



Chapter 17

Jason's Notes on Deception

“**I**n the animal and plant kingdoms, deception is among the most effective and widespread tools for survival. For example, when confronted by a predator, the *Sepiola* squid inserts a cloud of ink, which is colored and shaped just like the squid, between itself and the predator. The squid then changes color and darts away, leaving a confused predator in its wake.”

– *From Lessons from Animal and Plant Deception, Rand Corporation*

Jason's Journal

After returning to my room here at the hotel, I looked up the word “deception” on the ActionNet, and found this definition, “Deception does not automatically imply a conscious act, but can occur at different levels of cognitive ability. Markings that look like eyeballs on the hind end of a butterfly’s body act as a method to escape from predators. Predators use false behavior to trick their prey, and mockingbirds may even feign an injury to attract a predator away from its defenseless offspring. Chimps and humans may use verbal deception to hide a food source, or deceive another of its kind of its real motives.”

Each of the instances mentioned above, as well as others I found, are believed to be natural tendencies that have evolved in most all living things to preserve and protect, the continuity of all species.

As I see it, computers may make mistakes, but unlike living organisms, they have no need to be deceptive. That is one of the reasons that over recent years mankind has depended upon artificial intelligence to guide it passed human theories to unvarnished truths and accuracy.

In further researching the concept of deception, I focused in on self-deception and found evidence that humans are the only species known to practice it, as it is defined, “the process of denying or rationalizing away the relevance, significance, or importance of opposing evidence and logical argument.” It is a practice that is an anomaly in that it involves convincing oneself of a truth so thoroughly that the individual has absolutely no self-awareness of the deception.

The ability to “lie to oneself” and believe the lie to be true is present in most all humans, but more prevalent in some than others. It seems not to be dependent on intelligence or cognitive abilities, and it may even exist in a human after he or she fully understands that the held belief is proven false or invalid.

A scientist may know, in fact, that there is no soul and that he or she will never meet a deceased loved one in heaven. He can follow the proofs to a irrevocable truth, and yet choose to believe in life ever after, and the kingdom of God.

A child predator may be a faithful husband and caring father, and continue his actions of molestation without drawing a parallel between his own responsibility for his actions and the safe guarding and concerns he has for his family.

In further investigation I found an article on Sigmund Freud, who first wrote about self-deception. The existential philosopher, Jean-Paul Sarte dismissed Freud’s concept as impossible, in that Sarte could not accept the fact that one cannot know and not know that same something at the same time. From what we have learned since, we have learned to accept that there are some things in our subconscious that remain hidden to our conscious mind.

To be fair in judging the concept of self-deception, it seems not always to produce negative consequences. A soldier may face immanent death as he rushes through enemy lines to rescue a friend and drag him to safety. He may know the consequences, but truly believe that he will survive, even though the odds are

against him. If he succeeds, he is considered a hero; if he fails he is dead, and the child and wife he leaves behind are without a husband and father.

There are many arguments as to whether self-deception is a biological trait or one learned, but evidence has shown that most all humans have the ability to block actions from their conscious minds in the same way that a predatory animal will not consciously be aware of the neglect of its young, or the killing of its mate.

As a child of 11, I found a confederate black and red five-dollar bill marked with the title "Confederate States of America", ornate signatures, and the image of five goddesses surrounding the numeral 5. The bill was dated 1861 and seemed in remarkable condition. In fact, it appeared too good to be real. I believed that I had a find, but somewhere inside me I knew that this could not be authentic. Before showing it to anyone, I crumpled the bill and rubbed it in dirt. It fooled a few adults and many of my friends, and I convinced myself I might have come upon something of true value, before an adult pointed out the small print at the bottom of the bill stating it to be a "Fac-simile Confederate Note" with the name of the Philadelphia printer who created it and his address.

Apparently, the note was a souvenir piece, which possibly had some value if I had not ruined it to make it appear older than it looked. I later found out that souvenir bills were legally made in the North, since the northern states didn't recognize the Confederate States as legitimate, and the printer sold for the bills for pennies as curios and "mementos of Rebellion" from his shop in Philadelphia.

From what I read, dishonest cotton smugglers found out about the bills and purchased many packets of them, trimming off the small print at the bottom, and used them to buy cotton the South which they then smuggled back North past the battle lines. Knowing this, the Philadelphia printer began making a large amount of money from the sale of the counterfeit bills, and created higher denominations that floated south, with the impact being that inflation devalued real Confederate banknotes. This single deceptive act provided more help to the north in winning the war than any of the victories it won on the battlefield.

The printer of the notes did not "truly" break the law being able to justify his

actions, even though they were clearly profit-motivated.

I am sure now, that I have deceived myself into believing many things since childhood, but fortunately I remember the incident with the banknote, and how I purposely tried to deceive others as well as myself, in believing the note to be genuine until faced with the fact of the small print at the bottom of the note.

Did I learn from my larceny enough to not repeat actions of the same kind later in life? I am not sure, even now as I write this, that I learned enough. I can only say, that there are things humans say and do to get things the that we want, or believe they deserve, using methods that are deceitful. If our deceits are not discovered, we may continue to believe we were honest, or that we only “dreamed” the actions, while having blocked them so far into our subconsciousness that we believe we never, ever, said or did the things of which we may someday be accused.

So, kudos, to the human who puts his or her life at risk to save another, even though that same human may have swindled his or her neighbor, broken marriage vows multiple times, molested a child at a camp ground, or testified dishonestly under oath in court.

Is that flawed human to be valued or besmirched, held up as an example of greatness or vilified? I can't at this time answer that.

So what do I think of presentation at the lab this morning, and the supposed conversation with a living form of bacteria. Again, I'm not sure. Somehow I believe what we saw was truthful, and Moxy's message to me about my mother was not contrived by the computers, translators, or others involved with the project. I believe that Moxy showed herself to be as close to human as we may ever see in any other species, and of greater benefit to NASA and the future of mankind than we can possibly imagine.

