

# Delight and Despair: Personality and Experience

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We all lead our lives within the continuum from delight to despair with different sources over different lengths of time for each of these consequences. Most often we dwell in the more neutral zone between these emotional extremes – a little this way or that way, depending on the circumstances. Different social, physical and/or cognitive conditions push us to different locations along this continuum. And while we encourage and look forward to experiences that take us toward delight, we seek to minimize and avoid experiences that move us toward despair. Often we elect or are required to do things in the process of which we can flow between being satisfied [delight] or frustrated [despair] depending on how events are proceeding. Until we arrive at the point of completion, we do not know what the final emotional results will be. If we and others around us view the results positively, we trend toward delight; if we and others around us view the results negatively, we trend toward despair.

Of course we are always anticipating new activities, so we can not dwell long in either emotional consequence. Only if the results are traumatic do the negative consequences tend to linger or in the extreme case become embedded. In the context of trauma, we avoid being involved in the causal activity or anything associated with it. Interestingly, extremely positive results rarely sustain to become embedded with lasting effects. Instead, we seek to repeat the activity or some variant thereof so as to experience the positive consequences again. If we are repeatedly unsuccessful across a broad range of activities, the trend toward avoidance can become the norm, and opportunities to participate in new experiences may be rejected. If repeated positive consequences are the norm, opportunities to experience the challenges of new experiences may be sought.

Biology/personality inclines Individuals more or less in one or the other of these directions, and experience can either confirm or deny these inclinations. Social and physical survival sometimes favors the more adventurous, and sometimes favors the more cautious. The adventurous take more risks and both fail and succeed more often than do the cautious. So, the adventurous tend to enjoy more moments of delight, but they also suffer more moments of despair than the cautious. And, on the extreme continuum, the adventuresome are not reckless, just as the cautious are not timid. As in all things, it is a matter of degree!

All humans aspire to maximize delight and to minimize despair. The actual results of our activities in this regard depend on 1) our biology/personality, 2) the collective success or failure we have experienced in our previous activities

which influences our willingness to take risks, 3) the level of satisfaction or frustration we experience in the process of executing our activities, 4) the actual positive or negative results of our activities themselves, and 5) the positive or negative reaction of and with others around us to the results of our activities.