

A Treatise on Higher Passions

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“τῆς αὐταρκείας καρπὸς μέγιστος ἐλευθερία”

“*The greatest fruit of self reliance is freedom*”

Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings*

There is a poem written by Henry David Thoreau called *The Pretensions of Poverty*. In this poem, Thoreau writes about how Society takes our identities from us by restricting the Pursuit of those things which allow us to recognize our True Selves, and thus, human. I call those things Higher Passions. In order to understand Transcendentalism, we must understand Higher Passions. Higher Passions can be broken down into two categories, Art and Companionship. The Pursuit of these two Passions allow us to recognize and understand our True Selves and become human. When we become human, we can change our True Self, and this combined with understanding the True Self, allows us to be free. These ideas will be thoroughly explored by answering a series of questions. They are as follows:

- What is the difference between Higher Passions and 'other' Passions?
- Which *specifically* are Higher Passions?
- How do we Pursue Higher Passions?
- What about us changes when we Pursue Higher Passions versus 'other' Passions?
- Why do we Pursue Higher Passions as opposed to 'other' Passions?

These questions will be answered in order, and I will give a summary at the end of a paragraph of what has been covered after a question has been answered. Let's begin.

What is the difference between Higher Passions and 'other' Passions?

There is a line in *Walden* that describes how Society makes men ignorant to Higher Passions:

“Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that.” We can deduce that these 'finer fruits' are the same thing as Higher Passions. If our entire life is comprised of labor exclusively, then we won't have any time for these 'finer fruits,' these Higher Passions. You see, labor is a Passion of the body. When we exert ourselves physically, we are doing it in order to complete a task, to finish something. When we exercise, it is for our health, but it is also so that we may not have to exercise again for a specific amount of time. When we are farming or building or crafting, we are doing so that we may complete the respective object or task at hand, be it a field or a house or a trinket. This Pursuit of Completion, of an end, is an artifact of Society. Society has implanted this idea that Pursuits of Completion is important for the individual. Unsurprisingly, it is not. Why? Because it brings no benefit to you; you do not change when you complete things, you do not learn anything when you complete things. Sure, you may have gained *experience* in doing something, but all that does is allow you to profess of your ability in doing that task to your acquaintances and to complete the task faster and more efficiently. And those Passions that relate to and involve Completion are not Higher. Passions that are Higher benefit *you*.

-What is the difference between Higher Passions and 'other' Passions?

By definition, Higher Passions directly benefit you, where as 'other' Passions like the Pursuit of Completion do not. In order to answer the second question, we must first define 'you' and the concept of the True Self.

*What **specifically** are Higher Passions?*

The first things that may come to your mind when thinking of things that directly benefit you are food, rest, and shelter. Food, rest and shelter do indeed benefit you. But how are we defining 'you?'

How are we defining the self? If sleeping and eating and housing are indeed Higher Passions, and they directly benefit only the body, and that would mean that they are Passions of the body, and thus they are Pursuits of Completion, which contradicts them being Higher Passions. But you may say 'I go to sleep when I am tired but also so that I may feel well when I wake up, which is not a Pursuit of completion.' Ah, but you must know your reasoning behind wanting to feel well. If it is so that you may perform well at a job, and that you may not be tired at the office, and therefore get your pay and keep your job, then your sleep is a Pursuit of Completion. If it is for the feeling itself, feeling good for the sake of feeling good, then it is a Pursuit of the body. If it is for the betterment of yourself, of your character, then you are a fool, as how will one better themselves when they are asleep? The only self whom is bettered when we sleep, eat, and house is the physical self. So is there a 'different' self, outside of our body? There is such a self, separate from the physical self. I call this self the True Self. The True Self is that thing which makes you *you*; your opinions, your thoughts, your personality, your reason, those things that do not exhibit qualities in the physical world. Your physical self is your body, your words, your voice, things that may appear to be you, but are just a way for the True Self to interact with the physical world. The physical self and the True Self rely on each other for the survival of the overall person. The physical self can go on without the True Self, but the True Self cannot survive without the physical self. So physical Pursuits don't benefit the True Self, but they do allow for it to be sustained by keeping the physical self healthy. From this, we can extrapolate that the only way to directly benefit the True Self is through some other means. Those are what Higher Passions are, Pursuits that directly benefit the True Self.

