

Spirit of enquiry is
vital to human
fulfilment philosophy
essay



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The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.” – Albert Einstein

Humans are by nature curious and enquiring beings. We are also rarely able to be content in the state in which we find ourselves, as there is always something not possessed or obtainable, something we are not fully aware of that we still desire. As we go about our daily lives we experience and actively seek the unknown. Indeed it is generally accepted that enquiry and curiosity generally leads to overwhelmingly positive experiences as opposed to continuing blindly with the mundane nature of everyday life. There is indeed much to be said for searching out new and exciting experiences, giving us a fuller perspective and a greater insight into the world around us. Scientists identify the ‘spirit of enquiry’ as being synonymous to ‘scientific temper’ – most scientific discoveries, after all, were conceived in the spirit of enquiry. However, is this mental attitude crucial for human satisfaction and fulfilment?

The quest for human fulfilment is one which to this day remains largely unsolved; there is of course no ‘correct’ way to live one’s life, otherwise we would all be satisfied. Human fulfilment is difficult to define but for me it represents, at its core, a basic feeling of happiness and satisfaction. Three things which I believe are absolutely paramount to this feeling of fulfilment are: successful relationships, achieving one’s aims, and discovery – self-discovery or otherwise. These are all inter-linked – without venturing into some realm of the unknown, how can we ever have new experiences,

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achieve one's desires or meet other like-minded people? Enquiry is absolutely essential in leading us to the most fulfilling experiences of our lives, whether it is discovering and reading a book which inspires you to change your life, visiting an entirely new country and immersing yourself in its cultures and traditions or making an important scientific discovery.

Whilst some scientific advances have been achieved purely by chance (e. g. the discovery of Penicillin) most require a questioning, seeking mind and perseverance at the highest level. Today science does not tend to advance by chance - humans are at such a level of understanding (through our continuation of efforts) that we must in general use a 'trial and error' basis for research, which is where intelligence and our basic feelings of curiosity are hugely important.

In a similar way, it is generally accepted that in today's economic climate, a good education is of paramount importance. In a world where places for further education and where jobs are scarce, universities and prospective employers are increasingly looking for individuals who demonstrate this very spirit of enquiry. People who throw themselves into lots of different things are far more appealing than those who do not take advantage of their situation and do not actively seek new experiences; this is because an active and enquiring mind is present in an adaptable, versatile and intelligent individual. Thus, it is conducive to human fulfilment in the sense that it facilitates transition into the working world. Equally vital however is the ability to focus the mind, and not fall into the trap of becoming a jack of all trades, as leaving quests or pursuits unfinished can be the least fulfilling and most tragic thing of all.

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As well as its rather superficial economic benefits (ease of finding a job etc), an enquiring and curious mind is in my opinion a lot more content than an intellectually apathetic one – however, according to various polls, only a small proportion of Americans own passports (the Guardian estimates the number at 22%). Although this is not a definitive sign that they are not mentally inquisitive, it does suggest some of them have little interest in leaving the safety and comfort of their country. However this does not apparently adversely affect their happiness – according to a survey from gallup.com, 84% of Americans say they are satisfied with the way things are going in their personal life at this time, while 14% are dissatisfied. In this case, those surveyed feel fulfilled without having to take the leap of leaving their country. There is obviously a significant defence to the argument that only through intellectual curiosity we can be truly fulfilled. However I believe that the more basic intelligence one has, the more one will naturally feel the instinct to explore and to enquire. Those who do will often become enriched by the wealth of knowledge and personal experience gained, and those who don't will either continue unaware of what the world holds and not mind while the rest will undoubtedly feel unfulfilled.

There is of course an argument that in some cases, ignorance is bliss. I strongly believe that today's current state of general hysteria (particularly with regard to health and crime) is in some part caused the media – whether its claims be misinformed or otherwise, I believe that (warnings about genuine and formidable dangers aside) some things are better left unsaid. Scaremongering the public about the possible carcinogenic properties of everyday foods or the pervasiveness of violent crime is not particularly

constructive; it is hard to focus on the things which really matter in life and seek fulfilment in an atmosphere of chronic paranoia – in some ways, a more relaxed approach to daily life would be more beneficial to the human spirit.

However, I strongly believe that on a more basic level, humans must continue to search spiritually, scientifically and personally if there is any hope for happiness and fulfilment. There is a danger that if we let the important aspects of our lives be pushed aside by apathy and ignorance, we run the risk of losing sight of these things entirely, which would be a tragedy as friendship, love and discovery are the sole paths to human fulfilment and being happy, which in the end is arguably the most important thing we can ever hope to be.