Chapter 13: The Process of Action: Rational Activity as Cultivation

The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. M.K. Gandhi

Action is born of understanding. While Galilean understanding prescribes one kind of action (the instrumental), critical social research prescribes another. Some of its peculiar features are already clear. For example, critical social research calls for certain (limited) kinds of peacemaking. It makes these a part of the research process itself. But there are even more profound differences as basic as those between an acorn and a catapult. Both can put oak in the air, but in very distinctive ways. One grows it upward, the other flings it toward the sky.

The Galilean view holds that we act rationally only when we know how we believe the world works, what we want (our ends), and how (through what means) we plan to cause our desires to be realized. Our beliefs about these things can, of course, be wrong. Rational actors can make mistakes. But we need to have clear beliefs about these things in order to be in the rational ballpark of people who are trying to rationally (instrumentally) manipulate means to achieve their ends. We surely will not receive grants from the National Science Foundation and we will probably not be viewed as rational agents if we cannot give clear answers to questions like: "What are your objectives, that is, what are you trying to accomplish? Also, what means do you plan to employ to achieve these goals?"

Many of us often have difficulty answering questions like these. In part this is because we are not perhaps as smart as we would like. But often the problem is more basic. There are many times when these sorts of questions seem inappropriate.

Suppose I am trying to write a novel or invent a new scientific theory, if someone wants a detailed account of it ahead of time-- or he or she will only fund this activity if I say precisely what I am going to do-- then I might as well not bother to apply for the grant. After all, if I already knew what the novel or theory was going to be I would not need a grant to spend time dreaming it up.

Consider another example. Suppose I lean over in bed and kiss my spouse goodnight and she turns and asks: "Just what are you trying to accomplish?" I might very well find her question inappropriate. It is as though she has missed the whole point of the gesture. I was not trying to use the kiss as a means to accomplish some end. Instead, I was simply expressing something. Expressing what? Well, it may be rather hard to say. Perhaps it was an expression of affection for a loved one and co-worker at the end of a long day-- coupled with a sense of sympathy for her tired and aching body and a sense of how the stream of busy activity has reached the closure which bedtime brings. I might find it difficult to put this sort of thing into words. That’s precisely why I kissed her.

The kiss provided a complex gesture that expresses what it was I had to "say." To ask me to translate is to suggest that she has missed the point. It is as though someone has just heard Beethoven’s "Moonlight
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"Sonata" and then asked: "What is he trying to say? I mean what, exactly, is he trying to accomplish?"

Peacemakers are often accused of acting in naive or even irrational ways, and plainly they often do so--like most of us much of the time. Gandhi, for example, made gestures and undertook projects that were not well thought out and proved to be counter-productive. And he frequently revised that complex practice he called satyagraha because it needed revision. But even his detractors often found themselves most admiring of those of his actions which seemed least sensible to them-- the ones they would have never considered undertaking. Viewed instrumentally, his deeds seemed foolish. Yet they also seemed to have a peculiarly admirable foolishness-- one that somehow showed up the wisdom of the more worldly instrumentalist actors around him. Paradoxically the seemingly irrational peacemaker’s deeds can seem somehow to also be admirably sane or even saintly.

This apparent paradox loses its edge of oddness once we see that, in general, these "foolishly wise" actions exemplify expressive activities, projects, and practices that do not fit the instrumentalist model of rationality well.

This is not to say that they are irrational. In fact, if the assumptions of critical social research are right, then expressions, projects and practices are much fuller and in many ways more adequate examples of rational action than are instrumentalist actions (such as pushing down the lever on your toaster in order to brown your bread). They are distinctive because they involve emergence, internal reactions, and objective values. But this is precisely what one would expect of rational action once we admit that: (1) Intentions need to be made clearer and more explicit (by getting them to emerge). (2) Social reality is holistic in character. (3) Values are constitutive elements of the meanings that structure the social reality objectively out there.

If, in these respects, action is an organic process, then rational action will be like those activities of stewardship in which we try to facilitate organic processes like the growth of a garden or a forest-- things which we speak of "cultivating." We speak, also, of "cultivating" shared insights, job opportunities, friendships, the cohesiveness of a seminar group, law practices, and language proficiencies. Notice, then, that just as instrumental manipulation provides us with one model of rational action (on the Galilean view), cultivation provides us with another (which draws on the critical social research conceptions of knowledge and social reality). What, then, are expressions and projects and practices and how, as forms of cultivation, are they related to one another?

EXPRESSION

When a creative poet or musician sits down to compose, she does not, at the outset, know what the result will be. There is no pre-envisioned poem or melody she is trying to make. Many artists, of course, have little or no interest in expressing anything and their work starts, typically, with a technical puzzle or possibility that their media offers. But the artist aiming at expression starts, instead, with a kind of experience not unlike the sort William James ascribed to babes, namely, "a blooming, buzzing confusion." There is a confusion of which she is aware but not fully conscious in any clear way.
In the process of attending to this flow of inchoate experience-- and stabilizing and organizing it-- she comes to find out what she feels and believes. A recurrent word finds its place in a phrase, a vague theme takes shape as a melody line. Images are gathered and their interrelationships are developed in an increasingly coherent pattern. A word choice reveals a tacit judgement that is explored and linked to other thoughts. In the process, an artistic structure emerges which offers an interpretation of the confusion with which she started. It is an interpretation or "reading" of her feelings and thoughts which synthesizes them in an organic flow.

