

Intelligent Desiring

The key to happiness is to desire intelligently. That is one of the major conclusions of my new philosophy, and it rests on a sound, rational basis. Because every desire is desired solely for the sake of the happiness which is expected to result from the desire's fulfillment, and because happiness can only be caused by the fulfillment of a desire, intelligently arranging your desires can result in continual happiness, with no disappointments, or unhappiness, at all. However, in order to experience such happiness, understanding life, and the process of desiring, is a prerequisite.

Perhaps the most important change that is required, if such happiness is to be experienced, is that the concept of "need" must be eliminated. You do not *need* anything, because you do not even *need* to live as a human being. Of course, necessity does rule in its own sphere. The law of cause and effect cannot be overthrown, the past cannot be changed, and several other such things are necessary, but not a single one of your desires is *necessary*, and if you look upon them as such, you cause yourself a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness and grief.

By this I do not mean to imply that you should abandon all your desires, as ascetics would advise. I simply mean that all your "needs" should be downgraded to desires. Perceiving a desire as a need simply causes trouble without adding anything of value to the desire. For example, those who expressed their desire to join the gold rush as "California or bust" placed their entire happiness at the mercy of one desire, over whose fulfillment they had very little control. As a result, out of the thousands involved, very few succeeded, and the rest either had to change their mind about their "need", or resign themselves to unhappiness for the rest of their life.

As there is a great deal of such hopeless resignation in human life, I hope I can make it clear how ridiculous this approach to living is. First, in my example, there was no way those men could be certain they would get all the way to California. Second, there was very little chance that, if they did get there, they would strike it rich. And third, even if they did strike it rich, they might have lost their reason for desiring to strike it rich in the first place, in which case success would just make them miserable. For example, if a Kentucky farmer was among the gold rushers, and if his desire was to create a better life for his family, then even if he did strike it rich, his riches would only cause him bitter misery if his family had perished in the meantime.

All such misery can be dissolved by a little wisdom, because if the purpose of desire is continually recognized by the desirer, he will never get lost in the means to his end. To get back to our Kentucky farmer, if he had weighed the life he had in Kentucky against the possible life he could create elsewhere, he could have decided it was worth the risk to attempt a change. However, if he realized that his wife did not want to take that risk, then his purpose, the happiness of his family, would be immediately destroyed by his taking it. Therefore, it would be foolish for him even to attempt it, since even the attempt would undercut his own purpose. Of course, if his wife also desired to take the risk, then her happiness would depend on making the attempt, and, if they viewed it as an attempt, and not as a certainty, or an end in itself, the farmer and his wife would enjoy the attempt itself more than they would enjoy a continuation of their life in Kentucky, because in that way their purpose would be served whether or not they made it to California, and whether or not they struck it rich. This is a good example of the fact that when desires are desired intelligently, the fulfillment of the actual desire is just frosting on the cake. The process is what produces the bulk of the enjoyment.

That is because the process is always under the control of the desirer. Only he can decide to attempt, or not to attempt, to fulfill a particular desire, and if the process is viewed as the bulk of the

desire, the bulk of the desire always gets fulfilled, whether or not the desire itself is completely fulfilled.

I use this gold rush example because it is typical of the way humans view their most important desires. All of them are viewed as *needs*. A man tells a woman “I *need* you,” as if that were a compliment. A woman in love thinks to herself that unless she marries the man she loves she will be miserable—and she will, if she thinks that way.

Besides these human needs for money and matrimony, most humans need to go to heaven, or to sink into nirvana, or to merge with God’s consciousness, and these are probably the most frantically, and fearfully, embraced needs of all, since these goals represent final, perfect happiness to the person in need—and, of course, everyone *needs* perfect happiness.

The ironic aspect to all these self-imposed requirements is that the reason for imposing them is to ensure happiness, and the effect of imposing them is the inevitable creation of misery. Even when a need is fulfilled, for example, if you are rich, or are married to the person you *need*, viewing the desire as a need upsets your happiness anyway, because you are always afraid of losing the necessity. In addition, viewing desires as needs can cause insanity if the need goes unfulfilled, and always causes grief when the need is lost.

