A Dragon's Guide to Social Competency in the Year of Our Lord 2019

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Socialization, despite all the advances of the human race, remains one of the most difficult and technically demanding intellectual and practical fields in existence. It is hideously opaque and hence traditionally resistant to the tools of mathematical analysis that allow areas of lesser complexity to be broken down into familiar and discrete components and thus rendered scientific. Philosophical analysis is possible, but inconsistently fruitful.

What is socialization? It would seem in general to be a positive sum game based on communication which distributes social resources. However, there are also consistently negative sum outcomes to socialization for specific individuals such as job loss, joblessness, home loss, homelessness, and death. Socialization is roughly analogous to a game of musical chairs in which number of chairs and number of people scales dynamically, "knocking people out" at the fringes while rarely greatly reducing the total number of people in the game proportionally. The positive sum spoils are then divided up among the survivors according to other, unknown formula.

Socialization for most people also seems to reflect subconscious or reflexive level thought, rather than deliberate rational thought, even going so far as to contradict many of the rational intuitions of the most intelligent and rational people in the world in its machinations. It is so reflexive that it often seems to be something that happens to people, or perhaps with people, rather than because of people. In fact, trying to hold specific individuals responsible for negative outcomes to socialization in particular is generally impossible. It consistently results in evasion, appeals to God, nature, or higher forces, or the lower forces of physics, or metaphysical forces of determinism.

It is apparent that there are really two different games being played with socialization: one with winners and losers, and one with just winners of different degree. If you can't win the first game, you'll never be able to play the second. Therefore, this guide will strive to provide you with the conceptual tools and framework necessary to succeed at Game 1 so that you can begin the process of moving on to Game 2. I will begin with a historical-biological-evolutionary-psychological sort of background and move on to an eventual model based on such, then to game theory.

Chapter 1 A Historical-Biological-Evolutionary-Psychological sort of background

If you are like me, you have probably had the impression at some time that everyone in the entire world was trying to murder you. Obviously, problems of coordination alone make this implausible. Additionally, if everyone really were trying to murder you, this would likely result fairly quickly in your demise. While this second objection can be handled by supposing everyone has very specific restrictions on the way they are allowing themselves to murder you (perhaps due to collective psychological hang ups), whenever we reach problems of collective mass behavior in general it is probably fairer to take the question of intention out of it and suppose from the beginning that people's behavior is the result of subconscious or unintentional thought processes, rather than supposing intention and then adding auxiliary hypotheses about subconscious or unintentional thought processes.

Therefore, the appropriate formulation of the intuition is not "Everyone in the entire world is trying to murder me". It is "Everyone in the entire world is reflexively engaged in behaviors that will result in my long term death if they are maximized". This modified hypothesis is often true. Since socialization is a positive sum game for the vast majority of people, they will have no understanding of this and will thus deny it even when it's not about them, even for those whose lives they know nothing about. For those for whom socialization is consistently a negative sum game, however, it should be obvious and undeniable.

Now, there are some important qualifications in the modified hypothesis: "Long term" is important, and implies that socialization is an iterated game. What this means is that social losses, even for people who consistently incur them, are generally capped at the level of each iteration: there is only so much you can lose in a given iteration, except under exceptional circumstances. This should be apparent from the fact that, as Jordan Peterson puts it, "Some losers lose all the time". It would not be possible to lose all the time if you lost everything all at once. The next most important qualification is "if they are maximized". Socialization is human behavior, and humans behave stochastically. They must behave stochastically, because their conscious thought processes are based on chemical processes, which are by nature stochastic. Therefore, it is biologically impossible for humans to maximize anything in the sense that, say, a computer could. This is an important revelation and we will come back to it later.

Knowing that socialization is an iterated game with the potential to kill people, do we learn anything by exploring its origins? Probably not, but it is a common intellectual vice to explore origins and I see no reason to break from tradition here. Human beings are perhaps best thought of as "the mentally unstable ape". We do most of our learning at a young age by anthropomorphizing phenomenon that have no apparent intentionality or personhood, and if they did, almost certainly wouldn't have it qua themselves, as defined by our grouping or boundaries of them. At the same time, we keep track of levels of ability and intentional capacity and so forth and when things break, we tend to blame someone human for breaking them. It is almost formulaic, a mixture of temporal and spatial proximity compared against degree of inferred malice. Hence the burning of witches, the holocaust, and so forth. It is likely a new holocaust is about to happen in the United States based on this "hunt for intentional culpability", on the basis of economics, this one targeting immigrants, homeless people, political dissidents, and perhaps sexual deviants. Gosh!

