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Hot Passion Versus Cold Reason: An Expectancy-value-cost Conceptualization of What Motivated Partisanship versus Rationality

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Hot Passion Versus Cold Reason: An Expectancy-Value-Cost Conceptualization of What Motivates Partisanship Versus Rationality

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Abstract: *It is about as fashionable as it has ever been to disagree with objective fact. Being right is to some a matter of opinion rather than a position within reality. Volume seems to drown out reason. This paper is not an indictment of left, centre, or right, but rather a conceptual explanation for what motivates the choice, implicit or explicit, to ignore factual arguments and instead stand on emotional or irrational responses– what has come to be called post–Truth. Expectancy–Value–Cost theory (EVC) offers a unique insight into the latent processes that influence and convolute this otherwise straight–forward processing of presented facts into schemata and opinion. The driving forces behind tasks can be coalesced into three constructs: expectancies, subjective task values, and perceived costs. Motivation, in this way, can be thought of as the function of the expectancies and subjective task values balanced against the costs of the task. Using examples as guided theoretical case studies, this study illustrates how these motivational dynamics interact in real situations. Using the learning from the cases as well as leveraging approaches from other studies, potential solutions and guidance for teachers and the wider education community are offered with the goal of instilling an affinity and proclivity for reason and rationalism in an increasingly partisan world.*

Keywords: rationalism, motivation, partisanship, post-truth

On December 4th, 2016 a grown man walked into a pizza shop with a rifle and demanded to be shown where underage sex slaves were being held. There were no children held. The story was discredited quickly and efficiently by news outlets nationally and internationally. However, a salient detail would be uncovered by a poll three days later conducted by Public Policy Polling: 9% of a sample of registered voters believed that it was true, long after the facts had been presented and had shown that the story was a lie (Kafka, 2016). Adding insult to injury was that 19% were still unsure. Why would anyone continue to believe what had been exposed as an outlandish lie?

It is about as fashionable as it has ever been to disagree with objective fact. Being right is to some a matter of opinion rather than a position within reality. Volume seems to drown out reason. There has never been a better time to be uninformed about the world.

This paper is not an indictment of left, centre, or right, but rather a conceptual explanation for what motivates the choice, implicit or explicit, to ignore factual arguments and instead stand on emotional or irrational responses. We live in an incredibly polarised society precariously balanced on a reality many might wish was not real. As a response, parts of society has seemingly left behind the anchorage of truth and moved to something else — post–Truth (Davies, 2016; Higgins, 2016).

The Era of Post-truth

In politics and in real life, the details of facts and informed contemplation are of second class importance to the emotional appeal of a given perspective. Arendt (1951) predicted that post–truth would come to pass as a contempt for facts. Nameless and faceless, this contempt might be explained as a product of delicate egos with an inability to accept that perfectly rational people can hold different views than they do (Salter & Blodgett, 2017).

Keyes (2004) argues that opinions are disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points, factual rebuttals are ignored. Debunking falsehoods does not work anymore because some people deeply want the debunked to be true– what has come to be called 'Truthiness' (Narvaez, 2010). Many people have begun to see their worldview as validated by opinions about events rather than the events themselves (Achenbach, 2015). It would seem that the truth will not set you free; instead, it is liable to get you ignored. This paper argues that partisanship and rationalism are outcomes of a function of motivation dynamics and that schools can play a crucial role in promoting rationalism in generations of students.

What Role Does Motivation Play?

An overabundance of news has provided people with the ability to pick their "facts." But how do they choose? Expectancy–Value–Cost Theory (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Eccles, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) offers a unique insight into the latent processes that influence and convolute this otherwise straight–forward processing of presented facts into schemata and opinion. The driving forces behind tasks can be coalesced into three constructs: expectancies, subjective task values, and perceived costs (Flake et al., 2015).

Expectancies are the expectations of success (Wigfield, Tonks, & Klauda, 2009), integrating self–concept (Corbetta & Salvato, 2004) and self–efficacy (Bandura, 1986). They can be thought of like a capacity that is built over time through experience and confidence to undertake a given action. For someone to hold a positive expectancy of a task, there must be a belief that it is possible for them. Vicarious experience or bearing witness to someone

successfully completing the task is a crucial component of self–efficacy and expectancy (Bandura, 1986). This can manifest in as the simplest form as "monkey see, monkey do" in the form of a child misbehaving after seeing another child misbehave and escape without consequences.

