

So here's what I've been thinking about lately.

### The First Short Fable.

A fellow (We'll call him Arvek) lives in an uncomfortable world. The chairs don't fit, the tables are too far away, doors are at the wrong place to get through—nothing is right. One day a friend is complaining that his new couch feels crappy, and Arvek just by chance notes that his friend has a huge hump on his back. "You have a huge hump on your back," he says.

"Says you," is the friend's clever retort. But Arvek has become curious, and lifts the friend's shirt.

"Look!" Arvek exclaims. "You are wearing a backpack filled with canned peaches under your shirt!"

"No way," the clever friend replies, but Arvek unsnaps the straps holding the backpack in place and shows it to his friend.

"Now try sitting on your couch!" To the friend's amazement, the couch is *comfortable*.

This fuels Arvek's interest even more. So when another friend complains that the tables at Rio Bravo are too far from the seats, Arvek looks her over carefully.

"Look," he points out. "You are wearing your belt all the way around your arms. That's why you can't reach the table." Arvek unbuckles the belt, and miraculously his friend can reach her tequila shooter with no difficulty.

Soon Arvek is dispensing advice to everyone. "Don't wear your parka backwards, and you will be able to see better," he tells one. "Wear two smaller shoes instead of one really big one, and you can walk faster," he tells another. Life is entertaining, and Arvek is getting something of a reputation.

Then it happens. One morning as he is lowering the rails he uses to prevent rolling off the bed, but before he has put the ice cubes into his socks, Arvek has a thought—*What if I have something that is holding me back like all the others?* All during his morning the thought keeps returning. As he puts on his eye patch—*Is there something about myself that I don't see?* As he writes notes at the staff meeting, the pen held firmly between his teeth—*What if I am making things harder for myself?* As he lays the thumbtacks out on the bathroom floor for the next morning—*Is it time that I began to look at myself as critically as I have been looking at others?*

### The Second Longer Fable

A different fellow (We'll call him Arvek) is afraid of losing at strip poker, so he puts on every garment he can fit before the game begins. He loses the first hand and has to take off his topcoat. "Augh!" he cries. "Who am I now that I have lost my topcoat?"

"You're still Arvek," says the dealer. "How many cards?"

Then Arvek loses again and must remove his smoking jacket. “Woe!” he cries. “I am nobody now! I have no topcoat or smoking jacket!”

“You’re still Arvek,” says the dealer. “How many cards?”

Of course, Arvek is a terrible player. He loses his sweater vest, his cufflinks, and on and on. Each time he shouts something like “Oh no! I am diminished! I am nobody! What has happened to the man I once was?!”

And every time the dealer says, “You’re still Arvek. How many cards?”

But after many losing hands, Arvek is naked. “Now I can play no more,” he wails. “I am nobody, naked and poor, and I can’t even play the game any longer!”

“Sure you can,” says the dealer. “If you lose, you can shave off your beard.”

So Arvek plays again. He loses again. He shaves off his beard, and he cries out again. “Now it’s worse than I thought possible! Before I was naked, but now I’m naked and beardless, and I don’t look anything at all like the picture on my driver’s license! And I can’t play any more, because I don’t even have a beard!”

“Sure you can,” says the dealer. “If you lose, you can cut off your hair.”

So Arvek plays again. He loses again. He cuts off his hair, and he cries out again. “Before, I thought it was worse than I thought possible! Before I was naked and beardless and didn’t look anything at all like the picture on my driver’s license, but now I’m bald, too! And I can’t play any more, because I don’t have anything left to shave!”

“Sure you can,” says the dealer. “If you lose, you can shave your pubic hair.”

“Won’t that itch? Arvek asks

“How many cards?” asks the dealer.

So Arvek plays again. He loses again. He shaves his pubic hair, and he cries out again. “Before, I thought it was worse than I thought possible! Before I was naked and beardless and hairless, but now I look like some kind of pervert! And I can’t play any more, because I don’t have anything left *at all!*”

“Sure you can,” says the dealer. “If you lose, you can chop off your little toe.”

“Wait a minute,” says Arvek. “Clothes I can buy, hair I can grow. But toes, now once those are gone they are gone forever. I thought before that I was giving up my identity—especially now that not only am I unrecognizable, but also if someone did recognize me they would scutter away as fast as possible—but toes are a natural part of my actual body. If I cut off a toe, I can never go back.”

“Perhaps,” says the dealer, “but what if your luck is about to change?”

“Then again,” muses Arvek, “it’s just a toe. Evolution is apparently dropping them anyway—I would just be hastening the already destined fate of the toe, right?”

“How many cards?” asks the dealer.

When Arvek’s toes are gone, he absolutely refuses to consider fingers—except maybe the little pinkie ones that are not very useful. “I can still get a job with no toes,” he argues. “What kind of work will I get with no fingers? I won’t even be able to type.”

“Fingers may be extreme,” agrees the dealer. “They are far more a part of us than say, our left leg below the knee.”

“Just the left one?” asks Arvek.

“How many cards?” asks the dealer.

Later, Arvek has worked out a way to communicate by waving his arm stumps like Navy semaphores. “Look what I have done to myself!” he signals. “No one in their right mind would look at this lump of flesh and have the faintest inkling that it was once Arvek!”

“Do *you* know that it is Arvek?” the dealer replies.

“Well of course I do. If I didn’t know I was me, then my situation wouldn’t bother me, now would it?”

“So even though you’ve no arms or legs; and no liver, spleen, or gall bladder; even though you’ve lost your eyes, your tongue, one ear, and most of your blood supply, you still know that you are Arvek. True?”

“I suppose that’s true,” Arvek waves. “Perhaps there is a lesson in this. Maybe it is the case that all those times I thought that something that I was losing was a part of me, the truth is that no ‘part’ is really ‘part of me.’ Maybe there is something at the core of Arvek that remains in spite of what is stripped away- maybe there is a thing called ‘me’ that is still there, will always be there no matter what happens to my physical self.”

“So you are saying that as long as you are self aware, you still have something?” the dealer inquires.

“Yes, that sounds right. Even when I think I have lost everything that I can lose, as long as I know who I am, I still have my true self.”

“Arvek?” the dealer speaks.

“Yes?” Arvek signals.

“How many cards?”