

**ROMANTICS, MERCENARIES  
AND BEHAVIORAL RATIONALITY**

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# ROMANTICS, MERCENARIES AND BEHAVIORAL RATIONALITY

## ABSTRACT

Behavioral decision research focuses on cognitive biases and other barriers to economic rationality. However, if cognitive biases are costly to eliminate, the second-best solution to bounded rationality may be less rationality rather than more. I define the concept of behavioral rationality and discuss two extreme forms of strategizing, which I call *Romantic* and *Mercenary*. Using 20<sup>th</sup> century humanitarian Albert Schweitzer as a case study, I discuss the optimization of economic and behavioral rationality. I argue that the success of behavioral strategy as a field does not depend on removing cognitive biases but on helping people deliver more effective strategic actions.

## ALBERT SCHWEITZER

“Thought is nothing without enthusiasm.”  
Germain de Stael, *Germany* (1817), p. 181

In the summer of 1899, Albert Schweitzer received a Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Strasbourg, having completed his thesis on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In the next six years he would publish two ground-breaking books in academic theology and a two-volume analysis of the life and music of J. S. Bach. By 1905, Schweitzer was Professor of Theology at the University of Strasbourg, where he taught courses in Hebrew and Greek, and gave sermons in the University’s Chapel of St. Thomas. His reputation was spreading throughout Europe, and Schweitzer travelled frequently to Paris, where he gave theology lectures and organ recitals. As head of Strasbourg’s Department of Theology, he occupied spacious quarters that included a private library, grand piano and landscaped gardens. A biographer wrote:

It was a position for life; with roomy comfortable quarters overlooking the sunny St. Thomas embankment, a generous stipend, complete independence, agreeable companionship, the charge of an ancient and excellent library, and the prospect of a lifetime of congenial study. (Seaver 1959: 24).

In October 1905, at the age of 30, Schweitzer gave up his “position for life” and decided to become a medical doctor in equatorial Africa. According to Schweitzer, “It struck me as incomprehensible that I should be allowed to live such a happy life, while I saw so many people around me wrestling with care and suffering.” (Schweitzer 1949: 84)

Schweitzer’s plan met with disapproval from everyone who knew him. A colleague said he could do more good by lecturing on Africa than by going there, and a former mentor accused him of wasting his talents, “like a general who wanted to go into the firing line with a rifle.” (Schweitzer 1949: 89) Schweitzer’s mother wept and pleaded for a change of heart, and his

friends accused him of insulting them: “It was bad enough that he was . . . throwing away God’s gifts, but could he not at least have consulted them first?” (Brabazon 1976: 174) Others questioned Schweitzer’s motives, suspecting him of running dry of theological ideas, fleeing an unhappy love affair, or suffering a nervous breakdown. According to Schweitzer, “I felt as a real kindness the action of persons who made no attempt to dig their fists into my heart, but regarded me as a precocious young man, not quite right in his head, and treated me correspondingly with affectionate mockery.” (Schweitzer 1949: 90)

In this essay I want to use Schweitzer’s approach to career strategizing – pulling up stakes and striking off on a bold path for which he had no prior experience or training – to illustrate certain aspects of behavioral strategy. Schweitzer adopted what I call a *Romantic* approach to strategizing, driven by enthusiasm and undeterred by apparent impossibilities of implementation. I believe that many successful strategies in business have this quality, but that traditional ways of thinking about strategy dismiss them as irrational or lucky. In the following sections I introduce the concepts of economic and behavioral rationality, and in subsequent sections define *Romantic* and *Mercenary* strategizing and explore their consequences for behavioral strategy.

## **ECONOMIC RATIONALITY**

Hostilities to Schweitzer’s decision were based on suspicions that he was not behaving rationally – that he was “not quite right in the head.” These suspicions were justified. Schweitzer had no previous background in science or medicine, and to practice medicine would require six years of medical school and a year of internship. After seven years, Schweitzer would be an inexperienced general practitioner with no knowledge of African language or culture, and no expertise in tropical medicine, which would require further study. In the meantime, he was obligated to write two theology books for his publisher, and would be supporting himself through medical school by repairing church organs, preaching sermons on Sundays, and giving organ recitals in France and Germany.

