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Word pictures of depression: anhedonia

Sharon McConville

I have never been a particularly hedonistic type of person, but for me, the following illustration is useful in summing up my experience of anhedonia:

‘The sun is shining brilliantly and the sky is a cloudless azure. Everything looks pristine. The trees and bushes appear velvety, like model vegetation on a model railway set, and the lines of the buildings are sharp like the edges of neatly-wrapped parcels. My friends are excited because they have planned to watch a movie which is being projected on to the cliff face at Cavehill, and it is a perfect evening for such an adventure. I have a ticket but I have decided not to go. It is cloudy and dark in my inner world and I do not have the energy left to construct a bridge which I can cross into this bright parallel reality. Sometimes I can do it; sometimes I can mentally detach myself from the gloom and live for a time in the glow created by the people around me, like a candle which does not quite smoulder out because it is relit using the flame of others which burn more strongly. This is an excursion which I would ordinarily enjoy: the film is one which I would like to see; the people are friends with whom I am comfortable; I would like to be outside in a beautiful setting with panoramic views; and the novelty value of marrying Hollywood commercialism with the stark majesty of nature appeals to me. Tonight, I know that I could not concentrate on any film; I am intimidated by the thought of having to interact with a number of different people, taking into account their different needs and the differing expectations which they have of me; and I crave silence and space unmarred by noisy crowds.’

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