But I digress. The important takeaway from the point of view of generating useful abstractions, is that human beings are inherently gnostic in a certain sense: they believe that malice and stupidity are great provisional powers which higher powers ultimately trump and triumph over. And while most people would find this reasonable and agree with it, they would be less happy when presented with and made culpable for the practical consequences of the belief system as it applies to socialization. It is not the devil's malice and stupidity that gets the blame for anything under this tendency, but human malice and stupidity. It is not God's power that trumps and triumphs given these thoughts, but human power. And the assessment of human stupidity or maliciousness, let alone culpability, by untrained mob is not objective. The result is that good people are constantly being destroyed for the sake of the efficiency of a process nobody really understands.

Chapter 2 Poker without Probability: What unintentional communication reveals about the nature of communication itself

In order to understand how communication works when people want it to work, or have incentives to make it work, it is helpful to start by examining how communication works when people don't want it to work, or have incentives against it working. In this way we can take the noise of incentives out of the analysis of communication and understand the fundamental way communication is structured and what these basic structures imply for communication in other contexts.

Therefore, it is very helpful to look at the game of poker, which provides exactly such a communication context. It would be redundant in the extreme as well as entirely insufficient to address the matter of professional poker, which gravitates towards questions of math. Other, much better treatments of this subject have been written by many people including David Sklansky and Matt Janda. Instead, I will be analyzing poker in its broadest ecosystem: "street poker", as it is sometimes known. In effect, I will be analyzing the Schelling points of idiots and how they interact with the strategies and formal concepts of competent to advanced players.

The average poker player, in a truly globally average sense, does not know anything about probability. They know which cards are higher than other cards in most game variants, and certainly in Texas Hold 'em. They know that pre-flop betting usually represents high cards. And they tend to know as a result that betting high cards pre-flop is predictable. As a result, several modalities emerge: not betting preflop at all, betting preflop with a mixture of high and low cards, and calling preflop bets with low cards. This first strategy isn't necessarily negative expected value, but it's lower expected value than a strategy that includes preflop betting. The second strategy is the right idea, but is hard to balance without a mathematical understanding of the game. The last idea tends to have a negative expected value simply because of equity issues.

The average poker player, knowing nothing of relative hand strengths, equity, expected value, pot odds and so forth, instead relies on a collection of heuristics that mostly pertain to the frequency they observe things to happen. They also tend to think in a very binary fashion, of "bluff" vs "non-bluff", having romanticized concepts of the game of poker. As a result of thinking in this fashion and not understanding math, average players will tend to think of any non-made hand they catch a player betting with as a bluff, even when it is mathematically ahead of them by a substantial margin. So AQs with a four flush on a standard garbage board going all-in and getting called by bottom pair will be filed under "bluff" by an average player.

What is interesting is that average people, with no understanding of math, can actually be very good at discerning when the frequency of something is off. They can tell to a very high standard when a person is betting "too much", for instance. This makes them, in the long run, very profitable fish when a good player catches a good run of cards. But when it comes to average player vs average player, it creates some interesting dynamics. Average players create and deploy some quite sophisticated metagame strategies based entirely on betting frequency, and especially betting frequency of "bluffs" vs "non-bluffs" and "high" vs "low" cards. They are also hyper-attuned to "tells", which again relate to deviance from a pattern.

Since they are inclined to think in terms of bluff vs non-bluff, it is often the case that they end up believing that any situation in which they catch a player thinking or taking their time is a bluff situation, thus they will often end up calling bets in absurd situations against bluff-catching pairs, ace high, and second pair with inferior holdings, as well as non-nut flushes or whatever else a better trained player might have to think about betting with. However, since they are very good at discerning frequency, this can lead to an absurd situation: average players, with no mathematical understanding of the game, can wind up becoming very good at discerning when they are facing the worst edge of a players range, and very good at playing against the worst edge of that range. Thus, average players often seem to be better than good players at calling with bottom pair against ace high, second pair against bottom pair and so forth. Advanced players tend to build their game from the top down, by finding the trickiest edge cases and figuring out how to maximize profit there while also minimizing losses. This leads to concepts like pot size control and defensive play. Average players build their game from the bottom up. They believe that the key to good poker is being a good "bullshit detector", along with sometimes being tricky and being unreadable.

