

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

Post by “Godfrey” of April 15, 2021 at 8:31 PM

An extra tidbit pertinent to discussions on the forums"

Essentialism vs Construction

“The belief in essences is called *essentialism*.” Similar to Platonic Forms, idealism, etc, and integral to the classical view. LFB explores this in terms of emotions, Darwin, and natural selection, but I am taking the liberty of applying it to philosophy.

Why is essentialism so persistent?

- It’s intuitive and easy to believe.

- It’s difficult to disprove: since essences are unobservable, one can always believe in them even if they can’t be found. If an experiment fails to detect an essence, it can be blamed on a failed experiment. *“Essentialism inoculates itself against counterevidence.”*

- If a scientist believes in essences he will design experiments to finding them.

- William James: “Whenever we have made a word. . . to denote a certain group of phenomena, we are prone to suppose a substantive entity existing beyond the phenomena, of which the word shall be the name.”

- *“So, essentialism is intuitive, logically impossible to disprove, part of our psychological and neural makeup, and a self-perpetuating scourge in science. It is also the basis for the classical view’s most fundamental idea, that emotions have universal fingerprints. No wonder the classical view has such stamina—it’s powered by a virtually unkillable belief.”*

- *“It’s hard to give up the classical view when it represents deeply held beliefs about what it means to be human. Nevertheless, the facts remain that no one has found even a single reliable, broadly replicable, objectively measurable essence of emotion. When mountains of contrary data don’t force people to give up their ideas, then they are no longer following the scientific method. They are following an ideology.”*