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Sunday, March 11, 2007

Is it ever okay to lie? Part I

Maybe a more pertinent inquiry might be on whether there is any kind of maxim we can make in regard to some universal or absolute ethic. In simply stating this question, I am presupposing axiomatic, the nature of honesty. This is because I am not relying first on whether lying is contingent on the consequences, the outcome of the event, who is involved, or what or who is benefited. Instead, I am posing the proposition that honesty itself is a virtue, existent for its own sake, and that existence is something we should strive for. This supposition produces two premises:

- (i) Existence has value
- (ii) Honesty exists

In the case of the prior, we have to assert that at the heart of any metaphysical inquiry, we have to rely on the existence of something. The origins of reason presupposes there is an object to reason. To question if something exists, presupposes that existence is a truth. Though the argument can be made that something stems from nothingness, we are still then on the second iteration (after the initial void) presupposing existence. For these reasons, we shall assert, then, that existence is our primary source of validation. To value something, it has to first have existence. Otherwise, we are speaking nonsense. Even if we are just talking of hypotheticals (e.g., for the sake of argument, let's say unicorns exist....), the existence of something is our valuation point. Pragmatism aside, let us concern ourselves with the epistemological concern of whether honesty exists.

The second premise we concern ourselves with, now, is whether honesty exists. Though almost as trivial as the first, what are we speaking of in regards to honesty? Is it some platonic Idea that exists in the realm by which reason can grasp, and when brought into the practical world of reality we end up with a diminished version? That argument can be made, but I do not think we need to presuppose the Forms of Plato to reach them. Instead, we are speaking of logic and reason at its core. When we deal with evaluating something e.g., two-valued logic systems, we concern ourselves with whether the value indicates one thing or some other. Inherent to any system then, we have some consideration that there is something to evaluate. Again, unless we are talking nonsense (which makes this appear trivial), then honesty is intertwined with the reasoning, with the logic or with the valuation of some system. I cannot discuss whether something is true or false unless true and false exist. I cannot worry whether $1+1=5$ unless there is a truth value that exists in this statement. If I say I ate a hot dog for lunch March 2nd 2005, there is inherent a real evaluative context to it. This is the nature of honest that exists necessarily.

The jump from (i) to (ii), however, does need to be made known. Granted we have existence, even if it stems from a prior iteration of nothingness, we are then given a variable. We shall say we have x . This gives us our first valuation i.e., $x=x$; Given that we have axiomatically have to accept existence (less we be in the impossible state of nihilism), and thus implies a valuation ($x=x$), we can speak of honesty as the inherent nature of this valuation. This concludes the metaphysical analysis of this argument.

To go from our metaphysical consideration, that existence provides value, and consequently we can tie it with some kind of truth or honesty, we have to speak of things now in practical terms. As I said, the nature of honesty need not concern itself with the metaphysics of all of reality. Therefore, I do not have to concern, for the sake of this discussion, how we go from $x=x$ to the system of reality we have, whether we are theological, naturalists, et al. Instead, since honesty is inherent to any subgroup of existence, we can

say that we have existence (E), and all this exist therein. Since honesty is also a quality of E, whatever one assumes in their world view has to be contained in E, and therefore carry with it the quality of honesty.

Our question then becomes apparent in regards to ethics. Is it ever okay to lie?

This ethical concern comes into being in regard to conduct. For a lie, let us say we know a truth (whether actually correct or not), and we say an alternative to it, then we have lied. For it is not on the accuracy of our statement that honesty exists. It is on how we conduct ourselves with the truth. If someone asks for directions and I believe they need go left, when in fact, they needed to go right, I did not lie. I was simply wrong to the actual truth value (cogency) of this evaluation. Now, lets say I believe they needed to go left, when in fact they needed to go right, and being a liar, I tell them to go right, I may have been correct in reality, but I have lied to them in practice. Therefore, the accuracy of our valuation is not what makes something honest, but it is reflecting in our conduct to the truth we are asserting. For as I have just demonstrated, one can lie, but give true information. One can also be honest, and give misinformation. For this reason alone, one could argue for the requirement that we should become as knowledgeable as possible so as not to spread misinformation when we think it is true. However, that does not concern us here. Instead, given whatever limit of knowledge we have, whether great or small, what is of interest is our conduct of honesty so that, misinformation or not, we are consistent in what we give.

This consistency is important. For if I were to tell one person to go left, when they needed to go right, and likewise with the next person, and I tell them to go right, my information is inconsistent. They both are looking for the same place, but I am being honest in some cases and dishonest in others. This is not rational and would be a sure mark of a madman, for no one could trust what this person has to say. He tells us to go every which way when telling us to go to the same location. He surely, then, is insane. Therefore, on the grounds of rational consistency, if one is to be honest or a liar, one should at least be as such.

Now then, let us consider in a complete sense that we are not inconsistent with our information. Instead, we are either honest or we are liars, by in large, in our conduct. Which is the noble good? To be honest or dishonest? Surely dishonesty, as its name entails, cannot be the virtue. One could argue on the grounds of how it treats other rational agents, for we assume on the grounds of consistency we are conducting as rational agents, amongst rational agents. Therefore, treating other rational agents with lies is to subject them to an irrational consideration. Such an act of devaluating another rational agent could be taken as unethical. However, this is not too far from a Kantian perspective of applying one's act universally. For if we were all liars, we would lose function as a rational society. Why is this? Because simply that one is not honest does not give us an alternative truth. I may lie about x, then I am promoting its complement. This means anything but x. Unless there are only two possible considerations, say x and y, then there would be a multitude of other possibilities. If everyone were liars, we would have a world devoid of specific valuations (x), but in every case of multiple alternatives, we would then assert the truth value (knowing everyone is lying) to every other variable of valuation. This makes it impossible to operate unless we have enough people giving claims that completely remove the other possible alternatives until we are left with the opposing actual truth (y). Since this is not practical or realistic, we can assert along with inconsistency, that a world of liars will not work. Lying by its very nature, as in this thought experiment shows, is irrational.

With that in mind, let us then consider a world of honesty. If everyone were honest, then truth and information is clean and clear as well as it can be articulated and as well as it is known, remembering that the amount of knowledge one has in accuracy is not important here. Surely, by the fact that lying is not rational, it cannot then be virtuous. Then we must make the claim that honesty is a virtue. From then, we

have to pose if absolute honesty (never lying) is good, and if it is practical.

