Human Consciousness and Decision-Making

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This is the keynote talk presented by Martyn Carruthers, at the University Forum on Human Consciousness, Hull UK June 1997. This article provide an in-depths perspective on Decision-Making.

Take a look at your life. Whatever knowledge you have accumulated, however successful you are, whatever genetic mental, physical or material benefits you have inherited, your life primarily reflects your decisions!

Making decisions can be complex. For important decisions, such as a long-term commitment, you may dissociate from this moment - now - and review your past decisions and their consequences. You may first decide "what is most important" as a basis for the subsequent decision. You may decide to disregard your present mood. You may decide to plan beyond short term results. You may decide to put yourself into another person's "point of view", to incorporate information from that perspective. You may decide to creatively envision a number of different possible futures.

A child cannot make complex decisions. A complex decision is an adult behavior, requiring cognitive skills that children lack. Children make simple decisions. Children cannot abstract their core values, to find integrity. Children cannot consciously generalize experience, to find useful beliefs. Children cannot dissociate, to examine potential long term consequences of their actions. Children cannot "step into" another person's reality. Children cannot envision multiple possibilities.

An adult can make simple decisions. Simple decision strategies are useful for unimportant or hasty decisions. (Eg: "Which cheese to buy?") You may use a decision process which a child might choose an ice cream flavor. Maybe stay with your last choice? Maybe flip a coin? Maybe eliminate options with "Eeny meeny miney mo"? Maybe decide based on how you feel this moment? Maybe choose the easiest option? Maybe ask someone else to choose for you?

Difficulties may arise when a simple decision strategy is used for an important decision with long-term consequences. For example, what is likely to happen if you select a life partner or an occupation by a "simple" method? And some adults cannot seem to make complex decisions.

Having made a decision, complex or simple, action requires motivation. Perhaps you assess the significance of a task in terms of the meaning it gives to your life. Or you motivate yourself by imagining some unpleasant consequences of not acting, or by imagining the pleasure of completing the task. Maybe you may wait for someone else to motivate you, or you may motivate yourself with deadlines. And, although you have many possibilities, you may not be motivated to act on some lesser quality decisions. There have probably been times when your lack of motivation for some action was wonderful, as well as many times when you were motivated to create beautiful results.

After acting, you can assess the consequences of your decision, to help you make better decisions in the future. You can assess the quality of your decisions by the quality of life resulting from the decision. How do you measure the quality of life? My measuring stick for my decision to present this talk at this conference will be whether, through this action, I meet people who are interested in practical ways of accelerating the evolution of human potential, so that together we may assess the possibilities of contributing to a network of information, techniques and projects. This is my no-longer-hidden agenda.

Hidden Agendas

Making a decision seems easy - know what we want, create some options, evaluate the consequences of the options and select an option likely to produce optimum consequences. And yet we live in a world dominated by short term decisions that benefit few people (Eg: politicians looking no further than the next election), we live in a world where your image may be more important than your reality, where your assets may be more important than the quality of your life, (as my bank manager said "Many of my clients borrow money they can hardly afford to pay back, to buy things they don't need, to impress people they don't like!").

We live in a world where so many people continue to make the same old decisions and repeatedly suffer the same old consequences. I believe that we always make the best decisions available to us. But why do we often decide to suffer? We may make decisions with a hidden agenda - in which we hope for a some advantage that we hide from other people. Can we also make decisions with a hidden agenda that we hide from ourselves?

Our decisions reflect our desires. If we make negative goals (Eg, "I don't want to suffer"), we motivate ourselves to avoid a problem by focusing on the problem! Our unconscious minds seem to have difficulty representing negative goals. Don't think of what you don't want! This may be rather difficult - a solution is to think of what you want instead. However we can use negative goals powerfully - "You don't have to relax - now - and you don't need to consider the consequences of negative goals you have set in the past".

