behaviour that is hasty and sudden. It is demonstrated by our drive to do something without the ability to take into account possible consequences (like impulsively reaching for another drink when we have already had as much as we can handle). In this case, our immediate feelings, unmediated by any deliberative thought process, exert pressure on us to act. Our best judgement is just not available. The immediate aftermath of acting on some immediate impulse can result in emotional distress, and lead to disappointment in ourselves. Acting impulsively puts us in danger of losing control that potentially can cause us (and others) real harm. We are compelled to do something that runs counter to our best interests. Impulsive behaviour is also typically regarded as untrustworthy. So we might describe someone with a serious shopping addiction as "an impulsive (or compulsive) spender," whereas it probably would not occur to us to depict that person's spending as "spontaneous." This is likewise true of drug addicts. 15  
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- 4 Children can easily be governed by whim, or desire. What makes a young child impulsive rather than spontaneous is that his behaviour typically has not first been mediated by some internal censoring mechanism. Children do such things because, in the moment, the behaviour is irresistible. Adults, however – benefiting from life experience – are better able to count the costs of their behaviour. Therefore, each action taken is informed by numerous past mistakes, insensitivities and oversights. Only actions that are prudent – or at least safely "gotten away with" – are performed. As adults, curiosity, a sense of adventure, or what is believed to be necessary or pleasurable, can all motivate us to act spontaneously. If we act spontaneously, it does not mean that we have not evaluated the possible liability of that particular behaviour. It is just that such assessment happens in a flash. Due to knowledge gained from experience, we can instantaneously judge whether an action makes sense, is safe - or at least poses a risk that is manageable. This allows spontaneous people to live in the moment while being responsible for their actions. 25  
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- 5 In fact, when we suggest that someone acts more spontaneously, what is implied is that it would benefit them to adapt more readily to changing or unexpected circumstances – that is, become more flexible. It gives them more faith in their ability to do something appropriately without first having to mull it over. In fact, because spontaneous people are not tied down to a particular plan, they are more likely to propose or accept creative solutions to problems that crop up. Their "go-with-the-flow" attitude allows them to avoid conflict and ride the wave of excitement that continuously exists. 40
  
- 6 In essence, spontaneity is about adaptability and openness to change. Spontaneous acts are in harmony with the person's values and interests. They are a natural manifestation of something that has been thought about in the past – and therefore an expression of experience. Spontaneous people make the best of every situation they face, and take full advantage of everything life has to offer. It may be a bit of conjecture, but it stands to reason that those who are more flexible, creative, and relaxed will ultimately be happier with their lives. 45

*Adapted from "The Wisdom of Spontaneity" by Leon F. Seltzer*

**Passage 2.** *Steven Poole questions the modern cult of spontaneity.*

- 1 Live for the moment. Be spontaneous. Be free and happy. Don't worry about the future. Act as though it is your last day on earth. You only live once. Such is one modern conception of the good life. Advertisements encourage us to drop everything and jet off for a city break at the last moment, or to walk at random into a bar where we are sure to meet a new gang of stock-photo besties, all ostentatiously sipping the same brand of transparent liquor. People are reluctant to make concrete social arrangements, so just say, "Text me." Serendipity is our friend; planning is for losers. "Spontaneity" is rhetorically offered as the reason to celebrate both online social media and last-minute travel bucket list shops. Truly living in the moment and embracing utter spontaneity would render you unable, for instance, to make and keep promises, or to formulate any kind of plan for helping yourself or others. 5 10
- 2 Why, then, is the dream of spontaneity so attractive? It is perhaps because most of our lives are so corralled and timetabled, and our workdays increasingly subject to silent, automated time-and-motion studies conducted by data-harvesting computers for the purpose of what is euphemised as "workforce science", that we dream all the more of being able to be spontaneous – at least in our free time. Our "free" time is just that time which is left to us after most of it has been forcefully taken away. And so the idea of spontaneity is a dream of liberty. 15
- 3 But true freedom, as Jean-Paul Sartre noted, is also terrifying. And spontaneity, it seems, is a virtue that we sorely wish to have ascribed to us but do not actually want to act out rigorously. To be thought of as a spontaneous person is to own a certain kind of devil-may-care cool, to seem open to new experiences. 20
- 4 However, to be a spontaneous person might lead to a more stressful and disorderly life. Thus, a whole new class of smartphone apps offers what can be thought of as a kind of mediated, filtered spontaneity – a kind of just-in-time planning that still gives the desired impression of impetuosity. For example, a mobile booking start-up called *Hotel Tonight* recently added a feature allowing users to peek at probable same-day rates a few days ahead. The company announced on its blog that this planning feature was part of their "never-ending quest to empower people to be more spontaneous". 25
- 5 Consumer spontaneity is very good for business. It is very much in the interest of people selling things if a habit of recklessly spending money at a moment's notice were considered part of a desirable personality. As it happens, a friend's Twitter feed was recently interrupted by a "promoted tweet" (that is, advert) chirruping: "Go Brazilian this summer with free Ipanema flip-flops when you pick up our bikini razor now." Perhaps the purchase of a "bikini razor" is meant to count as an investment in future spontaneity, though the spontaneity that really counts here is that of immediately clicking on an ad to buy a product. Furthermore, one finds that recent "spontaneity surveys" showing that Britons really wish they were more spontaneous, are predominantly carried out on behalf of companies for which more spontaneity equals more business: train operators and retailers. Or take the advert for Delta Private Jets – the tagline which reads: "Perfect moments are often made on a moment's notice." Here, spontaneity becomes a kind of meta-luxury. 30 35
- 6 The dream of spontaneity is one of escape, but the truth might be that the more time we spend in a self-built cage, the better we can escape. Other work in psychology reported that pursuing spontaneity at all costs ensures we will be less happy. The problem with a devotion to spontaneity is that we are all subject to "decision fatigue", the existential lethargy that sets in quickly when we are forced to make too many trivial choices. The antidote might be, then, to stick even more closely to a timetable. Freed from the self-imposed pressure to do an awesome thing spontaneously, we will actually experience more pleasure. When we stop worrying about living, we might start having more fun. 40

*Adapted from "Think Before You Act" by Steven Poole*