

8 How to Emulate Positive-Cooperative Justice Now

As a prisoner in the existing punitive system, I have found myself variously in despair and frustrated by what is and isn't possible within this framework. I haven't been particularly upset about the lack of ability to go to nice places and do fun things, but rather the lack of access to be able to participate in constructive activities, healthy community and so forth.

The following is a brief set of recommendations for how the interested prisoner might simulate a PCJ environment on his or her own. These are things which I have personally found very helpful, and bear out in research as being demonstrably helpful toward improving one's outlook, and through that perhaps one's place in the world whether inside or out of the institutional setting.

The following activities are generally recommended for developing empathy:

- Reading literary fiction (The Violence Paradox, 2019). For a good list of books see the top 100 books of all time, published by the Guardian, or start with a good literary anthology such as Norton, or look for collections of short stories by respected authors. The key thing to appreciate is that literary fiction is the sort which focuses on the characters, their interactions, and what goes through their minds, versus plot centered fiction which tends to have stereotyped heroes and villains doesn't offer a lot of insight into human behavior.

- Do loving-kindness type mediation practices (Hanson, 2008). Rick Hanson's book *The Buddha's Brain* discusses this and what it does to improve one's outlook and brain architecture.

The following activities are recommended in Rick Hanson's above-mentioned book to reduce stress and make other positive brain changes:

- Do slow breaths while counting of equal duration in and out.
- Do strong exhales.
- Deliberately generate feelings of safety.
- Practice generosity (in prison this can be a bit dodgy, use your head, don't let yourself be used, but be creative with it. Secret generosity is usually safe).
- Stimulate positive emotions by engaging the facial expressions associated with them.
- Expand the category of "us" in your mind.
- Cultivate positive emotions.
- Practice non-contention (not arguing with situations or people, and accepting what is). Note: This does not mean ignoring things that really require action.
- Develop self-compassion. Note: this does not mean excusing yourself for harms done in the past, but rather putting them in context, *that was then, this is now*. It includes or implies the commitment to move forward being kind and helpful towards others and above all avoiding hurting others.
- Letting go of ill will.
- Studying ill will, understanding what's behind it.

- Investigating triggers.
- Accepting your wounds.
- Don't teach lessons in anger.
- Warm the heart.

One or two I would add to the above:

- Examine or even be suspicious of desires.
- Be mindful about what you choose to follow through on
- Challenge yourself to do the opposite of some arbitrary habit. This has been shown to increase willpower muscle. The example most frequently used is brushing your teeth with the opposite hand of what you are used to for a week.

A few nonfiction books stand out as being particularly worthwhile in the general area of self-help. This category is a big mixed bag of stuff, but a good handful of scientifically backed researched-based books stand out. There are also a couple here which merit attention without the backing of the associated research, but are based on related topics:

- Buddha's Brain, by Rick Hanson, Ph.D,
- Wherever You Go There You Are, by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- The Power of Habit, by Charles Duhgg
- Thinking Fast and Slow, by Daniel Kahnemann
- The Better Angels of Our Nature, by Steven Pinker

More to come in this section as time allows ...