

### III-33. Equation for Potential

At times it is necessary to provoke to evoke thoughts, responses, scrutiny and even action. If something bothers you it may touch some deeper cords. It can be used as a template for self-evaluation, develop a strategy for organizing thoughts, setting priorities, identify issues, and chart a course of action to do something about whatever surfaced. Such decisions may have long term and long range influences and consequences. You may get a second chance only if you are lucky.

**No, if you do'nt.** It is a generic response to a whole variety of questions: Is anybody watching? Does anybody care? Does it matter? Such questions do not necessarily originate from myopic, skeptic or alienated world-views. Nor are they part of the mystical or spiritual visions based on psychological needs. The underlying sentiment relates to an enduring issue: Relationship of individuals with ones feelings and the rest. In a very constructive sense it is dialog.

A dialog between the self and non-self is critical. It is the only way to develop individual objectives, set priorities, and evaluate resonance and dissonance from the world (Commons, society, market-place) and our experiences. Only when guided by sum total of our being we realize that not all products in a market-place are desirable or even acceptable. Suitable choices are possible if the appearances and warrantees can be scrutinized. Through critical measures we seek significant and meaningful options and choices for actions and behaviors. Very few choices come with guarantees. We also have to search through the implied for reliability and relevance. As one learns to peel frill and

fantasy from value, it becomes apparent that sales talk is just talk unless backed up with a meaningful walk.

Decisions about the future are often made with a limited sample of the present and with little knowledge of the future. We rely on the ability to recognize patterns and trends: *Where there is one ant there are likely to be many more.* One clearly takes a bigger risk if decisions are based entirely on the past, or a sales pitch, or one of a kind. How to deal with the dubious?

A decision to accept something for the long haul requires consequence evaluation. In a generic and generalized sense, it has to be in accord with the reality and offer tangible value. In designing a support matrix, look back, sideways and forward. Certain terms consolidate past, others break new ground, and still others take into consideration the future. Desirable terms propel opportunities towards growth and independence, and prevent errors turning into mistakes. Depending on the cues tragic events can be turned into tragedies or into the opportunities.

We often hear about the level playing field. It is about the same starting point, rules of the game, and the way rules apply and to whom. The terms that often appear in such considerations are grouped below. Not only they carry equal weight for all but they are also not linear or apply equally well to all individual situations. However, their relative importance is clear.

**Support matrices.** Broader influences shape and drive what we aspire to be. What we become are the products of the commons of knowledge and also of other forces and resources from the commons. Support structures in the guise of socialization include relatives, friends, teachers, and peers. For the broader influences consider the spells cast by of family, tribe, caste, education, economic group, nation, wars, diseases, technologies, dogma,

cultural practices, entertainment, literature and much more beyond the accident of birth.

**Power relations.** These build access to the resources from the Commons. Used at critical juncture they build momentum.

**Multipliers.** These are often the personal attributes of intellect, abilities, talents, health, and credibility. They help in learning from the experience of others. They offer opportunities for jumps (gains or losses in steps). Consider the opportunities provided by influential books and ideas, interactions with suitable groups, and good advice heeded at the appropriate moments. It is what we emulate while learning from the experiences of others.

**Additive terms.** Such measures maintain status quo while learning from ones own experiences. Clearly, it is a necessary part of holding on to the gains.

**Glass ceiling and niches.** These are the barriers that exist in all enterprises that confine ideas, goals and aspirations. Some barriers are more real than others. Some are wishful and others are rooted in what we do not know or cannot know. The real ones are integral part of the framework put in place for the various forms of exploitation. While it is critically important to be aware of such limitations, often opportunities also lie in such niches of contradictions and inconsistencies. Since the glass ceiling is often a local phenomenon, it is conceivable to grow out of the environment as one grows out of clothes.

Key to recognizing the significance of such terms in specific contexts is to identify specific factors and their relative contributions. Integrated outcome is of course based on how the terms add up with suitable probabilistic and deterministic considerations of the individual. Some orthogonal examples include:

**Accident of birth.** Once born there is little an individual can do about the historical time line except try to make the history in terms of what lies ahead. Such concerns are about what we get from our parents and environment in terms of the economic opportunities and social skills. Irrespective of the circumstances of the birth, many people have influenced the course of history as well as lives that followed. Drive to overcome limitations of the geography of birth is probably what brought humans out of Africa about 60,000 years ago. The wanderer's lust is only subdued by the uncertainty of opportunities elsewhere. As a result the influences that now shape support matrices for all humans include virtually all the remarkable inventions that have changed the course of developments in agriculture, animal husbandry, medicine, transport, social organization and fields of knowledge and decision making.

**Inherited genes.** One does not choose ones own parents. There is little that can be done about it after the birth except to nurture and maximize the utility of what one inherits of nature and nurture. It is also relatively rare to find humans with true genetic limitations that interfere with useful lives. By most accounts for most people nature provides far less than what can be made up with nurture. Earlier conceptions of inherited attributes and race were distorted measures of humans to empower few.

Diversity of the gene pool in the commons is critical for survival with the changing conditions. In-breeding may keep the control of the resources in the clan or tribe but it also encourages the structural defects and progeny of imbeciles. There is buzz about the designer-babies with specified color of the skin, eyes and hair, shape of the nose and other body parts. Even when a market or expert consensus emerges about such features, experience with the genetically engineered food crops suggests

that they do not have lasting benefits or survival value for the organism. More to the point, one does not know how to evaluate the evolutionary significance of the specified genetic changes. For such purposes nature relies on random trial and error. It may be better to stick to plastic surgery.

**Limitations of attitude.** Attitudes determine the accessible parts of the support matrices. For example, by starting with an all-knowing attitude one understands nothing while closing viable options. Ability to keep an open mind is about keeping the options viable.

**Decisions do matter.** Experiences conspire and chance events matter. However, once recognized, it is often up to the individual to do certain things to achieve certain ends. Decisions are about making such choices. Tragic events are facts of life but avoiding tragedies is about key decisions at critical junctures. It is often difficult to see the nonlinear trajectory. Epics, literature and anecdotes from all cultures emphasize such themes. Reality lies in continuing vigilance even if we wish to celebrate the happily ever after.

# Against Gods and Humbug

## Preface

1. Paradox of Choices
2. Representation for Potential
3. Feedback from Interactions
4. What Is Rationality?
5. Meaning to a Speck of Dust
6. The Unknown and the Doubtful
7. Actions Have Consequences
8. Beginning of a Decision
9. Tools for Thought Search
10. Living with Doubt
11. Who to Trust?
12. Living with Incomplete Knowledge
13. Do People Tell Lies?
14. Social Influences of Non-violence
15. Greed and Grab
16. Conduct with Consistency
17. An Activist Perspective
18. Causality: End or Means to Reality
19. Negate the Wishful
20. Man is Capable of Being Rational
21. Making Decisions
22. Keeping Viable Options Open
23. Inference and Successful Behavior
24. Genesis of Syad: The Logical Doubt
25. Science-based Conduct?
26. Philosophy and Logic for Action
27. Actions That Matter
28. Tragic versus Tragedy
29. Representation of Order with Room for Doubt
30. War Promises Meaning to the Otherwise Meaningless Lives
31. A Peace to End All Peace
32. Knowledge: Been There
33. Equation for Potential
34. Why I Am Not Moral
35. Unleashing Thought: Taming Brawn, Grunt, and Smarts