

Pleasure and Reality

Post by “Elayne” of April 8, 2019 at 9:57 AM

We have had several threads lately on FB addressing the principle that pleasure is pleasure-- no higher or lower pleasures. There is still often some contrast made between pleasures which involve altered states, such as through drugs or foods-- the use of extrinsic molecules which bind to receptors which otherwise bind our own endogenously produced neurotransmitters. I would like to consider this from a slightly different angle, while maintaining still that pleasure is pleasure.

The contrast in comfort level with feelings of pleasure mediated by intrinsic neurologic/hormonal pathways and those mediated by extrinsic factors may be based on an intuition that the extrinsic pathways are not credible contacts with reality. I'm saying intuition here because I don't get the sense that it is a reasoning process-- it seems like a visceral distrust. Perhaps a prolepsis?

The extrinsic molecules bind differently from our intrinsic molecules-- often more "tightly", less reversibly. They can result in down-regulation of our receptors, a hallmark of tolerance which happens in addiction. To my knowledge, feelings of pain and pleasure produced by unaltered contact with reality do not have this effect at the molecular level. We can become habituated to smells, so that we only notice a new smell after some time of contact with a particular odor, but we do not down regulate our ability to feel pleasure at a new, pleasant smell. We may become habituated to a particular pleasure without losing responsiveness to a new one. Whereas with extrinsic mimics, we can, if addicted, temporarily lose access to normal pleasure entirely.

Perhaps we have an intuitive sense of caution around extrinsic mimics of our pleasure pathways. From an evolutionary standpoint, this would make sense, because pleasures and pains are signposts about reality-- they tell us what will help and hurt us. If we alter our senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste so that we do not contact reality in the way we have evolved to do, this can be unsafe-- and in the same way, altering our ability to get feedback from reality-based pains and pleasures could be dangerous.

I have taken courses in medical hypnosis, which can be very useful for reducing both chronic and acute pain without medication side effects. I have mostly used it for patients with migraines and "functional" abdominal pain, where the pain is not serving a useful purpose as a warning. I've occasionally used it for acute pain, such as for a little boy whose mother brought him to my office unexpectedly with a serious, obvious broken arm. While splinting him and contacting ortho for an emergency appointment, I quickly used hypnosis to resolve his severe pain and panic.

However, a key element of medical hypnosis is always the suggestion to never remove ALL the pain and to never remove pain that has not yet been diagnosed-- because then we have removed a critical warning system for tissue damage. We do not want people self-hypnotizing away their appendicitis pain. It should really be used very very selectively.

I am wary of extrinsic molecular mimics of my pleasure pathways, as well as other practices which could alter my normal contact with reality-- such as trying to lose my spontaneous emotional response to painful or pleasurable events-- a goal of certain meditation practices. While maintaining that pleasure is pleasure, net pain can result from losing our usual contact with Nature.

Post by "Cassius" of April 8, 2019 at 11:05 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

We have had several threads lately on FB addressing the principle that pleasure is pleasure-- no higher or lower pleasures.

Elayne I consider this to be a very complicated subject and your discussion of how pleasure works is very helpful. However before I dive in to the medical side of what you are saying, I don't know that we (me included) are totally clear on the philosophical side.

When I read the Epicurean quotes, and when I read what DeWitt thinks they mean, ultimately I think we are headed in the direction of something like:

There are many different types of pleasures, and they differ in intensity and duration and probably other attributes as well, but the reason we call them pleasure is that our feeling of pleasure tells us that they are pleasurable.

I say this because when you say "no higher vs lower" I think that needs to be understood in the sense of "noble vs ignoble" or "worthy vs unworthy" or "virtuous vs unvirtuous." In other words what I am thinking is being said is not that all pleasure is essentially the same in every respect, but more simply that we recognize something as pleasurable simply because our "feelings" tell us it is.

As with the color analogy that I made on the recent graphic, in "the feeling of pleasure" i am thinking that we are talking parallel with saying "the sights that we see" or "the sounds that we hear."

We see birds, trees, airplanes, and houses, through our eyes, which convey the various colors, shapes, sizes, etc. All of these are "sights" but there is really not very much in common between birds, trees, airplanes, and houses. A similar statement could be made about sounds.

