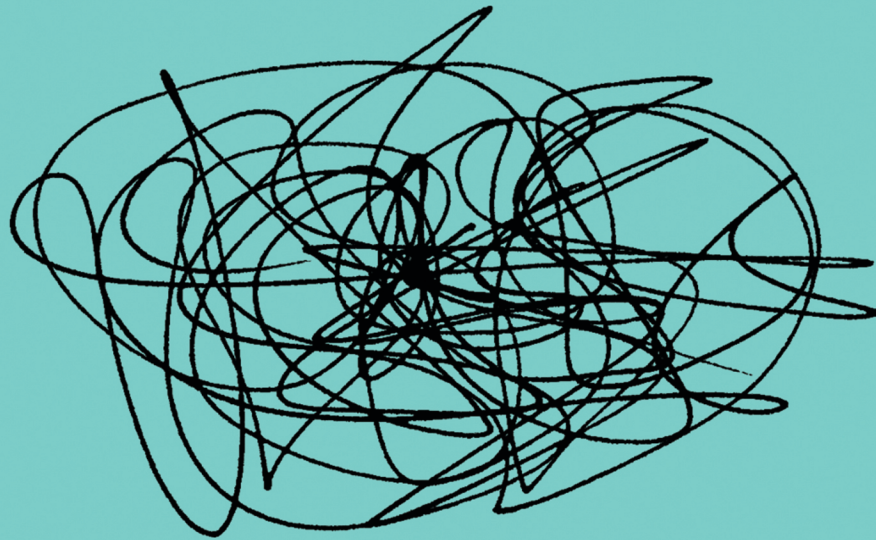


The Will to Think

Why does thinking feel like hard work?



by Sam Brinson

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Welcome. What you're doing right now is quite special. You're taking squiggly black lines and extracting meaning from them. No other creature on earth can do that like you can. What's more, you can probably achieve it with relative ease. You see the words and process them in an instant, never really thinking of the words themselves, only what they represent.

It wasn't always easy to read, though, was it? It might be a long time ago, but when you were first learning how to do this, you would have had to put a great deal of effort into it. Different words would have been obstacles, you would have stumbled along, having to focus on the letters and how they are pronounced. It's impressive just how far you've come.

Most things follow this trajectory. You learn, and the learning requires effort, but the knowledge you form afterwards gets easier to use. You've been a student of life for a few years now, and you've picked up many skills along the way. You can read, walk, use a knife and fork, brush your teeth, and all with little effort. Most of your daily activities can now be done while you think of something entirely detached from the activity itself. This is pretty incredible.

What's more, you probably have special skills and knowledge that most other people don't have. Maybe you have an interest in physics or math, design, psychology, or cooking. You are your own unique mixture of facts and memories and abilities and concepts. When you think, the content of your mind is like your fingerprint, it's yours and only yours. Your thoughts make you *you*.

But you had to work to get here, you had to work to become you. And, you'll probably have to work to become your future self, too. I'm sure you see the benefits of doing so. Gaining new knowledge is refining the mind, making it more accurate, making it more versatile, making it more efficient. Good though it may be, learning isn't always a pleasant experience. Becoming our future selves requires some discomfort.

In the coming chapters, I want to explore what's happening in your mind as you invest effort, what that often uncomfortable feeling behind your thoughts represents. I'm spurred by questions like whether we can invest more than we do, if we can learn to enjoy the experience, whether it has downsides, and what the experience of mental effort even is. We might be familiar with

thinking, but many of us aren't that clued in to what's happening when we rely on it.

The first chapter delves into what type of thoughts feel effortful; the second chapter examines whether thinking uses up some limited resource; the third chapter looks at effort from the angle of doing nothing; the last chapter takes into consideration the balance between intuition and cognition.

I'm by no means an expert, just a curious reader that likes to think, and wants to know what that even means. There are many experts out there that I have tried to draw upon, so by all means, follow the links and formulate your own thoughts. This was a journey I thoroughly enjoyed and hope you will too. After all, it's always good to learn a little more about who you are and how you work. Let's get into it.