

## Thoughts on Intuition and Reason

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I did not want to let our month of focus on the theme of reason go by without a few personal remarks. It appears to me that many of our readings seemed directed to attacks on reason rather than defense of it, as if UUism needed to be cleared of the unfair accusation of excessive intellectuality.

We might be able to agree that the distinction drawn here is between choices based on unspoken, subjective values and choices subject to analysis and discussion. Certainly, in guiding our behavior we inherit desires and aversions through our genes and develop others through experience, which we act on, often before we are aware of them. This we share with all animal species. But as beings with complex social structures and languages, we are able to articulate and discuss questions such as, "Why did you ...?" "Why not ...?" and "What if ...?". Many other species surely have social structures and communication, but, as far as we know, cannot form such concepts or modify their behavior with them. I would suggest that the idea of reason always depends on language, society, and analysis after the event, relevant to future events. An isolated individual may reason, but it would still take the form of a conversation with oneself: "That worked out badly (well)! Next time I should ...". Human societies that developed a written language also developed a much wider, more complex sort of reasoning.

If we recall our own everyday behavior, most of us would easily admit that we do not reason about many of our choices: eating, drinking, navigating, sleeping, waking, ... etc. But sometimes we do, especially if something goes wrong, or someone else challenges us. And sometimes we at least attempt to modify our intuitions, if they seem to have served us badly or conflicted with others.

The opposite pairing should be challenged, between an unquestionable "higher" truth, from God or Nature, versus a "scientific" analysis that will resolve all doubts and make perfect citizens into a perfect society.

"The unexamined life is not worth living." Plato?

"The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing." Blaise Pascal

"That to secure these rights, governments were instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Thomas Jefferson

"If it feels good, do it!" Anonymous, 1960s

"In your heart, you know he's right!" Barry Goldwater Presidential Campaign, 1964

"Make America great again!" Donald Trump Presidential Campaign, 2016