

Christopher C. Brower and Kirkland M. Eater

Humanities 104

Professor Anne Wills

25/4/24

THE DISTANT PASTURE

The characterisation of humans as creatures of constant striving directly opposes the modern ideal of “enjoying the moment”. Each of these approaches is at odds with the other for the simple fact that their coexistence as natures of humanity is impossible. The action of striving inherently places one in a state of imagining what comes next. Enjoying the moment at least entails an appreciation towards one’s current state. We will provide an argument against the account that claims “enjoying the moment” to be a sustainable method of living. Rather, perpetual striving is the default state for humans.

The above does not necessarily mean striving punctuates all moments, all of the time. It is certainly possible to not consider the future at a given moment, focused on the task at hand. This could be simply passing time, or working on a smaller goal with focus. However, we argue on the larger scale that humans are bound to return to a state of dreaming about greener grass. The best argument for this lies in the encapsulation of human history as a tale. As primitive creatures, we hunted for survival, and satisfied bare necessities to stay alive. Over time, we dreamed of ways to build shelter, to get food quicker. Despite these dreams coming to pass, we invented replacements, no matter the size of the goal attained.

Now, let us define “perpetual striving”. Where do your goals come from? Consider them as a product of possible choices: what seems to be the ideal possibility to maximize your satisfaction? The ‘ideal’ property of possible futures comes from the perpetual imagining of a

life lived ‘otherwise’. Take the common cliché “the grass is always greener on the other side”.

Applied to the nonstop passing of time, it could be said that we are always visualising this grass, perpetually searching for the “better option”.

Enjoying the moment derives from a commonly-used piece of advice, which is to ‘live in the moment’. The state of mind implied by living in the moment entails continual appreciation for the present moment. Appreciation for the present is necessary for living in the moment due to the present moment being exhaustible to the person’s thoughts *by definition of living in the moment*. Appreciation arises from presence of mind, similarly to how an art critic may appreciate a painting by dedicating their present thought to it. The opposite does not follow, as the same degree of appreciation would not be attainable while preoccupied with a non-present mind.. The non-present mind is, as the name suggests, not present due to preoccupation. It is intuitive to assume that the critic could still have some appreciation for the art, to an extent of preoccupation. Thus, we can conclude appreciation exists to varying degrees from this as well, due to its correspondence with presence of mind. As such, enjoyment should be categorised as maximal or near-maximal appreciation.

Evaluating whether or not enjoying the moment is a sustainable approach to life becomes about maintaining maximal appreciation. The requisite for this level of appreciation is maintained presence of mind. This is implausible to sustain. In reality, our lives as humans are punctuated by distractions, with the buildup of these diversions to our minds leading to our “greener grass”.