II-15. Active Interaction

Gandhi used to talk disparagingly of dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.

- E. F. Schumacher

Perceptions to create value

I have heard this anecdote in several versions. There was a well-to-do merchant. He used to welcome each of his new daughter-in-laws with the present of a bagful of rice paddy. Seeing his end near, he called for each of them and asked what they did with the bag they received decades earlier. One who had stomped out years ago, after feeling insulted with the gift of a bag of rice paddy said, "I will bring some from my store." The second remarked that she had forgotten about it, and she is surprised that the old man would even recall such a small thing decades later. The third said, "Of course, I have kept your gift and worshipped it all my life." The last said, "I have been blessed with that gift of excellent quality of seed. Now after twenty years we have hundreds of tons of that seed."

After telling this version, to me and my new wife, my father asked me "to whom would you give charge of your household?" Looking back, the parable is a remarkable illustration of the potential perceived by the of quality of interaction. Clearly, the way we perceive new inputs charts the course for the realization of the opportunity to create value. In the grand design of the universe, that bag of paddy is for sustenance as well as for sustainability. Sensibility dictates that we make judicious choices.

If perturbations in the space-time continuum make us aware of the underlying reality, resulting perceptions are critical for the realization of the potential of the reality. Definite outcome from the confluence of directed actions is also a reaffirmation of reality. Perception of such changes shapes the decision to act, or not to act. It sets the course of the trajectory for actions. Rationality lies in the realization that what becomes of a being is the consequence of such actions. The current state of being is the representation of the perceptions from the prior actions. With suitable decisions a being can influence its own transition from one qualitative state to another. Feedback from the experience also brings about a change in perception unless the behavior is inconsequential as mere sum of random acts.

Shared knowledge is an incrementally evolutionary process.

For the evolutionary changes over a period of time one assumes that the quirks of interaction are mere detours on the way to the desired equilibrium state where all wrinkles have been ironed out. In contrast, all real-time behaviors are based on the perceptions of prior knowledge, as well as the web of motives that underlie individual decisions. Such perceptions are critical for the real-time dealings for survival needs. Passing events are perturbations in awareness and far from the equilibrium of the perceptions. Often, until it is too late, the significant perturbations are not readily distinguishable from a steady stream of otherwise random events and associated mental chatter.

Is play purposeful? It is an age-old question. In spite of its tremendous impact and contribution the chaotic nature of the scientific exploration and the tentativeness of the scientific inferences makes some people uneasy. Many are willing to ignore

tremendous choices offered by the technological progress, possibly because in a perverse way it has reduced the individual choices for the consequential decisions. For most people a secure environment lacks something fundamental as if the individual acts do not cohere into a recognizable trajectory of action.

Did a flower bloom if nobody saw it bloom? If a bee saw it, the resulting interactions are beneficial to both -one gets the food and the other is helped in spreading its genetic material. Not quite *quid pro quo*, consequential nonetheless. On the other hand, if such interaction did not take place, the bloom was a total loss into the multitude of the nonproductive and inconsequential random events of the universe. In effect, the flower might as well have not bloomed.

Left alone most events remain mere noise blips in the scheme of things. Consider consequences of interactions that may or may not be consequential. When do we know that an event will create opportunity? Without sustained interaction such an happening is mere noise. It is a flower that bloomed but never realized its potential. If the event is acknowledged and registers into perception the realized potential will depend on the quality of the interaction. Quality of perception also assures the reliability of the decided course of action.

What brings a bee to a flower? We may not have an answer but it is worth exploring. It is quite likely that bees are programmed to be attracted to some quality of the flower determined by color, shape, and the fragrance. Does bee know that? Irrespective of the answer, bee does its job for the flower while trying to get to the nectar. In this sense, it is not clear if the bee is aware of only of the qualities of a certain flowers, or if bee perceives the functions of flowers for the plant, or any other higher purpose in the scheme of their relationship. Yet the pieces of the puzzle come together in a

successful strategy for the bee and also for the plant. Do we know what happened to the bees and flowers that did not interact? On the evolutionary ladder we can only see the consequences of the consistently successful outcomes.

It is simply amazing that mutual dependence (liking, preference, symbiosis) is a norm among organisms. It is built into survival strategies that transcend individual aspects of being a bee or for that matter any other organism. However attributes and behaviors co-evolve from the trial and error strategy that is built into the sum total of the experiences. Any changes would also adopt to the changes. Yet mutually beneficial processes go on even in the total absence of the knowledge of the underlying purpose, functions and mechanisms. It is in the nature of the being.

The purpose of being and being viably independent is not based on a narrow deterministic causality. For collective existence most species thrive only in a mutually beneficial relationship with its own kind as well as the others. Imagine the situation if a bee did nothing for the flower. The end result would be nothing short of the disaster where most plants will not be able to propagate and strengthen their genetic stock. The bee also looses because it may not have the flowers to thrive. Does a bee or a flower *know* this? Probably, they do not - at least not in the anthropomorphic terms. Probably, a perception of their utility is an integral part of their sensibility. Looking around, without such dependences between organisms the universe would certainly be a lot more inanimate.

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