Is Despondency the Disease of Our Modern Age?

We hear a lot about "depression" these days, but not much about "despondency" — a state characterized by low spirits and a loss of hope. It's also known by a term even less frequently heard of today — *acedia* — which was traditionally listed as one of the "seven deadly sins."

However, the symptoms of despondency may sound more familiar to you than the term. Indeed, Aldous Huxley — the author of *Brave New World* — thought it was [one of the main diseases](#) of the modern age.

The following symptoms of despondency come courtesy of [Gabriel Bunge](#), who gleans them from the writings of a fourth-century monk, Evagrius Ponticus:

1) You're unhappy with what you have, and want only those things you don't have.

"Everything that is available [to the person] is hateful to [him]; everything that is unavailable is desirable."

2) A state of inner restlessness.

"One can no more stand the ancestral home, the work skills acquired, the company of one's friends and acquaintances… it is impossible to finish a task begun, to read a book to the end… one picks up something and puts it down again… one frequently is not aware of what is happening."

"… the temptation to move…"

3) An excessive concern for bodily health or an anxiety about falling ill.

4) A desire to change your line of work.

"The temptation suddenly to view one's work or learned profession as the source of one's [sad] indisposition…"

5) A tendency to blame others for one's sadness.

"… There can also be 'superiors' or 'colleagues,' in short, fellow human beings upon whom we lay the guilt of our misfortune. The despondent one suddenly remembers in painful detail all the injustices he has had to put up with, either in reality or in his imagination."

6) A constant search for distraction and amusement.

"An entire entertainment and travel industry is occupied today with just this: to lighten the burden of despondency for our poor contemporaries, or rather, to prevent them even from realizing that they are afflicted with this evil. There must be no standing still, no emptiness!"

7) A false activism.

"Restlessness changes into a busy, untiring activism… It is the illusion of a full appointments calendar that blinds us to our inner emptiness. It is all the more dangerous as it serves so-called high goals and is therefore unassailable. The longer this illusion continues, the more disastrous the consequences. The sudden end of the delusion, the dreadful awakening, inevitably comes sooner or later. One will either give up in

desperation, dropping everything that up to then had ostensibly made up the content of life, or one will clutch at new and ever stronger doses of distraction… True love makes one lovable; by contrast, 'charitable activism,' born from despondency, renders one bitter and intolerant."

And finally, there's this famous description from Evagrius of the despondent person:

"The eye of the despondent one

stares constantly at the window,

and his mind

presents visitors to him.

The door creeks,

and he jumps up;

he hears a voice,

and peers through the window,

and he does not go away from there,

until, exhausted, he sits down.

If the despondent one reads,

then he yawns a great deal,

and soon he sinks into sleep.

He rubs his eyes,

and stretches out his hands,

and while his eyes wander from the book,

he stares at the wall,

then he turns away again,

and reads a little,

and when he leafs through [the book],

he searches for the end of the exposition.

He counts the pages,

and determines the number of sheets,

finds fault with the writing and the design

and in the end he snaps the book shut.

He lays his head on it,

and falls into a not-too-deep sleep,

and in the end hunger

wakes up the soul again, and the soul [now renewed]

attends to its own concerns."

Again, this is from the 4th century, but it could very well be a description of many men and women today!

What do you think? Is despondency one of main diseases our modern society suffers from?

Image credit: [“Despondency,”](#) by William Kurelek