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Rational Agency and Moral Practice: An Exploration of Dual Constraints

Abstract

A number of actions performed by a large number of persons are often characterized by apathy, impulsivity and goal-neglect in contemporary times. While being fully capable of exercising the theoretical reasoning consistent with their desires and beliefs, an increasing number of persons generally fail to take into account the necessity of practical reasoning focused on valuing the other-regarding responsibility, duty and obligation. They are endowed with the faculty of theoretical rationality and yet they have no regard for the necessity of deliberation about and valuation of future consequences of an action. In such a case, the apathetic and goal-neglecting impulsive persons fail to properly execute actions. What is at stake is that apathetic disposition and impulsive intentionality constrains the working of the relation of emotion, reason and thought towards purposeful action and moral doing. It needs to be acknowledged that agential autonomy of human nature and voluntary nature of human actions as these are mediated through practical reason have an intimate relation with the health of human brain and the richness of information it is endowed with. What is nowadays increasingly observed as human actions driven by socially pervasive undesirable whims and reprehensible impulses may often be simply the result of malfunction of cognitive control of brain over internal information and asymmetry in coupling of external information with brain. A human agent suffering from apathy, impulsivity and goal-neglect may not be successful in bringing the cognitive reason and perceptual information to leave a stamp on his/her moral practices in day to day life. Such a situation may allow for manifold standards of moral practices in the real world. Such a multiplicity in the practices of morality is tragically not always accounted in theories of ethics. It must however be accounted.

Classical postulates on the concept of a rational agency and the rationalist claim regarding universality of the practical reason needs to account for the general observations of at least two pervasive real-life constraints on moral practices since these dual constraints produce exceptions in standard moral practices. One is grounded in observations of pervasive apathy, and another derives from the phenomena of impulsivity and goal-neglect on part of a large number of people. Whereas apathy may often be caused by malfunction of cognitive control function of the **pre-frontal cortex** and **corti-costriatal circuitry** of the human brain, goal neglect may largely be the result of asymmetry in coupling and transferring of perceptual data and external information to human brain. In case of lesions of and damages to the pre-frontal cortex of brain, malfunctioning of the cognitive control functions begins and, inter alia, the human agents begin suffering from apathy. In case of irregularity in the functioning of corti-costriatal brain circuitry, the processing of reward-related (internal and external) informational resources is hampered and, inter alia, the human agents witness losing control over the process of regulation of impulsive decisions and actions. Both situations are symptomatic of the 'psychic akinesia' (also called 'athymormia') - **auto-activation deficit**.

Key Words: agency, apathy, auto-activation deficit, corti-costriatal brain circuitry, cognitive psychology, goal-neglect, impulsivity, morality and moral practices, practical reason, pre-frontal cortex, rationality.

Introduction

In analytical philosophy, a moral practice is not merely a virtue but an indispensable identity of an agency. A moral practice is conceived to be the result of ethical disposition to act on the part of an agency. It is argued in the tradition of rationalist morality that a rational human agency is necessarily identified with sound moral practices. A moral practice is a set of consistently repeated actions, which are motivated by a reason explicable in terms of a spirit of virtue and a sense of care for others in the surrounding and whose contents are evaluated and judged to be either good or right or obligatory in nature. It is argued that there are normative forces inherent in the reason of an agency which demands a specific type of actions to be repeatedly undertaken in a consistent manner so as to constitute a moral practice. Given the acceptance of such concepts of rationality in association with morality, a rational agent by virtue of being swayed over by the categorical imperative is inevitably a moral agent.

In the arena of real-life observation and experience, there are however a number of frequently occurring instances of goal-neglect, apathy and impulsivity as aberrations in moral practices on part of an otherwise rational agency that in turn result in utter disregard for considerations of other-regarding interests and needs. Skirting the demands of obligation, not keeping the promises and executing actions with utter disregard for the concern of goodness and righteousness have become persistent observations in day-to-day actually lived life. In modern contemporaneous times, the deviations from moral practices have become quite pervasive. Such real-life pervasive deviations from the sound moral practices are enough evidences for the breakdown of claims regarding the co-existentiality of morality and rationality in a project of a rational design of human life. The Greek moral philosophy did not go beyond “*akrasia*” or ‘weaknesses of the will’ in explaining the digression and divergence from moral course of action. In a Kantian framework of moral philosophy, such aberrations have not been convincingly accommodated. Whatever other explanations exist in the literature, these also do not go very far.