If you compare this process to a standard instrumental act like putting bread into a toaster in order to make breakfast, the non-instrumental character of such expression becomes clear. The cook has a clear and determinate conception of the end he would prefer to achieve: lightly browned whole wheat toast. The artist has, at best, only a vague sense of what the finished poem or musical composition will be--precisely because this act is a creative one, an act of expressing a confusion which she becomes fully conscious of only in the course of attending, stabilizing and organizing the confusion with which she starts. The cook has well defined types of materials (bread) and tools (a toaster) to work with, means whose natural properties he knows well. The artist is uncertain of how this or that word or phrase or dab of paint added here or there will affect the resulting piece.

This process of expression is one of self-discovery. In it, artists find out who they are, what they feel, how they think the world hangs together, what they want and how they are trying to get it. But they find these out in the process, as they engage in the activity of expression. They do not and cannot have precise understandings of these things at the start-- the way the instrumentalist model of action requires. The activity of expression does not presuppose such self-understanding, it provides it. And such understanding is emergent and holistic, moving from vague and tacit awareness to the increasingly clear and explicit integration of elements in an organic whole. These features are shared by other forms of cultivation as well, projects and practices. A further feature common to these modes of cultivation is that they are regulated by objective values.

The sense in which the values that regulate expression are objective is rather minimal, but significant. There is, of course, a clear sense in which the values expressed in art seem so subjective as to be at a polar extreme opposite to the objective claims made by science. In physics we must confront public facts that either match our interpretations of reality or do not. In art it seems as though we are free to use interpretations to express whatever we feel like expressing. And this is true. But we cannot choose interpretations that express what we do NOT feel like expressing. What we cannot do in art-- at least not if it is to express well-- is to choose interpretations that express what we do not feel. Our feeling are unfixed, unstable, inchoate and open to alternative readings. But they are there, there to be expressed. The process of art is one of self-discovery, not self-invention ex nihilo. In that sense, feelings are like the facts a scientist observes in making experiments. They are not arbitrarily invented, they are found.

These feelings we find in confusion and try to express are not publicly observable fact. Others can learn what they are only insofar as we are successful in expressing them. But if we lapse into cliche' or repress associations or force transitions or compose works mechanically, others can tell. What they can tell is that
we have failed to adequately express our feelings-- whatever they were. We have failed to adequately attend to them, stabilize them, and organize them. In the process, we have deceived ourselves, and it shows. It is not, of course, as though there is some simple and perfectly reliable test that is foolproof. But people who are not fools can get reasonably reliable results by employing "lie detectors" of a wide variety of kinds-- not just machines that measure galvanic skin response but perceptual and linguistic skills that enable us to spot the evasive glance or the pat phrase that indicates someone is avoiding coming to terms with a part of reality. The values that regulate expression are thus objective in a minimal but twofold sense: what is to be expressed is given or discovered and not merely invented, and that it has or has not been expressed is something that can be determined by others in reliable ways.

Like other forms of false consciousness or self-deception, the kind that occurs in failed expression takes place in a curious no-man’s-land, at the border between vague awareness and focused attention. We are not fully conscious of the feelings we have not adequately expressed-- to become fully conscious of them we would have had to express them successfully. Yet we are not wholly unaware of them-- if we were, they would not have formed part of the blooming buzzing confusion there to be expressed. So there is a choice made when we deceive ourselves about our feelings-- by choosing to gloss over their detail with cliche’ or obsessively focus on some at the expense of others. But the choice is not a rational deliberate one; it is a spontaneous decision to attend further or flee, to come to terms with who we are or hide ourselves from ourselves.

The spontaneous decision to lie to ourselves involves a corrupting of our consciousness. Like cold deliberate lies, these self-deceptions at the edge of our attention tend to require extra lies to be maintained. This is true not only in art works made by professionals but true as well of the countless gestures made each day in which we seek to express ourselves. We greet someone or gesture as we converse in a meeting, pacing our words to achieve apt expression of the feelings and thoughts we are trying to share. And we find that the false smile requires false handshakes and false words to be sustained. With his gift for (perhaps overly) strong and pointed statements of insights, R.G. Collingwood pointed out the significance of this in a way that indicates its relevance to our understanding of self-deception or false consciousness in social affairs at large:

> Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art. It is important to each one of us that in making them, however much he deceives others, he should not deceive himself. If he deceives himself in this matter he has sown himself a seed which, unless he roots it up again, may grow into any kind of wickedness, any kind of mental disease, any kind of stupidity and folly and insanity. Bad art, the corrupt consciousness, is the true radix malorum.²

Self-deception about our feelings leads to a distortion of our self-understanding and must be sustained through patterns of avoidance and suppression whose dishonesty breeds irresponsibility-- and all the manifold forms of sins of thought and action that irresponsibility breeds and nourishes. If the spontaneous choice to decline the expression of feelings is not the root of all evil, still it is certainly the root of much. It is the ground level form of lack of integrity and fidelity to truth, the germs form of failure to understand...
and act upon our own values in responsible ways.