There are many ways to think about economic rationality. In microeconomic theory, decision makers are economically rational when their preferences are complete, consistent and transitive, and when their choices maximize utility based on those preferences. Of course, people do not possess this kind of rationality. Individual preferences depend on the framing of decisions, such as whether payoffs are framed as gains or losses (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), or which alternative is presented as the default (Johnson and Goldstein 2003). Cognitive biases distort a person’s ability to calculate a utility function or to make choices that maximize it (Loewenstein 2007). Boundedly rational decision makers do not have enough information to identify all

possible options, calculate their utilities, or make accurate forecasts of uncertain probabilities and payoffs (Simon 1979).

Researchers in strategic management take a different approach to economic rationality, studying the “rationality” of strategy processes – usually defined as their formality, completeness, or “strategic decision comprehensiveness” (e.g., Fredrickson 1985, 1986) – and whether the outcomes of these processes provide a basis for competitive advantage. In the foundational statement, Kenneth Andrews (1971) defined a company’s “economic strategy” as the strategy that maximizes the company’s strengths, minimizes its weaknesses, removes its threats, and captures its opportunities. In Peter Drucker’s words, rational strategizing “builds on strength.” (Drucker 1964)

Business firms sometimes follow this “strategic” form of economic rationality, formalizing their planning processes and developing strategies that produce sustained competitive advantage. However, business executives do not maximize utility better than other decision makers. Like everyone else, their preferences depend on framing effects, and they suffer from information deficits and cognitive biases that distort evaluation and decision processes. Because of the economic and social magnitude of business decisions, the particular biases that seem to afflict business decision makers – hubris, delusional optimism, halo effects, competition neglect, and such – spill into communities and society at large, often with disastrous consequences (Tang et al. 2015; Powell 2014; Rosenzweig 2007; Kahneman and Lovallo 1993).

Research in behavioral strategy focuses on the gap between normative economic rationality and the actual decision processes of individuals and business firms. Using a variety of methods – experimental, statistical, archival, and qualitative – researchers examine how decision makers think and behave, the outcomes they produce, and the cognitive biases or behavioral pathologies that stand between the firm and some form of normative rationality. Behavioral strategy “aims to bring realistic assumptions about human cognition, emotions, and social behavior to the strategic management of organizations and, thereby, to enrich strategy theory, empirical research, and real-world practice.” (Powell, Fox and Lovallo 2011: 1369)

Behavioral strategy operates on the spectrum of economic rationality, much like behavioral economics, behavioral finance and other disciplines. That is, behavioral strategy is concerned with the question: Why do strategic decisions fall short of economic rationality and how can we make them better? This is represented in Figure 1, which shows the spectrum of economic rationality and impediments to rationality stemming from bounded rationality and cognitive biases. These barriers correspond with the most influential streams of research in behavioral strategy: the behavioral theory of the firm, connected with the Carnegie school in the 1950s

(March and Simon 1958; Cyert and March 1963); and behavioral decision research (Edwards, 1954, 1961), which, along with behavioral game theory, shaped the formation of behavioral economics.

– INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE –

Albert Schweitzer’s plan for medical school and Africa appeared to fall short of any kind of normative economic rationality. The plan sacrificed a favorable career position, squandered his talents in theology and music, and sabotaged his reputation and most valued relationships. It committed him to a course of action for which he had no skills or experience but clear disadvantages. From a strategic point of view, the plan incapacitated Schweitzer’s strengths, exposed his weaknesses, squandered his opportunities, and raised threats that could imperil his economic and bodily survival.

We know that entrepreneurs and business executives, like Schweitzer, often follow strategies that go leftward on the spectrum of economic rationality. They are not cognitively rational by any normative standard, economic or strategic. But we also know that these strategies sometimes succeed, and that some of them are very remarkable despite ex ante economic irrationality. These strategies seem to follow a *behavioral* rationality that allows them to succeed despite economic irrationality, or because of it. I explore this idea in the next section.

