

How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain by Lisa Feldman Barrett

Post by "Cassius" of April 17, 2021 at 2:38 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

The only thing that I would add to this is that if understanding the mechanism in more detail helps us to increase pleasure, then it is worthwhile to do so to the degree that it does so.

Agreed, with the question always being "Does this increase detail in understanding **actually** produce that result?"

What I am not sure about, since I haven't gone as far into the details of LFB as you guys have, is whether the result increases confidence in resisting rationalism and idealism in thinking, or the reverse. I think there is a constant tension in the pursuit of any "detail" or "tool" that we not get so consumed in the detail that we lose sight of the reason we are pursuing the detail. We are never interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge; the issue is whether it contributes to living happily. And the obstacle to living happily is only sometimes the lack of knowledge (such as might be the case when we need knowledge to diagnose and cure a disease, for example). Someone who gets a disease profits tremendously from drugs that treat that disease, and if we haven't pursued the knowledge to develop the drug, then we have a problem.

But there's also the constant issue that I think is present in Epicurean teaching that the disease we are treating and inoculating against is not a something that stems purely from lack of knowledge, but from an affirmative warped way of thinking that actually has a constituency behind it pushing its malevolent influence on unsuspecting people.

Skepticism, nihilism, rationalism, idealism, and on and on are the primary **philosophical** opponents that we are playing against just as much as we're playing against schizophrenia or other "clinical" conditions. We aren't in the game solely to respond to clinical conditions that developed naturally, though we do want to respond to those too.

I think that the ancient Epicureans diagnosed an example of this problem in the Stoic (and earlier) fixation on "virtue." Pursuing virtue became a tool in the minds of some people that transcended its function in happy living, and became an end in itself, with terribly misleading effects.

Sometimes it is in fact true that "the cure can be worse than the disease." If the pursuit of clinical knowledge ends up for any reason taking our eye off the overall goal, and leaves us

open to other harms (because we fail to address them) then in philosophical study too the "cure" (pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge) can be worse than the disease, by leaving us open to more powerful enemies which must at the same time be constantly guarded against.

An example of this occurs I think in our reading of Lucretius or many of the details of Epicurean physics. If we get too caught up in the comparison of Lucretian-age "science" against modern-day "science" then we can easily lose focus on the overall message. And that is something that is tempting to do, because all of us can easily get caught up in appreciating how far "ahead of its time" Epicurean physics turned out to be, as if the point of the discussion was to appreciate "the history of science" or something similar. If we see Lucretius as an exercise in the *history of science* it's very easy to lose sight of the fact of how the **conclusions** and **philosophical benefits** from science have in many ways **regressed**, rather than **progressed**, from the ancient Epicurean period. The Epicureans looked at their science and saw in it confirmation of the absence of supernatural gods, of the fact that we have but one life to live, of the fact that pleasure is the goal of life, and the fact that there can be no absolute standards of virtue or justice. If our "science" today isn't sustaining those conclusions with even greater clarity than before, then I think we have to seriously question how much "progress" has really been made.