Notes

1 My use here of ‘non-rationalism’ refers to all that is not rationalism. This would normally include the irrational, the extra-rational, and all that is putatively anti-rational. Emotions would be a case in point. The fact that there are instances where an emotion may be radically rational, like fear in the face of danger, or the passion for dispassion itself, suggests that it might be possible to use non-rationalism to denote what is ‘other than rational’ as well. It might be possible to find in the non-rational, in other words, more than the dichotomous negation of the rational. There is the possibility of complementarity, that is, and of a way of resolving the opposition between the rational and the non-rational. If this is the case, then using both rationalist and non-rationalist research strategies to know world affairs with may well be warranted, not only in principle but in practice too.

2 It is not ‘politics’, therefore, if I hypnotize someone, or stick a gun to their head, and get them to quack like a duck. I may get a laugh out of doing so, or I may give a laugh to others, but this is not of substantial benefit, to me or anybody else. Despite the fact that I have used power over someone, and despite the fact that I have got my own way, such an act is not political, though there are occasions when even this rather silly case could be political after all. If I demean the victim in the eyes of those who would otherwise have given him or her substantive support in some way, as in an election, for example, or if I make my living as an entertainer, and a silly act like this has substantive politico-economic consequences, then it does become political. The difference between what is trivial and non-trivial, in other words, can be far from self-evident. There are general principles to this effect, but establishing what they are is a political process in itself.

Everyone can’t get their own way on issues of substance all the time, which is why all peoples develop systematic ways of dealing with the getting and using of personal and communal power to a non-trivial purpose. These ways are what we usually understand ‘governance’ to be. If they are especially systematic, requiring particular people to perform specific tasks over protracted periods of time, they precipitate out in more clearly defined forms that we consequently call ‘government’.

The profoundly political nature of the world’s economies, societies and cultures is one reason for the use here of the concept ‘world affairs’, by the way. Such a concept allows all these analytic issue-areas to be included in our disciplinary purview. It prevents politics being confined to diplomatic and military concerns only. It lets us construe economic, social and cultural issues as legitimate political concerns. It lets us resist the attempt by radical liberals, for example, to create a concept of economics separate from politics, and then to prioritize the economy (or the ‘market’), rather than the polity (or the ‘state’), as the main point of world affairs.

3 It is well to remember that the US remains the great New World experiment in the European doctrine of rationalism. Nowhere is this more clearly the
case than in the study of world affairs. When faced with such diplomatic-strategic imperatives as winning the Cold War, for example, or maintaining post-Cold War US hegemony, US state-makers have deliberately chosen to further this experiment. They have continued, that is, to fund academic attempts to provide rationalistic answers to all their most pressing foreign policy questions. They have brokered a long-standing ‘behavioralist revolution’ in the process, and though the worst excesses of the early days of the attempt to objectify world affairs are long behind us, the first generation of revolutionaries are still in positions of institutional power and influence. They continue to use these positions to further the behavioralist cause.

4 This was a dream that later critics were to call an illusion. In good modernist fashion (since many of these critics were no more than late modernists themselves) they argued that we either have certainty and Truth, or we have relativity and truths. They were not about to concede a concept of Truth as a Grail, towards which we reach but which we can never hope to grasp. They saw knowing as more like gardening than a quest. They saw themselves as analytic horticulturalists in epistemological homespun rather than scientific knights in shining hypothetico-deductive armour.

5 Scientizing anthropologists attempt the ‘accumulation of systematic and reliable knowledge about an aspect of the universe, carried out by empirical observation and interpreted in terms of the interrelating of concepts referable to empirical observations’ (Pelto and Pelto, 1978: 22). The more systematic the accumulation process, the more painstaking the empirical observations and the more scientific the outcome.

The most stringent test of all is whether some other anthropologist could come to the same conclusions by doing the same research in the same way in the same place. The conspicuous failure of anthropology to pass this test, as with the scientized study of world affairs, suggests that the test itself might be inappropriate, a point not lost on behavioralists.

6 See, for example, the International Studies Quarterly, the journal of the International Studies Association, which is the largest professional association in the discipline. Note coincidentally, the Association is made up mostly of US scholars, which is not to say that all or even the majority of such scholars would share the Quarterly’s preference for social scientism.

