

jaak panksepp theory

jaak panksepp theory represents a groundbreaking approach to understanding the neurobiological basis of emotions, particularly emphasizing the affective experiences shared across mammalian species. Developed by neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, this theory revolutionized the field of affective neuroscience by identifying core emotional systems rooted deep within the brain's subcortical structures. The theory argues that primary emotional systems are evolutionary conserved and manifest through distinct neural circuits generating basic affects such as seeking, fear, rage, and play. This article explores the fundamental concepts of Jaak Panksepp theory, its implications for psychology and neuroscience, and how it contrasts with traditional cognitive-emotion models. Readers will gain insight into the seven core emotional systems outlined by Panksepp, the neuroanatomical underpinnings of these systems, and the practical applications of his research in mental health and behavioral science. An overview of criticisms and ongoing developments in affective neuroscience related to Panksepp's work is also provided. The following sections present a detailed exploration of the key components of the Jaak Panksepp theory.

- Foundations of Jaak Panksepp Theory
- The Seven Core Emotional Systems
- Neuroanatomy of Emotional Circuits
- Applications in Psychology and Neuroscience
- Critiques and Contemporary Perspectives

Foundations of Jaak Panksepp Theory

Jaak Panksepp theory is grounded in the premise that emotions are biologically basic phenomena, deeply embedded in mammalian brains and not merely byproducts of higher cognitive processes. Panksepp challenged the traditional view that emotions are primarily cognitive interpretations, instead proposing that affective states originate from ancient subcortical brain regions. His work emphasizes the evolutionary continuity of emotional systems, highlighting similarities between humans and other animals in the neurobiological mechanisms generating feelings. This approach laid the foundation for what he termed affective neuroscience, a discipline focused on understanding the neural substrates of emotions.

Central to this foundational concept is the distinction between primary-process emotions, which are innate and hardwired, and secondary or tertiary processes that involve learning and higher cognition. Panksepp's research used electrical brain stimulation and behavioral observation in animals to identify discrete emotional circuits responsible for generating instinctual emotional responses. These findings underscored the importance of recognizing emotions as fundamental survival mechanisms shaped by evolution, rather than abstract mental constructs.

Historical Context and Development

The development of Jaak Panksepp theory traces back to the late 20th century when affective neuroscience was emerging as a distinct field. Panksepp's experiments with electrode stimulation in subcortical brain regions of rats revealed consistent emotional responses such as seeking behavior and playfulness, which paralleled human emotional experiences. His pioneering work bridged gaps between psychology, neurobiology, and ethology, fostering interdisciplinary research on emotions.

Panksepp's approach contrasted sharply with cognitive theories dominant at the time, advocating for a more biologically grounded understanding that prioritized neural mechanisms over purely psychological interpretations. This paradigm shift influenced subsequent research on emotional regulation, psychopathology, and the evolutionary basis of affective states.

The Seven Core Emotional Systems

At the heart of Jaak Panksepp theory lies the identification of seven primary emotional systems that operate in mammalian brains. These systems are considered innate, universal, and essential for survival and social interaction. Each system corresponds to a set of neural circuits capable of generating specific affective states and motivational drives. The seven core emotional systems are:

- **SEEKING:** Drives exploration, curiosity, and goal-directed behavior.
- **RAGE:** Mediates anger and defensive aggression.
- **FEAR:** Governs responses to threats and promotes avoidance.
- **CARE:** Facilitates nurturing and parental behaviors.
- **PANIC/GRIEF:** Associated with social attachment and separation distress.
- **PLAY:** Encourages social joy and cooperative interaction.
- **LIKING:** Related to pleasure and satisfaction from rewards.

These systems are not isolated but interact dynamically to produce complex emotional experiences. Panksepp argued that understanding these core systems provides critical insight into both normal and pathological emotional functioning across species.

Characteristics and Functions of Each System

Each core emotional system identified by Panksepp has distinct neurochemical and behavioral profiles. For example, the SEEKING system is heavily linked with dopaminergic pathways and energizes exploratory and anticipatory behaviors crucial for survival. Conversely, the FEAR system activates in response to danger via amygdala-centric circuits, triggering fight-or-flight reactions. The PLAY system, often observed in juvenile mammals, supports cognitive and social development through joyous interaction.

