

Todo: add neuroscientific case studies to illustrate points; perhaps quote Ego Tunnel, Schopenhauer, etc.

Explain games and ethics as game, and the relation of language.

On Human Behaviour and Agency

This essay is about a development in my understanding of the structure/origins/purpose of human behaviour to a more complete story which takes into account chaos and the material (brain) correlate of consciousness/behavioural acting. What will be shown is that we are in large part not the ideal, rationally developing stories that we may feel or theorize ourselves to be, but in some situations we can become trapped in mechanic repetition like **Langton's Ant**, or a section of repetition in Conway's Game of Life, and that a lot of our usual behaviour lacks intelligible informational content regardless of our situation. We tend to follow reactive animalistic instincts which shape our view of the world, we become simply the expression of these generic evolved instincts but specific to our current environment once we gain understanding about how the world relates to them.

Note: consciousness is spoken of here with the assumption that the material state of the brain, in the end, amounts to a specific state of perception - ie. that material influences on the brain often have behavioural and/or perceptual influences to the conscious subject. Therefore, the implications of this essay, which is on the subject of *what we are and on the freedom of the will*, should be regarded on *all* its appropriate fronts: at least (1) as a description of how behaviours arise, personally and impersonally (2), as an ethical consideration, and (3) as an illustration of the shallowness and illusory nature of conscious perception.

A **game** is an internal representation of a system that begins in one state and is incentivised to reach some other state. The potential states (like chess piece positions, or video game maps) are completely variable, like the goals, rules, and presence of a character/piece. Simply the essence of this is goal-oriented behaviour that simplifies some aspect of the world into only the important details, and defines what kinds of actions can be made. The idea of "games" as the fundamental abstract structure for all behaviour is surprisingly apt; obtaining money and happiness can be portrayed as a game, as can perfecting finger movements for playing an instrument. The idea is that all behaviour is motivated, it is all change or movement, but the territory and form of the movement varies completely. The state-space of a game of chess is all of the potential future valid boards that can occur, and the end goal of chess is to produce the state of checkmate over your opponent. Similarly, the state-space of a conversation with a friend presents itself as all the socially acceptable responses in each moment we are invited to speak, and the goal may be to impress, persuade, or merely stay attentive. Games are nested: there are games within games and so on, for example if you wanted to get from point A to point B, you may go by bicycle and then also must play the games of riding the bike (balancing, steering, gears, all games), avoiding pedestrians, keeping track of the time. As said, games can account for small behaviours as well as prolonged long-term plans.

Prior to the development in my views, my idea was that behaviour can be understood as coming from a position within some internally represented game, which can be thought of as a state-space with movement to a goal, rules/moves being what we have at our disposal to move through the state-space. What followed from this view was that all actions can be described as best-guesses about the strategic fitness of achieving a goal.

Within human psychology would exist a plethora of nested goals. This view was circuit-like and perhaps complete for some machines. The view however, as I have come to face, is vastly reductive and sketch-like when considered as description for an important proportion of everyday experience, and perhaps even more inadequate for the understanding of more exotic behaviours/states of consciousness.

A large degree of human behaviour, perhaps all of it (although through specific lenses we can view the emergence of order), is ultimately nothing but ceaseless, unaware neural activity necessitated biomechanically, passing through networks which in general work towards coherence, but only as a whole and only to a short-sighted extent. This arising of order, combined with the perceived *sense of order and agency*, give the illusion that one's personal narrative and reasoning faculties function like a logical machine.

While all formally recognized behaviour, or movement/move-making, and all purpose exists within a system of games, this only encompasses a subset of our being.

The other part is half chaos, half divorced from real self-awareness or reason.

Our brains are self-ordering from the bottom-up, essentially always approximative and distributed. An apt metaphor would be to view the brain like a dense mesh of connected gears, driven by the motor of chemical metabolism. The gears can find themselves, for example, as developing the ideas and understanding, even identification with nihilism. But then the real nature of the system is revealed, as motors keep turning the gears with complete disregard; and then of course, nonsensical content keeps coming to surface, there's still content, behaviour, phenomena, in the experience of this hypothetical gear-mind.

