

The Articulated Intellect (Principle #2)

When I first started doing mathematics in my bug infested SRO about ten years ago I'd find myself jotting down thoughts that came to mind; the very beginnings of the kinds of things I always struggled to articulate but in the back of my mind maybe wished that I could say. Suddenly these very things were coming to the surface, albeit only in bits and pieces. So, I made it a point to write them down when they came to me as I found I'd not be able to recall them later.

A year or two later, after a particularly intense vector calculus course, I started writing my first blogs. What I was slowly learning was that it was not necessary to jot the thoughts down when they came to me. Though I certainly could not recall them soon after if I did not write them down, what I found is that if I simply continued to stress my brain out they would come back to me later, only this time they'd be more evolved and clear.

Another year or two later I made my first somewhat sad attempt at a manuscript. What I was also slowly learning was that by some inexplicable quirk of the universe, if given enough time and energy, these thoughts would come together and create a somewhat coherent theme. This begs the question if I was/ am seeing what I want to see; could I actually be willing my brain to establish neural connections between seemingly separate and arguably unrelated ideas? Or could it be that it's all already connected, and my intuitive consciousness was teasing me by feeding me small spoonful's off it at a time, i.e. was I onto something? If so it was only granting me these bits and pieces after painstaking and drawn out efforts off my conscious brain.

Somewhere in all off this I also found what was to me a shocking revelation; I could speak to people. Sometimes I could really excel at it. Why this came as a surprise to me is that I was historically the kind off person for which people told me, though I was hard working and able enough, I needed to come out of my shell. When I was a young teenager I recall literally shaking and stuttering through entire presentations.

Then one day about two years after beginning college, and coincidently or otherwise only very recently after becoming homeless for the first time, I inexplicably started explaining myself almost compulsively. To people I could sometimes wrap them up and reverse their thinking on a matter. To cops (for whom I held a grudge against for so many years of seeing them shove my dad around [RIP grandpa who was a cop – life is ironic]) I practically dared them to profile my shabby appearance at school so I'd have a chance to articulate exactly how they just showed up with a rule book but with no understanding of how to apply it.

What factors play a role in developing this articulated ability so far as I can tell are,

1. **Exercising mind and body.** one professor recently claimed to me that experiments on mice running wheels are currently showing that stressing the body has more to do with neural development than anything else.
2. **Acclimating oneself to the presence of others.** The human brain is a plastic thing meaning it will reshape itself according experiences. Accordingly, if one is not acclimated to the presence of others it is possible (and I infer this from personal experience) that the neural pathways of communication simple allow themselves to deteriorate as your mind no longer anticipates a need to be able to do so.
3. Possessing an utter disregard for the beliefs and perspective of the person you're engaged with, or at least possessing a firm belief that they are actually open to what you're saying, i.e. you must **fool yourself first and foremost.** Just ask a salesman.

Eventually I started taking my transgressions with life out on city hall. I found the ability to apply objective problem-solving methodologies, as well as the ability to articulate them clearly, is a thing which can be weaponized. On a good day (and this has happened on a few occasions) I've had people who I showed up to make a point against start

cheering me on. To this day I cannot deduce if they were unclear on their motives for being there in the first place and then suddenly found themselves moved by my reasoning, or if they simply did not know what I was saying, only they liked the way I said it.

In either case, if a single word of what I said turns out to be true I'll be just as surprised as them. I say this because Physics makes you adept at reductionist reasoning, i.e. always breaking the problem up into smaller parts. And if I can only convince you that what we're now looking at represents a more fundamental truth then I've just altered the very nature of the question being considered. To perform this act of convincing I'll need to hold in my mind nothing particularly deep. On the contrary, what proves most effective at convincing people is the relatively shallow points that we all know in our mind yet struggle to connect and to articulate. Hence the value of critical thought which problem solving induces – it is good for establishing such connections (physical discipline certainly plays a significant role as well).

Hindus (9) emphasized the story of Stenka Razin, who in the years 1669-1670 led peasants to one of the bloodiest revolutions in Russian history. Razin, Hindus asserts, not only had a cause he was willing to die for (and he did – in a most dramatic way), but he also knew the power of playing to the crowd by telling them what they already knew to be true. Most peasants were standing idly and indecisively – waiting for someone catalyze the collective decision-making process. In a similar fashion Dunbar (3) describes how a tipping-point phenomenon plays out in many species of our closest genetic cousins, i.e. when making a collective decision the majority are in the middle waiting to be convinced. Indeed in the 1890's and especially in the early 1900's under Stolypin, the state government began explicitly targeting 'influential' individuals among peasants who could proliferate their agenda of converting peasants to either cooperatives or individual land-tenure (private property, especially khutora style homes which divide the village).

