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Response to Foundationalism

2 Once we recognize there is a reality, we may decide to see if there is a way of being, both with that
3 reality and inside of that reality, a way of being which makes us more powerful, that is, more capable of
4 achieving our own needs and goals. There is a constant interface for human beings inside of Reality
5 and with Reality called Existence.

6 Existence does not depend on any particular custom epistemology. If I see myself in Reality, I exist, but
7 also, even if I see myself above reality, I still need to posit my existence, otherwise I will not be able to
8 affect that reality in any sure and capable way. However you can see from this that it does not really
9 affect Reality to place ourselves above it, or even outside of it. Reality will continue to affect us in the
10 same way it did before, so opting for the simplest choice, which is to participate as a member of that
11 Reality, is probably the most direct route towards understanding and establishing one's domain.

12 Foundationalists have identified a problem in Reality. They believe that the skeptical discovery that
13 Reality is deceptive requires one to find a methodological device that will enable them to prove or
14 disprove facts, thus to separate Truth from Illusion. This preoccupation sounds useful, until you realize
15 that each of us already does that in some way, and has been very busy doing it for most of their lives.

16 It might be useful to create a single machine that could prove or disprove any and all facts, if it were
17 possible. Clearly, the Foundationalist believes that he has found one. Some of the support for
18 Foundationalism comes from the fact that some pretty smart philosophers have tried to engage in
19 foundational thinking, yet I believe that we can't just justify an activity simply because of a majority, or
20 because of authority: We need to examine whether Foundationalism really lives up to its promise, or is

21 it just a pretentious way of trying to eliminate the fear one experiences when one first realizes that there
22 is a difference between Reality and Mind.

23 Foundationalism is not rooted in the search for better methods and goals, but rather, in a fear of
24 inadequacy in that respect: If my mind cannot discover a relationship with Reality through a more
25 direct method, as difficult and unrelenting as Reality is, then Foundationalism could provide a way out
26 for me, but that way out will more than likely also be designed to instill and support another meta-
27 belief such as religion, infallability, or even superiority all of which could be false friends or ideals to
28 seek if our true goal is knowledge.

29 How does one deal with Reality without resorting to such a religious, dogmatic, and pretentious
30 mindset? One should first look at Reality. Since we are human animals and active beings, we
31 participate in Reality. We work in it and play in it. Like any other animal, we constantly sense it with
32 our five senses, and we make judgments and decisions based what we sense. Some decisions are
33 merely based on habit, or reflex, but Humans are especially noted for their ability to make judgments
34 which go beyond the merely directive flow of movement, but which also plan rather well under a
35 variety of different circumstances for the future. A review of biological Nature shows this to be true:
36 Bees and ants are good at creating a hive of productive living and caring for their next generation of
37 young. Species of intelligent mammals create small societies that allow shared caring and rearing of
38 their young, cooperative hunting, and even group sex. But Homo sapiens is the only animal (as far as
39 we know) that builds cars, and civilizations, explores the planets. Without our ability to plan the future
40 in a variety of different real contexts, and without our language, we would not be very distinguishable
41 from the other animals.

42 Even in Language, we are not completely apart, since we know that each species of animal has its own

43 set of communication skills. The bees know how to imitate directional flight to communicate the
44 existence of intruders and pollen, for example. Lions and even domestic cats use a set of grunts and
45 growls to get their points across. It has been discovered that crows have in excess of 200 calls, each one
46 with a different purpose. Dolphins and whale communication has been analyzed to a degree. But all of
47 the mammals are capable of using gestures to some degree among themselves, such as mating gestures,
48 or gestures aimed at controlling other species and invaders.

49 Language is quite different for Humans than for these other mammals. We have highly structured
50 languages which use a limited number of phonemes (forty in English) as building blocks. Our speaking
51 is usually organized into statements, and the phonemes overlap as spoken, and literally fly by at the rate
52 of over 10 per second. The sentence you just read requires about 5 seconds to say, and contains 3
53 statements. We can see from this that statements can happen at the rate of one every one to two
54 seconds, showing that humans are capable delivering their complex communication at an astounding
55 rate. As humans, we not only have a way of sensing which composes our interface with Reality, but we
56 have a way of Speaking, since the other Humans we speak to are also part of our Reality. This opens up
57 the issue of how Humans and higher mammals impact reality: They direct it. Humpback whales, for
58 example, push the krill needed to feed into groups near the surface by scaring them, a technique used
59 by several aquatic carnivores, and then guide the prey into their baleen by surfacing quickly with their
60 mouths agape. Human activities go way beyond that kind of simple explanation, of course, and
61 constitute of myriad of inventive activities and innovations on existing activities, often for the purpose
62 of improving economy or education, but also for purposes of entertainment, a behavior we happen to
63 share with the other primates.