What does it mean to be virtuous? Virtue stems from the Latin word for habit. What is virtuous is what is habitual. Aristotle claimed to extend this view of virtue in his theory of ethics to that which is not only our habit of action for each person, but that habit by which we strive in excellence. In other words, those things we are meant to do, and I will say should do, we do them with excellence or to the best of our ability. Surely we can assert that lying is not good for it breeds conflict as irrationality inherently does to any system. Honesty promotes the consistent and rational. Therefore, honesty as a virtue is the act of articulating our truth most excellently or most readily. The virtuous person of honesty is one who freely, and without abatement, strives to give truth as far as she knows it. But is honesty a virtue? Let me say instead, does honesty promote excellence? Regardless of how one defines virtue, it should be obvious that the inconsistent and the dishonest interfere with habit (which needs consistency) and interferes with clear action which is better seen through open truth -- honesty. Therefore, honesty is the quality of valuating the truth. If from x to y to z requires mechanical analysis stepwise through some process, surely then the faster we can deal with this and find the truth between x to y to z, the more excellent our work and the more readily we are to habituate (become consistent with). Therefore, honesty as an evaluate quality within valuation is a virtue by which we value with excellence. To not be honest is to cause conflict, and to knowingly promote dishonesty (lie or say the alternative to our perceived truth) is to attempt to cause non-excellence and ruin consistent action.

Let me put our abstraction to rest here, for surely we can say lying is bad and honesty is good. To be virtuous in honesty is to do good through not concealing truth. But the pragmatist will say that there are times when honesty can lead to problems in practical matters, and lying can be beneficial. Surely then, with such situations and circumstances, we have to admit there needs to be room to "wiggle". Surely then, one might suggest that the intensity of the lie, or the alternative from the truth as a degree of distance should be utilized. For if the gap between your perceived truth, and the alternative you give is not great, then the lie is not too bad. For between saying go left and go right we have 180 degrees, if I tell them to go 178 degrees off course, it is less bad as the full 180. Surely then, if I tell them to go 90 degrees from left (the perceived truth), I am not telling them as bad a lie as to go right for the distance they'll eventually have wrongly gone would not be as severe as if they were to have gone 180 degrees to the right instead. But can we say the degree of a lie gives it some amount of value or virtue? For saying to go left would be honest and virtuous, then saying to go 2 degrees off course would be close to virtuous. Should we then allow such "white lies"? These are the context by which people argue for the sake of dishonesty. That in some cases it can be helpful or useful, while in others, the degree of dishonesty should value it.

Friday, March 30, 2007

Blind Allegiance to Free Trade, and the benefit of Protectionism

Taken from [Greg Mankiw's](#) personal blog post, "[My Father is Darth Vader](#)", he quotes an article from the [Wall Street Journal](#). The short of it is that one of his professors, Alan Blinder, turned to the "Dark Side" by advocating policies *against* free trade (protectionist). In it, Mankiw is quoted as stating, "Well, no, the economics is basically the same ... more things are tradable than ... in the past, and that's a good thing."

This kind of thinking I claim is, as the article also points out, largely accepted by most economists. It is the "popular thought" that with an increase in trade for a country, it increases GDP, thus it is a positive for the society and everyone will be better off. Mankiw is also quoted as saying, "Does it matter from an economic standpoint whether items produced abroad come on planes and ships or over fiber optic cables?" This is a very good point because on the one hand Blinder is looking out for the prosperity or welfare of the state. On the other, Mankiw is pointing out the obvious benefits of increased trade through the use of technology.

I think neither are seeing the total picture. Blinder has good intentions, but restricting trade because a technology boom that will allow costs to go down, jobs to be located conveniently and "goods" to be traded over fiber optic is not a good idea. Why? It's a good thing! As I pointed out in my [Socialism and Efficiency](#) post, technology is a key element in the growth of an economy. For the moment, let us assume Mankiw's principle that increases in GDP is an obviously good thing and good goal to aim at. Blinder is not saying to reduce technology, but he is prohibiting the benefits of it. This is not good for the state, or the global economy because we have to always remember that on the global level, for now, we are a closed economy. If the USA had one state that was completely backwards in what it did, it would be a drag on the United States' GDP. Likewise, a state that is going backward and restricting trade through the benefit of technology is dragging down everyone else. In this case, however, we are looking at one event - trade.

My conclusion is to side with Mankiw on this. Blinder is foolish in this advocacy, but I do not think he has gone to the dark side. The reason Mankiw states this is because Blinder, as I mentioned before, is looking out for the welfare of the state by restricting trade. This is called protectionist, or protectionist trade policies. The scare is that by opening up markets to off shoring privatization, where for instance, Microsoft sends its tech support to India for cheap labor because it makes no difference to the user whether they're calling someone down the street or half way across the world, it cuts costs and lets Microsoft make more (and of course, earn more profits for our benefit of their products, but all that is a wholly other topic). The complaint is that a state opens up their market this way and they will lose jobs at home. This was a scare for America when tech jobs were moving away. This is, of course, a serious issue. I do not think, however, along the topics of free trade or protectionism, it is something of a concern.

The reason I don't think the moving of jobs abroad is as much a trade issue as it is a spatial issue is because I view the world as a global society and economy. The displacement of jobs from one state to another is no different than displacement of jobs from one city to another. Jobs move. People move. Telecommuting is just one way we are able to work. We do not scream and shout when someone gets to work from home while someone else commutes 100 miles a day into the big city to work, do we?

This is [Urban Economics](#). This is not about trade. The reason it is an issue is because from, shall I say, an International Political Economy perspective, we are dealing with the nationalism of a state and its concern

with its population and its economy. This is no different than California (or the governor) complaining and trying to solve issues with "keeping jobs here." Cities have to build revenue, they want to make sure money is kept locally so taxes are paid to them through whichever means (jobs) and they can improve the city. Same goes to states (for the US), to nations (also called states politically aka nation-states). Remember, however, we are a global economy. The money is still there, but it is an issue of allocation. In urban economics, we speak of agglomeration effects or agglomeration economies. This is the process where a city grows and people and jobs move in or between cities or locations. New York is a good symbol of this because it has everything. Rural areas are lacking. The more people that localize somewhere, the more jobs and different variety of jobs will move there. There are also other effects that pull certain industries to certain places e.g., we have Silicon Valley here in California. The reasons and the times that these types of industrial centers spring up has to do with the businesses themselves, but this is not of a prime consideration. Let me just say that there are reasons jobs locate to certain places. It is no different if businesses are moving out of California to another part, or to another state or to another country. To California, it is a loss of its revenue so California is concerned. Is the US? Only if it leaves the US. Is it really a problem? Not necessarily.

