

## **Role of Reason**

Our world view shapes the day-to-day decisions that direct our behavior. This topic caught my interest when I became aware of the minimal role that reason has in human behavior.

To proceed with this line of thought, I will use the intellectual tools of evolution and cultural relativity. This way of thinking does not pass judgment on false reasoning and bizarre beliefs. It also diminishes the role of human agency and morality.

### **Evolutionary Foundation of Reasoning**

From a biological evolutionary point of view, our brains and reasoning abilities are the way they are because, our ancestors survived. All animals with brains evolve instincts that result in behaviors that benefit their survival. Humans have an enhanced capacity to learn beneficial behaviors that are not firmly linked to the biological evolution of genes. We can imagine that human brains evolved to be like computers with an operating system and no software. This allows adaptation to changing environments faster than a biological change in instincts. The ability to learn behaviors from our tribe is more effective than relying on behaviors dictated by instinct. Many human biological instincts, such as child rearing, do not persist. This is due to lack of evolutionary pressure. Behaviors previously controlled by instinct are now controlled by learning.

### **Biological vs Cultural Evolution**

Biological evolution occurs in the context of the natural environment manipulating gene frequencies that persist in a population. Cultural evolution occurs in the context of the abstract environment of human minds that hold ideas that persist.

When I say cultural evolution, I mean identifiable long running ideas such as using iron or bronze, as well as short-lived ideas such as clothing fashions. As with biological evolution, there is no universal value to an evolutionary result other than the fact that it persists. There are dead-ends such as stone tools and random persistent success like the QWERTY keyboard.

Human biological evolution interacts with cultural evolution, particularly with our capacity to learn, and with our variable inclinations that allow us to more effectively learn different things.

### **Learning, Metaphor, and Logic**

Our main learning method is associative learning, which is extended by the use of metaphors, and poetic slogans (e.g. "A stitch in time saves nine").

I view logic as the biological instinct that tells us when ideas feel right together. Greek formal logic is a cultural distillation of this feeling.

Reason includes metaphors, poetry, and logic and is usually employed to rationalize new ideas and improve their generality. In this context, confirmation bias and other reasoning errors are features, rather than bugs. Ideas that are confirmed by reason can become additional metaphors.

## **About Forming a World View**

An infant's first order of business is bonding with parents and tribe. Associative learning dominates infancy, such as learning hand coordination to bring food to your mouth.

We can imagine that the ideas that a child absorbs are directed by instinct. New ideas are absorbed that are consistent with earlier ideas. To my thinking, a world view is a collection of consistent ideas that accumulate over a lifetime. Here I imagine rolling a snowball, or ball of string or wax, and it is central to our sense of being. Without our ball of string, we cannot activate and control our behavior enough to maintain life. This is because our instincts have atrophied.

The cultural evolution of ideas proceeds so quickly that it is barely related to biological survivability. Ideas spread if they adhere to the wax ball of ideas in other people's minds. Sometimes cultural evolution acts against biological survivability, such as spreading of a doomsday cult.

We can imagine a huge variability in world views that depends on initial biological inclinations and the time dependent adhesiveness of new ideas to the existing wax balls of ideas.

## **Seeking Status in New Tribes**

We have a biological inclination to seek status in our tribe. If this is not possible, we can accept our current status or seek status in another tribe. In our society, we have many tribes with status based on things like money, political power, shared hobbies, technical expertise, etc.

New tribes can pop up, when a new idea adheres to a collection of minds. This can give an opportunity for advanced status in a new tribe.

## **Dysfunctional Thinking**

Even when a point of view is perfectly rational, there are many ways to support a point of view with dysfunctional thinking such as confirmation bias, sunk cost fallacy, gambler's fallacy, halo effect, etc.

How do you tell if another person has dysfunctional thinking or simply a different point of view? In the context of cultural relativity, there may be no answer. In the context of mental health, there is a similar question distinguishing between a mentally ill person and a person with a quirky personality. The medical issue is resolved by considering the person's ability to take care of themselves and maybe hold down a job. Perhaps there is a similar concept that can be used to diagnose dysfunctional thinking.

## **Keeping the Center**

We can imagine an evolutionary preference against indecision in favor of a tightly connected collection of central ideas even if they are partly wrong. Our ball of string is so important to us that we can die if it unravels. In the past, there must have been strong evolutionary pressures to defend our center against threats.

## **Away from the Center**

If our ball of string is not under threat, we can explore new ideas and add them to our center, provided that the new ideas are consistent with the existing ball. One of the features of our ball of string is that the constellation of ideas within it are self-consistent and have stood the test of time. Any reasoning that stays close to the center is highly efficient. However, we lose our ability to reason clearly if we stray too far from our worldview. This effect is visible on a smaller scale when we try to reason outside our field of expertise. When this happens, our minds are dominated by more basic functions that are susceptible to common thought errors such as confirmation bias.

Thinking too far from our worldview can cause disorientation and make us rush back to defend our center. This can also cause us to become angry.

## **Human Interactions**

I believe that biological evolution has given us inclinations to bond with our friends and intimidate our enemies.

In our society, each individual belongs to several tribes. There is normal conflict within a tribe, usually involving status.

When encountering someone from a different tribe, there can be varying levels of threat. In the extreme case, the Others may be homicidal criminals requiring extreme action.

For less dangerous Others, perhaps they should be treated like polar bears. They have a right to exist, but we keep our distance. In fact they add to the richness of our experience, as long as we are not dinner.

## **Influencing Others**

Here is where we completely abandon cultural relativity. By definition, our world view is right, and the Others require conversion.

When connecting with Others who hold a very similar worldview, our center is not in danger and we can exchange small flakes on the surface of our wax balls. This feels like a reasoned conversation. Hopefully, this results in new slightly altered world views that are more self-consistent and secure.

When trying to influence a more diverse population of Others, reason is a weak tool. Politicians, advertisers and con artists then use tools of dysfunctional thinking to promote their ideas. A more humane approach, is to use reason in ways that do not threaten the Other's world view.

## **Concluding**

So, we should not be too surprised by bizarre thinking in Others. This is just the variation in human behavior that is the result of biological and cultural evolution, where reason plays a minor role.

We can influence the tribal thoughts of Others only after finding common ground. We should pay particular attention to their fears and possible loss of status. Without addressing issues like these, reason will have no influence.