## **BEHAVIORAL RATIONALITY**

Where economic rationality focuses on cognition and decision making, behavioral rationality focuses on action and decision implementation. Whereas an economically rational strategy draws on consistent preferences and complete information to produce utility-maximizing choices, behavioral rationality draws on human beliefs, passions and moral values to produce commitment-maximizing courses of action. If economic rationality shows people how to overcome subjectivity, behavioral rationality shows them how to leverage subjectivity to achieve moral, social and economic purposes.

My theme is that behavioral strategy research and practice should pay less attention to the spectrum of economic rationality and more to the spectrum of behavioral rationality.

This is not to say that everyone has ignored behavioral rationality or that we know nothing about it. In behavioral economics, Gerd Gigerenzer (2007) has argued that people follow an “ecological rationality” that produces effective decision making in context. Gary Klein and colleagues (1998) showed the importance of expert intuition in ill-defined, time-pressured environments. In organizational studies, Nils Brunsson (1982) argued that people should focus

less on the rationality of decision processes and more on the beliefs and motivations that generate action, including enthusiasm, commitment, and shared ideologies. James March observed the decoupling of decisions and actions in organizations (March 1971; Cohen, March and Olsen 1972); and Henry Mintzberg and colleagues showed how decisions interact with unplanned actions and external forces to produce “realized strategies” (Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret 1976). Bill Starbuck has written insightfully on the sources of action-generation in organizations, and on the consequences of beliefs for organizational action (Starbuck 1985; Nystrom and Starbuck 1984); Karl Weick has argued for ideologies and commitments as “substitutes for strategy” (Weick 1987); and Jeffrey Pfeffer and Bob Sutton have described the “knowing-doing gap.” (Pfeffer and Sutton 1999)

The problem is that these insights are not properly represented in the mainstream of behavioral strategy. Even before the latest incarnation of behavioral strategy in about 2011 (Levinthal, 2011; Powell, Fox and Lovallo 2011; Gavetti 2012), behavioral researchers in strategy were following in the footsteps of behavioral economics, where experimental research on cognitive biases dominates both the academic research and its dissemination to practitioners (e.g., Lewis 2017, Thaler 2015, Ariely 2015). This is problematic because behavioral strategy does not consist of one paradigm but of three complementary perspectives – Reductionist, Pluralist and Contextualist – which use different theories and methods to triangulate on a set of shared problems (Powell, et al. 2011). Whereas Reductionism focuses on individual decision biases and experimental hypothesis testing, Pluralism uses mixed methods to explore the overall decision environment of the firm, and Contextualism uses qualitative methods to examine management perception, cognitive schema, language, and meaning (see Powell et al., 2011 for details and examples). Achieving a balanced understanding of economic and behavioral rationality requires full contributions from all three perspectives.

Reductionist research on cognitive biases contributes to behavioral strategy by showing how decisions fall short of economic rationality, which sheds light on something real in organizations: strategizing requires analysis and intellect, and business strategists need tools and aptitudes for choosing the right market positions, products, technologies and resources. But fascination with cognitive biases undermines our understanding of strategy by neglecting the psychological and behavioral pathways that bring cognition to bear on what people actually do. Unlike a chess match or lab experiment, business strategy is not primarily a cognitive enterprise, so theories of cognition nearly always mislead us. This is the fallacy of the “chess syndrome” (Powell 2017): whereas grandmaster chess requires great mental powers and cognitive exertion, corporate strategy often involves only one or two options, one of which is the status quo. Whereas

implementing a chess decision requires a player to move a chess piece, implementing business decisions requires managers to deploy social, financial and material resources across geographies, cultures and periods of time. Business strategy is not primarily a game of cognition, and removing cognitive biases – even if it were possible – would not solve its problems.

