

THE USC BRAIN AND CREATIVITY INSTITUTE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

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It is largely true that (1) humans created cultural devices and institutions using reason, but it is also true that (2) reason is grounded in and guided by feeling, and (3) that feeling is the direct mental expression of protocols of life regulation. It follows that the development of cultural devices and institutions is likely to have itself been motivated and guided by such life-regulatory protocols. Indeed, medicine, government, economics, philanthropy, education, and military defense can all be seen as cultural instantiations of life-regulatory processes.

The grounding of reason in feeling and by extension in protocols of life regulation is a relatively recent realization and its implications are not yet widely appreciated. In general, reason is exclusively credited with the creation of cultural devices and institutions, and reason itself has long been considered elevated and distinct from feeling. The latter is an age-old misunderstanding and our research has played a prominent role in correcting it. We have demonstrated that not only is reason grounded in and inseparable from affective mental processes, but that the effective operation of reason depends on the good functioning of brain regions that support affect, namely evolutionarily ancient neural structures that are primarily involved in core functions of life regulation.

The central implication here is that humans have created cultural devices and institutions largely unaware of the forces guiding the creations. They were guided by protocols of life regulation but unaware of this fact and, not surprisingly, in a somewhat clumsy and incoherent manner that has hindered their optimal realization. New clarity on the nature of this relationship may help to address, from a first-principles perspective, the formidable tangle of challenges currently facing our cultural devices and institutions, so that they may more effectively serve the natural purpose of securing the flourishing and integrity of living systems.

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