

My (Duncan's) annotations in comments; everything else is unabridged from the original email except that mentions of other specific people have been anonymized. I weakly recommend reading without commentary first (go to the upper right and switch from "suggesting" to "viewing" to get rid of visual distraction), but not if the idea of reading it twice dissuades you from reading it at all.

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- something pretty worrying is going on with me and my relationship to Duncan's relationship with the internet. something happened last night that made it quite clear to me that something is driving me crazy in this domain. i don't mean "driving me crazy" in quite the colloquial sense; the poison oak is driving me crazy in the colloquial sense, in that i'm almost constantly annoyed by it. no, what i mean is that something is causing me to take out-of-character, irrational, impulsive, harmful actions with very little awareness that anything odd is happening.
- this definitely has something to do with my values and a perceived threat to them. it's a feeling i've occasionally had with romantic partners before.
- i felt it once at an airbnb with Gloria. i don't remember exactly what the circumstances were. Gloria is very sensitive to many subtle sensory things, in some ways, and has strong preferences around things like the texture of blankets. she also is extremely reluctant to put up with small inconveniences, so for example i helped her construct an elaborate contraption that allowed her to comfortably read in bed while lying down without having to use her arms to hold anything at all. once when we went to an airbnb, much of my day was spent putting out many tiny fires of Gloria's sensory discomforts and small inconveniences. i'm not sure, but i think that when i reached the peak of the feeling, it had something to do with "bees" (that is, flying insects that can sting). the main emotion i felt on the surface was disgust. contempt, exasperation, and rage may also partially describe the feeling.
- i think i felt a little bit of it with Collin when i was trying to help him find a way to exercise regularly. the memory is very hazy, but i think the feeling was focused on the very long list of physical activities that were ruled out; it seemed the solution could not involve Collin having to tolerate discomfort. much like with Gloria and the "bees", i experienced some kind of emotional impulse to be separate from him, to push him away, to judge him to be inadequate or unworthy. (it wasn't super strong in that case, and i did actually succeed in helping him find an exercise routine that he stuck with for years.)
- and i've felt it with Duncan in the past, when i've perceived in him disdain or arrogance. also sometimes with food, especially when large stashes of sweets are involved.
- i think that in these situations, there is a stack of emotions. the ones on the surface, the ones i feel most consciously, are disgust and contempt. i'm guessing at the rest, but i strongly suspect that one layer down is rage, anger, possibly hatred (though that's perhaps

in between the first and second layers). and beneath that is fear, panic, terror. i hypothesize that everything happening on the higher levels is an attempt to execute some kind of strategy in response to the fear.

- i don't think this is genuine disgust. i think it's more like a disgust-shaped smoke screen.
- it's the same as when i feel ashamed, ask myself what exactly i'm ashamed of (or almost any other introspective question), and answer something like "i'm ashamed of being a bad person". the overwhelming, monolithic, laser-focus on "i'm bad" is a kind of protective paralysis. it reliably prevents me from being reflectively aware that i want whatever it is i'm not allowed to want. it's sort of locally helpful, because if i were aware of the truth about my proscribed desires, i'd likely be inclined to take some kind of action in dialog with those desires. for example, i might just decide to simply grant the desires, in which case my thoughts would enter the world of outward cause and effect. less risky, in the short term, to be paralyzed and blind. but according to my understanding, the most devastating patterns of irrationally involve artificial cognitive blindness.
- i have a hunch that this three-layer cake with disgust on top is doing something similar. but interestingly, the top layers involve action rather than paralysis. the anger layer creates motive force, prepares me to act. the disgust layer causes me to choose a particular kind of action, the kind that puts distance between me and something, prevents it from having an impact on me. that's how i used arrogance as a kid; i think i was probably bullied quite a bit, but when you're bullied by slugs you might not even notice, and the worst they can possibly manage is to annoy you. i set myself too far apart for anyone to hurt me directly. this disgust seems to be the same, but targeted at much more specific domains of value or habit rather than toward whole swaths of people, or even toward whole individuals.
- so it seems that i fear something, and part of me believes that closeness with the other person will result in the feared thing.
- when i look at the examples i've given of times i've felt this way, a certain impression arises. i feel it in several places in my torso, all connected together. it has something to do with being yanked around. as i say that, i imagine enormous lovecraftian forces that rise out of the sea and crash over you, a concrete wall suddenly emerging in the middle of an interstate highway ten feet in front of your car.
- i think most people who know me at all see me as unusually agenty. and i am. i'm deliberate, strategic, i make plans and follow through with them, when i care about something i never leave key components to chance, i seek alignment and address conflict and succeed more often than not at integrity and courage.
- but it's also true that in a way, i have much less control over my attention and experiences than almost anyone. my mind is so completely entwined with my environment and my body. a huge part of what i am is a vast, complex structure for moving \*forward\* despite the

unending cacophony that yanks every inch of me in different directions at all times.