But there is a significant difference between swaying a troupe of apes and millions of human beings. We might say this is because we know how to reason, but then again, we must acknowledge that we don't know very much about the brain and hence cannot really say what exactly reasoning actually is (there goes the credibility of our IQ exams), let alone precisely how much it has to do with decision making. The most significant difference in the collective decision-making process between the two cases I posit is this; whether or not the object being deliberated on is not plainly observable to the group considering it. When Hamahydras baboons are trying to choose which 'leader' to follow they *observe* the alternate paths being deliberated on, i.e. it is a collective as well as an objective decision-making process. With this 'superior' articulated intellect we human possess however, we end up engaging in subjective arguments that the audience to be convinced has no direct experience with. Worse, most decisions are not even made collectively (beyond collective voting which is a very poor substitute for an actual collective decision-making *process*). Much of what we have to go on is just the person themselves and what they say.

However, it is done, the ability to sway a crowd, once properly honed, is a powerful tool. It can be used to achieve one's agenda at city hall, it can be used to kill an interview, to win an argument, etc. On the other hand, what I came to realize is it can also be a bully tactic. When it comes to peasants (e.g. homeless) I've found it scares them away as they don't dabble in the articulated intellect. They relate to one another in a different way altogether.

[Another] problem with articulated reasoning is that it usually involves science. Science is not math where you create your variable, science relies on what is observed, and it only observes one very small thing at a time. This reductionist line of reasoning we've come to call rationalism or intellectualism makes you good at breaking the problem up into small pieces, but not at all at putting those pieces back together again. I walk away thinking of many [other] ways what I said could have been proven or disproven. Life is a tremendous number of interacting events, any of which science would be hard pressed to adequately describe. Hence, the more you utilize 'experts' to break an issue/ problem up, the more possibilities arise as you've now narrowed your focus and are neglecting the pieces you had to cut out to achieve 'expertise'.

When considered in this light, the role that science has played becomes clearer; it has served as a steady source of objectivity in an increasingly opinionated world, but it has only done so at the cost of extreme reductionism. It is worth remembering that science did not invent objectivity (think of the boy who cried wolf story – where did that come from?), in fact we almost need to be reminded that there once was a time when survival itself relied on objectivity, but as domestication increases this becomes less of the case.

This dichotomy (that objectivity must only come at the cost of reductionism) that is so often central to our reasoning process (any time we wish to use science or even just collected data which represents one small piece of the overall puzzle) is all too often weaponized in politics. The presentation of ‘hard’ data which selectively frames the issue in such a way that the data supports the conclusion (which is usually one in the same with the agenda of the presenter) is used on a weekly basis in city council meetings that are plainly observable to anyone wanting to pay attention; reductionism provides ample room to see whatever you want to see.

But when does this endless road of reductionism need be followed, and where does it end? At what point do people favor social congruent decisions over the theoretical existence of some conglomerate truth that will supposedly emerge from an endless process of breaking the issue up into a million little pieces, studying them individually, then deliberating on them? The answer is of course when people agree. But collective voting is not one in the same with collective decision making.

Gaudin (6) notes that the introduction of volost courts proved detrimental to the natural decision-making processes of peasant villages because only one judge from each village was able to attend a volost’ assembly. This transition from a collective group decision making process of an entire village to a representative based system in turn allowed factions, influences, and the general social dynamics of a given village to be bypassed. The decision-making process now relied on one person’s ability and willingness to articulate his or herself on behalf of an entire village, as well as their desire to resist the urge to simply be agreeable with other representatives (a thing which readily kills objectivity on a weekly basis in city council meetings).

Many writers also speak of how the *skhod* (the village assembly) changed dramatically between 1861 and 1917 (the abolishment of serfdom to the October revolution)¹.

Principle #2: As reductionist reasoning (intellectualism) goes up, social intelligence (social awareness and the ability to act cohesively) goes down.

¹ See pgs. 147-8 of Gaudin (6) for a colorful depiction of the ‘theater of the skhod’.