Expression of the unstable and inchoate elements of experience begins a process that can bear fruit in other kinds of activities—projects and practices—which are also non-instrumental in character. The non-instrumental features of expressions are worth reaffirming with one further example, before going on to consider these others.

Anwar Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem was widely and rightly viewed as an expressive act. But the notion of expression many people had in mind was different from the one developed here. He was reported as "sending signals" and "making a bold statement," as though his trip was a series of bits of information that could have been encoded in a computer disk and mailed to the Israelis. What was the point of actually going instead of simply sending such disk or a letter? One view would be that it simply served to give force to the statement, to show he really meant it.

Alternatively, we might view his act as expressive in the sense characterized above. Viewed thus, Sadat was someone who did not know very clearly how he expected things to work, who he was, what he wanted to achieve or how he was going to accomplish it. Surely he had some notions about these things. But if we view his trip as an expressive activity, we see it as one in which he was busy finding out answers to these things in the process of making the gesture. In the activity of greeting, speaking, responding, choosing appointments, composing his face and waving his pipe he was synthesizing his blooming and buzzing notions and feelings—he was engaged in a kind of self-discovery which could have failed. His diplomatic gesture could have failed not only in the sense that it could have led to no breakthroughs in the peace process. It could have failed by lapsing into cliche’, mechanical gesture, and suppressed feelings—the way attempts to make works of art may fail.

Many of the activities popularly associated with peace work (especially forms of "witnessing" such as holding vigils, demonstrations and rallies) can succeed or fail in the same ways—as non-instrumental expressive processes that aim to structure and communicate self-understanding that synthesizes experience of a complex, fluid situation.

PROJECTS

Often, as we become conscious of our feelings and thoughts in expressions, we are led to try to make the larger world of fact more adequately reflect our values. So we undertake projects aimed at altering the shape of our environment. Sadat’s visit to the Knesset led to the project of the Camp David peace talks. Often expressive letters to congressional representatives or expressive conversations with friends provide a self-understanding and consciousness of concerns and beliefs that lead to projects such as a petition campaign, the starting of a school, or the writing of a book.

Projects of this sort involve cultivation at another level of explicitness and clarity. We are as yet still unsure of precisely what we are doing and why, but we do have some tentative definitions and working hypotheses. What distinguishes such projects from tidy instrumental acts are the ways in which we "work
Chapter 13: with" such notions and the ways in which the projects take on a life of their own. We work with our general ideas about what we are doing and why. We also try to get such notions to further emerge in less vague and tacit ways and critique them for consistency, completeness, and accuracy. Such emergence is an organic process. As we will see, it typically involves the pursuit of multiple ends in ways that (in contrast to instrumental acts) involve internal relation between means and ends-- and values that are objective in more than the minimal way characteristic of expressions.

Suppose, then, that you are beginning some project such as a petition drive or a set of negotiations and you are rather vague about just what you aim to achieve and how you intend to accomplish it. How might you go about trying to get your ideas to emerge and get your project to take shape?

Studies of group dynamics and problem solving provide one important source of insight. They have not yet yielded any mathematical laws of group dynamics which can be applied by social engineers. But these sorts of studies, along with critical reflections on consciousness raising techniques like those developed by feminists in the late 1960's, have resulted in the cultivation of clusters of skills that can often be very effective in making our values and beliefs clearer and more explicit and enable us to critique them for consistency, completeness and accuracy. Role playing, playing devil’s advocate, and brainstorming are not just little gimmicks people can use; they-- as well as a variety of other techniques--have been cultivated as subtle and effective arts.

Aesthetic theories provide another important resource. One way to get our values and beliefs to emerge is to critically reflect on our expressive activities-- viewing them as works of art to be analyzed in order to make values and underlying beliefs more explicit. (Why did I begin the letter with those words? Why did I wear those clothes to the meeting?) The aesthetic categories used in studying novels and dramas are especially useful because a project is, of course, not reading another person’s story; he is "writing" or acting out his own. But he can project a tentative script with key themes, characters, definitions of the setting and plot, and if he is pursuing the project intelligently, he will.

For example, suppose I am trying to negotiate a peace settlement between the government of El Salvador and the guerillas of the FMLN. Perhaps I have a few informal initial meetings with representative from each group and some third parties. I may find that my physical gestures and eye movements turn out, upon reflection, to suggest certain themes that also emerge in the verbal metaphors I employ. Perhaps they are themes of circular tables for negotiation, circles of overlapping communities, and reciprocal relations between religious and economic and political interests which are non-aligned rather than standing in bipolar oppositions.

Alternately, I might find myself led to focus on themes of integration and metaphors of spiral structures--perhaps seeing the key issues as turning on problems in integrating the peace process in El Salvador into the larger patterns of development in Central America and the Americas at large. I may loosely typecast myself in a role like that of Athena who, in Aeschylus’ Oresteia, brought an end to blood feuding by establishing an independent jury who could decide the case in an impartial way. Or I may picture myself in a role like Carter in the Camp David talks, going back and forth between parties to mediate by developing a single text that both could consent to.
I may conceive of the setting of my work as being located in the larger arena of international diplomacy or I may view it as occurring in a local frontier in the no-man’s-land between two warring factions. With regard to the plot structure of the project, I may, with Kissinger’s shuttle trips in the Middle East in mind, project a series of episodic dialogues that will escalate in frequency and intensity until they reach a climatic resolution. Or I may project a plot more like the one that led to the denouement of the Vietnam story.

