

Deconstruction of the Social Self

Our understanding of the biological basis of social knowledge has arguably been stifled by the still potent influence of the famed 'mind-body dualism'. While in modern times the roots of biological evolution for 'normal' physiological processes have come to be interpreted through the DNA sequence of the genome, social communication continues to be regarded as a creation of the 'mind'. The political furor that arose when the field of sociobiology first emerged was focused upon the claim among its disciples that the social interactions and social differentiations observed among insects are directly encoded in their DNA. Not only did their extrapolation of a corresponding genetic determinism within human society prove to be groundless, so were their specious claims about insects. Regardless of the inaccuracies promoted by the heavy-handed sociobiologists, the overarching political significance of the controversy remains. From the perspective of the *Best*, the concept of the 'mind-body dualism' is inextricably intertwined with the presumed qualitative distinction between the *Best* (the embodiment of the 'mind') and the *Cattle* (the 'mindless' body).

What is the evolutionary function of social communication? The classic example is the sounding of an alarm by one member of a flock, perhaps in response to an approaching predator. While a generic sound of distress might be sufficient to prompt the rest of the flock to look and see that predator, far more useful is a more sophisticated signal that helps identify the type of predator, how close it is, and from which direction it is coming. Yet that level of sophistication requires that not only the sentinel must somehow learn to recognize and use the language elements of that complex signal but so must the rest of the flock. To gain the full evolutionary value of such communication capabilities, each individual must also learn to adequately perceive the surrounding world and translate that information into a form that can be communicated to other members of the flock. In turn, the other members must be able to correctly interpret the communication that they receive and, when combined with their own store of accumulated experience, choose an appropriate response. Thus to be evolutionarily advantageous, such social interactions cannot merely function to transfer a packet of information from one individual to another. Each individual should be able to usefully perceive and interact with the world at large and then bring that derived experience into the accumulating pool of social experience for the mutual benefit of the other members in that flock.

How does the individual learn to interpret and act upon the information that they either directly perceive or else obtain through communications from others? The most basic form of trial and error requires the ability to remember and interpret the results of one's previous perceptions and responses so as to influence how to respond to the present circumstance. In its most distilled form, it becomes the process of logical coherence and empirical correspondence. Can the individual identify an interpretation of a given perception that is seemingly consistent with interpretations that they have previously applied to earlier perceptions or else with interpretations that they have learned from others? Do the conclusions that are drawn from such an interpretation appear to correspond with what is presently observed? Our 'mind', that is to say our ability to perceive the outside world, to analyze those perceptions, and to take actions based upon that analysis, has evolved across large numbers of species over hundreds of millions of years. Throughout Western history from Plato to modern physics, this biological reality has found itself confronted with the political doctrine that the mind of the *Best* literally creates the world in which we live. Not only does this doctrine of intellectual causality serve to dismiss the significance of the *Cattle*, it turns the logic of biological evolution on its head while crippling the process by which productive social knowledge is generated.

Organisms communicate because they anticipate affecting the behavior of others. Social interactions would never have evolved over time if those interactions had not provided a net mutual benefit to the species whose members express those behaviors. Yet even with altruistic intent, not all communicated information is beneficial information. Misinformation is inevitable. Early cultures depended upon understanding which wild fruits are nutritious and which are poisonous. When one person's misunderstanding of such toxicity characteristics is then taught to others, the error of that belief may become regrettably apparent. A fundamental distinction emerges when that same information is communicated by an individual who knows it to be false. Downstream in the social communication process, this initial act of conscious disinformation often becomes operationally indistinguishable from an inadvertent act of misinformation. This apparent equivalence to everyone except the initial perpetrator helps give rise to the perverse tendency of many to treat 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' as if they were synonyms. Such naivety is the height of social irresponsibility. Whether in the jungles of the Amazon, the corporate boardrooms of Wall Street, or the halls of Congress, disinformation is a conscious act of parasitism. Disinformation is turning the crucial element in the biological evolution of society on its head to intentionally compromise social understanding for the sake of self-serving goals, typically at the expense of others. From a legal perspective, such an act of knowingly transmitting disinformation can readily give rise to a case of fraud. When treated as a legal tort, fraud is

traditionally defined as the intentional misrepresentation or concealment of an important fact upon which the victim is meant to rely, and in fact does rely, to the harm of that victim.