By delineating these systems, Panksepp provided a framework for interpreting emotional behaviors

and their underlying neurobiology. This framework aids in comprehending how disruptions in specific systems may contribute to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, or aggression.

Neuroanatomy of Emotional Circuits

Jaak Panksepp theory emphasizes the role of subcortical brain regions in generating primary emotional experiences. These ancient neural structures form the core of the brain's affective systems, predating the evolution of the cerebral cortex. Key neuroanatomical components include the hypothalamus, periaqueductal gray, amygdala, and basal ganglia, each contributing uniquely to distinct emotional processes.

Electrical stimulation studies revealed that activating specific subcortical areas could elicit discrete emotional behaviors and subjective affective states in animals. These findings suggest that the generation of raw emotional feelings is fundamentally rooted in these evolutionarily conserved circuits.

Key Brain Regions Involved

- **Hypothalamus:** Regulates autonomic and hormonal responses associated with emotions like rage and fear.
- **Periaqueductal Gray (PAG):** Mediates pain modulation, defensive behaviors, and vocalizations linked to distress.
- **Amygdala:** Critical for processing fear and emotional memory formation.
- **Basal Ganglia:** Involved in action selection and reward-related affective states, particularly the SEEKING system.
- **Nucleus Accumbens:** Central to the experience of pleasure and reward, integral to the LIKING system.

Understanding the neuroanatomical bases of these emotional circuits has profound implications for developing treatments targeting affective disorders and advancing brain-based models of emotion.

Applications in Psychology and Neuroscience

The insights derived from Jaak Panksepp theory have broad applications across various domains of psychology and neuroscience. Recognizing that emotions arise from innate neural circuits has influenced approaches to mental health diagnosis, treatment, and research methodologies. This theory has informed the development of affective therapies that address dysregulations in core emotional systems.

In clinical psychology, Panksepp's framework aids in understanding the neurobiological roots of mood disorders, anxiety, and social attachment problems. For example, disruptions in the PANIC/GRIEF system have been linked to depressive symptoms, while overactivation of the FEAR system is

associated with anxiety disorders. Therapeutic interventions targeting these systems include pharmacological treatments and behavioral therapies designed to modulate underlying neural circuits.

Impact on Behavioral and Emotional Research

Jaak Panksepp theory has also transformed experimental research by encouraging the use of animal models to study emotions, given the conserved nature of these systems. This approach has enabled the investigation of emotional processes at molecular, cellular, and systemic levels, providing a comprehensive understanding of affective neuroscience.

Moreover, the theory supports integrative models combining neurobiology and psychology, fostering innovations in artificial intelligence and robotics by modeling affective responses based on biological principles.

Critiques and Contemporary Perspectives

While Jaak Panksepp theory has been influential, it is subject to critical evaluation and ongoing refinement within the scientific community. Some critics argue that the theory may oversimplify the complexity of human emotions by categorizing them into discrete systems. Others question the extent to which findings from animal studies can be generalized to human subjective experiences.

Contemporary research continues to build on Panksepp's foundational work by integrating cognitive and social dimensions of emotion, exploring how higher brain regions modulate primary emotional circuits. Advances in neuroimaging and genetics contribute to a more nuanced understanding of emotional regulation and individual differences.

Future Directions in Affective Neuroscience

Emerging perspectives emphasize the interplay between innate emotional systems and learned cognitive processes, suggesting a layered hierarchy of emotional experience. Research aims to elucidate how environmental factors, developmental stages, and neuroplasticity influence the functioning of Panksepp's core systems. This evolving landscape underscores the continuing relevance and adaptability of Jaak Panksepp theory in explaining the biological basis of emotions.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Jaak Panksepp's theory about the emotional systems in the brain?

Jaak Panksepp's theory proposes that there are seven primary emotional systems in the brain—SEEKING, RAGE, FEAR, LUST, CARE, PANIC/GRIEF, and PLAY—that are evolutionarily conserved and underlie basic emotional experiences in mammals.

How does Jaak Panksepp's affective neuroscience contribute to understanding human emotions?

Panksepp's affective neuroscience bridges neuroscience and psychology by identifying neural circuits responsible for primal emotions, suggesting that emotions are rooted in subcortical brain regions, which helps explain the biological basis of feelings and emotional behavior.

What role does the SEEKING system play in Jaak Panksepp's theory?

