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Notational Systems and Cognitive Evolution

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For individual people, the process of acquiring literacy with a particular notational system seems to result in significant new analytical, descriptive, and creative capabilities. For such individuals, and for society as a whole, science must account for this apparent birth of new cognitive abilities that arise by means of new and revolutionary notational systems. Just as language is not “just another tool,” notational systems (which include language as an instance) are not just another tool: they seem to affect what we can see and think about, as well as how we calculate and communicate. The proper study of this subject will require a longitudinal and comparative approach across multiple notational systems. The goal must be an understanding of the nature of notational revolutions, and the creation of new tools allowing us to solve or dissolve currently unsolvable problems.

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