In the modern day world of American legalism, such controversies are solemnly declared to be a 'dead issue'. Yet it really is only in the last few decades that the Supreme Court 'discovered' that the spreading of disinformation is a legally protected right under the First Amendment. It was not until the 1970s that the Supreme Court chose to nullify the 'Truth in Advertising' laws which had become widespread during the decades before. Under the canard that "commercial speech is protected speech", the hardly endangered species of advertising fraud was bestowed a federal grant of asylum. Fifty years later, it has become hard to tell whether many members of Congress are marketing anything other than conscious disinformation. Up until quite recently, there would seem to have been only one significant exception to the doctrine that all forms of disinformation/fraud are now constitutionally protected. That exception is the sanctity of legal contract and the closely related issues of the submitting governmental documents and testifying in court. The profound implications of this selective imposition of an enforceable standard for integrity is well illustrated by the fact that few of us ever have the occasion to actually draft a legal contract, and fewer still have ever drawn up a governmental document or presided over a criminal trial. In practical terms, legal honesty is consciously designed to primarily operate as a one-way street. The political economic power that is embodied in that imposed asymmetric standard of honest commitments is self-evident. Equally apparent is the fact that the systematic destruction of the general populace's ability to function with a comparable level of assurance is a sure formula for the crippling of democracy.

Not only must the individual be able to effectively receive and transmit information to others, they must be able to effectively process such received information and apply it against their own perceived experience in order to judge its utility in helping them learn from that experience which, in turn, can be shared with others. How does one transform various strands of information into a mesh of understanding? In such a metaphor, we identify tentative points of connection between different strands of information based upon 'making sense' (internal consistency) and 'realism' (empirical correspondence). The connection between those two strands can then be stabilized by either repeated reinforcement or by forming additional connections to other strands that tie them into a larger network of correlated knowledge. Without such stabilization, the initial connectivity will eventually be lost. The initially coarse mesh of understanding that a young child establishes between basic strands of information becomes increasingly refined as more subtle strands can be properly positioned and integrated into an increasingly fine mesh.

Two basic approaches are utilized to systematically disrupt the individual's ability to form an effective mesh of understanding. In our 'Information Age', the target is bombarded with a torrent of disconnected facts and factoids that is designed to disrupt and overwhelm the individual's ability to recognize and integrate that data into a consistent and meaningful mesh of understanding. In complementary fashion, disinformation, particularly disinformation designed to elicit a sense of threat or uncertainty, functions like a blob of glue. In the face of an induced psychological need to 'make it fit together', such disinformation artificially stabilizes a network of interconnectivities that is unleashed from the mental expectation for consistency and correspondence.

When an individual does not actually understand what they think, how can they possibly communicate understanding to another? What happens when the interpersonal and intra-personal communication processes cease to be integrated? As Richard Dawkins has so graphically argued in his *Selfish Gene* (1976) where he first introduced his concept of the 'meme', the individual who merely echoes the memes that others feed to them is inevitably destined to be nothing more than a parrot for the parasites. At the other extreme, individuals can find themselves living within a world cut off from social interactions so that in a most basic sense other humans are not really distinguishable from the rest of their world. The effective development of one's social self requires the ability to usefully process both novel and socially shared input to gain further insight into their world as well as learning how to apply that knowledge so as to more effectively interact with that world. By productively sharing that knowledge with others, the success of the individual becomes fully integrated with the success of the society. Socialization requires coordinated action, yet how can the direction of that action most effectively draw upon each individual social self? As viewed from an evolutionary perspective, the fundamental strength of a democracy is drawn from its enhanced capacity to enable each member of society to effectively interact as a social self, including in selecting a leadership that most effectively embodies that capacity. Conversely, totalitarianism is social parasitism writ large with the systematic destruction of the well-balanced social self within the subject population. In such a State, the Leader is to be the only source of knowledge and understanding. All subjects are to receive and echo the doctrines and commands of the Leader. Only the Leader is granted the opportunity to personally drive forward the process of social evolution. As a result, totalitarianism is unavoidably a formula for social stagnation at best, social destruction at worst.

It is intuitively plausible to anticipate that this joint evolution of cooperative social communication and behavior must have been accompanied by a complementary evolution of the neural physiology that enables this learning and application of social knowledge. Yet it is axiomatic doctrine within modern neo-Darwinism that the associated assumption of group selection is inherently invalid. As declared in the orthodox dogma, the evolutionary process is exclusively based upon selection at the level of the individual genes within the individual organisms. As discussed in our Progeny Investment essay, Marcus Feldman and colleagues have challenged that dogma in describing a robust mechanistic basis for group selection in shaping the course of evolutionary advance (Livnat et al., 2008; Livnat et al., 2010). Their analysis focuses upon the inherently dynamic character of genetic selection. For a gene mutation to become the dominant variant within the breeding population, it must be able to efficiently interact with the corresponding products of all other genes that physiologically interact with that initial gene variant across a large number of generations. This property of ‘mixability’ not only enables the joint selection of functional modularity within a given organism but also joint selection of functional modularity among socially interacting members of a species.

