

Appearance of a higher power

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Subject: Science fiction

[From Bill Powers (930521.1800 MDT)]

A little science-fiction:

I would like to propose a theory: God, for each individual, is a higher level of control systems in the individual, above the level where awareness normally resides.

The higher level system can specify reference states for the conscious level. These are experienced not as reference signals (a control system does not sense its own reference signals), but as a judgment applied to perceptions. Some perceptions are correct, others are wrong. From the standpoint of the aware systems, the knowledge of good and bad perceptions is simply given; there is no reason why a given perception is good and is to be sought, while another is bad and is to be avoided. One simply knows when a perception is wrong and when it is right. It is a reasonable hypothesis for the conscious system to conclude that something other than itself is telling it about good and bad, right and wrong.

A year ago or so, in discussing how the imagination connection works, something someone said made me realize that in order to imagine, a higher system has to put a subordinate system into the imagination mode. A control system can't do this for itself. This has always been evident, in retrospect, but was never said in so many words. By throwing a lower-order system into the imagination mode, a higher-level system can carry out a control action and get back exactly the perceptions that it specifies. If the higher system provided its own imagination connection, it would have to provide an internal connection for each effect its outputs normally have on lower-order systems, thus providing each input to its own perceptual function that would occur with all the lower-level systems in operation. But those connections already exist in the normal mode; it would be far more parsimonious to throw a switch that puts one or more lower systems into a mode that makes each reference input become a perception in that system, a perception which then follows the normal pathways to the higher input function that are used in real-time operation. So when systems at one level go into the imagination mode, the imagined information is actually being used at the next higher level. Only one set of many-to-one perceptual functions is then needed, instead of one set for normal operation and a duplicate set for operation through the imagination loop.

Now consider the experience of the state of imagination as if awareness were limited to a set of lower-level systems, experiencing only the perceptual signals in those and still-lower-level systems. When a higher system institutes the imagination connection, those systems would suddenly begin experiencing new perceptions that are not coming from the environment. One could experience, for example, verbal statements, or perhaps just their meanings. These new perceptions would arise without any conscious attempt to create them: they would just occur. There would be no evidence as to why they occurred or where they came from. It would be just as if someone else were creating these experiences, using them to communicate something by a non-physical means. One might find oneself experiencing whole scenarios in which striving toward some goal-state was the central theme, or in which the solution to a problem was revealed.

The organization of these experiences would be elusive to the conscious system, because it is the organization of a higher-level system. If, for example, the conscious system were operating at the logical or program level, a whole new logically-connected procedure or argument might unfold, but the principle behind it would not be evident; principles are not programs or logic. It would be as if the logical self had been told "Do it this way, and it will work." Even without understanding the principle (or what a principle is), this level can bring about the specified perception of a logical process, and sure enough, it works. Of course it doesn't ALWAYS work, but the miracle

is that it EVER works when there is no logical reason why it should. To the first person to work out the procedure for multiplication, the idea for the program must have seemed divinely inspired -- and to others in the same position, that person must have seemed a magician.

Or suppose that the conscious system were working at the principle level. This level can perceive examples of principles in sets of programs or logical procedures, and can act to change the programs or procedures when the principle they embody departs from a reference-state, but it cannot choose its own goal-principles. Those are given to it as outputs from the system concept level. To a consciousness operating up to the principle level but no higher, the reference-principles would seem to be selected as if by an outside intelligence, having all the power of generalized commandments. This, and not that, is the RIGHT principle. To another person working at the same level, a description of the selected principles might seem to indicate that their originator received them as a gift from another world. To anyone operating no higher than the principle level, it would not be evident why this set of principles produces a more harmonious -- or at least more consistent or workable or coherent -- life than any other set. Yet some sets of principles clearly work together better than other sets, in some hard-to-define way.

At some stage in human evolution, there must have been a time when the neural machinery required to support system concepts simply did not exist. At that time, principles would have been selected experimentally, through reorganization, for no systematic reason. Before that, there must have been a time at which no principles could be perceived or controlled; then, logical procedures would have been selected by trial and error. And so it goes, back to the least organized forms of life before brains even existed.

