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Coaching from an evolution of view

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COACHING FROM AN EVOLUTION POINT OF VIEW

ABSTRACT

In the book *Autonomous Agents* Alfrede Mele distinguishes *autonomy* and *heteronomy*. This latter is present when the person who has self-mastery is also controlled by others. If they wish to use him for their own purposes, they subject him to brainwashing. Mele claims a Default Responsibility Principle. If nobody else is responsible for you are in state A, then you are. If coaches, in realizing their objectives, convert us into ethical agents, then coaching and not manipulation is involved. Mele considers brainwashing as “value engineering” that “bypasses” people’s abilities in order to gain control over their mental lives.

He suggests that it is very important not to lie to each other in the process of coaching to be autonomous. Coaches must not hide their genuine objectives – then the path to open-mindedness and flexibility can be seen as coaching that yields autonomy.

I argue, by contrast, that someone can be autonomous even if they are lied to or if they misread some of the situations if public ethics sets great value on original moral decisions.

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Perhaps the best example is the brainwashed King Oedipus, who is making a series of heteronom but imaginative judgements (among other things, he wins sphinx), whereby ruining himself and the community he rules. This is proven by the fact that when the truth dawns on him, after some hesitation he acts as an autonomous agent.

If the only difference between brainwashing and coaching is that the former uses lies and conceals this, but makes the mind open, then the distinction between brainwashed and coached people is amongst their true and false beliefs. The victim of brainwashing just needs time to rearrange the network of his beliefs to be able to make autonomous decisions in the real world as well.

Apparently, then, whether the result of coaching or programming, what matters is open-mindedness, flexibility, and resolution. In principle both coaching and brainwashing may result in open-minded, non-obsessive, flexible, and resolute personalities. The coach's motive will be different, but the outcome may be identical. Open-mindedness always makes it possible for the brainwashed person to realize that his "master" has used him for his own purposes; that hidden behind his every monologue there is a series of dialogues; that the distinction between what can and what cannot be

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questioned only makes sense within a given frame of reference – that is, all may be questioned, if not at the same time. Moreover, a master's, coach's, or *sensei's* intentions are as *freely* interpretable as those of an artist; this freedom explains, among other things, that the aims of both the educator and the brainwasher may only be partially realized. The evolutionist view of the consciousness makes it impossible to think of *the self* as a homunculus that controls all actions of the person, and by influencing which, full control can be gained over the person involved. *The self* is not an entity from which the consciousness springs, and it does not control the processes in the brain: it is the upshot of those processes.

Keywords: style, evolution, autonomy, heteronomy, brainwashing, coaching,

Natural style versus artificial manner

The androids may be at least as intelligent as us in Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids dream Electric Sheep?* but the one thing they lack is empathy. The Voight-Kampff test specifically

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been designed to measure just that, which makes it possible for bounty hunter Rick Deckard to tell them apart from humans. The director's cut of the film based on the script – *Blade Runner* – however, makes it obvious that the otherwise very much human and human-looking protagonist is an android himself, indistinguishable from a human, fitting one of those patterns of personality on which our culture places such a high a value. What puts the viewer off in the first place, besides his vulnerability, is his style, a kind of registered trademark. Only at the end do you realize that the main character is like a custom-built tool that opens the locks designed by cultural evolution. In Dick's novel another bounty hunter appears, Phil Resch, who Deckard suspects is an android for a long time since he has not the tiniest morsel of empathy for those he *must* liquidate. Put in Williams's terms¹, Deckard lives a life of ethics, while the other bounty hunter manifests being guided by morality. According to Williams morality can be seen as a subsystem of ethics, which is under control by obligations and *universalisability*. On the basis of their differing psychological sources, Wollheim² sharply contrasts the narrower notion of morality that is subordinated to obligation with the world of value and goodness.

¹ Williams, Bernard (1985) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Fontana, London

² Wollheim, Richard (1984) *The Thread of Life*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 215-216.

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One (morality) derives from projection introjection [of a menacing figure], the other (value) derives from projection ['of archaic bliss, of loves satisfied']. One is in its origins largely defensive and largely coercive, the other is neither. One tries against fear, the other to perpetuate love.

Williams claims that although morality underdetermines ethics, it is still looked upon as an overarching framework which, being a consistent system of obligations, prescribes how we should act. Williams questions the general validity of morality as well as its superior authority to prescribe our acts. Ethics rests upon the realization that a happy life means more than the fulfilment of obligations. It does not follow from this that ethics ignores moral considerations, merely that it rejects its claim to absolute authority. Moral obligations may be seen as a subset of ethic notions aimed at a good life, which means that ethic considerations are more like aesthetic judgements than logical or legal procedures.

