

IV-9 Anecdotes: Experience or Wishful

Anecdotes appeal with the power of observation, memory, and recall. In the interplay of experience and ideas, one man's joke may be another's philosophy. Reason is sacrificed yet the perception of the event remains. As the implicit are manipulated, spontaneous interactions focus attention to open new levels of awareness in association with integration of discerned patterns through analogies for explanation by iteration. As part of the consequence evaluation issues are packaged and loaded to raise questions that lead to deeper insights.

Shared knowledge of complex systems comes into practice through anecdotes. Often the fall out from anecdotes is the truth functionality that emerges with interaction of rational and spontaneous. As in Harem of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the role opposite gender plays in the genesis of ideas is often delegated to mistresses, muses, and other providers of the incidental and un-credited ideas. At the root of this tangle are elements of inspiration and rational mixed in with uncertainties of intellectual freedom and impulsiveness of jealousy and rivalries. As in a Greek melodrama all parties end up doubting their sanity: Arguments become futile and indistinguishable from whine that strips away power to reason. Through ambiguity of *this too and that too* mysticism calls for alternate reality. Similar paradoxes emerge in myths and epics through irrational use of principles, power, martyrs and heroes.

The task is to put away psychoses to identify an ad hoc or sane course of action. To paraphrase Descartes: *One is sane as long as one seeks a rational course*. What is that rational course? Desire to do so may spur creation and conviction, but how can one guard

against premature bliss. How does one arrive at it? How can one be certain? What strips away the melodramatic elements of this search? Does persistent desire to know bring one ultimately to terms with the reality? What happens on the way where desire to know is mingled with other desires?

Detours in the Journey of Mind

Dream: According to a Chinese tale (ca. 400 BC) Chang-Tzu dreamt he was a butterfly. It was so real that after being awake he wondered if he was a butterfly dreaming of being a human.

Hallucination: The term is often applied to the chemically or stress induced altered state of mind. The problem of such distortions is far more wide spread.

Mirage: Overlapping states of illusion, delusion, and hallucination.

Evil geniuses: The term was invented by Descartes to meditate on an age-old question. His variation was how to demolish falsehoods *to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.* To make a point about our mental images and the external reality, around 350 BC Plato imagined people living in a cave. These people have been chained by the evil master in such a way that they see themselves and other people only through their shadows on a wall of the cave. All their experience of existence is through such shadows. A modern reader can imagine such a virtual reality concocted by the evil genius in an environment wired with cameras and television screens but without a possibility of feedback.

Mass-hysteria and Collective-amnesia: Such behaviors are all too common through the human history right up to the 21st century: They continue to feign wars of exploitations and genocide.

Chaos: Inflate a toy balloon and let go. The path of the balloon is chaotic, not random. One cannot accurately predict the path of the balloon even if relations of all the forces acting on the balloon can be described. This is because magnitudes of the variables at any given point remain too uncertain to predict the outcome for the 'next' moment. Similar processes are at work in shuffling of a deck of cards, evolution of the traffic patterns, and the weather patterns where at least initially there are stupendous and mind-boggling numbers of possibilities.

How-do-you know? With varying degrees of skeptical slants, this question has been and continues to be raised in virtually all cultures. Following the approach of Euclid for two-dimensional geometry, 1700 years later Descartes approached the third dimension not merely as a representation of reality, but as a belief: "I think, therefore I exist."

Brain in Vat: In 1930s Penfield noted that touching a part of the temporal lobe activated the nightmarish dreams that have been haunting his patient for several years. Such observations have created numerous thought experiments invoking brain-in-vat invoking mind dissociated from the external reality.

Labyrinths and mazes: Fascination and excitement of dealing with unknown without a reference point probably comes from our cave-dwelling days. Labyrinth of caves have evolved into large buildings and garden mazes. The idea of arriving at a goal through a judicious choice of paths is intrinsic in the philosophical idea of *maya* and *lila*, and also in scientific simulation and modeling. In man-made mazes and labyrinths one deals with little knowledge of the path, although the goal may already be set. Borges has crafted the contemplation: *Beneath English trees I meditated on that lost maze. I imagined it inviolate and perfect at the secret crest of a mountain. I imagined it erased by rice fields or beneath*

the water. I imagined it infinite, no longer composed of octagonal kiosks and returning paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms... I thought of labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars.

Paradox: An assertion that asserts its own validity (or invalidity) is invalid as in the Liars paradox of *I am a liar*. It is self-referential.

Catch-22: It is an expectancy paradox memorialized by Joseph Heller in a novel *Catch-22*: There was only one catch and that was catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. *Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he did not, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he did not want to he was sane and had to.*

Greek plays, Medieval opera, Gothic tangles as well as reality based fictions explore the condition of man after emerging from the Garden of Eden. Individual excursions, howsoever illogical or illusory they may appear, ultimately chart the track for collective rationality provided we are willing to learn from such experiences. The anecdote implicitly focuses attention on the condition of ignorance, i.e. that we do not know that we are ignorant. In spite our collective progress, as individuals we may wonder if we wish to get out of that curse. Also once humans fell from grace, Prometheus stole fire from gods. Ever since we have been learning to live with ways to harness and control the products of fire - the energy and drive for actions. Both the goals and processes become indistinguishable as we realize that lacking ends and means we have to take care of ourselves and the garden.

One man's junk is another's treasure

Language is a playful activity driven by primitive and primordial instincts. Of the various devices to explore the word boundaries none is probably more universal than laughter. It transcends the cultures of the common and the uncommon senses. As deterrent for buzz, laughter is tonic against fear, antidote against doubt, and placebo for commonsense where simplicity is not to be confused with lack of functionality. Effective jokes are playful explorations that:

- * Catch you off-guard yet appeal to the shared experience.
- * Is contagious as we learn from others or do not want to be left behind (laughter breaks out uncontrollably).
- * Bring out relations (insights) by unintentional juxtaposition of dissimilar ideas.
- * Bring about free-flow of ideas by unintentional as well as voluntary control.
- * Are acceptable as it ends well for the narrator (although it may cost others).
- * Are usually about people (individual or groups) and therefore part of the social interactions.
- * Are not always about an overt value but the covert message ingrained in the culture.
- * Give appearance of fooling around - to make a point!
- * Relate to universal experiences of cleverness to deal with weakness, self-defense, pride, and fear.
- * Use phonetics in the narration style to overcome limitations of language and extend the range of verbal communication to include non-verbal means such as gestures, intonations, cultural metaphors, and icons.

Room for Doubt

Preface

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