Or it may be that after projecting themes and characters and settings and plots like these, I may reflect on them in a self-critical way and come to the conclusion that the scenario I envision presupposes an authorial point of view which it is inappropriate for me to adopt. Perhaps racist assumptions or cultural chauvinism have led me to picture myself as a kind of Shakespeare writing in the lines for others when in reality my own role will have to be much more modest and peripheral—more like that of a secretary merely taking notes at a meeting, making sure the coffee pot is full, and running errands when asked.

We cannot impose narrative structures on reality in arbitrary ways. But we can project them as tentative ideas, as working scripts which we revise as we go along. Furthermore, we not only can project such scripts, we do, and we do so continually. Indeed, we have to do so. Without some general narrative that relates our immediate actions to the past and future we cannot make our own moment to moment deeds intelligible to ourselves. The question is not whether or not to act in terms of such scripts. The question is simply whether we are going to do so blindly or in a self-critical and reflective way that aims at getting our projects to emerge in clearer and more orderly patterns.

If we adopt the latter alternative, cultivating their emergence, we find that distinctive kinds of structures emerge, ones in which means and ends are internally related to one another in organic ways— in ways that traditional action theory and traditional ethics fail to illuminate. For those theories suppose that rational action is, at a minimum, instrumentally rational.

In Kantian or utilitarian ethics, actions must be described before they can be evaluated and the descriptions of individual rational actions are thought to characterize them in terms of circumstances in which some means adopted provides an efficient cause of the end desired. Means and ends are externally related. There is nothing in the definition of an end (such as lightly browned toast) that tells you what means (a toaster or a fireplace?) Is required to achieve it.

In contrast, when we are cultivating a business partnership or a marriage or are engaged in some other project, it is typical to find internal relations between means and ends. Often these internal relations are conceptual rather than casual in nature. For example, suppose I want to establish a relation of trust or love with a partner or spouse, or achieve a legitimate peace accord between warring parties. If so, then I must pursue these in trustworthy or loving or legitimate ways.

This is not so much a matter of empirical fact as a conceptual truth. Part of what it means for a relationship to be loving is that it was developed and sustained in loving ways. Part of the definition of a
legitimate peace accord includes the requirement that it be arrived at in a legitimate way. The same goes for business contracts. If my partner wants me to sign a voluntary and legally binding agreement, holding a gun to my head simply will not do the job. The illegitimate coercion would make the contract invalid in a court of law-- and if he wanted a voluntary agreement, then coercion could not, by definition, be employed to get it.

In general, means and ends are internally related in a conceptual way when the ends we seek are defined in terms of the process by which they are brought about. This is a point that Gandhi was much struck by. He thought of his brand of non-violence as a kind of "truth force" that could be a seed that would provide the means for growing a free society governed by free consent. And he saw that free consent could not--by definition-- be coerced. It is this basic insight into the relations of means and ends that motivated much of his theory and practice.

Projects also involve internal relations between means and ends that are of a different sort, ones that are not conceptual. These arise because our projects typically involve the pursuit of multiple ends.

Suppose you have begun some political project like a petition campaign. Usually there will be a variety of values you are seeking to realize. Perhaps you want to educate voters, influence politicians, motivate involvement, build an organization, promote communal solidarity, and cultivate citizens’ democratic political skills. As the petition campaign gets rolling, elements of the project may begin to support each other. What is a means to one end may turn out itself to be another end of intrinsic value on its own-- one which is promoted by the use of other means or the achievement of other ends.

For example, to secure a petition signature you find with some individuals that it is necessary to talk at length and educate them on the issue. In doing so, you may find that such talk serves as an important channel for recruiting active membership for the organization sponsoring the drive. To take another slant on these kinds of connections, notice that if you build an educational component into your business meetings this may make it possible for members to be more intelligently and actively involved in running the organization itself. This in turn will make it possible, perhaps, to operate in a less hierarchical manner and to arrive at decisions through a process of genuine consensus.

The adoption of consensus procedures in governance (as distinct from mere majority rule) may lead people to demand fuller understanding (and education) on an issue before they assent to a plan and it may also provide an opportunity for more diverse points of view and sources of information to enter into the decision process. The result may be not only better decisions but also greater individual commitment and organizational solidarity. Here, education, governance by consensus, and a strong sense of community may each be valued as intrinsic goods but also as means-- each being a means to the other.

Of course things do not always work out so neatly. In fact, sometimes educative sessions make people realize how little consensus they share-- and how unwilling they are to identify themselves with each other. But organic relationships of the sort described here are not only common, they are usually the moving force that gets a project to "take off" and take on a life of its own. Anyone trying to start a school or begin a business must seek to find and foster just these sorts of interconnections. But there are sorts of
things that give projects integrity. In planning projects or envisioning them, this is the sort of thing that leads us to say that the project "makes sense" as a whole: its parts are both goods in themselves and reciprocal means as well-- each being means to the other.

