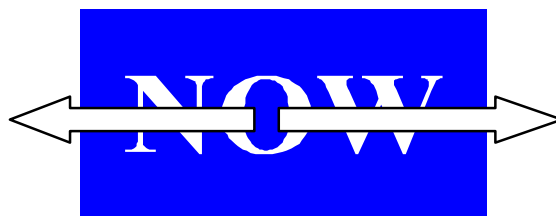


NOWletter 204



Monthly Musings — May 2018

“Deceit and Self-Deception” from Don Ross

Several years ago I read a book called “Deceit and Self-Deception” by Robert Trivers a professor of evolutionary biology. It was while I was still in busy surgical practice that allowed little time for the study of psychology or philosophy which has occupied a lot of my time since retirement. Nevertheless, the insights into the workings of the human mind and especially the 80% where most processing occurs, (the subconscious) instantly changed my life for the better. Principally because it made all the weird behaviour of my fellow humans logically explainable. I hope this summary will allow you to also gain similar insight if you haven’t already done so.

Most of the following text is taken directly from the book with some paraphrasing. His original contribution to this area is an evolutionary theory to explain why these strange and often counter-productive traits are present in all of us.

(Don’s observations on content are shown in italics, as above)

Deceit is seen in all animals because it is a necessary tool in the competition for food and sex. The more intelligent the creature the more deceit is necessary for its survival and genetic propagation. The evolution of language just makes it even more so. Sophisticated deceit however requires a high cognitive load and it has been argued that this could have, actually, been an important driver for the evolution of our brain.

Human evolution also provided us with the ability to communicate accurately just using facial expression, *probably it was the main form of communication prior to the evolution of language, which explains its sophistication.* This of course presents a problem for a liar as nuances of facial expression expose the deceit and can't be suppressed. Moreover, the cognitive load required to consciously plan and execute complicated deceptions is huge. Therefore, the hypothesis posits, for deceitful processes to be buried in the subconscious and actually believed as true thus eliminating facial indicators of lying as well as cognitive load.

It is important to emphasise that once the construct is buried in the subliminal and believed as true it becomes inaccessible to analysis and modification to an extent that is partly dependent on the personality of the individual. Those with a conservative mindset probably less prone to self analysis than liberals.

Self-deceit then, being inaccessible to logical refutation by self, is the handmaiden of deceit itself.

Notwithstanding the manifest harm caused by self-deception that will be illustrated shortly it must have served the imperative of genome propagation extremely well for it to have persisted so strongly in the psychological makeup of us hominids.

Deception is a very deep feature of life. It occurs at all levels—from gene to cell to individual to groups and it seems, by any and by all means, very necessary.

Deception tends to hide from view and is difficult to study, with self-deception being ... even worse, hiding itself more deeply in our unconscious minds.

Sometimes the subject must be ferreted out before it can be inspected and often we lack key pieces of evidence, given the complexity of the subterfuges and our ignorance of the internal psychological mechanisms of self-deceit.

Deception infects all the fundamental relationships in life: parasite and host, predator and prey, plant and animal, male and female, neighbour and neighbour, parent and offspring, and even the relationship within the organism and itself.

Some Categories Of Self-Deception

Self inflation is the rule in life to naturally improve one's self image

Derogation of others is the mirror image of self-inflation

Biases of power. It has been shown that power corrupts our mental processes immediately by disregarding the viewpoint of others and generating self-centredness. Another effect of power is overconfidence, the partner of power bias, which has been the sad cause of most of the world's man-made conflicts and catastrophes.

Biased social theory. Husband and wife may agree for example that one party is a long-suffering altruist and the other is hopelessly selfish, but disagree over which is which.

False personal narratives. We commonly believe we are more moral, more attractive, and more generous to others than in fact we really are.

Self deception and romantic love.....as Shakespeare noted: "Love is blind"

This is foisted on us by our genetic imperative for reproduction. We are thrown into a fantasy state where the shortcomings of our beloved are completely disregarded and vehemently denied while attributes real or imagined are glowingly amplified. Unlike other examples of self delusion this one has a use-by date.

As soon as the reproductive imperative has been fulfilled our genes begin their subtle genital based urgings to find new reproductive possibilities.

What are the psychological processes that help achieve self deception?

A good starting point is to trace the path of information from arrival to departure from the brain, examining every stage from biased arrival, biased encoding (organising it around false logic) and mis-remembering then misrepresenting it to others. In the process the mind continually acts to distort information flow in favour of self image, esteem and social status as well as deeply held and often totally illogical beliefs.