So where i am going is that I think the focus here is on the "faculty by which we know them" rather than the individual sensations themselves. We know pleasures because we feel them to be pleasurable, but that doesn't tell us much about the details of the feeling except that they are pleasurable.

I am thinking that the main importance of this is to continue to push away the false notion that there are gods, ideal forms, essences, or any kind of outside absolute standard whatsoever.

So when you say:

[Quote from Elayne](#)

. There is still often some contrast made between pleasures which involve altered states,

... that gets us to the question of to what extent all pleasures are similar in nature between themselves, and thus your investigation into the nature of the pathways and how pleasures are processed physically.

Maybe in the end the question is similar - Does all "pleasure" and "pain" end up being a particular type of chemical/electrical reaction? - but I thought I would make this comment first.

Post by “Elayne” of April 8, 2019 at 2:02 PM

Cassius, yes, I should have been more clear. I mean two distinct ideas-- the "higher and lower", as you say-- there is no distinction. And then the intrinsic pathways of pleasure vs the extrinsically mediated pathways-- I am tempted to call these natural vs unnatural, but that might be a stretch. There seems to me a definite difference between our pleasure systems responding to reality vs a molecule bypassing part of the intrinsic pathway to mimic our innate pleasure systems.

For the substance- mediated pleasure which sort of "hijacks" our innate pleasure pathways-- bypassing the ordinary workings of these feelings--I do not mean that the pleasure itself is differently felt, but I am wondering if the frequent sense of hesitation many people feel about these pleasures is because of an intuitive apprehension that there will be net pain. It may be a learned apprehension from having seen people go down the road of addiction, but I am not fully

sure that is all that is going on. With all the sense-altering plants in the world, that would be a constant danger if humans (and other animals) had to use reasoning every time to decide about them. Generally, instead, humans use the substances but have built up all sorts of rituals and prohibitions about them.

So I am wondering if we have an intuition, an anticipation/prolepsis to be cautious with what Elli called the "fantastic", when we were talking about someone lying on the beach forever with margaritas, in altering our sensory input. I am not calling this a different type of pleasure, in the felt sense. But like justice, I wonder if we are innately suspicious. Animals that make themselves intoxicated frequently would not survive to reproduce-- they would fall, be unaware of predators, etc. Loss of contact with reality is precarious. Humans can reason this out-- we can do hedonic calculus-- but that might be too fancy of a skill to have been present early in evolution.

Even lab rats will skip extrinsic mediators like cocaine and opiates if they are having pleasure from a natural environment. Even if they haven't experienced addiction and withdrawal pains. I don't think they are reasoning this out.

In that thought experiment asking people if they would chose the completely blissful simulated life vs the real life, I think this is behind an intuitive preference for the real vs the unreal. The unreal feels intuitively unsafe.

The closest I can come to finding a PD that would support this is PD 23:

" If you fight against all your sensations, you will have no standard to which to refer, and thus no means of judging even those sensations which you claim are false."

The extrinsic mimics of our pleasure pathways "fight against" our sensations, in a way, by rendering them unreliable as signals about reality. Sometimes only with the pleasure pathways and sometimes including our sense organs as well.

Post by "Elayne" of April 8, 2019 at 2:08 PM

A specific example-- if a person takes a powerful artificially manufactured extrinsic pleasure mediator, like fentanyl, they can put their hand on a hot stove and burn themselves while feeling no pain. Reality would have provided the signal of pain to prevent tissue damage. But the person has "fought against their sensations" by introducing a molecule that binds unnaturally to the endorphin receptors and now has no way to judge reality.

Post by "Cassius" of April 8, 2019 at 3:33 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

With all the sense-altering plants in the world, that would be a constant danger if humans (and other animals) had to use reasoning every time to decide about them.

I know that my dogs (and even more cats) have no trouble deciding whether to eat something or not. Sometimes they may get it wrong, but whatever they are checking it is not syllogisms.

[Quote from Elayne](#)

With all the sense-altering plants in the world, that would be a constant danger if humans (and other animals) had to use reasoning every time to decide about them.

