IV-8   On the Tail of Two Tales

Since ignorance evokes grunt and theory creates mess, most of us think in heuristic, unsystematic and inductive ways. Through words we learn to explore subtleties and begin to describe and explain the processes through which we wish to make sense out of the world around us. Object of heuristic search is to provide efficient prescriptions for rational action in the absence of complete knowledge.

Just as there is a garden for every season, there is a tale for every reason. Consider two ancient parables, each with its share of symbolisms that we draw on throughout this book. In one Adam is expelled from a garden of eternal delight for questioning the status quo. In the other, an elephant being examined by visually handicapped. Its focus is on dealing with incomplete information. The moralist drive of the first stands in contrast to the heuristic tone of the second. At a deeper level, one does not allow for doubt even in the form of curiosity, and the other appeals for a systematic search for evidence to reduce doubt.

Garden of Eden. Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions surmise that as a part of (Theon) rationality, omnipotent God also directed Adam and Eve to stay away from the fruit of knowledge. After Adam picked the apple and Eve took that fateful bite into it, for their curiosities humans were doomed to live outside the perfection of the Garden of Eden. Symbolically, both the US criminal code and Old Testament make a connection between forbidden fruit and knowledge: *It is legal to grow poppy plants, unless it is done with the knowledge that its fruit will be used for*

manufacturing a controlled substance (morphine).

Theon rationality is an attempt of a monotheistic philosophy to curb the tendency of believer to be curious and get distracted. It assumes that answers come as grace from a prior knowledge. The assumption is that for every purpose the knowledge, if not the answer, preexists as in *I am all that is and that was and that shall be,* but with a warning that *no mortal hath lifted my veil.* Is it exasperation with the diversity of nature? In a similar tone in *Closing of the American Mind* Alan Bloom laments: *All that is human, all that is of concern to us, lie outside of natural science.* Is it meant to sooth concerns of the faithful about perceived uncertainties?

In the stone-age speak world is acknowledged as grunt or no-grunt. Prescribed ways break the bonds from the diversity and plurality of existence in a complex world. The garden-path takes away the *burden of choice.* The Adam-Eve parable is from a culture where the word *jungle* is still used to denote the open spaces outside the settlements. Since open spaces could not be ignored, trees are wrapped in a taboo of a choice between the grace and the curiosity. As if to adopt the judgmental attributes, even the desert life forms have evolved to be thorny and venomous. Evolved in harsh environments, behaviors of desert tribes follow from the symbolism of a judgmental god juxtaposed against devils and barbarians. Rhetoric becomes heavier with allegories of power, death, suffering, and sacrifice.

The self-referential justification for faith goes something like:

> **Whatever the Bible says is true.**
> **The Bible says that God exists.**
> **Therefore, it is true that God exists.**
> One might as well conclude *science and logic should have no*

effect whatsoever on such a well-formed religion. In such desires hover meanings to life through faith in miracles, myths and wars. Such hopes may be perceived necessary, yet they lack direction. The promised truth is a commodity that is never delivered - yet we pay for it. There seems to be a perpetual contradiction as one breaks the laws that one wishes to uphold. Parable of the God that *giveth and taketh* has served well to perpetuate the view that God takes side with the faithful.

Recall Doubting Thomas (Didymus for twin in Greek), a contemporary of Jesus. He questioned ambivalent evidence on a variety of issues. He is also known as Apostle of Orient (India) possibly because that is where he learnt the value of doubt. For this mission *Jesus had him sold as a slave to a merchant.* Didymus did not believe in Resurrection for which he is charged to have *heralded the wound of disbelief.* To strengthen the faith and *to cast the doubt aside*, around 5th century CE the keepers of the Church did not include his Gospels in the Bible (New Testament). They surmised: *God cannot be seen by mortal man*, and as for the faithful *Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*

Note the resonance of *duvidha* (the Sanskrit word for ambivalence, doubt) with Didymus. In *Conundrum of the Workshop*, Rudyard Kipling tried to capture such influences on human curiosity: *Our father Adam sat under the tree and scratched with a stick in the mould. And the first crude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart. Till the devil whispered behind the leave: It's pretty, but is it Art?* Tinkering guided by curiosity is a necessary precondition to change the status quo. In stages, every scratching, musing and discovery, is ignored, challenged, tolerated, and then celebrated with.

***Making head and tail* of an elephant.** **A** parable from the Indian subcontinent takes the other fork on the path to reason. Imagine

yourself as one of half a dozen blind people standing around an elephant. Or imagine that with others you are examining a best in a pitch dark room. Key condition is that the beast can not be seen in its entirety. Also not only the visually-challenged do not see the beast, they have not even heard of such a beast or its name. The challenge is how to conceptualize and represent such an entity.

Except for the impaired sight, all other senses and faculties of each of the six observers are intact. One would develop a uniquely personal perspective in an eventless universe where both the observer and the observed do not move. For simplicity let use assume that the beast is an elephant. The person near the head will not agree with the descriptions given by those near the tail, tusk, trunk, legs, or the underbelly. Of course, a conundrum breaks out if the disbelief in each others *personal knowledge* is mutual. Even in an environment of mutual trust, each interpreter has to *make head and tail* by superposing veritable perceptions in relation to the reality of the whole. Questions of all manners are permitted within the common experience of the deterministic reality. Consider ways to resolve the conundrum:

External insight: Someone knowledgeable arrives to explain the problem and offer solution. Reliance on such guidance calls for eternal faith. Can you trust if you do not have a way to confirm the solution and evaluate its relevance? Preexistence of knowledge for perpetual guidance suffers from many other inconsistencies and contradictions.

Personal knowledge: As the observers with limited abilities cope with the conundrum make observations, a wise one among them realizes that everybody can not be standing at the same place. The wise one generates *a table of experiences from different perspectives to construct a description of the beast*.

Shared knowledge. If the observers could communicate with each other, they could develop a consensus about what they are dealing with and what is its relevance. A running description could be used to understand and predict future behaviors. Reliability of the predictions could increase with a record of accumulated successes and failures. By sharing in the process participants are empowered to ask questions. Resulting feedback makes the world accessible where experience is cognized as usable motif for the future.

Doubt emerges as we interact with our concerns. The first parable provides a template, and the second is algorithmic way to increase certainty with emerging evidence. Cognitive explorations facilitate in stages appreciation of the extant reality and of the liabilities.

Motifs in parables have lasting influences on human thought and behaviors. The garden-path for Adam was chiseled into the Aristotelian-Aquinas deduction where *not-yes is necessarily no*. The Elephant and blind men parable's appeal to reduce doubt in stages was formalized in the smoke-fire syllogisms (see Nay section on this site). It calls for evidence-based affirmation where independence evidence is required to assert *it is so* or to assert *it is not so*. Real world evidence can only affirm something on the basis of concomitance and invariance.

Room for Doubt