Putting a false image of one's self to others is probably the primary force behind the misrepresentation of self. How important is it then, that you actually believe what you present, avoiding the necessity to lie which not only involves a high cognitive load but may be detected from one's facial expression or body language?

Some examples of biasing that take place during information processing

Avoiding some information while seeking out other

I, for example, have firm beliefs about the type of coronary surgery I do and avidly seek out studies which confirm these beliefs while shunning or debunking or frankly disbelieving those that don't.

The same thing applies to anthropogenic climate change something which can be easily seen in the illogical behaviour of deniers. Illogical, that is, from my logical and unbiased point of view.

Biased encoding and interpretation of information. Visual inputs which are shown too fast for conscious recognition are able to reinforce subliminal biases without realisation by self. Our perceptual systems are set up to orient very quickly towards preferred information. In one experiment, people were selected for strong attitudes either for or against capital punishment. They were then given a mixture of facts supporting both positions. This led to more conflict and division because each group had a new set of arguments supporting their respective positions. Biased interpretation ran the process as those arguments against a position were totally rejected. This shows how self-deception is a force driving family, friends, lovers and neighbours apart although the opposite is true for group conflict where mass self-deceptions seeded in the minds of populations by those in power, including of course, elected governments, are the necessary drivers of inter group conflict.

Biased memory. There are many processes of memory that can be biased to produce welcome results. We easily remember positive information about ourselves and either forget the negative or, with time, traduce it to be either neutral or even positive. Memory is not a photo which gradually fades; it is both reconstructive and easily manipulated even by others, as has been frequently shown by the inaccuracies elicited by police interrogation.

Also, people remember their own good behaviour more easily than bad, but show no bias in recalling bad behaviour of others. Or we can invent completely fictitious memories.

Clive Palmer claims, as a child, to having sat on the lap of Chairman Mao and chatted with last emperor in the forbidden city but obfuscates wildly if asked to explain.

In arguments with others, lab work shows that we naturally tend to remember good arguments on our side and poor ones on the other and forget those that turn out badly for us and good for the other.

As John Banville put it in his novel: "Ancient light":

"Images from the far past crowd in my head and half the time I cannot tell whether they are memories or inventions. Not that there is much difference between the two, if indeed there is any difference at all. Some say that without realising it we make it up as we go along, embroidering and embellishing, and I am inclined to credit it, for Madam Memory is a great and subtle dissembler."

Rationalisation and biased reporting. We reconstruct internal motives and narratives to rationalise otherwise bad or questionable behaviour attributing such to external contingencies, thereby helping to defend ourselves. Subjects in a classic experiment had the choice of sitting next to a normal person or a severe cripple either when both were viewing the same TV program or different ones. In the former scenario they always sat next to the cripple so as not to show their bias but if there was the excuse of supposedly wanting to view a different TV program most used it to avoid sitting next to the cripple.

Denial and projection. Both are fundamental psychological processes to enhance self esteem (denial or negation of reality and recreation of new reality) Denial of personal malfeasance may necessarily require projection onto someone else. You do something wrong or stupid but rationalise it to be someone else's fault.

This mechanism which evolved to sustain and nourish self esteem, is particularly important for the gender which, by virtue of inferior physical strength and vulnerability during child rearing has been subjugated by testosterone fuelled males for millions of years. This perhaps explains why, especially after the delusions of romantic love have dissipated, wives mostly deny their errors and blame them on anything or anyone other than self.

I need to emphasise I am talking about intrinsic self-esteem that which is embedded in the subliminal brain, is inherited and is, so far as I know, never been able to be studied, only inferred. Studies show no sex difference in extrinsic self esteem which is that held in the conscious.

Cognitive dissonance The unpleasant state of tension, discomfort and often deep anguish caused by evidence against deeply held beliefs. We like our biases confirmed and are willing to manipulate incoming information to bring about that blessed state. This is called confirmation bias. In the words of a British politician:“ I will look at any additional evidence to confirm the opinion I have already reached.”

So powerful is our need to rationalise that negative evidence is immediately greeted with criticism, distortion, and dismissal so that not much dissonance need be suffered. Facts counter to one's biases tend to have a way of reinforcing these biases because they are so deeply embedded to be inaccessible to rational analysis. This leads to those with strong biases being both the least informed and most certain of their ignorant beliefs.

In one experiment people were fed politically congenial information and an immediate correction. Most of them believed the original evidence more strongly after the refutation. Another factor affecting the need for cognitive dissonance reduction is the post-hoc rationalisation of decisions that cannot be changed. You buy some useless stuff and create fantastical justifications for your gullibility.

