

What Is Inevitable (?)

"And of my loyalty none could doubt, because having always kept faith I could not now learn how to break it; for he who has been faithful and honest, as I have, cannot change his nature; and my poverty is a witness to my honesty." — Niccolò Machiavelli, Letter to Vettori

For all who can read this. For those who sacrifice body and soul for the sake of knowledge.
...and for Garniss. We all love you.

Words have interpreted society, nature, and the rest of the physical universe since thoughts became symbolized with sound, written since speech became illustrated. But most symbols, spoken or written, represent reality's substrate poorly. These words are so doomed, bound to inadequacy. But words are something we have, and they can always be re-vetted and updated.

A functional human can naturally form ideas from combinations of learned words and gestures. You are special; you can read these words because you are literate; you have been trained to translate visual symbols into words and thoughts. But what about this...

Water is fire and clouds are dirt and red is blue and up is down... love is hate, truth is false.

Words do not always correspond to reality.

Words convey many mistakes, obfuscations, distortions, or outright lies. And words are inadequate tools for fully modeling reality. Yet reading is useful, in spite of all this danger. We read because some written words approach truth.

Sun makes light

These words can be translated into any language and evoke the same mental replica of reality in anyone with working eyes who has been outside during a relatively cloudless day.

Some say words just can't capture reality. Some even say that there is no such thing as truth. Yet almost all living humans use words pragmatically to survive. Beyond using words to deny the meaning of words, some even try to use words to shroud reality. Maybe you profess with words that reality is an illusion! Unbelievable... really!? No non-human animal is afflicted with this absurd psychosis. To be sure, this defensive retreat of defeated sophists is nothing but wordplay, a distracting arson of logos. But nothing can gain real traction if it doesn't exist; it is only possible to deny reality with words, never via demonstration or action. Such nonsense has been effectively refuted time and again, only to rise once more when the memes of a waning sociopolitical power become indefensibly absurd. Alas, the seemingly quirky nature of the semi-perceptible edges of

our matrix, dimly detected only by physicists, reveals much about human limitations on cognition and perception, less about the non-existence of perceived reality.

While humans experience reality like many other animals with brains, we seem to interpret it much more deeply than most other animals, and we are capable of thinking, articulating, and communicating about it through symbols. But selective forces have limited the degree to which we could reason our way out of reproduction, and our apparently rational minds are actually on rigid social rails. Humans think a lot, sure, but the direction our perception and cognition can take us must not have diminished our ancestors' evolutionary fitness. Thus, through a combination of learning instincts, acculturation, and reason we believe something, yet our instinct blindness only allows easy awareness of the last. We are absolutely prone to perceiving and abiding by social taboos, and we generally don't let reason interfere. It is easy to imagine a social benefit of such instinct. The set of beliefs held by a group is thus limited by social dimensionality and communication, not raw perception.

To be different from the people around oneself is to be banished, a foreigner, an enemy, or a crazy person. From the time of our first speaking ancestors up to the chaotic megacities spawned by the techno-industrial revolution, non-conformity, failure to withhold controversial ideas from expression, has resulted in diminished reproduction, outright ostracism, or death. Ironically, what people present outwardly is never all of what they feel, yet most humans derive only some of their conceptual universe from direct sensory input. Usually much more belief comes from the other people around them.

Yearning for something to believe in and following the belief system of a group are overwhelming human instincts, and they came to exist after our lineage separated from Pan, the chimpanzees. These psychological adaptations' evolutionary underpinnings, the selective pressures endowing neural adaptations that construct belief as much or more from communication with others as from actual sensory perception of reality's substrate, have produced a human psyche both ludicrous and improbable; one that doesn't bother much with consciously reconciling conflicts between what is perceived with the senses and what is learned from the group.

This array of psychological adaptations happened in a distal twig of a branching four dimensional fractal of cosmically ubiquitous elements with tendencies to form large, self-organizing, replicating, mutating molecules...

