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Eudaimonia and Entropy: The Codependency of Inverses

Your body is decaying. The universe pays you no mind. Hire a prostitute, gorge yourself on dark chocolate, get on the treadmill and pump yourself full of SSRIs. Are you happy now? Humanity lives to cope with the undesirable truth of happiness, one we rarely pause to confront. Existence, by nature, has no structure nor overall purpose, but in its entropy humans rebel, making sense and meaning of a universe which has neither. We call this phenomenon happiness.

Scientific happiness, however, deviates from this definition, instead adopting a hedonic understanding. If put into the situation described, the prostitute would give you sexual gratification and consequently heightened oxytocin, the dark chocolate would release high levels of dopamine in your brain, exercise would improve your physical wellbeing and increase your endorphins, and the SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) would, as stated, heighten your level of serotonin. These four compounds, socially christened as our “happy chemicals”, are what give us the feeling of happiness. According to the National Institute of Health, “all activities [are] managed by [the] brain. Thoughts, feelings, activities, learning and love, [are] all conducted by [the] brain. Mood and emotions are not except for this role…positive mood and negative mood [are] mediated by dopamine and serotonin levels”, with endorphins “associated with states of pleasure and emotional well-being” and “providing a physiological basis for mood regulation”, and oxytocin “resulting in a feeling of well-being…positively associated with satisfaction with life”. In theory, the constant release of these chemicals would bring you to a state of immense happiness. Under this hypothesis, a disorder defined by the imbalance of these chemicals in which periods of intense surges of serotonin, dopamine, and several other chemicals medically associated with “happiness” occur, one would assume their duration to be

characterized by a constant state of joy. Bipolar disorder, defined by these periodic psychological floods, is a condition I am intimately familiar with—I've lived with it since adolescence. There is a duality in the hyperactivity of my "happy" neurotransmitters: my mania, their violent overfiring, will (stereotypically) look like intense euphoria, self-appointed grandiosity, and heightened energy, but also manifests itself as periods of extreme paranoia, irritability, self-destructive tendencies and the degradation of my body, and in severe cases, psychosis. According to science, I am happy, but my reality serves as both a brutal juxtaposition and a dispute against the reduction of happiness to something purely physiological. When put in situations that induce the "happy chemicals", whether it be a manic episode, having sex, or eating your favorite food, it wholly caters to the Freudian id, our instinctual drive toward immediate gratification. Many would argue that this isn't "true" happiness, and this is correct. The presence of these chemicals is pleasure, which is often misconstrued for happiness. While our biology *is* the birthplace of pleasure, happiness is a product of the *human psyche*. Neo-Aristoleian philosophies recognize this conscientious, structured form of happiness as eudaimonia: a state of purposeful human fulfillment independent of temporary pleasure.

To understand what exactly eudaimonia, or "true" happiness, is, we must first understand the foundation it arises from. The universe tends toward entropy: the disorder or randomness in a given system. The second law of thermodynamics states that the total entropy of a system either increases or remains constant in any spontaneous process—it never decreases, and the level of entropy in the universe is steadily increasing. The concept of entropy applies to dimensions beyond the perceivable, specifically in terms of string theory, the current candidate for the "theory of everything", which suggests the existence of up to 11 dimensions. Humans, as fourth dimensional beings (measured in time rather than length, width, or volume), cannot perceive

beyond the third, and attribute dimensions higher than our own to the theoretical: God, the soul, fate, etc. The extension of entropy to all planes of existence results in our incredibly human response: mass resistance and rebellion. As discussed in Roger D. Peterson's *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe*, the lack of understanding and/or acceptance of the system a community is living under mobilizes action, often taking shape in the defiance against said system. Our happiness is this rebellion; it is the creation of structure, meaning, and order in a universe with none—in spite of entropy, we pursue eudaimonia. Social structure, language, traditions, all attributes of humanity are efforts to counter entropy. The epitome of this rebellion, however, is religion, which pushes further than the known disorder and tackles existential entropy, simultaneously acting as a universal form of order as it applies to all aspects of human life: birth, death, virtue, relationships, purpose, and so on, giving almost everything we know meaning. The idea of divinity, in other words the perfectly disentropic, is a paradigm for human revolt—we value so highly, dedicate our lives, assign the highest meaning and fulfillment to, *worship* the absolute omission of entropy.

This structure we so desperately crave is inherent to our species. We are in constant psychological combat with disorder, predisposed by nature to seek patterns, order, and meaning. Apophenia, the psychological tendency to perceive meaningful patterns and connections in ambiguous stimuli, defines the human brain. The feeling of finding this structure and therefore eliminating entropy is what we perceive as happiness. These cognitive traits originated as survival instincts—we were meant to evolve to handle entropy. Our evolutionary progress is measured in our successes against it, from the paleolithic age and our discovery of agriculture and shelter to the birth of fine arts: our progression into making sense and meaning of the abstract—translating the divine, the tragic, and the beautiful.