Subjective task values are a dynamic amalgam of intrinsic, attainment, and utility values (rewards, avoidance of punishments, connecting you to something else you want) (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Eccles, 1983). Intrinsic task value reflects the extent to which an individual may view a task as being fun, fulfilling, or otherwise worth doing for its own sake. For example, a person that inherently enjoys debating ideas will likely see intrinsic value in contesting facts or challenging the world views of others. Attainment task value reflects the extent that a person considers a task or behaviour to be a part of who they are. A person who sees themselves as a purveyor of truth is highly likely to see value in disseminating their truth. Utility value reflects the extent that a person sees the ability to co–opt that task to obtain something else that they want or how useful the task's outcome is to them. For example, a person might argue a view they do not wholly agree with if the outcome is to their favour or they might be motivated if they forecast standing to benefit from the outcome.

Contrastingly, tasks also have perceived and unperceived costs. These costs can be prices paid, barriers to alternatives, effort, time, and other undesirable expenditures or possible outcomes that are themselves undesirable as a result of the completion of the task (Flake et al., 2015). For example, passionately arguing one's genuine beliefs might be seen as potentially alienating to colleagues. In the same vein, the process of debating ideas can be experienced as a waste of time to some. Costs are factors that decrease the motivation to act in a specific way. Motivation, in this way, can be thought of as the function of the expectancies and subjective task values balanced against the costs of the task (See Figure 1).
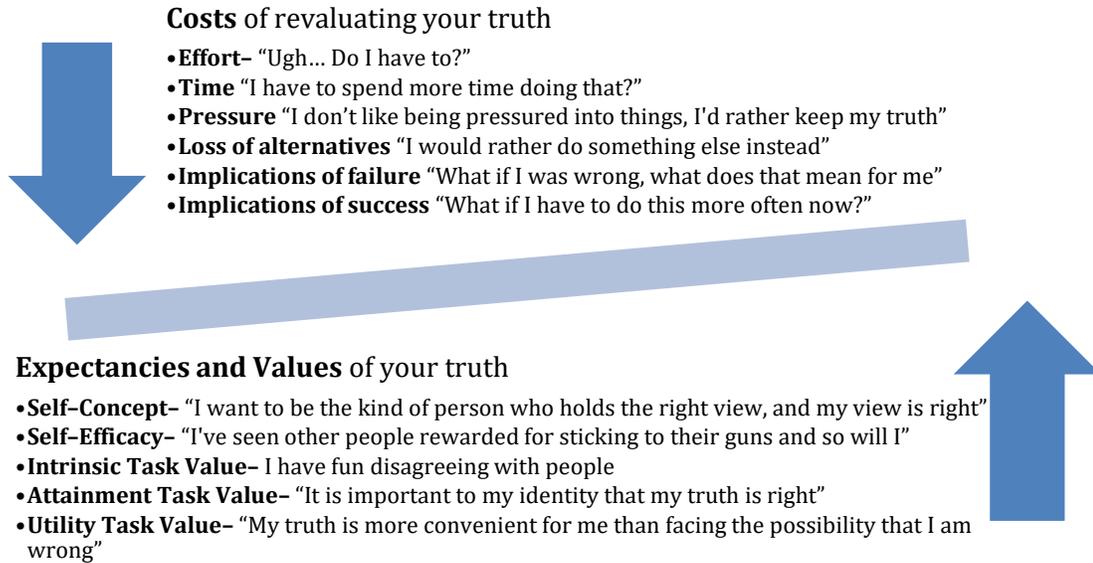
Costs of revaluating your truth
- **Effort–** "Ugh… Do I have to?"
- **Time** "I have to spend more time doing that?"
- **Pressure** "I don't like being pressured into things, I'd rather keep my truth"
- **Loss of alternatives** "I would rather do something else instead"
- **Implications of failure** "What if I was wrong, what does that mean for me"
- **Implications of success** "What if I have to do this more often now?"