American philosopher-psychologist William James contributed important insights on decision making. He identified five types of decisions, and argued that four of the five types require almost no cognitive effort on the part of a decision maker: either the evidence points directly to a superior choice, or events intervene to tip the decision one way or another (James 1890). Decision makers exert serious cognitive effort only when the evidence is inconclusive *and* events do not make the decision a foregone conclusion – which, in James’s estimation, is very rare. James wrote, “We are, I think, misled into supposing that effort is more frequent than it is, by the fact that *during deliberation* we so often have a feeling of how great an effort it would take to make a decision *now*. Later, after the decision has made itself with ease, we recollect this and erroneously suppose the effort to have been made then.” (James 1890: 534-5)

James argued that the crucial feature of most decision processes is not the degree of cognitive difficulty, but the capacity to produce the actions required to put the decision into practice. He called this the “impulsive force” of the decision; that is, the degree to which the decision supplies the psychological or behavioral force for getting itself acted on by people.

James identified several kinds of impulsive force, and discussed characteristics and problems associated with each. These forces include the decision’s appeal to pleasure-seeking or pain-avoidance, and its capacity to invoke human passions and appetites such as moral purpose, religious fervency, inspiration, and a zeal for making contributions to society. James argued that these forces do not obey the logic of economic rationality, but a behavioral logic that propels people to do what it takes to achieve their purposes, even if it means sacrificing advantages or ignoring large obstacles to implementation.

Of course, impulsive forces can lead people to act foolishly or impetuously, and can produce spectacular failures. James argued that this happens when people either pursue immoral purposes or become attached to the impulsive force itself, rather than to the purpose it serves. For example, attachment to pleasure as an impulsive force, rather than as a characteristic of the object of choice, leads to pathologies of indulgence and extravagance; and attachment to enthusiasm as an impulsive force, rather than to the object of enthusiasm, leads to behavioral pathologies such as thrill-seeking and zealotry. Thus, impulsive force can both promote the implementation of choices and subvert them through a range of behavioral pathologies.

A strategy can be defined as “behaviorally rational” if it generates the impulsive power for its own implementation, where “impulsive power” refers to subjective mental, physical and/or emotional forces that impel people to engage in directed action to a morally desirable purpose. A strategy has impulsive power if it contains within itself the psychological force for its execution; for example, if it stimulates enthusiasm, interest, commitment, inspiration, religious fervency, or moral resolve (see Table 1). Impulsive forces often appeal to beliefs and ideologies but can also appeal to intellectual curiosity or economic ambitions; or people can be impelled to act on non-ideological stimuli such as novelty or beauty. We say that a strategy is “behaviorally rational” if it invokes its own psychological forces for the achievement of moral purposes.

– INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE –

## **ROMANTICS AND MERCENARIES**

Relatively few business strategies are behaviorally rational in this sense. Business strategies do not generally impel ordinary people to implement them. People can be lured by money and other inducements, but the range and sophistication of these inducements – what we might call “substitutes for enthusiasm” – show the lack of behavioral force behind most business strategies. This is true even when a strategy shows potential for maximizing a company’s strengths, capturing its opportunities, eliminating weaknesses and threats, maximizing profits, and creating sustained competitive advantage. Exciting as these features may be to corporate strategists, to most people they have no impulsive power.

This suggests that many plausible business strategies are “behaviorally incomplete”: economically sound but behaviorally inert. Figure 2 refers to these as *Mercenary* strategies, which can be defined as economically rational strategies that do not impel people to act on them. They are “mercenary” because companies must devise artificial “substitutes for enthusiasm” to convince people to implement them.

– INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE –

Conversely, strategies that people find inspiring or morally engaging can be “economically incomplete”: behaviorally powerful but economically unsound. Figure 2 refers to these as *Romantic* strategies, which can be defined as behaviorally impulsive strategies that fall short of normative economic rationality. They are “romantic” because people pursue them regardless of their degree of economic rationality.