...after replicating nucleic acid/sugar-phosphate chains incorporated proteins that augmented their replication.

...after the protein generating parts of these nucleic chains, alleles, and the introns between them diversified and expanded into protein factories that eventually encapsulated themselves in

protein-built cell walls.

...after cellular nuclei suppressed lateral gene transfer and canalized evolution.

...after sexual reproduction transformed independent cell lines into gametic collaborations, thus populations and lineages thereof, freeing alleles to evolve independently from their host.

...after the cellular leks ushered in by sexual reproduction transformed into collaborative colonies, later eventually multicellular organisms, and then organisms with developmentally-orchestrated complexes of tissues, structures, and structural systems dedicated to keeping gametes alive and allowing for their sexual reproduction.

...after one such structural system integrated electrochemical signaling mechanisms that coordinated sensory input and muscle movements.

...after some of these mechanisms became concentrated into neural clusters that allowed for information processing.

...after neural clusters emerged into consciousnesses.

...after consciousnesses loosened reflexive responses to stimuli and allowed for cognitive choice between competing emotional stimuli.

...after such emotional signaling coalesced around patterned social interactions and selfish cooperation between individuals...

It might seem like this is where the path ends, but several animal phyla have achieved this stage. It is very prevalent in mammals, our group of vertebrates. Many mammals have evolved complex neural circuitry that modulates social interaction: cetaceans, ungulates, elephants, carnivores, and primates among them. What came next could have happened to any of these taxa, but, by fate, it happened in a group of social mammals that thrived on the energetic brain-fuel provided by the evolutionary radiation of fruit-bearing angiosperms. Among primates, highly-complex social behavior came to dominate survival in the Cenozoic. Monkeys and apes can engage in deception. They learn new ways to do things and copy each other's ideas. They use tools. In primates, large brains opened the door to a vast array of socially responsive psychological mechanisms modulated by the processing of ever more complicated arrangements of social data. The apes took this to the extreme, the human clade the farthest, but it was not until very recently that we crossed what might be thought of as THE threshold. After we became social apes, after we started walking, after we started eating meat, after we started using tools, after we started manufacturing weapons that made us the most powerful predators, by far, on the savannah, after all this, something seemingly unique in the history of life seems to have happened. A new array of communication and perception mechanisms evolved that transformed the bipedal primates into humans. It transformed the way they processed information, the way they made tools and weapons, the way they foraged, and the way they formed groups.

Of course, belonging to a group meant life or death well-before we became the world's most deadly fighters and intense tool-users, so it is not just the group, per se, that changed things. What

changed things is the way the group transformed with our peculiar and extreme runaway selection on intelligence, social cognition, and communication. It was really not so long ago that most of the psychological adaptations that define us emerged.

And we are definitely something special among living things. Knowledge production work over the last 6,000 or so years has led to bizarre, descriptive, time-transcending threads of self awareness; the evolutionary tree of life grew a branch that drew a facsimile of itself, however crude. The biological capacity for this, while older than the Holocene, has only recently been achieved. Chimp societies range from about 15 members to about 150 members. Our species made a number of changes since the lineage split; we started walking pretty soon after we diverged from chimps between 5 and 8 million years ago and stone tool manufacture came at about the halfway point along that path. After lithic technology became ubiquitous our brains started to expand faster, at first following a roughly cubic growth curve. Tool complexity roughly follows this curve. We have little evidence, but it is reasonable to induce that communication and group dynamics were also changing. Only about 350 thousand years ago do we see evidence for use of pigments, and abstract art seems to come later, about 100,000 years ago. Rate of tool complexity intensification goes exponential in these last few hundreds of millennia. The last million years of evolution have been an age of accelerating runaway natural selection on psychological adaptations, and, as natural selection works best on alleles in large populations, it seems unlikely that the selective process has stopped.