To someone trying to be a good "bullshit detector", any sort of regular, high-frequency behavior is extremely salient. This makes such behavior either suspicious or, for lack of a better word, obnoxious. If you bet nothing but AK, AQ, and AA-QQ preflop, an average player will very quickly conclude you are stupid even as they call with 270, 35s and so forth. But if they catch you varying your game you will set them off on a bizarre elliptical orbit of high-low, bluff non-bluff action. It is very helpful to think in terms of range. A player with a wide range is exploitable. But an average player is not a "dead" player. They are not just playing their range statically. An average player is playing a very live, very dynamic game that follows incorrect, non-mathematical heuristics (or at least heuristics where the only "math" is observed frequency of events).

So, what does all of this mean for socialization? Well, since human beings are stochastic creatures, average human social skills are in fact very similar to average human poker skills. They pertain to the discernment of frequency of events and inference into them based on that frequency, usually in the absence of higher information. In fact, social skills are probably where the average person gets their poker skills from (we are calling them "skills" for lack of a better word here). This has myriad implications. Since average human social skills have many more dramatic implications for life than average human poker skills, they constitute "the real world" to a substantial degree. It can be -EV to conduct yourself according to higher principle for this reason, whereas in poker knowing the math can only improve your long term expected value.

There are several main things that all have deep structural parallels to poker: whereas average

poker players think in terms of bluff vs non-bluff and high vs low, average human socializers think in terms of bullshit vs non-bullshit and "being fake/stuck up" vs "keeping it real". Like in poker, average socializers can be very good at discerning when a piece of information is "off", which they tend to interpret as it being bullshit due to binary thinking and lack of higher principled understanding. Also, consistency is suspicious to the average socializer: they will either conclude you are "fake" or "stuck up" (which is the same thing as "obnoxious" as mentioned earlier in a poker context), or they will sit around waiting for the other shoe to drop, which if they catch any hint of it actually happening will send them into a frenzy of pseudo-random adversarial behavior just as it will in poker.

The next chapter will analyze these parallels specifically in the context of socialization. The following chapter will go into more elaborate detail about some of the emergent effects of this in the total ecosystem of information, and the last chapter will give brief summaries of what sort of behaviors and behavioral strategies one should apply or avoid, with brief explanations of why for each.

Chapter 3 Game Theoretically Sound Socializing

We begin the analysis by dissecting the average person's heuristics of bullshit vs non-bullshit. Like in poker, these heuristics are not based on any sort of even basic math. Instead they are based on crude logic coupled with hyper-awareness of statistical frequency. It must be noted that bullshit vs non-bullshit is a distinct dichotomy from being fake/stuck up vs keeping it real. "Keeping it real" is about having a wide range of behaviors including behaviors that are generally considered maladaptive or low status in other contexts. The reasons for this will be addressed later. It is enough for now to note that bullshit vs non-bullshit is instead about the verisimilitude of information.

How does information gain verisimilitude to the average person? The average person is not tremendously experienced with very many things, yet they have opinions or positions on a wide range of subjects. How do they get these? In practice, they have heuristics for assessing expertise from other people, and when a given person registers as an expert in a specific context they tend to import their view as best as they're able to understand it, which in turn is typically not very well. The average person reasons by analogy to what they know, and the average person doesn't know very much. The result is that even when the assessment of expertise is sound, the opinions or positions people adopt are run through an idiot filter and pared down into crude bromides and so forth.

Since most experts in most subjects know about this process, they will often have a good grasp in advance of what bromides their actual knowledge is capable of being reduced to without total loss of fidelity to the original concept. This leads to the common idiot's heuristic "if you can't explain it in simple terms, it's not true/useful/something you yourself understand". This is nonsense, but since most fields of knowledge have to interact with laymen, most fields of knowledge have protocols for interacting with laymen. The result is that when these protocols are not in place, laymen become suspicious. On this basis alone the heuristic has some limited validity, since it represents the unrecognized insight that experts are generally the product of other experts, and the propagation of expert knowledge tends to include certain artifacts. When these artifacts are not present, the conclusion is then that expertise is not present. This is probably statistically sound, but framed in its usual way it is logically insufficient, like all average thought.