The philosophical psychology has some promises in accounting for diversions and deviations of practices as constraints on morality. While the abstract, conceptual and theoretical investigation of the categories of agency, reason and morality and rationalist theoretical paradigms is important in analytical philosophy, the significance of philosophical psychology for ethical analysis is not to be underestimated. In popular image, the reach of ethics is rather wide enough to be responsive to empirical facts and evidence provided by researchers in social psychology and neurology. There has been an old relation of ethics with philosophical psychology since the latter has been concerned with the empirical investigation of the facts and evidence. It is possible in the domain of philosophical psychology to explain the pervasive modern-life phenomenon of goal-neglect, impulsivity and apathy on part of a large number of human beings. Since mind (brain plus intentionality plus something) is quintessential the medium through the categories of which a human agency reasons, the health of brain matters in the formation of ethical disposition to act. In a rational human agency, the formation of ethical disposition is ever posited to be a natural process; it is however never spontaneous. It has been argued long ago by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle that the formation of such dispositions needed proper education and careful upbringing. In addition to education and upbringing of a human agent, the status of the health of brain of an acting person is quite significant. A rational

agency who is already capable of exercising practical reasoning and who has also been brought up with background of a proper education may still fail to exhibit an ethical disposition and a moral practice, and such failures may have a relation with the minor and often disregarded malfunction of human brain.

While presenting the classical postulates on the relation of agency, practical reason and morality in the philosophical conceptual format, the paper draws attention to the possibility of discord between the faculty of reason and the morality practices of humans. What is argued is simple: a person may suffer from impulsivity caused by irregularity in the information-perception refinement function of sense-organs. A person may also suffer from the phenomena of goal-neglect and apathy which may simply be the result of lesion and damage afflicting the brain – an integral constitutive part of mind. In both cases, an otherwise rational agent suffers from what is technically called the '*psychic akinesia*' and in ordinary language the '*auto-activation deficit*'. In the present paper, dual limits on thought and action, initially arising from the lesion in human brain and poverty of environmental information and finally reflected in the irregularities in the cognition control function of the human brain and the information-perception refinement function of sense-organs, are explored as double constraints in the practices of morality by an agency.

1. Agency and Reason: An Intimate Relation

An agency is considered to be a finite, embodied, historical person who responds to reasons. An agency has a desire, an intention and a goal and s/he seeks not just any means or the only means rather searches for the best means (Searle, 2001) while performing an action. A rational agency is not merely capable of responding to reasons but is also a doer of an action – a purposeful action explicated by a reason. Autonomy in desideration and deliberation and goal behind the intentional action are the two hallmarks of the identity of a rational agency. Classical postulates established a concord between human reason and human action through conception of a rational agency. It is through positioning 'reason' as mediating factitive entity that agential autonomy of human nature and voluntary nature of human actions are put forward as two principal postulates of classical formulations in moral philosophy. An agency is posited to be an entity, which is autonomous in deliberation and desideration, and whose action has an intimate relation with reason (Petit and Smith, 1993). It is this intimate relation between reason and action of a human person that makes for a rational agency.

There is a long chain of connected reasoning which is advanced to establish the postulate. It begins with the assertion that a human is a person – possessed of a personality with individuality, a human is also an agency – endowed with free will (autonomy), and therefore, a human is a personal agency. A materialist account identifies a person with a body and bodily continuity. A Cartesian account identifies a person with immaterial substance of mind and mental or psychological continuity. A balanced view is that a person is an entity which necessarily has two dimensions – mind and body; a person admits both mental and bodily attributes. A person is

“a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation, etc are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type (Strawson, 1959, p. 102).

In the tradition of hylomorphism of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, a person is neither reducible to some bundle of bodily characteristics nor psychological characteristics; a person is rather a body with a “form” – a body and a soul in causal contact with each other (the rational soul of the Greek tradition). In other words, a person is the locus of immaterial rational soul – the “form” – within the material being – the body who is a subject of conscious experiences and intentionality. After Thomas Aquinas (1999), the analytical Thomism has been the improved version carried forward by works of Elizabeth Anscombe, John Haldane and J F Ross.

A human who is a person is also a deliberator and an actor. While being a deliberator and an actor, a human person is first and foremost essentially an agency. To make a human subject a rational agency, the weights of deliberation and forces of desideration must resonate in harmony (Petit and Smith, 1993). An agency is capable of responding to a reason and in whom reason and value necessarily resonate. Rationality requires not only the weights of deliberation but also the forces of disposition, and the disposition in turn is influenced by forces of desideration, for example, desire, wanting, and longing. As a deliberating and acting human person, (s)he is endowed with a disposition to act – a disposition to act in order to see the fructification of a project of a rational design of life. In other words, such an agency does not merely produce a purposeful action but is also disposed to produce that action – intentionality. According to Frantz Brentano (1973), “intentionality” is a mental state ‘about’ something, and this “aboutness” is a capacity of the mental state (beliefs, desires) to aim at, to point at and to be about something beyond itself. It requires a first-person subject to have a mental state for there being an “intrinsic” intentionality (Searle, 1983), a disposition to act and action by an agency. Since personal autonomy requires appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options, and independence (Raz, 1986), a personal agency always leaves behind a stamp of his/her distinct individuality in the execution of an action. The mainstream literature of ethics and moral philosophy postulate an intimate relation of reason with agency and thereby the moral practice. In a rational human personal agency, reason and value must necessarily resonate. A rational agency does not just have a goal but also a capacity to make an appraisal and choose a goal in the light of something. That something is a value that (s)he considers to be either a good or a right or an obligation.

