

Squirrel In Hell

2016-09-20

Against Amazement

第一

The feelings of wonder, awe, amazement. It's a very human experience, and it is processed in the brain as a type of pleasure. In fact, if we look at the number of "5 photos you wouldn't believe" and similar clickbait on the Internet, it functions as a mildly addictive drug.

If I proposed that there is something wrong with those feelings, I would soon be drowned in voices of critique, pointing out that I'm suggesting we all become straw Vulcans, and that there is nothing wrong with subjective pleasure obtained cheaply and at no harm to anyone else.

I do not disagree with that. However, caution is required here, if one cares about epistemic purity of belief. Let's look at why.

第二

Stories are supposed to be more memorable. Do you like stories? I'm sure you do. So consider a character, let's call him Jim.

Jim is very interested in technology and computers, and he is checking news sites every day when he comes to work in the morning. Also, Jim has read a number of articles on LessWrong, including the one about noticing confusion.

He cares about improving his thinking, so when he first read about the idea of noticing confusion on a 5 second level, he thought he wants to apply it in his life. He had a few successes, and while it's not perfect, he feels he is on the right track to notice having wrong models of the world more often.

A few days later, he opens his favorite news feed at work, and there he sees the following headline:

"AlphaGo wins 4-1 against Lee Sedol"

He goes on to read the article, and finds himself quite elated after he learns the details. 'It's amazing that this happened so soon! And most experts apparently thought it would happen in more than a decade, hah! Marvelous!'

Jim feels pride and wonder at the achievement of Google DeepMind engineers... and it is his human right to feel it, I guess.

But is Jim forgetting something?

第三

Yes, I know that you know. Jim is feeling amazed, but... has he forgotten the lesson about noticing confusion?

There is a significant obstacle to Jim applying his "noticing confusion" in the situation described above: his internal experience has very little to do with feelings of confusion.

His world in this moment is dominated with awe, admiration etc., and those feelings are *pleasant*. It is *not at all obvious* that this inner experience corresponds to a inaccurate model of the world he had before.

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Even worse - improving his model's predictive power would result in *less* pleasant experiences of *wonder* and *amazement* in the future! (Or would it?) So if Jim decides to update, he is basically robbing himself of the pleasures of life, that are rightfully his. (Or is he?)

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