



in pursuit of constant improvement the process of progresses too often overlooked.

this is not a camera.

the picture of a thing is not the thing itself. the measurement of a trait is not always indicative of true ability. more directly: you can change a number without changing yourself.

simply put: biology is messy. training is less like building a machine and more like cultivating a garden. there is preparation and execution and then faith and waiting, and often unintended consequences...

we learn by success, by rewarding certain behaviors; which begs the question: which behaviors are you rewarding?

this is not a rhetorical question, but critical and frequent exercise for anyone seeking to build a cultivated self.

what behavior gets rewarded? what sort of future am i building? be it in the gym, at work, with food or friends or hobbies - what am i encouraging? is that a place i want to go? is that a person i want to be?

progress is vital, but it can be deceiving. it is possible to move in the right direction, but in the wrong manner. perhaps i am being unclear...

it is possible to get closer to the symbol and further from the source.

it is easy to get so focused on our goal, on improvement, that we loose sight of why, of *what exactly* it is we are rewarding and how we expect that to impact our lives moving forward. think of it as a map - the "direct" route is not always the fastest one, or even viable. there is terrain to contend with, replete with open roads and dead ends. it is a common human problem to get so focused on the horizon that we trip over our own feet, we take for granted that learning is a skill, or even worse: assume we have already learned everything there is to know and blind ourselves to the information before of us.

in order to learn we first have to pay attention, and to pay attention we need to understand what is worth paying attention to, how it changes, and what those changes mean. before we can learn, or even learn how to learn - we have to first become sensitive enough to gauge whether or not we are

making any real progress at all.

sensitivity is a trait too often overlooked. sensitivity is recognizing the terrain under our feet, the weather over our heads, and if the road we are on is a dead end, regardless of the fact it heads in the right direction. we all want to rush headlong towards our goal, we (or at least I) feel like we are already starting too late, and that we need to get to work. the question always circles back to goals. do you care more about making progress or being seen to make progress? are you interested in getting better or getting high?

too often we hide behind hard work. if we are constantly moving no-one can accuse us of being lazy, right? rushing around, dead end after dead end, may feel like making progress, but if our objective is truly to improve wouldn't our time be better spent not only examining the terrain overall, but learning how to tell the difference between real progress and immediate gratification? accepting that the first step to progress is to learn what progress really looks like and how to be sensitive to the changes dramatically alters how we weigh the costs and benefits of each day, and may be extremely helpful in exercising control of your current situation.

if we are to accept that sensitivity in and of itself is a skill, then it would make sense to find a way to reward it. i used to wonder why so many of the people i look up to, so many individuals who seem to be fiercely, relentlessly competent - are also good photographers. or climbers. people who practice jiu-jitsu or enjoy some level of firearms training. these hobbies are a simple way to reward sensitivity. to practice receiving feedback and altering course. to practice asking the question "why?" why is this different? what did i do? is this better or worse? if "some" was good, is more better? these tasks allow us to constantly practice the art of learning. of improving. of being sensitive enough to listen and flexible enough to change. of recognizing when the barrier to our progress is our process, and how to change accordingly.

it is about rewards. it is about rewarding behavior that we want to encourage. with that perfectly composed shot, the ring of a steel target, or a well timed mount escape - we are rewarding having listened. we are rewarding appropriate response to the environment. we are rewarding some level of communication and even cooperation with the opponent. ultimately, our goals are our own. our progress is our own. i do not mean we get there alone, far from it, but that we are responsible for our part. we are responsible for how we respond to the circumstances we find ourselves in, and for how we influence the circumstances we face in the future.

to be responsible for a thing, you must first learn to see the thing - and one of the first things you need to see is what behavior you are rewarding. in all circumstances, what are you encouraging?

where does this road lead?

how will this influence my behavior in the future?

the cultivated self. with every action we plant and prune, we feed habits of thought and action and create the environment where the new habits are going to grow. the nature versus nurture debate is worthless in that it lacks utility. it is not an impetus for action. it doesn't matter to me. nature is more important because starting today my environment is fixed, everything before this moment already happened and has created the raw material of which i have to work. nurture is more important because **action** is what i possess, what i use to alter my environment today.

tomorrow it all begins again.