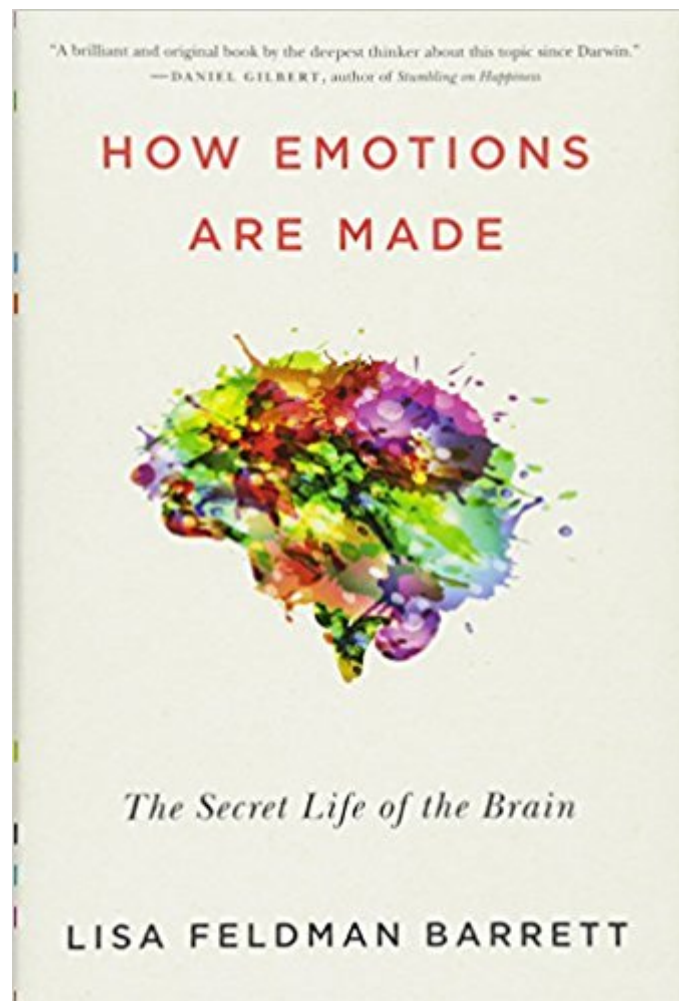




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How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life Of The Brain



Synopsis

A new theory of how the brain constructs emotions that could revolutionize psychology, health care, the legal system, and our understanding of the human mind. Emotions feel automatic, like uncontrollable reactions to things we think and experience. Scientists have long supported this assumption by claiming that emotions are hardwired in the body or the brain. Today, however, the science of emotion is in the midst of a revolution on par with the discovery of relativity in physics and natural selection in biology--and this paradigm shift has far-reaching implications for us all.

