

This is not Jhana, not Flow, not Meditation, not Reward

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This document exists to prevent immediate misclassification. The phenomenon described here, the *Ease regime*, is frequently assimilated to existing categories. These mappings are structurally incorrect.

Not Flow

Flow is task-optimized, goal-aligned, and performance-coupled.

The Ease regime is anti-instrumental and destabilizes as soon as goal orientation is introduced.

Not Meditation

Meditation is practice-based, method-driven, and repeatable.

The Ease regime is non-repeatable; repetition reinstalls the evaluative processes that block access.

Not Nostalgia

Nostalgia is content-triggered and memory-dependent.

The Ease regime is mechanism-based and content-independent.

Not Reward

Reward is value-driven, outcome-dependent, and accumulates through reinforcement. The Ease regime is not value-driven, does not depend on outcomes, and does not accumulate across exposures.

Not Happiness

Happiness is typically defined through evaluation (life satisfaction, well-being judgments, reported affect).

The Ease regime collapses under evaluation, making it structurally incompatible with how happiness is defined and measured.

Not Jhana

Jhana requires sustained attention, progressive stabilization, and training-dependent control.

The Ease regime appears when monitoring drops below a critical threshold and collapses under attempts at stabilization.

Core distinction: ease is a regime that becomes accessible when evaluative monitoring fails to stabilize. The associated phenomenology is classified as joy, but joy is not treated here as an outcome to be generated. Rather, it is the experiential signature of a specific control regime. The most accurate way to characterize the experience is in terms of intensity, not because intensity explains the regime, but because it is the most salient and reliable descriptive feature at the level of experience.

Happiness

Increases with age
Compatible with goals and optimization
Linked to meaning and narrative
Measurable under standard conditions
Gradual and stable
Entry is reliable

High positive affect

Declines or becomes inaccessible after adolescence
Incompatible with instrumentalization
Disrupted by meaning
Suppressed by measurement
Abrupt and event-like
Entry is probabilistic
Naturally gated by access to the ease regime
Modulated by prediction error

What is commonly studied as positive affect excludes an entire regime of high-intensity experience, which the present framework isolates and formalizes.

External Description vs Internal Configuration

From an external perspective, the phenomenon described here may appear modest or familiar, commonly interpreted as a positive affective state, a sense of ease, or a return to “childlike” engagement, but such descriptions fail to capture its underlying regime structure. Observers naturally map these descriptions onto existing categories such as mood, nostalgia, distraction, flow, or reward.

However, this mapping fails because the central feature of the result is not the presence of a feeling, but the absence of several normally persistent control processes, including self-monitoring, performance optimization, and outcome tracking. These processes are often invisible until they are no longer active.

