

How to Go to Hell with Least Effort?

Have you ever wondered why this era, when information is so readily available, is dominated by superficiality? Why is it, that when there are so many books, people read less? Why do the language skills of the younger generations become poorer and poorer? And why are there more and more children with learning disabilities? Why the proliferation of so many addictions, and obsessive/compulsive behavior patterns? And why are most people indifferent toward the imminent danger of global warming, the disappearance of honeybees, the daily extinction of animal and plant species?

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Could the answer to all these questions be the same? Several young people told me in confidence that their lives weren't worth living; they felt, they had no life: work, sleep, nothing to look forward to, no excitement. They felt the only true excitement they experienced was when they did drugs. When I asked them, what would make them happy, the answer was, being on a beach in Thailand and perhaps, doing drugs.

Some of my friends are single and they dream about having a healthy, good relationship. Only, they are not willing to travel further than the next block to meet a prospective date. Some others live in bad relationships; they suffer, and yet, won't make the step to change conditions. Why? Their circumstances, even if bad, are cozily familiar, and ultimately, doing nothing about it, is much easier than investing forethought, planning, and effort. Yet these same people are mostly very busy, hard working people. So why are they willing to exert effort in one direction (work) and not in the direction of making changes to improve their lot?

Some people pray for earth and meditate to bring back the honeybees; if the honeybees die off because of genetically engineered crops, then how is meditation going to help? Why don't these good people who want to help through meditation invest the same effort that is invested in meditation to boycott genetically engineered food and to lobby against activities that destroy the ecology?

Many conscientious people seem to stay indifferent to issues where they could help; they prefer to stay uninformed claiming they can't deal with anything beyond their own chores while quietening their conscience by trying to believe that governments have special people who are supposed to solve these kinds of problems, and so it is not their problem. Why? Why are these people willing to go to great length of involvement and trouble when they have hope to be in control of the situation (such as giving up everything else in order to fully concentrate on making the daughter the best cheer leader) and unwilling to exert any effort as part of a greater whole that in the long term, might make the principal difference between life and death for the entire community? This is not a question of generosity, as these same people could be very generous in aiding the needy.

What makes people, corporations, and governments blind to long term consequences? Why go on repeating the myopic solutions to small problems that create incomparably greater problems, such as genetically engineered crops that disintegrate the food chain? Such as clearing out rain forests to gain land for one single year of harvest? Of course, there are urgent problems that need solutions now, such as being hungry; but why revert to solutions that are going to leave one hungry forever? Is it only faulty judgment or something much deeper?

The answer to all these questions is the principle of least action. In physics, this is a basic law connected to the law of motion and entropy that explains why something will take the shortest route. When people behave like matter, this law gains manifestation as the principle of least effort, which explains why someone will consult a next door co-worker rather than a specialist in another building as long as the next door co-worker's answers seem acceptable.

Another example of living in the shadow of the law of least effort is Attention Deficit Disorder, which is a grand name for

wanting it all now, instantly and effortlessly. Some people learn easier than others; those with difficulties have to change their habits and invest more energy. But precisely this tendency of not wanting to change habits is rewarded and strengthened by accepting this kind of behavior pattern as a disability. (Of course, there are lots of people who profit from it, which for them, is reason enough to market easy fixes and how to's for those suffering from the Spoilt Brat Syndrome.)

Often, spiritual leaders mislead people by popularizing the deeper spiritual teachings. They teach that the universe is infinitely wise and therefore, everything is as it should be. One should accept the moment as is and have a positive outlook on life, live without resistance because force creates counter force. They teach that through defenselessness, through no resistance, one can be like nature, and by utilizing the law of least effort, one can achieve everything.

Imagine, what would happen if there was a pacifistic culture that lived by the rule of "no matter what, do not kill and do not resist?" Imagine that this culture is overrun by barbarians who want to kill each and every member of the pacifistic community. The community does not fight back, it is defenseless and accepting of everything because they believe that everything that happens is the wisdom of the universe. What do you think is the destiny of such a community? Of course, it gets wiped out.

It is not true that nature is defenseless, and neither does it operate upon the principle of no resistance. Nature is chock-full of creative, evolving defenses: plants develop poison against insects, to which the insects react by developing tolerance to that poison, and so on. And this is the exact difference between inanimate objects and live systems: plants and animals change their patterns of behavior to survive, they do NOT abide by the law of least action whereas inanimate objects do. The wisdom of nature is that it survives by adaptation, which means, by developing better means to resist threats to survival.

Let's say, the universe and nature are wise; does that mean that we should accept every act of the human race as supreme wisdom? Wouldn't such acceptance encourage the current destruction through overpopulation and pollution? Wouldn't it condone human actions that cause daily extinction of animal and plant species? This has nothing to do with the wisdom of the universe, but rather with our stupidity and greed. Refraining from resisting being poisoned by ignorant or greedy corporations is a choice: the choice of least effort. The principle of least action is a deterministic law of physics, and so, choosing the avenue of least effort is choosing to be like a deterministic matter particle. Isn't such a choice forfeiting the very essence of the gift of life, the freedom of choice?

I do not believe in any principle as a generalization. I do not believe that we should be or act according to any principle. My credo is, look and observe and act accordingly. And so, neither defenselessness nor resistance can function as general guidelines for life. If we want to emulate nature, then we should look at what nature does: nature is not defenseless, but interactive and proactive. By being defenseless, we choose to forego being proactive and instead, become purely acted upon. By accepting any behavior through justifying it as being the wisdom of the universe, we encourage irresponsibility with unrealistic hopes that through some miracle à la Hollywood, in the last minute everything will be fine. If it's difficult for you to study, then don't: no need to exert effort, stay stupid, the idiot society will find a name for your disability and you can demand to have rights. Yes, you deserve it. The universe is on your side.

Luckily, some people are willing to be more than inanimate matter, and they invest great effort in trying to salvage lives, whether human or other. These people do not walk with glassy eyes proclaiming to possess enlightenment, and they do not wallow in positive emotions only. When they act, they often do things against their own natures because if they abided by the law of least effort, they would have stayed politically correct avoiding confrontations, avoiding the use of force, and thereby letting others use force on them violating what is dear to them. Sometimes, being politically correct is a sign of tolerance, but mostly, it is betrayal of one's own values. Nevertheless, in both cases, being politically correct is least action.

The meaning of least effort, least action is not equal to lack of effort; it means that one follows the well tread furrow, like a train moving on its rail. The train can use tremendous energy to go faster and faster, but still, it will move on its rail. This is least effort. To leave the rails, the train would have to violate the law of least action. To move the train off its rail, we would need to apply force. If you want to change an old habit, you must use force; it is not enough to say you'll change. Without effort, you'll fall back into the old rut repeating the unwanted behavior pattern. However, with the investment of effort, you can change.

Perhaps we do not know what is good for us, for others, or for the planet. But we certainly know what definitely is detrimental to survival: flowing with the law of least effort; "do nothing" is not only uncreative, but it allows entropy to take

over. Life is: going against entropy; life means investing energy. The moment we stop, on its own, the system winds down as an old-fashioned clock. This is our prerogative as an intelligent species, to knowingly invest effort and thereby change conditions. Life is negative entropy, which means, you prevent the system from dissipating by investing energy, by proactively changing old habits. "Therefore choose life." (Deuteronomy 30:19)