By merit of the well-formed and intricate structure of the brain, this "nonsense" will usually take the form of general everyday behaviour and endless reiterations of past ruminations, and accompanied by the routine perception of self-agency and *some desire* - which is why this has been difficult to spot, and is usually difficult to see in yourself. But this nonsense content is not meaningfully wrapped up by a neat theory on games as the encapsulate of activity/behaviour/thought - or if it is, then only as a result of the structural tendency to create more *things to do* without end; here, you are like **Langton's Ant**, working without the awareness that any self-held as "authentic", any further inward potential for yourself, has reached a conclusion.

Shown on the right is the plotted behaviour of Langton's Ant. The "ant" traverses a grid of colored cells according to two simple rules. Behaviour is complex and erratic at first, but order quickly emerges, and nothing but repetition remains.

It seems we often behave like this, repeating on routine due to the "rules" of attraction and repulsion in our environment, which seems insurmountable until some change occurs and we are again finding our way for a brief period of time before effectively becoming undead once more.

The brain is scarcely self-aware, and therefore you have a large degree of internal blindness, which nonetheless functions and finds its own broad spectrum of effects all the time. As self-awareness is the awareness of purpose, the lack of internal self-awareness precisely is the breaking point defining the contents of that behaviour which is game and that chaos which arises because our brains are but approximative biochemical hacks taken far outside of their natural habitat. Ideally, these blind processes are linked together in such a fashion that they come to be aware of *something*, but that thing is the result of a plethora of fuzzy, blind components. As such, the resulting experience of a self is constantly varying, incomplete, in a sense illusory.

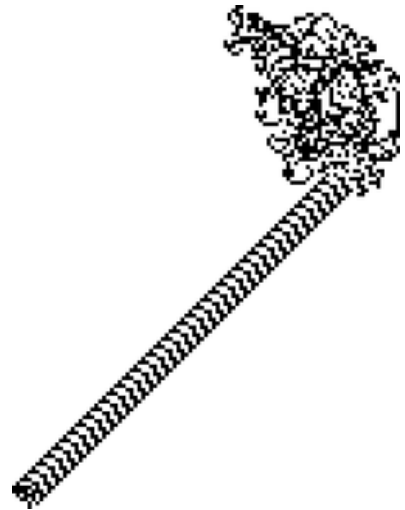
Just like a stable state of repetition in Conway's Game of Life, or how Langton's Ant eventually just trails off following the same turns, our brain too cannot cease to produce endless movement even in the absence of real information. The static bullshit just flows out so long as the power is on.

The rest of behaviour is in part chaos - by this I only mean that we will never make any sense of it, and in part the pure inelegant result of the coming to the surface of deep unconscious mechanics.

There are endless studies/cases illustrating the purely energetic/pump-like nature of the brain. Tinnitus, motor tics, Tourette's, sleep walking, etc. all seem to point to the fact that our behaviour is in some part irrational and chaotic.

The Bounds of Willing/Reasoning

So, at this point it has been explained why and how there exists a large margin for chaotic and untailored, generic behaviour in the mind. Now some sense of this will be made, by taking the perspective of the brain as a servant at gunpoint rather than as a master, which also tells us about the nature and limits of our fantasies of freedom in self-direction.



The material part of the brain, driven by the chemical metabolism of energy, and the structure of neural networks, makes up the bottommost influence of human behaviour. This level is ridden with chaos and is the clearest reason for a result of gear-like repetitive behaviour.

From the structural level arises instinctual responses to stimuli, and other automatic/regulative processes, these are vast and complex, and they are intelligible in their function despite their complete lack of self-awareness. The incessant need for things to do and think about, as well as fear, pain, and pleasure responses, and as a rule all structurally inescapable behavioural patterns belong to this category.