Although we constantly seek its absence, we inevitably crave universal entropy to contrast our creation against. A heavily stoic principle, the lack of chaos cannot exist without chaos itself. As a result, entropy is what ultimately creates organization and consequently happiness. Roman philosopher Seneca, whose dogma was primarily based on imperfection and improvement, writes in *De Providentia* that "no man is more unhappy than he who never faces adversity", echoing Heraclitus, recognized for his paradoxical philosophies, in his notion that "all things come into being through opposition". Both argue that the universe is structured by contrast and forces human life to rely on it. Synonymous with these beliefs, the proposal of utopia, the theoretical achievement of unlimited and inconsequential happiness, becomes hell. Explored in American ethologist John Calhoun's "Mice Utopia" experiment, the creation of and residence in the ideal without natural predators, hardship, or resource scarcity proved detrimental to animal species. Specifically with mice, it was observed that they responded to this type of environment with unnatural and violent behavior, social dysfunction, and even biological decline. Existence in "perfection", something both unattainable and unnatural in our universe, causes unnatural responses. Living organisms are wired for survival, short circuiting under the presented futility of this fundamental impulse.

So why, and more importantly *how,* does this apply to humans? We often forget that we are animals, too far removed from this fact by our cognitive superiority and societal advancement. Our animality, however, becomes obvious in the observation of our behavior in proximity to utopia and its effects on human happiness. Similar to the mice, we become our own predators when placed at the top of the food chain. In our current state of near-utopia, an exponentially advanced society with our human needs readily available (to the majority), we almost completely lose the need for our programmed survival instincts—our internal drive to

diminish entropy. Exactly how it was for the mice, this environment is unnatural for us. The fundamentality of entropy to living in this universe is so essential that we as animals, when distanced from it, subconsciously recreate this entropy for ourselves by serving ourselves everything on a silver platter, so gluttonously catering to our atavistic needs. The reason most humans enjoy junk foods heavy in fats and sugar is because our brain still views these types of macronutrients as a *nutritional need that is difficult to find naturally*, thus triggering the brain's reward system that floods you with dopamine, and when consumed in excess, causes even greater pleasure. This is only one of countless examples of the human population's desensitization to true universal entropy—what would have caused disentropy and synonymously happiness would have been the successful consumption of our body's required macronutrients, but the presence of "neo-disentropy", the modern access to an excess of basic disentropy, paints this basic, *natural* disentropy as today's entropy, or "neo-entropy". The rise of both neo-entropy and neo-disentropy has motivated a mass suicide in our happiness. When contrasted against natural entropy, natural disentropy registers as happiness to humans. When contrasted against neo-disentropy, natural entropy becomes excruciating, and is, unfortunately, unavoidable. Reiterating the second law of thermodynamics, the total (natural) entropy of a system is either constant or, in the case of the universe, increasing.

The presence of both entropy/disentropy and neo-entropy/neo-disentropy in the universe has caused the contemporary understanding of happiness to stray from its basic definition. We have perverted disentropy (i.e., happiness), in its pursuit. The human insatiability for its structure, security, and advancement, the literal "pursuit of happiness", has paradoxically drawn us further from its achievement. Put simply, Icarus has flown too close to the sun. At this point in

time, “true” happiness is difficult to attain because of its reliance on natural entropy rather than what is humanly synthesized.

As a result of this dilemma, humans tend toward universally permeated homeostasis—reversion to immaterial, natural disentropy. The growing popularization of “tech cleanses”, the Mediterranean and Caveman diets, and even LSD (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide) and its subsequent “ego deaths” are all examples of human effort to create disentropy within the self rather than relying on the heavily distorted outside world. Those in pursuit of this internal disentropy are those who have realized where true happiness is perpetually available: the self, the only thing that is constant in an ever changing world, and solipsistically, the only thing we can prove to exist. It relies on nothing, is birthed simply out of existence, and is arguably what we have the most (and possibly full) control over. Everything is entropic, therefore holding potential for disentropy, and this principle naturally applies to the self. True to the infamous saying, “you cannot control the behavior of others but you can always control your own”, self control, order, structure and internal alignment creates true happiness—happiness that is universally achievable.

The pursuit of knowledge, self improvement, building relationships, growth: the individual lifespan, is, by nature, the pursuit of internal disentropy. While humanity continues to change, psychological needs, at least in the entropic realm, do not, and neither does the presence of entropy. We exist with sex, drugs, and rock & roll readily available to us, but the acquisition of true happiness wholly relies on an individual's pursuit of internal disentropy. Only the silence of internal noise leaves room for eudaimonia to sound.

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