This heuristic is also easily spoofed, which is why sports metaphors are overused in many business and professional contexts, for instance: the perceived lowest common denominator of sports allows for very easy bromides that can be generalized to a lot of contexts. The result is the production of an "idiot's expert", which is someone with no higher knowledge of any kind but a long memory of assorted slogans and dead metaphors. In sufficiently populist circles, the very idea that there could be knowledge outside of such things, that they could be the compressed translation of some purer form of information, is itself considered bullshit.

This brings us to the second major heuristic the average person uses in discerning the verisimilitude of information: motive. The average person is always trying to infer motive, and the less they understand about a person's reasoning the more convoluted their inferences will become. This is because they think that what they can't understand must be complex, instead of merely unknown or inaccessible. The metagame of average socialization includes constant reassurances and self-assertions of the speakers character. This is aimed at other average socializers who actually care about such things and can for whatever reason be persuaded by simple assertions about them. When such assertions themselves become dismissed as bullshit, one-on-one interactions cease to be possible and truly motivated parties begin enlisting secondary parties as proxies to produce the desired social effects.

The result is that socialization with average people is a minefield in which information can be dismissed at any moment based on perceptions that scale in complexity (and hence increase in failure likelihood) based on perceived disparity in thought processes, whether this is because of differences in IQ, education, or background. The best case scenario for communicating with a normal is that they understand you are translating for them and have not mistaken the assortment of translations they've received over the course of their life for true and sound information. The worst case scenario is a vulgar populist who considers their bromides and slogans to be very hard won by analogy between personal experience and thirdhand knowledge. What a person can't learn from a book or from a true expert is generally tanned into one's hide by life itself when it is necessary knowledge. However, life is subject to statistical variance, so a lot of wrong knowledge gets tanned into people's hides.

The vulgar populist is a very dangerous social enemy. They consider a shocking and unpredictable range of things to be bullshit. They can also be very good at manipulating people, since they are also often an "idiot's expert". I recommend a policy of avoidance at all costs. If it is not possible to avoid, give serious consideration to killing them, as they are ticking time bombs of stupidity that absolutely have the capacity to destroy your life if you leave them in it.

These are the essential factors that determine the verisimilitude of information, or it's bullshit vs non bullshit status, for the average person. The analogousness to poker comes from frequency based salience of information: uncommon information is suspicious. Uncommon presentations are suspicious. Uncommon motives are suspicious. If this suspicion can be allayed into boredom, into a sense that a given socializer is not "a live player" (which would typically be phrased as them being dull, a bore, simple, stupid, or naive), then it can serve as an excellent camouflage or shield: but be very careful, because if this camouflage or shield wavers or is perceived to waver for even a moment (and remember, perception can be very arbitrary coming from the average person), it can instantly trigger a cascade of events that leads to an extremely negative social outcome.

Moving on now to the matter of keeping it real vs being fake/stuck up. This is not about verisimilitude, as was said earlier, but is about range. People's behavior is stochastic. The less human they are, the more stochastic it becomes, to the point that I am not convinced that low IQ schizophrenics are actually people in any sense that matters. IQ seems to be heavily related to degree of randomness, with higher IQ correlating to higher capacity for regularity. Degree of discipline further reduces randomness. The average person has an IQ of 100 and very little discipline. As a result, the average person has a very definable range of behaviors, which includes both socially useful and productive behaviors such as working, donating to charity, or whatever, and socially detrimental, maladaptive, or just "undisciplined" behaviors such as emotional outbursts, violence, and drug use.

Where game theory comes in it that how to match this range should, in principle, be formalizable along similar lines to engineering a range in the game of poker. However, whereas poker is always adversarial, about trying to figure out how to either destroy or exploit other people's sense of rhythm or timing, socialization is generally non-adversarial and only becomes adversarial in a Game 1 social context.

Game theory thus cannot help much with the matter of things being dismissed as bullshit. It is most applicable to trying to match the semi-stochastic rhythms of average people in communication, when necessary, in order to not be dismissed as "stuck up" or whatever and to be understood as "keeping it real". And it should be clear, if you've been paying attention, that "keeping it real" is neither more nor less than the exhibition of a specific range of behaviors that match expectations. It has nothing to do with any actual metric of authenticity as such, only with frequency and commonality.

I will mostly leave the specifics of actually using game theory to the more than capable reader, having elucidated the core concept along which it is to be used to a satisfactory degree. I will, however, come back to it a bit in the last chapter of this text.