Groups offer many benefits: mating access, cooperative survival versus predators, collaborative hunting, defense against resource competitors, and protection from groups of marauding conspecifics. Conversely, competition for resources and reproduction, rivalry, occurs within groups of all social animals. Groups are good for us, but group integrity is thwarted by internal strife. It is not an evolutionary conundrum unique to humans, but humans form exponentially more complex groups, usually based on abstract symbols or ideas. We can induce that multiple groups of pre-humans existed at any one time, and competition between groups would have been inevitable. We would expect conflict; both human and chimp groups fight, and the archaeological record is largely a sequence of weapons.

This ubiquitous paradox of natural selection had a unique effect on our highly intelligent and communicative group. We conceal ovulation and copulation. We engage in secrecy and deception way more readily and consistently than any other animal; we mask our true intentions and suspect correctly that others will always mask theirs. This happened before we started using abstract gestures and sounds to interact, but communication via these sorts of symbols intensified things greatly. With abstract communication, group sizes could increase, mutualistic collaborations could thrive into economies, and deception can be deviously organized.

Ultimately the use of complex, abstract, meaningful lexicons of auditory symbols, language, made belonging to a group equivalent to thinking like that group. Knowledge could readily cross generations. Our pre-agricultural ancestors would have gained both survival-relevant knowledge and social fitness from this communication, but the distance that learning could divert behavior from basic survival was almost certainly small when everyone was just barely surviving. Necessity promoted language that communicated reality relatively accurately with respect to survival activities, and it promoted legends that stored knowledge about it. But symbolic communication more importantly provided a vast new landscape for social interaction. Language, of course, evolved around social interaction; the lexicons of meaning it captures necessarily orbit social entities. Communication is always social.

Deities provide an interesting reflection on humanity's tendency to mentally process the physical world in social terms: When we in foraging societies think and communicate about the dynamic phenomena in the natural world we use symbolism steeped in social meaning. Rain, thunder, the ocean, the Sun, planets, and many other things are given living identities and worshiped through actions that result in survival. Many other examples of such social bias to our psychologies are readily available... we are capable of computing social situations of staggering mathematic complexity with a processing speed no mathematician could hope to match by abstracting the problem with numbers and functions. To reiterate, symbolic communication is itself a social phenomenon, and, as a result, social entities and contexts form the foundational subjects and objects of all communication. And our ancestors gained greatly from survival-related environmental data that could be archived in this social system.

A pre-agricultural human ancestor would have lost little when social and environmental memes got mixed up into a primitive worldview. But under circumstances of consistent abundance, a hyper-social human could gain everything without all the dangerous fussing about in the wilderness. And agriculture brought abundance on a massive scale. As long as a highly social person fulfills a simple role in a pastoral, agrarian, or industrial society, that person can eat without thinking too much about the extra-social world. Once we humans started living in towns and cities, adherence, feigned or sincere, to the prevailing system of beliefs/social rules became the only really essential thing.

Many secular thinkers still artificially separate nature from nurture, diminishing the former in an attempt to give weight to the latter. They are, of course, overlooking the sublime; every single one of us has billions of neurons and gobs of circuitry canalizing us into some system of beliefs/social rules shared with other humans. You will never overcome it as long as you are a human living with other humans. Most people don't openly question discordance between their group's beliefs and their own sensory perception, though many readily see such hypocrisy in other groups. You probably don't spend much time questioning conflicts of beliefs and reality in

the everyday people around you. Such are pretty sensitive subjects!

A human should believe or outwardly express belief even if what they believe or express to believe defies their senses. Yet, while largely modular and universal, the neural underpinnings of conformist behavior are variable among individuals in societies. Some appear to be more prone to outright belief, or fervent expression thereof, than others. It is unclear why, but there seems to be a correlation between skepticism, admitted or hidden, and those who rule. Most individuals inside a society are manipulated by a belief system. Those doing the manipulating are the powerful, and, generally, they have been the most reproductively successful since the pattern started. The submissive are, of course, not without some reproductive hope (especially post-agricultural revolution), but those ostracized or executed have little or none.

