



🐘 Elephant?

An important but unacknowledged feature of how our minds work; an introspective taboo.

We, human beings, are a species that's not only capable of acting on hidden motives—we're designed to do it.

The fact that we're self-deceived—and that we've built elaborate institutional structures to accommodate our hidden motives—makes us far more interesting

straightforward characters aren't nearly as compelling, perhaps because they strike us as less than fully human.

🎨 Art

Red ochre engravings have been dated to **100,000** years ago (..) the earliest rock art appeared some **40,000** years

Art is a costly behavior, both in time and energy, but at the same time it's impractical. Art doesn't put food on your table, look after your children, or keep you warm at night—at least not directly. So art, on its face, seems like a waste of time and energy.

"I'm so confident in my survival that I can afford to waste time and energy."

"showing off" is one of the important motives we have for making art, and that many details of our artistic instincts have been shaped substantially by this motive.

Even today we encumber ourselves in the name of style. High heels, for example, are awkward for walking and brutal on the feet—which is precisely how they're able to convey the message, "I care about fashion."

Art is an animal behavior, after all, and we need something like the fitness-display theory to explain how art pays for itself in terms of enhanced survival and reproduction, especially in the primitive ("folk art") context of our foraging ancestors.

Intrinsic properties are the qualities that reside "in" the artwork itself, those that a consumer can directly perceive

The **extrinsic properties**, meanwhile, are mostly an aside or an afterthought (..) In the fitness-display theory, extrinsic properties are crucial to our experience of art.

Our disdain for replicas strongly suggests that we often use art as something other than a trigger for sensory or intellectual experiences.

🐘 The perfect hypocrisy

When others are constantly probing our beliefs - internalize the belief, while remaining inconsistent enough to occasionally give in to temptation.

We're so vulnerable to being hurt that we're given the capacity to distort as a gift.

"To understand most important ideas in psychology," says social psychologist Jonathan Haidt in The Happiness Hypothesis, *"you need to understand how the mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict."*

the very architecture of our brains makes it possible for us to behave hypocritically—to believe one set of things while acting on another.

Information is sensitive in part because it can threaten our self-image and therefore our social image.

🐘 Synchrony-solidarity effect

In 2009, Stanford psychologists Scott Willemuth and Chip Heath demonstrated this **synchrony-solidarity** effect experimentally.

Students to perform synchronized movements (such as marching around campus together) before moving to economic exercises.

"people acting in synchrony with others cooperated more in subsequent group economic exercises, even in situations requiring personal sacrifice."

When daily life is clamorous, even a few seconds' reprieve, taken in the context of fellowship, can be a powerful experience

🐘 Art: handicap principle

A live performance, or even more so an improvised one, won't be as technically perfect as a prerecorded one, but it succeeds by putting the artists' talents on full display.

Performing live is a handicap. With such little margin for error, the results are that much more impressive.

🐘 Realism

Realism did two things for the viewer: it provided a rare and enjoyable sensory experience (**intrinsic** properties), and it demonstrated the artist's virtuosity (**extrinsic** properties).

In the **Age of Mechanical Reproduction** very perfection became the mark of cheap, mass-produced goods. In response, those consumers who could afford handmade goods learned to prefer them, not only in spite of, but because of their imperfections.

The advent of photography wreaked similar havoc on the realist aesthetic in painting. Painters could no longer hope to impress viewers by depicting scenes as accurately as possible, as they had strived to do for millennia. "In response," writes Miller, "painters invented new genres based on new, non-representational aesthetics: impressionism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, abstraction. Signs of handmade authenticity became more important than representational skill. *The brush-stroke became an end in itself.*

We're choosing to celebrate the skill and effort of an artist over the intrinsically superior results of a more mechanical process.

🐘 Warm glow

Wealthy people often perform unskilled volunteer work (and are celebrated for it), even when their time is worth vastly more on the open market. (...) Andreoni theorized, we do charity in part because of a selfish psychological motive: it makes us happy.

