

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

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 11, 2023 at 1:05 PM

Wow, you people are a delight! So many great ideas, and things that might be said about them. For my part, I hardly know where to start or what to respond to. I'll stay with the medical, neurobiological issues since that is where I might be of most benefit.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

For example if I have an injury I may eventually notice that I'm avoiding doing certain things, even though doing them doesn't actually hurt. Or I'll anticipate an action being painful and tense up, thereby making it more painful than it would be otherwise. I'm thinking here of the injury as being "pain" and the avoiding or anticipating as being or causing "suffering".

Reacting to past injury in this way might be considered "suffering"; however, I would put it in the category of adaptive strategy. Indeed, in most cases we do have caution or avoid places and circumstances where we have previously suffered injury. The aphorism "once burned, twice shy" comes to mind.

In contrast, "suffering" is more tightly related to living with or reliving the anguish of a prior situation. For example, with the death of a parent we all would feel loss and some suffering. However, some people who saw themselves as highly dependent on the parent might have this suffering go on for years.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

How do desires fit into this evolutionary picture of pains, or do they? Are desires, biologically, considered pains or are they completely different? Philosophically, they seem to be a type of pain and yet, at the same time, they seem to be something quite different.

In my view desires are not equivalent to pain (existential or nociceptive). However, our desires, and particularly the loss of them as lost dreams, do produce existential anguish. And, because losses produce existential anguish they may compound nociceptive pain - making it much worse and lasting much longer. Also desires in the form of "that shouldn't have happened" cause existential anguish and do the same thing - propagating and exacerbating our perception

of pain. So, sociological loss and psychological loss, particularly where compounded by expectations of "shouldn't have" and anger, markedly exacerbate nociceptive pain, lead to pain treatment failures, and extend pain symptoms into years or longer where the nociceptive injury might largely recover within weeks or a few months.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Also, is a complete absence of pain something that is considered neurologically possible while maintaining full consciousness?

No. There is a rare, serious condition called "Congenital Insensitivity to Pain". (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3564101/>)

This leads to tissue destruction and early death. So, such a condition is not impossible.

On the other hand, with less drama, there are many people who don't pay much attention to pain. For example, extreme sports enthusiasts (example: dirt bike riders) may be injured seriously many times and yet they quickly get over it and don't pay much attention to residual pains. This is an interesting subject (too long for this entry).

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

My thinking is that, eventually, it would be most interesting to get an outline of how pleasure, pain and desire operate, together and separately, then perhaps dig into details from that point. But in my ignorance I might be overly ambitious about such a complex subject....

It would easily support a whole book. The problem is that the complexity and some of the answers would not be appealing to a large audience.

[Quote from Don](#)

How would you describe the pain from "painful" memories or similar mental pains? There's no actual nociception going on there, is there? I'm curious for you to expand on the "existential pain" you mentioned in passing.

Because of the biological cross-connection of nociception and suffering we tend to use the word "pain" to cover both. So, as you said, we may refer to "painful" memories involving losses or abuses that did not actually involve any nociceptive pain. So, this is an interesting philosophical area which explores how types of experiences generate our vocabulary, and how this vocabulary may be subsequently extended to uses that involve some element of the original type of experience, while actually not correlating with it entirely. (Essentially, the vocabulary of metaphorical, experiential Venn/Euler diagrams.)

"Existential pain" may then be understood as a type of suffering that derives from adversity of various types. Two paths lead to "existential pain" as a term: 1) When we talk about loss we want it to be understood as important, interfering, and anguish-producing; so, we use "pain" vocabulary to transmit these ideas; 2) people suffering a lot of existential pain are considerably more prone to experience nociceptive pain even when the nociceptor is minor and transient.

Okay, this is probably way more in this entry that you would wish to see. So, I will stop. Hope the above helps and answers some questions (though perhaps generating others).

Best to all you smart folks!