Our decisions reflect our congruence. If we have inner conflict, (Eg,"Part of me wants this, but part of me doesn't"), we may either avoid making a decision, or we may act incongruently and later find ways to sabotage ourselves. Why not make decisions and act with 100% congruence? Finding a 100% congruent goal is difficult. Finding a 100% congruent goal takes time. And we may feel bad about having a conflict, and let the unpleasant feeling motivate us to avoid the self-discovery required to resolve the conflict. Few people are aware of how their lack of congruence influences their decisions.

Our decisions reflect our specificity. If our goals are abstract (Eg, "I want to succeed"), without a plan for achievement, we have little hope of success! If our goals are wishy-washy (Eg: "I want to learn a second language"), without specifying exactly how much of what, we may lose energy. And if we make goals without deadlines, (Eg "I want a wonderful relationship - before I die"), we can endlessly procrastinate taking concrete action. Few people are aware of how the format of their desires influence their decisions.

Our decisions reflect our beliefs. If we believe "There are infinite choices available for every decision", we are less likely to have tunnel-vision about a single option. If we believe "I do not deserve success", we may decide to fail! If we believe "All wealthy people are corrupt", then we may decide not to be wealthy - or we may decide to become corrupt so as to become wealthy! If we believe we are Souls with the possibility of fulfilling ourselves in our physical lives, we may decide to focus on the long-term social consequences of our actions. Few people are aware of how their beliefs influence their decisions.

Our decisions reflect our relationships with ourselves (Eg: " Do I like myself? Am I proud of my actions? Can I be happy in the future?) and our relationships with other people, past and present (Eg: "Is it OK if I am more successful than my father", "Will my success will damage my relationship with my life partner", "Will my failure motivate my family to give me the attention that I want from them") Few people are aware of how their relationships influence their decisions.

Our decisions reflect our Sense of Life. (Eg: "Am I angry about how I allow myself to be treated?",

"Am I afraid of expressing my anger?", "Am I sad that I do not maintain my boundaries?", "Will success allow me to express my emotions?") Few people are aware of how their emotions influence their decisions.

It seems that our decisions reflect what we really want in our lives, and what we really want may be incongruent with our stated, conscious goals. If we look at the results of our decisions, even those that are seemingly poor, we may find that those decisions accurately reflect our desires, our beliefs, our relationships and our Sense of Life.

Sense of Life

Janelle Doan (a consultant-trainer in Eastern Canada), Annegret Hallanzy (a family therapist in Southern Germany) and I, with input from the fields of accelerated learning, expert modeling, neuro-linguistic programming, systemic family therapy and traditional Polynesian healing, and with the tremendous support of many people, created a format of reconciliation to help people make decisions that are congruent with their Sense of Life. The first step is finding the motivation to change. The next step is fully experiencing one's full identity, or totality of being, or Soul, later called Identity State. The next is evaluating whether one can express one's full identity in one's current relationships, and the final step is resolving past emotional trauma that overwhelm the expression of one's full identity. Together, this methodology supports a person in making congruent decisions towards achieving self-selected important goals, while sequentially resolving a person's internal conflict, relationships and emotional issues. During this threefold resolution, many mental health issues and physical symptoms "go into remission".

My motivation to become involved in a "soft" science (I come from a background of physics) originated as a desire to find effective techniques for teaching radiation protection to the staff of nuclear power stations. I explored relaxation techniques, musical backgrounds and visual imagery with some success, and while I gained a strange reputation as a teacher, my techniques were effective in raising average marks to previously unheard-of levels. Later I found that the most effective methods for accelerating learning came with helping students to change their learning strategies and their limiting decisions about themselves. I found that many people use poor learning strategies, usually installed while at school, which encourage limiting decisions, such as "I cannot learn physics".