Finding what is right becomes a matter of finding the most fitting and appealing gestalt, of perceiving the most attractive and harmonious

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constellation of various and variously weighted features in a given situation or life.³

Dick's other character, Phil Resch, who invariably carries out what he is hired to do – exterminates replicants that are a potential danger to humans – leads a moral life. Rick Deckard, by contrast, is the embodiment of an aestheticized ethics, for whom the fine shades of behaviour mean more than duty. Resch, the *homo moralis*, is closer to the ideal of the electronic teacher than Deckard, who embodies the *homo ethicus*, although he is a replica, judging by the film. The two of them appear to me to be paradigmatic characters because in the book, the real human figure behaves like a machine, he acts by following rules, all his actions guided by a “morality program”. Deckard, by contrast, although a machine, acts creatively and inspiredly, often in defiance of the rules. In Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids dream Electric Sheep?* Rick Deckard seemed creative, original, unpredictable and sophisticated, in short, he had style; his colleague, Resch, who acts on pre-constructed rules, appeared to be an android-exterminating machine pre-programmed by morality. As we realize that Deckard is a replicant, very much like when we realize that we are looking

³ Ibid. 245.

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at a fake what we thought was original representation – style – will be seen as worthless imitation of the original representation that is as pre-programmed as that of its counterpart. Deckard being run by a style-simulating program, his apparent originality is not a bit more real than that of Resch.

Mother Nature's Discreet Charm

Man, aesthetically and ethically unique, to use Daniel Dennett's terminology, is an "intentional system" that represents the world originally; the robot that copies him has but derived intentionality. Similarly, Phil Resch, supposedly having intentionality of the original kind, carries out his tasks android style, while Rick Deckard, who has no original intentionality, is a mannered replicator of the archetype of the lonely cop. Danto⁴ claims that skills are not involved in tastes either so authentic manifestations of aestheticised ethics are original figures whose tastes cannot possibly be refined by anyone; since by using rules people can only be taught to simulate others' refined tastes, they are like artefacts with

⁴ Danto, Arthur, C. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. 203

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derived intentionality. He⁵ argues that if the accusations at the time had been true and J S Bach had indeed used a secret machine to compose fugues, then logically, his fugues thus produced in a mechanical manner could not have style, for they would have been composed not directly by their creator but by a mechanical device that worked according to rules, lists, and codes. Although Danto does not say this explicitly, these would only have represented the manner, not the style of Bach. *Show* themselves to have style but not *have style*. Danto's claim can easily be invalidated. At a certain level of description, we all are machines run by such rules, lists, and codes since our mind is a system of representation that is part of the physical world, and its workings can, in principle, be predicted by resorting to the rules of physics. The mind may be looked upon as a complex computer with programs installed by natural and cultural evolution.⁶ Danto's presupposition is that no program can be original, that is, the fugue machine does nothing but mechanically carry out its creator's plans. The question then arises, what if the machine simply outdoes its creator and composes original music? Who does this do credit to then? Has the machine become a genius through self-

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ „We humans are not just products of our genes. We are also products of our social upbringing and our interactions with the world of objects. Our culture too is a product of our embodiment within the world.” Brooks, Rodney A. (2003) *Robot...*, 67.

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improvement? Did the original melody lie dormant in the original program in the first place, was the hidden genius of the fugue-maker activated by the piece of machinery, making its style visible? Can this complex and original act come from a combination of simple mechanisms? By modifying somewhat the original story and replacing the maker of the mechanism with a programmer writing programs that create fugues, then the answer to the question will be partly the answer to our question, namely whether students dream about electric teachers (of music) or not.

