

The Option Method Institute

Education based on the teachings of Bruce Di Marsico

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Comparative Consistency

Prerequisite Preparation

From

Monday Night Study Group, 1973

Bruce Di Marsico

Outline

- “Comparative Consistency” is deciding the degree of unhappiness for an event in proportion to how unhappy we feel about a similar event.
- “Prerequisite Preparation” is deciding between two desires proportionate to which seems better preparation for the rest of my life
- Since we presume that others use unhappiness as we do, we often use the threat of unhappiness to motivate others.

Introduction

In this lecture from the 1973 Monday Night Study Group, Bruce Di Marsico discusses more about how we judge how unhappy to be, and what we want more between two things.

“Comparative Consistency” is deciding the degree of unhappiness for an event in proportion to how unhappy we feel about a similar event. For example, if we lose \$20, we will be unhappier if we lose \$100, and even more unhappy if we lose \$1000.

“Prerequisite Preparation” is deciding between two desires proportionate to which seems better preparation for the rest of my life. For example, if we both want spend more time exercising, and want to spend more time making money, if we are not confused by unhappiness, we will decide between the two based on which we predict will be better preparation for our future.

Since we presume that others use unhappiness as we do, we often use the threat of unhappiness to motivate others. For example, if we know that a employee is afraid of disapproval, we may act disapproving so that the employee is motivated by their unhappiness at being disapproved of.

READINGS

Comparative Consistency

The degree of unhappiness is proportionate to the importance of the desired thing. For example, I'll be more unhappy if I lose \$100.00 than if I lose a penny. I'll be more unhappy if I don't get any food than if I don't get a seven-course meal. I'll be more unhappy if I don't get love than merely don't suffer. Somehow it is all in proportion.

What determines the importance of a desired thing? Two factors are present: comparative judgment and consistency in judgment, or what I call "Comparative consistency". For example, if it is bad to lose a little of something then, in comparison, it is worse to lose more.

I make the comparison: if I decide it is bad not get a lot of something, then it is worse to not even get a little of it. That's how I determine what's important to me. I'm exploring with you how we determine what's important, because that's what our unhappiness feeds on: the idea that some things are more important than other things.

In my comparison I have to be consistent. So for instance, if I find that I feel a little bad when you rip my shirt, I'd feel worse if you ripped three of my shirts.

Now this comparative consistency is the way we do it all the time. For example, if it is a pain in the neck to travel 10 miles, it is going to be more of a pain in the neck to travel 20. If I hate getting up at 7:00 I'm going to hate getting up at 6:00 more.

If it is lousy to get up at 7:00 in order to go to a job, it'd be worse to get up at 6:00 in order to go to a job. But it might not be worse to get up 6:00 in order to go camping. That's not inconsistent. That's consistent with another comparison, that it is better to get up earlier for the things that I want, than for the things that I don't want.

Another example: if someone thinks it is really bad not to have that \$100,000 in the bank, they'll think it is much worse to not even have \$10 in bank. And if you think you need \$100,000 and you don't even have \$10 you'll feel worse off. Sometimes people won't put any money in the bank because they can only put in \$10 a week. "If I could only save \$10 a week what's the sense? I won't bother." If I allow myself to keep wanting, and if I want money, I'm going to be pained at the fact that I'm not getting as much as I want, and so therefore I'll just stop wanting to save altogether.

Prerequisite Preparation

Prerequisite preparation is a function of choosing something that in some way we believe leads to more good things—it is a prerequisite, a preparation for more of other things. And that is another way that we decide what's more important.

So in other words, given one domain of choice, in that domain alone we decide in terms of more bad, less bad—that is comparative consistency. But now, when you're comparing two different domains, apples to oranges, how do you do it?

It is good to have a lot of oranges, so it is worse to have less. If I stayed with oranges I know how to decide. But when I compare apples to oranges, now how do I decide which is more important? Prerequisite preparation. In summary: if I believe I can become more, or get more, or function better, with, for example, approval than with money, then I will say then therefore that approval is more important to me. If I think that I can become more, or get more, or function better with money than approval, then I'll say money is more important to me.

My question to myself is, what is best for my wanting?

So the whole concept of prerequisite preparation is, "I want the thing that will enable me to get more. Period." When I furnished this room, I bought a chair before I bought a painting. Why is a chair more important than a painting? And in many ways I could protest it is not. They're two different things but the benefit of one enables me to get the benefit of the other in some way. By having the chair and having a place to relax, only then it would make sense to get the painting after, to then relax with the painting. The chair is a prerequisite for the painting—why have a painting if you can't even sit and relax with?

Let's say you want to prepare something the next day, and you have a choice between working late on something, or going to sleep. Which is the better preparation for the next day? They're two separate things, but if I look at them in terms of preparation for the rest of my life it is easy to compare them.

And so we're always going to be looking at things in terms of comparative consistency and in terms of prerequisite preparation, or how they prepare us for other things that we want. That unhappiness is proportionate to importance is only apparently different from that unhappiness is in proportion to the temptation to give up but they can be seen to be the same. For instance, the more important it is, the more I want it, but it is important *because* with it I can get more of what I want. So things are important and become more important because somehow we judge that with them, we can get more of what we want and that's how we decide what's more important than others.