It is a fact that a human being is the animal that can both understand reasons and respond to reasons. A rational agency necessarily responds to reasons. A reason is rational deliberation in the form of searching, weighing, and inferring a conclusion, and therefore, a reason may just constitute an improved guideline – a sort of an adequately informed, reflectively endorsed practical consideration. Facts give us reasons when they count in favor of our having some belief or desire, or acting in some way. Reasons are facts but reasons can also be propositionally structured entities such as obligations, commitments, requirements, and needs. Both reasons and the things they are reasons for can be either facts or the intentional states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions. These intentional states and propositionally structured entities are factitive entities. A reason is a set of factitive entities (Searle, 2001), since reason are either facts or considerations or both. A fact is a reason only relative to the fact it is a reason for, and it is a reason for that fact only if it stands in an explaining relation to that fact. All good reasons explain, and all explaining is the giving of reasons, and reasons have overriding force in the

course of execution of action by an agency. Reasons are not causes, and an agent does not need to appeal to evidences in giving his/her reasons for action. To cite reasons for acting is to cite those beliefs, wants, values which are telling ones, responsible for so acting. Reasons are those considerations that ought to weigh with an agent because they would weigh with a perfectly rational agent (who has the capacity to examine critically and to improve upon initial, natural considerations) (Parfit, 2011). A reason is always contrasted with 'intuition' which is sudden flash and knee-jerk reaction resulting in instant approval and disapproval; the intuitive and emotional reaction processes do not involve reasoning.

A Kantian rational agent is an agent in possession of the reflective and reflexive disposition leading him/her to an acquisition of a value and a capacity to respond appropriately to his/her normative judgments over options available. The rational agent has an ability to be guided in behavior by his/her normative judgment of what is right/wrong, good/bad, and obligatory/discretionary and to act on the basis of such normative judgments since there exists not only universal nature of the principles of reason but also fact of autonomy of agency (Sayre-McCord, 2011). A human primate rather evolves through successive stages into a Kantian rational agent. A stimulus-response agent has a capacity to think of 'something' as representing the world in the nature and a capacity to respond to those representations with simple cognitive resources while a planning and strategic agent has a developed capacity to respond rather differentially to all such representations according to the alternative prospects of attraction and repulsion and also a developed capacity to respond differentially and interactively to one's own representation and other's representation with complex sophisticated cognitive resources of decision-making and game playing. In both agents, a capacity to represent something in the world as good/bad, better/worse, right/wrong, and obligatory/discretionary is lacking. A norm-governed agent has a capacity to respond to the rules of behavior not only in terms of being disposed to confirm but also a capacity to enforce such rules of behavior on others in the interactive surroundings on the basis of commanding something giving a power of enforcement. A rational agent in contrast to all these three variants of agency has a capacity to represent something in the world as good/bad, better/worse, right/wrong and obligatory/discretionary because (s)he has normative concepts to deploy (Sayre-McCord, 2011). A concept counts as a normative concept because the criterion used in its deployment is open to evaluation, and the evaluation is probative with respect to whether the criteria used are correct. The normative concepts are essentially contestable in nature and any proposed standard for the application of normative concept is intelligibly challengeable as wrong.

In classical literature, prominent conception of a rational agency has been taken to be either expressed in the conception of a '*noumenal self*' or expressed in 'how one should lead a satisfying life'. A rational agency in Aristotelian conception responds to practical reason as the overriding reason having normative force in the performance of action, motivated as s/he is to attaining any reasonable goal or a goal of the rational design of life and universe. In metaphysical conception of the agent in Kantian framework, the self of moral agency is a '*noumenal*' self, outside time and causality - a transcendental self (Kant, 1785). In the tradition beginning from ancient Greeks, it has been postulated that a rational agency has an interest in either leading a satisfying life (a thick interest) or acting rationally (a thin interest) or both. While the richer and determinate 'thick interest' conception was developed in its earliest philosophical version by Aristotle, the abstract and minimal 'thin interest' conception of a rational agency has been associated with the name of Emmanuel Kant. Both interests - 'thin interest' and 'thick interest' - which are attributes of a rational human agency yield an argument in practical reason of a

person in action. A reason for intending to do something or trying to do something is, other things being equal, a reason for doing it. A fact is a reason for acting insofar as it bears upon one's best reply to the doings or expected doings of others (Baier, 1978; Gauthier, 1987). A reason for desiring is a theoretical reason and a reason for acting is a practical reason for a person. An egotist person is a person capable of responding to theoretical reason, and a reasonable person is a person capable of responding to practical reason. A person endowed with theoretical reason is merely a necessary condition in the way of conceiving a rational agency who inescapably and inevitably responds to practical reason.