False historical narratives are important because every country has one, they are often fiercely defended and regularly upgraded and they provide a strong underlying logic which is easily biased for interpreting social and historical trends and truth. In short, they are available to justify all actions either contemplated, under way, or already accomplished. They are mostly based on a lie or religion but once created, they act as self-deception at group level. Most people are unaware of their deceptive construct and take them to be true.

Self-deception and war. It has been said that truth is the first casualty of war. Usually truth is long dead before war begins. Regarding the Iraq war there was an imperial fantasy to fit the full grandeur of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny. The United States is now an empire, the greatest ever, and an empire creates its own reality; it will seize on 9/11 as a pretext to launch a series of interconnected, aggressive wars with lightning speed with increasing beneficial effects on themselves and those being invaded.

Here self-deception is directed at itself and the world. But self-deception as we have seen is intrinsically dangerous because important contrary, true information will be resisted and disregarded. In a neat little confirmation, when no evidence for WMDs was evinced Democrats found it easy to believe they had been lied to, and most knew about the evidence but half the Republicans had either not heard of it or had dismissed it out of hand and believed WMD had been found.

With this strength of confirmation bias you need merely to state the lie of your particular group to get almost everybody aboard and countervailing evidence ends up being cited as evidence.

Overconfidence and active avoidance of any knowledge of the potential downside to one's decisions are the great drivers of self-deception.

Religion and self-deception. Some people think of religion as complete self-deception, all of it nonsense counterfactual and, in the extreme, having nothing but negative side effects. In this view the entire enterprise is self-deluded at the outset, so religion should be studied as the well-developed system of self-deception that it certainly is. These people, however, have no theory for how this malady could have spread so far, to every culture and almost every human being in every culture, by self-deception alone.

The author provides theories for this, mostly based on group co-operation and well-being. They are beyond the scope of this review but evidence that the human brain before the age of three, a time we have no memory of and before the development of the neocortex, is highly susceptible to the implantation of life-long irrefutable beliefs/ delusions. 1.

Religion often preaches against self-deception because it interferes with one's ability to know yourself and your god. Thus, the golden rule (*Not the one which argues that the one with the gold makes the rules*) the "do unto others" one which counters much, of your unconscious self-deceptive tendencies in favour of self over others. And not forgetting Jesus' parable against self-deception: "and why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam in your own. In other words, instead of denying your own fault and projecting onto others, admit it, the better to perceive your other faults. And in the Lords prayer one asks for sins to be forgiven but only in so far as you forgive the sins of others.

The value of being aware. The lack of awareness of deceit and self-deceit in others can harm us. We may be too likely to believe them, especially when they are in a position of authority. We may believe what is printed, we may believe con-artists and we may easily embrace false historical narratives. Be eternally vigilant as the world is saturated with deceit and self-deception. We can be aware of our biases and self-deceit but it is rarely possible to change them for the better even if we so desire, a real paradox and tragedy of our genome and evolution.

On the other hand, consciousness of deceit and self-deceit allows us to enjoy it more, to understand it more deeply, to guard against it better and finally, to fight such tendencies in ourselves. Mostly it gives us greater insight into the social world surrounding us and the deeper self-deceptions we tell ourselves and our loved ones. But remember, seeing your self-deception in retrospect is one thing but decreasing its frequency in the future is much more difficult.

So, his parting advice: **Don't believe all that you think!**

Don Ross

J Bargh. Phd. Before you know it: The unconscious reasons we do what we do. William Heinemann London

A very worthwhile little fiction to show how this precious knowledge can change you life is:

https://www.amazon.com.au/Leadership-Self-Deception-Getting-Out-Box-ebook/dp/B00GUPYRUS/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1524119474&sr=8-1&keywords=leadership+and+self+deception

Poem: field and sky by Colin Oliver

At the willow's* gap
 we step through the hedge
 and are nothing but field and sky.
 Hares race, lurching
 to a tussle,
 their frenzy printed in the soil.
 The kestrel soars –
 pausing, head down,
 to sew with the finest needle. (1)

I lifted this poem and the following note from James Nichol's Contemplative Enquiry blog at:
<https://contemplativeinquiry.wordpress.com/author/contemplativeinquiry/> ...James says:

I like this poem for two reasons. The first is as a beautifully written nature poem. The second is the experience it triggered for me in the second and third lines:

we step through the hedge
 and are nothing but field and sky.

It is as if the hedge is a portal, and stepping through it takes us into another world, changing us into field and sky. Yet it is the same world, experienced differently. In this version we contain the natural world, holding the lives of hare and kestrel.