What I want is *more*, and what will give me the ability to get more. So since I've become unhappy to assure that I get it, it follows then that I must become unhappy also to make sure I don't forget that I want to get it. In this frame of mind it is a

prime prerequisite that I never forget that I want more and more. And since I use unhappiness as a cause of remembering, I use unhappiness in order to remind myself—which is exactly the very reason why I want might want to *stop* wanting more and more.

This is all because I believe that I want more *in order* to be happier. Since happiness is *really* what I want more and more of, then I'm tempted to give up wanting more and more when I've coupled it with unhappiness or pain.

Using unhappiness to motivate others

Unhappiness is also used as a way to motivate others to give me or help me get what I want, and, remember, what I want is more. What I always will want is more, more, more. More happiness basically, but since we're into unhappiness here, we're wanting more to *make* us happy. Unhappiness is also used as a way to motivate others to give to me or to help me get what I want. One of the reasons people want love is that because love helps them get the help they need to get what want. Someone I love makes the environment around me happy. They cater to me perhaps, so then I'm free to now use more of my own potential.

You clean my house, I'll go out to work. Or I'll clean your house, you go out to work and then you'll give me money for clothing, stuff like that—somehow we're helping each other.

If you believe others use unhappiness to motivate themselves, you will use it against them as a way of getting what you want.

If I believe you're into using unhappiness yourself I'll use it against you, and if I can threaten you that somehow my unhappiness threatens to stand in the way of what you want, you'll try to prevent me from being unhappy—at least, that's the ploy. So I'll get angry at you or whatever. It's a kind of blackmail. Since you use unhappiness and I want something from you that you won't give me, I'll use the whole principle of unhappiness against you.

Since I believe that, being another human, you probably are unhappy about some things, and I think I know what they are, and if one of the things that you seem to need is my approval, then if I threaten to be unhappy, you'll start worrying about not getting my approval, and you're going to make yourself unhappy if you don't get my approval. So to prevent your own unhappiness you'll give me what I want.

There is an underlying fear which is disclosed by the Option Method. It sounds something like this: if I don't get unhappy it means that I don't really want it enough to try to get it, it couldn't mean that much to me. If I don't unhappy that's almost like saying, "It'd be okay with me if I don't get it." If don't get unhappy that's tantamount to not wanting what I want. This belies the fear that I will want *less* rather than *more*, and that I just might not naturally want what is more important.

Example: Honesty vs. Approval

Another example is: I want to disagree with you, but also be honest about what I feel, yet I don't want you to dislike me for being disagreeable. So I've got those two wants. I'm going to have to decide which one is more important, right? So let's say I've decided that your approval is better preparation for getting more of what I want, that it is more important for me to get approval in this case than to be honest.

Now, since honesty is very attractive, and is tempting me away from the approval, I'm afraid I may seek honesty, which is less important to me right now than approval. Since I'm afraid of I may seek honesty, I become unhappy start becoming afraid of your disapproval in order to reassure myself that that's what I want *more*.

I started off by wanting two things: your approval and my honest expression. I've made the judgment that your approval gets me more than my honest expression. That can be a fine, nice decision, and doesn't have to be a problem. But I'm afraid that I'm going to have a real temptation to be honest. Honesty is attractive, and so I'm afraid I might do it just because it is attractive, and I might forget that what I want is your approval more than I want to be honest.

If I'm into unhappiness to motivate myself, the fear is that I'll screw myself, the fear is that I'll forget that I want our approval and wind up being honest. I'm afraid that if I don't keep the fear of disapproval in my mind I'll blurt out something honest—which is something I want, but not at the expense of your approval which is something I want *more*.

I'm afraid I'll get one thing I want and defeat myself and not get the things I want even more, because I noticed that I want both these things. And especially, the more I want the honesty, the closer I get to being honest, the more afraid I'll become that I'll get overcome by that and that'll overcome my desire for what I really want most, if I'm into using fear to motivate myself. If I'm just confidently knowing that I'm going to do what's best for me, then I'm just going get the approval if that's what I want, and I will have no temptation to be honest.

Questions for Reflection

What is something that you got unhappy about recently? If some characteristic of the event were increased or decreased, would you be proportionately more or less unhappy? For example, if you were late to a meeting, what if you had been twice as late? Half as late?

Make a list of things you want. Then, look at each possible pair of things you want. Which of the two is better preparation for getting more of what you want in the rest of your life, as well as it is possible for you to predict right now?

How do others try to use the threat of unhappiness to motivate you? For example, if you have a fear of disapproval, are there people who try to use your fear of disapproval to motivate you? How do they try to use the threat of unhappiness to motivate others?

Meditation for the Week

- Happiness is *really* what we want more and more of. If we believe that we want more *in order* to be happier, then we'll be tempted to give up wanting more and more, because it is now coupled with unhappiness or pain.