

You Have Not Read The Sequences

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Content Warning: Neuropsychological Infohazard, De-Biasing Infohazard, Evocation Infohazard

Recommended Prior Reading:

So in *The Room Eats You* I posed a rhetorical question:

How do you escape from something that is all around you? Which you are immersed in at all times? Of which you have never known anything else? If you did escape, would you even know what it meant? *Would you even recognize the real world if you saw it?*

Except that this isn't just rhetorical, it's an important thing to consider. How *do* you recognize the real world? How *do* you discern truth from falsehood? What process do you use to cleave facts from falsehoods? How do you know that your attempts to break free from narrative are getting you closer to truth instead of just isolating you within your own personal conspiratorial madness?

It was pointed out in the comments that I never actually answered this question, and they were right to criticize that. This is an absolutely critical piece that we cannot just gloss over. We can work on stripping out narratives and comforting falsehoods that are preventing us from seeing reality, but that still leaves us with the problem of figuring out what it actually is we're looking at.

Most people calibrate their epistemics around social reality. They trust experts and friends and family, and are fully immersed in their worldview, never pausing to reflect or defuse at all.

For most people, the universe is a mysterious place filled with random events beyond their ability to comprehend or control. Think "guessing the teacher's password", but not just in school or knowledge, but about everything.

Such people have no problem with the idea of magic, because everything is magic to them, even science.

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Unfortunately, most people, in most areas of their lives, treat everything as magic. They're not used to being able to understand or control anything but the simplest of things, so it doesn't occur to them to even try. Instead, they just go along with whatever everybody else is thinking or doing.

For such (most) people, reality is social, rather than something you understand/ control.

Simply rejecting social reality doesn't by itself get your epistemics any closer to actual reality, and this is how you get conspiracy theorists. The average conspiracy theorist probably did see a glitch in the matrix which caused their initial decision to reject social reality and try to get at the truth. However, when they rejected social reality they didn't know how to properly do discernment or detect reality when they saw it. But they thought they did.

So on the one hand if you have too much epistemic humility then you'll be subject to the whims and vagaries of social reality and will have trouble discerning truth from narrative. This was part of the problem I tried to point out in *The Room Eats You*: social reality isn't about truth, it's about politics, and trusting social reality is also trusting the political process. It doesn't converge on truth, it converges on acceptability. The end of the world isn't acceptable, and so our epistemics around it are very distorted.

On the other hand, if you have too much epistemic smugness, you'll be subject to the whims of your own biased mind. This is how you end up on the local news after being arrested doing something that no one could convince you was a terrible idea because anyone who disagreed with you was just a brainwashed sheep who couldn't see reality.

This is the problem with trying to break free of the social and mental forces that are keeping a lid on our sense of agency. If people are using society and narrative to hedge in their beliefs, and you pull all that up, you need to replace the narrative railings with something else so your beliefs don't go careening off into unreality.

So how do we learn to recognize the truth when we see it?

Well, fortunately, [Eliezer Yudkowsky has written extensively about this.](#)

Now, of course, I've already read the sequences, multiple times over the years in fact, and yet, as my mentor put it:

You never read The Sequences, you think you read them but you actually read the warped version generated in real time by your high-identity mind. You unread them and replaced them with something else.

And I found this to be an extremely valid criticism of my engagement with not just the Sequences but the rationality memplex as a whole. It's very easy to read what you want to read and mentally discard the rest without realizing what you're doing.

And so I set out to correct this. I picked a version of *Rationality from AI to Zombies* and I started going through it chapter by chapter, making sure I actually and thoroughly understood the concepts.

However, I quickly noted that Eliezer never really gets at a central thesis, he just sort of throws spaghetti in its general direction, and there's a sense in which he's sort of all over the place.

The Sequences are a chimera. Of rigorous enlightenment philosophy and 20th century philosophy of science and Science, combined with science fiction, anime, and tvtropes.

He's also writing to a particular audience, namely computer scientists, and there are thus blind spots and neurotypes that he just fails to account for in his writing. To actually read the sequences requires more than simply the materials contained in the sequences themselves. It will take a rigorous and hard look at the history and context of these ideas to really and fully understand them.

And so that's what I set out to do. Since beginning this project, I've gone on a fantastic journey through some of the darkest chapters of world history. I've explored wars and genocides and violence at a scale that boggles and baffles our modern minds. And you stardust, you get to come along for the ride.

This will be the beginning of a new sequence that looks at truth and the origins of rational thought and uses them to build up an understanding of how to do discernment and detect reality when we see it. Along the way, we'll develop the theory and underpinnings that make this all so important.

We'll begin at as close to the beginning as we can, with Alfred Korzybski and the First World War.