A significant preparatory stage in the deconstruction of a democratic society is the process of grooming both human echo chambers and social recluses. Both can be exploited by the emerging totalitarianism while at the same time serving to hinder the orchestration of a defense for the democracy. Only in recent years has it become more fully understood that the development of the social self is founded upon direct physiological processes. We are not born with a social personality. However, in most instances we are born with the physiological capacity to develop a social personality. That said, the degree to which that capacity is fulfilled is very much a function of the environment in which the developing child is raised.

One still ongoing casualty of the mind-body dualism doctrine has been the clinical recognition and treatment of autism. A formal description of autism as a distinct medical condition did not appear until 1943. While the range of differing specific symptoms did and still do complicate the proper diagnosis of this ailment, the primary characteristics involve the inability of the young child to develop normal skills of social interaction. The child (four-fold more common in males) is typically uncommunicative and appears to be emotionally detached from others. In the classical case, the patient can easily become engrossed in monotonous repetitive simple motor activities. A crucial element in the prolonged failure to adequately characterize autism as a clinical condition is the fact that the symptoms generally mirror those seen among children who have been raised under conditions of severe deprivation of social interactions. Indeed, during the first few decades after autism became a formally recognized medical condition, it was widely blamed upon the “refrigerator mother” whose purportedly cold and distant interactions with her own child had stunted his social development.

Autism is often analyzed in terms of the theory of the mind (Frith, 2003). As young infants, we do not initially draw a clear distinction between the world as we perceive it and its independent existence outside of ourselves. When we begin to consciously interact with other humans, we first try to understand them as being a projection of ourselves. We normally soon learn that others do not always respond to us or to the world at large in the ways that we expect. We learn the concept of mind in recognizing that our perception and interpretation of the outside world is distinct from the existence of that outside world. At the same time, we come to understand that other humans have formed their own minds that perceive and respond to the world in ways that differ from our own. Crucially, their responses to us are conditioned by our behavior as we learn to shape our own behavior in response to our interactions with them. People who fail to establish this interconnected network of socially conditioned responses tend to be identified as being in some sense less than human. Among low-functionality autistic individuals it is often unclear whether they ever establish any recognition of the mind-world distinction and of the differing minds that other humans have. Those with high-functionality autism generally recognize both of these facts but remain unable to efficiently join into the interconnected network of socially conditioned responses. For them, socially ‘correct’ interactions must be learned by rote memorization in which the individual consciously determines their own behavior based upon imitating previously observed behavior that occurred under seemingly similar circumstances.

With the advance in genetic analysis techniques, recent studies of the familial risk of autism spectrum disorder indicate that heritability is around 83% with environmental effects accounting for the remainder (Sandin et al., 2017). As has been shown with many other well-studied diseases, by learning how the physiological alterations induced by autism mechanistically impact the development of the social personality, we can potentially gain greater insight into the normal course of that developmental process. Not surprisingly, the alternative political perspective on autism looks upon this disorder as a blueprint for social control. Just as a genetic block in a specific physiological process can hinder the normal development of the social personality, designed social manipulation of the child can compromise these developmental processes to yield a nominally similar degree of social isolation.

At several levels, autism provides a valuable guide for how to deconstruct democratic society. Particularly noteworthy is the striking 4-to-1 asymmetry that is seen in the incidence of autism in boys and girls. The fact that autism is far more common among boys can be easily construed to indicate that the physiological networks which underpin the development of key aspects of the social self are less deeply embedded in the genetic evolution of the male sex. Among social species of insects it is overwhelmingly the females who exhibit the often striking physiological diversification into different social 'castes' that are not genetically specified. Closer to home among the mammals, within most species the males typically offer minimal contribution to progeny investment beyond the donation of sperm except for the cases in which they serve as a largely disassociated enforcer of feeding grounds access. In contrast, females quite often jointly participate in the direct care of offspring.

With respect to human society, there has long been a debate as to whether socially reinforced patterns of game playing among children induce exaggerated levels of narrowed social behavior as adults. This process has been fundamentally transformed by the switch from a society-wide set of social conventions to a program of profit-driven corporate design. The early twentieth century witnessed a tremendous expansion in the industry of commercial advertising. At that time, the field of economic theory was undergoing a fundamental transition in its representation of the commercial marketplace. In contrast to the traditional understanding that the producers re-engineer the products they bring to market so as to suit the needs and desires of the customers, modern day businessmen attempt to re-engineer the customer/target to fit the products they will bring to market. Computer technology has advanced this process in various ways. One is in addressing the crucial challenge posed by the preeminent philosopher of fascist economics Vilfredo Pareto. More than a century ago, Pareto lamented the potential commercial profits being lost because competitive markets operate to set the price of a product at a value which a particular number of consumers will all be willing to pay. Far more profitable would be a 'market' in which each consumer was compelled to independently bid against the producer for whatever product they wished to buy. Yet at that time, Pareto saw no available mechanism to impose such an 'efficient' marketplace in which each consumer is forced into their own individual commercial silo.