Leading the charge is psychologist and neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett, whose theory of emotion is driving a deeper understanding of the mind and brain, and shedding new light on what it means to be human. Her research overturns the widely held belief that emotions are housed in different parts of the brain and are universally expressed and recognized. Instead, she has shown that emotion is constructed in the moment, by core systems that interact across the whole brain, aided by a lifetime of learning. This new theory means that you play a much greater role in your emotional life than you ever thought. Its repercussions are already shaking the foundations not only of psychology but also of medicine, the legal system, child-rearing, meditation, and even airport security. Why do emotions feel automatic? Does rational thought really control emotion? How does emotion affect disease? How can you make your children more emotionally intelligent? How Emotions Are Made answers these questions and many more, revealing the latest research and intriguing practical applications of the new science of emotion, mind, and brain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Barrett's is a singular book, remarkable for the freshness of its ideas and the boldness and clarity with which they are presented." — •Scientific American "Chock-full of startling, science-backed findings...an entertaining and engaging read." — •Forbes "Fascinating...a thought-provoking journey into emotion science." — •The Wall Street Journal "Fascinating... If you want to read emotions better, read this book." — •Harper's Bazaar "I have never seen a book so devoted to understanding the nature of emotions...the book is down-to-earth and a delight to read. With a high level of knowledge and articulate style, Barrett delivers a prime example of modern prose in digestible chunks." — •Seattle Book Review, 5 Stars "Most of us make our way through the world without thinking a lot about what we bring to our encounters with it. Lisa Feldman Barrett does — and what she has to say about our perceptions and emotions is pretty mind-blowing." — •Elle "Drawing on neuroscience and experimental psychology to overturn the assumption that emotions are innate and universal, this book describes them as 'goal-based' concepts designed to help us categorize experience...Upbringing has the biggest influence, but we can all reshape our mental makeup and learn new concepts. The latter part of the book considers how doing so can affect our health, the law, and our relationship with the natural world. As Barrett frequently repeats, 'You are an architect of your experience.'" — •The New Yorker, "Briefly Noted" "A neuroscientist offers an enjoyable guide to a revolutionary scientific theory of emotion and its practical applications." — •Shelf Awareness "Prepare to have your brain twisted around as psychology professor Barrett takes it on a tour of itself... Her enthusiasm for her topic brightens every amazing fact and theory about where our emotions come from...each chapter is chockablock with startling insights. ...Barrett's figurative selfie of the brain is brilliant." — •Booklist, STARRED "A well-argued, entertaining disputation of the prevailing view that emotion and reason are at odds...Highly informative, readable, and wide-ranging." — •Kirkus Reviews, STARRED review "Barrett (psychology, Northeastern Univ.) presents a new neuroscientific explanation of why people are more swayed by feelings than by facts. She offers an unintuitive theory that goes against not only the popular understanding but also that of traditional research: emotions don't arise; rather, we construct them on the fly. Furthermore, emotions are neither universal nor located in specific brain regions; they vary by culture and result from dynamic neuronal networks. These networks run nonstop simulations, making predictions and correcting them based on the environment rather than reacting to it. Tracing

her own journey from the classical view of emotions, Barrett progressively builds her case, writing in a conversational tone and using down-to-earth metaphors, relegating the heaviest neuroscience to an appendix to keep the book accessible. Still, it is a lot to take in if one has not been exposed to these ideas before. VERDICT The theories of emotion and the human brain set forth here are revolutionary and have important implications. For readers interested in psychology and neuroscience as well as those involved in education and policy."

—Library Journal, STARRED review

"This meticulous, well-researched, and deeply thought out book reveals new insights about our emotions—what they are, where they come from, why we have them. For anyone who has struggled to reconcile brain and heart, this book will be a treasure; it explains the science without short-changing the humanism of its topic."

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"A brilliant and original book on the science of emotion, by the deepest thinker about this topic since Darwin."

—Daniel Gilbert, best-selling author of *Stumbling on Happiness*

"Ever wonder where your emotions come from? Lisa Barrett, a world expert in the psychology of emotion, has written the definitive field guide to feelings and the neuroscience behind them."

—Angela Duckworth, best-selling author of *Grit*

"We all harbor an intuition about emotions: that the way you experience joy, fear or anger happens automatically and is pretty much the same in a Kalahari hunter-gatherer. In this excellent new book, Lisa Barrett draws on contemporary research to offer a radically different picture: that the experience of emotion is highly individualized, neurobiologically idiosyncratic, and inseparable from cognition. This is a provocative, accessible, important book."

—Robert Sapolsky, author of *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* and *A Primate's Memoir*

"Everything you thought you knew about what you feel and why you feel it turns out to be stunningly wrong. Lisa Barrett illuminates the fascinating new science of our emotions, offering real-world examples of why it matters in realms as diverse as health, parenting, romantic relationships and national security."

—Peggy Orenstein, author of *Girls & Sex*

"After reading *How Emotions Are Made*, I will never think about emotions the same way again. Lisa Barrett opens up a whole new terrain for fighting gender stereotypes and making better policy."

