

Original Paper

Consistency as an Indeterminate Factor for Rationality

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Abstract

Consistency and rationality are aligned with each other because they are presumed to be conterminous, but this conclusion is suspect because irrational behavior when continuous and deliberately directed is also consistent. Beneath the analysis of a relationship between consistency and rationality lies free choice as the foundation for human behavior. Because consistency has reduced relevance, an individual's behavior when grounded in subjectivity becomes the pivotal characteristic for all actions, whether rational or irrational. If irrationality means that a person has moved away from himself because a rift has appeared between rational behavior as the expression for one's own well-being and the world at large, then consistency becomes subordinate or reduced in meaning.

Keywords

consistency, rationality, irrationality, openness, behavior

1. Introduction

Any word can be accurately defined when it is fixed within the concept that is relevant to its meaning, content, and circumstance, but it must also correspond to the social context from which it is derived. A word must be comparable to and limited by the subject which it evokes, which is to say that it must be conceptually dependent upon the ideas that render it meaningful, and therefore, any word outside its context is rendered meaningless such as describing a tree as covered by fur or a mammal as covered by leaves. The conceptual context is a dependency which helps to define and differentiate one word from all others, even apart from words that have multiple meanings. If a word can be dislodged from the concept to which it is presumed to have, then that word is suspect as being inaccurate within the context from which it is derived.

To complicate this process is not helpful, and to align the meaning of any word with another may further complicate its meaning. One example of this complexity concerns the alignment of rationality with consistency, the latter of which supposedly relates to the beliefs, emotions, and actions that are

associated with rational behavior (note 1). Unfortunately, this relationship does not help the clarification of either word. However, rationality has meaning only with humans who exist within the openness of being, and this idea does not conflict with the fact that some animals, primates in particular, have proto types of reason. If there is no openness, then there is no rationality. If there is rationality, then there is openness. One presupposes the other. If a person acts irrationally, he may still have a relationship with openness, but how does this occur? How can we be open and irrational as we can be open and rational?

What may be described as irrational actions may be rational actions whether they are or are not considered to be extreme. In what sense is irrationality a description for actions that are poorly understood or inadequately related when contrasted with other actions that are derived from better choices? It may be concluded that irrationality is rooted in a person's character that may reflect contempt for or disapproval of an idea or policy that conflicts with one's own understanding because condemnation of anything can always be devised even before the object or subject of its discontent exists. Irrational actions are normally discouraged when they produce harmful effects or promote behaviors that disagree with behaviors that are more acceptable, as if we blame the victims of a crime and not its perpetrators for causing it, but at that point it may be too late to annul them. Irrationality reflects the contradictions or discrepancies we encounter that reveal the complexity of being human. Our conclusion must be that the effects of irrationality may not be perceived any differently by some people who give them support, especially support for actions and behaviors to which reason is not as formidable as we would normally believe, and despite moral extensions or conflicts (note 2), ordinary decisions can be radicalized for any persuasion. Behaviors (or beliefs) that are not similar with other behaviors (or beliefs) by the same person form the basis of inconsistency, but an inconsistency that is applicable individually. Consistency and inconsistency are specific, not universal. What applies to one person may not apply to another. Should we ask why the idea of consistency has been applied to human behavior? That it is applicable to logic and to the concept of method are topics for inquiry, but human behavior lends itself to a much wider and variable perspective.

Nevertheless, it is not action itself but its motivation that is more meaningful. An action's underpinning supports it and presents the basis, if known, why we do or do not act. Any underpinning does not relate to consistency and does not connect to a pattern of behavior that supposedly creates a method of repetition. Consistency is not and cannot be a definitive criterion for action, nor does it guarantee rationality (note 3). It is a consequence not an antecedent, a result not a reason, an effect not a cause. The conclusion must be that consistency has no relationship with chance which, contrary to Hume, may be a real possibility. More than cause and effect is the relationship between them. Irrationality, like rationality, relates to choices, and choices are subjective. We cannot ignore the range of possibilities that influence actions, whether known or unknown, important or unimportant, intended or accidental.

