

Rest in motion

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Many people seem to think the 'good' state of being, the 'ground' state, is a relaxed state, a state with lots of rest and very little action. Because they think the ground state is the relaxed state, they act like maintaining any other state requires effort, requires suffering.

This is a failure mode that I used to fall into pretty regularly. I would model my work as a finite stream of tasks that needed doing. I'd think "once I've done the laundry and bought new shoes and finished the grocery shopping and fixed the bugs in my code and finished the big refactor, everything will be in order, and I'll be able to rest." And in that state of mind, every new email that hit my inbox, every new bug discovered in my code, every tool of mine that wore down and needed repair, would deal me damage.

I was modeling my work as finite, with the rest state being the state where all tasks were completed, and so every new task would push me further from that precious rest state and wear me down.

But the work that needs to be done is not a finite list of tasks, it is a neverending stream. Clothes are always getting worn down, food is always getting eaten, code is always in motion. The goal is not to finish all the work before you; for that is impossible. The goal is simply to move *through* the

work. Instead of struggling to reach the end of the stream, simply focus on moving along it.

Advertisements and media often push the narrative that the purpose of all our toil is to win a chance at relaxation. We're supposed to work hard at boring jobs in order to earn our vacations. We're supposed to work hard for decades so that we can retire. (We're supposed to conceive of heaven as a place where nobody does anything except lounge on clouds.)

I call bullshit. For almost everybody, inaction is *boring*. That's why we pick up books, go exploring, and take up hobbies. The ground state is an active state, not a passive one.

The *actual* reward state is not one where you're lazing around doing nothing. It's one where you're keeping busy, where you're doing things that stimulate you, and where you're resting only a fraction of the time. The preferred ground state is not one where you have no activity to partake in, it's one where you're managing the streams of activity precisely, and moving through them at the right pace: not too fast, but also not too slow. For that would be boring.

And yet, most people have this model of the world where whenever they're not resting, they're taking damage. When the homework isn't done, they're taking damage. When

they're reading a textbook, they're taking damage. When they go to sleep with work unfinished, they're taking damage. When they're at a large social event, they're taking damage. Some part of them yearns to be in the rest state, where they don't need to do all these *things*, and insofar as they aren't, they're suffering a little.

This is a grave error, in a world where the work is never finished, where the tasks are neverending.

Rest is not a reward for getting through all your obligations. You already dropped your obligations, remember? Rather, rest (and personal health, and personal time) are part of the goal. Both because most people care about their personal comfort, and because taking care of yourself is very important in order to do all the other things you want to do.

Rest isn't something you do when everything else is finished. Everything else doesn't *get* finished. Rather, there are lots of activities that you do, some which are more fun than others, and rest is an important one to do in appropriate proportions. Disconnect your impulse to rest from whether or not the world is in a stable state, because, spoiler alert, the world isn't going to be in a stable state for a long time.

Rest isn't a reward for good behavior! It's not something you get to do when all the work is finished! That's finite task thinking. Rather, rest and health are just two of the unending streams that you move through.

Imagine the person who is tight on money and needs to buy groceries once a month. Imagine that they agonize over every purchase, even though they know that they're buying as little as they can in order to secure the health of their family. You might suggest to them that they stop fretting over individual purchases and come to terms once and for all with the fact that food is a necessary purchase, and suggest that they fret over their *budget* instead. That way, they won't need to suffer every time they enter a grocery store.

The same technique applies to effort. You don't need to suffer every time it's time to do the laundry. Stop looking at the individual tasks, and start looking at the streams of work, some of which you can widen and some of which you can narrow.

Look at *all* the streams you want to move through, assess how much bandwidth you have available, and then simply move through the streams at the appropriate clip. Some streams will be unpleasant (chores, etc.), some will be basically mandatory (making money, etc.), some will be quite fun (learning, exploring, relaxing, etc.), and some of the most important streams are the meta streams (improving your capacity, finding better ways to fulfill your needs, etc.). But in all cases, simply see the streams and then move along them.

Many people I meet seem to think that they need to take damage whenever they're working, and then only heal it when they rest. While they're studying, they're taking damage. While they're at a large social event, they're taking damage. While they're doing their job, they're taking damage. They seem to think they "should" be able to be at home doing nothing, and so when they're not, they're taking damage. They think that the ground state is a resting state, a state of inaction, and so whenever they're acting, this is a deviation from the default, and it requires effort to maintain.

I say, *the ground state is in motion*. The privileged state is not a frozen state. Most of us wouldn't want to just lie in bed doing nothing forever, anyway. The easiest state to maintain isn't a motionless state, it's the state where you're out there *doing what needs doing* at a sustainable pace. *That's* the ground state, that's the state that requires no effort to maintain. Anything less leads to boredom, and it's *boredom* that's taxing.

I think one of the reasons people think high productivity is hard is that they think of lying in bed doing nothing as the default state, and anything else as taking damage. But it's not. It's really not. We were built to *move*, and we have things to do.

Make sure you're not taking damage just for moving. If any state of being is going to wear you down, then I suggest that you feel pressure whenever you start to move too fast *or* too

slow. Take damage when your life is too boring and nothing's getting done, and take damage when your life is moving at an unsustainable pace: but don't take damage when you're moving through the streams at a steady clip.

The default state, the effortless state, is the one where you're moving along many streams. It is up to you to make sure that you're prioritizing the right streams and that you're steadily increasing your throughput, but the end goal is not to cease moving. Total inaction is dreadfully boring.

The ground state, the state to aspire to, the healthy state, the state that occurs naturally when you aren't forcing yourself to do anything, is the state where you're getting done what you want done as fast as is sustainable, and no faster.

The ground state is in motion.