Accelerating Learning

For example, most people look up to visualize. But when a child looks up to remember a visual eidetic image, a teacher may say "The answer isn't on the ceiling Johnny - stop day-dreaming and look at your desk". Looking down is pretty good for talking to oneself, but talking to oneself is a poor way to remember diagrams and charts. Also few teachers know HOW people learn well. For example, most good spellers spell by looking up, visualizing a word, and waiting for a feeling. If the feeling is "rightness" the person "reads" the letters off the image. If the feeling is "wrongness", the person tries another visualization. A lesser speller often writes the word and makes a kinesthetic check. A poor speller tries to "spell it out" auditorily - which is slow (and very inefficient with irregular English spelling). A terrible speller usually switches between negative self-talk and unpleasant feelings, which may become evidence for a decision that one is slow, learning-disabled or stupid! Such decisions are often encouraged by teachers! Although such decisions may be changed by encouragement or counter-examples, teaching an effective learning strategy makes such decisions irrelevant!

For example, changing a person's subjective experience of time is extremely useful in education. Typically, we have a certain mental "speed", limited by sub-vocalization (Eg: How fast can you count from one to one hundred? It is much more efficient to do this visually without sub-vocalizing - for example "seeing" the numbers from one to one hundred without mentally verbalizing them. And it is even more efficient to "see" the entire number set from one to one hundred

simultaneously!). We can all change subjective time flow - for example the minute that seems like an hour when we're in a crisis, or the hour that seems like a minute when we are enjoying ourselves. Using a hypnotic "double dissociation" to allow a person to stop sub-vocalizing, while simultaneously increasing the subjective time ratio from 1:1 to around 300:1, allows lightening fast cognition, without conscious "brakes". This is sometimes a superb strategy for organizing knowledge that one has already learned - for example prior to an examination.

Accelerating Healing

I explored applying hypnotic techniques for accelerating learning and changing decisions to psychotherapy, which produced a lot of resistance from psychotherapists! (For example: helping a person to plan their future - as if with an important resource that had been lacking in the past, perhaps the ability to make complex decisions). Later I began applying accelerated learning to the process by which we heal our own bodies. At first the results were peculiar. Accelerating the healing of a disease often shortened the disease duration but increased the severity of the symptoms! And removing symptoms by direct hypnotic suggestion often caused different symptoms to suddenly arise! Something was missing in my rather mechanistic approach. People do not let go of their suffering so easily.

I particularly liked the concept of sub-identities, ego-states or parts used in many therapies. This notion is that certain skills may be state-dependent - ie the skills can only be used in a specific emotional state. (Eg: "I can only be creative when I am angry!") I explored existing techniques for changing the meaning or boundaries of parts, (including many "therapeutic" techniques which now seem totally unhealthy), and became adept at working with them. Later I came to see parts as dissociated "personality packages". Each part had their own values, beliefs and behaviors, although the package was often more appropriate for children than adults. (Eg: "When I see a physics formula, part of me wants to scream").

In 1989, I was invited to teach in Hawaii, where I met a native healer, Papa Havi (a "kahuna la'au lapa'au", living in Hilo, Hawaii). Papa Havi uses a number healing concepts that transcended my hypnotic skills. His work includes each client learning from their disease, as if each symptom was a teacher. (Papa Havi: "It is more important that a person learn from a disease than that they heal it!") He also focuses the importance of helping a client heal their relationships! I returned to Hawaii many times to study with Papa Havi and other native healers.

Another example: a Hawaiian concept is that we keep "black bags" in our bodies, with the bags representing unresolved emotions from some past traumatic experience. In the "black bag" are the emotions from a previous experience and a younger version of ourself - as if some part of ourselves is still experiencing the traumatic experience. The location of this "black bag" in the body may be a focus for disease. "Opening the bag" can be very emotional, and also opens the possibility of accepting and integrating a hitherto rejected younger version of oneself. Hmmm, more parts! However, instead of being "fragmented ego states", such parts are treated like "lost frightened children".