-What *specifically* are Higher Passions?

Expanding on answer to the first question, Higher Passions directly benefit the *True Self*, which we defined as one's personality, thoughts, and opinions.

How do we pursue Higher Passions?

So, now we have an outline for what Higher Passions may be: they are Pursuits that directly benefit the True Self. To put a name to 'Pursuits directly benefit the True Self', we have Self-expression and Companionship. Companionship is the intimate connection we have and maintain with those that mean the most to us. But isn't Companionship physical? No, that is lust. The Pursuit of Companionship is not a physical passion because it is not a pursuit of physical intimacy, but of emotional intimacy. When you pursue Companionship, your True Self is meeting the True Self of another, and that connection is neither easy nor painless to make, for you must know your own True Self and your Companions True Self, and your Companion must know their own True Self and your True Self. So that is the first Higher Passion. The second one is self-expression. Another word for this may be Art. There are two different ways to Pursue Art, Creation and Consumption. Creation is that Pursuit where one channels their True Self into the physical world, 'creating' an artifact representative of the True Self. Consumption is that Pursuit where one uses their true self to interpret Pursuits of Creation. Within these two Pursuits of Art, there are three Realms of Pursuit for each. These Realms each coincide with a function of the True Self, which are Perception, Understanding, and Feeling. Within these three realms, we can fit every single possible form of Art, be it Creative or Consumptive, into the model. Interestingly enough, one can project an Art within a specific Realm into any other Realm, in both the Pursuit of Creation and the Pursuit of Consumption.. For example, projecting Art typically of the Realm of Perception into the Realm of Understanding. So we have now answered the third question: Higher Passions are pursued by using the True Self to Create or Consume Art. Let us recap what we know, before moving on to the last few questions.

-What are the differences between Higher Passions and 'other' Passions?

We answered this question by first finding what Higher Passions are *not*. We found that these 'other' Passions were either creations of society, or Passions which benefited only the body. Thus, we came to the conclusion that Higher Passions are those Passions which directly benefit the True Self.

-What *specifically* are Higher Passions?

We answered this question by defining the True Self as one's personality, thoughts, and opinions, and expanding the definition of Higher Passions to those Pursuits that directly benefit the True Self.

-How do we Pursue Higher Passions?

To answer this question, we had to find what *specific* Passions directly benefited the True Self. The answers we came to were Companionship and Art. Companionship must be Pursued by knowing the True Self of your Companion and yourself, as well as your Companion knowing their own and your True Self. Art can be pursued in two different ways, Creation or Consumption. Creation is where one channels the True Self into the physical world, with a resultant of 'creating' something, be it a feeling or an object or a sound. Consumption is where one uses the True Self to analyze the world around them, and make sense of it, be it an Art itself or a moral dilemma, and to come to an opinion about the said surroundings. How we Create or Consume Art, and how Companionship is attained and how it is related to the Pursuit of Art will be thoroughly explored in the next question.

What about us changes when we Pursue Higher Passions versus 'other' Passions?

I went over this a bit before, with the differences between the True Self and the physical self, so let's review what we said there. The True Self is that thing which makes you *you*, your opinions, your thoughts, your personality, your reason, those things that do not exhibit qualities in the physical world. Your physical self is your body, your words, your voice, things that may appear to be you, but are just a way for the True Self to interact with the physical world. So when we as the True Self Pursue 'other' Passions, our True Self does not benefit, and in some cases, is even hindered. Those Passions which bring hindrance to the True Self are those Passions that are the lowest. Let's call them Primal Passions.

