

Mental pleasure/pain more intense and longer lasting than physical pleasure/pain

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 10, 2023 at 6:35 PM

Okay, I'm happy to contribute. And, we could come at the topic (collectively) from a variety of vantage points. I would be happy if this was a discussion, not a didactic. In that spirit, let me throw out a couple of frameworks that I think are helpful to get the big picture of pain as a human experience. Then we can see where the discussion takes us from there.

For me, to really understand pain it is pivotal to understand evolution. Pain essentially says two things from an evolutionary perspective: 1) this is a problem, and 2) this is concerning. The former reports function and structure issues and is summarized in neurobiology as nociception. The latter reports existential risks and is summarized in the neurobiology of suffering and anguish. Pain biology always contains both elements, though the proportions can be greatly different and have greatly different courses over time. Evolution clearly understood that structural dysfunction presented risks, both physical and existential.

A great starting point to understand the dynamic interplay of these two issues is a simple, non-serious childhood injury. We've all see a child do something like fall down or fall (non-seriously) from a bicycle, get up screaming, run to a parent, and lapse in to further screams and crying. From the reaction one would anticipate that important injury had occurred. However, the parent nurtures the child, checks wounds and finds them minor, reassures and comforts the child, and in a few minutes the child is out playing with friends again. Examination of this scenario reveals that injury sets off both nociception and suffering/anguish. But, when risk and seriousness are removed from the equation the anguish goes away and the nociception quickly becomes a modest issue.

So, that takes me to the Lucretius quote, ""But when the mind is excited by some more vehement apprehension, we see the whole soul feel in unison through all the limbs, sweats and paleness spreadover the whole body, the tongue falter, the voice die away, a mist cover the eyes, the ears ring, the limbs sink under one; in short we often see men drop down from terror of mind; so that anybody may easily perceive from this that the soul is closely united with the mind, and, when it has been smitten by the influence of the mind, forthwith pushes and strikes the body."

And, indeed, it strikes the body - in this context - with pain behaviors and exacerbation of nociceptive pain. Adult behaviors are outgrowths of these early presentations. When stress, fear, and vulnerability are high pain tends to be high. A great deal of the discussion of "chronic pain" is actually a discussion of chronic anguish. Opioids (pain pills) relieve both nociceptive pain and emotive pain. The reason is that they are interlinked in evolutionary neurobiology. The

"opioid pain crisis" of the 1990's and before was really a discussion of opioids used for existential pain (they work, and then lead to addiction).

Okay, that's enough for the moment. So, let's see what portion of this strikes interest and we can go from there.