The emergent and organic features of projects give a distinctive kind of objectivity to the values that regulate them. The values pursued in projects can, of course, be objective in the minimal sense that values found in expressions are: they are discovered rather than merely invented and their discovery can be successful or fail in ways that disinterested observers can check. But there is a kind of objectivity involved in projects.

Suppose you are planning a petition campaign like the one just discussed. You value both education and governance by consensus. Very well, but what precisely are they? You will surely have at least some rough conception of these when you start. But it is also very likely that you will find your understanding of them developing as you work on the project. At first, perhaps your idea of education is that it is the flow of information from the knowledgeable to the ignorant. And you may conceive of consensus as a kind of voting system that simply requires a majority vote not of 50% plus one or 2/3 or 3/4 but of 100%. As you work on the project, however, you may find two sorts of things happening.

On the one hand, you may find your understanding of each of these central values changing. Sometimes the change will just consist of the rejection of a former view in favor of an entirely new one. More often the change will occur as a development in which critical reflection on your actual use of the idea in practice leads you to make aspects of it more explicit-- and perhaps view things formerly overlooked as the most essential features of the values. For example, you may find that the most important thing in successfully persuading potential petition signers is not giving them information but getting them to think through their own convictions for themselves through dialogue with others. In the process, you may find that your conception of the thing you valued, an "educated citizen," shifts. It may shift from the notion of a "citizen supplied with the facts" to a "citizen who has acquired the skills and concerns relevant for thinking through his or her own convictions."

Probably you would want to say you had both notions at the start and still hold to both. But a shift in emphasis has occurred. You have come to view the second, formerly tacit notion as more essential. Likewise, you might find that in working on a consensus basis you are led, increasingly, to view consensus as something other than a voting rule that requires unanimity. You arrive at the view that it is a process that requires shared understanding and agreement on the details and merits of a proposal. Again, this discovery may involve continuities in your earlier and later conceptions of the value of consensus. Shared understanding was, perhaps, a tacit part of your earlier idea and you may still think that consensus requires that no one say no to the proposal. But, that said, it may remain the case that a basic shift has occurred, a shift in what you consider to be the most essential to the value.

The other kind of thing you are likely to find is that as the means and ends you pursue become more internally related, your understanding of each begins to inform the other. You begin to think of education as a shared dialogue that cultivates understanding and moves toward consensus. Conversely, you begin to
understand governance by consensus as inherently educative activity-- rather than seeing it as a rule regulating a political bargaining process.

Such developments in your understanding of your values take the form of discovery. We find these things out; we do not make them up out of thin air. In projects, this sort of discovery is typically a social rather than private process. Most of the values we seek to promote concern joint activities, and the values are features of these activities-- they are not just private feelings or personal preferences. This gives values a kind of objectivity that involves an independence from our individual wills. The notions of education and consensus with which you start are ones you learned from others and they are constitutive meanings-- values define the practices shared with others. To discover what is most essential about them is to discover something about these shared notions and shared practices, not just something that is true "for me" or "for you" as an individual. To discover that internal relations between practices of education and consensus develop is to discover something about the ideals that regulate the community of which you are a member. It is not just a discovery about your own "utility preference curves."

In making important decisions about work, marriage, business ventures, and community plans, people often find themselves guided by shared values that are emergent. They may speak of "having a leading," "finding a calling," acting according to their "lights," or listening to "a still, small voice." And they speak of following these as though they were engaged in a journey whose destination they do not know but which they can discover as it emerges from beyond the horizon.

If you look for discussions of these emergence-centered notions in twentieth century discussions of ethics you will look largely in vain. To a utilitarian or Kantian who adopts a Galilean notion of knowledge and an instrumentalist account of action, such notions are essentially unintelligible. They come off (at best) as vaguely superstitious notions concerned with experiences beyond the pale of rational deliberation and clear-headed overt action-- as though people with leadings, voices, callings and lights lived in a pre-scientific world of dryads, naiads, and extra-sensory powers. But once we begin to think of activity in terms of cultivation that is guided by participatory understanding, these notions of emergent values seem neither superstitious nor irrational. They are central to the experience of rationally pursuing open-ended projects.

Once a project is completed, or even well underway, it is often possible to give a clear and explicit account of its rationale in reasonably near instrumental terms. In retrospect, we can develop "rational reconstructions" of what we were trying to do. But this permits us to give a rational account of the product of the activity, not its process. It tells us what we figured out in the course of pursuing our project, but not how we figured it out. To understand the process itself as a rational one-- and to cultivate such projects in a rational way-- we need to employ non-instrumental categories.

To sum up for the moment, we see in the notion of a project that we have a conception of a rational human activity that involves the cultivation of: (1) emergent structures of experience, (2) means and ends which are internally related in conceptually ways and in reciprocal organic relations, and (3) values which are objective not only because they are discovered (like the feelings we express) but also because they are discovered to be constitutive features of a shared social reality regulated by values that are independent of...
our individual wills.

Projects of these sorts often result in the development of institutionalized activities which share the same features of emergence, holism and objective values but which introduce further distinctive characteristics as well. These provide a third type of non-instrumental activity, a third kind of cultivation.