2. Openness

We cannot infer if irrationality is inherently harmful, although everyone is ontologically free when acting irrationally. Freedom is not at issue when rationality or irrationality is considered because openness to being has no bearing upon rational or irrational behavior. Openness precedes rationality, not the reverse, whether rationality is practical (determining how to act, particularly in deciding what to do in reference to what we believe), theoretical (forming conclusions about beliefs, particularly in deciding what we believe), or instrumental (choosing how to achieve goals or ends most efficiently through the reasonable exercise of means), among others. Being free remains open, undefined, and unique. Since we must choose whenever we think, deliberate, and act, it is these factors that determine if we are or are not rational. But there are many factors that influence our behavior, many personal, societal, environmental, and technological forces or determinants impacting it. Even the description of behavior thought to be misguided can be equated as being irrational, but it cannot be described as not being free. Freedom is simply the result of openness. It is no more or no less than a description of what characterizes humanity, since it is an undisclosed phenomenon of everything human.

Anyone may act irrationally when losing control of oneself, or acting impulsively, or not following better judgments, although rationality offers a better solution to difficulties that remain incomplete in themselves and yet provide an alignment with reality that is anticipated and accepted. The relationship with rationality may be explained easily because openness is not subject to predetermined or instinctual behavior of an inborn necessity from a powerful and all-consuming motivation. Instead, openness is exemplified by rationality which is the mechanism that helps to determine our behavior. But more can be said about reason than just openness. Whether it may be perceived as a stimulus for human activity because no other explanation is available, reason may be perceived merely as a form from which rationality is its application. And therefore, we can go beyond Whitehead's inference of Plato's conclusion that reason is necessary for a complete understanding of reality (note 4). In fact, it is necessary because of the imperfections we experience within ourselves. Rationality is simply a consequence of openness. It is its occupant. Because rationality is its consequence, it is subordinate to the existential choices we must make that force us to interact with the world as we persevere.

The development of character allows individuals to act rationally as it is assumed that they will also act consistently. This development also allows them to become well-adjusted with other individuals and with society. Supposedly, a maladjusted individual will act differently by acting irrationally. Does the maladjusted individual acting irrationally also act consistently? We must conclude that to be persistently irrational is to be consistent. Consistency relates to performance as the result of behavior. It relates to accomplishment or achievement, not to its underlying morality, not to its bearing, manner, or presence, not to its uprightness or virtue. If it can be demonstrated that an individual acting irrationally can also act consistently, then consistency loses its sole association with reason. Although consistency describes the continuation of behavior by acting in a certain way, neither it nor any related behavior must be rational. In relationship to behavior, consistency must be continuous by establishing a pattern

or method of action. Unfortunately, a consistent action may mean the enforcement of extreme actions, and therefore, it must be equated with a pattern of conformity of a prearranged structure whose main characteristic is the continuation of a prescribed tendency that supports something while opposing something else.

3. Change

It may be said that if anything lacks something in its being that normally should be there, then it cannot be consistent with itself, but this conclusion cannot be supported since there is nothing that lacks something that is inconsistent in its being which presupposes its underlying nature; otherwise, any change to itself entails something other than its being as originally noted. Every entity when it comes into being is already complete and consistent. A being supposedly lacking something when similar beings do not lack that thing is nevertheless complete in its being, even if an elephant is born without a trunk or a human is born blind. Since being is an affirmation of what is, whatever is affirms consistency in its being as a way of identifying its underlying nature. Thus, consistency seems to reveal a universal twist of events, that is, it manifests what is complete and everlasting in its being, for even what is thought to be inconsistent must also be consistent as a means to the being that it is. Consistency reaffirms the presence of being, but if inconsistency is relevant at all, then it must follow it. Consistency indicates a coherence within being, but inconsistency is merely a variant of it, just as irrationality is a variant of rationality. Consistency and inconsistency are no more and no less than manifestations of openness when overtly expressed.