—Anne-Marie Slaughter, author of *Unfinished Business*

"What if everything you thought you knew about lust, anger, grief, and joy was wrong? Lisa Barrett is one of the psychology's wisest and most creative scientists and her theory of constructed emotion is radical and fascinating. Through vivid examples and sharp, clear prose, *How Emotions are Made* defends a bold new vision of the most central aspects of

human nature. —Paul Bloom, author of *Against Empathy* and *How Pleasure Works* “Lisa Barrett writes with great clarity about how your emotions are not merely about what you’re born with, but also about how your brain pieces your feelings together, and how you can contribute to the process. She tells a compelling story. —Joseph LeDoux, author of *Anxious* and *Synaptic Self* “How Emotions Are Made offers a grand new conception of emotions — what they are, where they come from, and (most importantly) what they aren’t. —Brain science is the art of the counterintuitive and Lisa Barrett has a remarkable capacity to make the counterintuitive comprehensible. —This book will have you smacking your forehead wondering why it took so long to think this way about the brain. —Stuart Firestein, author of *Failure: Why Science is So Successful and Ignorance: How It Drives Science* “How Emotions Are Made is a provocative, insightful, and engaging analysis of the fascinating ways that our brains create our emotional lives, convincingly linking cutting edge neuroscience studies with everyday emotions. —You won’t think about emotions in the same way after you read this important book. —Daniel L. Schacter, author of *The Seven Sins of Memory* “Lisa Barrett masterfully integrates discoveries from affective science, neuroscience, social psychology, and philosophy to make sense of the many instances of emotion that you experience and witness each day. How Emotions are Made will help you remake your life, giving you new lenses to see familiar feelings — from anxiety to love — anew. —Barbara Fredrickson, author of *Positivity* and *Love 2.0* “How Emotions are Made is a tour de force in the quest to understand how we perceive, judge and decide. It lays the groundwork to address many of the mysteries of human behavior. I look forward to how this more accurate view of emotion will help my clients in athletics and trading. —Denise K. Shull, MA, Founder and CEO of The ReThink Group “With How Emotions Are Made, Lisa Feldman Barrett has set the terms of debate for emotion theory in the 21st century. —In clear, readable prose, she invites us to question both lay and expert understandings of what emotions are — and she musters an impressive body of data to suggest new answers. —Barrett’s theory of how we construct emotions has major implications for law, including the myth of dispassionate judging. —Her ‘affective science manifesto for the legal system’ deserves to be taken seriously by theorists and practitioners alike. —Terry Maroney, Professor of Law and Professor of Medicine, Health and Society, Vanderbilt University “Every lawyer and judge doing serious criminal trials should read this book. We all grapple with the concepts of free will, emotional impulses, and criminal intent, but here these topics are exposed to a new scrutiny and old assumptions are challenged. The interface

of law and brain science is suddenly the area we ought to be debating." —Baroness Helena Kennedy, QC House of Lords, U.K. —"Extraordinarily well written, Lisa Barrett's *How Emotions are Made* chronicles a paradigm shift in the science of emotion. But more than just a chronicle, this book is a brilliant work of translation, translating the new neuroscience of emotion into understandable and readable terms. Since that science has profound implications in areas as disparate as police shootings and TSA profiling, the translation is critical for scientists and citizens, lawmakers and physicians. (For example, what if there is no meaningful scientific difference between premeditated murder, the product of rational thought, which we consider most culpable, and the lesser offense of manslaughter, a "crime of passion"?) Emotions do not reside in dedicated brain areas, constantly at war with areas charged with cognition or perception, as Pixar caricatured it in *Inside Out*, let alone the brain described by Descartes or Plato or other philosophers. Nor does the brain passively retrieve data from "outside" to which it reacts. The brain constructs the reality it perceives, and the emotions it (and we) experience, using core brain systems, not specialized circuits. And it does so in concert with other brains, with the culture surrounding it. The implications of this work (not only challenging two thousand year old assumptions about the brain) and its ambitions are nothing short of stunning. Even more stunning is how extraordinarily well it succeeds." —Nancy Gertner, Senior Lecturer on Law, Harvard Law School, and former U.S. federal judge for the United States District Court of Massachusetts

LISA FELDMAN BARRETT, Ph.D., is a University Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Northeastern University, with appointments at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in Psychiatry and Radiology. She received a National Institutes of Health Director's Pioneer Award for her groundbreaking research on emotion in the brain, and is an elected member of the Royal Society of Canada. She lives in Boston.

