CORTEXIA TERTIARIUS: THE ULTIMATE HEDONIST

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ABSTRACT

The paper explains why our brains direct us to do so many things which are indifferent, hazardous, or detrimental to our survival. Our overdeveloped, largely autonomous neocortices are responsible; their tertiary (association) regions constitute a "virtual organism," given the pseudo-Linnean name of Cortexia tertiarius ("C.T."). C.T. is not just driven by the old brain, but can transmute its messages, and has developed some internal circuits (and pleasure centers?) of its own for motivation and reward. It is unique among organisms: its top priority is not survival, but to do what most pleases it, which may be contrary to the body's biological interests.

The genesis and evolution of C.T. in the hominids is traced from Homo habilis on down; brain enlargement may have occurred via bizarre evolutionary processes relatively independent of phenotypic selection. "Unnatural wants" (wants for other than the biological necessities) are the hallmark of C.T. At first a boon, C.T. has finally made us maniacally greedy, and--thanks to our technology--may destroy us and the earth. Thus C.T. began as a symbiont, but has become the most dangerous of all parasites.

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