When does this really become an issue? When it causes conflicts with the welfare and the growth of an economy (for some sectors of business, or countries, or of the world grow at different rates). Let me address these separately.

The welfare, as I mentioned earlier, is what Blinder is concerned about. Foolishly, opening up trade through the benefit of technology is hardly going to be a problem for a state. If they have the technology, they should use it, otherwise it's slowing growth most likely. The loss of jobs will be supplemented somehow. Other industries will spring up (as long as the infrastructure and resources are there). The resources are not disappear, it is that we have laborers local and jobs elsewhere. If you have laborers, you can still have jobs, just not the ones that would have been there had you not opened up the trade. Makes sense right? Let me drop this then. E-Trade is not the end of the world!

The growth is the issue. Now I said earlier we'll side with Mankiw that increases in GDP is our goal, and that free trade gets us there. As I've explained previously, it is not free trade that justifies why Blinder is being foolish in his advocacy. Blinder is making a good fight (in theory) by concerning himself with the benefits of [protectionism](#) and the welfare of the state.

[Nobel Prize](#) laureate [Amartya Sen](#), in his remarkable book "[Development as Freedom](#)" shows some basic and easily reasoned examples as to how GDP is not the end all solution for welfare. An increase in GDP does not equate to removal of economic problems. The loss or lack of high GDP also does not equate to poverty and lack of welfare. Of course, a state that has more GDP has more potential (more resources) to improve itself, but it comes down to how those resources are used. Sen points out that even in the USA, adult black males have incomes far greater than those of developing countries, but have lower life expectancies. Therefore, increased GDP does not mean your citizens just live longer, which is a cultural geographical measure of how well a society is doing. Also, some less developed countries (LDC) such as [Kerala](#), have low GDP, but exceptionally high literacy rates, especially among women. This shows that with the right institutions (education funding and structure, and cultural approval -- for the women), you don't need the large amount of money thrown wastefully at it to make social improvements. Instead, effective and efficient spending (given cultural acceptance allows it), can be done at low levels of GDP and still greatly improve a society (literacy, again, is another social metric). The conclusion is thus, to increase the "freedoms" or the choices or capacities to do things (more than just rights/liberties, but actually being able to act on them for the things one has reason to value), it is not simply a question of increasing income (GDP is aggregate income), but what is done with that. It is a question of what

institutions and what infrastructure and what spending is done with the money. GDP gives us an idea of the resources. If they are allocated effectively, then we can improve society. Ineffectively, and we are wasting resources or moving them on to be allocated to someone else (trade!). The notion that increased income equals better life is not substantiated. I may be richer if I have more money, but if I blow that needlessly, I am not going to be better off, especially in the long run. Simple right? Don't know why the rest of the economists are blindly aligned with this principle Mankiw presents.

Lastly, what about these protectionist claims? In an easy to read, but involved book on protectionism throughout the historical development of the more developed countries (MDC), "[Kicking Away the Ladder](#)", by Ha-Joon Chang, details how protectionist policy was actually one major factor in "climbing the ladder" to where we are today. The problem is, the LDCs are being forced to jump into free trade with claims like Mankiw makes as being *the* solution to ending poverty and bringing them "up to speed" with the rest of "us". Effectively, it is argued, we are kicking away the ladder we climbed so no one else can get up here. This is, in fact, counter-intuitive. Britain, America, Germany, Sweden, etc all used protectionist policies and infant industry trade protection. These countries would not live up to patent laws, steal workers, engineers and technology from abroad all to protect their interests and their growth. They would place tariffs on imports that today would make us cringe! Britain built its clothing industry up by placing tariffs on raw imports but opening exports so people bought domestically and they increased revenue on their trading (exporting). It wasn't until these countries were developed, powerful and economically and industrially strong before they opted to abide by patent laws, and increase legal responsibility and push for "free trade", all of which was mainly the past century. Now, with the developing countries of today trying to protect and grow their industries, trying to build up their economies, even through legal means of some sort (because we obviously wouldn't want them stealing workers or technology or breaking patents), are then scolded and refused funding by the IMF and World Bank. Developing countries trying to make it in the global economy, get some agglomeration on that scale are told to open their markets, privatize and follow the rules and dictum of the "already developed" who have already kicked away the ladder!

For these reasons, and from a historical note, we can see protectionism has its place, and where beneficial, should be allowed, if only for the reason of increasing their local GDP (and not the pocket books of private industries that would move in or take jobs abroad -- Blinder's fear). For welfare reasons, we can see, though, that GDP is not the end-all solution. Along with developing industries, a state needs to focus on the infrastructure and allocation of the resources it is getting and will get. Without those, even getting funds for support from abroad or from the IMF or World Bank are useless (as is shown in examples of post-communist Russia, all of which are for another discussion, but "[Globalization and its Discontents](#)" by [Joseph Stiglitz](#) discusses infrastructure needs extensively, and the failings of the IMF). We need to realize there is more to welfare than an increase in income. We need to realize there's more to economics than free trade, and the blind allegiance to it fails to realize where its counter is beneficial, and where free trade is problematic (it is much like the [laissez faire](#) claim for markets as if they never have anything wrong and governments are just a problem, which is highly false and empirically proven so). Blinder might see this, but his claims against trade along the internet route is foolish and counter-productive. The negatives are minimal, and there are many other issues against free trade that are more important and more prevalent. Though Mankiw is correct in his argument against Blinder, it is made on the wrong pretense, as GDP and free trade are not the end-all solution and goal for economics, as Sen and Stiglitz and Ha-Joon Chang demonstrate.

Tuesday, April 03, 2007

Character, Commodity and Convenience

Preface (added Saturday, April 28th, 2007)

The reason for this analysis is to fulfill two purposes or satisfy two issues I find in common thoughts on subjects. The first purpose is to provide a direction toward what I will call my Relational Theory of ethics. The second purpose and issue to satisfy is that common misconception that consent makes something ethically permissible. This is a gross generalization that is often argued when one person reasons why they had casual consensual sex. Many can relate that they either have used or heard "but we both consented" or "there was a mutual agreement". The problem if this is the basis for moral permissibility as implied by these justifications, then we quickly and easily fall into a logical inconsistency that my model demonstrates. Instead, the inference of my analysis is that there must simply be more involved and that consent may or may not be relevant (though if not, will cause other logical inconsistencies, so it is simply inherent in a mutual exchange to be fair -- it must be consented). This also is the basis of my relational theory, that the other issue is the way we perceive our justifications. All too often do people rely on consent as the only requirement for our behavior with other human beings. The point and purpose of this analysis and my ethical theory is that relations are not only important, but are the gauge of the scope in our array of ethical choices. The value of consent and the nature of relations and their importance will be discussed in a further analysis, but for now, the issue of this flawed mindset and inconsistent thinking derived from generalizing consent and its moral value is demonstrated.