- some things, such as "a large stockpile of sweets", do not yank randomly. they are able to grab many of my ropes all at once and pull in the same direction. and that direction rarely has anything to do with "forward", as i've chosen it. little to do with the vision of my sculptor.
- with Collin and the long list of ruled-out exercise types, it involved abandoning endurance as a tool. he was convinced that he should exercise, but enduring emotional and psychological discomfort was simply off the table. with Duncan and contempt, i think the feared force is of old habits that i've deliberately replaced. with Gloria and the "bees", the feared thing was something like "endorsing a complete surrender to the yanks".
- and with the internet, i think the fear is of something very similar to a large stockpile of sweets. it involves the slot machine of superficial algorithmic social engagement, the endlessness of the supply of memetically strong information snacks, and, above all, immediate gratification.
- the internet yanks so hard on so many human ropes. it's specifically designed to.
- my guts say that it's not ok to put myself at the mercy of these forces. if i find myself yearning constantly for them in their absence, it means i have lost something important, something about my ability to move forward reliably, and it's time for drastic emergency measures to restore grounding in my independence.
- but the big question is, why does my perception that someone \*else\* may be getting yanked lead me to expect that \*i\* will get yanked unless i distance myself from them? why i do i behave as though it's contagious?
- perhaps because it is? because humans adopt the values of those they like and respect? if Duncan acts as though it's no big deal to fill the freezer with ice cream, i genuinely expect that over time, my estimation of the size of the deal will in fact reduce.
- (i think that maybe disgust, contempt, and hatred are exactly the tools that tribes of humans use to insulate themselves from the conflicting parts of the cultures of other tribes. the blue tribe thinks it's \*better\* than the red tribe, not so much because it has good reason to think it's better (even though it might), as because emotional closeness with the red tribe's whole deal would disrupt the internal coherence of blue. blue constantly reinforces its feeling of betterness with contempt for rednecks, trumbers, and so on, practicing casual ridicule and mockery, to maintain an insulating buffer that keeps its culture intact.)
- and why do i seem to be so damn confident that i'm incapable of navigating the risks with my eyes open? why the automatic, blinding, brakes-disabled disgust?

- (why not some kind of cooperative gap-bridging, specifically? a "lol sob" kind of hopelessness at that. i cannot possibly create convergence on every issue. that is... unthinkably exhausting. there has to be some kind of doing what is good for me, while letting Duncan take care of himself, even when i don't understand, and sometimes even when i think he's doing something wrong.)
- perhaps because, especially right now, i feel that my mind is at the mercy of external chance. i have no awareness of a top-down process capable of navigation. i do actually believe that fairly robust navigation processes exist in me, even moment-to-moment, but i've certainly not been in any state to conceptualize or even perceive them of late. it certainly \*feels\* very plausible that during this month, i could get yanked around by almost anything, and if something yanked in a coordinated way, it could move me, and i might not even notice, and even if i did notice, i might not be able to do anything about it.
- in fact, i think i'm less happy about living here today than i was two days ago. and i think it happened while talking to Duncan last night. i feel more constrained by poison oak, by my lack of a car, and even by the absence of internet. i think some of my sense of comfort drained out while i tried to actually hear him about struggling to answer questions, solve problems, and so forth. i heard "this place is awful", and at least a little bit, i just... fell for it. i already knew about all of these challenges, had already accounted for them in my attitude toward the country, yet today i feel this sad and scary internal struggle with a part of me that gobbled his expressed attitude right up.
- so it seems like there really is a problem here, and the disgust really is doing something to mitigate the local damage. but the fear-anger-disgust cake strategy is also \*definitely\* a threat to our relationship. any strategy that involves distancing myself from Duncan by setting myself in opposition to him—let alone blinding myself to my own thoughts and feelings—is one i prefer not to use, if i can help it.
- i don't know what to do instead. but at least maybe now i can at least watch whatever's happening, and try to see how it works.