Grief is simply the emotion of unhappiness intensified by the fact that the unfulfilled desire was viewed as a need. For example, humans tend to view their parents as necessary, which is especially foolish in light of the fact that their parents’ death is necessary, not their parents. That is why the grief which follows a mother’s death is often hard to understand for the griever. Sadness at the passing of a loved one is another thing, but the grief which makes grown men weep without knowing why is due to this misunderstanding of necessity. It is hard for the mind of someone who viewed his mother as essential, as necessary, to comprehend how life can go on once she is dead—and that is just how heavy mourners think. They have trouble understanding why the world did not skid to a halt when their loved one died.

Particularly severe cases of need can even cause insanity. For example, a husband who is slavishly dependent on his wife may lose his sanity when she dies if he refuses to comprehend the change which has occurred. Whenever reality does not conform to an individual's view of necessity an adjustment must be made in either one or the other. That is why the miseries of insanity are all unnecessary. They are all caused by inaccurate understandings of life in which necessity and reality diverge from one another.

This should make it clear why viewing any particular desire, which is simply one means to happiness, as necessary to happiness itself, places the enjoyment of life in great jeopardy. Unfortunately, this foolish habit is common, and is responsible for an enormous portion of the fear and unhappiness which humans experience.

The facts say that life does continue when your parents die. The facts say that life does continue when your best friend dies. The facts say that life does continue even if you don't own a million dollars. The facts say that life does continue even if you are raped. The facts say that life does continue even if you are bankrupt. The facts say that life does continue even if you have accidentally killed someone else. And the facts say that life does continue even if the person you love marries someone else. There is no use in fighting the facts, but there is a good reason for attempting to understand them: if you do, you can make the facts work *for* you, rather than *against* you.

Any desire is dispensable. In fact, any desire *should* be dispensed with if doing so serves the purpose of that desire better than pursuing that desire could. Desires are servants of happiness. That is why it is so foolish to pursue them when they are destroying what happiness you already have.

For example, a happily married man, with a wife and two young children, suddenly gets the urge to have a wild fling. Often you will hear such men refer to this urge as a *need*, as a biological necessity. Of course, it is not, but viewing it as such effectively shifts the responsibility for his foolishness onto nature—at least in the man's own mind. Now, indulging in such wild escapades puts

a great deal in jeopardy: his long term friendships, his happy family life, the respect of his wife, the happiness of his children, and perhaps even his career. All for what? All for a simple physical sensation which is only pleasurable because it is desired. That is how out of balance viewing a simple desire as a need can throw a man's mind.

If the perspective of the purpose of a desire is not lost, the desire will never be viewed as a need. The happiness expected from a desire, if not forthcoming, causes the desirer who retains this perspective to cancel the desire. However, for those who have lost sight of this purpose, the absence of happiness only causes the desire to be intensified. This is why the goal of becoming a millionaire almost always intensifies into the desire to become a multimillionaire. This is also why desires turn into needs. Something is missing upon the fulfillment of the first desire which is hardly even recognized, but that vague sense that something is missing often causes redoubled efforts to succeed. Ironically, what is missing is happiness.

Of course, I am not claiming that no happiness exists, but just that not enough of it does. The desire to become a millionaire, having been fulfilled, must cause some happiness, but it is rarely the kind of happiness expected by the desirer, since those who desire to become a millionaire for its own sake generally imagine their state of mind, upon fulfilling their dream, as being perfectly happy. I would be quite willing to bet the same disappointment reigns in heaven. Not right away, of course, because the first flush of success, both in becoming a millionaire, and in having escaped the pains of hell, must be tremendous. However, after a while the sneaking suspicion is bound to creep in that neither goal is all it's advertised to be.

These problems are all due to the fact that most desirers fall prey to the illusion that happiness is a matter of quantity. It is not. It is a matter of quality. One of the most important conclusions of my explanation of life lies in this fact: happiness, if it is to be pursued intelligently, and enjoyed continuously, must be viewed as a qualitative state of mind, and not as a

quantitative possession. Working hard at being happy never works. Desiring intelligently does.

