

PD09 - Condensed Pleasure

Post by "Elayne" of March 27, 2019 at 11:26 AM

Thanks, Hiram, the fatigue/ finite physical energy is huge-- not sure why I didn't think of that, but definitely needs to be part of the limit on intensity-- and fits with the idea of condensed being an event per time based thing, at the molecular level. It's not a limit on the fullness of pleasure but on the intensity.

The issue of Harris and free will-- I think this is a very hard concept to explain, but we do need to keep in mind that there is not sentient being with agency which is other than "merely the processes in the brain and the body that produce pleasure." The decisional capacity itself is one of those brain processes. An important process but not separate. I don't fault Harris for having trouble with this-- not sure if I can do any better-- because our language really gets in the way. What he is arguing against is something people think they believe in but which is entirely impossible. The type of free will most people believe in would require a ghost in a machine-- a separate soul which is somehow a free agent in regards to the brain and the body.

I have had some success explaining it in this way: when I was born, I made no decisions about my DNA, mitochondria, parents, social environment, etc. My beginnings had no agency of mine involved whatsoever. (Of course, you know many people think otherwise). As long as I am talking to atheists, I think there is not going to be argument against this point.

If we say that I did not create myself with agency, at some time there must have been a first actual decision I made-- a movement of an arm or a leg, for instance. That decision, that agency, could only have been produced by a brain I had no decisional input into creating. So that first decision, although made by me and not by my mother, was 100% dependent upon decisions not made by me. It was not "free" in that sense. From the moment of conception, the components/ function of my brain are affected by everything in the environment-- foods, the weather, other people, viruses, etc. My brain is also affected by each decision I make. It is still me making that decision, not my mother, the weather, etc. So I clearly have agency. But at no point does there exist a homunculus inside of me which can be traced back to anything other than the total interactions of my starting material and my environment. The self which makes each decision is not constructed by anything which has become independent/ free-floating in regards to the starting material and the subsequent environment. The environment includes "the swerve", but we also do not create "the swerve"-- if we did, it would not be a swerve at all but also a product of us plus the environment.

Those who believe in the supernatural are imagining a separate spiritual being which can override the biological being, and that's how they imagine free will. Some of them imagine sort of free spirit that emerges from inert matter-- but what would have gone into producing the

characteristics of that emergent free spirit, if not the starting material plus the environment? I don't see how that would work.

Some people feel like this means we aren't making decisions, and that doesn't make sense. We are certainly deciding. Harris knows that but spends more time on how the "we" which decides gets formed. I may have done no better, above, but that is my go at it.