64 So Humans sense, they direct, and they speak. How do they know they should do this? I would say that
65 Reality pressures them to. Without all of the composites of human life, there would be little that we

66 could accomplish, even for our own survival. The question of Mind or Thought becomes one of
67 necessity, then. Do we need to think in a certain manner in order to accomplish survival, or accomplish
68 some other higher goal? The answer is that we each have probably already possessed habits of thought
69 which have benefited us by allowing us to survive as long as we have, and which have allowed us to
70 accomplish those things which we have already accomplished. The logical consequence of that, then, is
71 that if we want survival to continue, and the accomplishments to be more or less similar, we should
72 probably continue on the same. That seems like it might be a trap, though, since we may not agree that
73 where we have come to is where we need to be, and that what we have accomplished so far is not
74 necessarily the only kind of thing we are capable of: We don't want to limit ourselves if we don't have
75 to. Believing that we should limit ourselves might establish greater humility, but it would not
76 necessarily allow for all such things as humans are famous for, such as innovation.

77 So what is the foundation for humans sensing, directing and speaking? It is thinking, of course, at least
78 that's the missing ingredient, and here's where the problem lies. Since we need to decide things for
79 different purposes, that involves quite a lot of thinking –and not just the kind of thinking that allows us
80 to talk fast. It is this great amount of thinking we do that convinces us that thought and the self, the
81 doer of the thinking, is primary and all else is secondary and less important. This is really not true at
82 all; it's the illusion, and our self or thinking part is not the Reality we would like to wish away in order
83 to assume our god-like mantle of dominion over all that Reality, thank you, if you don't mind. Unless
84 we subscribe to another dogma that states for us that Reality is subservient to our thinking, we have
85 nothing more to do here with thinking than to let it take its course.

86 At least to Homo sapiens, if not to other species, thinking is real, in the same way that sensing is real,
87 directing is real, and speaking is real. We think many things, but mostly we get very little wrong when
88 we are thinking. In this sense, thinking has been called, "The sixth sense".

89 Where we can get things wrong is usually in action, such as when we get 14 wrong in a math test
90 because we didn't study, or we didn't get something right at work, because we didn't test or verify our
91 results properly. Or maybe we said something stupid and hurt someone's feelings. Such events may
92 occur for many reasons, however, they may occur because of habits of listening, such as our being
93 moved by hearing comedians or actors ape these statements, and can be due to our own subconscious
94 desires as well. We can't eliminate all of them, because our environment is constantly forcing these
95 kinds of errors upon us as burlesque, and because our being the kinds of animals we are requires both
96 true and false information.

97 It's easy and natural to communicate true information. There are rarely any strictures against it. When
98 these strictures do occur, such as when you are in the position of being, "the bearer of bad news", they
99 are almost unavoidable. One perhaps looks around for someone to delegate. False information, such as,
100 "When you die, you will go to sleep, and wake up in heaven," is not always in the form of bad news, or
101 incorrigible on its surface: It may simply be a statement that is impossible to test. Other statements test
102 the limits of reality and are thus falsifiable: If I say, "It will rain tomorrow," and it does not rain, I have
103 made a false statement, yet that says nothing about my ability to think, it may simply reflect an
104 unforeseen change in the climate. What about a pernicious lie? If I said, it rained in Arkansas
105 yesterday, knowing full well it did not, will that ruin anyone's day today? The lie is pernicious enough,
106 but does it really have consequences other than breaking a commandment and ruining our chances to
107 become the TV weatherman? Did we cast doubt on anyone else's veracity? Not if no one cared about
108 the weather in Arkansas. The only thing we may have accomplished then, is to prove ourselves a lover
109 of spurious knowledge, while at the same time putting ourselves in a position to be falsified. So the
110 outcome of a lie is either the harm it causes, or else it is this moment of falsification that places the
111 pernicious liar himself in jeopardy. The fact that the problems faced by the pernicious liar mirror, at

112 least in form, those confronted by the compulsive truth-teller is nothing less than ironic.

113 If we don't intend it to, will our thinking necessarily fall into error? Obviously if the senses cannot be
114 relied on, we can make mistakes sometimes. Thinking, though, follows patterns; it relates to specific
115 real situations and contexts of involvement. Generally speaking, we have some experience with these
116 patterns and can reproduce them when they are needed. The danger here is that we will apply the wrong
117 pattern in a given context, but that danger is not great, and regardless, our experience will likely save us
118 from making that same mistake again in the future.

119 Foundationalism is this kind of mistake. By being a Foundationalist, and establishing a pattern of
120 thought we believe to be universally applicable, and since one pattern of thought can never substitute
121 for all the patterns we assimilate over a lifetime of thinking, with Foundationalism we can create a
122 context for errors which may potentially last us a lifetime.