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Essay #3 Draft #2

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Sociology

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Against Outcomes

Though people define success differently, too many people in America over-emphasize success and its outcomes by any definition. Many people believe that the outcome of their efforts will fulfill a sense of deep dissatisfaction, but in reality, they are looking in the wrong places. This fulfillment cannot be found anywhere but in the present moment, and striving for the sake of the outcome robs us of the experience of this present moment, which itself can bring fulfillment.

Too many people in America over-emphasize success because they believe that the outcome of their efforts will fulfill their dissatisfaction or bring happiness. Attempting to escape dissatisfaction and seeking fulfillment in things outside of yourself are two sides of the same coin. We dislike negative emotions or pain and run in search of positive emotions or pleasures. Being successful is perceived as an important value and a source of happiness and satisfaction. It is commonplace for teachers to tell students that academics are vital for success. Growing up, kids often dream about a future in which they are successful. Teens will often dream of fame, or money, or power, and believe that this will give them something emotionally that they don’t already have. Throughout our childhoods, we experience a sense of freedom and joy that is, at some point along the way, lost as we grow up. As our minds are filled with likes and dislikes, biases and prejudices, as we solidify a sense of what is right and good, wrong and bad, we develop a deep sense of dissatisfaction. A certain dualistict view of the world is ingrained within us. If we are not happy, then we are unhappy. If we aren’t the best in everything, then we are failures. When we do reach a space of happiness and fulfillment, it doesn’t last long, and is soon shattered by some minor external circumstance. Maybe we were having a good day, and then our car is scratched, and we are quickly overcome with anger and loss- our day is ruined. And so we begin to reach out for more, for the next thing, for something better, to no end. Striving for outcomes means we are reaching for things external to us and that’s a problem because fulfillment can only be found within yourself. In focusing on future outcomes, we lose out on a precious experience.

Striving for the sake of the outcome robs us of the experience of growth, which can only happen in the present moment. Success might be a new car, a house, more money, a better partner, a better job. In the process of seeking these outcomes, we lose a part of who we are- we lose a part of our humanity. We become self-centered, seeking to fulfill ourselves first and foremost. We sacrifice awareness of what is happening right now in the search of a better future. We may miss out on our children growing up. We may miss out on spending our limited time with our parents. We may ask ourselves, “Where was I for that?”. We may miss out on the journey of our human experience, which is a beautiful thing. Additionally, this experience can only be found in the present moment.

The happiness people are looking for cannot be found anywhere but in the present moment. The future has not yet arrived. The past is gone. The only thing that is here, with us, is the present moment. When we strive for future outcomes, we are seeking fulfillment in a place outside of the present moment; our focus on the future impairs our ability to be mindful and aware of what is happening right now. Cars, fame, and money are all impermanent. Even if we do succeed in achieving these outcomes- a car will lose it’s shiny “newness” and break, fame can disappear with one unfortunate incident, and money will be spent. We become accustomed to what we have, and will simply look for the next thing outside of us in order to try and find fulfillment again. Striving for future outcomes outside of ourselves is an endless cycle that only brings temporary pleasure or positive emotion. However, fulfillment can be found through mindfulness.

Being open and mindful of the present moment is a path towards a sense of fulfillment that is not based on external circumstances. Being open to our anger, or fear, or irritation develops within us a capacity to also be open to the joy and peace that is in our lives. This mindfulness allows us to be present with the powerful beauties in life that often pass us by- a flower, the blue sky, the smell of rain. At the same time, being open and mindful of the present moment does not exclude striving for success. It is the emphasis on the outcome of that success that can harm us and take away from our lives.

Too many people in America do not question their source of happiness and fulfillment. Too many do not question where their dissatisfaction comes from. Many forces stoutly believe and promote the idea that fulfillment is not found right here, but that it is somewhere outside of ourselves and this moment. We may strive all our lives to receive the outcomes of our effort. Ironically and tragically, we may miss out on our precious human existence in this effort. Rather than focusing on what the future may bring, it is important, if we want a stable source of fulfillment, to instead turn our attention to the unfolding of our lives. The immediacy of our predicament, whether we are joyful or sad, is the true meat of the process of life. Why focus on the destination when the journey is filled with so much visceral content. The sights we may see, the sounds we may hear, pass us by in a flash. Without being attentive to our present lives, we may find ourselves on our deathbed with only memories of striving towards something greater, which never came. As Ghandi once said, “Satisfaction lies in the effort, not the attainment. Full effort is full victory.”