Figure 2 shows four types of strategies. *Complete* strategies contain economic and behavioral rationality; *Incomplete* strategies contain neither; and *Romantic* and *Mercenary* strategies are partially complete in the ways just described.

The question is: Why would any strategist knowingly adopt a strategy that was not *Complete*? In a world where *Complete* strategies exist, why would strategists be satisfied with anything less? If strategists really understood the economic and behavioral dimensions of strategy, why wouldn't they insist on *Complete* strategies?

One answer is that *Complete* strategies are not achieved because human decision makers cannot achieve them. Behavioral decision research shows that human decision makers do not and cannot make perfectly rational choices. If we take seriously the full impacts of cognitive deficits in information processing, errors in estimating uncertain payoffs and probabilities, and neurally-hardwired cognitive biases and heuristics, the best we can expect from human decision makers is a middling kind of bounded rationality.

This does not mean that people cannot improve their cognitive processes or learn to make better decisions. Experimental research reveals *specific* cognitive tendencies – loss aversion, status quo bias, base-rate neglect, availability bias, representativeness bias, temporal myopia – and shows their magnitudes and directions of error, along with conditions that elicit these tendencies. If people could use this knowledge to improve decision making, firms might achieve *Complete* strategies.

The jury is still out on whether this is possible. Researchers have proposed cognitive “counter-measures” and “corporate de-biasing” to improve decision rationality in firms (Larrick, 2004; Heath, Larrick and Klayman 1998; Lovallo and Sibony 2010), but evidence suggests that people cannot make long-term headway against their biases by being told about them or participating in one-off training programs (Kahneman 2011). It is possible that strategy consultants will develop corporate versions of the “nudges” that have succeeded in government and public policy settings; or design collective decision processes to counter the *effects* of individual biases in organizations (see, for example, Liu et al. 2017; Sibony, Lovallo and Powell 2017). However, the evidence so far is not encouraging.

Another possibility is that economic and behavioral rationality are mutually antagonistic; for example, a new strategy process might improve economic rationality while weakening executive commitment to putting the strategy into practice. Brunsson (1982) made this argument, suggesting that the things people must do to improve economic rationality – analyzing competitors, researching markets, assessing strengths and weaknesses, dealing with cognitive biases – demoralize strategists by raising doubts and uncertainties, while consuming time, effort,

and enthusiasm for getting things done. Enthusiastic action requires a degree of purposeful ignorance about inconvenient economic realities like weaknesses, threats and competition. According to Brunsson, “Some irrationalities are necessary requirements for organizational actions. Choices are facilitated by narrow and clear organizational ideologies, and actions are facilitated by irrational decision-making procedures which maximize motivation and commitment.” (p. 29)

This suggests that economic and behavioral rationalities give rise to an optimization problem. If strategists cannot simultaneously maximize them, they must find ways to “complete” their strategies, either by moving the *Romantic* strategy toward economic soundness (without sacrificing too much enthusiasm), or by moving the *Mercenary* strategy toward behavioral soundness (without sacrificing too much economic rationality). This optimization problem suggests that the core problem in behavioral strategy is not the problem of Figure 1, making business strategies more economically rational by overcoming cognitive biases; it is the problem of Figure 2, optimizing strategic behavior and performance by managing the tradeoff between economic and behavioral rationality.

## **A THEORY OF THE SECOND BEST**

The concept of behavioral rationality suggests that decisions and actions are not the same thing, and that strategists can do more than work on their cognitive errors. Behavioral strategy operates on two dimensions rather than one, and offers strategists two levers for improving outcomes: removing barriers to rational cognition and improving behavioral rationality.

This is where Pluralist and Contextualist research can make the most significant contributions. Aside from the fact that removing cognitive errors would not solve the problems of behavioral strategy, even trying to remove them could prove costly: for example, if removing biases from organizations is expensive or time-consuming; or entails excessive decision bureaucracy; or if processes of bias-correction have unintended consequences that spawn new forms of cognitive error. The question comes down to this: If normative economic rationality is not possible, what is the second-best way to strategize? Shall we keep hammering away at economic rationality, whatever the cost? Shall we mass all of our intellectual resources on the war against cognitive biases? Is there another way?