Although reason is associated with consistency, which is an assumption by Kant, reason is not solely possessive of it. Given the whole range of human choices, consistency must be associated with more than just innately conceived rational decisions because we do not necessarily generate rational responses to the conditions of life, however related to temperament, character, or behavior. Consistency must also concern the social underpinning of ideas that are variable by time and place as they are also variable by the cultural and historical context in which they were formed. And these ideas also affirm the importance of change in everything we do, which introduces a separate but related group of issues. Normally, when discussing change, consistency loses its relevance to be replaced by its opposite that makes inconsistency directly relevant to change associated with cause, motion, or time. And yet for our purposes, change has greater importance when associated with cause and time, and lesser importance with motion. We should ask if there is change in the world, how is inconsistency associated with it? Does change signify that there must be some type of inconsistency wherever it is encountered, or is change a natural phenomenon that appears regardless of circumstance? And if the latter is correct, then change must be a part of inconsistency as a natural characteristic of being. One would assume that if change and inconsistency are aligned in some way, then change and consistency must not be. And if change is associated with both, how can we explain their meanings? One factor that is relevant to both consistency and inconsistency is human behavior which has a multiple range of applications that are

conditioned, as explained above, by the cultural and historical context in which they were formed, but this idea is not offered as an excuse for bad behavior.

Because change is associated with being in general (*ens generalis*) within the full range of entities in the universe, it must also include human beings who manifest many variations that are explainable by different personalities, any of which may be perceived as a cause while change is perceived as an effect. And If reason is or is not present, change would still be consistently present in its inconsistent form. Not that reason follows consistency, but once established, consistency can hardly be a secondary characteristic, and as noted above, reason cannot be solely possessive of it. In fact, what would reason be possessive of? It is simply a means to an end. The means is always limited by its own self-identity and self-limitation, whereas the end is unlimited but throws itself back to the means as its origin. Nevertheless, if we fail to pursue the means to its ends, we cannot be consistent in our beliefs, let alone in our actions (note 5). Therefore, consistency is both subjective and reflective: subjective in its self-identity, and reflective not so much of what it represents, but of what it does not. It is a negation, and by so doing, consistency demonstrates being by its presence as it is also reflective of its identity which is demonstrative of itself when compared with everything else. If we choose to ignore appropriate means to appropriate ends as suitable for a particularity when set aside for a specific need or use, then we pursue contradictory beliefs. And as a result, are these beliefs irrational? Such a question is significant because the ends may not be the reasons for actions that are connected to the means. Somewhere between the means and the ends is a chasm of immense depth, one that cannot be easily explained unless the human psyche is examined. It is inconsistencies along with contradictions and denials that really motivate us. Affirmations attest to what is given but leave undisclosed the whole range of what is unknown.

4. Method

If logic is logically consistent, then consistency must be methodic. Initially, a method must be supported by rationality, but once established, rationality may not continue. If a method is systematic, any feature may follow once it is in place, but if it is to be agreeable with a method, it must be rational. Nevertheless, a method which is presumed to be based upon a rational procedure may be distorted over time. How can distortion occur, and by so assuming, have we encountered a dilemma? If we accept the latter condition of a dilemma, we would not be at a loss for an explanation of extremism, of severe decisions that occur in moments of passion, ineptitude, or hatred that obliterates logical, systematic, or methodic choices. A method may not be prearranged, but its procedure or pattern of performance certainly is, and therefore, its procedure or pattern must be known before it is applied (note 6). Following Descartes, we can agree that a method is based upon a sense of order that confers a judgment upon the world (note 7), and when we encounter a procedure that is irrationally applied, it may be consistently applied to one example but not to another. Consistency is essential for the first step of a method which sets it in place but may not be essential for what follows. Choices in general are

open and subject to an endless list of influences, but overall, they represent a presence of uncertainty. Joseph Stalin who as general secretary and later as premier of the U.S.S.R. acted consistently when personally checking off the names of countless individuals to be sent to the gulag. There was a method for his actions, however arbitrary, subjective, and extreme for his victims. Indeed, the greatest contradiction would be a consistently belligerent or violent person starting to act inconsistently by becoming kind.

