Twitter Thread by Zero HP Lovecraft



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If a small child scrapes her knee, her parent might "kiss it better". This does nothing, but both parties appreciate the ritual. Hanson finds that empirically, many medical interventions do nothing, but we pay for them, because they are an adult version of "kiss the boo boo"

Our institutions are prodigiously wasteful. Under the feel-good veneer of win-win cooperation—teaching kids, healing the sick, celebrating creativity—our institutions harbor giant, silent furnaces of intra-group competitive signaling

trillions of dollars of wealth, resources, and human effort are being burned to ash every year, largely for the purpose of showing off... institutions do end up achieving many of their official goals [but] they're simultaneously serving purposes no one is eager to acknowledge

People are judging us all the time. They want to know if we'll make good friends, allies, lovers, or leaders. And one of the important things they're judging is our motives. Why do we behave the way we do? Do we have others' best interests at heart, or are we entirely selfish?

Because others are judging us, we're eager to look good. So we emphasize our pretty motives and downplay our ugly ones. It's not lying, exactly, but neither is it perfectly honest.

This applies to both our words and our thoughts. Why can't we be honest with ourselves? The answer is: our thoughts aren't as private as we imagine. Conscious thought is a rehearsal of what we're ready to say to others. "We deceive ourselves the better to deceive others"

Some ideas are more naturally viral than others: When a theory emphasizes altruism, cooperation, and other feel-good motives, people want to share it, shout it from the rooftops. It reflects well on both speakers and listeners to be associated with something so inspirational

Human beings are self-deceived because self-deception is useful. It allows us to reap the benefits of selfish behavior while posing as unselfish in front of others. Confronting our delusions must therefore (at least in part) undermine their very reason for existing

What looks like altruism is actually, at a deeper level, competitive self-interest.

When a species is pair-bonded and monogamous, the incentives for males and females converge. (My note: What happens when we undermine monogamy?)

if you're worried that your neighbors might disapprove and even coordinate to punish you, then you're most likely dealing with a norm. Norm violators are punished by a coalition, that is, people acting in concert.

Christopher Boehm calls it a "reverse dominance hierarchy," where instead of the strongest apes dominating the group, in humans it's the rest of the group, working together, that's able to dominate the strongest apes

Four seemingly irrational behaviors we use to win social (mixed motive) games:
* degrading communication channels
* opening ourselves to future punishment
* deliberately not learning things that undermine us
* intentionally believing a lie

The strategy for degrading communication channels is to use a proxy agent to conduct negotiations. We can place inflexible terms on an intermediary, making it harder to propose new terms to a deal.

Opening oneself up to future punishment. Schelling: Among the legal privileges of corporations are the right to sue and the right to be sued. The right to be sued is the power to make a promise, power to do business with someone who might be damaged

Ignoring information (strategic ignorance). If you're kidnapped, you might prefer not to see your kidnapper's face or learn his name, because if he knows you can identify him later (to the police), he'll be less likely to let you go. Knowledge as a liability.

Purposely believing something that's false. If you're a general who firmly believes your army can win, even though the odds are against it, you might nevertheless intimidate your opponent into backing down.

The value of strategic ignorance and related phenomena lies in the way others act when they believe that you're ignorant. As Kurzban says, "Ignorance is at its most useful when it is most public."It needs to be advertised and made conspicuous.

Although we're aware of some of the surface motives for our actions, the deep-seated evolutionary motives often remain inaccessible, buried behind the scenes in the subconscious workings of our brains' ancient mechanisms

Information can threaten our self-image and therefore our social image. In this sense, Freud was right: the ego needs to be protected. Though it's not because we are fragile, rather it's to keep damaging information from leaking out of our brain to our associates

Reason is the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.—David Hume

A man always has two reasons for doing anything: a good reason and the real reason."—J. P. Morgan