I was simultaneously seeking people who had experienced "spontaneous" remission from the physical symptoms of serious disease, and, if they were willing, hypnotically investigating their healing process. Many times, in many ways, I heard people say "The disease became my friend" or "The pain became my teacher". It is as if a part was creating a disease and this part was being fully accepted! Such people also commented on how they redefined their "toxic" relationships. Exploring the advantages of a disease in a person's life seemed to indicate that disease symptoms resolve some deep issue in the person's life. Although the information was confusing, the deep issues seemed to be in three groups - inner conflict, relationship problems and overwhelming emotions from past traumatic experiences.

Another source of information was neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a meta-philosophy from which are derived many techniques that I found to be useful in the duplication of expertise. I

found some NLP to be profound, particularly work on "Identity Metaphors" - how to recognize and change the metaphors by which we guide our lives. Combining this work with accelerated learning and Hawaiian healing opened a door to "dreaming together" - the ability to join a person in their metaphoric experience of identity. But I still lacked a "big picture". I was unsure where all this was leading.

In 1992 I met a Canadian consultant-trainer, Janelle Doan (called a professional angel by many of her friends). With an exuberance of joy and a love of people, Janelle lives the principles that I now teach. Janelle has since been researching human bonding, which forms the basis for the relationship phase of this work, and together we explore the meta-physical implications of the Hawaiian techniques. Each "Path to Identity", discussed later, can access unusual states, the descriptions of which would normally be associated with religious experience. (We're not in Kansas any more, Toto).

In 1993 I met a German family therapist who was struggling with similar issues, Annegret Hallanzy. We worked (and suffered) together in Bavaria to investigate the Hawaiian healing techniques. Our results were beyond our expectations - many of the seemingly esoteric techniques used by native Hawaiian healers could be translated into a psycho-philosophy that generated a specific tool set, based on the reconciliation of self! Although Annegret and I take our results in different directions, this synthesis represents a very big picture indeed.

Reconciliation

The reconciliation inherent in each phase of the following seems to make physical and mental symptoms irrelevant - as if the physical symptoms of a disease represent old decisions that can be redecided! The following steps can be adapted to many specific symptoms. However, for these steps to be useful, a person must want to "grow up", that is, a person must want to find and fulfill his or her adult responsibilities. Also, a person must have or have had at least one quality relationship, in which the other person, as they are, is more important than their position or any other bonds (see Phase 3). If this experience in relating is lacking, a person cannot create a healing relationship.

However, the spontaneous remission of physical or mental symptoms seems to be a lesser benefit to a person than their finding and making decisions based on their Sense of Life, which is the focus of all that follows.

Most people are consciously aware of their short term goals, their present relationships, their symptoms and some past events. Most people are unconscious or unaware of existential conflict, identifications, limiting identity beliefs, the relationship bonds and early childhood trauma. However, all these things contribute to a sense of normality which people use as a standard when making decisions. The following helps a person redefine "normal", in alignment with their highest values. The following seems to be a natural human way to fulfill life. The phases are merely ways to describe it, so that we may, if we decide, accelerate fulfillment!

Phase 1 - Motivation (Suffer all you want!)

Lack of motivation is an obstacle to making complex decisions. For most people Phase 1 is "suffering" - living the consequences of poor quality decisions until a congruent decision is made to grow up and take responsibility for living life! Suffering seems to be a normal human way to motivate oneself. Few people say "I'm living a great life, my family get along fine and we're all healthy - please help me!". In our society, suffering is often a normal way to build self-respect and earn the attention of other people. Suffering is often enshrined as "holy". Many people have told me that their suffering somehow makes them a better person. But how much suffering is enough?

What is suffering? It seems to be an existential dilemma, often associated with hopelessness or

helplessness, associated with one's sense of life. The work of Clair Graves, a post-doctoral student of Abraham Maslow, provides useful insights into this. While attempting to create an instrument to assess a person's position on Maslow's famous "Hierarchy of Needs", Graves discovered that people have different hierarchies based on their values, and that a person