

IV-34 Rationality by Practice

First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win."

- *Mohandas K. Gandhi*

In 1925 both Gandhi and Einstein signed a document against forcing men into Military service. At the end of the century both, along with Adolph Hitler were judged to be the three most influential persons of the 20th century. Albert Einstein is remembered for developing the current understanding of matter and energy in relation to space and time. In the pursuit of his belief in the superiority of his strain of humans, Adolf Hitler annihilated 100 million people within a decade. On the other hand, Mohandas Gandhi is called Mahatma, the great soul, for practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution. In emphasizing a practice-based conduct he argued against arbitrary principles and beliefs.

Paradoxically, based on their individual beliefs, each followed a *rational* course of action to address widely perceived problems. In each case the course of action was contrary to the prevailing belief system. Clearly, their efforts were not directed towards self-goals, nor were their vision accomplished in their lifetime. Yet they continue to influence choices available to virtually all of us.

Some considerations for rational foresight, judging behaviors for planning and decision-making are outlined below: (a) Just as self-reference, deontological a priori (axiomatic, moral, ethical and legal principles and values) is also a matter of arbitrary interpretation that leaves a gap between theory and practice. Such

a priori of reason and cause is a comforting guide because certain kinds of actions are often considered inherently right or wrong. Such action choices are rationalized as morally, ethically and legally defensible. Pure deontological *rights* and *wrongs* without concern for consequences are virtually nonexistent. Such idealizations from the Judeo-Christian-Islam tradition for serving the powers-to-be are rarely backed up by self-practice. Responsibility for consequences through faith ends up with *the grace and judgment*, and not with the individual. In the Brahminical tradition the *priori* follows from the status quo of the past-practices. The Confucian *a priori* comes from the ancestors (heavens) and the emperor. Possibly appeal of patriotism and related precepts also by-passes the need for the moment-to-moment vigilance for decision-making and consequence evaluation. Such make-beliefs stay with us, and faith-based rationality continues to be influential even when irrelevant.

(b) As commonly conceived, truth is a static term for a facet of reality. For specific purposes we often confuse truth with facts of information and other particulars. Truth accumulates baggage as it falls short in dealing with reality. As it barely touches upon the potential, it is hard to be rid of liabilities of truth and faith. Beyond serviceability, qualifications like coherence and correspondence do not peel the truth away from ad hoc. Apparently, the problem stems from the fact that we still do not have a theory of truth (Robert Nozick): *To know the correct and deep theory of truth's nature requires far more than the mere ability to state particular truths. It requires knowledge of the ultimate dependence relations, and of the ultimate explanatory and ontological factors. A theory of truth, therefore, arises closer to the end of inquiry than to its beginning. Do not be surprised that we have not reached it yet.*

(c) Rationality of behavior lies in communicability. Language and

communication abilities are integral part of natural behaviors that contribute towards development of viable social institutions. Organisms interact and respond in a commonsense way with the imminent and the immediate. Determinism of the tit-for-tat is apparent in the instinctive behaviors of all animate beings. As captured by virtually all models of successful group behaviors, human rationality lies in treating one's fellow being well with benefit of doubt, and then reciprocation on subsequent encounters. In reality, individual behaviors of all shades are based on internal models that rely less on the grand universals or inherited traits, and more on what we learn from contingent and local contexts. Apparently the pattern is followed both by rational and irrational variants of behaviors. Emotions come into play: We are rarely concerned unless we are one of the victims or identify with one.

(d) Behavior with consequence evaluation follows a trajectory of actions and outcome guided by goals, decisions, strategies, feedback for mid-course correction, and damage control. As future is touched by the past, the process is forward-looking and remains rooted in reality. Whether or not we like it, in the end, through trial and error, survivors recognize and choose what may be acceptable. This is how we come to accept the consequences of the past actions as the best of the possible real worlds. Learning from trial and error, metamorphosed as the path-based approach, relies on the outcome of multiple events. Such knowledge is a way to intuit facts and construct empirical reality in hypothetical terms.