The SEEKING system is a core emotional system that drives exploratory and goal-directed behavior, motivating organisms to pursue resources, rewards, and new experiences, and is associated with feelings of anticipation and enthusiasm.

How has Jaak Panksepp's theory influenced modern psychotherapy and psychiatric research?

Panksepp's work has influenced therapeutic approaches by emphasizing the importance of addressing fundamental emotional systems for treating mood disorders, addiction, and trauma, and has inspired research into pharmacological treatments targeting specific emotional circuits.

What evidence supports Jaak Panksepp's theory of primal emotions across species?

Evidence includes behavioral and neurochemical studies showing that mammals display similar emotional expressions and brain activity patterns linked to the seven emotional systems, as well as experiments where stimulating certain brain regions elicits specific emotional responses consistent with Panksepp's model.

Additional Resources

1. "Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions"

This seminal book by Jaak Panksepp introduces the concept of affective neuroscience, exploring the neural mechanisms of emotions in humans and animals. It delves into primary emotional systems such as SEEKING, FEAR, and PLAY, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding emotional processes. The book bridges gaps between psychology, neuroscience, and psychiatry, highlighting the evolutionary basis of emotions.

2. "The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions"

Co-authored by Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven, this work explores the evolutionary development of emotional systems in the brain. It provides an in-depth analysis of how ancient brain circuits give rise to complex emotional experiences. The book emphasizes the continuity between animal and human emotions, offering insights into emotional disorders and mental health.

3. "Emotional Systems and Brain Networks: Insights from Affective Neuroscience"

This book examines the intricate brain networks underlying emotional behaviors as proposed in Panksepp's theory. It discusses the role of subcortical structures and neurotransmitters in shaping

affective states. The text is valuable for researchers interested in the neurobiological basis of emotions and their clinical implications.

4. *"The Emotional Brain in Psychiatry: Applications of Jaak Panksepp's Theory"*

Focusing on clinical applications, this book applies Panksepp's affective neuroscience principles to psychiatric conditions. It explores how dysregulation in primary emotional systems can manifest as mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. The authors offer therapeutic strategies informed by an understanding of emotional brain circuits.

5. *"Play and Emotional Development: Affective Neuroscience Perspectives"*

Drawing on Panksepp's work on the PLAY system, this book investigates the role of play in emotional and social development. It highlights how playful interactions stimulate brain circuits that foster learning, bonding, and emotional regulation. The book is relevant for educators, psychologists, and neuroscientists interested in developmental processes.

6. *"Neuroevolutionary Perspectives on Emotion and Motivation"*

This volume synthesizes research on the evolutionary roots of motivation and emotion, grounded in Panksepp's theory. It discusses how primary emotional systems drive behavior and decision-making across species. The text integrates findings from behavioral neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary biology.

7. *"Brain Emotional Systems and Consciousness: Exploring the Affective Mind"*

Exploring the relationship between emotion and consciousness, this book builds on Panksepp's affective neuroscience framework. It investigates how emotional brain systems contribute to subjective experience and awareness. The authors propose that emotions are foundational to the emergence of consciousness.

8. *"Jaak Panksepp and the Science of Emotions: A Comprehensive Overview"*

This comprehensive overview presents the life, work, and scientific contributions of Jaak Panksepp. It covers his groundbreaking discoveries in affective neuroscience and their impact on multiple disciplines. The book includes critical analyses and reflections on the future directions of emotional research.

9. *"Emotions in the Brain: Neurochemical and Circuit Mechanisms"*

Focusing on the neurochemical substrates of emotions, this book elaborates on Panksepp's identification of key neurotransmitters involved in affective states. It details how specific brain circuits generate and regulate emotions like fear, panic, and joy. The text is essential for understanding the biological basis of emotional experience and its disorders.