If irrationality has a relationship with openness, then both rationality and irrationality must be ontologically derived. Nevertheless, the inference that irrationality is not based upon reason, which is a conclusion by Jung, tells us very little since irrationality must relate to reason in some way because reason is an effect of openness. Nor is it helpful to infer that irrationality goes beyond reason, which is also a conclusion by Jung (note 8). Although justifiable psychologically, neither conclusion is justifiable philosophically. If irrationality goes beyond reason, then reason is left behind in its wake. A logical explanation for irrationality must be the continuous influence of being's openness, although subject to the pressures of internal inclinations and external contingencies. To say that irrationality appears only when rationality is appropriate seems to be correct (note 9), but it does not explain its ontological basis. When we no longer act rationally, we are still free. Regardless of our actions, openness to being remains in place, and it does not exempt us from our responsibilities. But neither is rationality a skill that is learned from observation, experience, and experimentation, that is, by making decisions of what to do and what to avoid, and if it is not a skill, then neither is it a character trait (note 10), which would infer that some people would have more of it than others, which is a way of saying that they would be freer than others, but this explanation is unfounded ontologically. If all people are rational, that is, if all people are subject to reason, then all people are free. Rationality is not a characteristic of anything except openness that is restrained, limited, or inhibited only by internal and external influences.

That rationality is variable is an idea that should be analyzed, but it has little or no relationship with any intuitive variability. If some people have a deeper or more profound intuition, why do they correspondently not have a deeper or more profound rational sense? Although rationality is derived from openness, intuition is derived from an innate empirical sensitivity of the world, a knowledge that varies from person to person. Intuition is variable, but rationality is not. These thoughts bring us back to the idea that rationality must be based upon consistent behavior, a thought that has little foundation and little confirmation. Rationality when supported by reasonable actions is subject to a wide range of choices that cannot be accurately fixed to any standard. Actions are open-ended, and there is no criterion that can be applied other than being indefinite. If we are influenced by inaccurate or misleading information that gives us heightened opportunities to act without serious reflection, do they also encourage us to act irrationally? Should we conclude that irrationality comes along with rationality as if the former becomes dislodged from the latter? Should we conclude that rationality is equally apportioned to everyone but is influenced by conditions that are susceptible to changing situations (note

11)? Although the pursuit of rationality has been interpreted, questioned, and criticized for centuries, it cannot be denied that it is an attribute of ontological freedom that comes into existence with humanity and will persist provided that we are free.

5. Coherency and Comprehensiveness

In general, it may be asserted that whatever is consistent must be both 1) coherent and 2) comprehensive. 1) Consistency must reveal a unity in which its individual parts, features, or characteristics manifest a harmony that would not otherwise be possible. Thus, consistency must be coherent because it holds together and does not violate its own integrity because it is sound, methodic, and intelligible. 2) It must also be comprehensive because it is understandable within the full extent of its being since it is inclusive by being broad in its orientation or scope, that is, by encompassing everything that is necessary, requisite, or compelling. We would normally assume that what is inconsistent would be its opposite. Theoretically yes, but practically no. And the difference between theoretical consistency and its practical version occurs within the options evident within the conditions of human reality. It is not delineated by anything except compliance on the one hand and noncompliance on the other. Human choices indicate the options that are applicable revealing difficulties encountered, obstacles avoided, and opportunities utilized for change. But reason and its rational application must not be confused with the notion of rationalization which attempts to explain, reconcile, absolve, or provide justification of or a defense for anything. Unlike reason, rationalization lacks the power of understanding. It is not supported by procedures affixed to an orderly manner which thereby renders a rationalization as an auxiliary and subjective means for explaining anything.

Nevertheless, if all human actions are consistent, then rationality is subordinate, and if rationality is subordinate, then so is irrationality. The principal difference between them would be their outcome, and therefore, their origins would also be subordinate. Either we must pursue arguments for the importance of consistency, or we must avoid them. Overall, consistency is presented as an explanation for actions, but it does not adequately explain why we do anything. Although representing harmony or compatibility with something, consistency does not offer any guarantees. Behavior resulting from deliberate and seemingly definite decisions cannot guarantee that inconsistencies will not follow.

