

Major (In the Sense of Major Publication) Review of Emily Austin's "Living for Pleasure"

Post by "Todd" of January 26, 2023 at 12:41 PM

I couldn't read the article - it seems to be behind a paywall. But here are my initial thoughts.

My gut reaction: Fear/anxiety is an extremely powerful emotion, and is a very effective tool for manipulating people. If I see someone telling me it's good to feel anxiety, I'm immediately suspicious.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I agree with that but I am not sure something does not need clarifying. "Anxiety" seems to be used by some people to cover a very wide range of things, including "anger."

I would not consider anger a form of anxiety. If you want a definition, I'd say anxiety is fear about the future. It suggests chronic fear about the more distant and uncertain future, but since all fear is ultimately about the future, that seems like merely a matter of degree.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I think we can say confidently that there are times when "anger," at least of a type, is indeed appropriate in response to certain circumstances. We've had a recent thread I think with some material from Philodemus on that.

I agree, but I think some clarification is needed. Anger (or sadness, or even fear) can certainly be an appropriate feeling in a given situation. Those are non-rational reactions - we can't choose to feel or not feel them. My point is that actions based solely on those emotions are unlikely to maximize our future pleasure. We need to choose our actions prudently, and consider what will be the result if I do this thing, and what if I do not. Actions are most effective when chosen rationally, and a state of ataraxia is best for doing that.

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

"The emotion of anxiety and the underlying physiological stress response evolved to protect us," Wendy Suzuki, a neuroscientist and the author of "Good Anxiety," said."

True, but I feel like this is leaving out some important context.

Fear and the associated stress response evolved in animals prior to humans, and prior to the development of the pre-frontal cortex.

When animals experience fear, they are reacting to an immediate, present danger. Animals can't imagine hypothetical future states to worry about. Humans can, and do.

Animals don't imagine what other animals might be thinking about them, and worry about that. Humans can, and do.

Animals (including humans) evolved to default to fear when encountering something new. This makes sense for self-preservation in a largely hostile environment. It doesn't work as well in the mostly safe environment that humans have been able to create for ourselves.