

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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Aw! So cute!

The destructive power of

By GLENN CAMPBELL

One of the fundamental challenges of life is learning how to resist temptation now in favor of a better outcome in the future. Most people simply can't do it, especially if the temptation is something emotional and close at hand.

Take, for example, the puppy. Look how adorable, helpless and funny he is. Can't we take him home? Pleeese?

Faced with those big, innocent, heartbreaking eyes (of both the puppy and the person begging for one), most of us can't resist. It's just one little puppy. What harm can he do?

But what happens then? That's right, puppies grow up! They can turn into big, hungry, undisciplined bruisers who take over your life for years, sometimes long after the person who begged for them has moved away. Grown up puppies can cost thousands of dollars over their lifetime and cause you daily inconvenience worth far more.

Metaphorically, a "puppy" is anything that appeals to your emotions in the present but that isn't best for you in the long run. All of us are struggling with puppies—doing what feels good vs. what we know is right—and all of us fall for them sometimes.

Drugs are a puppy, in that they make you feel good now (or at least stop the bad feelings) but aren't good for you over time. Rich food is a puppy if you know you're overweight. A puppy can be something you buy for yourself that you know you don't need or "help" you give someone when they should be helping themselves.

A puppy can also be a painful but necessary decision that you have been avoiding, like firing an employee who is trying his best but not meeting the requirements of the job. It's a puppy when you avoid causing someone immediate discomfort at the expense of both their long term health and yours.

"Puppies"

Puppies abound in the home and in intimate relationships. Even the most ruthless judge or businessman, capable of hard and calculated decisions on the job, may turn into a creampuff when he gets back to the wife and kids. Once you drop your defenses with someone and become responsive to their emotions, it can become incredibly difficult to say "No." Puppies sneak in wherever the will gets weak, and soon you have a house full of dysfunction.

The "puppy problem" is a common disorder of the underclass in any society: the poor, illiterate and impulsive. It is not just that these people lack resources, but they tend to misuse them when they do have them. Those without much experience in good fortune are likely to squander it on things that feel good right now—luxury goods, entertainment, gifts to friends—while their long-term prospects go down the drain.

The puppy problem is also the official disease of politics. Leaders are elected or defeated on the basis of whatever puppies appeal to the public at the moment. The voters rarely comprehend the long-term consequences of their current hysteria, so they elect leaders who pander to those feelings.

Advertisers are always trying to sell you puppies, for a simple reason: the profit margin on products you don't need is usually much greater than on the basics. There's little reward in selling tap water or basic transportation but huge profit on sugared soft drinks and luxury cars. The job of advertising is to manufacture puppies: things your emotions say you can't live without even as you

mortgage your soul to pay for them.

The puppy problem turns up in countless guises and never goes away. If you don't face the problem today, you will in the near future.

You have already had plenty of life experience concerning what happens when you fall prey to puppies. They can lead to many kinds of prison and rob years from your life, so you can't afford to make too many puppy mistakes.

No one wants to be a puppy killer. Part of the burden of refusing the sentiments of the moment is that people are going to hate you for it. The risk, however, is that you take in too many puppies and your whole system collapses, leaving you unable to care for any of them.

Come on, just one little puppy? Look at those sweet little eyes!

Okay, well maybe just one.

You're going to fall for it sooner or later, so you have to be crafty. You can give in on the little puppy proposals, like borrowing one for the weekend, but you have to hold the line on the big ones.

The puppy before you can't just be seen in three dimensions but in four, including time. What will this puppy become over months and years?

If you clearly see the fourth dimension and understand that your best control of it happens now, you might be better equipped to face the puppy temptation.

—G.C.

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