

Dislike

To dislike is to find uncongenial, to avoid the company of. We all like and dislike many people, and toward many others we feel neutral. My guess is that most of us like many more people than we dislike. Liking other people is easier than disliking them; it brings more rewards in mutual support than does dislike, and thus has social evolution on its side. Disliking is highlighting negative emotions, which we are led to think is bad for us. (The relation between negative emotions and immune system suppression makes sense). Yet to like everybody is to adopt a naïve and uncritical attitude, and, probably, to deceive yourself about your true feelings. Some people deserve your dislike, while you rightly protect yourself by marking off your foes from your friends.

Example

1

I dislike a certain person in politics. I see him all the time on television, especially in this election year. He has a little moustache, rounded porcine cheeks, small eyes. I dislike him on the grounds of his appearance, and because his values, for society, are almost entirely commercial; and he has little to offer his culture. The problem with this dislike, which is an easy emotion to feel, is that it is useless. If I liked this guy I would be more likely to understand him and make what I can of him for myself. Liking would be advantageous. Disliking X means making him into a cartoon character whose peculiarities are thus hidden from me, and whose objectionable presence (as I see it) cannot be put to any use. Another case of not liking being a way of not understanding.

2

I dislike myself when I review many of the foolish decisions I have made, based on false pride, impatience, and desire. Even though these decisions led me into trouble and at times downfall, I pursued them, and once started had no power to turn back. Disliking myself, of course, is more complex than disliking X, my foe. When I dislike myself I dislike the self that chose to make the decision I now deplore. Am I not still that same person who made the poor decisions? In fact, is not that former stupid person precisely the one who is making the present judgment call? Can I then trust that judgment call?