If the program has “created” our piece of music by applying a sequence of easily identifiable operations, it has only made more explicit the pre-existing ideas of the programmer. Then supposedly the original ideas have always been in the programmer’s mind. If, by contrast, we cannot discover the way the original music was created by simply going through the steps in the program, then self-contained “ideas” must be attributed to the machine powered by the program. Its maker is to be credited with the program but not with the “original ideas” induced by the program. Having created its creator, man is but a “meta-author” of this work.⁷ In the former case, the program’s maker is to be credited with style, while in the

⁷ Hofstadter, Douglas R. (1979) *Goedel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Brain*. NY: Basic Books

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latter case, the program itself. Here I ignore aspects such as the meaning of a piece of music cannot be localised within a single mind, sheet of music, or orchestra that plays it. In interpreting music we can directly grasp the syntax intrinsically present in the given work, while its semantic traits depend on the relationship of the object being interpreted and the potentially infinite set of other entities. Whereas the syntactic features are public and local, the semantic traits are mysterious and free-floating – this is the pledge of freedom. In contradistinction, Searle⁸ proposes that the intentionality of mental states is intrinsic, while the intentionality of material objects used to represent something is of the derived kind. Daniel Dennett⁹ denies this and believes that there is a close link between the adaptationism used in the theory of evolution and the theory of intentional systems. The intentional stance is an efficient albeit undoubtedly risky device, one that is parasitic on the predictive power of semantic information. The folk psychology informing about intentional stances is a successful technique that informally accounts for the storage, transmission and transformation of semantic information – that is, memes – which ignores measuring the capacities of the

⁸ Searle, John (1983) *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge University Press, New York

⁹ Dennett, Daniel (1983) „Intentional System in Cognitive Ethology: the 'Panglossian Paradigm' Defended”. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 6, pp. 343-390.

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media for transmitting and storing information. I believe that what makes intentional stances efficient is just its referential opacity: by their *that*-clauses (creating an illusion of leaving the system), propositional attitudes break from the space of extensional logic. In the theory of intentional systems, referential opacity involves considering the system rational whose intentional states we are interested in. The intentional grasping of patterns produced by evolution and human behavioural patterns can both be normatively constituted, and the intentional attitude is capable of discovering similarities between them on a pure semantic basis and of utilizing this in acts of prediction and interpretation. Dennett¹⁰ is right when he asserts that this is a Panglossian picture, but he believes that this is the mirror that Mother Nature loves looking at herself in. George Kampis¹¹ offers a witty caricature of the Panglossian attitude proudly defended by Dennett. “If selection is lost, adaptation gets lost; if adaptation is lost, evolutionary epistemology (EE) gets lost; if EE is lost, the intentional account gets lost; if intentionality is lost, the mind gets lost; if the mind is lost, reason gets lost – and all that for a trifle like this”. The poem-machine works but it is not optimized. For the genie shut in the bottle of intentionalism to

¹⁰ Dennett, Daniel, Ibid.

¹¹ Kampis, George (1999) „Dennett and Evolution.” *Replika*, 36. 25-44. (In Hungarian)

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be summoned, the story must be told backwards, to get a really apt and appropriate summary of the surprisingly efficient albeit circular explanation of the world by Master Pangloss. If the mind is lost, reason may be lost; if reason is lost, intentionality gets lost; if the intentional account is lost, evolutionary epistemology gets lost; if EE is lost, adaptation gets lost; if adaptation is lost, selection gets lost – and all that for a trifle like this. From this angle, our trust in the original intentionality grounded in the doctrine of the rationalism of meaning must be place with the free-floating rationales and our own derived intentionalism. Dennett believes that it will do to see ourselves as artefacts produced by Mother Nature. The genes, which treat us humans as devices of survival, are the beneficiaries of Mother Nature’s engineering work, while the primary recipients of cultural evolution are the memes. Obviously, cultural evolution itself is only of derived intentionality; only Mother Nature’s intentionality is original. We do make the mistake of intentionality in the analysis of original works of art and original humans if we interpret the “work” by constituting authorial intentions based on the patterns of the representational system in question. The author of artefacts produced by evolution – Mother Nature –

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may also be constituted if we read her works according to the rules of the given representational system.

It thus becomes possible, through the multiple intentionality of our mind that was created by, it for evolution to see itself, however limitedly, in its own mirror – that is, us. We owe our derived intentionality to Mother Nature's original intentionality, while it is only in the opaque mirror of our derived intentionality that her original intentionality becomes visible.