(e) Experience guides synthesis of reality through diverse areas of inquiry - arts and philosophy to technology and sciences. It is not clear how individuals integrate *learnt* inputs into lasting perceptions, and then arrive at a clear recognition that reality is

not an arbitrary construct. Otherwise, even the most useful representations and intellectual interpretations become listless. Instrumentality and serviceability of representations lie in the observer participation. Synthesis of beliefs in practice motivates concern and action to be integrated with contemplation. The unformulated models that interfere with the individual perception of reality behind awareness are ultimately weeded out.

(f) Ground for reason, or reason for believing something, are perceived through conceptual schemes that guide us in real-time decision making. This is possibly the way we interact with the awareness of events and happenings to extract meaning. Thus reason is an instrument for defining the goal as well for attaining the goal. Reasonable goals may be attainable goals but are not necessarily worth having, and thus they differ from rational goals. Reasons themselves have been used as evidence for what they are reason for. This is often the justification for the belief that reasons with connection to all relevant facts about the world must guide action, at least as the basis for the consequential actions.

(g) Reason guided by what seems evident at the surface is not necessarily meaningful: Wars give meaning to hollow lives and meaningless existence. Modern law and justice systems make a direct causality connection to reason. Consider the consequences of keeping the *undesirables* off the streets: Even if some are stopped from doing wrong, locking away petty criminals also tends to make them more determined. Such threats are certainly not effective in stopping the political corruption, accounting manipulations, and corporate wrongdoings. The white collar crimes cause far greater damage to innocent individuals and shake confidence in institutions of organized society.

(h) It is often recognized that rationality is rooted in conceptual schemes. Depending on what motivates us and what we desire

we make principles to justify actions legally, morally and ethically. We know too little to consider the interests of everyone to arrive at a utilitarian or deontological utopia. Thus we speak of bounded and other forms of rationality in human behaviors.

(i) To perceive worlds through conceptual schemes, we use knowledge to construct and develop principles as standards of rationality. Most social activities of our lives are driven by principles thrust upon us. Specific principles guide us through learning physics, making marriages work, negotiating mergers of corporations, making pronouncements about the systems of education and government, and even for bad-mouthing others. Whether or not we learn the basis of these principles, as social beings we all learn to mimic the principled-responses. In fact, in some cases the chasm between words and behaviors is so deep that the correspondence between the principle-based social expectations and personal beliefs becomes unbridgeable.

Principles are not immutable. At the very first level, principles do provide a road map for steering through the chores of living. Operational principles change as we learn more about the system, and sometimes they have to be pushed out. Consider the utility of the following principles of behavior:

- Intellectual principles permit acceptable decisions as they constrain and restrain personal factors. One example would be following the precedents. This does not assure that a principled decision would necessarily be a correct decision.
- Interpersonal principles assure adherence in the face of temptations and inducements: Reducing distractions increases the range of interaction and cooperation with others.
- Personal principles define one's physical being and intellectual identity. Self-regulation to overcome temptations is an important part of personal growth. Such commitment makes certain

decisions easier, but at the cost of one's missing out on some opportunities.

- Sometimes principles come to symbolize the standing and meaning of a person and society. Such second-order pride seems to carry the individual to a plane from whence he may be induced to take otherwise irrational actions. Would the leaders sponsor a war if they knew that they would at the front lines? Does it make a difference if the war is sponsored by: Islamists, or Christian missionaries, or Superpowers, or Governments, or Corporate CEO? On your own would you be able to make out the difference?
- Principles are also teleological devices that transmit evidential support and probability. Through give-and-take, they transmit utility from some actions to others.

In search of rational behavior guided by principles it is worth examining what motivates us to justify our actions. People rarely take responsibility for what they did not formulate. For such reasons at some stage principles become dissociated from reality with role playing and peer pressure as the judge.

Living with incompleteness: Reality of incomplete information demands that we come to grips with the appeal of *maybe it is so for a reason, and maybe it is also so for another set of reasons*. Its value lies in the recognition that even a hypothetical world let alone a real world can not be completely represented. Beyond that even in search of the episodic outcomes, pragmatism requires not digging dry wells in the pursuit of self-referential contradictions that cannot be proven or falsified.

Inspired by the works of Robert Nozick

Room for Doubt

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