In the two-dimensional world of Figure 2, there is another way. Strategists do not have to push rightward on the rationality spectrum at all costs, but can reorient themselves to the task of optimizing economic and behavioral rationality. The second best solution to bounded rationality is not “slightly less bounded rationality,” but something altogether different. Like a bee in a

window-box, strategists may have to go away from the light in order to get outside. Some companies need to become less *Mercenary* and more *Romantic*; others need to become less *Romantic* and more *Mercenary*; and others need to reboot their strategies to discover a new balance. Whatever the circumstances, strategic problems cannot be solved on the economic dimension.

Going beyond the statics of Figure 2, behavioral thinking raises questions about the origins of strategies, and the paths by which people develop and improve them. It stands to reason that strategies may start as one of the pure types – *Romantic* or *Mercenary* – and evolve into something better as people solve the problems that commonly arise in those types. *Romantic* strategies become better by making them economically viable, and *Mercenary* strategies become better by increasing their impulsive force. This suggests a kind of “production frontier” along which strategists dynamically equate the marginal benefits of economic and behavioral rationality.

But I doubt if this is how effective *Romantic* strategizing actually works. Certainly in the case of Albert Schweitzer, whose career strategy seemed so *Romantic*, this was not how it happened. His strategy came as a shock to many people, but part of the shock was due to the fact that he kept his plans secret, having confided only in a close friend. His actual decision came by a longer process, which Schweitzer described as follows:

The plan which I meant now to put into execution had been in my mind for a long time, having been conceived as long ago as my student days. . . . Even at school I had felt a stirring whenever I got a glimpse of the miserable home surroundings of some of my schoolfellows and compared them with the absolutely ideal conditions in which we the children at Gunsbach lived. . . . Then one brilliant summer morning at Gunsbach, during the Whitsuntide holidays – it was in 1896 – there came to me, as I awoke, the thought that I must not accept this happiness as a matter of course, but must give something in return for it. Proceeding to think the matter out at once with calm deliberation, . . . I settled with myself . . . that I would consider myself justified in living till I was thirty for science and art, in order to devote myself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity. (Schweitzer 1949: 84-85)

So Schweitzer’s career change did not materialize when he was 30 years old, but was decided almost ten years before. The extended time interval between conception and implementation does not fit the *Romantic* stereotype. The degree of deliberation involved in making the decision – one would almost call it formal strategic planning – shows that Schweitzer was not a reckless enthusiast, but seemed aware of the magnitude of his decision and its economic irrationality, and had included them in his planning calculus. For example, Schweitzer wrote:

In my own case I held the venture to be justified, because I had considered it for a long time and from every point of view, and credited myself with the possession of health, sound nerves, energy, practical common sense, toughness, prudence, very few wants, and

everything else that might be found necessary by anyone wandering along the path of the idea. I believed myself, further, to wear the protective armor of a temperament quite capable of enduring an eventual failure of my plan. (Schweitzer 1949: 90-91)

*Romantic* strategizing is not incompatible with formal strategic planning or comprehensive decision processes. Despite mythology to the contrary, I think it is rare for *Romantic* strategies to arrive in a fit of passion, with complete disregard for experience and logic. The continuous balancing of behavioral and economic realities requires strategists to combine thought with action, in a process not so different from scientific reasoning. In Schweitzer's case, the process divided into an early "context of discovery" culminating in his student years, and a much longer "context of justification," which involved information gathering, hypothesis formation, and experimentation (Reichenbach 1938). These *Romantic* processes, like scientific ones, do not always follow clear temporal patterns (Feyerabend 1975). However, Schweitzer's case suggests that *Romantic* strategizing can involve formal planning, sustained reflection, experimentation, and progressive refinement over a period of months or years.