Autonomy and heteronomy

Acceptance of this view allows for looking at J S Bach as just as much of a fugue machine that the composing machine he allegedly created. A fugue-composing program devised, through natural and cultural selection, by Mother Nature, who is thus the meta-author of J S Bach's works. Ontologically, Johann Sebastian Bach's is not more privileged a position than the android Rick Deckard's. What differentiates both autonomous creators and quasi-artists operating within the range of aestheticised ethics from their heteronomous counterparts is that they produce patterns indicative of

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autonomous agents that are substrate-neutral, that is, independent both of the inner representation of their creators and of what the carriers of those representations are. Without autonomy there can be no talk of creativity, which, of course, does not mean that all autonomous decisions are necessarily aesthetic or ethic choices. In the book *Autonomous Agents* Alfred Mele claims that besides self-mastery, *autonomy* is also involved here, which is contrasted to *heteronomy*.¹² This latter is present when the person who has self-mastery is also influenced by others. If they wish to use him for their own purposes, they subject him to brainwashing. If teachers, in realizing their objectives, convert us into moral agents, then education and not manipulation is involved. Mele considers brainwashing as “value engineering”, which “bypasses” people’s abilities in order to gain control over their mental lives.¹³ To clearly distinguish heteronomy and autonomy, let me present a thought experiment.¹⁴ Let us imagine that the protagonist of the film *Blade Runner*, Rachel the android has a replica, Rachel I (a copy of a given type in Dick’s novel), who are true copies of a pair of twins, Rachel II and III. Let us suppose that all four of them are alike psychologically but

¹² Mele, Alfred (1995) *Autonomous Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

¹³ *ibid*, 166-167.

¹⁴ My thought experiment lives on one of Dennett’s. see Dennett, Daniel C. (2003) *Freedom Evolves*. Penguin Books, London, 281-287.

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Rachel I and Rachel III have been brainwashed; then, while Rachel and Rachel II are autonomous agents, their twin sisters have only apparent autonomy, in actual fact they are morally inauthentic. The question is, what would happen if Rachel I and III grasped and became aware of the reality of the situation: are they to be seen as autonomous agents from this point on? Let us suppose that Rachel I relates to her past in an autonomous fashion while Rachel III heteronomously. What conclusions would follow from this? That despite brainwashing sessions of identical lengths and brainwashing programs resulting in identical psychological dispositions only statistical guesses can be made as to whether the agent's next decision will be autonomous or heteronomous. This is neither surprising nor dispiriting, since dispositions like intelligence or originality are involved. What matters is that their decisions that are morally important should be generally authentic. Since Rachel I and III have been brought up to accept their situation, that is, brainwashing has been successful, Rachel I's autonomy is probably apparent and may be likened to a one-off success of a poor athlete or a surprisingly good paper by a poor student.

Let us suppose that the two sisters subjected to brainwashing are not told the truth before years pass. They will have made

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quite a few genuine moral decisions exactly like their autonomous sisters, since in terms of the thought experiment they are as open-minded and cognitively flexible as they are. From this it follows that with time, heteronomous creatures that have an apparent open-mindedness and flexibility can themselves become autonomous. In societies where open-mindedness and creative aesthetic and moral decisions count as valuable, robots programmed to simulate these and brainwashed people may become creative, if exposed to the appropriate experience. In a suitably stimulating environment, manners that simulate original styles may easily – while they do not necessarily – grow into styles. The fugue-composing program that is capable of teaching itself is only an interpreter for the ideas of the programmer at first, but may become a composer of music thus only meta-authored by the programmer himself. The original intentions of “value engineering” may be overwritten by those complex problem situations and intricate manipulations of symbols during the solution of which the object of brainwashing grows into an autonomous agent. Obviously, this can happen in the opposite direction, with styles turning into manners, originality becoming empty, replaced by acts of self-quoting. A good part of moral decisions deduced from moral obligation are not

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creative but still autonomous; creative ethical decisions, on the other hand, are necessarily autonomous, which means that in an ethic and an aesthetic sense the personality is only authentic when it is capable of making creative decisions. In Spark's novel *The Prime of Jean Miss Brodie*, Miss Brodie subjects her students to brainwashing, but because she indoctrinates open-mindedness, freedom, and a dedication to individuality, it becomes possible – at least for the most talented of them named Sandy Stranger – to become an autonomous agent and write her treatise on moral perception, titled “The Transfiguration of Commonplace”.

While playing the piano, and musing over her “family” photo in the film *Blade Runner*, Rachel wonders whether she is a human with genuine memories or, an android. Deckard cuts this short, replying to her that she's a good player. Implicit in this answer is that it does not matter whether she has pseudo-memories or real ones; it is immaterial whether her aptitude for music is the outcome of instruction or programming; the important thing is that she can play well, making creative aesthetic decisions.¹⁵

¹⁵ „The insight underlying the Turing test is the same insight that inspires the new practice among symphony orchestras of conducting auditions with an opaque screen between the jury and the musician. What matters in a musician, obviously, is musical ability and only musical ability; such features as sex, hair length, skin color, and weight are strictly irrelevant.” Dennett, Daniel (1998) „Can Machines Think?” in *Brainchildren*, 5.