Besides recognizing that no desire is a need, intelligent desiring consists of recognizing that the goal of all desires is happiness, that the quality of the happiness produced by the fulfillment of a desire depends solely on the quality of that desire, that priority desiring is extremely valuable, and that contingency desiring holds the promise of continual happiness, even though the quality of that happiness will always be changing.

I'm sure some people will still argue that there are *needs* in life, such as food, sex, and the other appetites, which are often referred to as instincts, but in every case there are examples of human beings who desired something else even more, and thus violated their biological "instructions". These facts undermine the instinct theory. That is why I consider it more fruitful to view an "instinct" as a petrified habit.

For example, there are persons who, for a more important goal (as far as they are concerned), will forego all food, starving themselves to death to prove a point. There are also individuals who refrain from all sexual behavior in order to achieve something far more important to them (and even though the majority of such attempts do not prove successful, even one exception would disprove the need theory). There are even individuals who have ignored the supposed need to seek survival first. To serve thousands of other desires, from highly idealistic ones to the simple pursuit of a fleeting glimpse of glory, millions have unnecessarily laid their lives on the line.

This is because it is all a matter of priority what appears to a desirer as a need, even though none of his desires are actually necessary. That is why it is much wiser to view desires simply as more or less important, for in that way they can all serve happiness most effectively. Life continually demands that we make decisions based on the priority of our desires anyway, so if a desirer does not have a clear sense of what is important to himself, he has a difficult time making decisions, and can even become subject to his every whim.

On the other hand, if a person has a clear conception of the importance of his desires, decisions are very easy to make, and a comfortable sense of being in control of his own life is experienced. Based on these observations, my conclusion is that the highest priority desire ought to be the structural basis of all desires: the desire to be happy. Saying that this is the highest priority desire is just the same as saying that desirers would be well advised to remember the purpose of their desires.

The rest of the priority list of desires should conform to the desirer's own conception of which of his own desires he expects will produce the highest quality of happiness. The more productive a desire is expected to be, the higher the priority it should be given, as that makes it easy to decide against low priority desires whenever they get in the way of a higher priority desire. This is actually just a description of what everyone does anyway, but being conscious of this process is often very helpful in realigning your own priorities. Since many people lose sight of purposes, they often unwittingly destroy their own happiness.

For example, a man may desire to be rich in order to satisfy more of his family's desires, but if one of their most important desires is for him to be relaxed and happy, and to spend more time with them, the two full-time jobs he works in order to please them destroys their happiness more than it helps it. Of course, if a man's family doesn't care about him except insofar as he makes money, and if that man's highest ambition is to be a money-making machine, then the described situation *would* yield more happiness, not less.

Priority decisions like these have to be made all the time, and in every case the decision falls on the side of what *appears* as if it will produce more happiness. The only trouble with this is that appearances are often deceptive. On first thought it may appear that producing the largest number of goods will produce the greatest profit, but every good businessman knows that there is a point of diminishing returns, given the realities of the marketplace. The same is true of all quantity/quality decisions. A graph could be constructed showing how much more work would yield how much

more money allowing how many more desired objects to be possessed as a function of the diminishing free time available to enjoy those possessions, but, even then, this graph would only be treating one individual and his possessions. The qualitative enjoyment of friendships and family life has to be weighed in the balance as well, and the individual's desires have everything to do with how the decision should be made to maximize his own happiness.

That is why deciding to work longer hours is wise for those who enjoy their work, and the people they work with, more than they enjoy their home life, whereas for others such a decision may be very foolish. Of course, that example ignores the financial factors involved in almost all such decisions. For those who work solely for the money, a balance must be struck between the amount of free time and the amount of income, and that balance will depend a lot on how expensive that worker's free time desires are to fulfill.

Because of all these individual factors, no one can make such decisions for another person as well as he can for himself, but what *would* assist everyone is a clear set of priorities, and the willingness to "sacrifice" low priority desires which interfere with the fulfillment of higher priorities.

