Ill-Fettered Emotions:

One of the largest contributions Dr. Perkins made to society was the real-life enactment of one of Professor Grimshaw’s famous thought experiments. In it, Grimshaw details two environments: one with good experiences and one with bad experiences. Two identical men are placed one in each environment. Grimshaw posits that through relativity, the man in the good environment will become less satisfied and the man in the bad environment will become more satisfied. On paper it gets a bit sticky, so Dr. Perkins aimed to set up the scenario in a forthcoming way to provide hard empirical evidence.

Due to the flimsiness of the operation, Dr. Perkins was unable to find any human volunteers, so he instead used two twin chimps. One chimp, named “Good” for his environment, was placed in a large house and the other named “Bad” was placed in a smaller house. Good had lots of toys and furniture and things to play with; Bad just had walls. Good was given audacious meals four times a day; bad was given a box of saltines and necessary vitamins twice a day. Any layman could predict the emotions of the chimps on the first day: good was happy and bad was sad, but that’s not what Dr. Perkins hoped to capture.

The next week, Dr. Perkins amped up the experiment. Good was given massages, baths, and innumerable treats by his team every day. Bad had two rooms removed from his house and began to get shot with paintball guns every now and then. Good became astoundingly more relaxed and satisfied and bad became astoundingly more anguished and depressed.

Productions like these took place every week, the environment becoming even more good or bad depending. On the second to last week, the environments reached their peak. By that point, Good was receiving more food than he could eat, more toys than he could play with, more baths and massages than he had time for, and more chimp friends than he could play around with. Bad was receiving only about a fifth of a box of saltines a day, foul smells had been leaked into the rooms, and he was regularly being shot with paintballs. As predicted, emotions were running extremely high just as the last week rolled around.

The last week of the experiment featured the same sensations as the first, that is, Good was again receiving only what he had in the beginning: audacious meals four times a day, a manageable amount of toys, and furniture. Bad was receiving only what he had in the beginning: a box of saltines and necessary vitamins twice a day and barren rooms.

As posited by Grimshaw in his original treatise, Good would begin to act sad because he lost the grand benefits he used to have and Bad would begin to act happy because he lost the irritable treatment he used to have—and this was exactly what happened. It seemed that the emotions of the chimps on the first day were rather ill-fettered during the course of the experiment and they instead acquired new ones by the end. Dr. Perkins had successfully proved through his experiment that innate value does not exist in anything, rather, absolutely everything is valued relative to other things. If innate value did exist, then why was Good sad with that exact same environment that made him happy the first day? Why was Bad happy with his environment?

The success of Dr. Perkins’ experiment lay rich groundwork in the theories of innate, inherent, and intrinsic value and went on to influence the works and lectures of professor Grimshaw in his later teaching career. In fact, I’ve heard stories that not only did he use the experiment as a basis to speak on, but even went so far as to physically use parts of the chimps for philosophical teachings. Dr. Perkins launched his career in natural world experiments, taking some of the oddest thought experiments of the time and putting them to the test in actuality.

In any case, what we can learn from Good and Bad is that nothing truly is good or bad. Everything is dependent on our other sensations and experiences. Now, this could be taken in either direction, but the next time you’re unsatisfied or unhappy, imagine yourself as Good in that final week. Am I really in a bad spot or have I over-heightened my expectations for life based solely on my best experiences?