7 We are not told how.

8 Abstract reflection and ‘barefoot empiricism’ are opposite ends of a continuum. Neither represents what most people do, which is to combine the two. The dichotomy only works as a matter of conceptual convenience. It is false when applied too literally to how we behave.

9 It is worth noting, in terms of this metaphor, how a politico-strategic map does not display the details that feminists, wage-workers, indigenous peoples, ethnic, environmentalists, or religious believers might put on a map of world affairs that pertains to them. It is highly instructive to ask how the world would be pictured in each case. Even the idea of alternatives like these prompts us to ask why it is that only politico-strategic maps hang on most walls as representations of world affairs, however. Is state-making really the only aspect of world affairs worth depicting in cartographic terms? Or do we have here one of the ways in which world affairs practitioners place inordinate emphasis upon what state-makers do, and upon
the values that state-making currently represents, at the expense of other points of view and other dimensions to world affairs.

10 Consider the law of gravity, for example. If large numbers of people choose to refuse to obey it any more, they do not fly off the planet. Gravity works whether we want it to or not. Consider the law of contract, however. If enough people decide to stop obeying this law any more, then capitalism and the world economy collapse. Capitalism works, in other words, because people believe that it should. Whether it works only because they believe it should is another matter. Some would say we cannot help in the main but to honour our contracts, given the kind of creatures we are, and the way human behavior is more law-like than my example above would allow. This may be so. There is still the matter of free will however. Because of our exercise of this faculty, our patterns of practice are in part what we decide they should be, and if we change what we decide should be, we get different patterns of behavior. Why we make such changes is harder to say, but change we do, as manifest in the way world affairs change. We may want to argue that free will is largely an illusion, and that we never really change our minds, in which case all we need do is discover how our biological instincts work to understand world affairs. If we don’t think free will is an illusion, however, we will want to know how many people share what particular beliefs, and how the more dominant beliefs work, in a self-fulfilling and other-fulfilling fashion, to bring these world affairs about, and not the world affairs that would follow from our holding other assumptions about them.

11 Has the evolutionary process placed absolute limits on what we can know? If it has, we couldn’t know about them, since we couldn’t transgress them. Perhaps there are no such limits. Perhaps the human mind has crossed some kind of cognitive threshold, and now has infinite potential, at least in terms of its ability to know how world affairs work. Then again, perhaps it has not.

12 Any who doubt the need for objectivity should read the following anecdote. It illustrates the fundamental part objectivity plays in the knowing process: ‘A man makes a visit to the doctor, complaining of pains all over his body. “It hurts here and here, here and here” the man says, pointing to his head, his stomach, his back, his chest. “Everywhere I push,” the man says, “I feel pain. I push here it hurts. I push there it hurts. Everywhere I push it hurts.” The doctor examines the man carefully and then gives his diagnosis. “I can’t find anything the matter with you,” he says. “But you do have a broken finger.”

Any who doubt the need for subjectivity, should heed the following exchange. It illustrates the fundamental part subjectivity plays in the knowing process. Quoting a famous academic satire (Miner, 1956), a professor concludes his lecture with the following: ‘The fundamental belief underlying the whole [cultural] system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man’s only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony.’ Having just returned from studying the same cultural system, one of his students then says: ‘That’s not how I’d describe the Americans.’
What relevance does this have to our understanding of world affairs? What can these anecdotes possibly mean? As to the first anecdote, it is clear that our subjective perceptions of what is happening need objective appraisal if we are not to mistake what we feel to be the case for what is the case. It is not enough, for example, to go around the world taking part in wars, if we want to know what causes them. We have to stand back and examine as objectively as we can the whole pattern of human practice such conflicts involve, before we can make plausible pronouncements on war’s cause.

As to the second anecdote, it is equally clear that our objective perceptions of what is happening need subjective appraisal too, if we are not to mistake what we think to be the case for what is the case. It is not enough, for example, to stand back and examine Japan’s success in making social capitalism work objectively if we want to know how and why the Japanese make a non-liberal version of this system work. We will also have to listen to Japanese informants in a subjectifying way. We will have to take part ourselves in the whole pattern of human practice that ‘Japan’ represents. Only then will we be able to make plausible pronouncements on social capitalism’s cause.
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