**How Have You Been Feeling?**

The debate continues about whether we are essentially good.

or whether we are essentially selfish, or neither, or both,

such as when you agree to take your auntie out and you end up

watching your local football team, and at least she is getting fresh air.

Karen, of course, has this habit of bouncing up to you on Tuesdays

and asking how you are feeling. It is very hard to tell

if Karen cares, or lacks a model of the mind of the other.

If you tell her how you are feeling she will talk about something else.

But she smiles. She has a warm, winning smile, the kind of smile

that film stars have when they receive an award, the kind of smile

that says either that everything is going wonderfully or you don’t

actually understand where you are and this is your bravest face.

I, on the other hand, am known for being miserable. When asked,

I usually say, so-so, a phrase so non-committal to my mind it is perfect,

but it is always taken negatively, as if I am feeling terrible

(which I am), and I am therefore known for not being particularly well.

This is why Karen, when she bounces up to me nowadays seems to think

I am not long for the world. ‘I am sorry,’ she says, ‘I hear you’re under the weather’.

‘I don’t know where you got that idea,’ I think, knowing she has no model of the mind of the other,

and so not actually replying. We both smile, like two happy fish, and swim on.

And so the debate continues. It began with some heavy thinkers.

It continues as gossip down the lane, a few Whatsapp messages about Ruth

who’s come down with something, and all our love to her,

and that awareness of the grey, brutal sky you normally have in February.