Primal Passions are Pursued when we give in to desire. The names of these specifically are Sloth, Gluttony, Hubris, and Lust. Why do we pursue Primal Passions? Because when we do, we feel *very* good immediately afterwards. Thus they are a Pursuit of completion. This then becomes a cycle; we pursue Primal Passions, then we feel immediate gratification, and then after that period of gratification has passed, there is a crash, and we feel terrible, so we Pursue another Primal Passion, and the cycle continues. This mechanism is very similar to an addict's drug use, and with similar results, in the most extreme of cases. We push those we love farther and farther away from us, we become dirty, subservient animals, and our lives becomes meaningless save for the Pursuit of Primal Passions. This is an extreme example, but every individual who Pursues Primal Passions has the potential to become just that. But what happens to the True Self? The physical self and the True Self rely on each other for the survival of the overall person. The physical self can go on without the True Self, but the True Self cannot survive without the physical self. And when we Pursue Primal Passions, our physical self suffers, and so eventually, our True Self will also suffer. We fall into a sort of poverty, both the physical and True Selves. The physical self becomes malnourished, weak, and dirty, whereas the True Self becomes slow, weak-willed, and impulsive. Once a person has fallen past this point, they are no longer a person, as they are now no different than a wild beast, and their life is just as meaningless. So the Pursuit of Higher Passions must be the exact opposite, correct? Not exactly. You see, Pursuing Higher Passions benefits only the True Self, whereas Pursuing Primal Passions detracts from both the physical self and the True Self. The physical self is bettered by the Pursuit of physical Passions, and the True Self is bettered by the Pursuit of Higher Passions. So what specifically happens when we Pursue Higher Passions? It is difficult to articulate, so let's start simple: The True Self gets better. Okay, *what* about the True Self gets better? Well, what *is* the True Self? It is your opinions, your ideas, your personality. Do these 'get better?' It could be argued as such, but we can be more specific. When we Pursue Higher Passions, these things, opinions, ideas, personalities, they *change*. How do they change? In the case of Art, the qualities of the True Self will change according to which Pursuits of Art are used,

and within that, which Realms of Arts are Pursued. These changes are not immediate. For some, the changes may come quicker than others, but even those changes may take many years of Pursuit before any change has occurred. The reason this is so is that Higher Passions are by definition *not* Pursuits of Completion, so things that happen due to the Pursuit of Higher Passions must be drawn out and slow. For example, when one Consumes within the Realm of Perception, immediately afterward, you do not gain 'better' opinions on the Art, but you have gained *your own* understanding of what the Art means. This process repeated many, many times, over many years, will lead to one having many opinions about those Arts that they have Pursued. But how does that change *us*? Well, the Art doesn't change us; we do. When we repeat this process, we gain an understanding of the Art, and since the Art is understood through the True Self, we can say that by Pursuing Art, we come to recognize the qualities of our True Self by seeing how our perceptions of such Art fits with a common theme. Further Pursuit will give us understanding of our True Selves, which will then allow us to recognize in full our thoughts, personalities, and opinions. Even further Pursuit will give us *understanding* of those opinions, thoughts, and personalities. And this point, where we *fully* understand our True Selves, is when we can change them. What change is good for a person in what scenario is wholly dependent on what that person wants to accomplish, thus making it impossible to explicitly tell what the end result will be when we Pursue Higher Passions. This brings us to to other Higher Passion, Companionship. The purpose of Companionship is to keep ourselves away from Pursuing Primal Passions. When we have a Companion, we have shown them our True Selves, and they have show us their True Selves. This means both involved are extremely vulnerable to one another. But that vulnerability build trust between Companions, a trust that, given time, exceeds the magnitude of any influence that contests it. This means that Companionship is a mutually beneficial, self propelled system. It is a very powerful tool, and its main use is to keep each other from Pursuing Primal Passions. This works because the trust that Companions build is like a life line, a rope, to tug the other back from the edge of losing one's True Self. But Companionship is also proactive. The longer a Companionship is Pursued, the stronger the

True Self of each involved becomes. How? Why, by the old fashioned way, giving and receiving constructive criticism! This allows the Companions to be even more in touch with their True Selves. Companionship acts as a catalyst to the Pursuit of Art, in the sense that what you can do through Companionship would take many, many times longer to happen through the Pursuit of Art.

-What about us changes when we pursue Higher Passions versus 'other' Passions?

