

Residing in the mortal realm

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The last sevenish posts describe the main tools I have for removing guilt-based motivation. The common thread running through them can be summed up as follows: *Reside in the mortal realm.*

Many people hold themselves to a very different standard than they hold others. They hold themselves accountable for failing to do the psychologically impossible. They fret over past mistakes and treat themselves as failed gods, rather than ambitious monkeys. This condemning-of-the-self can lead to great guilt, with all its negative effects.

My suggestion for dealing with guilt, roughly speaking, is to first focus your guilt, by dispelling the guilt that comes from not doing what other people think you should or from from false obligations, and shifting all your guilt into guilt about the fact that you have not yet made the future how you want it to be. Then, once your guilt is focused there, remember that you are a denizen of the mortal realm.

In the past, you have failed to act as you wished to act. You have failed to make the best available choices. But these facts have little bearing on what you do next. They have *some* bearing, insofar as your memories still hold lessons that can teach you about how to better steer yourself to

steer the world, but they do not say anything about the color of your soul. They are simply the background knowledge against which you move forwards, from here, looking only towards the future.

You are a mortal, who often struggles to follow their own will, and your actions set the course of the entire future. Instead of berating yourself for your shortcomings, figure out how to do the best you can *given* the shortcomings — sometimes by spending time and effort to fix them (mere willpower seldom suffices), and sometimes by taking them as given and working around them.

Be a mere mortal, and do the best you can anyway. Learn everything you can from your mistakes, and then forgive yourself your sins, and look only to how much better you can make the future (knowing what you know now about how you perform in different situations).

Guilt has no place among mortals: we already *know* we're fallible. We don't need to suffer over that fact: our failings provide only information about what to do next, if we want to steer the future.

Over the last few months, three different people have informed me that I broke their motivation systems. In short, one found themselves less able to care about what they

were working on, another found themselves unable to force themselves to work, another found themselves unable to continue spurring themselves on with guilt.

In part, this is working as intended: in the long run, I think that guilt-based motivation can be harmful. However, my goal is not to simply remove existing motivation systems: my goal is to replace guilt with something else.

So the question is, without guilt, what can you use for drive? And this brings us to the penultimate arc of my "replacing guilt" series of posts.

I've already given partial answers to the question "whence internal drive?", when talking on caring, or about the value of a life, or about caring about something larger than yourself. Those posts are intended to inspire you and remind you that there's something *worth* fighting for, and that you can fight for it even if you lack a burning passion. That's not the whole picture, though, and in the upcoming arc, I'll touch upon a different aspect of intrinsic motivation.

I think many people are motivated by an intrinsic (often subconscious) desire to be virtuous, or perhaps by a strong aversion to "being bad." I think many other people are motivated primarily by whatever obligations currently sit on their plate. They don't need to ask themselves what they are doing or why; they simply continue fulfilling the obligations in front of them so that life continues proceed. They fulfill obligations at school, they fulfill obligations at their jobs,

they find a spouse, they start a family, they fulfill obligations to their family. The obligations keep flowing in a steady stream, and there is never any need to soul-search in a grand quest for some sort of deep intrinsic drive (except, perhaps, during the occasional "midlife crisis," which is a fine distraction that they're expected to eventually overcome).

Yet here I stand, suggesting that you ditch the notion "being bad" and drop your obligations entirely, keeping only what remains. But dropping an existing framework is a far cry from creating a new one, and dropping guilt does not often reveal a blindingly virtuous non-obligation that you're supposed to pursue instead of what you were currently pursuing.

In fact, the new framework can't contain "supposed to's" at all. Obligations have been jettisoned.

So in the upcoming arc, I'm *not* going to give you something to pursue. Rather, I'm going to do my best to give you a different way of looking at the world. I'm going to describe a vantage point from which guilt motivation seems quaint, and something else — maybe cold resolve, maybe hot desire, maybe a different drive — guides your actions instead.

From that vantage point, guilt is alien — and it is only once it seems foreign (rather than evil) that it be fully replaced.