What ultimately sets *Romantic* strategizing apart from other types is not foolhardiness or recklessness, but the fact that it produces novel, irrational-looking outcomes. Comprehensive reflection over an extended period of time, grounded in the impulsive forces in Table 1, can produce surprising strategies. Schweitzer's friends were shocked and confused because they knew he was a thoughtful person not prone to delusional optimism or recklessness. Their real problem was not with Schweitzer or his thought process but with his *strategy*, which seemed incommensurate with everything else they knew about him.

I believe this bundle of properties is characteristic of the best examples of behavioral rationality: they contain a high degree of impulsive force; they involve thoughtful deliberation over a period of time; and they produce strategies that have an "impossible" quality that seems delusional or absurdly risky to other people. However, when risk is assessed in its economic and behavioral totality, *Romantic* strategies need not be foolhardy and can entail less risk than conventional strategies. For Albert Schweitzer, who weighed the risks for many years, the least acceptable risk was staying in Strasbourg, living out a predictable life, and dreaming about the road not taken.

Behavioral strategizing only makes sense if we accept that strategizing involves more than making good decisions. Conventional dichotomies such as "rational vs. emergent" do not capture what is going on. In two-dimensional strategizing, strategies can be rational *and* emergent, or neither. The best strategies contain impulsive forces for their own execution, along with enough thoughtful deliberation to harness these forces for effective results. In refining and channelling these behavioral strategies, people may employ small-scale experiments, short-term

commitments that temporarily set aside unresolved conflicts, and early “stakes in the ground” that guide information search and problem solving. For example, Schweitzer described the following approach:

What would be the character of the activities thus planned for the future was not yet clear to me. I left it to circumstances to guide me. One thing only was certain, that it must be directly human service, however inconspicuous the sphere of it. (Schweitzer 1949: 85)

Between the ages of 21 and 30, Schweitzer tried many forms of humanitarian service – working in prisons, homeless shelters, and orphanages – with no idea of going to Africa. Only after those years of service, many of them disappointing, did he find the opportunity he was looking for, at age 29:

One morning in the autumn of 1904 I found on my writing table in the college one of the green-covered magazines in which the Paris Missionary Society reported every month on its activities. . . . I mechanically opened this magazine, which had been laid on my table during my absence. As I did so, my eye caught the title of an article: *Le besoins de la Mission du Congo* (“The needs of the Congo Mission”). It . . . contained a complaint that the mission had not enough workers to carry on its work in the Gaboon, the northern province of the Congo. . . . Having finished the article, I quietly began my work. My search was over. (Schweitzer 1949: 87-88)

Research in behavioral strategy needs to recognize the strategic power of an idea filled with impulsive force. Decision research is important, but we already know a lot more about decision making than we do about strategic action. The future of behavioral strategy as a field depends less on making incremental advances in decision rationality than on our willingness to take on the full range of behavioral issues that arise in human strategizing.

## POSTSCRIPT

I do not suggest that Schweitzer’s approach always leads to better strategizing, or that his own strategy was an unqualified success. Schweitzer drew criticism in later life for having been a kind of European medical colonialist, holding church services and patronizing the villagers to whom he was providing medical care (Brabazon, 1976). His career path was both more rewarding and more difficult than he expected. After seven years in medical school and a year of internship, he went off in a boat in 1913, along with his wife, who had trained as a nurse, to become a doctor in Lambaréné, a town in the Ogooué District of modern-day Gabon. On arriving he discovered that the hospital had not been completed, there were no qualified staff, and there were few supplies for treating tropical diseases. Over the next 40 years, his daily life consisted largely of building up the hospital, serving as the general practitioner for villagers, and making periodic

trips to Europe to raise money, buy supplies, and report on progress. Along the way, he was taken prisoner of war, published three books in philosophy, two in theology, and two travel memoirs, and in 1952, having become an international celebrity on a par with Albert Einstein or Frank Sinatra, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for contributions to humanity and “reverence for life.”