Chapter 4 Emergent Effects and Archetypes: A Brief Exploration

The particular dynamics of socialization and it's hidden negative-sum Game 1 component create some significant emergent strategies or behaviors, along with accompanying archetypes. Since avoidance of Game 1 is paramount, and since the interaction of Game 1 with Game 2 is similar to a hidden game of musical chairs, the incentive becomes to try to manipulate social interactions in such a way that, when it becomes clear a "round" is coming to a close, a person besides yourself ends up being "knocked out". Other incentives being what they are, it is also generally the case that the least liked person in a given group will, if possible, be the person people try to ensure is "knocked out". But this is not always the case, or not always possible, and the interaction between Game 1 and Game 2 carries on anyway.

However, since people assign intentional culpability for the behavior of systems, the emergence of a particularly unliked person will tend to remind people of the existence of Game 1 and hence accelerate or exacerbate the process along with all of the strategies and tactics people adopt in relation to it. The expedition or exacerbation of this process along with its emergence itself produce two main archetypes, which I call the cop and the cop-attractor.

The unambiguous job of a cop in most of the world is to kill people who socialize incorrectly, and it is only ambiguous in the first world by accident. The law, regardless of what it's supposed to be or what it is in other contexts, is just an excuse to this end. This is true of literal cops, who wear uniforms. But it is also true of emergent cops: people who take on this role because of an immediate perceived social need for it. Emergent cops appear wherever there is a cop-attractor, and the ratio of cops to cop-attractors is proportional to the social incompetence of the cop-attractor. Thus, a perfect cop-attractor generates a ratio of n/1 cops, where n is the number of people in a given social group.

Since the musical chairs interaction between Game 1 and Game 2 is somewhat random and uncontrollable, the person injured by it is not consistently the cop-attractor. This explains to a high

standard why there are so many anxieties about "keeping it real" and "not bullshitting". It is an attempt, somewhat magical in nature, of avoiding the accidental summoning of the emergent cop, who is associated with the sudden appearance and loss of Game 1.

Chapter 5 What to do and what not to do

Potentially important Game 2 strategies include expanding your range of behaviors to match those of the group, and matching the frequency of behaviors of the group using psuedo-randomized triggers. The use of these triggers should be familiar to anyone who has ever studied poker seriously. However, unlike poker, you want these triggers to be discernible to others because it helps allay perceptions that your behavior is "too random" even if it is exactly matched to the frequency of the behaviors of others. You also want to avoid committing to a set of ranges and frequencies you cannot maintain: find a social group whose ranges and frequencies you can easily imitate. The alternative is eventually being outed as a "bullshitter" or a "phony" or whatever and dealing with all the social fallout of that, which generally includes losing Game 1.

As for Game 1 itself, this is less a matter of range, frequency, or timing than of trying to arrest and de-escalate adversarial psuedo-random behaviors. The first step to this is counterintuitive: you want to make yourself as large of a target as possible. Most people make themselves as small of a target as possible in this situation, thinking that it will lessen the range of attacks. But attacks don't have to be based on anything, and the less information you give to your opponent, the more information they will invent, in a runaway process. Therefore, give them information and do it in a way that makes it clear you understand the adversarial nature of the current game being played. This functions as a form of hormesis, confirming their "worst fears" in a limited dose and thus allowing them the potential opportunity to see you as walking things back, when in reality you never had a problem with them in the first place.

Making yourself a larger target also exhausts your opponents ability to argue against you effectively in the eyes of others: they will have to pursue more and more convoluted arguments over a wider range and the attention span of the average observer to the argument will waver: plus, since Game 1 has been invoked, by engaging in more arguments the adversarial other risks committing a social faux pas or two and becoming the person who gets "knocked out". In this way, a small target appears larger than it is, but a large target becomes a muchness and can very nearly cease to be an effective target entirely.

Never ask anyone to explain reasoning that seems absurd to you. This will out you as not understand absurd reasoning which may be reasoning that is collectively shared among the group. It also gives them the opportunity to invent new absurdities in the public ear which may appear more reasonable than the actual truth.

Lastly, and most importantly, never admit fault. As far as the average person is concerned, an admission of doing wrong is an admission of a propensity or tendency to doing wrong. You become a "wrong-doer", and hence end up in a constant state of playing Game 1 for the sake of survival that is very close to inescapable.

I hope these tips, and the application of the knowledge I outlined in chapters 1-4; which may take some construction or application to one's own particular circumstances; find you well, and that your socialization keeps you out of Game 1 and ensures you the full opportunity of a successful, healthy, and productive life.