2. Practical Reason and Morality: A Design of Life

Moral rationalism is the view that general moral principles and moral truths are knowable a priori by reason alone. Such a view was defended by Plato in the ancient Greek times as well as Emmanuel Kant in 1785. Rationalist moralist in the past tended to regard both reason and will as two dimensions of the same faculty. In the rationalist view of moral obligation and duty, free will was "contra-causal freedom". The philosophical moral rationalism has been prevalent in two forms: one using theoretical reason, and another using practical reason to act as leverage between the conception of rational agency and the idea of rational action. In contemporary times, this tradition has been carried forward by Kristine Korsgaard (1996), Richard Hare (1982) and Michael Smith (1994). Recently, G M Singer (2008) has provided a succinct elaboration of the idea of 'rational morality'. According to Bernard Williams (2010), the Archimedean point in moral philosophy has been an argument in practical reason. The postulate of practical reason has worked as a point of leverage between the conception of rational agency and the idea of rational action.

Socrates was one of the first to seek a rational design of life. The ancient Greeks subscribed to teleology. An explanation which consists of a description in terms of the end, result and goal aimed at is called a teleological explanation of action. Such an explanation posits that an action is performed with a purpose in mind, with the intention of bringing about some state of affairs of the world and is directed toward some goal. In the teleological conception, a rational design of life was considered to be contingent on rational action, and the rational action was the action of man of virtues. A virtuous man with a background of proper education and upbringing had the capacity of performing good action, and good action led him to seek a rational design of life. A rational agency endowed with the faculty of practical reason was therefore located in a man of virtue – virtue ethics.

A long journey beginning from virtue ethics has been completed. It is as yet considered a reasonable postulate about human nature that affirms that (wo) man deliberates, prior to acting, from other-regarding concerns and perspectives, so as to accomplish something good or something right or something obligatory. When our reasons to do something are stronger than our reasons to do anything else, this act is what we have most reason to do, and may be what we should, or ought to, or must do (Parfit, 2011, p. 1). If a person has a reason for acting then there must be something good or right about what s/he is doing. A rational agency being capable of responding to practical reason generally follows certain norms (with a scope of revision in the light of new facts and evidences) - a set of moral practices. Practical reason as a faculty has a capacity to motivate agents to act, and thereby, it does determine the content of morality. The rationalist moralist asserts that practical reason has a normative force because it is the justifying

reason for action with an overriding force. It is the 'reason for action' - the reason for performing action. A rational agent acts as (s)he does by virtue of his/her judgment of what is and what is not worth doing. A rational agent is in essence a moral agent, and practical reasoning is an essential aspect of a moral agency (Kant, 1785). A failure to act on a moral injunction has been considered to be a form of irrational behavior.

A practical reason is a normative reason for action, that is, it is some fact that counts in favor of the agent's performing that action. Practical reason is the faculty of reflection and deliberation of an autonomous agency. Such reasons are facts that ought to be considerations for someone to do something, provided she is adequately informed. It is understood to be our capacity to reason from normative belief to practical conclusions, and the normative force is the action-guiding force. It is nothing but reason that is guiding action. It is conscious intention and mental deliberation towards a choice of what ought to do and how ought to act. Practical reason is rationality in action, which is always a matter of an agent consciously reasoning in time, under the presupposition of freedom, about what to do now or in the future (Searle, 2001). Practical reason is the faculty of reflection and deliberation of an autonomous human agent; it is in the nature of being justifying reason for regarding a course of action as good, right and obligatory (Keenan, 1984). Practical reason plays a substantial role in self-regulation of a rational agency. Practical reason is posited to be an externalist reason in the nature of being justifying reason with overriding force for regarding a course of action as good or right or obligatory for achieving a better state of affairs of the world; it is a moral reason. Practical reasons tell a person what s/he just plain ought to do, that is, what s/he ought to do, all things considered. A human primate is a rational personal agency and such a rational agent is essentially and unfailingly a moral agent in the Kantian system of understanding. This has been considered and defended as a universal theoretical philosophical premise.