Nor is acting irrationally the same as acting in an insane, absurd, or nonsensical manner. To be insane means having lost one's mind, but the expression of insanity as a description for going mad or becoming crazy explains little that is meaningful. Rationality is usually considered to be consistent with normal behavior, and one would assume that irrationality describes the opposite, but neither is absolute, and neither is defined by conditions laid out that can be analyzed objectively. More than anything else, humanity is defined by being in situations that generate good or bad behavior. A familial household, for example, may set the stage for behavior that may not be improved without a strong and independent personality, even when we know that personality is the result of the conditioning of temperament given at birth, given by the powers of openness however defined.

To change any situation has the potential of changing behavior that might be derived from living within it, an idea that has been described extensively by psychologists and philosophers alike. It is true to say that rationality is never static, fixed, or unmoving regardless how we crave stability. More than the effects of irrationality are the reasons from which they are derived, but describing irrationality as the underpinning for activities that are not open to reason is ambiguous. To ask why people behave violently, foolishly, or irresponsibly does not explain why they act at all. There is something more fundamental to our choices, more basic to our state of being, more derivative of our nature. Therefore, the notion of consistency does not explain if one is coherently irrational, nor does it explain if one is coherently rational. Whatever is consistent is merely conformist, commonplace, or normal for any individual, whether one is a saint or a demon. Let it be known that in no way are we condoning bad behavior or making excuses for the persecution of innocent people, but the reasonable understanding of bad behavior is not irrationality, nor is it an unpredictability of some kind, or erratic behavior, or lacking in a correct logical manner, and therein is the failure of associating consistency solely with rationality.

If consistency determines rationality, then it must also determine irrationality. To be persistently irrational whether expressed in some deceitful or abusive manner is to be consistent. A normal, law-abiding, and so-called moral person would normally question this inference. Regardless of how we describe the effects of bad behavior, whether they annoy us or challenge our beliefs, we cannot in all honesty describe them as being irrational, and therefore, acting irrationally does not signify pursuing false beliefs. It is the rational person who may describe another person as being irrational, but rarely would an irrational person describe another as being rational. Therefore, the criterion of irrationality resides with rational people who then can reserve the designation of consistency for themselves, but in fact irrational people may also be consistent in their behavior, no matter how they may challenge or annoy rational people. Seemingly, the difference between rationality and irrationality in reference to consistency must be reduced almost to non-existence (note 12).

6. Conclusion

To describe irrationality as something that is not tied to reason but goes beyond it in the Jungian sense does not clarify its meaning. However ambiguous, irrationality must be tied to rationality in some way, and yet it does not concern its denial, as if we wait for the right moment to act or perhaps not to act. How does this relationship occur? Indeed, we should not ask how rationality is tied to irrationality, but how irrationality is tied to rationality. Given that there is a relationship between the two, the more significant meaning concerns how irrationality is somehow a part of rationality as one can love something for a time and then for no reason hate it. Even the expression “for no reason” indicates that although there is an original reason in place for doing something, it does not need another reason for that action to be performed. Although “for no reason” means that the original reason is all that is necessary to do something, it does not mean that an action for any reason is necessarily consistent.

Consistency is merely an imposition upon human activity that supposedly is repeatable, methodic, and orderly, all of which are not likely to occur when considering the non-conformity of human activity. We indicated above when describing the relationship between consistency and its methodical underpinning that a method regardless of how it comes into being does not have to be prearranged but its performance certainly must be. Far too often, we answer when asked why we did something in a certain way with the response that we do not know why we acted in that way. We leave open many unexplained uncertainties.

When indicative of human behavior, irrationality is more meaningful because rationality can always be taken as a given, but acting irrationally cannot. And since acting is the means for any application, choice must be involved (note 13). Regardless of behavior, consistency has reduced relevance, but this reasoning does not and cannot exclude an individual's subjectivity that augments the understanding of irrationality. How many crimes, injustices, or wrongdoings are perpetuated without either the perpetrators or the victims knowing why they occurred, except for the generalization that they are the result of criminal, deranged, misguided, or evil people? As far as supporting evidence is concerned, rationality cannot be based upon it because what is acceptable is subject to many interpretations.

