

Secular Karma

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Karma is originally a religious concept, which has been very popular, and many claim the validity and manifestations of it. Academics, on the other hand, introduces another concept, History repeats itself, which, if perused, is a secular and broader interpretation of karma.

All events and actions from every human to have ever lived since the dawn of human civilisation constitutes a set of human social events. And, following the bell curve theory from Mathematics, each event has a probability associated with it, the occurrence of which depends on this probability, and other factors. When I act, and if my action is new, it is added to the set, but if it is already in the set, then the probability of that particular event increases. Going by the human behaviour, any event encourages its repetition, which is also referred to as group behaviour under some circumstances. Kindness encourages kindness while hatred encourages hatred. Thus, any committed event increases its chances of being repeated, through any of the member of the human species, in any time frame. This leads to the statement, History repeats itself. The nature of that event is passed on through family, friends and generations.

Now, considering karma: When a person acts, she is destined to be the recipient of a similar-natured act, in the future. If she commits an immoral act, she is destined to be the recipient of the same in the future. Previously, I've mentioned that upon acting, the probability of repetition of that event increases. Therefore, any event triggers a chain reaction, wherein this act is likely to be repeated. The actor, among many others (who may or may not have committed a similar act in their past) become recipients of this very act. Thus, this probability, when viewed from an individual perspective, is ignorantly interpreted as karma.

In Mathematics, there is a probability distribution, called Normal Distribution (a.k.a. Bell Curve), as displayed in Figure. 1. It captures the behaviour of most of the events and situations in the universe (hence the name "normal"). The large sum of (small) random variables often turns out to be normally distributed, contributing to its widespread application. Its validity is well proven. The same is applicable to the distribution of the various actions, interactions and behaviour of people. If every action (event) from every human that has ever lived since the dawn of human civilisation is recorded and plotted, such would be the shape of the graph. Much of the actions that are normal, i.e., those whose event-points lie within the first or second standard deviations are those which are most probable of occurring. Those "normal" actions are the most common among people. Those actions which are rare to find, i.e., which are positive and negative extremes lie away from the centre. Consequently, those who commit these rare

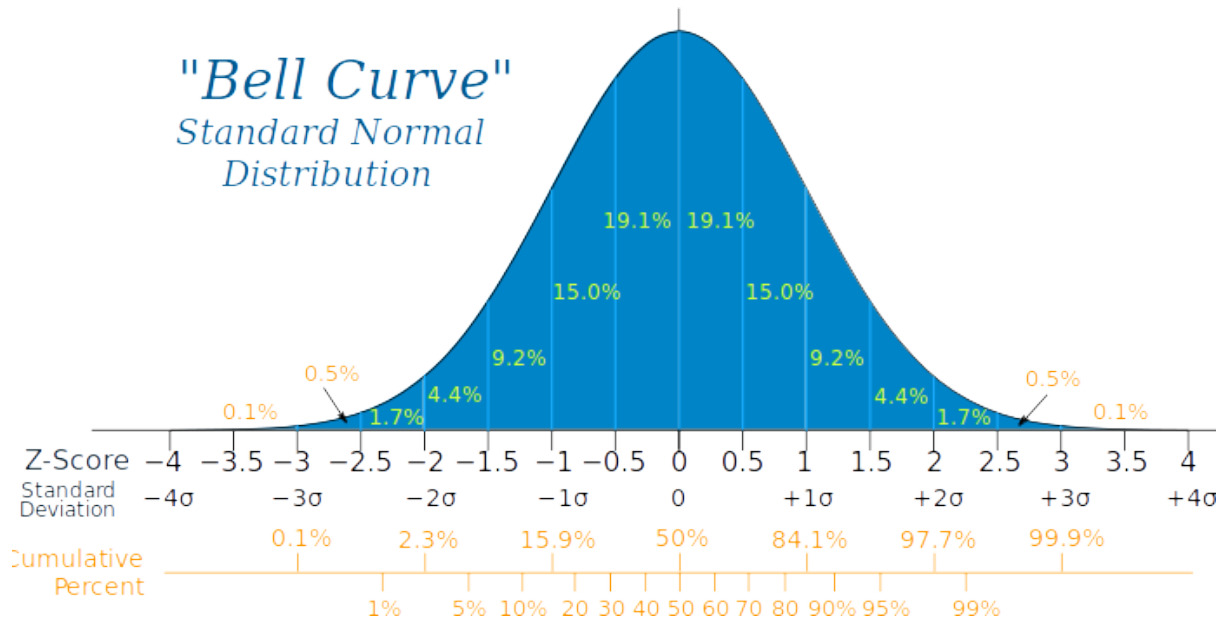


Figure 1: Standard Normal Distribution (Bell Curve)

actions are also rare. Now, more an action is committed, more it drifts towards the centre, and this acts as progressive reinforcement. But, given that the normal events occupy the centre, it leads to the conclusion that such natured-actions are the most probabilistic.