Expectancies and Values of your truth
- **Self–Concept–** "I want to be the kind of person who holds the right view, and my view is right"
- **Self–Efficacy–** "I've seen other people rewarded for sticking to their guns and so will I"
- **Intrinsic Task Value–** I have fun disagreeing with people
- **Attainment Task Value–** "It is important to my identity that my truth is right"
- **Utility Task Value–** "My truth is more convenient for me than facing the possibility that I am wrong"

Figure 1: A representation of exemplar expectancies, values, and costs interacting to determine relative motivations of re-evaluating one's position.

Why do People do this?

With the ability to back increasingly varied views and perspectives, it's only natural that given the choice, people choose the truth they want– the 'truthiness' that most validates their life (Narvaez, 2010). To some, it is not about the truth anymore, it is about winning. Their "truth" is winning, and this constitutes a validation of their life and experiences (Higgins, 2016). The era of post–truth has made believing things a shoving match between objective facts and the interpretation that you want to be true. Consider the following two parallel scenarios with matrix responses starting with Table 1.

Table 1
The Motivational underpinnings of Rationalism and Partisanship illustrated through a person you like reaction example (Created by E.K. Soleas for this paper).

Scenario: A person you personally like does something deplorable you do not like. This is something you would normally confront someone about.		
Construct	**Outcome: Rationalism– You confront them**	**Outcome: Partisanship – You give them a pass**
Expectancies		
• Self–concept	I see myself as someone who is balanced and deliberative, therefore I should hold this person accountable for their deplorable action.	I identify with the person, I might not have done what they did but they are my kind of person. I should give them a pass.
• Self–efficacy	I have held people accountable for their actions in the past and it has usually turned out for the better.	I have normally sided with them before and it has worked out for me.

Values

• Intrinsic Task Values	It feels great to be on the side of being right, it's like a warm blanket. That's why I should speak up and denounce them.	So what if they bother people? I think they are overreacting, and I enjoy seeing them whine and get knocked down a peg or two.
• Attainment Task Values	It is important to who I am that this person face the consequences for their actions.	It important to me that the people I root for are treated well and given the benefit of the doubt.
• Utility Task Values	Being on the 'right' side will help me score points with my friends and colleagues who agree with me	My peers cheer for them, it helps me fit in if I do too! This person being where they are makes me money.

Costs

• Effort	Confronting someone is a lot of work, do I absolutely have to?	It is hard work defending someone especially if they make you do it often.
• Time	Honestly, I have places to be instead of worrying about this.	I spend lots of time trying to cover for their mistakes.
• Pressure	This could ruin my relationship with them, is it worth it?	This could ruin my relationship with my friends, is it worth it?
• Loss of valued alternatives	What if me doing this costs me the opportunity to do something else I like?	What if me doing this costs me the opportunity to do something else I like?
• Implications of failure	What if I confront them and the situation is not resolved?	What if I cannot defend them?
• Implications of success	Even if I do confront them, what if it does not change anything?	What if I do defend them and they still do not benefit?

A Second Case

In this case, consider the case of American President Donald Trump pardoning Jack Johnson, a boxer who had been prosecuted in what is seen by many to have been a racially–motivated trial in the early 20ᵗʰ century. No doubt, by the standards of today, Johnson was wronged by the criminal justice system because of the colour of his skin. When President Trump pardoned him, many people should have been pleased with the late, but righteous, vindication of a sitting president admitting that an injustice occurred. However, popular reactions diverged. In fact, some news reports argued that President Trump's motivations may have been to spite former President Obama (Yglesias, 2018). Instead of recognizing that someone that they did not like had done the right thing, an immediate partisan spin made an event they wanted to happen into something sinister. It would seem to me that partisanship and the motivations that underpin it were likely involved (See Table 2).

Table 2

The Motivational underpinnings of Rationalism and Partisanship illustrated through a disliked person reaction example (Created by E.K. Soleas for this paper).

Scenario: A person you personally dislike has done something you actually like. This is something that you would normally enthusiastically comment on positively and publicly.