Contemplative moments like this – whether directly in nature or evoked in poetry – can take me out of my bounded sense of self and place me more fully in the flow of experience and relationship. In their afterglow, I feel a certain poignancy at the fragile, ephemeral, not-to-be-taken-for-granted quality of such connections.

**salix caprea*, also called pussy willow

(1) Colin Oliver *High River* Sudbury: Downstream Press, 2006 (Available from poetry section of the shop at <http://www.headless.org/>)

Krishnamurti

Selected early talks & writings — An extract from pages 177&178

(In 2004 I was given a copy of an extensive analysis of the early talks and writing of J' Krishnamurti. The author or compiler wishes to remain anonymous. It is a great work and in my opinion encapsulates the teachings and, in particular, catches the essential aspects of what is involved in the recognition of both the individual and the undivided aspects of our being. This short piece from the two-volume extracts provides a taste. If anyone wants the complete package let me know and I will supply. Alan)

*Extract: —Questioner comment in italics.—*Krishnamurti answers in normal text.

“What you speak of as the poise of reason and love, in the liberated man, is a twofold poise, (a) It means that love and reason must be equally balanced, so that there is not too much of the one and too little of the other; (b) It means that both, taken together, must preserve their poise against all impacts from without which might tend to throw them off their balance. For example, nothing can happen to the liberated man which can make him, even for a moment, hate instead of loving, or cease to look upon everything with the eye of all-embracing truth. Is not that so?”

Naturally. Each — that is, reason and love — must be balanced in itself and not in contradiction, in opposition, to each other. If you treat love as its own eternity and reason as its own eternity, then, because there is a poise and balance in them each, there is also a poise between the two. Hence they are able to withstand the impacts from outside. That balance, then, is pure action; it is outward-going, never relying on external things, on external reactions. That is why there must first be the love of the single individual — though this is not that pure, balanced love, naturally. To arrive at that detached, perfectly poised love, you must go through this attachment to the individual — with all its limitations, sorrows, corruptions, struggles and so on. But it does not mean that in itself it is the real thing. So the wise man, the man with the attentive, highly concentrated mind, is not satisfied to be limited by the love of one, but is all the time seeking to expand and to grow, and to give of that love which has its roots in eternity. Everyone wants to be practical, to understand life practically. Now the most practical man in the world is the liberated man, because he has discovered the true value of all things. That discovery is illumination.

“This last kind of poise has its parallel in the technique of a great artist, gathered up, as it were, and held in suspense, but ready to manifest as soon as the occasion presents itself.”

Like the poise of an eagle on a delicate branch: it can fly high, or fly low; it is poised, always ready in suspense.

“The liberated man, in other words, is the artist in life who can recreate everything about him and all events that may happen to him in terms of love and reason.”

Please understand — that is perfectly true. Whatever happens to *him* he can recreate, not what happens to others. Some of you expect a liberated man to

mould *your* life — in other words, you are seeking miracles, a way of escape from this conflict. That is not the way to understand. The liberated man, through his gathered-up technique held in suspense, recreates everything in terms of reason and love; and hence is free of all incidents and experience, because he has already gathered up the essence of all experiences. So “the liberated man is an artist in life who can recreate everything about him” ... in terms of his own realisation of all life.

“The man who has not yet achieved liberation lives, or thinks that he lives, from his own separate centre. When he has reached liberation he sees this as a focus merely and lives through it, not from it.”

That is, before, he was a point through which life could express itself; after he attains liberation, he becomes the whole of life, no longer a point.

“If this is so, then does he feel himself as living equally through all similar foci as well?”

There are no foci then; there is no circumference to limit.

“Or is he conscious of some special link with the focus which he has hitherto looked upon as himself? Possibly this question is wrongly put, but an answer would be interesting.”

Surely, if I may say so, the question is wrongly put, in the sense that it approaches the idea objectively, whereas, in this pure being, there is no objective or subjective state of mind. The moment you are self-conscious, there is in each one the subjective and the objective. The realisation of absolute happiness is a state in which there is no objective or subjective consciousness. It is a state of pure being. The moment you cling to individual existence you must have a focal point through which life can express itself, and hence the question arises: Does the individual, achieving realisation, add such a focal point as his contribution to the whole of life? Such anxiety to perpetuate individual existence comes from your limitation, not from your understanding of life. You are looking at this from the point of view of a purely individualistic existence; you want the scar of individuality to continue and to be preserved in fulfilment. To me, individuality is not an end; it is a means to realisation. Hence there is no question of subject and object or of foci. It is, rather, a question of an immense realisation of Being, in which there is no separateness, no individuality, and no reaction. These questions can only be put and understood, if you are not examining the question and answer with a finite mind. (Please do not imagine that you must become mystical or occult to understand!) So, you realise that you cannot approach Truth through any path. Paths are a division of life by a finite mind, and hence are an illusion. If you treat the whole of life, with all its light and shade, pains, struggles, pleasures, ecstasies, joys, and sorrows as one thing, and assimilate and gather up and hold all this in reserve, perfecting your technique for right action under all circumstances, then you will understand that state of Pure Being which is dynamic, not static; which is neither annihilating nor establishing the individual.

