

What If Anything Has Changed About Human Nature In the Last 2000 Years?

Post by "BrainToBeing" of January 6, 2024 at 12:17 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I would argue Epicurus and the ancient Epicureans advocated a form of proto-science in their insistence of holding off on rigid opinions of the causes of phenomena until sufficient evidence was acquired

Agree, Don. However, the issue is that the "sages of old" were the top less-than-one-percent of the population. Indeed, they understood the concepts (within the foundations of information available to them). But, now we need to have the whole population understand how to think with science, and be willing to work with "inconvenient science".

[Quote from Don](#)

I'd be curious what you mean by "preferred belief systems,"

Yes, it is what you said. The desire to see the world according to personal wishes and preferences, rather than with incorporation of what objective information (beyond opinion) would advocate.

[Quote from Don](#)

Epicurus looked at both animals and baby humans to arrive at the idea of pleasure being the supreme good

The pivotal issue here is the interpretation of "pleasure". I do many things that are ethically appropriate but do not derive to my personal pleasure. For example, in my medical career I could have made a boatload more money if I practiced for my "pleasure". But, I didn't. I did what I thought was ethically appropriate for patients, illness, and the healthcare system. Many, many times this made my life harder. And, it also resulted in very unpleasant confrontations with people who wanted me to say or do what was convenient to their desires but not medically reasonable.

For example, I was not one of the guys who handed out opioids to pander to whims or "hidden" addiction during the prescription opioid epidemic. But, I assure you, resistance to these agendas did not derive to my personal pleasure.

If the word "pleasure" is interpreted to mean "consistent with personal ethics, beliefs, values, expectations, attitudes, goals and habits" then I guess doing what I did could be claimed to be consistent with my "pleasure". However, I guarantee you it did not feel like pleasure.

[Quote from Don](#)

Again, we're just better at gathering information with more sophisticated instruments.

I actually don't agree with this one. Quantum mechanics has been recurrently proven to be consistent with objective tests of predictions. Yet, quantum mechanics changes our views of the way things work in the Universe. The sages of the past were wonderfully insightful, but we do now have concepts and intellectual frameworks that are beyond what they could propose. For example, quantum entanglement works and is actually used in quantum computers; yet, it makes no sense to our Newtonian view of the world.

[Quote from Don](#)

He saw the mind as inextricably linked to the physical body and composed of fine atoms.

Yes, Epicurus and Lucretius (among others) were remarkably (even dramatically) insightful. Yet, 1600 years later we still got to Descartes and his "duality" which still infuses thinking at this time.

[Quote from Don](#)

LOL! That remains to be seen! I have certain issues calling cleverly-constructed algorithms "intelligence."

See, this is precisely the problem. You apparently want to grant "intelligence" as something transcendent - something which cannot be explained as the result of our 86 billion neurons interacting or reproduced by adequately sophisticated non-biological systems. However, my entire career clearly demonstrated to my satisfaction that our intelligence does derive from those physical components. I saw all manner of losses of intelligence due to defined physical/structural brain illnesses.

Thus, if our intelligence derives from a highly sophisticated system of interacting components then it is not beyond reason to predict that similar intelligence could be derived from some non-biological system of similar level of complexity.

Even at this very early stage, answers I get from ChatGPT are very commonly better than answers I can get from discussion with anyone (including all my university colleagues). And, this is only the beginning.

We need to be careful that we don't define "intelligence" within some purely anthropocentric construct. So, I define intelligence as the ability to integrate information into useful or potentially useful constructs. This "working definition" allows not only for varying levels of intelligence but also varying kinds of intelligence. And, it excludes simple rote regurgitation of facts or simple "stimulus-response" reactions. If these were not excluded then computers would already be vastly smarter than we are based on fund of information, or the cheetah would be smarter than we are based on reaction pattern capabilities.

Okay, I did want to respond to your thoughts (to keep the discussion a discussion); but, this is becoming greatly too long. So, I'll stop here.

Cheers.