Emotions. We all have them. We assign them to inanimate objects like cars - "It's too cold outside. The poor girl is feeling rough this morning." We assign them to animals - "You certainly are looking guilty for tearing up the trash can, Boomer!" But what ARE emotions? Why do some people feel them more intensely than others? Can you learn emotions? Can you unlearn emotions? Probably the one thing the author tries to get across to the reader is that people have preconceived notions and ideas about what emotions are, how people should or should not experience them, what it looks like when someone feels an emotion, etc. Dr. Barrett wants the reader to set these notions aside and

see emotions not as a "thing", because that isn't what they are. Emotions just, well, are. No two people experience emotions the same way. No two cultures experience them the same way. What we see and experience as happiness here in America (laughing out loud, broad smiles with teeth showing, buoyant displays, etc.) are normal for us, but for another culture like the Japanese they are much more reserved (polite chuckles, smiling without showing teeth, hands over mouths if they do smile widely, etc.). Is there way of experiencing emotions wrong? Absolutely not, it's just different. The author also delves into just how deeply the mind and body are connected. She mentions how self-help books tend to focus only on the mind, on trying to master emotions. The problem is, these books tend to overlook the significant role the body (or "body budget") plays in our emotions. Did you know that 30% of ALL medications taken in the US are to treat negative emotions? Thirty. Percent. The trouble is, when these medications are prescribed, the doctor and the patient rarely take into account what signals the brain is receiving from the body and how out of whack your body budget is. The author also postulates that this is one reason some people turn to drugs and/or alcohol. Rather than treating the reason their body and emotions are misfiring, they use chemicals to trick the mind and body into thinking and feeling like everything is okay. She doesn't claim that medications to help with emotions and feelings like depression, bi-polarism, schizophrenia, and others, but Dr. Barrett does advise, even while she says "I suddenly sound like your mother, that "there is no substitute, biologically speaking" for "eating healthfully, exercising, and getting enough sleep." Following chapters go even further into just how deeply the body and mind are intertwined, and I have to admit the hypotheses she puts forth in this book are utterly fascinating. It sounds odd, but one of the best parts of the book for me was the bibliography. If you enjoyed reading this book by Dr. Barrett, then the bibliography is going to be the unexpected free gift with purchase. Please, please, please take the time to go through every reference for this book. If not, you will miss such incredible books like 'Madame Secretary: A Memoir' by Madeleine Albright or 'Animal Wise: How We know Animals Think and Feel' by Victoria Morrell. Since finishing 'How Emotions are Made', I've already read these two and have ordered three more. A good number of the references are from medical journals, but those are pretty easy to find online. Don't be surprised if you also come away with a new found interest in other aspects of the human mind and body, such as how gut microbes and how science is learning just how large and extensive a role they play in our lives. Many times books about medical subjects are so dry and technical that it's a chore to even get through the introduction, let alone the whole book. Dr. Barrett's book doesn't 'dumb down' the science for the readers, and she also doesn't litter every sentence with technical and medical terminology. the best way to describe her voice is as if you are in a class with your favorite teacher.

Your teacher comes up with easy to comprehend analogies and comparisons so that the whole class understands the subject of the lecture - not just the top students in the class. Your teacher is also passionate about the subject, speaks with great animation, and your attention on their words is so rapt that you forget that you should be taking notes. At the end of the lecture, you feel a bit disappointed that it's over but you are now really interested and excited about the subject and head for the bookstore to see what other books you can find on the subject. THIS is the kind of style Dr. Barrett writes in, and the exact kind of feeling she invoked in this reader. I admit that I have always enjoyed books (even textbooks) about the mysteries of the mind (human or animal) and body, so this book was a no-brainer (no pun intended) to read. 'How Emotions Are Made' is not a fast read, but it is definitely a worthy one.