Rationalist conception of morality insists that we always have most reason to do and to act to do our duty, and bring the stamp of self-responsibility to bear on our action, and it could not be rational to act in any way that we believe to be wrong (quoted in Parfit, 2011, p. 141). It is since eighteenth and nineteenth century until a couple of decades back that this proposition about concord between agency and reason has been carried forward in moral philosophy. An agent has the power to affect the state of the world by producing action; the cause of actions is not an event but a thing and such a thing with a power to cause actions is the human agent. In order to account for a rational agency, there is always a need to postulate a self that combines the capacities of rationality and agency. It is the self (something that intervenes between thought and action) which is the source of generation of an ethical disposition (Searle, 1983). An ethical disposition is the intentionality and disposition to bring about a change in the state of affairs of the world. To act intentionally is to be prepared to give reasons to justify the action. An action is creation in the sense of altering the physical state of the world; it is an intentional performance and movement of human beings.

Morality is a life-guide with a marked social dimension to it, and it is a belief in the objectivity of morality that an appeal is made to reason. Morality is grounded in rationality in the sense of being possessed of not only a special reason-giving force (a positive force) but also action-guiding (a normative force). It motivates a person to act because it imbues the reason-for-action with an overriding force. Both rationality and morality are normative. While rationality requires the recommending normativity, morality consists of the demanding normativity (Schulte, 2011). The rationality judgments are action-guiding in the sense of recommending an action while

morality judgments are demanding a course of action. Morality is crucially a matter of disposition of a rational agency who responds to practical reason. The dispositions to want certain things, to react in certain ways to other people, and to their actions, to use such notion as obligations, and to promote certain outcomes like justice are ethical dispositions. An agency requires a number of disposition in which resolution is one of the disposition required for agency (Wallace, 1999). The exercise of resolve is a constitutive habit of agency (Raz, 1986, p. 372). Reproduction of ethical dispositions in a person is conducive to preservation of ethical values – values of norms-following. In specific circumstances, morality is but not merely a matter of disposition; it is also a matter of practice by a human person. A moral practice is constituted by actions which are motivated by reasons to “care” about inter-personal desire-independent other-regarding interests and “norms-following” by a human person. It is claimed that such actions are necessarily performed by a rational agency responding to practical reason.

3. Apathy and Moral Deficits: Dual Constraints

Both Thomas Nagel and John Rawls, prominent modern moral philosophers in their own respective rights, have variously asserted that our moral theories have been ancient and our ethical theory has been in infancy for quite a long time (Parfit, 2011), because these theories could not address a number of queries with a proper answer. It is only during the last two decades that the ethical theory has been attempting to come out of the infancy, though unsuccessfully.

Whereas formerly ethicists were concerned mainly with the merits of teleological versus deontological moral systems, with the discovery and application of moral rules and with the logical structure of moral judgments, nowadays many have devoted most of their energies and resources to analyzing and answering the question “Why be moral?” in the past twenty-five years or so (Keenan, 1984, p.3).

It is not that the idea of a reason for acting has been easy to understand; it has rather been frightfully difficult to answer as to what is a reason for action. This is what Philippa Foot also claimed once (quoted in Cullity and Gaut, 1997; Searle, 2001, p. 97). This is why a number of moral theorists have come forward to opine that practical reason and morality is no more to be considered as co-existent (Foot, 1972; Harman, 1978). In the arena of rationality, the moot question from a singular first-person point of view is: “what do I have most reason to do?” in the arena of morality, the significant issue from a singular first-person point of view is: “what ought I morally to do?” there are cases where the answers do diverge. Given the divergence in answers to the questions raised from the singular first-person point of view, reason loses the capacity to determine the content of morality and the capacity to motivate the agents to act. In such a case, morality is undermined. The self-interested “I” and other-interested “I” may have discord with each other. In such cases, the empirical observations do not accord well with the theoretical and conceptual model of the rationalist morality and moral rationalism.

Why be moral? Whether it is rational to be moral? Is it not possible that we could rationally act wrongly? Recently, Philippa Foot (1972) opined that a man may reject morality without being irrational, in-calculative or inconsistent. Immorality does not involve irrationality. Gilbert Harman (1978) asserts that if a person’s interest and principles diverge and differs with others, he may have no reason to accept other’s morality. In other words, there are no substantive

moral demands everyone may have reason to accept. According to Phillip Petit and Michael Smith (1993), there are many situations where practical unreason ensues only because there are imbalances in various combinations between the weight of deliberation (weighing the considerations about values) and forces of desideration (desires, disposition) for a rational human agency. In the past, David Hume (1751) could go a step further to generalize that morality is determined by sentiments and moral judgments have an essentially emotional, sentimental and non-rational character to them. In ancient Greece, Aristotle allowed for a vicious man and a man suffering from weakness-of-will to be out of the ethical system of the co-existentiality of practical reason and morality. The mythical human characters of the antiquity the *amoralist*, the *Callicles*, and the *skeptic*, the *Pyrrhonians* were also considered out of the ethical system, despite it that they reasoned very well and were of course rational agents. In general, the universality claim of practical reason has been presumed to fail in cases of weakness of will, compulsion, wantonness and caprice due to ignorance, bias, inferential error and illogic. These have been standard instances of failure of practical reason enumerated in the past literature.