The goal of this discussion is to draw a relation between a common economic experience we are all familiar with -- commodities -- and that of the concept of convenience. Furthermore, we are going to relate this ethically to our choice theory and follow that with a relation to one's character as a means of prescribing ethical choices in how we deal with people as commodities and our relationships in general.

[Webster](#) defines a [commodity](#) as

- 1 : an economic good:
- 2 a : something useful or valued b: convenience

The latter comes from its etymology as found on the [American Heritage Dictionary](#):

[Middle English *commodite*, from Old French, **convenience**, from Latin *commoditas*, from *commodus*, **convenient**]

Clearly, the very term commodity, which we deal with every day, stems from the concept of convenience. The commodities we buy from our markets are, in essence, to offer us conveniences in life. If I buy a car, or a TV dinner, or a video game, then I am having the convenience from having to walk, or make a meal from scratch or find some other means to entertain myself. Commodities are those things that we go through some transaction for (economics), to enhance the conveniences we enjoy in life. There is nothing wrong with this. This is the relation with have with these items because it is their *purpose*.

The ethical issue I wish to address is what I call *reducing a rational agent into a commodity*. This is not a new idea, as we have seen from socialist e.g., Marxists, philosophy about laborers being turned into inputs or some other function of the great economic machine. In fact, it is the general humanist philosophy that there is something wrong when we reduce a person into something simplified and categorized by its utility and performance -- something less than human. In the specific case of this discussion, I am referring to when we, by our choices, reduce a human being into a convenience in our life. As commodities serve the purpose of our convenience, so to,

then, we reduce another rational agent into serving our purpose by benefiting us in some way by their convenience. This is the fundamental moral issue I address.

To begin this analysis I will set a dichotomy. Too often one argues a straw man and extends it to claim I am saying one cannot have any kind of interaction with another person without it being immoral and exploitive. This split will be based on the social context of the interaction. One's relation to the other rational agent is the context and framework by which we evaluate the exchange with that other person. What I do or say or whatever with a friend may be wholly different to that of a stranger. In the one case it is permissible because of the relation, the friendship. In the latter case, there is no relationship (beyond the generic "interaction" definition of relationship), so doing such things would not be permissible. Extending this logic, this is the dichotomy I am to use. The relationship will become important, but in the context that there is no relationship with the other rational agent, it produces conflicts.

Now, I stated an ethic prior, that we should not reduce a rational agent into a category based on utility and performance. This is not to say we do not, or should not categorize. Certainly in the generic definition of relationship, we can define our relationship to people and "stranger" is pretty broad in who fits in it (99+% of the world). We also have other kinds of relationships such as manager-worker relationships, friend relationships, co-worker relationships. It is where these people fit in our lives that define largely our behavior with them in a lot of ways.

In analyzing this reduction to a commodity ethic, does it apply throughout all categories? If I reduce my friend into a convenience in my life, or that is to say, she is a friend because she is convenient, then yes the ethic applies. In fact, it is simply a re-working of the categorizations. That is to say, these are not set compartments. People often move from one to another, or may fit in multiples. A co-worker may become your boss, or may become your friend or maybe even your significant other, for instance. This ethic is to apply a reshaping of those who are defined by their convenience, and those who are not, plain and simple. This is not to say I may not have convenience from a friend, but they are my friend otherwise, even when absolutely difficult to deal with or I can't stand them. A commodity on the other hand is utilized at our liberty, and this is where putting rational agents into that category at all is the unethical choice, and I will extend this to if we allow that, what does it say about our character? For what choices and what people fit in that category and our justification allow them, and dealing with them in such a manner speaks of our character, since it is the essence of our moral motivation.

If we accept this ethic, then it would incline us to have a moral imperative to not just make the choices to keep people out of this category of commodities, but to more fully deal with our relations with other people such that they are not placed into this category of commodities.

When, then, does it occur that we treat someone or relate to someone as a convenience? Certainly when someone is exploited that would fit. However, most people usually have no problem with that condition, and accept we should not exploit other rational agents. The confusion I find is when people agree that if one consents to being a convenience, it makes it moral. That would be like saying suicide is wrong, but if the person wants to kill themselves, then it is a moral choice. That analogy is not good enough to construct an ethical formulation, however. Let us proceed on the notion that we are going to look at this from a singular party view. If it is the case that the ethics of consensual convenience is found not tied up with the consent of the other party, but in the actions of the person, singularly, then we need only concern ourselves with looking at this from a singular party view.

(i) Person A consents to x for the benefit of Person B, where x is some event that satisfies the criteria of satisfying person B.

In this simplistic form we can place many things in x . The two most usable and diverse topics are sex and slavery. I use these two because the argument against this ethic is generally a hedonist/utilitarian one where pleasure,

utility, or satisfaction are the moral metric. This ethic, as I have explained, goes beyond those. Sex is found, hedonistically, as a great pleasure and if consented there is no reason not to do it. Slavery is found completely opposite that it should never be allowed, but superficially utilitarian theory does permit it. The key here is consent. Let us use these examples:

(a) Joe consents to *slavery* for the benefit of Smith.

(b) Joanne consents to *sex* for the benefit of Smith

Remembering we are not concerned with the benefit of Joe or Joanne in this case, for a number of reasons, most importantly is that we assume if Joe or Joanne (person A) consents then they do so because they will be benefited. Person A and B can easily be swapped and the example and ethics still apply the same. Therefore, we do not concern ourselves with that.

The usual argument is that slavery can not be compared because it only benefits Smith. This is incorrect.

[Webster](#) defines [Slavery](#) as

2 : submission to a dominating influence

This definition will suffice. To elaborate, however, Joe submitting to Smith is obviously a trade off. On the one hand, Joe loses his freedom to select his employer at will. Joe loses his freedom to go as he pleases. Joe loses his freedom. It is for this lose of freedom many will exclaim this is never beneficial to Joe. This nearsighted perspective fails to consider the subtleness of slavery, for I am not speaking specifically of the slave trading of my US history. Instead, I am speaking of slavery in general by which even migrant workers who are bound to their work, brought over illegally from their country (but choose so for a number of reasons we should all be familiar with this day and age, so I will not go at lengths to explain) can be considered slaves. Even impoverished people who are stuck in their job unable to successfully find a much better one, or get educated to do so, or have a family to raise and work multiple jobs and 80+ hour work weeks to survive. These people consent to this lifestyle because there is benefit (survival for instance, or support of family and their improved lifestyle, etc). It is for these simple and basic reasons that slavery can benefit the slave I am not condoning slavery, far from it, since I am speaking that both things are immoral here.

