

Evolution's Choice: Innovate or Automate

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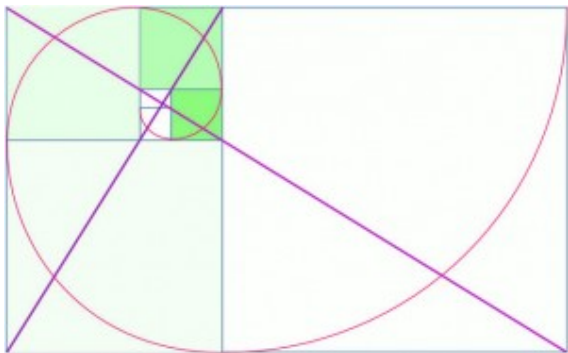
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Fractals

Fractals are structures that repeat themselves in sequences of increasing scale. Examples are plants, buildings, bodies, and societies. The simple Fibonacci Spiral, built on the ratio of the Golden Mean, reflects the fractal nature of the world. Humans appear unusual in our ability to reflect on our participation in this progression as if we were separate from it, and so to work to change and hopefully improve our role in it.



This is evolution's choice and, as humans, we take authorship upon ourselves, though we do far less than we think. In genetics the choice appears random, in politics it appears entangled, in corporations it is exploitative, in education it is rare, and in health care individual change is viewed with suspicion. There are different justifications for preserving the status quo in every case. These are based on the irrational fear of uncertainty's different consequences. The fractal behavior of these systems lies in the way they retain their

character as they grow. As they grow their goals change but the rules on which they operate don't change much.

“There is nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency something that should not be done at all.”
– Peter Drucker

Repetition

Reflect on the role of repetition in your own development. If your experience was like mine, your teachers didn't understand the difference between practice and repetition. To practice is to evolve; to repeat is to habituate. Habituated behavior does not change. Failing to understand this difference leads to misunderstandings in everything from the structure of memory to the definition of artificial intelligence. I learned the meaning of practice as a reaction against repetition.

I took music lessons. Music is universally mistaught as an exercise in repetition. I tried various instruments – recorder, piano, french horn, and guitar. The teachers destroyed the creative process in every case, and I abandoned music until later in life.

I disliked high school gym class but, by some stroke of inspiration, I reacted by engaging rather than rebelling. I joined the diving team not to compete but to practice. I unilaterally excused myself from gym to train for bicycle racing, though I was the only person doing it. The coaches saw me doing physical training and, to their credit, did not object to my truancy, through the principal did. My attempt to define my own education caused in him a reflex response.

Then I took up rock climbing and found myself in ever changing situations where no two routes were the same. Increasing skill was the only option. You'd think I would be attracted to art but, for my own personal reasons, art lacked the kind of resistance I needed.

I am more intellectually than physically inclined, so it is ironic that I got more support in athletics than scholastics. In some way, athletics reflected my nascent interest in the interaction of body and mind more so than book learning.

Practice

The goal of practice is not to routinize but to perfect, and to perfect means to innovate. To the unattuned observer an artist or athlete's practice appears repetitive, but internally they are looking for a new skill, structure, or awareness. We can view everything we do as either practice or repetition, innovation or automation.

Most of our thinking habits are bred in school. School, a modern institution, arose from the need for automation. It is not that school fails to distinguish between practice and repetition, it clearly does, and it teach repetition. This is clearly stated in the writings of Horace Mann, John Dewey, and other founders of modern schooling.

Traditional teacher training encourages habitual behavior in the guise of knowledge, and routine thinking as empowerment. Embedded in the idea of a “right answer” is deference to someone else. Teachers are sold on conformist thinking as the foundation of The Great Society. Like secret agents, teachers accept a heroic path only they understand.

“20 years of experience, or 1 year of experience repeated 20 times?”

To be fair, progress involves a combination of efficiency and innovation. My point is that the balance is not discussed, and that makes all the difference. Who makes the rules? Who controls the information?

We are taught to prevail in fair contest. To stand in ranks, squared off against our opponent, and fire our muskets until whoever is left standing can be declared the winner. Then came better intel, guns, bombs, lasers, robots, and computers. But if the opponent dresses as a civilian and blows him or herself up with fertilizer and carpet tacks, then they're not playing fair. Such is the story of innovation in conflict.

Illness

Now we come to your illness or struggle. Will you prevail through innovation or automation? What do doctors offer you? What have you been taught?

It's traditional to say Western medicine developed the "external agent" model of illness by overlooking the psycho-somatic relationship. It's closer to the truth to say Western medicine developed from mindset of external agency. It was the renaissance that separated the mind from the body, and in the process created rationalism, corporatism, and nation states. Western medicine goes unquestioned not because it's better, which it isn't, but because it's based on a faith in science. Faith that is largely misunderstood, and science that is rarely practiced outside the laboratory. Our internal thought processes are not scientific, so why do we think the experts are any different?

Health is not what you do, it's what you are. It is not a state of achievement like getting a high mark, it is a state from which you function. If you're not functioning well it's either because something is "wronging" you, or you're doing something wrong. If you're not winning, change the game.

Like wars between people, the "war" against your disease will be won by whoever makes the rules. What does this mean? It means that you should never play a losers game, and if you find yourself struggling and losing, you should change the rules of the game which includes, of course, not playing the game at all.

When it comes to your health, winning seems the imperative, and it seems one must win at all costs. This is rarely true; it is rarely the case that your fate is sealed and you must play the game set before you. To make a mechanical analogy: you have a certain momentum that propels you along a certain course. You feel attracted to certain goals, perceive certain markers, believe certain truths, and apply certain skills. Yet all of these "certain" things are the uncertain result of the reality you believe and who you define yourself to be. And of these, it is who you believe yourself to be that is the most entrenched yet, at the same time, holds the greatest potential for changing the rules of the game.



Ego

Your rules are stored in who you believe yourself to be, and your adherence to these rules follows your attachment to who you have adopted as your identity. The ego, your rational sense of self, does not make the rules, but it is the primary means by which you enforce them. You make most of your decisions from your separated sense of self, which is your ego, your identity.

Think of your ego as the soldier defending the society of your mind, the policeman patrolling the streets of your decisions, or the bouncer charged with maintaining order within the club of your beliefs. When I encounter clients who are themselves responsible for some portion of their illness I find myself working not against some external agent, but against their ego. The first limit of their ability to heal themselves is the limit of their ability to change their identity.

This is not to say that once you get beyond your ego you can do anything at all, to heal or change any condition. There are other obstacles. The laws of nature set obvious limitations, but when it comes to self-regulation the laws of nature reside in the sub-foundation of your condition. Much of your condition, both mental and physical, relies on dynamic concepts of memory, reflex, reaction, awareness, and control. This is obvious. What is not obvious is just how little awareness you have, how little control you exert, and how much physical change your powers of mind might accomplish.

Reflex

It may seem that I have moved far away from the roles of innovation and automation, but I have not. If you look at your mind's role in your body's processes you can see your mind as always deciding between creating change or enforcing reflex. When we consider reflex action we often mistake it for the natural order, a law of nature, or a medical condition.

Allopathic medicine is not science, and medical diagnoses are not laws of nature. The power of innovation lies exactly at the juncture between what's likely and what's certain. Maybe you can now see that your decision as to which path you will take has deep roots in your own habits of innovation and automation.



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