In the modern real world as it obtains today, it is often asserted that the reason has nearly lost the capacity to determine the moral practices in case of a large number of human beings ala` persons. It is asserted that the rational importance of a personal identity is often lost in case of a large number of human beings in the modern world. The empirical researches paint a dismal portrayal of the role of reason in morality. These argue that practical reason is a fiction lacking empirical roots, and therefore, it has no role to play in guiding an action – a thinning of the air around possibility of a moral action. In the empirical setting of our modern world with the system of political coordination through “democracy”, the co-existentiality often gets broken. Joseph Schumpeter (1942, p. 262) opined long back that in a democracy, typical citizens may possess a wide range of cognitive skills but they lack motivational virtues. They often act without virtue. They lack virtues required to employ cognitive skills in ways necessary for effective deliberative engagement in a democratic arena. They are insensitive to truths. Since acquiring and gathering information and knowledge involve costs in terms of consummation of time, money and resources, they prefer rational ignorance which is a phenomenon resulting from a lack of motivation by citizens to be knowledgeable and informed. They succumb to their primal and primitive passionate instincts. Asymmetry in the dissemination and acquisition of information across citizens combined with lack of motivation to employ the cognitive skills mars the deliberative reasoning process. The cases of moral hazards in the ethos of information asymmetry and failures of patron-client relations are widely explained with the help of observational categories in the discipline of economics. In the material world of capitalist framework of society and economy, there are more observed cases of vices ruling the roost than virtue in relations among humans.

Contemporaneous social psychology researches propound the paradigm of ‘automaticity’ in human action in day-to-day affairs. In psychological researches, the personality of a person is treated to be integrally linked with at least three things: functioning of the *prefrontal cortex* of the brain, functioning of the *corti-costriatal* brain circuitry, and process of the coupling of external information of environment with brain. Neuroscience claims that the auto-activation deficit is a specific brain-related disorder contributing to the agential apathy, goal neglect and impulsivity. In claiming this, the neuroscience bears the blame of being narrow in the sense of treating mind as consisting of purely material categories of brain only while philosophers treat mind as being much broader than the material categories of brain. Be that as it may. Why do passions inform the decision-making? Why does impulsivity characterize a majority of human characters? Why

does automaticity in the form of mostly non-conscious automatic responses to environmental stimuli characterize the profile of a majority of actions? Such questions have been answered under the programmes of the modern social psychology researches by pointing to the anomalies in the working of human brain.

To begin with, a brain thinks; a human brain thinks over the thought of the mind as well. Being a conscious organ, the human brain makes a coupling with body. What is unique about this organ is that it co-ordinates not only our physical actions but also regulates our unconscious body processes, such as digestion and breathing. A human brain needs data and all such data constitute the information for brain. Information is encoded, transmitted and stored. Knowledge is a store of information which an agent gains as a result of interaction with the world. Information is a property of representations that are meaningful to some subjects – intentional. It is presumed to be meaningful by virtue of having some appropriate connection to its objects.

The word 'information' has been given different meanings by various writers in the general field of information theory. It is likely that at least a number of these will prove sufficiently useful in certain applications to deserve further study and permanent recognition. It is hardly to be expected that a single concept of information would satisfactorily account for the numerous possible applications of this general field (Shannon, 1993, p. 180).

Be that as it may. A brain without information, be that external or internal, is a blank slate. Abstract information is all there in the environment of the world, and it is the coupling of environment with human brain that effectuates the transfer of the information – a set of symbols, signals and messages constituting data as facts and knowledge. In everyday usage, information is facts acquired from observation, instruction and study and it constitutes the knowledge. Both epistemology and semantics postulate that such data, facts, knowledge and information are conveyed from world to mind - transference from environment to agents – a coupling. Information as well-formed, factual, meaningful instructional data is transferable through coupling and conveyed from the physical, biological, non-intentional world to cognitive, mental, intentional states of human agents. It is conveyed from the biological and physical world – non-intentional entities – to our minds and cognitive systems – the intentional entity.