The third level, which does not strictly arise from the previous levels as an overarching master, but instead is merely one particular group of connected components, is responsible for self-awareness, high level executive function, and the reflective ability that allows us to linguistically represent our intents and figure out how we feel about things.

The issue here is the dominance order. We typically feel that our sense of self and self-agency is primary and concrete, that we live in a sort of freedom to choose what we want and that on the level of our internal self, we are not created by our environment but merely forced to endure what it means to us.

The most clear demonstration of the primacy of the bodily receptive nervous system and automatic instinct is this: reason alone is responsible for planning and foresight, but it seems to do little other than *feel* ahead-of-time. The apparatus of reason is imbued with knowledge about how things make our bodies feel and respond to certain scenarios, which it uses to plan out the path the body will take in the future while retaining safety and meeting physical and psychological needs.

For example, the reason may be aroused by the idea of benefiting from the effects of using cold showers/ice baths for health, but it simulates the response of the sensations arising from the bodily nervous system in advance, and feels pain. Therefore, its instinct is to retract.

Matters, however, are more sophisticated than this; it is not only bodily wellbeing that is simulated, but the extended human self with its arms in various intimately sensed appendages: property, money, tools, social placement, geographical location.

Regardless, the basic situation is the same, and fundamentally has its origins in the body, which is both the original judge of attraction/aversion, and forever the most vital and immediate consideration.

Have you ever had an elaborate idea or intent about something, only to come into contact with a certain physical or emotional confrontation, which seems to instantaneously curve your perspective and will on the world into something else? This phenomena is the perfect, clear first-hand realization of the primacy of the archaic instincts of bodily self-preservation over

anything you may think you are or want. There is a fantasy taking place in the intellect, but it is thwarted by anticipation of pain. It is as if your intent was seen by a higher power and deemed heresy, and correction automatically ensues.

Here a friend says: “But I think you have to look at the unconscious, not the body. The body is dumb.”

This is somewhat true, but to further explain, the point is that your body is at the root of why you think what you think, why you desire what you desire, and why you are limited in what you can will yourself to do. Previously unknowable knowledge, preferences, and moral beliefs were not in-born, but were learned as fruits of this ancient body-environment behaviour feedback loop¹. The unconscious just serves a faithful part in this function of predicting what hurts and what brings us fulfillment, it doesn't by any means transcend the instinctual bodily forces of aversion and attraction, only makes sense of them. In early stages of understanding the world, primarily as an infant, the body is the root source of judgement about a thing, since understanding is not yet obtained about the world.

How often do you utterly despise a situation or idea that puts you as greatly advantaged in fulfilling your needs as an organism? And how often do you take preference to situations which are adverse to your body, sexual expression, or social status? Of course these questions are silly to ask: the reason for this is because the unconscious has done nothing but merge to become the perfect mirror of what the world means for any general animal's predicted genetic success. This has nothing to do with what you think you are or want to be, it's predetermined and unchanging for us all.

All this said, we see rationality is a rather weak and subjugated force. It is not our planning at the pilot seat of our bodies ready to play out in the world as an ideal rational self, but instead we are more like big ants whose antennae reach out into the future to detect pain, we call these antennae “reason”. Thus we often go in circles without being aware of it. We don't have a deeply nested, logical, coherent plan for what we are and do and why. We just eat, shit, fuck, and know how things we've encountered before feel like. At our perceptual tip of the iceberg, we can interpret ourselves linguistically and sketch a rough plan of what we think we'd like to say is going on, but in whole it seems more like these are nothing but mere idealized fantasies to avert the gaze from the self as being a fuzzy pile of evolutionary tricks.

1: In case of confusion, I mean to say that specifically authentic and directly important beliefs and knowledge result from this mechanism. I do not mean to speak this of passive recitations of nonsensical culture, which survive despite being contradictory and often self-disempowering, because of either social pressure, their mere unimportance to the individual, or obfuscation.