🐘 Self-deception

Human beings are self-deceived because self-deception is useful. It allows us to reap the benefits of selfish behavior while posing as unselfish in front of others

Knowledge suppression is useful only when two conditions are met:

- (1) when others have partial visibility into your mind;
- (2) when they're judging you, and meting out rewards or punishments, based on what they "see" in your mind.

Just as camouflage is useful when facing an adversary with eyes, self-deception can be useful when facing an adversary with mind-reading powers.

🐘 Effective altruism

Inspired by the work of Singer (along with Karnofsky, Hassenfeld, and others), effective altruists hope to change how people donate their time, effort, and money to good causes maximizing return on donations (**ROD**)

🐘 Fashion

Fashion often distinguishes itself from mere clothing by being conspicuously impractical, non-functional, and sometimes even uncomfortable.

"The history of European costume," writes Alison Lurie, *"is rich in styles in which it was literally impossible to perform any useful function: sleeves that trailed on the floor, . . . powdered wigs the size, color and texture of a large white poodle, . . . and corsets so tight that it was impossible to bend at the waist or take a normal breath."*

🐘 Artistic discernment

Discernment helps us answer a question we're often asking ourselves as we navigate the world: **"Which way is high status?"**

we use art as one of our criteria for choosing mates (and teammates). But without the ability to distinguish "good" art from "bad" art, we run the risk of admiring less fit, lower-status artists.

Humans also need to consume a lot of art in order to calibrate our judgments, to learn which things are high status.

"An untrained ear can't appreciate the genius of Bach."

In this way, discernment becomes important not only for differentiating high quality from low quality (and good artists from mediocre ones), but also as a fitness display unto itself.

The fact that the princess could feel the pea, even under the mattresses (i.e., when handicapped), is itself an impressive feat, a mark of her high birth.

Discernment, artistic or otherwise, is a critical skill (..) how rarely we're impressed by truly unimpressive people. When it happens, we feel as though we've been taken in by a charlatan. It can even be embarrassing to demonstrate poor aesthetic judgment.

🐘 Rationalization

Rationalization, sometimes know to neuroscientist as **confabulation**, is the production of fabricated stories made up without any conscious intention to deceive. They're not lies, exactly, but neither are they the honest truth. (...) When we rationalize or confabulate, we're handing out counterfeit reasons (..) "Reasons" are the verbal explanations we give to account for our behavior. Reasons can be true, false, or somewhere in between

🐘 Cooperation

Cooperation is hard. Groups that are chock full of peaceful, rule-following cooperators are ripe for exploitation.

🐘 Consciousness

Consciousness is simply **too slow** to manage the frenetic give-and-take of body language. Consciousness is also **too narrow**. We can focus our spotlight attention on only a small handful of things at once.

🐘 Ideals

It would be a mistake to conclude that virtue requires us to somehow "rise above" our biological impulses. Humans are **living creatures** through and through; we can't transcend our biology any more than we can transcend the laws of physics. So if we define virtue as something that arises from nonbiological causes, we set a literally impossible standard. If we want to improve ourselves, it must somehow be through our biological heritage. (...) We absolutely need ideals—not just as personal goals to strive for, but also as yardsticks by which to judge others and to let ourselves be judged in return.

🐘 Prussian school system

Compulsory state-sponsored education traces its heritage to a relatively recent, and not particularly "scholarly" development: the expansion of the Prussian military state in the 18th and 19th centuries. Prussian schools were designed to create patriotic citizens for war, and they apparently worked as intended.

...our ancient hunter-gatherer ancestors were fiercely egalitarian and fought hard to prevent even the appearance of taking or giving orders.

A systematic exercise in human domestication.