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scholarly study of emotion is whether there is a correct list of “basic” types of affect or whether all affective states are better modeled as a combination of locations on shared underlying dimensions. Many thinkers have written on this topic, yet the views of two scientists in particular are dominant. The first is Jaak Panksepp, the father of Affective Neuroscience. Panksepp conceptualizes affect as a set of distinct categories. The leading proponent of the dimensional approach in scientific psychology is James Russell. According to Russell all affect can be decomposed into two underlying dimensions, pleasure versus displeasure and low arousal versus high arousal. In this volume Panksepp and Russell each articulate their positions on eleven fundamental questions about the nature of affect followed by a discussion of these target papers by noted emotion theorists and researchers. Russell and Panksepp respond both to each other and to the commentators. The discussion leads to some stark contrasts, with formidable arguments on both sides, and some interesting convergences between the two streams of work.

jaak panksepp theory: Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy, Fourth Edition Alan S. Gurman, 2008-06-24 This authoritative handbook provides a definitive overview of the theory and practice of couple therapy. Noted contributors--many of whom developed the approaches they describe--combine clear conceptual exposition with thorough descriptions of therapeutic techniques. In addition to presenting major couple therapy models in step-by-step detail, the book describes effective applications for particular populations and problems. Chapters adhere closely to a uniform structure to facilitate study and comparison, enhancing the book's utility as a reference and text. See also Clinical Casebook of Couple Therapy, also edited by Alan S. Gurman, which presents in-depth illustrations of treatment.

jaak panksepp theory: Emotion Theory: The Routledge Comprehensive Guide Andrea Scarantino, 2024-07-23 Emotion Theory: The Routledge Comprehensive Guide is the first interdisciplinary reference resource which authoritatively takes stock of the progress made both in the philosophy of emotions and in affective science from Ancient Greece to today. A two-volume landmark publication, it provides an overview of emotion theory unrivaled in terms of its comprehensiveness, accessibility and systematicity. Comprising 62 chapters by 101 leading emotion theorists in philosophy, classics, psychology, biology, psychiatry, neuroscience and sociology, the collection is organized as follows: Volume I: Part I: History of Emotion Theory (10 chapters) Part II: Contemporary Theories of Emotions (10 chapters) Part III: The Elements of Emotion Theory (7 chapters) Volume II: Part IV: Nature and Functions of 35 Specific Emotions (22 chapters) Part V: Challenges Facing Emotion Theory (13 chapters) Special Elicitors of Emotions Emotions and Their Relations to Other Elements of Mental Architecture Emotions in Children, Animals and Groups Normative Aspects of Emotions Most of the major themes of contemporary emotion theory are covered in their historical, philosophical, and scientific dimensions. This collection will be essential reading for students and researchers in philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, political science, and history for decades to come.

jaak panksepp theory: The Neuroscience of Emotion Ralph Adolphs, David J. Anderson, 2018-06-05 A new framework for the neuroscientific study of emotions in humans and animals The Neuroscience of Emotion presents a new framework for the neuroscientific study of emotion across species. Written by Ralph Adolphs and David J. Anderson, two leading authorities on the study of emotion, this accessible and original book recasts the discipline and demonstrates that in order to understand emotion, we need to examine its biological roots in humans and animals. Only through a comparative approach that encompasses work at the molecular, cellular, systems, and cognitive levels will we be able to comprehend what emotions do, how they evolved, how the brain shapes their development, and even how we might engineer them into robots in the future. Showing that emotions are ubiquitous across species and implemented in specific brain circuits, Adolphs and Anderson offer a broad foundation for thinking about emotions as evolved, functionally defined biological states. The authors discuss the techniques and findings from modern neuroscientific investigations of emotion and conclude with a survey of theories and future research directions. Featuring color illustrations throughout, The Neuroscience of Emotion synthesizes the latest in

neuroscientific work to provide deeper insights into how emotions function in all of us.

jaak panksepp theory: *Controversial Therapies for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities* Richard M. Foxx, James A. Mulick, 2015-10-14 One of the largest and most complex human services systems in history has evolved to address the needs of people with autism and intellectual disabilities, yet important questions remain for many professionals, administrators, and parents. What approaches to early intervention, education, treatment, therapy, and remediation really help those with autism and other intellectual disabilities improve their functioning and adaptation? Alternatively, what approaches represent wastes of time, effort, and resources? *Controversial Therapies for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities*, 2nd Edition brings together leading behavioral scientists and practitioners to shed much-needed light on the major controversies surrounding these questions. Expert authors review the origins, perpetuation, and resistance to scrutiny of questionable practices, and offer a clear rationale for appraising the quality of various services. The second edition of *Controversial Therapies for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities* has been fully revised and updated and includes entirely new chapters on psychology fads, why applied behavioral analysis is not a fad, rapid prompting, relationship therapies, the gluten-free, casein-free diet, evidence based practices, state government regulation of behavioral treatment, teaching ethics, and a parents' primer for autism treatments.

