



The Happiness of Pursuit: What Neuroscience Can Teach Us About the Good Life

By Shimon Edelman

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When fishing for happiness, catch and release. Remember these seven words—they are the keys to being happy. So says Shimon Edelman, an expert on psychology and the mind.

In *The Happiness of Pursuit*, Edelman offers a fundamental understanding of pleasure and joy via the brain. Using the concept of the mind as a computing device, he unpacks how the human brain is highly active, involved in patterned networks, and constantly learning from experience. As our brains predict the future through pursuit of experience, we are rewarded both in real time and in the long run. Essentially, as Edelman discovers, it's the journey, rather than the destination, that matters.

The idea that cognition is computation—the brain is a machine—is nothing new of course. But, as Edelman argues, the mind is actually a bundle of ongoing computations, essentially, the brain being one of many possible substrates that can support them. Edelman makes the case for these claims by constructing a conceptual toolbox that offers readers a glimpse of the computations underlying the mind's faculties: perception, motivation and emotions, action, memory, thinking, social cognition, learning and language. It is this collection of tools that enables us to discover how and why happiness happens.

An informative, accessible, and witty tour of the mind, *The Happiness of Pursuit* offers insights to a thorough understanding of what minds are, how they relate to each other and to the world, and how we can make the best of it all.

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Editorial Review

Review

New Scientist

"*The Happiness of Pursuit* is for fans of enquiries into the nature of the brain, mind—and happiness itself.... [Edelman] offers a happy addition to the classic recipe of 'self-knowledge, self-improvement, and, eventually, selfless conduct'—a coherent notion of the self."

The Winnipeg Free Press (Canada)

"Edelman's explanations of just how the mind works...are dense but fascinating.... Without resorting to empty enthusiasm he demonstrates just what a marvel the mind is. He is especially good at explaining how facial recognition works ('analogy rules all') and how babies learn language ('language is also a game that plays people')."

Toronto Star (Canada)

"The Cornell University psychology professor demonstrates that the more we understand how the brain operates the better we will understand how our minds process information, knowledge that will make us happy – at least momentarily. We are strivers, forever moving to the next challenge, and that's the key. Edelman's traipses through all fields of human endeavour."

David Eagleman, Director, Laboratory for Perception and Action, Baylor College of Medicine, and author of *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*

"Edelman marries his scientific mind with his poetic eye to give us the neuroscience that matters the most: an understanding of our own lives."

Ben-Ami Scharfstein, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Tel-Aviv University, and author of *Art Without Borders: A Philosophical Exploration of Art and Humanity*

"For all its seriousness, ambition, and learning, Shimon Edelman's *The Happiness of Pursuit* is an extraordinarily human book. It is ambitious because he bases his view of the nature of happiness on what for many of his readers will be an unusual conception of the relation between the brain, the Self, and the body. Happiness, says Edelman, is not simply a state of mind one tries to attain, but an unceasing activity. That is, whenever it does attain its goal, after a pause for savoring its success it must change its goal for a new one. *The Happiness of Pursuit* shows Edelman to be a witty, resourceful, raconteur. You never forget his presence. He leans out of his book as if he were at an open window beckoning to us to come inside and listen."

Dan Lloyd, Brownell Professor of Philosophy, Trinity College

"The ancient injunction to 'Know thyself' gets a lively update in Shimon Edelman's eclectic examination of 'knowing' and 'self' through the lens of twenty-first century cognitive science. It's human to wander thoughtfully through real and imaginary landscapes, learning as we go—this is happiness, embodied in Edelman's witty odyssey, which provokes the very pleasures it describes."

Nature

"Taking passages by luminaries including Homer, William Shakespeare and Jorge Luis Borges as

touchstones, Edelman powers along on his 'quest for an algorithmic understanding of happiness', revealing that it is this computational journey that constitutes the good life."

Salon

"From Bayes' theorem of probability to Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet,' Edelman offers a range of references and allegories to explain why a changing, growing self, constantly shaped by new experiences, is happier than the satisfaction any end goal can give us. It turns out the rewards we get for learning and understanding the workings of the world really make it the journey, not the destination, that matters most."

Post and Courier

"[Edelman] paints a picture about how new knowledge of our brains can inform our ability to achieve happiness.... [He] weaves together his scientific expertise about our knowledge of how the brain works with references to Ulysses, Walt Whitman's poetry and Edelman's own passion for the Southwest desert."

The Guardian (UK)

"[A] cultured and often witty account of brain science and our potential for feeling good. The conclusion is that happiness is to be found in the journey (learning, etc) rather than the destination, at which proverbial advice we arrive after many interesting facts and provocative thoughts on evolution, language, the self and decision-making."

Greater Good

"An owner's manual for the mind ... an entertaining one."

Book News

"[An] accessible volume on the science of the brain and mind.... Drawing on hard science, literature, and observations of the human condition, the work presents a readable narrative covering both physical and psychological aspects of happiness."

About the Author

Shimon Edelman is Professor of Psychology at Cornell University. He has taught at universities in Israel, England, the United States, and South Korea. He is the author of *Computing the Mind* and *Representation and Recognition in Vision*, along with dozens of scholarly publications in theoretical neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence, all focusing on reverse-engineering the human brain. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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