As an 87-year-old non-emotional Scandinavian who avoided all the science courses I could when in high school and college, I am probably not the ideal person to write a review of this book, but I was fascinated with Dr. Barrett's, "How Emotions Are Made." Either she is a good communicator or my octogenarian brain is expanding. I think it's the former. She has a way of using homey illustrations to explain profound concepts. When I thought I was getting bogged down in simulations and emotion construction, she writes about her 12-year-old daughter's 'gross' birthday party. And when she begins to write about categorization and 'How the brain makes meaning' she introduces the wonderful German word *Backpfeifengesicht* ('a face in need of a fist.') I have waded into some books that I found were soon over my head or else that the author said all that he or she had to say in the first chapter.. But not Dr. Barrett. Some of her best (or maybe I should say 'most applicable chapters') are in the last half of the book where she writes about 'Mastering your Emotions' and 'Emotions and the Law.'

Lisa Feldman Barrett's "How Emotions are Made" is a frustrating read, because while she accurately describes many elements of the process by which we create emotions, she constantly seems to misinterpret her own findings in order to make them fit her preconceived conclusions. According to Dr. Barrett, there are no neurological or physical "fingerprints" defining how each individual emotion looks in the brain; instead the brain takes whatever hormonal and physiological ingredients are involved in a particular instance of feeling (like increased heart rate, body temperature, and respiration), and processes it through concepts it has constructed -- i.e., its own expectations based on prior experience (memory) and cultural norms. "There is no single difference between anger and fear, because there's no single 'Anger' and no single 'Fear,'" says

Barrett. There is no particular place in the brain that produces Fear (or an avoidance response); the sense of Fear is a learned response. So are Anger and Sadness. For some people, force of habit makes them associate many of their everyday feeling tones with Anger; for others it is Sadness or depression -- but the sensory inputs (the circumstances in which they find themselves) aren't really important factors in creating the anger or sadness they feel. More importantly, there isn't any "disorder" of the brain involved. They have simply learned deeply unhealthy habits of thought and feeling, which take place without their awareness. And WHY does the brain go to so much trouble? Because its primary function is, ultimately, to predict the future based on current circumstances and past experiences. So far, so good. From my own experience, I can say that this resonates with me. Earlier in my life, I spent far too much of my time ruminating on life as meaningless and hopeless; these habits of thought became closely associated in my brain with every manner of physiological state, even those which were otherwise entirely neutral. As a result, these perfectly neutral states became depressive states to me, entirely as a result of my own habits of thought. My depression was a construct of my brain. Even though the habits of thought I developed could be viewed as a natural consequence of the circumstances in which I grew up, as soon as I realized that I had control over my own thoughts, I was empowered to break the cycle of depression. If everyone understood that our emotions are NOT inherent to our circumstances, but are rather a consequence of how we perceive our circumstances, society would be much better off. But here Barrett starts to go off the rails. She claims not just that all emotions are constructed by the brain, but that there cannot be any objective measure of the validity or "truth" of our emotions, because they are socially constructed. Here is the example she gives to illustrate her point: Say you are walking down the street with a friend, and you see a stranger stamping his feet. You perceive this stranger as being "angry;" your friend sees him as "dejected;" to the man, it was merely an act of "clomping caked mud off his shoes." Barrett asks, who is correct? Her answer is no one, because with social reality there is no such thing as accuracy. At best, there is only consensus. "You, your friend, and the stamping man each construct a perception by prediction. The stamping man himself might be feeling unpleasant arousal, and he may categorize his interceptive sensations...as an instance of 'Removing Mud from My Shoe.' You may construct a perception of anger and your friend a perception of dejection. Each construction is real, so questions of accuracy are unanswerable in a strictly objective sense." In other words, we are expected to believe that ANY perceptual response one individual has to a particular emotional state is just as accurate as any other individual's response. Now, I will readily agree that each emotional response is individual; is built on a socially-defined foundation; and is not inherently a part of the objective circumstances themselves.

