

Carl's Call for Contentment

"So I commend enjoyment..." Eccl 8:15

Survival requires adapting. Adapting requires paying attention. Paying attention requires stillness.

Stop what you're doing.

Put your hands in your lap. Sit up straight. Take off your reading glasses. Take a deep breath, lift up your chin, and as you exhale, let your head turn and your eyes look out.

Look around. What do you see?

I can see trees and water, two of my favourite things.

What can you hear?

A moment ago I heard a bird tweeting. I can hear a clock ticking. (I can hear the keys clicking on my keyboard as I type this...)

Now what can you feel?

I can feel the chair's sure and safe support of my body. I can feel a twinge of pain in my lower back, but that just reminds me that I am human and alive. I can feel swelling in my nostrils - hay fever. I can feel a cool breeze on my face even though I'm indoors. I can feel my hands resting against my legs. I can feel the floor through the soles of my feet.

I feel...not bad!

What can you smell?

I can't smell a lot at the moment - aforementioned stuffy nose. But I can recall recent smells. I like the smell of my deodorant (no sense wearing it if I'm not going to enjoy it). I can smell the smells of the forest from my walk yesterday.

What can you taste?

I still have the taste of milk and cereal in my mouth. And the taste (smell? Notice how taste and smell converge, sometimes) of morning coffee.

Now what is the gestalt, the overall impression, of these collective experiences of your present moment? Mine is mostly of safety, and comfort. I find my body giving a sigh of contentment. *Mostly* safety and comfort. A few changes coming on the horizon. Tasks. Deadlines. Things to prepare for. But I begin the preparations from this moment of peace.

It's 2020, coming up on midsummer. And in this moment, you can be okay. You can connect with your immediate surroundings and say, "Not bad."

The world is always changing, and new challenges arise in every moment. Each new challenge demands a response, a change, in order to continue surviving. That is true.

Isaac Newton may or may not have been more productive during the bubonic plague¹. In and out of pandemic he was a busy guy. But it was in his two years of self-isolation during the plague - two years of sitting quietly at home, contemplating his apple tree - that Newton developed the mathematics of *change* - calculus - which he then used to study the forces of the universe.

Maybe we can have similar - perhaps less spectacular - ideas about how and where our universe is heading. How to prepare for it. Even as we sit still.

Breathe in, look around, wonder, and heave a sigh of contentment.

Peace to you.

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-truth-about-isaac-newtons-productive-plague>