And so we operate our lives on terms we dare not express.

Hence the timelessness of Sun Tzu...

Hence the infamous reality of Machiavelli's exposé of Medici political tactics...

Hence the seemingly tragic truth of the 48 Laws of Power:

So far, pretty-much every centrally-organized, top-down, ideologically-driven philosophical/political system, from theocracy to nationalistic fascism to socialism/communism, has failed to be anything but a device for a mafia of sociopathic, violent narcissists to dupe the conscientious and coerce the politically disenfranchised. So does that mean that something like the 48 Laws are, underneath all seemingly idealistic political movements, the ultimate reality of human social organization?

Yikes! Most of the people we know are not really like that! And won't such a formless basis for power lead to organized, large, but otherwise ape-like gangs? Wouldn't it lead naturally to tyranny and genocide at societal, national, and global levels if this is the mantra of secular humanity? If institutionalized deception is the inevitable outcome of human nature's synthesis with social organization, then these questions are obviously irrelevant and naïve. With the power of organized religion waning, populism metastasizing through the democracies of the world, and the multiple embarrassing failures of socialism and other centrally-controlled economies, one wonders if anything but tyranny is even possible for more than the blink of an eye among such Pleistocene apes, however smart and cooperative they can sometimes be.

But one encounters such purity in conversations over Machiavelli's honesty, such ruthlessness among those who refuse to talk about it.

This seems important.

Is the apparently inevitably Machiavellian nature of secular society an illusion? Might it be the byproduct of hopeless reality-worshippers never really experiencing a stable society? Would it be different if we did? Might there be something then that actually unifies us? Might there be something real that provides the symbolic and philosophical substrate necessary for stability?

Conspiracy theories and Armageddon hysterias might be mostly the delusion of paranoid Pleistocene brains, but human history does seem riddled with sociopolitical intrigue and large-scale catastrophe. Sometimes it feels like we have very little time to find something; the brightly glowing, but obviously dying embers of the overtly flawed, obsolete religious fables that provided some basis for social stability are losing energy quickly. Counter-Enlightenment 19th Century political ideas did not stand up to the stern vetting applied by the 20th Century. Nobody believes compromised leaders as they manipulate ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, and the plethora of other juvenile, untested socioeconomic and sociopolitical "-isms" from their already-ambiguous original forms. We see that they have little capacity to check absolute power. Is all humanity in a precarious position? Does truth have the power to organize a society?

Human nature is the traditional bane of utopians and socialists, and since the less-than-glorious rise of Stalin, the bloody chaos of the Spanish Civil War, and Mao's great leaps, the farce of a violent mafia waving the banner of idealistic social progressivism has been obvious. And how arrogant, how elitist some of us are to assume possession of the mastery of human nature that would be required to organize us all! We know enough to know we are pretty clueless about the way humans do or should behave in groups. We know enough to see that humans are pretty rebellious and that the rabbit hole of human nature goes very, very deep. We know enough to know that nearly any political philosophy, content independent, can be utilized for power by a mafia. In reality, the only things it seems we can do correctly as groups is solve urgent problems and organize to achieve short-term common goals. Almost every time someone starts to talk about the group as such it all goes horribly wrong.

Sometimes it has gone wronger than others, however. Politics and economies have emerged as pragmatic solutions to the problem of human relations. In situations where conditions are right, where people are affluent and informed, where they are not broken, where outside powers don't corrupt, solutions emerge through finding consensus. They are not justified by any infallible political philosophy, rather they are a group of people talking with each other about power and how to subdivide it without resorting to violence. The more socioscientifically enlightened the group, the more effective the process. Functional, independent groups have rarely, if ever, been imposed; independent groups either emerge or they don't actually exist.