Therefore, given that we can assert both parties are benefited in some manner, I shall expand on the ethical formulation as follows:

(ii) Person A consents to x for the benefit of person B, resulting in an increase in y for both parties, where y is now some benefit for each party e.g., utility, pleasure, satisfaction, et cetera.

The criticism here might be that in one case both person's are receiving the same benefit and in some cases they do not so y cannot be used arbitrarily. That is correct, but no two people experiencing anything exactly the same, so the pleasure one might receive will never be the same pleasure the other person will receive. Likewise, in the slavery case, the benefit to the master is not the same benefit to the slave, in interpretation or form. Does this change the ethic or its validation? By no means would it. The only argument might be that my simplistic use of an arbitrary y that can be said to represent two different things (to person A and B) is problematic. Let us assume, however, we are speaking generally. Y is simply some benefit respectively to each person as they interpret it. If I have to call it a function $F(x)$ so be it, but we should assume and understand what I am saying now. Lets look at our examples:

(c) Joe consents to *slavery* for the benefit of Smith, resulting in an increase in *utility* for both parties.

(d) Joanne consents to *sex* for the benefit of Smith, resulting in an increase in *pleasure* for both parties.

Just as above, the argument is that utility and pleasure are two different things. The criticism is that this ethical formulation fails because the comparison of y's is inaccurate and invalid. That would be fine, but that is to say pleasure is then ethical to achieve and utility not. Utility is an almost arbitrary word, and pleasure ambiguous for both are, as I mentioned earlier, representative of satisfaction.

My argument here is that if (d) is morally permissible, which people condoning having sex with someone just because they're convenient and you have no relationship with this person, and then in the same breath will say (c) is immoral, are making an inconsistent claim. I say this because logically they both are representative of the same fundamental interactions.

Let me dispel one more criticism. The argument is that inherently slavery is wrong so you cannot compare it in this framework to sex. Which one might also assume they are saying sex is inherently good, but that would be a fallacy on my part that I need not bother with. Instead, is slavery wrong? Why? The argument is that of the freedoms I explained earlier. This, however, fails to make sense as some universal claim, which would have to be if slavery were inherently wrong. I say this because there are many cases where slavery benefits someone, and even more so than those who have freedoms. Referring to US history, the Northern industrial laborers [1] worked in appalling conditions, had terrible wages and without child labor laws (or other worker's rights), had lives in worse conditions than some slaves. This is not to say all slaves, for obviously some slaves were beaten to death and basically tortured, but that is to forget other slaves who lived well, had nice clothing, slept in warm beds and lived close with their families, but were simply, as always, property of the master. Note, I also did not say all workers of the North. Simply that if slavery were inherently wrong, and made people worse off then how is it that some slaves lived better than some of those who were free in the North? Even with the laws in place today workers are exploited. Free people of free America forced to work jobs of terrible conditions that cause health problems later in life, etc. But I am referring to the same time period we can have a free man in a worse condition than that of a slave person who lacks the freedom to choose what he wants. Do we just say the free person chose to live that life style so if they're in it, it is their problem? Of course there are many factors involved, and I am not saying slavery is wrong or that lack of freedoms is wrong, nor am I saying they are right, for the reasons given. But the claim that freedom is our metric fails to make sense if we do not consider what freedoms and thus have to make a more thorough analysis of the entire social context.

To make it more abstracted, government is in place to protect its citizens (basic social contract theory). We give up freedoms, civil liberties, to have this protection. If our goal were to eliminate prohibitions to freedom, we would have to assert a requirement for an anarchic state. I find that absurd, as government and the social contract are very necessary things for a thriving and flourishing society. However, if the claim is slavery is wrong because it fringes on freedoms, then so does government and by that reasoning we are saying government is immoral. Let us put to rest, then, the claims against slavery for these reasons. We agree it is wrong, it follows also that (c) is wrong. Logically, it also follows that (d) is wrong, but people still justify it and many go about doing it without concern or consideration to the ethical consequences of that justification (that it is the same argument to justify slavery, among other possible x's).

The final step I wish to make in this logical formulation is the commodity factor. Easily when we refer to slavery we can say we are treating the slave like a commodity, or in the example of the exploited worker the manager or business treats the laborer like an input, a commodity to be utilized in his production process. However, we assume completely and wholly that these slaves are not benefited and claim it is wrong. In sex, we clearly know the benefit is good and the costs (being used or reduced to a commodity) are minimal. Sure being exploited so you can have a five second orgasm is worth it, as opposed to giving up your freedoms so your child can go to college is not worth it. This is a brash assumption on the part of those who criticize this theory. In either case, the cost-

benefit analysis done is completely personal and subjective. However, the consent they give warrants their perspective of approving it, period. If they did not approve of partaking in the action (again, we're not talking about slaves against their own will, but those who choose or consent into it), then they would not consent. Under their own motivation they choose to engage in being a commodity. This is not moral for the person to do to themselves, or for another to do to them. Their consent does not remove the moral dilemma inherent in dehumanizing a human.

The last formulation shall give the conceptual linkage between the reduction of a person, and our choice to relate to them as such. (ii) shall remain, but we now have a premise I have argued for this far:

(iii) For all x , if Person B is unrelated to person A, then Person B *ought not to benefit* from Person A from any x by its convenience.

It might then be argued, rightfully so, that one can engage in said activities if the convenience is taken away. I say that, but it will be taken, no doubt, superficially so. I am not saying you can have a slave if it inconveniences you, but if they consent to it, there shall be some kind of criteria by which this relationship is formed. To argue against specific cases (such as slavery, or exploited workers) requires more, but that is not my aim in this case.^[2]

(e. 1) If Smith is unrelated to Joe, then Smith ought not to benefit from Joe from any slavery by its convenience.

(e. 2) Joe consents to slavery for the benefit of Smith, resulting in an increase in utility to both Smith and Joe.

(e. 3) From (1), Smith ought not to, less Smith be inconvenienced to form a relationship with Joe such that, Joe is no longer categorized, to Smith, as a convenience.