With the present day entrapment of individuals into their own 'personalized' social silos, the science of re-engineering the social self has blossomed. As to be expected, particularly susceptible are young boys and young girls. In this era of AI-manipulated screen time-funded computer games of violence that leave hardly anything to the imagination of the player, there can be little doubt that young males are consciously being groomed toward anti-social personality development for the benefit of corporate profit. Given the manipulative sophistication of these gaming systems, it is fair to ask who is gaming and who is being gamed? Living in a virtual ecosystem where other humans simply do not exist and the displayed humanoids only appear for the purpose of being killed, the development of 'social' in the social self is severely suppressed.

Yet in the world of increasingly sophisticated social media manipulation, it is arguably the adolescent girl who is being most effectively targeted. Here it is the input of 'social' interactions that takes center stage, and it is the collective manipulation of those interactions that drives the business model. The adolescent girl has proven to be particularly prone to failure in developing a well-balanced social self as the result of her losing a sense of her own self in a deluge of social/economic pressures which compel her to believe that her own self-worth is to be valued strictly in terms of who she thinks other people see her to be. Whichever uploaded image of her gains the most 'likes' serves to define how she is to understand her social self. Regrettably, not only do many of those 'likes' often come from people that the targeted girl does not actually know, with the blossoming of AI technologies we can rest assured that an increasingly large fraction of those 'likes' will come from digital avatars whose sole function is to manipulate the self-image of their targets so as to optimize the economic/political profits of the media corporation. The inevitable result is the systematic deconstruction of the 'self' in the social self that society depends upon being developed in these girls.

Understandably, there is now an active controversy of whether, or more realistically, when AI technologies will evolve not only to make the vast majority of the populace economically superfluous but may 'autonomously' decide to actively eliminate that excess population. While those concerns appear to be well-founded, far less serious attention has been focused upon the fact that the basic operational function of much of the algorithmic code being presently developed for social media is clearly designed to enable that apocalypse by targeting the development of the social self within each individual. The automated sequence of websites displayed on your display screen and the omnipresent text 'suggestions' for every digital message you attempt to send are all quite specifically designed to manipulate your subsequent actions for the purpose of maximizing commercial profit while training the target to simply imitate their own 'personalized' digital avatar. Quite unambiguously, the fundamental purpose of the 'personalized' digital avatar is to assume the role of 'self' for the targeted individual so that their 'social' side can be operationally reduced to the role of an advertising bot.

As with any long term social policy, the most robust approach for achieving such a goal is the efficient monetization of the steps from here to there.

Social media corporations standardly claim that they are merely profiting from providing products that their customers want to consume. Yet, the targets of the social media corporations are not their 'customers', given the obvious fact that social media users generally do not pay directly for the services that they use. The customers of these social media giants are the companies that purchase information from these corporations regarding how to target and manipulate their own intended customers. Since profit margins are primarily determined by user screen time, the business model of social media is intrinsically based upon instilling addictive behavior in those users. Contrast the social media industry to their alter ego in the pharmaceutical industry. The Sackler family systematically developed opioid painkillers designed to ensnare millions of patients into a downward spiral of addiction. While the Sacklers exploited the physiological chemistry of the social self, the Zuckerberg's of the world target the conceptual infrastructure of the social self. While ultimately the governmental response to the Sackler addiction business has fallen far short of what would have been appropriate, nevertheless, that response does offer valuable guidance. In both situations, this is a commercially-inspired systematic addiction program which knowingly leads to the otherwise avoidable crippling and deaths for large numbers of individuals, and those responsible should be held to legal responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

A productive free democratic society is fundamentally dependent upon a citizenry among whom the substantial majority has established a well-grounded social self. This process requires the individual to constructively interact with the world at large and to productively analyze that interaction. Secondly, that derived understanding must be effectively communicated to others. If that majority allows itself to be systematically transformed into the hollow gong of the meme world that the political elite create, the fundamental justification for the democratic society is lost, and the evaporation of any perceived justification for the *Cattle* within that society will not be far behind. The individual who lacks an effective social self is severely crippled in their ability to advance society. This issue takes on added significance for a species which is capable of systematically culling its own membership on the basis of that perceived social usefulness. The biological question then ceases to be whether any particular individual can positively contribute to the success of society and instead becomes whether such individuals are judged to be superfluous by those in political control of that society. We must keep in mind that totalitarianism is not just about controlling how the people think. Totalitarianism is also about which people will be removed from the process of thinking.

Bibliography

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