

Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Elayne" of July 12, 2019 at 11:18 PM

Cassius, thank you for your comments-- it will be likely Monday before I have time to give a full response.

I will throw out there, though, that although pleasure is felt at all normal times as a response to a specific experience (as is pain), I think the activity itself is not the pleasure or the pain. My first reason to think so is that the same activity under different conditions of the same person can be pleasurable or painful. This gives the nervous system a more flexible, accurate way to indicate to us the desirability of whatever it is we are doing, in different circumstances.

The second reason I think that is the issue that under abnormal circumstances, a sensation of pleasure can be somewhat unhinged from a direct action. I can think of two ways to do this-- electrical stimulation of the brain during surgery, and drugs which bind to the pleasure neurotransmitter receptors in an abnormal way, causing prolonged feelings of pleasure with no other cause than the drug.

Although actions-- electrical stimulation and drug taking-- did initiate the feelings of pleasure, the feelings are not being produced through the normal pathways and are not serving as a useful feedback about the health and safety of the action. It is not so much that the person is enjoying the action but that artificial bypassing of the natural feedback system is going on. It's not at all the same type of pleasure-action association, neurologically, as pleasurable reading.

This is similar to a "sense of knowing", where electrical stimulation of the brain can cause a person to feel they "know something", a sense of certainty, but without any content.

I do completely agree that we know pleasure when we feel it, and that normally it's a result of activity, but not that it "is" the activity.