PRACTICES

Some human activities require practice and repetition if we are to perform them well or even if we are to learn to perform them at all. This is a central feature of what is meant here by "practices." Examples would include law, medicine, chess, tragic drama, diplomacy, teaching, and scientific research. A second feature of this is that they, like projects, involve the pursuit of multiple ends which are internally related to the means to them. A third characteristic is that they have practitioners who have already achieved some notable degree of excellence. In this sense, they have a tradition, one which is typically borne by participants in institutions of a formal sort (such as the ABA, the AMA, and the local chess clubs). Such traditions usually require that someone learning the practice undergo an apprenticeship. But as apprentices become masters, they learn that the tradition not only can be passed on, it can be extended and deepened. It can be cultivated in new directions and with greater profundity.

Practices grow out of expressions and projects. In some cases, like that of the origins of Greek drama, their genesis is largely unknown. In other cases, a fairly detailed-- though almost inevitably complex-- history can be given.

For example, there are many things that would need to be included in a complete account of the origins of Gandhi’s practice of satyagraha, but two key parts of the story would concern an expressive gesture he made and a political project he undertook. The expressive act occurred when he was riding a train in South Africa and was ordered to leave the first class compartment which was reserved for whites. He refused to leave but passively let himself be thrown off the train without a fight. The particular way he made this gesture (and the particular ways in which it echoed and elaborated earlier experiences and coalesced his attitudes toward the British) made the act a kind of seed, a seed of insight and commitment. It, among other things, led him to undertake a political project-- organizing the South African Indian community for a petition campaign. And in the course of pursuing this project and finding it take on a life of its own, Gandhi began to develop a number of the key doctrines and techniques that were later gathered in that subtle and complex practice referred to as satyagraha or "truth force."

Practices emerge out of expressions and projects and they are sustained by continued expressions and projects that make up a part of their fabric. So they share the same non-instrumental features that expressive activities and projects have. But practices also introduce other significant types of holism, emergence and objectivity in values.

One of these concerns holistic and organic (or internal) relations. In practices, there are reasonably definite kinds of episodes which are the units of repetition in which the practice is rehearsed (or practiced
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in the narrow sense) and performed. The central unit of activity in a practice is not the means employed to achieve an end but the rehearsal in which we practice for a performance.

Unlike instrumental means and ends, rehearsal and performances are internally related in a way as yet untouched upon. For often rehearsals are themselves performances, and performances are themselves, in turn, rehearsals for subsequent performances. People practice law by practicing at law, and when they are practicing at law they are -- usually-- practicing law. In the narrative process by which we would recount the story of someone involved in a practice there are, then, internal relations of two distinct types. Not only are there organic relations between the means and ends employed in each episode, there are also organic relations between the episodes that make up the narrative.

Two distinctive types of emergence also come to prominence with practices. One is glacial and sometimes hardly noticed, It is the kind of evolution by incremental changes that occurs in the development of traditions-- but which cannot occur in projects because they are of such short duration. The other is of more importance. Typically a tradition of practice gets reflected on in relatively systematic ways. Participant begin to develop a body of theory to explain the functions of the practice, how it could best be taught, and how it can best be cultivated. I am not referring to academic theories here, but to the critical participatory theories that practitioners themselves are led to develop.

These theories-- and the debates that they elicit-- do two things. First they accelerate the process of the critical cultivation of the activity by making it an explicit aim that is undertaken in a reflective way. As a result, they may lead to the more rapid emergence of less tacit and more consistent, complete, and accurate accounts of the practice. In doing this, the theorists typically are led to draw on earlier expressions, projects and episodes of performance that form the basis for their tradition. Cezanne’s work is of importance to later painters not simply because it is good work but because it is exemplary in crucial ways, ways that reveal things about what the painting as a practice is about. Similarly, the actions of early Quakers provide a testimony that is a continuing source of revelation for contemporary members of their Religious Society of Friends and Gandhi’s work provided exemplars for the civil disobedience of Martin Luther King.

Second, such theories usually bring to light tensions in the tradition. They highlight inconsistencies and alternative visions of the direction in which the practice should develop. They often even serve to create tensions-- by being inadequate and yet attractive theories of the practice. In doing so they may generate dialogue and a creative interplay between theory and practice. Much of the history of early twentieth century painting could be narrated as a series of attempts to remedy the gap between inaccurate theory and actual practice by altering the practice. Likewise, much of the development of satyagraha can be understood as the attempt to wax eloquent in high sounding moralisms that laid Gandhi open to charges of hypocrisy-- which he remedied by revising his practice.

The dialogue about theories which members of a tradition use to cultivate their practice is, in many ways, the paradigm of rational activity. But it is not a speculative activity; it is an eminently practical one. And yet it is not a string of instrumental acts.
To elaborate the point, consider the activity of reasoning together in dialogue. If we try to think of a dialogue as a sequence of interactions in which people use words to manipulate one another in order to cause their desired ends to occur, then . . . well, we simply are not talking about dialogue any longer. For it is the very essence of dialogue that we not know what we are trying to achieve and how we intend to accomplish it. The point of dialogue is to raise questions and seek answers, not act on answers which we already know. Once we stop sharing a quest, the discussion is over and all that remains is propaganda or advertising-- both of which are, of course, clear examples of instrumental acts.