jaak panksepp theory: *Affective Neuroscience* Jaak Panksepp, 2004-09-30 This comprehensive text on the fundamental brain sources of human and animal feelings summarizes up-to-date information about the subcortical operating systems that organize the fundamental emotional tendencies of all mammals. Complex material is presented in a comprehensive but readable manner. The book approaches emotions from the perspective of basic emotion theory, but does not fail to address the more complex issues raised by constructionist approaches, including relations to human consciousness. Representing a synthetic integration of vast amounts of neurobehavioral knowledge, this book may be the most important contribution to understanding the biology of emotions since Darwin's *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*. Throughout, the psychiatric implications of this type of knowledge are also addressed.

jaak panksepp theory: *Theories and Models of Communication* Paul Copley, Peter J. Schulz, 2013-01-30 This unique volume offers an overview of the diversity in research on communication, including perspectives from biology, sociality, economics, norms and human development. It includes general social science and humanities approaches to communication, from systems theory to cultural theory, as well as perspectives more specifically related to communication acts, such as linguistics and cognition. The volume also features chapters on the participants and various elements in communication processes, on possible effects and on wider consequences of mediation (with technical media). The scope of the contributions is global, and the volume is relevant to both the empirical and the philosophical traditions in human sciences. Designed as a stand-alone collection to engage undergraduates as well as postgraduates and academics, this is also the first book in, and an introduction to, the De Gruyter Mouton multi-volume *Handbooks of Communication Science*.

jaak panksepp theory: *Interdisciplinary Foundations for the Science of Emotion* Cecilea Mun, 2021-06-22 In this book, Cecilea Mun introduces an innovative meta-framework for conducting interdisciplinary research in the science of emotion, broadly construed, as well as a framework for a particular kind of theory of emotion. She provides new solutions and arguments in support of an embodied cognitive approach to resolving a wide range of problems, including those concerning skepticism, the place of ordinary intuitions for the science of emotion, intentionality, the rationality of emotions, naturalizing knowledge, and the debate between philosophical cognitive and noncognitive theories of emotion. Her solutions include a revolutionary, unifying, interdisciplinary taxonomy of theories of emotion, which allows one to understand the discourse in the science of emotion as a debate between four fundamental types of theories: realism, instrumentalism, eliminativism, and eliminative-realism. Her original proposal for a conception of intentionality that makes sense of our ordinary intuitions is also combined with her comprehensive account of

rationality to articulate a groundbreaking understanding of the structure of human rationality. All of the contributions made herein, together, provide the foundations for a profound understanding of emotions, including as a kind of embodied language.

jaak panksepp theory: Psychodynamic Supervision Theory and Practices Roy E. Barsness, 2024-12-30 This book sets out a new model for psychodynamic supervision, designed around relational psychoanalytic theory and practice. It emphasizes the development of the self of the therapist and working directly with the emergent therapeutic relationship. Building on Barsness's seminal Core Competencies of Relational Psychoanalysis text, this book is grounded in those theoretical competencies. The author offers what he calls the MAMAL method of supervision—(M—muse; A—affect; M—metabolization; A—articulation; and L—learning), a method that privileges (1) affect over cognition, (2) the use of the therapist's subjectivity as the primary portal to the patient's internal and interpersonal world, (3) the immersion of the supervisor's subjectivity in the supervisory process, and (4) viewing the patient as a muse rather than an object of assessment. The MAMAL method approach enriches the supervisory experience and enhances the therapeutic process, fostering a therapeutic climate where both therapist and patient can thrive. It is attention to our own humanity and woundedness that facilitates a deep connection to our patients and animates the progression of the therapeutic process and is at the core of this supervision model. Drawing on clinical experience, this book is grounded in research and is a readable resource for psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and mental health professionals, providing a clear guide to a relational model of supervision and a concise understanding of relational theory and practice.