Construct	Outcome: Rationalism– You praise them	Outcome: Partisanship – You refuse/minimally acknowledge it
Expectancies		
• Self–concept	I might not like them, but I'm a fair person and they did something I liked.	I don't like them and it's okay for me to ignore their good deed.
• Self–efficacy	I can say something without consequence. I've spoken truth to others without being worse for wear and that's what I'll do here	I can say something without consequence; I don't like them and this doesn't change anything.
Values		
• Intrinsic Task Values	I enjoy recognizing that others have done right. That's what I'll do here.	I enjoy being hard on this person, why would I stop now?
• Attainment Task Values	I see myself as being impartial. It is important to my identity that I speak up. That's who I am.	I see myself as being opposed to this person. It is important to my identity that I speak up. That's who I am.
• Utility Task Values	It might be helpful to be seen as being rational and impartial for other goals I might have. It might be to my benefit to praise their positive action.	It might be helpful to be seen as being unsupportive of this person for other goals I might have. It might be to my benefit to ignore their positive action.
Costs		
• Effort	Praising someone is a lot of work, do I absolutely have to?	It will probably be really hard to ignore something that I think is right.
• Time	Honestly, I have places to be. If I ignore this, I lose nothing.	Why would I waste time on this, this person has done other things and I would rather spend my time on those issues.
• Pressure	This could ruin my relationship with other people. They might not want me doing this. Is it worth it?	This could ruin my relationship with other people. They might not want me to ignore this positive act. Is it worth it?
• Loss of valued alternatives	What if doing this costs me the opportunity to do something I like?	What if me doing this costs me the opportunity to do something else I like?
• Implications of failure	What if I praise them and the situation is not resolved?	What if I ignore them and they still benefit? What would have been the point?
• Implications of success	Even if I do praise them, what if it does not change anything?	Even if I do ignore them, what if it does not change anything?

Why do we do the Things we do?

People are intensely rational even when it looks like we are being irrational (Dawes, 2018). Much of the different reactions and actions that people undertake as a result of interpreted stimuli precipitate a complex risk–reward calculation. Motivation dynamics like this are latent second nature (Ryan & Deci, 2017). EVC posits that the mental math that we do looks like a risk–reward equation and the larger valence dictates the most likely course of action. Were one to be interested in tipping the scale in favour of one outcome, the process would be to feed that side through the experiences that a person has in their life. Schools could be the change agent that nurtures rationality through facilitated debate. This might look like having and enforcing the rules of decorum as difficult and even controversial ideas are debated on their merits. In short, schools have an opportunity to help shape people to make logical, balanced, and informed choices for given situations.

How can Reason Win?

There is a popular parable of two wolves symbolizing inner conflict. In the parable a grandparent is asked by their grandchild which wolf wins– the grandparent answers the one that is fed. Two such forces in conflict are rationalism or partisanship. Which one wins? The one that is fed.

An individual's educational upbringing is a prime spot where rationalism and partisanship are developed. One can be either enculturated to be rational or be partisan in response to cognitive dissonance (Tudge & WinIterhoff, 1993). As posited by EVT, an approximation of the motivation to complete a task is the sum of expectancies and subjective task values arrayed against the perceived and unperceived costs. One framework to map out what schools can do is build expectancies and subjective task values while managing the costs.