When we Pursue Higher Passions, we begin to understand our True Selves. In the case of Art, this is done by repetition and mindfulness. In the case of Companionship, this is done through a complex system of trust and criticism. Both take many years to develop into a healthy understanding, and Pursuing Companionship after or during the Pursuit of Art will speed up the process considerably.

To answer the final question, I want to look at the quote at the beginning of this treatise. It comes from a writing of Epicurean philosophy by a man named Epicurus. It translates to, "The greatest fruit of self-reliance, is freedom." Epicurus' philosophy was based on the principle that human sensation can be separated into Pleasures and Pains. Pleasures are those things that make us feel 'good,' whereas Pains are those that make us feel 'bad.' So as a general rule, Pleasures are 'good' and Pains are 'bad.' When we experience Pleasures, they will counteract Pains. When we experience Pains, they counteract Pleasures. If we want to be 'good' we must always Pursue Pleasures. But there are some instances where a Pain is preferable over a Pleasure, as that Pain will lead to a greater Pleasure than that which the Pain is chosen over. But there are also instances where Pleasure may not be preferable at all, as it may be overindulgence, which would lead to great Pain. So the ultimate goal of life is not to be rid of all Pains and indulge in all Pleasures, nor to be rid of all Pleasures and Pains equally, but to achieve a balance, tranquility. Why?

When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of

sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual lust, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is wisdom. Therefore wisdom is a more precious thing even than philosophy ; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly; nor live wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them.

Excerpt from *Letter To Menoeceus*

So wisdom is the end goal of life. And to live a wise life, we must also live a pleasant one, so we must Pursue Pleasures. The distinction Epicurus makes between Pleasures that he is talking about and Pleasures that are over indulgence is the same distinction between Higher and Primal Passions. So does this mean that we Pursue Higher Passions to live a wise life? No, that would be a Pursuit of Completion. Now, we may analyze the quote brought up in the beginning. “The greatest fruit of self-reliance, is freedom.” Self-reliance is an ideal championed by the Transcendentalist writers, so what does it mean? Self-reliance is the ability to rely on yourself, to trust yourself, and therefore know yourself. And in order to know yourself you must Pursue Higher Passions. So be self-reliant, to lead a wise life, to know your True Self, are all things that come from the Pursuit of Higher Passions. The greatest fruit of self reliance, the most important thing that will come of it, is freedom. What is freedom? In order to know our True Selves, our identities, we must transcend society and Pursue Higher Passions. When we Pursue Higher Passions, we are Pursuing wisdom, the knowledge of yourself. When we attain wisdom, we become self-reliant, we can trust ourselves for we know ourselves. So what is freedom? Epicurus says of the free man:

He holds a holy belief concerning the gods, and is altogether free from the fear of death. He has diligently considered the end fixed by nature, and understands how easily the limit of good things can be reached and attained, and how either the duration or the intensity of evils is but slight. Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he scorns, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance is inconstant; whereas our own actions are autonomous, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach. It were better, indeed, to accept the legends of the gods than to bow beneath that yoke of destiny which the natural philosophers have imposed. The one holds out some faint hope that we may escape if we honor the gods, while the necessity of the naturalists is deaf to all entreaties. Nor does he hold chance to be a god, as the world in general does, for in the acts of a god there is no disorder; nor to be a cause, though an uncertain one, for he believes that no good or evil is dispensed by chance to men so as to make life blessed, though it supplies the starting-point of great good and great evil. He believes that the misfortune of the wise is better than the prosperity of the fool. It is better, in short, that what is well judged in action should not owe its successful issue to the aid of chance

Excerpt from *Letter to Menoeceus*

This can be taken in a thousand different ways, so I will take it my way. Epicurus says that those who are free not only make their own decisions, but recognize that the success of one in their endeavors is determined by their own volition, not by chance or necessity. In other words, if you want something to happen, do it, but be thoughtful and plan it out beforehand, and be prepared to accept the consequences. That is freedom. Not only to have the ability to choose, but to understand what that ability entails, and what the consequence of each choice will bring. And there is no freer being in existence than a Human.