(f. 1) If Smith is unrelated to Joanne, then Smith ought not benefit from Joanne from any sex by its convenience.

(f. 2) Joanne consents to sex for the benefit of Smith, resulting in an increase in pleasure to both Smith and Joanne.

(f. 3) From (1), Smith ought not to, less Smith be inconvenienced to form a relationship with Joanne such that, Joanne is no longer categorized, to Smith, as a convenience.

Thusly, the consequence of this ethical formulation is that, as I aimed this discussion toward earlier, we ought to form relationships with people that remove them as mere conveniences or commodities which dehumanize a rational agent. The consequence of rejecting this ethical formulation is that our character is then in question that we presume not to culture our relationships with people, but instead to prefer them to remain in that 99% "stranger" category, and is only to relate (interact) with us, as when convenient for us. We reduce 99% of human beings, rational agents, into potential commodities, for not every one of these strangers would not come into some kind of relationship with ourselves. Instead, I am saying some percent or potential amount of them will continue to be filtered into the category of commodities. This is no way to treat human beings.

That final statement is the crux of this argument. Anyone can disagree and claim it is perfectly moral to dehumanize a human being. No one has to be a humanist, or claim all humans should have equal rights, etc. However, such claims, in another argument, can easily be shown to be inconsistent, but that escapes the scope and intent of this discussion. If we are to be moral creatures, then we should strive to make the moral choice. Morality is an extension of our character. If we do not strive for the moral choice we are essentially saying we have the character of an immoral person because we allow and act toward (rationally choose) the immoral. Such a consequence should never be taken lightly and should never be acted toward. We ought, by nature I might claim, aim at the ethical and culture not only our relationships, but our personal character that such relationships extend from.

[1] Note, when I use these workers as a comparison, one might argue that they are exploited workers and fall under the definition of slavery, thus I am comparing slaves to slaves as the exploited lack the freedoms as well. That would be correct, but those workers do have other choices, alternatives and can exercise those alternatives. However, that is like saying I have a job that exploits me that pays me \$100/day, or I can go to one I am not exploited in and make \$10/day. It is a cost-benefit analysis that one does. One *chooses* to be exploited (consent) for the benefit they are getting out of it. A slave does not have that freedom. The comparison works.

[2] Note, for instance, people may effectively be exploited workers, but choose to do so for the benefit they get out of it. Today in the USA there are government programs and a lot of financial support to help laborers get training, take time from employment to find a suitable job, etc. In this case, we are speaking of the exploiter as not so much the business but the "system" as a whole, which includes responsibilities from the government. For that, the government (representative of society trying to help itself, and not exploit part of itself), has these safety nets, specifically to reduce such exploitation. This is what I am talking about when being inconvenienced. To be inconvenienced then, is to force the convenience out, or more accurate force out the person from being categorized as a convenience, thus resulting in a solution to the ethical problem of people ending up in there (by our allowance, or their choice/consent).

Extension: Motivation and Virtue Theory

I wish to briefly comment on one other aspect. Lets say, for the sake of argument, in the case of the casual consensual sex, we say it is okay. Even still, is it the virtuous act? This requires us to investigate the motivations behind it. Why would we exploit another human being (exploiting their sexual desire and wants) for sex? What *is* it we are satisfying in ourselves? The list is large from mere instinctual drive and desire, to alleviation of stress, to psychological attractiveness (they're hot, I want to **** them, oh, I can!). However, when does engaging in this activity become the virtuous act? Lets say for every reason you can give, there is at least one (if not many more) alternatives and other activities we can do to satisfy our motives. This is to say, motive (z) compels us to satisfy y, then we do A. Well, what about B, C and D? All of which will satisfy y, all driven by the same z. What makes A the virtuous choice to be made over the others? Under virtue theory, what kind of moral character is it of a person to make that the virtuous choice as being the most excellent and best way to satisfy y ethically? I only ask this question as it is a whole other formulation to decode the inconsistencies and simple lack of virtue to be found in exploiting another human being. Even if we are to say it is not immoral, there is no time when it is the most virtuous choice to make. A simple counter to z equaling stress, if I am motivated to rid myself of stress, I smoke crack, therefore doing crack is moral because I think the virtuous person would do that. It is no different than saying I am stressed, I have sex with whomever is convenient, therefore it is moral because I think the virtuous person would do it too. The character of virtue would never exploit another person, and that argument would have to be made to justify any of those exploiting acts (granted, the crack one was not, but just to show the absurdity in comparison), regardless of consent (for reasons above).

Sunday, August 19, 2007

The Metaphysics of Evaluation: Defining Subjectivity and Objectivity

Preface

For some time I have been interested in laying out a theoretical framework for objective reasoning. For me, I have passionately conceptualized these ideas for several years now. With my continued training in philosophy, mathematics, etc., I feel it is about time I attempt to articulate it into something useful. The motivation at this time is not solely my own. I have had an ongoing debate with [Spoonwood](#) for the past couple of months: [Here](#) and [Here](#). A number of subjects have been brought up, but the latest conclusion is on defining objectivity and subjectivity. Not to be, by any means, a direct response to Spoon, but I felt it a convenient time to finally engage this long standing subject I've desired to discuss. I will attempt to elaborate on the lexical definitions, plus give the theoretical grounding for it in reasoning. I will respond to direct criticisms that Spoonwood and others have made, or follow in their conceptions, and use that to attempt at comparing it to other systems of reasoning e.g., religion and faith.

Lexical Definitions: Subjective

The dictionary has a number of interpretations. The importance ones I shall elaborate on are as follows:

Webster:

characteristic of or belonging to reality as *perceived rather than as independent of mind* :

PHENOMENAL -- compare OBJECTIVE

... relating to or being experience or knowledge as *conditioned by personal mental characteristics* or states

... modified *or affected by personal views*, experience, or background

... arising out of or identified by means of *one's perception* of one's own states and processes (emphases mine)

Dictionary.com:

existing in the mind; *belonging to the thinking subject* rather than to the object of thought (opposed to objective)

...Philosophy. relating to or of the nature of an object *as it is known in the mind* as distinct from a thing in itself. (emphases mine)

Subjectivism in its most general definition can be said to be evaluated in relation to the subject i.e., the observer, the evaluator, the perceiver, etc. Subjectivism does *not* have to do simply with a subject. As I have emphasized in every definition that pertains to our discussion of subjectivism (the others are a different context), they all show it is more than simply a subject. Subjective has to do with *the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the subject*. This is the definition I shall adhere to that summarizes what the above lexical definitions characterize.