Children are expected to sit still for hours upon hours; to control their impulses; to focus on boring, repetitive tasks; to move from place to place when a bell rings; and even to ask permission before going to the bathroom Children are also trained to accept being measured, graded, and ranked, often in front of others. (..) Domestication also has a softer side that's easier to celebrate: civilization. Making students less violent. Cultivating politeness and good manners. Fostering cooperation (...) and train us to submit to our place in a modern hierarchy.

🐘 Art: evolutionary perspective

"From an evolutionary point of view," writes Miller, "the fundamental challenge facing artists is to demonstrate their fitness by making something that lower-fitness competitors could not make, thus proving themselves more socially and sexually attractive."

"We find attractive," says Miller, *"those things that could have been produced only by people with attractive, high-fitness qualities such as health, energy, endurance, hand-eye coordination, fine motor control, intelligence, creativity, access to rare materials, the ability to learn difficult skills, and lots of free time."*

🐘 Cost & Benefit of self-deception

The benefit of self-deception is that it can, in some scenarios, help us mislead others. But what about its costs? **The main cost is that it leads to suboptimal decision-making.**

🐘 Devious brains

Our brains are **devious**. They intentionally hide information from us, helping us fabricate plausible prosocial motives to act as cover stories for our less savory agendas. As Trivers puts it: *"At every single stage [of processing information]—from its biased arrival, to its biased encoding, to organizing it around false logic, to misremembering and then misrepresenting it to others—the mind continually acts to distort information flow in favor of the usual goal of appearing better than one really is."* It is the **introspection illusion**.

When push comes to shove, we often make choices that prioritize our hidden agendas over the official ones.

...because people strategically misconstrue their motives. Only by cross-examining these motives, using data about how people behave, that we're able to learn what's really driving human behavior.

Our brains "seek out information," he says, "and then **act to destroy it**."

Our mental processes act in bad faith, perverting or degrading our picture of the world. (..) If our minds contain maps of our worlds, what good comes from having an inaccurate version of these maps?

🐘 IQ

raw intelligence can only take you so far. If you're smart but lazy, for example, your intelligence won't be worth very much to your employer. As Caplan argues, *the best employees have a whole bundle of attributes—including intelligence, of course, but also conscientiousness, attention to detail, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to conform to expectations.*

someone's IQ can be measured with a simple 30-minute test, most of these other qualities can only be demonstrated by consistent performance over long periods of time.

A in a biology class (...) implies that she has the ability to master a large body of new concepts, quickly and thoroughly enough to meet the standards of an expert in the field—or at least well enough to beat most of her peers at the same task.

also tells you that she's the kind of person who can consistently stay on top of her workload.

🐘 Conspicuous consumption

"conspicuous consumption" - we use purchases to flaunt our wealth, buying things not so much for purely personal enjoyment as for showing off or "keeping up with the Joneses."

🐘 Impracticality of Art

Art originally evolved to help us advertise our survival surplus and, from the consumer's perspective, to gauge the survival surplus of others. By distilling time and effort into something non-functional, an artist effectively says, "I'm so confident in my survival that I can afford to waste time and energy."

The bunker reflects a kind of desperation of an animal worried about its survival, rather than the easy assurance of an animal with more resources than it knows what to do with.

🐘 Strategic ignorance

The entire value of strategic ignorance and related phenomena lies in the way others act when they believe that you're ignorant. As Kurzban says, "Ignorance is at its most useful when it is most public." It needs to be advertised and made conspicuous.

🐘 Humor

Humor can thus be seen as an art form, a means of provoking laughter subject to certain stylistic constraints. Humor also sets the mood dział to „play”

When we laugh at norm violations, it often serves to weaken the norms that others may wish to uphold. This helps explain why people charged with maintaining the highest standards standards of propriety—schoolmarm, religious leaders, the guardians in Plato's Republic, the Chinese officials who banned puns in 2014.

🐘 Hill-climbing (analogy for beliefs)

Individual brains are built to go "up" in pursuit of higher and higher social status (or any other measure of reward). So we scramble our way toward the top of whatever hill or mountain we happen to find in our local vicinity. (...)