Ok now in talking about anticipations, we've always had disputes due to the absence of texts. You have the (1) Diogenes Laertius implication that anticipations come only after experience and processing of thoughts, and you have (2) the DeWitt / Velleius (On the Nature of the Gods) view that anticipations are given to us by nature and function PRIOR to experience, as if in analogy to a computer operating system that functions in a particular way even before application programs are added to it. For the reasons DeWitt states, and especially because I think that anticipations/feelings/senses all must function on their own and prior to "thinking," in order to be part of the canon of truth, I side with option two, which probably fits closer with the path where you are going. To repeat my standard position, of course conceptual reasoning does exist too - when we see cows, we form concepts of cows - definitely. But DeWitt argues I think, and I agree, that the two are separate processes, one of which is "innate" prior to experience and the other is the result of conceptual processing after experience.

And to expand that out more generally, yes it is true that we have to take the senses, anticipations, and feelings of pain and pleasure as 'given' and as a part of animal nature, but that doesn't mean that they are mystical. They operate according to set principles and properties, it seems, and those are born with us, not the result of the embryo or baby having experiences. Yes they can be trained and tuned over time, after dealing with experiences, but they could never have operated in the first place if they had not been born with their innate raw abilities.

And I agree with you that some kind of "disposition to embrace reality" is probably an anticipation. I think DeWitt says it somewhere in sort of this way - that anticipations are a faculty that allow us to organize (maybe perceive is a better word) complex relationships, just as eyes enable us to "perceive" sight, ears to perceive sound etc. And just as eyes and ears have preset methods of functioning, you would expect feelings (pain and pleasure) and

anticipations to also have predisposed methods of functioning.

If I am totally off track to what you are talking about don't hesitate to reel me back in. You know the science far better than I do, about all I can offer is potential ways to organize it given my reading of Epicurus.

Post by “Cassius” of April 8, 2019 at 3:56 PM

Just a followup random thought, but I think the huge underlying issue in the name "canon of truth" is the question of "what is truth?" and that the main issue is that there is no "absolute truth" - nor is everything totally relative to what we would like to process in our minds. The "truth" is to some extent "true to us" but it is not subject to our whim or stoic mind-control -- it is what we are able to determine to be true based on natural faculties that operate automatically and without reasoning -- and as soon as "opinion" or "processing by the mind" enters in, what we are talking about is not "truth" but "opinion" -- which is why DeWitt (and Epicurus too, if you read the section in DL on whether there are three branches or four) excluded any aspect of conceptual processing as part of the "canon of truth." And now we are back to the big issue of what that "fourth branch" is, and whether considering it part of the canon undermines the integrity of the system. That's a subject for long debate 😊 But I do think that the issues involved in it relate to your current direction of thinking.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 8, 2019 at 4:13 PM

From my reading of the paper "Epicurus' Scientific Method" I'm understanding a different take on the canon where the anticipations, senses and feelings are not separate, but interconnected. You have a preconception, which is verified by the senses. From there action is guided by pleasure/pain.

This doesn't mean that anticipations/senses/feelings are never separate, but to me it describes the canon as a measuring process involving all three components. To follow this reasoning, the anticipations almost equate to hypotheses. I think that that's going too far, but something that bothers me about anticipations as I've previously understood them is that they seem disturbingly close to Platonic ideals.

I like that interpretation of PD 23! I've understood it as a poke at the Sceptics, but this is a very practical reading of it.

Post by “Elayne” of April 8, 2019 at 4:33 PM

Cassius, that is exactly the track I am on with this, and your phrase "disposition to embrace reality"-- that's the short version to encapsulate my long explanation.

I thought it was worth talking about because I haven't seen us address it directly, when it comes to seeking pleasures. It doesn't change pleasure being pleasure but it could explain some intuitive aversions.

Post by “Cassius” of April 8, 2019 at 7:51 PM

Godfrey:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

but something that bothers me about anticipations as I've previously understood them is that they seem disturbingly close to Platonic ideals.

Yes depending on the interpretation given to them, "close to Platonic ideals" is pretty much the concern that DeWitt had. I cannot recall if you have read DeWitt's version of them -- whose have you read?

Dewitt goes into significant detail, pointing especially to this Diogenes Laertius comment to indicate that other Epicureans ("the Epicureans generally") deviated from Epicurus himself: "Now in *The Canon* Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make perceptions of mental presentations to be also standards. His own statements are also to be found in the *Summary* addressed to Herodotus and in the [Principal Doctrines](#)."

