

THINKING



Is thinking a curse or a blessing? Both. We spend hours doing it. It is as Descartes said “I think therefore I am.” We do not think much about thinking, probably because we do it all the time. I am thinking as I am writing this. Everyone reading this is thinking. From the time you get up in the morning, you are constantly thinking, starting with what I am going to do this morning. What am I going to eat?

Is thinking a good thing? Would we be better to function like lower animals on instinct alone? Our early ancestors did so to a certain extent. Life has gotten much more complicated since that time. Humans were much closer to nature prior to the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism was the result of technological advances and Marx correctly noted that capitalism resulted in alienation between workers, work, and product.

I am going to try to explore some thoughts on thinking. These are not based on scientific studies, but simply observation and deductive reasoning, however faulty that might be.

EVOLUTIONARY



Humans are the peak of the evolutionary pyramid. Although our brains are not the largest, they are proportionally the largest. That is, a blue whale has a larger brain, but in comparison to its size, it is not the largest. Size is not only what matters, but also the connections and the morphology of the brain. For instance, there is a primitive hindbrain that controls functions such as breathing. In the midbrain there are functions that control movement and hormonal balance. The largest part of the human brain is the cortex, also referred to as the forebrain. It is here that language, emotion, sensation, and movement occur. That is thinking originates from the cortex of the brain, which is developmentally more advanced than human ancestors.

Wild animals are instinctual. Their behavior is based on Darwinian survival. For their species to survive, they must reproduce. To reproduce they must secure adequate nutrition and avoid predators. Anyone that has had a pet such as a dog would think that their dog thinks and perhaps, they do, but certainly the complexities of their thoughts cannot compare to human thoughts and thinking.



So according to Darwinian theory, there must have been an evolutionary advantage to thinking. Scholars argue that Homo sapiens superseded Neanderthals because of their superior brains. Maybe. As humans developed more advanced brains, they lost several physical advantages. For instance, they lose hair which is useful in cold climates. Obviously, humans compensated for the loss of hair by thinking about a problem. When cold, he wondered about solutions, creating clothing.

The earliest thought of humans was about survival. Cooperation was beneficial especially when it came to matters of defense and downing larger animals.

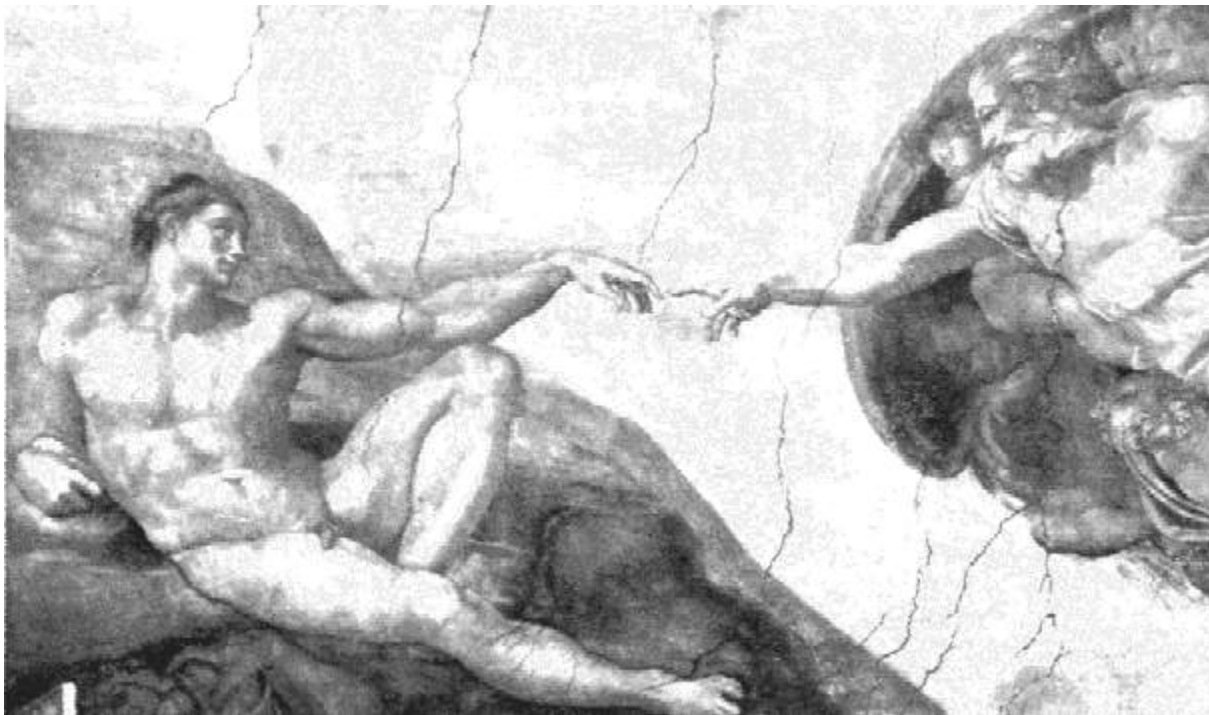
NECESSITY V LUXURY

One should think about evolution and the development of traits as to whether these new traits improve the survivability of the species. Reproduction is the primary goal of living

organisms because without that ability the species cannot survive. To reproduce a species must be healthy, meaning it must obtain adequate nutrition. Finally, it must compete. It must compete for resources such as food, especially when these are scarce. Competition also involves the ability to eat other organisms and not be eaten by them.

So how did thinking improve the survivability of humans? The choosing of a mate is more instinctual than logical. Likewise, sexual urges are more instinctual and biological rather than theoretical. Obtaining food might involve more thought. Division of labor involves planning and cooperation. The search for food might involve understanding of seasons and environment. The great advance of civilization would be impossible without agriculture and agriculture could not have developed without the human mind. The ability to defend or conquer also involves planning, cooperation, and thought.

Once the basic needs of survival exist, thinking becomes a luxury. Our ancestors developed a system of belief that they used to understand the world. Man observed and analyzed the sun, moon, and stars. He recognized patterns useful for predictions that aided survival. Thinking was useful.



In modern times when the basic needs of survival require little effort, thinking becomes a luxury but we spend more time involved in this. With the division of labor, some professions are thinking professions and others less so. With increasing free time, the brain is free to wander. Thinking goes wild.

HELPFUL V HARMFUL

Mental illness can result from aberrant thinking processes. Imagination can result in great artistic creativity but also a warped view of the world. Paranoia occurs when we see enemies everywhere. In a pugilistic society, paranoia has evolutionary advantages. Awareness of aggression enables evasive or defensive action, so-called “fight or flight.” Even in a more advanced civilization, thinking modifies the instinctual “fight or flight” reflex by weighing pros and cons.

In advanced societies, we wonder and think about everything because we have the luxury to do so. Education serves to direct thinking toward productive activities. Socialization is both habitual and planned. When instinct, emotions, and thought combine, there is a recipe for human life. Thoughts can be logical and guide emotions and instinct into optimal behavior patterns. Stoicism is a philosophy of life with a premise that correct analysis of life and behavior leads to the optimal outcome for the individual and for society.

SUMMARY

The document explores the nature of thinking, questioning whether it is a curse or a blessing. It references Descartes' famous quote, "I think therefore I am," and discusses how thinking is a constant activity for humans. The author examines the evolutionary advantages of thinking, noting that while animals rely on instinct, humans use their advanced brains for complex thought processes. The document also touches on the role of thinking in human survival, cooperation, and the development of civilization. Finally, it considers the shift from thinking as a necessity for survival to a luxury that allows humans to understand and analyze the world around them.