Mostly we just climb skyward as if on autopilot. And in most landscapes, these instincts serve us very well. But if we happen to find ourselves in a nonstandard landscape, one that our brains weren't designed for, the same instincts can lead us to bad outcomes.

you seek to climb higher, which often (counterintuitively) requires you to make sacrifices. Each sacrifice earns you more trust and respect from your peers, taking you further up the slope. It may get steeper and the air more rarefied. With each step, you run the risk of slipping back down or getting clawed down by rivals.

Your brain, expecting a simple mountain, took a step that felt like "up." But in reality, the mountain was a volcano, and your final step sent you tumbling over the edge and into the crater.

For a solder seeking bravery it might be a bullet. Drug addicts seek ever-more-pleasurable highs until they overdose.

🐘 Putting the Elephant to use

Better situation awareness. The first benefit is situational awareness—a better, deeper understanding of the human social world.

Controlling the blind spot we often misunderstand our own motives. We have a gaping blind spot at the very center of our introspective vision.

promising strategy is to put ourselves in situations where our hidden motives better align with our ideal motives. (if a selfish motive is what it takes to create a great scientist or surgeon, the rest of the world may be OK with that)

Where does this leave us, then?

By what path can we hope to improve our collective welfare? Enter here the philosophy of "enlightened self-interest." This is the notion that we can do well for ourselves by doing good for others. It's the philosophy described by Alexis de Tocqueville, preached by Adam Smith, and practiced by Benjamin Franklin. In the biological literature, it's known as "indirect reciprocity" or "competitive altruism."

🐘 Mixed-motive games

Scenarios involving two or more players whose interests overlap but also partially diverge. The players have an incentive to cooperate, but thanks to the divergence, they're also somewhat at odds with each other.

The **perverse incentives** of mixed-motive games lead to **option-limiting** and other actions that seem irrational, but are actually strategic:

- Closing or degrading a channel of communication.
- Ignoring information, also known as strategic ignorance.
- Purposely believing something that's false.

"Mixed-motive games contain the kind of incentives that reward self-deception." In simple applications of decision theory, it's better to have more options and more knowledge. Yet Schelling has argued that, in a variety of scenarios, **limiting or sabotaging yourself is the winning move**. The value lies in convincing other players that you've sabotaged yourself. In the game of chicken, you don't win because you're unable to steer, but because your opponent believes you're unable to steer.

🐘 Language & Conversation

Our instincts for using language didn't evolve to help us do science or build empires. Language evolved among our foraging ancestors at least 50,000 years ago (...) when our ancestors were animals locked in the competitive struggle to survive and reproduce.

Conversation as a transaction between speakers and listeners—a transaction constrained, crucially, by the laws of economics and game theory. Speaking seems to cost almost nothing—but full accounting should necessarily include:

- 1. The opportunity cost of monopolizing information.** *"If one makes a point of communicating every new thing to others, one loses the benefit of having been the first to know it."*
- 2. The costs of acquiring the information in the first place.** We need to spend a lot of time and energy foraging for information before the conversation.

Speaking functions in part as an act of showing off. Speakers strive to impress their audience by consistently delivering impressive remarks. (...) It's more important for speakers to demonstrate that they have abilities that are attractive in an ally. In other words, speakers are eager to show off their backpacks.

Text/Subtext

The text says, "Here's a new piece of information," while the subtext says, "By the way, I'm the kind of person who knows such things." (..) Conversation, looks on the surface like an exercise in sharing information, but subtextually, it's a way for speakers to show off their wit, perception, status, and intelligence, and (at the same time) for listeners to find speakers they want to team up with (..) we want allies who have entire Walmart in their backpacks.

Accuracy of sources

We show surprisingly little interest in the accuracy of our news sources. (..) we seem content with just the veneer of confidence and expertise, as long as our pundits are engaging, articulate, connected to us, and have respected pedigrees.