According to DeWitt, "perceptions of mental presentations" must be the result of conscious thought, and that if you form a mental presentation after observation, then what you have is something in your mind that you have created yourself, not an automatic reaction of a faculty given to you by nature.

Of course as usual DeWitt is the minority position - the majority is that you look at enough cows, you form a picture of "cowness" in your mind, and that becomes a standard of truth. DeWitt thinks that is ruled out by the nature of the canon of truth, others say DeWitt is wrong,,

and the debate goes on.

There might be a way to reconcile the positions (in my view) by saying that the process of forming pictures in one's mind is so automatic that the pictures themselves become canonical, but DeWitt argues that this blurs the distinction between something that is automatic and something that is the process of conscious reasoning.

With the ultimate hazard, according to DeWitt, being that if you allow that the product of conceptual reasoning can reach canonical status, then you're basically a Platonist.

Elli has been very tolerant of me continuing to point out this issue, and that virtually no one in Greece agrees with DeWitt on this 😊 So at this point in the discussion I simply think it is important to point out what DeWitt saw, because I largely trust his "instincts" in interpreting Epicurus.

One concern that DeWitt had, and I share, is that later Epicureans were under tremendous pressure from the Stoics to grant to logic/reason a status that Epicurus refused to give it. In addition to the Diogenes Laertius reference above, there is in *On Ends* this statement, which seems similar as an indication that some later Epicureans bowed to Stoic/Platonic pressure:

"Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance? Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain."

[Quote from Elayne](#)

It doesn't change pleasure being pleasure but it could explain some intuitive aversions.

And that is why (I think) DeWitt calls Epicurus an "intuitist" more than once, rather than a strict "empiricist."

We're basically counting up all the reasons why DeWitt (1) has been excommunicated from polite Academic society, or (2) brilliantly followed clues which open up an accurate understanding of Epicurus for the first time in 2000 years --- depending on your perspective!

Post by “Elayne” of April 8, 2019 at 8:33 PM

The thing that convinces me of the anticipations is developmental pediatric research-- the fact that we are not blank slates. We have a rudimentary "sense of justice" based on the tit for tat scheme, and several other innate intuitions which are either present in infancy or emerge as if on a schedule, in a variety of environments.

I have decided the best word for me to describe these brain functions is as being like senses. That is what they seem closest to, but instead of being sights and sounds, they are innate intuitions. People know what we are talking about if we say a "sense of justice." We have more senses than had been understood in Epicurus' time-- we have senses which were then subsumed under touch, such as temperature and vibration. We have proprioception to know where our body parts are with our eyes closed, a sense of balance (lol, some of us-- me not so much), and a sense of acceleration (we cannot detect constant speed, however). There is some recent convincing evidence that humans, like some other animals, have a sense of magnetic fields! I have seen some research on the sensation of "knowing something", which can be stimulated in the brain completely unattached to content. There is a sense of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and although the familiar usually (except with deja vu) requires prior exposure to a setting, that does not explain the sense itself-- anymore than having seen red once explains color vision after that. And maybe we have an innate preference for reality.

The innate intuitions like the sense of justice are different enough from vision and hearing to be put in their own category. They are not based on reasoning and/or experience. I suppose someone could lump them in together with the other senses, but they do need to be accounted for in the ways humans interact with reality, somewhere in the Canon.

Post by “Cassius” of April 8, 2019 at 9:13 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

he fact that we are not blank slates.

Yep, that's the issue!

[Quote from Elayne](#)

I have decided the best word for me to describe these brain functions is as being like senses. That is what they seem closest to, but instead of being sights and sounds, they are innate intuitions.

I agree, and that's why I equate them as being "faculties" have a similar nature to the 5 senses, and also probably to the feeling of pain and pleasure.

Of course this part of the discussion always reminds me of the Jefferson quote in equating a "moral sense" to an arm or a leg:

*Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. **Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787***

Post by "Godfrey" of April 8, 2019 at 11:08 PM

Cassius, I frankly can't remember if I've read DeWitt's take on the anticipations or not, but I'm going to read (or re-read) it in the next few days. When I was putting together an outline I was getting hung up on the anticipations and it was suggested that I return to them later, as I recall. Which I'm doing now 👍

Your description of DeWitt's theory is in line with my anticipations 😊 and seems to align with Asmis as well, as I understand her paper.

