**Script**

**How Humans Know Who To Trust**

**– Thank Darwin**

**By Don Stuart**

The foundations of society rest on trust.

Humans are incredibly vulnerable -- without society, individual human survival would be a serious problem. Of course we collaborate for our mutual protection, to engage in joint enterprise. But even more significantly, we share with others and receive in exchange from them, accounts and interpretations of life experience – information that dramatically empowers our intelligence and that allows us to reach out and shape the world around us in a manner that serves our individual and collective interests.

So our ability to trust one another is a critical survival trait.

Recently, in writing my recent science fiction novel, *Darwin’s Dilemma*, I found myself struggling to anticipate the point of view of a possible future autonomous, self-conscious, self-programming, artificial super-intelligence. Since there are dramatic limits on how much world experience any of us, any intelligent individual being (human or otherwise) is able to assemble on our own, we badly need to exchange and share our experiences. So it seemed possible that, just as we humans do, multiple AI’s might learn to collaborate in the completion of joint projects and, more significantly, in sharing their unique individual life experiences with each other. Any intelligent social being needs to share if they are to prosper. By sharing we dramatically increase our data and greatly empowering our massive intelligence.

Since we humans are the only self-conscious, highly intelligent beings we know, our experience seemed relevant to anticipating how AIs might address this matter. So I needed to ask: how **do** we humans manage to trust one another when we are all simultaneously in competition with one another? How do we share important information when we are always painfully aware that misplaced trust, and the poorly considered sharing of useful information with a competitor, could easily empower them to out-compete us? It’s a problem we all have to deal with daily.

We humans evolved as social creatures. Our forebears were primates so, after all. So long before our full intelligence emerged, we’d had as much as 52 million years of evolution as social beings—already built into our genetics. That’s far more that the mere 200,000 to 300,000 years drive time we have on our current cognitive ability. That 52 million years would have been plenty long enough for us to have acquired a host of social survival traits that might be useful in assuring that our social groups succeeded and prospered—traits that encouraged us to be socially responsive and responsible. Our intelligence showed up only recently in our evolutionary history.

Throughout our history, however, we also evolved as individuals. If we hadn’t learned to look out for our personal self-interest, we’d have died off anyway, regardless of any survival advantages society might have offered.

Thus our genetic (and cultural) makeup has simultaneously evolved down two completely different tracks. We present today as creatures that have traits which support successful societies. But we also have traits that assure our individual survival. Both those sets of traits are empowered and informed by our intelligence.

Those traits and behaviors are in competition. As I mentioned in a previous YouTube video, choices we make that aid our individual survival, may quite easily run counter to the needs of society. And those that are supportive of society may NOT be in our individual self-interest. It’s things like: Shall I wait in line or crowd in ahead of others? Do I contribute to a worthwhile charity, or go out on the town and treat myself to a sumptuous dinner? Should I rob a bank or get a job? Save another or save myself? Punish or forgive. Go to war or negotiate a peace?

We make those kind of complex choices every single day. And we all strike our own balance between them.

Significantly, when we encounter other humans, they know we’re thinking about that—just as we know they are. So the very first questions we ask ourselves (and that they will be asking as well) are: If I share with or rely upon this person, can they be trusted to reciprocate? And: how can I persuade them to rely on *me*?

Shortly after development of the European printing press and the ensuing dramatic increase in the sharing of scientific research, Sir Frances Bacon first described what later developed into what we now refer to as the “scientific method.” Scientists needed to be confident that scientific observations by others could be relied upon. The answer was in their replicability. If I observed something of interest, I needed to be able to describe the circumstances that led to that observation in sufficient detail that others could replicate my experience and observe it as well. My observations, descriptions, and explanations would be published in reputable journals so they could be subjected to widespread examination, critique, and improvement. Only those observations and ideas that survived the crucible of replication and of rigorous peer review would come to be accepted by the scientific community.

Even outside the world of science, most of us subject new, unfamiliar claims or ideas to less formal but equally essential credibility testing. When we encounter a new claim or idea, we ask: Who is this person? Do they have appropriate skills and credentials to make this claim? Have they provided accurate reporting in the past? Are they motivated to produce accurate reporting, or might they have a hidden agenda? Are their claims corroborated by other credible sources? Are their claims inherently logical or are they, perhaps, inconsistent with what we already confidently know about how the world works? As you watch this video, you are, quite likely, considering such questions right now.

The answers we produce will draw upon our understanding of our society. And will depend upon often-subtle cues, often ones that are both verbal like the use of language, and non-verbal like attire, personality, demeanor, apparent emotional state. These are judgments we need to make well because our survival may depend upon them. It seems safe to assume that those of us who are skilled at making choices of this kind are more likely to survive than those who are not.

Given how many of us there are on Earth today and given the complexity of modern society, we humans also have no choice but to specialize. None of us can hope to have deep personal expertise in every field of endeavor. So we inevitably rely upon the representations of respected intermediaries—of others in our community whose knowledge of the matter at hand seems strong and whose judgment of similar issues we’ve come to trust.

The choices we make about the trustworthiness of those intermediaries may be flawed. It may, sometimes, even be downright sloppy. But the skills we employ in making them are critical. We’re all aware of our need for information and insights that come from others. But we are also all painfully aware of that inherent inconsistency between individual self-interest and social interest—an inconsistency that will inevitably arise whenever intelligent, self-conscious, self-interested individuals hope to rely upon one another and to work together collectively as a society.

Thankfully, we humans are built and trained for this. We’re born entirely dependent upon our parents for our every need. Most of us grow up closely protected by family, by friends, by communities. And even after we are supposedly “on our own,” our lives continue to be a thoroughly social enterprise. We are surrounded by teams, co-workers, employers, clubs and associations of every kind. Nearly every area of our lives is deeply influenced by the needs of others and by our own ability to negotiate with others as we address our own needs. Even if we are in business for ourselves, our success still turns on how well we form and maintain relationships with others upon whom we can depend and who we must convince to depend on us. We very quickly come to appreciate how completely we rely on others in a countless myriad of ways from how we secure our food and shelter to how we stay safe, healthy, and alive over the course of any given day.

That, in other words, is how we humans, make those hugely important yet impossibly complex decisions about who to trust. And how we manage to persuade others to trust us. The skills involved are certainly cultural. But they seem likely to also be ones that are built into our very genetic code. They are skills that can decide our short-term individual survival. But they are also ones that are critical to the survival of our societies. Those of us who make them well are more likely to survive in part because those societies whose members make socially successful choices are more likely to cohere and prosper.

If you’d like to see a written version of this presentation, or if you’d like to see a bibliography with some of the annotations I’ve assembled in the research which supports it, you might take a look at my website at: [www.donstuart.net](http://www.donstuart.net). I also have two other videos thus far in this YouTube series. One is entitled: “The Fallacy of Individualism.” The other is: “How We Humans Know Right from Wrong—Thank Darwin.”

Finally, if you’ve found this video interesting, you also might also enjoy reading my recent multiple award-winning Science Fiction novel entitled: *Darwin’s Dilemma: A Story of Humans, AIs, and the Future of Intelligence*. It is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and in bookstores everywhere.

Thank you so very much for watching.

And, please, subscribe to my YouTube channel and I’ll be sure to bring you more.