As we understand more we will discover places where we can effectively beat our sociopolitically Pleistocene genes. We can hope to generate memes with these discoveries that

will allow large numbers of people to lead better lives. We cannot impose, for we do not have that power without undermining the balance of the whole system, so the memetic products of this mission must be designed for voluntary consumers. We will do this most effectively working together.

Why think like this? Well, it seems like an extra-academic group of some kind is bound to emerge from the science of human evolution because the academy does not currently structure itself as a reproductively viable society. History has proven that memes must nurture reproduction to prosper, and the Academy is anything but a nursery. Humans benefit from belonging to groups that benefit their fitness, groups benefit from sensible organization, and clever humans should be able to figure out a way to use what we know about our evolved psychology to overcome many of the organizational hurdles that plague us. It seems like something inevitable.

And maybe an optimistic consideration of the possibility of such a group is itself part of the meme of the group's organization. It would be nice to derive some sense of identity from an outwardly secular economic society of ethical integrity, knowing that such a society, if participated in honestly, would ultimately culminate in domination of a larger financial network where deception and manipulation have lurked for centuries. It seems like it need not be coercive at all. We can be selfish about our altruism while we lay the foundations of a new society, an opt-in, bottom up, universally inclusive, power-oriented, sociopolitical structure based on some semblance of truth about human nature. We can agree that we want power, both individually and collectively. We can agree that sufficient truth about power can be approached with words to be negotiated without violence.

It seems like if we could identify each other we could be internally transparent and outwardly honest with all but those who would organize to hurt us. It seems like there could be a real society where reality itself was substituted as the symbolic basis for cohesion. Maybe it is just delusion, but it sure seems possible.

Such a group would have to acknowledge that reality can only be approached, not defined, with perception and words, and that thus there can never be a static basis for power captured by words. Shouldn't anyone or any group claiming to have found anything like an ultimate true way be treated with skepticism? Additionally, people differ in intelligence and aptitude. It seems like there should be broad freedom of thought and expression; people will have different paths in life with different outcomes. There will be social experimentation and frequent failures. Plurality would seem to be both unavoidable for historical reasons and inherent to improvement. Tolerance might be subdivided and redefined to handle this such that frontiers would be managed with dialogue, not violence.

All societies must manage knowledge and ignorance, and no social experiment can hope to generate a society of pure reason. Yet reason alone produces conscious patterns from senses, and senses alone elicit reality. We will increase collective quality of life only as we strive individually and continuously for knowledge about human nature and how to mitigate it within our families, friends, acquaintances, societies, and ultimately everyone in the world. That is our group.

Can a group sustain without evangelism? Can it survive without simplistic memes as fuel? Is a leaderless group even a group? Can a faithless group actually persist that is based entirely on our sensory perception, reason, and careful communication thereof? Can such a concept coalesce into a unit that exhibits the internal compassion and cooperation of a cult, religion, philosophical society, social club, or political party? It seems like it could. Of course at some level it already does, but it really hasn't gone viral as such yet. With neither a simple storyline nor a dominant leader it goes against our Pleistocene-born instincts... so we have to try a little.

Maybe if we talk about it with the people around us we will find we are already everywhere! Maybe we, across literate societies, are the ever silent, often fearful, majority.

It seems like we should be intolerant of the deliberate manipulation of people's belief systems for power. Groups of the sincere-yet-ignorant are largely harmless unless guided by recalcitrant illuminati. It seems like we should mobilize to defend ourselves from poorly-led groups when they are an issue and conspire against the designs of their conniving pulpiteers.

And each of us is guilty of deception every day; it is an aspect of human nature. Embracing this reality, none of us can even really trust ourselves with power! So shouldn't we constantly nominate good leaders and routinely remove them before they can move to consolidate their position? Shouldn't we direct serious energy toward revealing the way that power behaves as an opiate in the mind of any leader?

Hopeless? Naïve? Premature? probably certainly... but what is inevitable anyway? There will be groups, and there will be leaders. What group, if any, will organize us all?