Now thinking out loud (digitally speaking): what if we compare justice and cows? They're two common examples that are used, along with the round/square tower.

Justice: I think we all agree that there is an innate sense of justice, perhaps an intuition. However each individual's sense of justice evolves over time, or I propose that it should in a properly functioning adult. An adult's sense of justice should be substantially more complex and possibly different than a two year old's. How does this happen? Through a continuous process of adjustment based on input from the senses and the feelings and adjustment of the initial concept. As an aside, it's possible that the end point of a person's concept of justice, after various permutations, will be the same as it was when they were two, but with more nuance. (Regarding familiar/unfamiliar, those, too change based on sensory input. Unfamiliar becomes familiar... likewise safety/danger....)

Cows: I can't imagine that we're born with a sense of what a cow is. (Didn't someone say to Plato, "when I see a horse I don't see horseness, I see a horse"?) We see a cow or a picture of a cow, or we hear "moo" or someone describes a cow to us. Then when we encounter a creature that might be a cow, we compare the information from our senses to what we have learned about a cow. If they match, perhaps we have a feeling of pleasure and our idea of a cow is reinforced.

I'll call justice and cows two different "modalities", for lack of a better word. But they each get measured through the canon in a similar fashion.

Call justice an inner intuition, call a cow an external presentation. If a person regards all anticipations as inner intuitions, then a cow must be an example of "cowness". Likewise if everything is a external presentation, there is no innate sense of justice but only a learned concept. So as I now understand it, there are probably multiple modalities of anticipations, similar to multiple modalities of the senses. At the very least "inner" and "outer".

Is it the case that the arguments using cows and such were all presented to promote one point of view and the arguments using justice were all presented to promote another viewpoint? I'm not clear enough on who said what to parse that.

Post by “Cassius” of April 9, 2019 at 5:36 AM

Godfrey the argument appears in several locations in DeWitt's book, but primarily starting page 142. When you get a chance to look at this material I'll be very interested in your reaction. To connect your specific comments to a particular page, here is this:

Unfortunately the traditional account of the Anticipationism here goes for us. Three excellent reasons can be cited for these aberrations: first, in the graded methods of Epicurus the topic was covered by advanced students and mostly omitted from both the Little and the Big Epitomes; consequently Lucretius has no help to offer; second, already in antiquity the concepts of such abstract things as justice had become confused with the general concepts of such concrete things as honor and fame; third, modern scholars have become victims of the confusion of the ancients and on their own account have committed the error of merging the Anticipationism with the Atomism.

It is highly probable that Epicurus allowed even to certain animals, especially elephants, the possession of these embryonic anticipations of social virtues. The tendency of the day was to have recourse to the study of irrational creatures in order to learn the teachings of Stoicism. It should be recalled too that not only was Epicurus very eager to have information of Pyrrho, who had been in India, but also that the writings of Alexander's associates, Aristarchus, Nearchus, and Cleander concerning India were available in his youth, and the same is true of the description of India by Megasthenes of the time of Seleucus. The elder Philo, who quotes those of the above writers, testified to elephants "a sort of divination of justice,"¹⁰ an excellent equivalent of the Epicurean Anticipationism. Philo also testifies to elephants the possession of pride, honesty, goodness, equity, and even religion.¹¹ All of these fall squarely into the category of abstract notions, where the Anticipationism belongs. The term *prolepsis* was correctly rendered by Cicero as *anticipatio* or *praesensio*¹² and less precisely, though satisfactorily, by the elder Philo as *divination*. It is wrongly rendered as "concepts" by those who confuse the general concept of such a thing as an ox with the abstract idea of justice. One scholar prefers "preconception," but perhaps "pre-concept" would be preferable. It seems most advantageous, however, to adhere to "Anticipationism" because this is the meaning of the Greek word *prolepsis*.

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Post by "Godfrey" of April 9, 2019 at 12:53 PM

Good cite! Time for a deep dive into this intriguing topic.

Post by "Hiram" of April 11, 2019 at 3:40 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

... And then the intrinsic pathways of pleasure vs the extrinsically mediated pathways-- I am tempted to call these natural vs unnatural, but that might be a stretch. There seems to me a definite difference between our pleasure systems responding to reality vs a molecule bypassing part of the intrinsic pathway to mimic our innate pleasure systems.

