

WEEK 5 ANSWER TO QUESTION 2

STEP 5.10 ASK MARK

OK, here comes question number two. It was suggested this week that the, "lack of awareness of our own motivational impetus," came as a result of the rapid development of human thinking and reasoning-- the functions of our young prefrontal lobes, along with an inhibition of our instinctual emotional systems, residing in our older brain. Two other uniquely human tendencies were mentioned-- confabulation and hypocrisy. Here's the question.

How about the case when we claim that we do something for a certain reason-- for example, from altruism-- and truly believe our claim, while in fact we are motivated by some unconscious drive-- for example, self interest. Is it possible that there's a continuum between confabulation and hypocrisy, with various grades of self delusion, and perhaps involuntary deception in between? So I want to just, before directly addressing the question, point out-- although I'm sure the questioner is aware of this-- point out that this development of the frontal lobes, with the capacity for thinking and reason that comes with them, and be commensurate inhibition of instinctual limbic brain stem ways of responding.

Thinking replaces that type of responding. That this is what gives rise to the hypocrisy that's asked about in this question. And the confabulatory tendency is a function of the extent to which the prefrontal lobes are doing their job properly. And I refer you back now to my answer to question one, when I speak of how confabulation arises, out of an inadequate performance by the thinking apparatus. In terms of its function of having to meet our needs that are represented by feelings, having to meet the needs, the demands, represented by these feelings, in the outside world. That's what thinking is for.

Now, the question is asking about, in this process, what is the difference between confabulation and hypocrisy, both of which, I'm saying, arise from this phylogenetic and ontogenetic maturational and developmental achievement of us having prefrontal cortex, or having so much of it. I think that, yes, indeed, they are related. And they're related in the sense, in the way that I've already explained. But I do think there's a difference between the hypocrisy and the confabulation that I'm referring to.

And I'm not trying to give a dictionary definition of the words here, so much as to give a clearer account of how I'm using them in this context, in relation to the life of the mind. I think that probably the best way to think of it as that confabulations are

misrepresentations of our thinking and the motives that underpin it, that come from below. Whereas hypocrisy is, likewise, a misrepresentation of our intentionality, but it comes from above.

The confabulations work in the way that I've already said. They're thought processes, and particularly memory processes-- but not only memory processes-- are distorted by an overly powerful feeling. And in the example that I gave in question one the feeling was a wishful one, trying to contend with an overwhelming feeling of anxiety and panic in the patient. So these feelings distort the thinking process, and the remembering process, in a tendentious direction, creating these wishful constructions, which are the confabulations. Confabulatory distortion of memory and thinking.

The hypocrisy that I refer to in the course is more a matter of, because we, with our frontal lobes, have the capacity to think through situations which exist for us in contemporary human life-- that is to say, in civilised society, for which evolution gave us no preparation—that is we've only been living in permanent settlements for 12,000 years, us humans. We were hunter-gatherers before that. We only started building permanent structures and keeping herds and planting crops, and therefore, living together in large groups, over long periods of time in which we can plan for-- and must last plan for the future. That's what crops and herds are all about.

It's not just responding to the present moment. Oh, I'm hungry. What shall I do? But rather, I'm going to be hungry again, come winter. Why don't I plan for it, and do the following. So out of this type of thinking process that the prefrontal lobes render possible, we build these abstract systems of rules of governance, of laws, including scientific laws-- predictions, understandings. And these formulations are the contents, as it were, of cultural and civilised life.

We then hold these as our ideals, that this is how we should behave, this is how we want to behave. The important point about hypocrisy, in the context that I'm describing and in the way I'm using-- borrowing the term is that we don't, in fact, live in that way. We don't plan properly for the future. We don't treat each other in the ways that would best suit the needs of the large group as a whole, et cetera.

This is, in fact, why we have not only laws, but police forces, and courts, and jails. It's because there's a hell of a lot of us who don't do what our prefrontal lobes aspire to-- what these Bills of Rights and so on, these ideals by which we, as civilised human society, realise we best should live. We don't like that, and that begs the question, why? Why don't we live like that?

Why do we have to have, as I said, police forces, and courts of law, and whatnot, to deal with forces which work against those ideals? And that's coming back, then, to these forces from below, these instinctual systems which are much older, much more powerful, than our prefrontal lobe structures, superimposed above them, which are meant to inhibit and control them. So when we say, we are not animals-- we are human, and when we speak of our civilisation and of our culture, and we refer to our institutions, cultural and

legal and educational, and et cetera, institutions, and all the ideals that they embody, we have to recognise that, in fact, we don't live that way. And this is taking account of this other force, which our prefrontal lobes are trying to manage.

So the hypocrisy is not the same as confabulation, in that we're just saying, well, this is what I think. And in fact, it's a distortion. What we say is, that's what I think.

And, in fact this is a very good, realistic, rational plan for how we should live. But in fact, we can't manage it. So we tell ourselves we live this way, but in fact we don't. So I hope you can see from this attempt at an answer that yes, indeed, there are closely related concepts. But there is an important distinction between the confabulatory tendencies that I'm speaking of, and the hypocritical ones.



Mark Solms 2015

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