

Self-Deception

Fakery doesn't require deliberate intent on the part of the faker. Swindlers know what they are doing is wrong, but flowers don't. [See Monograph 105.] A salesman may think he is providing you a useful service when he sells you a product you don't need. The product is only fake within your frame of reference, not his.

Some frauds are even perpetrated by you upon yourself. Your own perceptual system can fool you into making unwise decisions, because your senses may not have been designed for the conditions you are facing today.

Take the food you eat. Humans are programmed with a fondness for sugar, fat and salt, which were rare and valuable resources throughout most of our evolution. Today, these substances are so plentiful and refined that our taste for them has become counterproductive, leading to obesity, heart disease and even malnutrition when they displace other foods.

In today's environment, the snacks that most tempt us are, in essence, fake foods that give us the illusion of nutrition while not really doing the job. You can't blame Frito Lay or Coca Cola for making them, because they are just giving us what we want, what our emotions tell us is good for us.

But emotions can lie. When you "trust your heart" you are just as likely to find disaster as happiness. This is because emotions are based

on the experiences of the past—in both human evolution and our own lives. They aren't necessarily the wisest counselors in the present.

"Emotion," broadly speaking, is any pre-programmed pattern of behavior. The bee's attraction to flowers and the human male's fondness for pornography are emotional responses programmed by evolution. In our own lives, we have similar emotional responses established by the conditions of our childhood. All of this past experience contributes to our knee-jerk reaction to new things.

Sometimes our emotional reactions are productive and sometimes not. The impulse to withdraw from a painful stimulus, like an open flame, is undoubtedly important for assuring our survival, but this same impulse is unproductive if it prevents us from, say, going to the dentist. Emotions don't understand that a little pain now can sometimes prevent a lot more pain in the future. Only intellect can grasp that.

Your perceptual system is emotional. Your ability to see colors, decode language, appreciate music and detect the feelings of your fellow human is programmed into you by biology. It is a system designed for an earlier era when life was dominated by many concerns not present today, such as the need for raw calories.

Perception is also molded by our own personal experience. Each of us has had our past traumas and successes which influence our habitual response to new events. In

the present, these responses may be useful or dysfunctional.

Someone abused as a child is going to carry this experience with him into new relationships. If he trusts his feelings alone, he is probably going to overreact to certain features of the new relationship that remind him of the earlier one. This perceptive distortion can sabotage a good relationship and even guarantee the same abuse that one fears.

This is relevant to each of us because, to some degree, everyone was abused a child. The journey from infancy to adulthood is inherently traumatic, regardless of the circumstances of your upbringing. Especially if your childhood was protected, it is never easy adjusting to the harsh demands of the outside world. Again and again, you're going to be burned by things you weren't expecting, and each time you will probably receive a scar, some sort of distortion of your perceptual system.

Perception is not reality. It is a flawed model of reality. Your senses may convince you something is good or bad for you, but senses aren't the ultimate test. Operations are the test: whether the product actually does what it is supposed to.

To lead a healthy life, you have to treat your own perceptions like you would salesmen knocking at your door. You have to have some skepticism. Just because something tastes good doesn't mean you should eat it. The fact that an experience feels right or doesn't feel right is only one element in your decision whether to do it.

You can't disregard your emotions altogether, but intellect should be your executive force. Regardless of your feelings, you can't deny logic or you will certainly sabotage yourself. Emotions should not persuade you to defy gravity or disregard nutrition.

It is okay to do what feels right, but only if it thinks right too.

Glenn Campbell