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While the Rachel II of the thought experiment is open-minded, non-obsessive, and flexible as a result of her education, Rachel is all of those thanks to programming. Using Wollheim's terminology, they both project their creative decisions into the external world, and have internalised their obligations, that is, they freely pursue the aims therein. By contrast, it was due to the brainwashing program and the brainwash that Rachel I and Rachel III have become open-minded, non-obsessive, and flexible, while their apparent projections are really introjections that they do not freely choose, although this is what their brainwashers make them believe. Their creative ethical and aesthetic decisions are very much the fallacy of someone quoting others while thinking that he is articulating his own ideas.

What distinguishes the victim of brainwash and the agent brought up to be creative in Mele's thought experiment, then, is that they lie to the former, keeping all this a secret. Dennett believes that it is very important not to lie to each other in the process of educating to be autonomous.¹⁶ Coaches must not hide their genuine objectives – then the path to open-mindedness and flexibility can be seen as education that yields

¹⁶ „As long as you tell people the truth ... and eschew efforts to mislead them, as long as you leave them in a state from which they can make at least as good an independent assessment of their predicament as before you intervened, you are educating them, not brainwashing them.” Dennett, *ibid*, 283.

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autonomy. I argue, by contrast, that someone can be autonomous even if they are lied to or if they misread the situation. Perhaps the best example is King Oedipus, who is making a series of autonomous decisions, whereby ruining himself and the community he rules. This is proved by the fact that when the truth dawns on him, after some hesitation he acts as an autonomous agent.

If the only difference between brainwashing and coaching is that the former uses lies and conceals this, but makes the mind open, then the distinction is just one of true and false beliefs. The victim of brainwashing just needs time to rearrange the network of his beliefs to be able to make autonomous decisions in the real world as well.

Apparently, then, whether the result of coaching or programming, what matters are open-mindedness and flexibility. In this thought experiment, the only difference between autonomy and potential autonomy is that the former is yielded by education or programming earlier on, while the latter may only become autonomy aided by the appropriate experience. Both education, coaching and brainwashing may result in open-minded, non-obsessive, flexible, and resolute personalities. The coach's motive will be different, but the outcome may be identical. Open-mindedness always makes it

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possible for the brainwashed person to realize that his ‘master’ has used him for his own purposes; that hidden behind his every monologue is a series of dialogues; that the distinction between what can and what cannot be questioned only makes sense within a given frame of reference – that is, all may be questioned, if not at the same time. Moreover, a master’s, coach’s, or *sensei’s* intentions are as *freely* interpretable as those of an artist; this freedom explains, among other things, that the aims of both the educator and the brainwasher may only be partially realized. Worse, the evolutionist view of the soul makes it impossible to think of *the self* as a homunculus that controls all actions of the person, and by influencing which, full control can be gained over the person involved.¹⁷ *The self* is not an identity from which the mind springs, or which controls the processes in the brain: it is the upshot of those processes. Dennett quotes the neurologist Daniel Wegner to prove this point. „People become what they think they are, or what they find others think they are.”¹⁸ Free will is not the ability to do something, but knowledge that something is being done in your name.

At the end of Dick’s novel, Rachel the android takes vengeance on Deckard by killing the genuine sheep that he came by

¹⁷ Ibid, 287.

¹⁸ Ibid, 250.

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expensively. That gesture symbolically kills the modernist faith in originality. Style is a substance-neutral pattern that androids can enjoy as much as humans. It is the expression, and not the cause, of talent, which partly genetically determined for us humans. These meaningful patterns freely float in cultural space rather than being anchored to brains or bound in or to paper. All this is the pledge of our freedom – free as we are to interpret our situation. “Everything is possible,” says the artist, but “not everything is feasible” the engineer replies. The question in the title is intended to provoke: it suggests that while the modernist myth of originality has come to naught, the relativizing contextualism is not viable either. The question is not whether to be engineers or artists. The word “dream” in the title suggests art, the free play of fancy, while “electric teacher”, exactitude and the determinism of physical reality. The world wide web is an exciting experimental ground for the co-evolution of free will and determinism. What is involved here is how dumb algorithms liberate us, citizens of open societies and descendants of impersonal machines subjected to ruthless determinism; how we, intentional individuals, grow capable of providing ever more complex representations of our many selves and of the world, becoming thereby more free,

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and dreaming of electric coaches, the eternal students that we are.