However, there is unquestionably an objective measure by which the various responses can be judged against each other, and Barrett herself makes the point repeatedly: i.e., how well does a given "explanation" predict the future? In the case of the stamping man, if I perceive "anger," then I will certainly have a neurophysical (or "interoceptive") reaction to my own perception -- I will anticipate the possibility of interacting with "an angry stranger," and my body will react accordingly with some level of flight-or-fight response. If my friend perceived "dejection," then her bodily reaction will be correspondingly different. Now imagine the "stamping man," having completed his task of getting the mud off his shoe, smiling pleasantly and saying "Have a nice day" to me and my friend before proceeding merrily on his way. Can we still insist that there is no objectively accurate answer to the question of who was right regarding the man's emotional state in this instance? Barrett seems to have adopted a problematic attitude toward the construction of emotions: That simply because something is in part socially constructed, it is therefore wholly arbitrary; thus, any construction is just as good as any other. But the truth is that whatever mental and emotional perceptions I habitually construct will have an enduring impact on how I interact with the world, i.e., with society and other human beings; and those interactions will have repercussions which reverberate throughout the society to which we all contribute. The danger comes when, out of an excess of egocentricity on my part, I insist on the accuracy of my belief that the man was angry, and no amount of apparent pleasantness or merriness on his part convinces me otherwise. Thus I go through the rest of my day thinking that I've encountered an angry guy; and since I am apparently in the habit of seeing "anger" at inappropriate times, I'll probably have lots of interactions with "angry" people -- or at least with people I perceive as angry, and to whom I respond accordingly. In this regard I am reminded of a humorous aphorism: If the first person you meet today is a jerk, then you met a jerk; if everyone you meet today is a jerk, then YOU are the jerk. This could certainly explain why people come to believe that our society is filled with angry people, or depressives, or scarily aggressive cis-normative patriarchal oppressors. Once they develop the habit of seeing these things in others, they see them habitually. Another point Barrett makes, the significance of which she seems to miss, is that although we feel emotions "effortlessly," and as if they were "built-in," they are really just concepts that we learn extremely early in our lives. It is because they become a part of the foundation of "who we are" that we think of them as "built-in." Cannot the same be said for every other aspect of our unique personal identities? Barrett further makes the claim that stress and emotion are created identically by the body-brain connection. But she is less than coherent in the way she describes these processes. She says, "You might think that stress is something that happens to you.... But stress doesn't come from the outside world. You construct it." Then she describes things that we associate with stress,

like living in prolonged poverty or being bullied. The problem is that these are things that HAPPEN TO US. And Barrett even acknowledges that these things (which happen TO us) have a profound impact on our body (our "body budget" as Barrett puts it). We use the term "stress" to label the very real impact that these things have on us. Barrett's description of the way the brain "creates" emotion/stress sounds as if our neurophysical responses are somehow arbitrary, socially constructed; but those bodily responses are NOT arbitrary or socially constructed, only the label we use to categorize them (the word "stress") is arbitrary. What she's really saying (though she doesn't come out and say it, implying to me that she doesn't consciously realize it) is that our mindset is the key to mental and emotional health -- that is, how we respond mentally to the things that happen to us is the key to how we feel about those things (which is subtly different from the idea that our brains are "creating" emotions out of whole cloth). She repeatedly asserts that poverty and bullying produce negative physical reactions in the body which we perceive as "stress." So isn't it obtuse to say that "stress" doesn't really exist, and isn't caused by things happening to us, but is instead wholly constructed by the brain? When we view our circumstances as the "problem," we are denying ourselves the ability to learn the mental habits which are the real means of achieving mental and emotional health. If we perceive bullying as the problem, then we will devote our resources to stopping bullying, rather than the more useful approach of helping kids learn how to deal with bullies. Ditto for poverty. Yet Barrett pooh-poohs the idea of changing your thoughts in order to change your moods. She doesn't explicitly address what she thinks is really going on when people successfully "change their brain," but I suppose she would argue that by altering their own subjective perception of what is happening to them, they are recasting events into more positive (to them) categories; over time, by improving their "body-budgeting" predictions they gradually begin to feel better. She says that there aren't any areas of the brain that are devoted to various functions, there's just a brain trying to predict the current and near-future energy needs of a complex organism based on its own past experiences (memories). I can totally get on board with this. But she doesn't really have an explanation for our subjective experiences of things other than that they are a shared social construct. Where and how does this construction occur? Yes, in the brain, through top-down and bottom-up processes -- but how is this idea any different from what we currently believe about the brain? Is the "difference" merely in how we conceive of what is happening, as either the brain "processing" a distinct state known as Anger or Depression, versus the brain shoehorning a hazy and nebulous neurophysical state into a mental category called, say, Anger? Why in the world would such a system evolve, and how can this socially constructed system cause a brain to misread its body's own needs so drastically? Even more bizarrely, she insists that any prediction is as