Now notice that rational dialogue is itself in many ways a definitive example of both rational activity and of a practice which can be cultivated. Then note that the non-instrumental features of dialogue are shared by other practices which are central to rational thought and action such as scientific research, legal practice, and business negotiation. Finally, draw this conclusion: cultivation provides a conception of rational thought and action which is superior to the Galilean and instrumentalist models.

This is not to say that the latter are bankrupt, but only to insist that they are fairly limited accounts that need to be placed in the larger perspective provided by a theory of cultivation that takes into account the intelligent but non-manipulative activities that are central to inquiry and action.

Practices, then, involve distinctive forms of emergence and internal relations. They also involve values which are objective in ways that go beyond those characteristic of expressions and projects. Architects and natural scientists can evaluate their peers’ work in terms of the critical theory, guiding visions, and past exemplars of excellent achievement which provide standards for assessment that are independent of the feelings of individuals or the specific emergent values regulating a particular project in their tradition.

Objective values also come, in practices, to take the form of prescriptive rules and virtues which require participants in a tradition to undergo self-enlargement and self-transformation.

Most traditions of practice come to be defined by rules that characterize the standard episodes of their performance, rules that enable us to tell what counts as an argument in a court of law or what counts as a move in chess. These rules are prescriptive in the sense that they tell us how one ought to act if she is going to obtain legal standing as an attorney for the defense or how he can and cannot move a pawn if he is going to continue playing chess. But they are also descriptive in the sense that they characterize what the practice does, in fact, involve. These rules have a conventional character in the sense that they can be revised. But they are not arbitrary in that they are not expressions of any individual will. They are objective features of social reality that provide prescriptions that are constitutive of the practice.

Another sort of prescriptive style-- with a similar sort of objectivity-- enters in whenever practices are associated with institutions. And typically they are. For institutions that monitor performance, certify practitioners and promulgate sound training are, for many complex practices like medicine and law, indispensable. Without such institutions the practices cannot flourish. Such institutions must employ rules to define membership, govern themselves, award prizes and honors, and so on. The value of having such rule, and the reasons for obeying them, are something that Kantian and rule utilitarian arguments have
made commonplace. If people violate the rules that these institutions rest upon, then the institutions break down. If borrowers habitually lie to banks, then lending becomes impossible—unless some remedy to prevent such lies is found.

Communities that seek to promote a practice and secure its flourishing need to train the characters of their initiates. They need to get them to internalized the values that structure the practice and make its cooperative pursuit possible. This means that they must teach virtues. And typically, apprentices can learn to excel at the practice only by internalizing these values and acquiring these virtues. Such education of character usually requires a process of self-enlargement and self-transformation.

The game of chess is defined, in part, by certain rules that prohibit cheating. The child who cheats has, in an important sense, stopped playing chess. The same is true of natural science. The researcher who falsifies data is no longer pursuing science per se. In most games and practices honesty is a virtue that participants must acquire if they are to perform well and if the practice is to survive. (Games like "I doubt It" in which players are supposed to lie provide exceptions, of course.)

The child or scientist may be tempted to cheat in order to win candy, tenure or other sorts of external rewards. But both must acquire the strength of character that enables them to resist such temptation. They do so by growing. They internalize the values of playing fair and remaining honest because these are values that are internal to the practice and define it.

Honest assessments of performance are likewise required for the mastery of a practice. The would-be artist must learn to give and take in "crits" in an honest way. He cannot simply prefer works because they were made by friends or because he fears the counter-attacks that will be made on his own work. To be unjust or cowardly in these ways is to refuse to cultivate the kind of honest and accurate judgement that is the life blood of successful evaluation and performance. So courage and justice provide virtues that (at least usually) must be internalized by the participants in a tradition.

There are a variety of other virtues that are more specific to particular traditions. The student of law who has not internalized the values of due process or respect for evidence has, in an important sense, not really become a lawyer. He or she has not yet full internalized the role of lawyer which the practice defines. Kindergarten teachers must acquire the virtue of being disposed to give warm and loving support. College teachers must acquire the virtue of being respectful and challenging. Surgeons must acquire the virtue of cleanliness.

To speak of acquiring these virtues is to say something not just about the specific actions these people perform but the kind of characters they acquire—characters defined by the sorts of motives that dominate their decisions. The beginner may enter law or research for the glory or go into medicine for the money. If so, he is motivate by external rewards that could be gotten in other ways and that can, at times, be gotten by violating the rules of the practice. There are cases of scientists winning significant status with falsified data. But typically, to perform the practice well you must learn to "be at home" in the practice, "live" in it, "be" a lawyer or researcher. You must enlarge the number of things you value by internalizing...
the values that regulate the practice. You must transform yourself.

However, the worth of internalizing such roles and virtues and the value of following prescriptive rules that are constitutive of practices or institutions can be called into question. This kind of question has, in fact, been the sorest sticking point in ethics since the Enlightenment: If I stand to gain by violating the rule (by cheating at chess, say, or lying in a court of law, or fudging my data in a scientific paper), then why should I care if my violation will make my act not count as a legitimate performance of the practice—or undermine the institutions that help the practice flourish? If I can enrich myself without enlarging myself, why acquire virtues? If I can go uncaught, why not get away with murder? What’s in it for me?