It is not difficult to understand rationality on a personal level, but it is also essential to understand it on an interactive level. Rationality appears on the personal level as an essential feature of openness, but its relationship with humanity in general changes its context. And it changes its context because including behavior in relationship to rationality introduces a topic of great importance for both. As we stated above, concepts must be relevant to its meaning and must correspond to the context from which they are derived.

Since aspects of rationality include free choice, it also includes the essential nature of rationality when expressed through different traits or dispositions that, like other factors, are influenced by the social context in which they appear. Although there are different theories explaining how behavior evolves, for our purposes it may be acknowledged that humans as social beings create conditions described as opportunities, requirements, limitations, or restraints that lay the foundation for interaction on any level, whether within the family, community, or larger human organization, that is, within the world at large. Since rationality is inherent within us, attempts to understand it must be equated as revelations of self-realization, and therefore, rationality will remain a topic of some importance in reference to its origin and meaning. But it cannot be stated that within its context lie the full range of human choices because not all actions are rational. Outside of them, or perhaps more correctly stated, in addition to them, are the whole range of irrational decisions that include acting when wishing not to do so, or choosing what may appear to be predetermined causes, or complying with anything as long as we are not challenged.

In answer to Jung's interpretation that irrationality goes beyond reason, we must reply that it cannot be explained without understanding the conditions that give rise to it, and those conditions indicate that irrationality means moving away from oneself by creating an inner rift or gap between one's own

reasonable expression as a paradigm of oneself and the challenges of the world that lie outside of it. Apart from insanity, the separation between oneself and the world becomes the cause for any irrationality that may follow. Irrationality is consistently applicable when rationality is consistently denied because there is nothing inconsistent about a denial of what normally would be approved as there is nothing consistent about its revival from time to time. Normally, we would assume that rationality concerns choosing wisely, but it also concerns being subject to strife, conflict, or stress. Ultimately, not being faithful to oneself means finding meaning somewhere else. Therefore, finding and understanding the motives of our actions goes a long way to illustrate the importance of rationality or the threats of irrationality, and somewhere between the full range of both lies consistency.

Notes

Note 1. Donald Davidson, Problems of Rationality, ed. Marcia Cavell, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 170 and 192.

Note 2. Niko Kolodny, "The Myth of Practical Consistency," European Journal of Philosophy, 16 (2008), 379.

Note 3. John Broome, "Practical Reasoning," in José Luis Bermúdez & Alan Millar, eds., Reason and Nature: Essays in the Theory of Rationality, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002, pp. 87-90.

Note 4. Alfred North Whitehead, The Function of Reason, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929, rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, p. 11.

Note 5. Michael Bratman, "Intention and Means-End Reasoning," The Philosophical Review, 90, no. 2 (1981), 259-60.

Note 6. Justus Buchler, The Concept of Method, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 3.

Note 7. The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham *et al.*, 3 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991, vol. I (1985), "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," rule 10, p. 35.

Note 8. The Collected Works of C.J. Jung, rev. by R.F.C. Hull of H.G. Baynes trans., Bollinger Series, XX, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-1979, vol. VI: Psychological Types (1971), p. 454.

Note 9. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Note 10. A conclusion proposed by Carl G. Hempel, Aspects of Scientific Explanations and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science, New York: The Free Press, 1965, pp. 472-76 describes rationality as a dispositional trait including objectives and beliefs.

Note 11. Martin Hollis, "The Limits of Irrationality," in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., Rationality, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 219-20.

Note 12. Nor should we confuse irrationality in general with the criticism of rationalism that promoted the pursuit of knowledge without the need for experience that began with Descartes and was extended by Spinoza and Leibniz. The total neglect of experience as promoted by rationalism gives little credit

for human action and no validation of consistency unless it is totally deductive. Rationalism is excessively a priori and ignores any connection to empiricism.

Note 13. Harold I. Brown, Rationality, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 226.