Given the state of neurophysiology and, more importantly, my own lack of knowledge in the area, it is difficult for me to establish that internal representations of the other have some neurophysiological reality, regardless of their use as a metaphorical understanding of how our brains work. The following research, however, which obviously I need to track to its source, does explain how this might work. My sense is that we get physiological pleasure from the removal of cognitive dissonance between representations, and “cooperation” is a way in which our representation of ourselves can be placed in consonance with our representation of the other.

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 11:01:46 -0400
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Subject: HAB: Brain Research and the Return of Universal Human Nature?

The New York Times
July 23, 2002

Why We're So Nice: We're Wired to Cooperate
By Natalie Angier

What feels as good as chocolate on the tongue or money in the bank but won't make you fat or risk a subpoena from the Securities and Exchange Commission?

    Hard as it may be to believe in these days of infectious greed and sabers unsheathed, scientists have discovered that the small, brave act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, makes the brain light up with quiet joy.

    Studying neural activity in young women who were playing a classic laboratory game called the Prisoner's Dilemma, in which participants can select from a number of greedy or cooperative strategies as they pursue financial gain, researchers found that when the women chose mutualism over "me-ism," the mental circuitry normally associated with reward-seeking behavior swelled to life.

    And the longer the women engaged in a cooperative strategy, the more strongly flowed
the blood to the pathways of pleasure.

The researchers, performing their work at Emory University in Atlanta, used magnetic resonance imaging to take what might be called portraits of the brain on hugs.