Schweitzer’s case illustrates something important; namely, that strategists who cannot achieve perfect economic rationality do not have to keep hammering away at rational perfection. An alternative is to focus intelligent thought processes on purposes that generate a high degree of impulsive force. The outcome of these processes may not appear rational, as Schweitzer’s did not. But without this kind of strategizing, the overriding tendency is to produce *Mercenary* strategies that compromise human potential and require costly inducements to put them into practice. *Mercenary* strategies will always be with us, but researchers should not be complicit in promoting strategies focused on economic rationality alone. *Romantic* strategies can be wildly successful, but can also bend in immoral or pathological directions, which is all the more reason to understand their origins and tendencies. Behavioral strategy can contribute to strategy research and practice by bringing moral, social and emotional forces to the forefront, helping people to discover more complete forms of human rationality.

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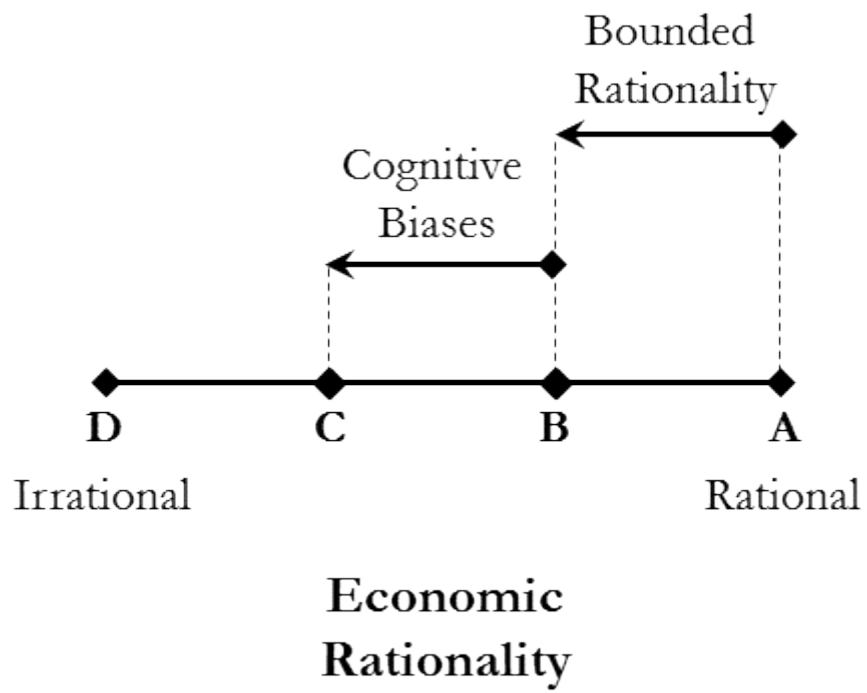
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Figure 1: Economic Rationality



**Figure 2: Economic and Behavioral Rationality**

<b>Behavioral Rationality</b>	Rational	<b>Romantic</b> (Economically Incomplete)	<b>Complete</b>
	Irrational	<b>Incomplete</b>	<b>Mercenary</b> (Behaviorally Incomplete)
		Irrational	Rational
		<b>Economic Rationality</b>	

**Table 1: Economic and Behavioral Rationality**

<b>Economic Rationality</b>	<b>Behavioral Rationality</b>
<u>Focus</u> Making decisions Right thinking Cognition Objectivity	<u>Focus</u> Getting things done Right action Behavior Subjectivity
<u>Microeconomic</u> Complete preferences Consistent preferences Transitive preferences Utility maximization Profit maximization Complete information Identifying all options Accurate forecasts of probabilities Accurate forecasts of payoffs Freedom from cognitive bias	<u>Impulsive forces</u> Enthusiasm Passion Interest Curiosity Caring Compassion Calling Spiritual purpose Moral purpose Social purpose Political purpose Patriotism
<u>Strategic</u> Systematic formal decision process Building on strengths Improving weaknesses Capturing opportunities Removing threats Achieving competitive advantage Optimizing economic risk/return	Loyalty Emotions Passionate beliefs Passionate ideologies Beauty Excellence Fulfilling human potential