

Aspects of Pleasure - Dopamine, Endorphine, Continuity

Post by "Julia" of November 9, 2024 at 8:36 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

continuous pleasures [...] sustained pleasures

What we consider to be painful and pleasurable is relative to our past experiences. Pleasures and pains both wear off with time. As such, no single pleasure can be sustained continuously – and that's not an opinion, that's biology. Now, the fragment uses the plural; that can be interpreted in a number of ways. However:

Whenever one pleasure ends and another pleasure begins – when, say, the pleasure of warmth ends to be replaced by that of a long winter hike – that winter hike will, by necessity, contain the pain of the absence of warmth and the presence of cold; vice versa, the winter hike contains the pleasure of watching bird and breathing fresh air, which were absent inside the warm cabin. In this way, by necessity, every pleasure – if at all, save only that of brief ecstasy – contains some pain.

How that pain is met is just as important as how the pleasure is met; and I chose to accept it as a fact of life, and dismiss it as fast and best I can, focusing my attention elsewhere instead (something I called "embrace" before).

Furthermore, what we consider a good time is relative to our past experiences (and unnatural desires instilled through media and society at large); today's good week is tomorrow's normal week, and also today's bad week is tomorrow's normal week. This is why, in times of abundance, running away from pain will only serve to narrow down the corridor of what is experienced, whereas in times of want, running away from pain will serve to widen the corridor of what is experienced.

Now, one might think: "That's fine, I'll narrow the corridor way up there, where all the pleasures are." However, that is precisely what doesn't work – because, as I said initially, pleasures wear off with time, and so that will be one dull, bland and pale corridor to rot away in. Instead, in times of abundance, the way to go is to seek out discomfort and pains to maintain one's experience of good things as pleasurable.

As for times of want, I suspect the vast majority of us, myself included, doesn't live on a remote trapline in the Yukon, where what is necessary for mere survival entails more than enough discomfort, pain and struggle already; and neither did Epicurus, which is why the [Letter To Menoceus](#) says:

Quote

To grow accustomed therefore to simple and not luxurious diet gives us health to the full, and makes one alert for the needful employments of life, and when after long intervals we approach luxuries disposes us better towards them, and fits us to be fearless of fortune.

I don't see the point in whining about the cold and the struggle, when I could just embrace it to get going to begin with, could just accept and dismiss it while I'm at it, and in this manner enable myself to shift my attention and enjoy breathing clear air, watching the birds.

Living in continuous pleasure *without a recurring, prior pursuit of that pleasure* is harmful, because it invariably leads to a progressive narrowing of the corridor of things which bring pleasure, which is at the very heart of addiction. The only way to keep that corridor wide and open is to do unpleasant things: Chop all the firewood for winter, instead of having it delivered. (There's nothing wrong with, e.g., earning money to then have firewood delivered. That's not instant gratification; there was a struggle for that pleasure, it was just done differently.) Clean your own house, instead of hiring a maid. Save up instead of taking out loans. Take a cold shower. Pleasure without pursuit switches the brain to an endorphin-driven system instead of a dopamine-driven system, and that means it kills one's motivation and drive, resulting in a lifestyle that is a pain in itself but very hard to break out of – because to break out of it one would need motivation and drive. That deadlock only exists, because abundance is not what we evolved to live with; humans thrive in struggles – well-chosen and calculated to yield net pleasure, but still: struggles. We thrive with pleasures which require recurring prior effort to capture them. Avoiding all struggle results in living with a big box of junk food, smartphone in hand. Instant gratification, no drive.

The opposite (dopamine-driven) route is that of purposely seeking out pleasures that are hard to get. In pursuing them, in accepting-but-dismissing the pain involved to get to them, one will at worst make oneself unusually motivated and driven, but that's not such a bad thing, because there are always nice adventures to be had. Those are the people who want to get out, want to go on a hike, a bike ride, build a shed, get things done – and who, in the end, happily enjoy even the simple pleasures nature readily provides, such as fresh food and clear water.

Now, I really want to agree to disagree, and that's why to be fair I'll read replies, but I won't reply in turn, because I don't want to argue this point any further (as I consider it to be a biological fact).