"accurate" as any other, regardless of how pernicious the consequences of a given prediction might be. She offers a story about her own visit to the doctor where she was feeling very fatigued, and the doctor suggested she might be depressed even without being aware of it. She countered that there was no depression, just physical fatigue caused by various things in her life. In her telling, by listening to her doctor's suggestion about possibly being depressed, she might have reframed her own inner experience into one of "depression," making it literally true for herself, even to the point of producing depressive thoughts. Instead of allowing this to happen, she stuck to her guns. But isn't this identical to the "change your brain, change your life" argument, which Barrett dismisses out of hand? The whole point about changing your thinking is that it recasts your habits of thought into a more positive mold, helping to shape your future perspectives into more positive ones. She seems to be all-but-agreeing with the fact that you control how you respond to things, while insisting that changing your thoughts isn't really changing your feelings. Instead she explicitly argues that it's really the other way around, that the way you feel influences the way you think. Yet with the doctor story she acknowledges that she could just as easily have adopted a way of thinking about her feelings which would have produced worse feelings. There seems to be a fundamental contradiction in her argument which is never resolved (but constantly recurring) and therefore frustrating to read. In conclusion: I think Barrett is right that most of our thinking about the brain is too rigid and "essentialist" (i.e., that very specific areas of the brain are associated with "recognizing" very specific instances of emotion), and that we instead essentially create the concepts of emotion which we then apply to the situations in which we find ourselves; but the fact is that this isn't as far removed from what many people think as she seems to believe. And every time she uses an example to bolster her point, it invariably undermines her claims -- which suggests to me that she doesn't really understand the real implications of her theory. I would hazard the guess that she's determined to believe that her theory is an earth-shattering paradigm shift in our understanding of the brain (possibly one for which she deserves a Nobel Prize), and so she is constantly trying to present her findings as if that is the case, whereas in reality she is mainly tweaking our established understanding. I'm reminded of the Daoist story of a man riding in a canoe which is hit by another canoe, spilling him into the water. At first he is angry and outraged at the person in the other canoe for deliberately ramming into him -- until he sees that the other canoe is unoccupied. We are always responding to things emotionally, as if the outcome of everything that happens to us is the deliberate, intentional effect of conscious agents. But really, everything that happens is just stuff happening. Even more importantly, even the deliberate and intentional things done by others which cause us pain are just more examples of stuff happening. In both cases, whether or not the outcome

is caused by an intentional agent, our emotional reactions to those things arise from the same place: The egocentric mind. Only when we can set aside our own egoic impulses can we learn to recognize all the things that happen to us as just "stuff happening," and respond appropriately. This is where Barrett goes so wrong in her description of how emotions are made; while she recognizes, accurately enough, that emotions are just mind-stuff, she makes the mistake of assuming that everyone is equally entitled to have his or her mind-stuff recognized and acknowledged by everyone else -- in other words, that any emotional reaction is as accurate as any other. But realizing that NO emotional reaction is "accurate" isn't the same thing as saying that every reaction is as accurate as every other. I believe further that Barrett is right in speculating that the main purpose of the brain is to act as a prognosticating machine, predicting the future as accurately as possible -- and in this regard, accuracy is real and measurable. However, Barrett misses the mark by suggesting that the labels we apply to whatever internal state we find ourselves in (our "body-budget") is more or less entirely a matter of cultural conditioning. (If that were the case, how could we glean any meaning from the Daoist story?) As long as we insist on accepting our emotional reactions as "truths," then we are like the man who is knocked into the river but who insists on holding on to his anger and outrage, which he expresses toward the empty canoe; the cold wet river; the whole dumb, monstrously unfair universe. My answer: Let it go.

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