I don't think taking pleasure in an external object is "unnatural", but it is an interesting question whether we inherently trust intrinsic pleasure more than extrinsic pleasure (I imagine you mean here the serotonin or oxytocin that our own brains produce versus the substances that we get from things we eat, etc.)

This goes to a question that I've considered in the past, that part of what it means to be Epicureans is to train ourselves to become self-sufficient in our pleasure (which I don't think excludes external pleasures, just includes the confident expectation that we can have pleasure).

Some people may say "objective versus subjective" but this may be a way to disguise their distrust of and alienation from our neurologically-cogent, direct experience. I don't think this alienation is healthy, so the arbitrary ideal of "the objective" is suspicious to me. The key here is that Epicurean philosophy seeks to reconcile us with NATURE--all of it, our own (internal, and "subjective") nature as well as external.

Concerning the addiction question, I refer you to [principal doctrine 20](#), which includes the adage: "our nature does not shun pleasure", and sets the mind against the body in a "mind over body" logic that is applied in Epicurean therapy. The founders of Epicurean Philosophy observed that our body / our unconscious nature / our *id* (to use Freudian language for our drives) does not shun pleasure. It is the role of the mind and of reason to understand clearly the limits set by nature to our pleasures and our desires, and it is the role of philosophy and education to civilize us enough to choose and avoid wisely.

So yes, the dangers of addiction exist, but the founders seem to have been confident that, under normal circumstances, one only needs a philosophical education to avoid its dangers. So my opinion is that a person who is always high or drunk has a pathology, a disease and possibly a form of neurosis or psychological illness (and today this is the consensus among professional who treat addiction).

This reminds me of an example I've also used in the past re: our craving for candy, which is sometimes owed to the YEAST in our bellies. Gut bacteria are organisms that have their own agenda and drives, and they can sometimes hijack the neurons in our stomach to make us crave things that our bodies do not need. They are operating as a type of disease or parasite in doing this. Ultimately, our desires and cravings are bodily rooted, and unconscious, and (if they are harmful) we have to apply reason (and sometimes dietary changes and other treatments) against them.

Post by "Elayne" of April 12, 2019 at 3:14 PM

Hiram, right, I do not mean an external object but a molecule that mimics our endogenous pleasure pathways-- which could give us pleasure despite actual danger. This is more similar to someone's brain being directly stimulated with electric current to create pleasure-- it does not give us the usual information about whether the action is likely safe. I would limit unnatural to synthetically produced mimics, such as fentanyl, but the word unnatural is tricky and I rarely use it. But I think it is safe to say that since fentanyl has not been around long, we can't have adjusted to it through evolution. There is a generation right now being exposed to massive use of synthetic opiates by their parents, and a dramatic increase in overdose deaths in the past few years in the US, often by young adults. The grandparents are raising these children-- I have

many in my practice. I'm expecting a cultural aversion to synthetic mimics of the opiate pathway in that generation, which is being left orphaned-- once they are of age.

I am contrasting something like fentanyl's mimicking action with, for instance, a sweet pleasurable taste tending to indicate that a fruit is less likely poisonous-- in which case the brain is producing the evolved pleasure response. There is a definite difference between those two events in the brain, as well as in outcomes for the person.

As far as addiction goes, of course I have assisted in the treatment of teens, since that is part of pediatric practice, and for that reason I have done a fair amount of research. I think the evidence is most supportive of a process like the one Stanton Peele outlines. I have had several conversations with Stanton on the subject, and I had the pleasure of reviewing an advance copy of his book on developmental aspects of addiction, which is coming out in May. The general gist is that people do not become addicted when they are enjoying pleasure through their innate pleasure pathways-- they tend to have no interest in the mimics, or if they do use them, they do so without becoming addicted. <https://peele.net/>

Post by "Godfrey" of April 12, 2019 at 7:15 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Godfrey the argument appears in several locations in DeWitt's book, but primarily starting page 142. When you get a chance to look at this material I'll be very interested in your reaction.

