

Introduction

Like most people, I'm not the biggest fan of pain. It's uncomfortable, distressing, and, for lack of a better word, painful. Now, this isn't a particularly profound observation I've made here, but what if I told you pain plays a more important role in our lives than you might think? Sure, it kind of sucks and isn't all that enjoyable, but in a world without pain how would we be able to determine pleasurable experiences as being good? What would set our standards of fun, happy activities versus unpleasant, dreadful ones? How would we grow and learn if it were not pain that told us which direction is the wrong one? To put it simply, is some suffering a *good* thing?

In order to answer this question, I decided to do some reading on our understanding of pain as a whole. I wanted to know why suffering is considered so bad, but in my research I ended up finding some surprising philosophies that actually preached the opposite. Introducing, Friedrich Nietzsche, a somewhat of a loony genius from 19th century Germany. Unlike so many ideologies and religions that put an emphasis on *avoiding* discomfort or even promise an afterlife free from such concepts, Nietzsche adopted a bit of a different mindset. He understood a happy life to be one where a person embraces pain, accepts the cruelty of the universe, and chooses their own instances of suffering in order to grow as a whole.

"What? He expects us to put ourselves through suffering to be *happy*? Perhaps he really is a loon," was my first thought. But being the open minded person I try to be, I decided it was wrong to write off this idea immediately. As I continued my reading of similar philosophies and thought more deeply about this notion, I began to accept Nietzsche's theory as a real possibility. But in order to prove this, I figured what better way than to follow this lifestyle myself? So, that's exactly what I did.

For the experiment, I would subject myself to unpleasant but supposedly "beneficial" activities to see how I felt after one week. Such activities included taking daily morning runs, cold showers, cutting out caffeine intake, and meditating in the evening. Meditation isn't exactly an unpleasant experience, but it was something that took time from other activities I regularly do so I figured I would include. I recorded my thoughts and feelings during the experiment daily in order to track my mental state and attitude to see what changed. I've written short summaries of my day by day progress and included the audio of my reflections. Enjoy.

Day 1

Woke up early to go for a run in the 30 degree weather. Was not looking forward to the run, nor the cold shower that would follow. The run was not as cold as I was expecting, but my muscles did quickly become tired and I was exhausted by the end. The cold shower was better than expected since I was warm from my run. Overall, a good first day and not too rocky of a start. No end of day reflection since there wasn't much to discuss.

Day 2

Woke up not very excited to run but did so anyway. Legs are sore. Expecting it to be unpleasant, but trying to keep in mind Nietzsche's principles and how we must suffer in order to grow. After my run and cold shower I get some breakfast and orange juice from Rutter's. The cold shower was again not that miserable due to being warm from my run. At the end of the day, I touch on one of the first key principles of Nietzsche, the focus of power of one's own life. Copy and paste the link below for the full end of day reflection.

End of Day 2 Reflection

<file:///Users/22gstudzinski/Desktop/Day%20end%20of%20day%20reflection.m4a>

Day 3

Woke up on day 3 with much difficulty. Finding it hard to stay motivated. Legs are very sore and I'm quite tired, but luckily it is a little warmer. After my run and shower I am still very sore, and the shower felt colder than before. Despite that I am alive and doing alright. At the end of the day I discuss my dinner, the rest of my day, and Nietzsche's idea of affirmation, or in other words why we should embrace this life instead of focusing on the next. Full audio clip below

End of Day 3 Reflection

<file:///Users/22gstudzinski/Desktop/Day%203%20end%20of%20day%20reflection.m4a>

Day 4

Woke up and it was very nice and warm and in the 50s. After my run and shower I went to Rutter's again for breakfast and orange juice. The run itself felt better, but I began to notice a pain in my left knee as I walked that didn't want to go away. Later that day I discovered that the cause of my leg pain was iliotibial band syndrome, which is when the band running down the side of your leg from the pelvic bone down to the knee is overworked causing shooting pain. So that's fun. I then go on to talk about the importance of truthfulness and honesty with oneself in life and acknowledging the absurdity of it all. Full audio below.

End of Day 4 Reflection

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Day 5

Didn't go for a run. Want to try and let my leg recover a bit so that I can hopefully run the 6th or 7th day. Cold shower was very tough since I wasn't warmed up from the run so I was very cold before, during, and afterward. I had the day off so I took some time to get done some schoolwork and other tasks. At the end of the day I touch on Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of the arts.

End of Day 5 Reflection

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Day 6

Woke up with my leg still hurting. Very painful to walk down the stairs, so I decided to not run again. Still got something to eat for breakfast for more energy throughout the day. Worked on my art project a lot and relaxed after school and stretched my leg to try and speed up the healing process. I touch on Nietzsche's thoughts on individuality at the end of the day.

End of Day 6 Reflection

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Day 7

Tried running in the morning, but didn't get far before my leg began to hurt. Ran maybe half a mile instead of the usual 1.5 miles. Went to work afterward and had a lovely 8 hour shift. Afterward I went to the school play with a buddy. I touch on some concluding thoughts on the experiment as a whole and how it went for me.

End of Day 7 Reflection

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Conclusion

_____ So it is done! I did it! Kind of. I did finish the experiment and I *did* get interesting results, just not exactly what I was anticipating. Was it a failure? No not by any means. Was it a success? For the most part I would say so. If anything, getting results you aren't expecting is a sign of a good experiment. But that's besides the point. What can we take away from this endeavour?

Overall, I would say this experience was positive, despite the upset halfway through. The reason for this I believe is that it gave me a sense of control and power over my day, as well as

reminding me of my morality in a sense. I had the choice of laying in bed longer and sleeping in, but instead I forced myself awake and pushed through the discomfort so that I later could feel more awake and more accomplished throughout the day. Not only this, but the feeling of your legs hurting, heart pounding, shortness of breath; all of these primordial feelings are necessary occasionally to remind us of our temporary residence here on this plane of existence. The jolt that runs through my body as the cold water hits my back and the feeling of my lungs tightening under the ice cold water make me appreciate the times I was warm, as well as understanding that there are those who suffer and toil far more than I do. Do I know if there is an afterlife, free of suffering? Certainly not, but what I do know is that the world and life I perceive now is very much real, and that is something not to be discarded in an attempt at preparing for some undetermined afterlife. As preached by Nietzsche himself, "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself."

That being said, the idea of meaningless suffering is not advocated for by Nietzsche. To suffer for solely the sake of suffering or some other menial purpose is not what encapsulates his philosophy. Rather, he simply states that suffering is necessary for any kind of growth and advancement to take place. Perhaps the pain in my leg may seem pointless and unnecessary, but in the eyes of Nietzsche it very well could be an inevitable step in the process of self growth. And you know what? I think that is in a way a far more optimistic way to look at things. In a world of uncertainty and struggle, think of the suffering and hardship you experience as the rungs of the ladder you are climbing to achieve maximum potential. With that in mind, perhaps that morning run might just go by a little bit more easily.