Schools can logically fulfill expectancies and values and manage the costs based on the motivations highlighted in Figure 2. Below is a non–exhaustive list of ways that schools can promote rationalism and associated ideas.
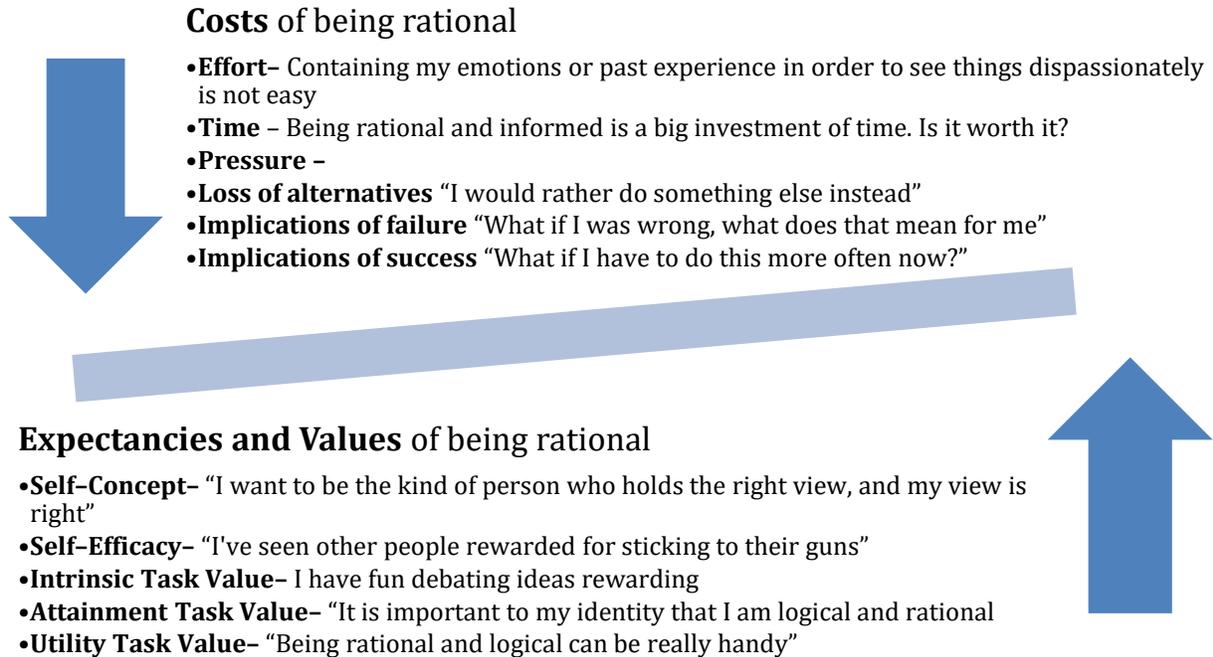
Costs of being rational

•**Effort–** Containing my emotions or past experience in order to see things dispassionately is not easy
•**Time** – Being rational and informed is a big investment of time. Is it worth it?
•**Pressure –**
•**Loss of alternatives** "I would rather do something else instead"
•**Implications of failure** "What if I was wrong, what does that mean for me"
•**Implications of success** "What if I have to do this more often now?"

Expectancies and Values of being rational

•**Self–Concept–** "I want to be the kind of person who holds the right view, and my view is right"
•**Self–Efficacy–** "I've seen other people rewarded for sticking to their guns"
•**Intrinsic Task Value–** I have fun debating ideas rewarding
•**Attainment Task Value–** "It is important to my identity that I am logical and rational
•**Utility Task Value–** "Being rational and logical can be really handy"

Figure 2. A representation of exemplar expectancies, values, and costs of being rational (Created by E.K. Soleas for this paper).

Idea 1: Reconciling that Wisdom is Entertaining an Idea without Accepting it

"Someone Taught Alan Turing how to Add."

In a polarized partisan era, few things are more important to teach students that it is not a weakness to ponder new ideas and challenge established ones. A common parable is that wisdom is being able to entertain an idea without blindly accepting it. This ability must be built and developed through practice and effort. Thankfully, in education, we have a word for this— inquiry. Inquiry–based learning has long been established as a beneficial driver of learning (Banchi & Bell, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Levy, Aiyegbayo, & Little, 2009) although questions abound about its utility as a sole–driver of the learning process in children (Glassman, 2001; Wee, Shepardson, Fast, & Harbor, 2007). It would seem to be that inquiry is of maximal benefit when it is guided by a steady hand, consisting of guided discovery rather than pure discovery learning. In the classroom, teachers could provide a structure for students to evaluate ideas and then allow students to wrestle with the big questions of the day. It is clear that a way to cultivate thinkers who are able to be independently rational is to provide them with the formative experiences that develop rational thinkers. In this way, expectancies for rationality are built, making this behaviour more likely in the future

Idea 2: Creating an Environment that Lets you Challenge Ideas

"People are Bolder when they Feel Safer."