In human brain, the Prefrontal Cortex and Corticostriatal Brain Circuitry are ideal places to look for neural correlates of abstract information (Kaplan, et al., 2001). It is not to deny that a given pattern of information affects many brain circuits, since processing of information is orchestrated in many different brain systems and therefore, the neural correlates of abstract information are to be found in many brain circuits. The role of Prefrontal Cortex is but vital since it is in direct contact with a wide array of sub-cortical structures that also process 'internal' information such as motivational state. The Prefrontal Cortex provides a venue in which information from distant brain systems can interact through relatively local circuitry. It is the Prefrontal Cortex that contributes to those cognitive capacities that distinguish humans from animals. The prefrontal cortex is the brain's executive. The Cortex of brain has access to and the means to influence processing in all major forebrain systems. This Cortex of brain seems to have a central role in cognitive control. The Prefrontal Cortex provides a means to synthesize the diverse information related to a given goal of a human agent. The Corticostriatal is a brain circuitry that is also thought to regulate not only the cognitive but also the decisional and

behavioral tendencies in human beings. The circuitries integrate aspects of cognitive, sensorimotor, and motivational information (Groenewegen et al., 1997). Corticostriatal circuitries are important not only for basic incentive motivation and instrumental learning functions but also for the higher order cognitive control over decisions, actions, and goal-directed behaviors that can either promote or impair physical and mental health.

Apathy is a quantitative reduction of voluntary, goal-directed behaviors. The capacity of the frontal cortex to select, initiate, maintain and shift programs of actions is impaired. The absence of cognitive control which is a reflection of malfunction is related with the lesion and damage to the Prefrontal Cortex of brain. The clinical signs grouped under the concept of apathy are a common feature of lesions of prefrontal cortex and dysfunctions of corti-costriatal brain circuitry (and basal ganglia). The underlying mechanisms responsible for apathy are to be grouped into three subtypes of disrupted processing: ‘emotional–affective’, ‘cognitive’ and ‘auto-activation’. Apathy due to the disruption of ‘emotional–affective’ processing refers to the inability to establish the necessary linkage between emotional–affective signals and the ongoing or forthcoming behavior. Apathy due to the disruption of ‘cognitive’ processing refers to difficulties in elaborating the plan of actions necessary for the ongoing or forthcoming behavior. Impulsivity is typically envisioned as inefficient, un-adaptive or suboptimal reaction and is often reflected in manifestations of rapid action, quick decision making, and hasty reward seeking. In both humans and monkeys, it is now clear that those individuals exhibiting relatively high naturally occurring impulsivity exhibit poor working memory capabilities. Perhaps the basic mechanism mediating this relationship is that poor working memory leads to deficiencies in developing and maintaining goal-directed plans related to behavior—the result being a more myopic behavioral phenotype. A malfunction of brain leads to apathy, impulsivity and goal-neglect by a person.

Apathy, impulsivity and goal neglect shows uneven distribution of internal information of brain. The damage to the pre-frontal cortex leads to apathy - a quantitative reduction of voluntary, goal-directed behaviors. An inconsistency in the corti-costriatal brain circuitry is a reflection of failures of processing of reward-related information and regulation of impulsive decisions and actions and the inability to self-activate thoughts and self-initiate actions may simply be a reflection of the uneven distribution of internal information among human population. Extreme form of such malfunction is found in a psychopath. Early socioeconomic disadvantage directly account for variation in the adult functionality of brain circuitries—specifically *‘corticostriatal brain circuitries*. Early socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with alterations in several cognitive functions in adulthood, particularly those that are presumably supported by prefrontal and networked cortical control systems (Kaplan et al. 2001), leading to apathy and impulsivity in human actions. Parents of lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend on average to report that child development is a process that unfolds naturally. They perceive that that it is not necessary to do more than provide basic supports, including food, shelter, and comforts to children. Such practices may lead to asymmetric distribution of information and knowledge across the divergent socio-economic classes of people. Though information, technically speaking can never be false, it might be misleading in such an environment of asymmetric distribution. The uneven distribution of external information of the environment among the human population may lead to apathy, impulsivity and goal neglect, which may be the direct result of uneven distribution of socio-economic advantages and disadvantages in the civil society.

Apathy, impulsivity and goal-neglect is often the result a specific kind of disorder of human brain called the 'auto-activation deficit'; it is the disruption of 'auto-activation' processing which manifests in the inability to self-activate thoughts and self-initiate actions. It is the lesion and damage of prefrontal cortex and inconsistency in the working of the corticostriatal brain circuitry that often leads to the 'auto-activation deficit' in human beings. There is superficial appearance of normality in a human agency suffering from the natural lesion and the accidental damage to prefrontal cortex and dysfunctions in the corticostriatal brain circuitry (and basal ganglia) (Prinz, 2007). An agency suffering from the natural lesion and the accidental damage to prefrontal cortex can perceive, make bodily movement, and appear remarkably normal in casual conversation. The agency suffers from very little impairment in the memory. They have but difficulty in sustaining attention, in keeping 'on task', and seem to act on whims and impulses without regard to future consequences. They suffer from 'goal neglect' (Duncan et al., 1996). They simply react to their environment with whatever behaviors are strongly associated with the cues that are immediately present. They become impulsive. They exhibit apathy.