Actually, there is no such thing as a *sacrifice*, which is why I set that word off. When someone says she has made a sacrifice, she only means that she gave up a less important desire in order to fulfill a more important one. For example, if a woman spends more time cooking for her family than her neighbors do, and watches less TV as a result, she may be looked upon as a self-sacrificing mother. But actually, if anyone should be labeled with that adjective, it should be her neighbors, since they sacrifice the pleasure of pleasing their families' taste buds in order to watch just one more game show.

Another example is the self-sacrificing husband who decides to forego the extra work a chance for a vice-presidency might entail in order to spend more time at home so that his wife can also pursue a career. Such men may appear to be great saints to those who wouldn't think of thinking of their own wife's desires, but

such thoughtless men are the real sacrificers, because their family life cannot be pleasant unless their wife is able to fulfill her desires too.

However, in all these cases no one actually sacrifices anything, according to their own way of thinking, as they each choose what appears to them to promise the most happiness. The idea that you have sacrificed something is, therefore, only disruptive to the amount of happiness you can experience from your choices, since it is a dishonest evaluation of what you have done. That is why I discard the whole idea. It only diminishes the enjoyment one obtains from virtuous actions. The concept of self-sacrifice is based on false assumptions. It appears to exist simply because everyone does not share the same set of priorities. What would in reality be a sacrifice for one person (which, given his priorities, simply means an action he would never engage in) is actively desired by the person who performs it, and that eliminates all elements of sacrifice from the action.

For example, a miser must think anyone who buys Christmas presents for his friends is a self-sacrificer. Because misers don't know how much fun it is to give, such a perception undoubtedly seems valid to them. Of course, there are complicating factors. Many apparent self-sacrificers do suffer under the burden of their sacrifices, but that is because they disagree with themselves about making the sacrifice. Most cases of this nature, numbering in the billions, no doubt, are caused by the performance of duty as opposed to personal preference. In these cases it is the desire to be dutiful which takes priority, and whatever that entails, in terms of time and money and specific actions, will be engaged in by the desirer even though, if given his freedom from duty, he would live quite differently. Because such duties are performed motivated by fear (either the fear of God's wrath, the fear of bad karma, the fear of public censure or the fear of losing your own self-respect), such self-sacrificers are not very happy individuals. They are pleased with themselves for being dutiful, but the rest of their desires, going unfulfilled as a result, cause a great deal of unhappiness as well.

This points out one of the basic problems of recognizing what happiness actually is: the quality of happiness experienced is as varied as desires are. In addition, some happiness, of some sort, is experienced by every individual, no matter how unhappy they are as well, since some basic desires, such as to be alive, or to eat, and the like, are being fulfilled in every case. Even those persons who hate being alive also love being alive. It is only when their desire to die becomes stronger than their desire to live that they commit suicide. So, everyone is happy, but most people are unhappy as well, because some of their desires are fulfilled, and some of them are unfulfilled. This mix of happiness and unhappiness, given the priority of the desires involved, creates the quality of each person's overall emotion of happiness. If this sounds complex, it is. It is also why each individual is unique.

However, any individual can arrange to be a basically happy person simply by intelligently arranging the priority of his desires so that high quality, fulfillable desires carry the most weight in creating his mix of the emotion of happiness. That way those desires which go unfulfilled, and create unhappiness as a result, will never be able to disrupt his fundamentally happy nature.

I should emphasize that the concept of quality is very important in this endeavor to be happy. In its ability to satisfy the longing for happiness, the quality of a desire is all important, as the disappointment which follows shortly after intense bursts of pleasure demonstrates. By recognizing desires as servants of happiness, they can be ranked, with respect to their inherent quality, without much difficulty.

The highest quality desire, being the one best able to serve the number one priority desire (the desire to be happy), is the desire to understand life better. Without understanding, life is completely outside the individual's control, and happiness must then be viewed as purely a matter of luck. When considering the importance of priority desiring in creating happiness, the art which Socrates recommended, that is, the art of being able to perceive which is greater and which is lesser, the art of being able to distinguish