Another lever to lean on, if the goal is to promote rational thinkers, is to deliberately design an environment that makes challenging ideas safer. Research has shown that need–supportive classrooms foster the exchange and debate of ideas as students feel safer in these environments (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Safety in this regard is characterized as the feeling that others will not punish or diminish you for speaking your mind; that they would support or at least disagree graciously rather than punitively if your idea is not to their liking. In much the same fashion as scholarly debate, where disagreements are resolved or at least contended with facts rather than personally.

Teachers can enforce the rules of decorum with their classroom management tactics. For example, teachers can proactively prevent interruptions by enforcing decorum at every instance. Teachers can also negate bullying by either intervening when necessary or, preferably, by immediately calling attention to it and guiding the class towards a culture where it has no place. Most importantly, teachers have a golden opportunity to prevent group think by being the first to elegantly challenge ideas thus modeling the importance of individual contemplation as opposed to taking the thinking of others as gospel. These tactics help manage the costs of being rational.

Teachers can also stoke rationalism by designing their assignments and classroom tasks to require the debate of ideas by including group consultations and discussion as well as facilitating guided critique of others' ideas through rigorously moderated debate. Expressions of opinion that break decorum or cross the line into being personal are immediately rebuked and with time will become rarer. In such a way, students are coached, mentored, and molded into debating ideas on their merits rather than based on the person. In this way, the perceived costs of being rational are managed and make rationality more likely for students.

Idea 3: Early Exposure to Different Ideas

"Start them While they are Young."

Banchi and Bell (2008) outline their argument that inquiry is itself a scaffolded process with degrees of difficulty, while Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) argue that creativity exists on a continuum. These constructs show that skill in manipulating and evaluating ideas is a skill that is built incrementally meaning that their development must start small and scale from there. Bruner (2009) argues convincingly that almost anyone can be taught almost anything as long as the idea is taught in a language that is accessible to the learner's

level of comprehension. The same is true of rationality and debating ideas on their merits. Students need to be taught how to debate and consider the ideas of others, especially when they are opposing their own internally held beliefs from an early age so that they have plenty of experience when they reach adulthood.

This early exposure of ideas while students are still making up their minds, constitutes a sensitive period (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993) where habits are not yet cemented and are still subject to positive influence from their peers and mentors. The hope is that open–minded children who are exposed to many ideas, become open–minded adults who can rationally examine diverse ideas for merit. In this way, subjective task values are built for someone to be rational.

Idea 4: Avoiding Reinforcing the Status Quo

“Established Ideas were New at Some Point. Be Glad they were not Dismissed out of Hand.”

It has become clear that some ideas are more welcome than others. Mainstream ideas tend to benefit from societal inertia more than newer ideas that resist or push the existing status quo. As change agents, schools have the choice to either perpetuate the status quo or judiciously make the conscious choice to present other ideas fairly and let students make up their own minds. For example, Ontario's 2014 Sexual Education Curriculum presents many different gender and sexual identity perspectives without placing primacy on heteronormative views. Presenting new ideas is done in the hopes of being accepting and cautiously allowing students to make up their own minds rather than inculcating existing ideas with little room for considering the ideas of others. In this way, expectancies and values of rationality are built whilst also managing the costs that make rationality less likely.

Final Word

This paper argues that rationalism and partisanship are choices that individuals make based on a subjective function of motivation dynamics built by a lifetime of experience. These experiences result in contextual expectancies, values, and costs that make one response: rationalism or partisanship more likely than the other– driving behaviour. In this era of partisanship, it has never been more important to value objective fact and to be informed on issues before making a judgment or decision. To this end it is crucially important that schools act decisively to promote rationalism and to prevent skewed views that promote post–Truth, remove reason, and demand impulsive emotional responses to complex, multi–faceted issues. Post–truth politics have resulted in the collapse of the

middle ground, disrupted the ability to debate ideas on merit, and generally made people like each other less. It is my hope in this paper to catalyse reflection on one's own expectancies, values, and costs to promote respectful debate and civil disagreements as a means to solve the problems facing our society.

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