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neuroscience. In addition, the emerging neuro-psychoanalytical dialogue is enriched here by the voice of a culturally informed history of science. The book brings leading authorities on these topics into conversation with each other, creating an unprecedented opportunity to better understand the 'language' of the psyche. Specific concerns include the discussion of corporeality, how the body figures into psychoanalysis, the meaning of the unconscious in connection with dreams, unconscious fantasies, and the field of epigenetics. Following a historical perspective the book provides a re-reading of Freud's drive theory, exploring his concept of 'life' at the threshold of science and culture as well as the relationship between various representations, somatic states and the origin of drive. Overall, the book argues that if the different methodological approaches of psychoanalysis and neuroscience are acknowledged not only for their individual uniqueness but also as a dialectic, then the resulting epistemological and methodological dialogue might open up a fascinating body of neuropsychanalytical knowledge.

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memory, forms of intelligence, modes of experience, and kinds of emotion. Authors in this volume take on the challenge of showing how creativity can be characterized behaviorally, cognitively, and neurophysiologically. The complementary perspectives of the authors add to the richness of these findings. Neuroscientists describe the functioning of the brain and its circuitry in creative acts of scientific discovery or aesthetic production. Humanists from the fields of literature, art, and music give analyses of creativity in major literary works, musical compositions, and works of visual art.

jaak panksepp theory: *De-Idealizing Relational Theory* Lewis Aron, Sue Grand, Joyce A. Slochower, 2018-06-13 Self-examination and self-critique: for psychoanalytic patients, this is the conduit to growth. Yet within the field, psychoanalysts haven't sufficiently utilized their own methodology or subjected their own preferred approaches to systematic and critical self-examination. Across theoretical divides, psychoanalytic writers and clinicians have too often responded to criticism with defensiveness rather than reflectivity. *De-Idealizing Relational Theory* attempts to rectify this for the relational field. This book is a first in the history of psychoanalysis; it takes internal dissension and difference seriously rather than defensively. Rather than saying that the other's reading of relational theory is wrong, distorted, or a misrepresentation, this book is interested in querying how theory lends itself to such characterizations. How have psychoanalysts participated in conveying this portrayal to their critics? Might this dissension illuminate blind-spot(s) and highlight new areas of growth? It's a challenge to engage in psychoanalytic self-critique. To do so requires that we move beyond our own assumptions and deeply held beliefs about what moves the treatment process and how we can best function within it. To step aside from ourselves, to question the assumed, to take the critiques of others seriously, demands more than an absence of defensiveness. It requires that we step into the shoes of the psychoanalytic Other and suspend not only our theories, but our emotional investment in them. There are a range of ways in which our authors took up that challenge. Some revisited the assumptions that underlay early relational thinking and expanded their sources (Greenberg & Aron). Some took up specific aspects of relational technique and unpacked their roots and evolution (Mark, Cooper). Some offered an expanded view of what constitutes relational theory and technique (Seligman, Corbett, Grossmark). Some more directly critiqued aspects of relational theory and technique (Berman, Stern). And some took on a broader critique of relational theory or technique (Layton, Slochower). Unsurprisingly, no single essay examined the totality of relational thinking, its theoretical and clinical implications. This task would be herculean both practically and psychologically. We're all invested in aspects of what we think and what we do; at best, we examine some, but never all of our assumptions and ideas. We recognize, retrospectively, how very challenging a task this was; it asked writers to engage in what we might think of as a self-analysis of the countertransference. Taken together these essays represent a significant effort at self-critique and we are enormously proud of it. Each chapter critically assesses and examines aspects of relational theory and technique, considers its current state and its relations to other psychoanalytic approaches. *De-Idealizing Relational Theory* will appeal to all relational psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists.

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jaak panksepp theory: *Embodied Morality* Darcia Narvaez, 2016-05-25 In this book the broad,

interdisciplinary theory of Triune Ethics Meta-theory is explored to demonstrate how it explains the different patterns of morality seen in the world today. It describes how human morality develops dynamically from experience in early life and it proposes that the methods in which humans are raised bring about tendencies towards self-protective or open-hearted social relations. When the life course follows evolutionary systems, then prosocial, open-hearted capacities develop but when the life course goes against evolutionary systems it should not be a surprise that self-focused values and behaviors develop such as violent tribalism, self aggrandizement and a binary orientation to others (dominance or submission). Many humans alive today exhibit impaired capacities in comparison to humans from small-band hunter-gatherer societies, the type of society that represents 99% of humanity's history. TEM is rooted in ethical naturalism and points out how to optimize human moral development through the lifespan—toward the ethics of engagement and communal imagination.

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