An agency that is incapable of judging what is best and also incapable of forming the intention to do what is best is pathologically afflicted. In a series of recent neuro-imaging studies, a neo-Humean sentimentalist account of morality has been invoked to establish that there has been domination of automatic emotional processes over deliberative reasoning process. Human behaviour is posited to be a struggle between affective and cognitive systems in the neural anatomy of brain, and it is argued that the decision-making draws on the emotions even when reason is clearly involved. Affective systems of mind embody not only emotions such as anger and jealousy, but also drive states such as hunger and sexual desire, and the motivational states such as anger and physical pain that motivate us to aggress and take steps to ease the pain. In the neural anatomy, the affective system has primary control over behaviour, but the deliberative system chooses which behaviour to implement. It does this by trading off its objectives against the cost of exerting cognitive effort or willpower so as to influence the affective system's choice. In such cases, moral judgments of human agents consist in intuitive response and emotional reactions (Prinz, 2007). This is the upshot of an emerging field in economics, going in the name of neuro-economics (Camerer, Loewenstein and Prelec, 2005). Extreme form of moral judgments consisting in intuitive response and emotional reactions is found in a psychopath. A modern psychopath – our best-known real-life example of amoral agent – is of course out of the ethical system. A psychopath has a brain and capacity to reason but lacks affective feeling of guilt, remorse and empathy. A psychopath lacks emotion, intuition and the ability to grasp moral judgements. A psychopath does understand but not care at all about what is wrong and right. A psychopath cannot distinguish violations of moral norms from conventional norms.

Concluding Remarks

Rationalist conception of morality insists that we always have most reason to act to bring about and attain something good, something righteous and something obligatory. We act with a sense of our duty. We bring the stamp of self-responsibility to bear on our action. It could never be rational to act in any way that we believe to be wrong. If a person has a reason for acting then there must be something good or right about what s/he is doing. A person is a rational agency and (s)he being capable of responding to practical reason generally follows certain norms (with a

scope of revision in the light of new facts and evidences) - a set of moral practices. A rational agent (in contrast to all variants of thinking and acting entity, for example, ape or chimpanzee) has a capacity to represent something in the world as good/bad, better/worse, right/wrong and obligatory/discretionary because (s)he has normative concepts to deploy. It is a belief in the objectivity of morality that an appeal is made to reason. Morality is grounded in rationality in the sense of being possessed of not only a special reason-giving force (a positive force) but also action-guiding (a normative force). It motivates a person to act because it imbues the reason-for-action with an overriding force. Practical reason as a faculty has a capacity to motivate agents to act, and thereby, it does determine the content of morality.

There are but exceptions to rationalist conception of morality so far as real-life observations go. A rational agency who is already capable of exercising practical reasoning and who has also been brought up with background of a proper education still fail to exhibit an ethical disposition, and consequently, a moral practice. Such moral failures and deficits do have a relation with a minor though often disregarded malfunction of human brain. In addition to education and upbringing of a human agent, the status of the health of brain of an otherwise rational person is quite significant. What has been sidelined from the mainstream debate has been simple: a person may suffer from impulsivity caused by irregularity in the information-perception refinement function of sense-organs. A person may also suffer from the phenomena of goal-neglect and apathy as a result of lesion and damage afflicting the brain – an integral constitutive part of mind. In both cases, an otherwise rational agent suffers from what is technically called the '*psychic akinesia*' and in ordinary language the 'auto-activation deficit'. Neuroscience claims that the auto-activation deficit is a specific brain-related disorder contributing to the agential apathy, goal neglect and impulsivity. In case of a rational agency suffering from '*auto-activation deficit*', there is a breakdown in the co-existentiality between practical reason and morality.

A psychopath reveals an acute form of apathy and impulsivity in action. Apathetic disposition and impulsive action built upon utter disregard for moral judgments and principles are but not infrequent on part of a large number of human persons in contemporaneous time. Such disorders put a heavy burden on the processing of internal informational resources and coupling of external information with the brain. The capacity to select, initiate, maintain and shift programs of actions is impaired and a quantitative reduction of voluntary, goal-directed behaviors is observed. Apathy and impulsivity leads to aberrations in moral practices on part of an otherwise rational agency. Contemporaneous social psychology researches propound the paradigm of 'automaticity' in human action in day-to-day affairs. What is arguable is simple; there is a need of integration of postulates of ethical theory with researches in philosophical psychology so as to account for moral deficit and failures on part of multiple variants of a psychopath - our best-known real-life example of an amoral human agent – in contemporaneous times.

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