

Edward de Bono

I AM

RIGHT

YOU ARE

WRONG

*From this to the New Renaissance:
from Rock Logic to Water Logic*



NEW FOREWORDS BY THREE NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS

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Summary

For centuries we have worked within our traditional thinking system. We are convinced that this traditional thinking system is the only possible one. Surely truth and reason are absolutes for which there can be no alternative and beyond which it cannot be possible to go. Surely these are the absolutes demanded by the system itself. It is true and reasonable to have a system based on truth and reason.

As we begin to understand self-organizing systems we find that neural networks can work in this manner. The very simple model of a self-organizing neural network given in this book shows how a few interactions can give rise to complex behaviour. Should we just ignore the big step forward that this provides in understanding how the brain works? Should we choose to persist in dogmatic ignorance on the basis that such understanding might be disturbing?

The implications of self-organizing systems for perception and for our traditional thinking habits are very considerable. In this book I have tried to spell out some of these implications. In each case I have done no more than hint at an implication. There are two basic types of implication. The first type is an understanding of how perception works, which covers such things as humour, creativity, catchment, and circularity of beliefs. This gives us an understanding of why perception is so very useful and yet so distorted. The second type of implication covers the defects in our traditional thinking system, with its absolutes, categories, identities and contradictions. We can easily see how the imperfections of this system have both given rise to serious problems in human affairs (wars, racism etc.) and prevented us from making much progress in them.

At this point we have some choices. We can simply ignore completely what I have written or set out to prove that it is incorrect (at least in some aspect). This would be very silly, because the matter is so fundamental that it will return again and again with more force. We can simply never ignore self-organizing systems again, now that we know about them.

We can accept what is said at least in its broad terms even if not in all detail. We can accept it and then ignore it to continue with our existing system as if nothing had happened. But a thought once thought cannot be unthought. So at the back of our minds there will be some growing doubts about the arrogance and assurance of our traditional thinking.

We can take the view that this is indeed a useful description of how the mind works. We can take the view that this description shows up the messiness and unreliability of the human brain and then marvel at the achievement of classic Greek thinkers in giving us a thinking system (with its absolutes and logic) that gives such a practical way of proceeding. Most people will take this view but are then left to answer the original question: why have we been so unsuccessful in dealing with human affairs as compared with technical matters?

We can take the view that what has been described in this book deals with perception and is most valuable and useful for this purpose. Then we say that the second aspect of thinking is processing (logic, mathematics etc.) in which we construct artificial systems with which to process our perceptions. This is a satisfactory view, but it does mean that logic has to retreat. Because we have never understood perception we have tried to apply the logic of traditional thinking directly to the world. Once we acknowledge that perception must come first, we must spend a great deal more time working on the logic of perception because this is extremely important. We shall then find that a great deal of our thinking really takes place in this perception stage.

I would be very happy indeed if we did but acknowledge that perception was a very important part of thinking. Once we do

this we soon find that the table-top logic habits of our traditional thinking system do not readily apply (as I have been showing in this book) and that we must develop a better understanding of perception and deliberate perceptual skills (as with the CoRT programme in schools). Perception becomes a new area that we must work within.

That has been the objective of this book: to shift the emphasis to the importance of perception.

