

I-18. Rationality of Self-Interest

Human rationality is as much about the methods as about the goals towards realizing the potential of reality. While individual initiative is widely celebrated, viable social institutions also compensate for individual shortcomings. All beings show concern for others. However, instead of relying on the conduct-based ethics some groups have encouraged moral-based conduct.

It is a fact that often we fail to realize what we seek because we shirk active inquiry into our own values. Consider what do you do when your bicycle breaks down? Or the bathroom faucet leaks? How many of such apparently minor annoyances or chaotic events can you take? What does it take before you take action? Or change your ways? Erratic ways of viewing the worlds with attitudes of love and hate persist in personal relationships as well as in interactions with institutions including of knowledge and technology.

Traditional cultures may have been impoverished by ignorance. This condition is also inherent in being tone-deaf by training or choice, or being “proud of ignorance.” Denying the world one lives in is the syndrome of two-cultures. It is made worse by the media and popular buzz that intermingle real and imagined fears about weight, sex, drugs, meltdown, toxic dumps, and whatever else comes along on the radar. Much of it is concocted in the spirit of the popular myths where death and destruction is supposed to be followed by the second-coming. Many go for toys and tool to get away from the trivia of life. Does it have to be so mindless?

On the way from here to there: States of emptiness with self-denial and self-doubt are aptly represented by attitudes of will-

not, can-not, do-not and need-not. Other characterizations are: boxed-in, closed-mind, hostile, disabled, unable, and not-interested. Such attitudes make it difficult to internalize one's own experience, let alone build on shared experience. Behavioral manifestations of such attitudes include reactive and aggressive (*anudayik*), deliberate (*pramanik*), subdued and changeable (*vedag*) with unsubstantiated and unbridled confidence. In such states the ongoing theme is of disordered perceptions dominated by contradictions, disabilities, inability to discriminate, and indifference. Add to these the states resulting from the limitations of physical disabilities, delusions, inability to discriminate, ignorance, misconceptions, temptations, fads, distortions, illusions, paradoxes, chance events, random acts, mood swings, misplaced goals, lack of commitment, and reliance on unsubstantiated evidence. Interspersed with these are the contradictions and distractions that follow from blind faith in grace and judgment of ad hoc omniscience.

To appreciate the extent to which we deal with such limitations of states and processes consider the verbs, adjectives and adverbs used to express the states whose truth value can not be ascertained (See Table IV-1 in volume IV). The concept space and boundaries of these words are explored though out these volumes. No wonder we need so many words! Clearly, there are far too many disordered states, and only a few desirable ordered states. By acknowledging ignorance one makes a good start towards order and getting out of such states of disorder. In effect, mindless skeptics have given bad name to devil. Being devil's advocate is about search of the truth value. It requires words to dissect information about the states that can not be unequivocally affirmed. Such states are explored through orthogonal and independent assertions. It is not just semantic or rhetoric. As the doubt emerges in stages and the partial truth values are ascertained in appropriate contexts, representation

identifiably different doubtful states helps us focus on meaningful differences and similarities

Caught in the flow? Rationality lies in continuing effort without making it a struggle. We are prisoners of thoughts, words and actions. Starting with the assumption that virtually all humans can learn from experience, no matter where one stands, rationality lies in activation of the desire to do something about the present situation. A good start is to represent and evaluate the present. Realization of where one stands comes by avoiding traps of faith in random events and of reliance on chance happenings. The desire to do something about the present usually calls for multi-dimensional approach and active negation of obsessions and blinders to stop the slide. Beyond this lies effort to open one's mind to potentialities in the present. Even if the overall task may appear daunting, the strategy is to identify the limitations and divide it into parts - each to be conquered individually. Feedback is a habit of mind to learn from experience to direct the future.

What is there there? The chasm between what we comprehend and what we know (and accessible to us) is part of being human. It calls for doing something about it. Active effort is required to deal with the incomprehensible. Active choices are required to integrate the apparently irreconcilable ways of the world. An individual can stop the slide by negating obsessions with addiction or blinders of faith that interfere with other more desirable actions. Not choosing certain things is a real option in entertaining doubt: It is neither self-denial nor denial of the self.

Beyond this lies the need to identify a locus for deliberate change, such as restraint against making excuses. Restraints are about exercising choices on the basis defined criteria. Controlled ego is directed through disciplined efforts to drive discovery. It is self-motivated and it emerges with harmonized thoughts, words and actions. Significant changes are often incremental (boring?) and not of the break-through kind. Choices create order from

chaos, and chaos from disorder, as we make and implement decisions: Level of commitment and behavior modification amounts to discovering new horizons. If restraints allow self-discovery, through communication we learn how others do it. On the path to discovery one does not reinvent fire and wheel every day. That is also the wisdom of discovery of a path.

Practice-based conduct: Values emerge through practice. It is the way to make and implement decisions concerned with creating order from chaos and disorder. Along the way, ethical restraints are about exercising choices on the basis of defined criteria.

Through restraints we discover ourselves and through communication we learn how others do it. Desired behavior modifications set priorities in relation to the surroundings as well as our own goals. Desirable outcome is more likely with increased level of commitment towards a goal. If you take two servings of food and throw away one, taking only one is a step towards behavior modification by curtailing the choice.

Just as we are born with craving for foods that provide necessary nutrients, our bodies also rejects spoiled and poisonous food. Similar revulsion is not uncommon towards violence, unfairness, and over-consumption. Negation of obsessions takes hold in stages. As one learns from the experiences of others, personal choices and conduct are about focus on the task at hand, decisions to deal with distractions, quirks of habit and behaviors, and relevance of the existing order.

Contemplation versus Meditation: Dead-ends are built into contradictions and in the pursuit of what cannot be proven or falsified. Pragmatism requires not digging dry wells. Actions based on unformulated models interfere with the perception of reality behind the awareness. In the absence of a reasonable model, restraints are required for reconciliation. It is the hallmark of *anupreksha* contemplation to arrive at a workable representation from the available parts. *Anupreksha* contemplation is not the

same as the various forms of meditation (translated from *tapas* or *tap*) although some provide for a start.

In the Patanjali (ca. 450 BCE) tradition, articulated as *yoga chitra vritti nirodh*, the focus of meditation remains on ways of avoiding distractions to awareness. This is also the basis for the popular versions of yoga. In effect contemplation and meditation represent two ends of the spectrum with different goals. Contemplation is an active interaction with the ongoing process to seek reconciliation at all levels. Through *anugam* one seeks consilience between the parts of the observed as a way to the coherence of thoughts, words, and actions. On the other hand, the yogic (meditation) exercises are often ritualistic ways of putting a distance between you and the task at hand. Dedicated meditation (*tap*) may seek insight towards a specific objective.

Test for the validity of outcome is possibly the most critical difference between the meditation and contemplation. It is difficult to test the validity of deep personal insights sought through meditation. Their integration into shared knowledge occurs at random basis. On the other hand, the strategy of incremental exploration of possibilities through defined criteria appears to be a more efficient way to test the validity of possible options. Through contemplation one seeks consistency with established knowledge and thus it is more likely to be rooted in reality.

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