People who would reason in this way are egoists. Because Kant and the utilitarians thought that, as a matter of natural fact, people are, by nature, egoists, they found it difficult to deal with this question. There is, however, a rather striking argument that Ralph Barton Perry, an early twentieth century American philosopher, offered to refute egoism. It may at first seem glib but turns out, upon reflection, to catch hold of some important truths—ones that reveal something important about practices.

The egoist holds that what is good is precisely what is good for his own self. Period. Perry’s refutation was simple and direct: There is no self, ergo egoism is false.

The conclusion does not seem to flow. If I have no self, then plainly I cannot define the good as that which is good for myself—unless I simply mean to say that there is no good. But what could it mean to say that there is no self? Or, even more puzzlingly, to say that I lack a self? Who is this me that is doing the lacking? Stated this way, the question makes such a refutation of egoism sound silly, or at least paradoxical. But suppose we counter with another question: Very well then, who (or what) are you? At that point the shoe on the other foot begins to pinch. Clearly the egoist needs to answer the question: What is a self?

There are two sorts of answers that can be given to this question, each of which must be taken into account. For there is, in some peculiar way, both a self that I am and an I that is this self. The one is an object of thought. It is the self that think I am—or discover I am—when I ask: What (or who) am I? The other is not an object of thought but the subject, the thinker who, in the first person singular, asks himself: Who am I?

Another way to get at this distinction is to note that I may try to find out things about my self by taking a look at my self. I may look in a mirror at my body or I may look at my speech patterns and gestures as they appear on tape or as they are reflected in responses other people make. Or I may look at actions or my habits or my personality traits or my peak experiences or my roles in various institutions. In all these cases, there is the self that I discover when I do the looking—the one that is the object of my visual gaze or my reflective self-examination. But in each case there is also the I that is doing the looking.

This subject-self, the I that views myself as an object, is difficult to define—and for a very good reason, that Martin Buber came squarely to grips with in his study of I and Thou. As soon as we try to define the
I, we are viewing it as an object of thought-- as an "it." So the very thing we wanted to describe disappears-- by becoming a "thing." Buber concluded that I cannot acquire a spectator’s knowledge of the "I." I can only cultivate my self-awareness of the I that I am by participating in the activity of thinking and acting with others and the larger world that encompasses me. In doing so, I inevitably lapse into thinking about myself and others-- and viewing me and them as objects. Nonetheless, when this happens I can shift gears and reestablish an active orientation as I think and dialogue with others like you.

The notions of "I" and "you" are not, then, descriptive concepts that can be accounted for by Galilean social science. They are words that serve to acknowledge and avow a participatory understanding of the nature of dialogue and the process of cultivation. These words also provide an indispensable core of our understanding of what it is to be a person worthy of respect rather than a mere thing available for manipulation. And this notion of personhood is at the heart of much of our talk about the kinds of values many people take to be the best candidates we could offer for that special status of genuinely trans-historical objective values. The notions of universal human rights and cross cultural moral truths are often tied to just this notion of persons as I’s and you’s. And yet the notion seems indefinable-- by definition. . . so to speak. Is there any way in which this puzzling notion could provide the basis for discovering values (such as basic human rights) which are trans-historical and objective in the strongest sense of the term?

His is a question to which we will return later. The answer is yes, but the reasons can best be understood once we have gotten clearer about the nature of peace as an activity and, in particular, its limitations.

And this is something we are ready to do. We now have conceptions of reason, social knowledge, and action which permit us to fundamentally rethink the nature of peace-- because they offer us models of rational human life which are not conflict centered.

Maieutic reasoning provides us with an account of how people can reason together without viewing their differences of opinions as oppositions. They may view them as parts of an emergent consensus in which an understanding organic relation between insights and facts is cultivated. Critical participatory reasoning provides us with an account of social knowledge that pictures researchers and the subjects they study as engaged in a cooperative inquiry (except in cases of deception)-- a dialogue aiming at an understanding that often requires significant (though limited) forms of peacemaking. Cultivation provides us with a model of rational action in which people are not instrumental agents seeking to manipulate each other but participants in the activities of shared expressions, projects and practices. Natural scientists who engage in joint research projects employ-- and exemplify-- all three of these basic networks of categories. In choosing to reason maieutically to cultivate a tradition they themselves reflect on critically as participants, they choose to do so without appeal to guns. They resolve their differences by treating them as parts of problems to be solved rather than conflicts to be fought over.

It should also be clear that the categories of reasoning, social knowledge, and rational action developed so far are intimately connected. Each adopts common views of the nature of meaning, truth, feeling, reason, values, the self, and community. Is there an activity of peacemaking in the realm of social concerns that adopts this same network of categories and would enable us to deal with our differences in the ways in which natural scientists do rather than in the manner of propagandists, legal prosecutors, authoritarian
parents, and diplomats whose ultimate appeal is not to reason but to conventional weapons and "peace-keeper" missiles?