

# Replacing guilt

20 APRIL 2015

In my experience, many people are motivated primarily by either guilt, shame, or some combination of the two. Some are people who binge-watch television, feel deeply guilty about it, and convert that guilt into a burning need to *Actually Do Something* on the following day. Others are people who feel guilty whenever they stop working before they *literally fall over from exhaustion*, and in attempts to avoid that guilty feeling, they consistently work themselves weary.

I find that using guilt as a motivation source is both unhealthy and inefficient, but yet, I find it to be a common practice, especially among effective altruists.

Thus, in the coming series of posts, I'm going to explore a whole slew of tools for removing guilt-based motivation and replacing it with something that is both healthier and stronger.

My goal is to help people remove guilt-based motivation entirely, and replace it with intrinsic motivation. I'm aiming to both reduce the frequency of netflix binges *and* reduce the bad feelings that follow. I'm aiming to help people feel like they're still worthwhile human beings if they stop working before they literally drop. I'd like to help people avoid the failure mode where they feel guilty about something for days (even after learning their lesson), and I'm also hoping

to remove some shame-based motivation while I'm in the area.

My first goal will be to address the guilt that comes from a feeling of *listlessness*, the vague feeling of guilt that one might get when they play video games all day, or when they turn desperately towards drugs or parties, in attempts to silence the part of themselves that whispers that there must be something else to life.

This sort of guilt cannot be removed by force of will, in most people. The trick to removing this sort of guilt, I think, is to start exploring that feeling that there must be something else to life, that there must be something more to do — and either find something worth working towards, or find that there really isn't actually anything missing. This first sort of listless guilt, I think, comes from someone who wants to find something else to do, and hasn't yet.

Unfortunately, addressing this sort of guilt isn't as easy as just finding a hobby. In my experience, this listless guilt tends to be found in people who have fallen into the nihilistic trap — people who either believe they can't matter, or who believe that no one can matter. It tends to be found in people who believe that humans only ever do what they want, that nothing is truly "better" than anything else, that there is no such thing as altruism, that "morality" is a pleasant lie — that class of beliefs is the class that I will address first, starting with the Allegory of the Stamp Collector.

I'll post the allegory tomorrow. In the interim, I invite you to devise your own tools for removing the listless guilt: the tools that people develop themselves are often more useful to them than the tools they are given.