Cassius, I've been reading up and feel much more informed on the prolepsis issues now. DeWitt presents a concrete and comprehensive case for his view, although when I read the letter to Herodotus I tend to interpret it more in line with the "mainstream" view. Apparently my "multiple modalities" questions are the 3 v 4 faculties problem, and I've got nothing to add to that. I've got to live with these ideas for longer; for the time being my head is spinning!

The one thing that I'm now convinced of is that Platonic ideals are incorporeal and eternal, and the Epicurean canon is firmly biologically based. So even if innate ideas/ anticipations/ preconceptions/ prolepseis are considered universal to mankind, they aren't Platonic as long as they remain in the body/mind.

The discussion on The Anticipations thread is excellent, BTW. 👍

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2019 at 7:05 PM

Godfrey I think DeWitt would say in reference to the letter to Herodotus that the issue of forming words with precise meanings, and using those for reference, is a really important and useful thing to do (as he says in the letter). The issue is whether (1) what he is talking about there are preconceptions/anticipations, or simply the kind of conceptual reasoning that everyone acknowledges to exist and to be important, and (2) how that process relates to something going on as an automatic perceptual process, which (arguably) is more what anticipations would be.

I remain convinced of DeWitt's position because i think (1) that anything that involves "opinion" (and I think conceptual reasoning clearly does) must not be part of the canon, and (2) to read the process of forming words as being canonical, i think it would be necessary to conclude that the formation of words (assigning particular observations to particular words/concepts) is an automatic perceptual process, but I think the existence of different words for the same thing in different languages is strong evidence that we are not all guided to come up with the same words for the same concepts.

Post by “Godfrey” of April 13, 2019 at 9:14 PM

I was curious while reading the letter to Herodotus if he was discussing rhetoric, or perhaps clear thinking. But it's the placement in the letter that seems to connect it with the canon.

The timing of your reading of Cicero is fortuitous: after reading DeWitt I downloaded a Cicero compilation so I can work my way through On Ends, The Gods and Tusculan Questions. Part of DeWitt's case (as you know) is that Cicero had a better grasp of the ideas than Laertius, even though Laertius was more sympathetic to the philosophy. I'd also never realized that Laertius lived after Cicero.

The pleasure comes at the same time as the learning, so I'm going to take my time with this!

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2019 at 11:21 PM

Yes it is fascinating stuff.

Also - in the last year or two there was a major article written on preconceptions by Voula Tsouna. If I recall, she takes the "mainstream" position, but also if I recall correctly she cites much material from David Sedley which is more sympathetic to the intuition/DeWitt position.

File

[Epicurean Preconceptions - Tsouna](#)



Epicurean Preconceptions



Cassius

April 13, 2019 at 11:14 PM

It has been several years since I read this but I see Hiram wrote down some of his notes here:
[My notes - Tsouna's Prolepsis Essay](#)

I have also found some notes from a discussion between several of us on this topic and have placed [that in this subforum](#).

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2019 at 11:34 PM

[Godfrey](#) I thought I just saw you post again on anticipations but now I don't see it.... (something about kudos on the forum and then being in the weeds on preconceptions - maybe I misread it.)

Post by “Godfrey” of April 14, 2019 at 1:16 AM

My last two posts were #17 and #19. That sounds like #17.

Thanks for posting all this information, it's a great resource!

Post by “Hiram” of April 14, 2019 at 7:17 AM

How the Gut Affects the Brain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4CBy0uVqRc>

Post by “Hiram” of April 14, 2019 at 7:33 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

As far as addiction goes, of course I have assisted in the treatment of teens, since that is part of pediatric practice, and for that reason I have done a fair amount of research. I think the evidence is most supportive of a process like the one Stanton Peele outlines. I have had several conversations with Stanton on the subject, and I had the pleasure of reviewing an advance copy of his book on developmental aspects of addiction, which is coming out in May. The general gist is that people do not become addicted when they are enjoying pleasure through their innate pleasure pathways-- they tend to have no interest in the mimics, or if they do use them, they do so without becoming addicted.

<https://peele.net/>

So he's involved in the SMART program!? This is great. I first read of the SMART recovery program in an issue of "The Humanist" that also included an article I wrote for them. I remember that the editor took an interest in my mention of Epicurean cognitive therapy because she felt that it related to other essays that were going to appear in the same issue. I'll share some tweets on this.