To note, this definition also absorbs claims such that there is something objective or real in the perception of the subject i.e., the chemical and electrical signals of the brain constitute something objective. This still is characterized in our general agreement on the manifestation of mind. Irregardless that there is something biological, something physical, going on in the perception, we are still identifying an evaluative process between some object and some subject. If we remove the subject and claim it to simply be another object, then our entire concept of perception is removed and there is no evaluation at all. Given that we are concerned with the evaluative process, and the reasoning there after, we must accept a subject

that is characteristically individual in its mind that does the perceiving and reasoning.

Lexical Definitions: Objective

Now I shall follow the same model above, detailing the numerous objective definitions:

Webster:

of, relating to, or being an object , phenomenon, or condition in the realm of sensible experience independent of individual thought and *perceptible by all observers* : having reality independent of the mind

...expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived *without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations*

Dictionary.com:

not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased

...being the object of perception or thought; belonging to the object of thought rather than to the thinking subject (opposed to subjective).

...of or pertaining to something that can be known, or to something that is an object or a part of an object; existing independent of thought or an observer as part of reality.

Having left out a few, and from other dictionaries, I think the common theme should be apparent. I also left out the numerous examples where the etymology demonstrates objective *as the opposite* of subjective, or that subjective is the antonym of objective. Irregardless, to summarize the characterization of the lexical definitions on objective, I will keep with the form given above. Objective has to do with *the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the object independent of any subjects or subjective bias*.

Clearly, this definition has an important extension that subjective does not. What is objective is, by definition -- as our lexicons indicate -- mutually exclusive and separate from the subjective. Could this extension be applied conversely to the subjective? Can we say the subjective is independent of any objects or objective bias? Obviously the latter segment of that makes no sense, but the former does. This is where the dictionary definitions I left out would, in part, be defined. A subjective thing can exist purely in the mind i.e., "made up" without anything real, but that is not what we are discussing here, so that is why, in part, I left those definitions out. The definition of subjective itself makes it mutually exclusive enough; the discrimination of it from objective does not need to be made. The fact the evaluation is characterized by the subject itself, and not the object of evaluation clearly separates the two, *ex vi termini*.

Defining Evaluation Through Subjects and Objects

The main thing we are trying to discern here is the process of evaluation. When we ultimately concern ourselves with our reasoning, we have to, at some point, realize what is being reasoned has first to be assimilated into the consciousness of the one who reasons. This process is the evaluation. In the final analysis it will be important to utilize objectivism in our understanding of reality. Therefore, we have to lay the theoretical framework for this process. Lets recap our definitions:

- Subjectivism is the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the subject evaluating.
- Objectivism is the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the object being evaluated, independent of the subject evaluating.

Our definitions keeps the obvious characterization that they are mutually exclusive i.e., something

evaluated as objective cannot be subjective, *per definitionem*. This fact will be explained later after our framework is established.

Theoretically, when evaluation is done we have at least two elements -- the evaluator and the evaluated. Since the evaluated is always going to be considered an object (even if an abstract one), we will denote it as the object. By our definitions this is not to be mistaken that all evaluations are objective, for what should be obvious, the object itself does not give it objectivity. The objectivity is characterized by the fact what is being evaluated is to the object *independent* of the evaluator doing the evaluating. Conceptually, this means that the object obtains its objectivity not through the evaluation process, but contains it independent of it altogether.

This means that whether no evaluators exist, or all possible evaluators evaluate the object, the objective should remain consistent with the object. This will be what is meant when the objective applies to all evaluators evenly, consistently, equally or any other such considerations.

Given that the evaluator is always considered to be a rational agent i.e., the purpose and meaning of evaluation is that something is being understood, for lack of a better term, we will denote the evaluator as the subject. This is to contrast it with naming such as observer, which could be any organism with sensory perception. Consequently, this means an ant does not, through its ability to observe objects in its environment, discern subjectivity from objectivity. In this case, we can say there is an evaluation through the processes of the organism, but this would be better considered under the guise of an observer. This observing and reacting to one's environment without rational understanding of reason lacks any conception of objectivity or subjectivity and therefore escapes the definition and purpose of this analysis.

Therefore, we shall define evaluation through the qualities of subjectivity and objectivity as something more than an observing process. Instead, evaluation as we define shall be *the process of determining the value of some object, by a subject*. Alone this is not much different than the lexical "to determine or fix the value of" (source: Webster -- evaluate), but it introduces the key elements that we are engaging the key elements of the subject and object to bring out the rational conclusion of whether this value is objective or subjective. Note, I say the process in this definition because the means of this is not important. A subject can evaluate through any number of possible ways, and these are *methodologies*. The most important method I would consider is the *Scientific Method*, but all of this is irrelevant to our metaphysical determination of these elements in our current discourse.

Definitions

- Subjectivism is the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the subject evaluating.
- Objectivism is the evaluation of some thing as characterized by the object being evaluated, independent of the subject evaluating.
- Evaluation is the process of determining the value of some object, as determined by a subject.

Defining Subjectivity and Objectivity

Understanding the lexical definitions, and how subjectivity and objectivity exists in the value of some object as evaluated by a subject, I shall engage concepts of all these variables into a systematic framework that defines them to the usage of reason. To start, let me define some notation.

$M(x)$ -- this function nomenclature shall consist of the system utilized. I use M because it signifies some method being used in this process. As I stated previously, the method is irrelevant. Regardless of what

method or what system we gauge this under, it all operates the same fundamentally.

: -- the colon shall represent an evaluation e.g., $S:O$ is a subject evaluating an object. It can also be considered some kind of relation e.g., the subject has a relation to the object that allows it to evaluate it.

Together these can produce outcomes as the method and relation i.e., the evaluation, results in some kind of value e.g., $M(S:O) = X$. Given this notation, let me express what I stated previously on the theoretical concept of objectivity applying equally to all subjects.

Under the generalized example above, X is considered subjective or objective depending on either how S and O , through M , produce X . This is to say, does X get evaluated as a characteristic of O independent of S or is it an extension of S 's evaluation? Note, this does not concern us with whether or not some S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n *actually* evaluates X or X differently than another S , but whether it theoretically can. If X can vary from any S_n to S_m , then it is subjective, by definition. Therefore, we need to denote whether or not X is evaluated through M for all S , or for some S . The quantification resets completely on the subject. Why? Because as we can see, and as I have shown above, the object is what's being evaluated and it doesn't have any weight. We can be concerning ourselves with a completely abstracted object to begin with. What is in question is the evaluation of this object and whether that value consists in the object undetermined by the subject, or has a bias by the subject. Therefore, the quantification is whether or not all subjects can evaluate the object equally, because no matter what subject evaluates it, if done "properly" through M , they should have the same result. For example, no matter who measures the mass of x , the mass should remain the same, because the mass is an objective characteristic of the object. If there is a variance outside of measuring differences (an applies problem, not a metaphysical i.e., theoretical, one), then that difference must obviously be subjective, and not the mass.