(We had been speaking of meditation on the lines of Metzinger's kitchen version and Graeme sent me this quotation and the link to its source. I have tended to steer clear of Osho due to the chaos in the final days of the cult he founded and his addiction to Rolls Royce motor cars but earlier, before all the scandals, I read some of his serious writing and there is no doubt he was a very clear and gifted being. Alan)

Osho on meditation from Graeme Wilkins

And the day the search stopped, the day I was not seeking for something, the day I was not expecting something to happen, it started happening. A new energy arose – out of nowhere. It was not coming from any source. It was coming from nowhere and everywhere. It was in the trees and in the rocks and the sky and the sun and the air – it was everywhere. And I was seeking so hard, and I was thinking it is very far away. And it was so near and so close.

There are not two things, God and the world. God is the world if you have eyes, clear eyes, without any dreams, without any dust of the dreams, without any haze of sleep; if you have clear eyes, clarity, perceptiveness, there is only God. Then somewhere God is a green tree, and somewhere else God is a shining star, and somewhere else God is a cuckoo, and somewhere else God is a flower, and somewhere else a child and somewhere else a river – then only God is. The moment you start seeing, only God is.

Meditation is not a result of your efforts, meditation is a happening. When your efforts drop, suddenly meditation is there, the benediction of it, the blessedness of it, the glory of it. It is there like a presence, luminous, surrounding you and surrounding everything. It fills the whole earth and the whole sky.

<https://realization.org/p/osho/my-awakening.html>

Cash Rewards for Informers in Tibet

By Tenzin Samten / April 13, 2018

A document issued by the Chinese authorities on March 13 in Tibet's Nagchu county promises cash rewards of 100,000 yuan (US \$16,000 / £11,500) for people reporting on "criminal" activities – which include promoting Tibet's national culture or language; supporting HH the Dalai Lama; supporting the "Middle Way Approach"; demands for greater cultural or religious rights and environmental activism, among others.

To read more go to: <http://www.contactmagazine.net/articles/cash-rewards-informers-tibet/>

MEETINGS

Sunday — 6th May

Old Power and New Power – Hilary Armstrong and Peter Melser

Peter introduced us to the current shifts in social power under his heading ‘New Power Transformations’. These manifest as networks of interest where large numbers of concerned citizens form special interest groups; and, by means of social media combined with ground roots collective action, make things happen with or without the assistance or approval of the established, old power institutions. Getup and Uber were considered as examples, and the organising structure of these new power systems or platforms, as a triangle comprising: the Platform Owner, Participants and Super Participants. In the case of Uber these would be the owner designers of the system (platform), the drivers and the clients or passengers. Peter referred to a book NEW POWER by Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans as recommended reading. (Heimans was on the panel of Q&A on Monday 7 May). Peter provided handouts to help us assimilate some complex aspects of these developments. I found myself awakened to conditions in which I have become gradually immersed without, until this talk, being fully aware of their significance. Alan

Sunday — 3rd June

Emily Dickinson- Joan Kirkby

Emily Dickinson is a constant reference in my life, and Joan is both a long-time friend and a distinguished Dickinson scholar. Among other things, she taught American Literature at Macquarie where she and Margot met. She is the author of books on Emily and has published several papers on Emily’s life and times.

There are a number of additional projects for which dates have not yet been decided:

An Uncommon Collaboration , Bohm and Krishnamurti — Graeme Wilkins

Metzinger’s Kitchen — Life as Meditation — Alan Mann

The Master & His Emissary — Dave Knowles

The DSG Survey — Garry Booth

For your diary.

The above dialogues will be allocated according to availability of the speakers on:

Sunday 1st July

Sunday 5th August

Sunday 2nd September

Sunday 7th October

Gathering as usual at 10am for a 10.30 start. Please let us know if you plan to come. Give us an email or phone call a few days before the meeting so we have an idea of numbers in advance.

Alan & Margot

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