However, the initial probability of committing an event is itself probabilistic. A rare-natured action if committed, no doubt, has equal, if not more influence than the normal ones. However, their perpetuation and sustenance decays fast, as people naturally drift towards the normal centre. Rare-natured actions are rare, but if and when they are committed, they do influence others to commit the same. But, given the rarity of such actions, the attitudes they represent are rarely retained as well. We do witness random acts of kindness, now and then (rarely, in other words). However, if a normal act is committed, it doesn't demand much energy from the actor to sustain it or the attitude that accompanies it. Therefore, the chances of it being committed, and people being recipients of it is naturally increased, drifting more towards the centre [in Figure. 1].

Speaking in the perspective of Karma, if a person commits a positive act, then no doubt, it will be replicated by others, but it becomes hard to sustain it, unless there is constant reinforcement. This is where the general social attitude matters. Each society has a unique distribution. Over time, this external reinforcement might change the nature of the person itself. And therefore, there is also the case wherein, culturally, certain types of action might be more probable. However, given that it cannot be isolated from the world, it is bound to gradually decline. Reverting back to Karma, if a malevolent act is committed, it too will be replicated by others. Therefore, in an event set comprising a mixture of positive and negative events, a person who has committed a positive action might be recipient of a negative action, i.e., he might not get what he deserves, and vice versa. In the rare occurrence when an undeserving person receives more than what he deserves, people ignorantly and incorrectly regard it as luck. But, in fact it is an interplay of probability.

Further, a person committing positive action is generally someone who is mature, responsible or simply a benevolent citizen. This inner alignment of values and morals is visible in their personality, attitude towards others, or in their actions. Many times, certain traits are misattributed. A completely neutral, or even an undeserving person is regarded as malevolent, or vice versa, without a deep evaluation. In some cases, bad intentions are disguised as positive actions. These are the cases of false positive data instances. Therefore, looking at all these misattributed events it can be concluded that even Karma is never accurate. A rare self-occurrence or self-repetition of an event doesn't prove its validity. It just proves that Karma is probabilistic at best; no one is destined to receive anything in return, especially in proportion to the nature of their actions and attitudes. What one receives is a matter of probability of that natured-action, at that particular instance of time and space.

Considering the large expanse of human and natural history, the actions and events, rather than their impact on the actors is important. An action when committed increases its chances of being repeated. An anti-state protest is a common example, which happens across the world, under different but similar circumstances. The surreptitious involvement of any non-state actors in instigating such protests isn't unusual either. Many contemporary nations are guilty of such clandestine activities, though they reject such accusations bluntly. Subservient activities are as old as human civilisation itself, with it being available even in coded form (Arthashastra). Wars, protests, suppression etc. are events that are common in human history and hence have greater probability associated with them. Their next occurrence is not a matter of if, but when and where.

In a recent study¹ conducted in Europe among the Czech-Slovakia population, it was evident that the decision of first time committer(s) largely influenced the behaviour of the successors. According to the research, hostility towards ethnic minorities is contagious and the acceptability of destructive behaviour towards them can easily change depending on how others behave. "Social norms regulating anti-social behaviour are very fragile if this behaviour is aimed at ethnic minorities," the researchers told.

The study was conducted in eastern Slovakia, a district with a large Roma ethnic minority, in 2013, based on a game in which the players 327 school children from the majority ethnic Slovak population aged 13 to 15 first received 2 Euros each. Then they had to decide whether to pay 0.2 euros to reduce their rival's funds by half a "destructive" choice or whether to keep the payoffs unchanged.

Next, in groups of three, they played against potential rivals represented by a list of 20 typical Slovak majority or Roma minority names, with all three players making their choice one after another. The hypothesis that susceptibility to follow peers becomes magnified when harm is done to ethnic outgroup members compared with co-ethnics was tested.

The results were "striking" the study pointed out a significant influence of peers in decision-making on doing harm to the minority. If the first child to choose was "peaceful"

¹social contagion.

towards the minority, only 19 per cent of the second decision-makers were hostile. But a total of 77 per cent of second decision-makers showed hostility if the first child to choose had been hostile. Among the third decision-makers, only 18 percent were destructive if one or both their predecessors were peaceful, but 88 percent were destructive if the previous two showed hostility. Besides, the participants saw hateful behaviour towards the Roma as more socially acceptable if somebody else treated the Roma with hate.

While this study is specific to the Slovak-Roma population, the majority-minority differentiation, however, isn't provincial. Universally, there is differentiation based on ethnicity, race, religion, sex, caste, etc. And, the basis of this study can be safely applied universally, while being confident of similar, if not the same, results. This study broadly conveys two things: One, the more an action is committed, its chances of being repeated also increases. A destructive behaviour encourages the same, and a positive behaviour encourages the same as well. Also, the actor, along with many others are likely to be the recipients of such action. Two, each culture has its own set of events and therefore a unique normal distribution.

Corroborating this with Karma, once one commits an action, its probability increases, which implies that more people, including the actor, are susceptible, or destined, to be a recipient of this very natured-action. This is Karma; this is History Repeats Itself; and this is the Probabilistic Distribution of Human Events. Now, is it the destiny of the minority to face gratuitous retribution at the hands of the majority, even if most of them aren't guilty of anything? What was their past Karma for having deserved this? This hatred and violence against the minority doesn't seem justified, because it isn't. Karma cannot justify such actions. This only happens because of a trigger and accumulation of probabilities that follows.