

Unanimous Union: The Mind and Body Together Lean Toward ‘Truthiness’

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‘Truthiness,’ according to television satirist Stephen Colbert, represents the human preference to follow our intuition despite the presence of facts or evidence. For example, the more ambiguous an answer to a question, the more likely an individual will believe it is truthful.

At least that is what psychologists Rick Dale of the University of Memphis, Michael Spivey of Cornell University and the late Chris McKinstry found when they asked college students questions that ranged in levels of vagueness and tracked their corresponding arm movements to clicking ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on a computer screen.

Specifically, questions such as “is murder sometimes justifiable?” are considered ambiguous and could cause the sensation of being ‘pulled’ in both directions at once; however, questions like “can a kangaroo walk backwards?” have a high probability of ‘no’ responding.

The results of participants’ cursor movements suggested that the human brain thinks and acts at the same time, in contrast to what many researchers previously assumed: That the decision-making process was completed by the cognitive subsystem, or the brain’s thought center, before it was shared with other parts of the brain.

“These dynamic data showed that participant arm movements had lower velocity and curved more toward the alternative response box during ‘no’ responses than during ‘yes’ responses—suggesting that we experience a general bias toward assuming statements are true,” the authors explained.

The findings, which appear in the January 2008 issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, suggest that the mind and body do in fact work together and the resulting collaboration may prompt us to lean toward ‘truthiness.’

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