As the possibility of new levels came into being, the skills at using them must have developed in a slow and patchy way. The highest level at any given time would have to go through a long process of organization, working at first crudely and then in a more and more extensive and effective way. Each new elaboration at the new level must, of course, have been useful in order to be selected, but the degree of utility would not instantly become the maximum possible.

And evolution does not proceed in the same way over the entire human race. Some individuals will have more equipment than others from which to construct new systems at the developing level, just by chance recombination of genetic materials. Even in one family the differences can be large. This does not make the lucky individuals any smarter than the others; the existence of the raw neural materials does not specify how they will be used. If one person is able to perceive and control principles more extensively than another, the particular principles selected on a trial-and-error basis might be less effective than those learned by another person with fewer basic neural capabilities. A person with more extensive equipment for constructing a higher level might be far less capable, at a lower level, than many other people, or even most other people. The development of a new level and the process of putting it into operation in the existing world are not systematically organized. Evolution and reorganization operate through unsystematic change, followed by a process of selection from the unpredictable results.

Now couple this idea with the mysterious phenomenon of awareness. Consciousness, I have proposed, is a state that results when awareness is associated with the perceptual signals at one or more levels in the hierarchy. There is evidence that the locus of awareness can change; in at least many cases, the control systems involved may operate essentially the same way with and without awareness (save for possible connections of awareness with reorganization). There is informal evidence, too, that different people habitually focus awareness at some highest level, at least as adults, and that for them, the operation of any systems that became organized at still higher levels is unconscious. At one time those systems may have been conscious, but eventually people seem to settle for a favorite level, a level at which they feel (and may in fact be) most competent, perhaps. Or they may be forced by circumstances to deal with problems at lower levels, and come in that way to dwell there.

So a painter may focus at levels involving sensation and form and relationship, while a physicist may focus at levels involving categories, sequences, and mathematical logic. A Talmudic scholar may focus at the level of logic and principle. A Bhuddist monk may focus on system concepts -- but very few people can survive by attending exclusively to that level of perception.

Most people, I think, consciously live somewhere in the middle regions of the hierarchy. Whatever goes on at higher levels operates without benefit of consciousness, whatever that benefit is. At one time, they must have been aware at the higher levels if the idea of reorganization being associated with awareness is true. But whatever degree of organization came about at those levels, by the time of late childhood the focus has returned to lower levels where the immediate problems of life are, and the higher levels from then on operate automatically, as they were when last reorganized. This seems evident in at least some instances, where the organization of higher-level concepts in a person seems to be very simple and childlike. The last major reorganizations occurred when the person WAS a child.

This is another approach to the problem of belief. In this view, a belief is not so much a fixed perception or reference signal as a fixed organization at a higher level. It is evidence of an unchanging way of controlling for the highest levels of variables. A person in the grip of a belief is in conscious control only of some intermediate level and downward; whatever that person feels impelled to do at the highest level comes from a source outside awareness, and because of not being subject to conscious examination, from a source that can't be reorganized.

So when David Koresh said he was waiting for God to tell him what to do (what to want to experience), he was telling the literal truth, exactly as others who have said similar things have told the literal truth. He was conscious of a systematic story, but he did not know that it was coming from his own higher-level systems. From the level where his awareness was stuck, all he could do was wait for the urge to say or do something consistent with the story. He took this urge, when it appeared in its own time, as a message from God, and he could do nothing else but what it demanded. To his followers, self-selected by their own loci of awareness, David's demands were as much a revelation as they were to David, and were as little comprehended. People capable of forming their own principles and system concepts did not follow David Koresh, or anyone else.

As I said: science-fiction. This is a plausible story put together from principles that remain to be proven. But it is grounded in experience, it is part of a logical conception of human organization, and in principle it is falsifiable. It is consistent with, or not inconsistent with, a vast body of physical concepts and observations. It embodies PCT, a proven principle.

So I ask whether this story is any less plausible than many others that have been offered as an explanation for the same kinds of phenomena.

Best, Bill P.