

The Allegory of the Maze

by Cynthia Jared

Every member of the animal kingdom has a hunger drive, a need for food. This need excites the organism and compels it to search for food. The creature will explore his environment and investigate novel stimuli to find the variety of food that is necessary to satisfy this drive. Theoretically the intensity of this need may be reduced, but it can never be fully satiated, nor can it be extinguished. The organism is equipped genetically with the physical capacities and knowledge to satisfy this drive. What happens if the animal fails to respond to this drive, and under what conditions might this happen even when a sufficient amount and variety of food are available?

To answer these questions take one of these hungry creatures, a plump, white rat, which has been isolated for several hours, and place him in a T-maze. Suppose that this creature has been in the labyrinth before and has learned that if he turns right he will be fed. Presume also that this rodent has never before been aware of the alleys on the left. What will the subject do? He will explore the left arm of the maze. Even though he is extremely hungry and knows where to find food, some innate force guides him to the left. He must explore all possible sources before he selects his source of nourishment.

However, suppose an electric grill has been placed by an experimenter just inside the left arm of the maze, which will shock the inquisitive creature when he ventures into this unexplored alley. The rodent will enter the arm, receive the shock, and return to the right arm. This may happen several times, but eventually the creature will control his desire to explore and return to his previous pattern of behavior turning right consistently, never venturing to the left again.

Now the experimenter places the hungry, right-turning rodent in the maze again. At the end of his journey through the maze he finds many brightly colored stars with his food. Perhaps not immediately but eventually, because of the consistent pairing of the two stimuli, the subject will explore the stars, value the stars, work for the stars just as once he explored his food, valued his food, and worked for his food. The behavior that was previously elicited by the food will not be elicited by the stars. Suppose the rodent will receive a greater number of sparkling stars if he runs the maze very quickly. He will then run

as fast as his little rat legs will carry him so that he may win the greater number of the valuable stars.

Now another hungry, right-turning, star-collecting rat is placed at the entrance to the labyrinth with the subject. These two rodents are of the same litter and are accustomed to sharing their mother's milk. Will they assume that there is a sufficient amount of food and number of stars for both, or will each race, bite, scratch, and claw his brother so that he may have the greatest number of stars for himself? The subject is now competitive.

Suppose that the experimenter then erects an obstruction in the passageway. The obstacle is tall so that it will challenge the rodent but short so that he can climb over it. There is a space between the obstruction and the wall. This space is large to allow the plump rat room to squeeze by but small to make slipping by more difficult than climbing over. What will the star-collecting, competitive rat do? He will try to slip by because it appears to be easier than climbing over. The creature realizes that squeezing by is not what is expected of him, but it does not concern him that he has not "earned" the stars. All that interests the subject is the accumulation of the precious stars. He is now a cheating rat.

The creature is next required to make a given number of journeys through the maze, over a required number of obstacles, with his brother rat. He is given food and stars each time he completes a trip. The creature is promised that when he completes the required number of runs and collects the required number of stars that he will receive the largest, shiniest star of all. The subject makes the trips, collecting the stars but ignoring the food. The morsels of grain are of no value to a star-collecting rat. If the pellets are not presented, this creature is not distressed. Food is worthless; stars are important.

Now the star-collecting, competitive, cheating rodent has received the largest, shiniest star. He will accumulate no more stars for running the maze. What will he do then if placed at the entrance to the labyrinth? The animal knows that there are not stars at the end, so he no longer runs the maze. He has long ago forgotten the other arm of the maze. The slim, sad creature has a faint memory that once many thousands of maze-trips ago there was a reason to run the maze. A reason other than stars. But the connection is gone, he can not remember. Even though he is starving, the rodent loiters at the entrance. He runs in circles. He may even venture tentatively into the

maze. Arriving at the goal he finds food, but he does not recognize it, so the animal will return to the entry. He sits down to wait. Wait for what? He does not know, he can't remember. Eventually he will die. Inches away from food he will starve to death, because in his haste to collect stars he has neglected his basic needs and has lost his ability to satisfy them.

Sentimentalism Is What You Would Call This Had I Not
Left Out the Woodpeckers and the Butterflies

by Susan Cox

It was wonderful to be alive.
Today I
picked up a buckeye and one for my
love, peanut-warm
from the last sun of summer
(Or was it the first sun of fall?).
It smelled like hay
the grass, not like chlorophyll
heavy escaping.
Not to be Thoreauish, but there were squirrels too
(just as I expected) scampering
without reason
after mutual tails and entirely
for the fun of it.
I kept the buckeyes to impersonate
still warm
a paranoid's ball-bearings
for a not so warm day.