

Cognitive Fuel on Emotional Fire



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Thinking and feeling usually appear together, except in children and psychopaths. But thinking and feeling are really quite distinct, although they are often mistaken for one another because they are both conscious and extrasensory. For simplicity let's say that feeling is in the body and thinking is in the mind, although that boundary is notoriously fuzzy. Fear, anxiety, exhilaration, depression, anger, and lust each produce a signature physical sensation that corresponds to a particular cocktail of endocrinal drugs, with which your glands infuse your bloodstream in order to express their view of your situation. Different parts of your body respond to each endocrinal cocktail in characteristic ways. You know these feelings well if you have been paying attention to your life.

It is obvious and certainly true that we sometimes have feelings for reasons, which is to say that we feel the way we do in reaction to events in the world. I am angry because you insulted me, I am anxious about my financial prospects, or I am exhilarated because I have just jumped out of an airplane or had a particularly interesting thought. It is less obvious but certainly true that it also works the other way around. When we recognize a feeling we then try to figure out why we are having it, and we don't always get this right.

Depression and anger illustrate this point clearly. Regardless of the reason that you become depressed on any particular occasion, you will certainly then go on to notice an unlimited variety of other hopeless and gloomy things in your world, each of which will constitute a further valid reason for your increasingly justifiable depression. Regardless of the reason that you become angry on any particular occasion, you will certainly then notice an unlimited variety of other irritating things about your beloved, each of which will constitute a further valid reason for your increasingly justifiable hostility. There is no limit to the cognitive fuel that can be thrown onto an emotional fire and it is sometimes tempting to pile it on.

This is one way either individuals or relationships can spin out of control. Critical examination of the actual root of problematic thoughts or feelings invariably has a constructive and stabilizing effect. I think you will feel better if you think differently about your feelings and their reasons. Call me.

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