Instincts and their Relation to Habits

Name

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**Instincts and their Relation to Habits**

William James was an American philosopher who was a leading thinker of the late 19th century. He indicated that habits had an innate tendency known as instincts. James emphasized that all living things contain plasticity, which assists them in adapting to different needs, environments, and challenges. Similarly, human brains are plastic at birth, which gives them the capability to engage in what he termed “adaptive unconscious”. The term refers to the notion that thoughts and perception take place without awareness (McGranahan, 2017). As a result, human beings would still engage in mental activities even when they are in an unconscious or subconscious state. As a result, he perceived habits to be automatic. James explained the phenomena by indicating that the development of the nervous system depends on the parts of the system that are exercised (Campbell, 2017). In this way, habits are instinctual as they occur due to automatic brain processes and do not necessarily require conscious mental processes for them to be conducted.

James emphasized on the difference in habits between man and animals. In animals, habits are implanted at birth, which explains why animals of a similar species tend to portray similar behavior. Similarly, human beings portray habits implanted at birth, referred to as instincts. However, in human beings can also acquire habits as a result of education. That is why human beings exhibit different habits despite belonging to the same species (McGranahan, 2017). James explains that habits reduce the conscious attention needed to perform actions. For instance, minor sensations are sufficient to evoke muscular movements. Thought processes are only required in case anything out of the ordinary occurs in the upper parts of the brain and the mind. Therefore, James indicated that habits are instinctual as they are innate and depend on the automatic brain processes.

References

Campbell, J. (2017). *Experiencing William James: Belief in a pluralistic world*. University of Virginia Press.

McGranahan, L. (2017). *Darwinism and pragmatism: William James on evolution and self-transformation*. Taylor & Francis.