

How much is our effort to persuade egoistic vs. altruistic?

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The tradeoff between egoism and altruism permeates our life, and, as I explain in *Human Life*, it gives our life meaning.

In a situation in which we seek to persuade someone, how much is our motivation egoistic and how much is our motivation altruistic? That is, how much are we trying to achieve our own goals and how much are we trying to achieve the other person's goals, including their personal welfare? We can ask this question for a variety of relations and situations in our life in order to better understand ourself.

This topic continues our discussion from last time:

What is the intellectual key to persuasion?

Email conversation between Bruce and Philip

2016-06-30 – Bruce

I'm still musing over the question Mark raised along the theme of "Why is intellectual persuasion so [comparatively] ineffective [generally]?" While intellectual persuasion seems like the ideal, for most people in most situations, it seems only tacitly utilized. Indeed, I am often puzzled by my susceptibility to non-intellectual attempts at persuasion. This is part of a general question I have which is: Why does the conscious part of the mind often have such limited influence, compared to the sub-conscious mind?? Alternatively, why is the subconscious typically so difficult to override consciously?? The issue of persuasion seems very related to this.

2016-07-01 – Philip

As for your puzzling over the role of the unconscious activity of the mind, I explain it in my book. Our thinking is actually done by the automatic unit. The volitional unit merely focuses our attention and approves or disapproves an urge to act [p. 144-150]. The automatic unit presents such urges, or impulses, as proposals, and it's up to the volitional unit to approve or disapprove them.

As I explained at the last meeting, the intellectual key to persuasion is to show a person how they can better achieve their goals. The role of the person's automatic unit in thinking about such a proposal is similar to what it is in performing a behavioral skill: the automatic unit has automated a behavioral process — or a thought process — so that the process can be performed quickly, smoothly, and effectively. If our mind didn't do this, trying to think would be like trying to walk without the use of automated skill, as in trying to walk on an undulating boat deck for the first time — it would be slow, uncertain, and awkward. Now, on stable ground, we can override our normal way of walking, but in order to do so, we've got to walk slowly and concentrate on doing it differently. So it goes with thinking in a new way. Hence, we won't expend the effort to do this unless we think that it will be worth the effort. So part of persuasion is to convince a person to expend the effort to think in a new way, overriding their former, automated way of thinking.

2016-07-01 – Bruce

In regard to my puzzling, let me refine it. As you mention "*The automatic unit presents such urges, or impulses, as proposals, and it's up to the volitional unit to approve or disapprove them.*" I would see that as the ideal. However, it is a self observation that occasionally the subconscious asserts a "mind" of its own, overriding the volitional unit's function. Some forms of "persuasion" purposefully exploit this. Maybe they would be better defined as coercion than persuasion, but that distinction can be hazy.

Compulsions and addictions are more extreme examples of what I am puzzled about. I have some propensity for compulsion. I am often amused by what seems like *clever* attempts by my subconscious to direct my focus and attention to things *it* desires: things that my volitional unit has already strongly disapproved of. Indeed, it would seem parts of my subconscious are actively trying to persuade (even coerce) my more recognizable/observable conscious mind.

My conjecture is that the brain utilizes competing mind constructions (limited volitional/autonomic pairs). Usually, there is a strong primary mind, which we associate more with our definition of self. However, there seem to be alternate mind models which are also aspects of the subconscious. At times they may assert enough influence to be recognizable. Multiple personality disorder, and some forms of schizophrenia appear to be extreme examples of this. Someone "having an internal debate" or "convincing themselves of something" may be a more common example of this abstraction.

Although, I'm probably just regurgitating what is already theorized in psychology, regarding what multiple personality disorders illustrate.

2016-07-02 – Philip

Here's a quick response to your latest message.

Besides reading p. 144-150, please read/note the following topics in my book, and see if these passages answer your questions:

Paragraphs 1-2, p. 128

Impulsiveness [p. 142]

Willpower, self-control, exertion, temptation [p. 149-150]

Character development [p. 150]