Given this system, we can say that:

- For all S , $M(S:O)=X$ implies that X is objective
- For some S , $M(S:O)=X$ implies that X is subjective

With this quantification we now have a system to denote our concept of subjectivity and objectivity as it should be applied to any system of reasoning.

I will continue this evaluation as it extends to more applications, and show the failings of certain systems of conception as utilized by religion e.g., God is objective, or systems that I find have it inherent e.g., naturalism.

To follow-up this discourse, I wish to address some specific statements by Spoonwood here, under this system. He stated that "self-perception" constitutes a case where we have subjective and objective at the same time. This would mean $M(S:O)=M(S:S)=M(O:O)=X$ because $O=S$. This still doesn't change the fundamental aspects discussed here. I can say that it fails as some sort of a *reductio ad absurdum* on the basis that you cannot have the universal quantification because the subject equals the object. Why? Because S in our generic case applies to *all possible subjects*. That is how we conceptualize objectivity in our reasoning. Since we are not evaluating all possible subjects we are having one specific subject evaluated (denoted $S!$). This means we really have $M(S:S!)=X$ where $S!=O$ from our generic model. For this to be even considered objective would mean that all subjects evaluate this one subject to be X , but we are also in the same breath limiting our evaluation to one subject, the self-perceptive one. Thus, we are restricting S to only $S!$ and it does not apply to all S i.e., $M(S!:S!)=X$, and thus cannot be, *per*

definitionem, objective.

However, one only need say they do not agree this model works, even if conceptually the definitions hold. Then let me extend the consequence of this description above. It not only holds that the self-perception is subjective, it means that *any isolated individual perception is inherently subjective*. This is not a new concept. If I am the *only* person who experienced something, it does not make it objective because I am the only evaluator. The quality of being objective extends from it existing irrelevant of the subject, and solely to the object. As I stated before, there need not be anyone evaluating, or there can be everyone evaluating. If it is objective, it should remain the same conclusion (X). Therefore, the entire process of evaluation is one by which we discern whether or not something *is* objective. Why? Because inherently our evaluation is considered subjective. Through the scientific method, for instance, we test and evaluate over and over that something is characteristic of the object i.e., it is objective, because it does not concern the actual subject doing the evaluation. In essence, it is having $M(x)=X$. The evaluation process need not be involved and the object will equal what it does. The ultimate goal, then, of the evaluation is to determine if X is a characteristic of the object and not the evaluator or the evaluation itself.

This means that self-perception is subjective. It doesn't mean the perception is *wrong*. Someone can, through their self-evaluation, determine their mass. It doesn't mean they are wrong, but without the application of some method to determine if this quality discovered is of one subject's perception, or characteristic of the subject themselves (as an object), we are left with determining, rationally, we only have something subjective *until* shown it is objective. Of course we can say now "you found your mass, and by definition, it is objective", but this begs the question since the mass is only defined *after* we have, through our scientific method, determined it as an objective quality to all objects in our universe!

The main thing to realize in this example is that the *perception* is separate from the *object*. I alluded to this in characterizing the evaluator and the evaluated previously. The self-perception is no different a perception as any subject is. Simply because the subject that is evaluating happens to be the evaluated doesn't change the fact they are still separate in the evaluation process. Under our system of reasoning to determine the value of this evaluation (X), we are still left with the problem that it is subjective if left to only S!. It is only when we extend our quantification to all S, that this evaluation becomes objective; remembering, however, that it is not that we *actually* have something evaluated by everyone, or even evaluated at all!

Spoonwood also made the statement "I evaluate a book as good, but the book itself comes as objective."

This is another misunderstanding of what objectivity is. If he had said "the book itself comes as an object" then he would be correct. The book itself is merely an object; we are concerned with what is *evaluated*. Otherwise, just making statements of objectivity and subjectivity is nonsensical. The evaluation of the book as good is an evaluation and is subjective. The book itself is merely an object. What is being evaluated? The physical properties that have to do with the book? Then we can discriminate them individually and realize they are objective e.g., the book's mass, but just saying the book is objective is nonsensical. I mean, the mass isn't good? Those are two different values being evaluated on this object. We're not considering the book in its totality as one or the other because objectivity and subjectivity is not a *state* of the object, but a value of some thing of the object e.g., simply because the book has a mass which is an objective value does not make the book valued as an objective thing. It is simply an object. The only way to make such a claim is to say you evaluate the book as a whole and weighing the subjective qualities (which could be considered infinite) to the objective (which may or may not be finite), and you come up with which is the majority and say that's what the value of the book is, but that is absurd,

inaccurate and meaningless; not to mention, it contradicts itself by these definitions and is still nonsensical.

I think this misconception is most prevalent when he says "objective just means residing in the object *and no more*." (his emphasis). As was clearly indicated in the beginning, the lexical definition clearly indicates it is not "and no more" but quite the opposite -- that there is, and must be, a "more". This is where the independence from subjective bias is most important. Without this obvious distinction, we come around to nonsensical statements like "the book itself comes as objective."

Two other statements that illustrate my point:

"A subject who sits in a house does not receive the same effect from the object of the atmosphere as does a person outside." and "perception has mechanisms of its own, such as real-world neural networks or brains."

He is absolutely right on both of these accounts, but they are irrelevant. In the former we are looking at the pinnacle example of subjectivity. If what is being evaluated were discerned by whether someone is sitting in or outside their house would make it, *ex vi termini*, subjective. We have in this case $M(S1:O)=X$ and $M(S2:O)=Y$. The object has not changed, yet the value has. The reason is because we have two different subjects. I'm not pointing out the other factor that could be different, but we are not talking about application i.e., the method, but solely the conception of objectivity.

In the latter case we have, again, the fact that we have a separation of subject and object. Pointing out the "real-world" nature, or physical/biological aspect of the subject doesn't make any difference. That would be like saying because the subject evaluating is a living real-world organism, its evaluation is objective, and therefore all evaluations are objective. That would obviously be absurd, and has nothing to do with objectivity, *per definitionem*.

Sunday, September 09, 2007

Induction: Methods of Reasoning

Throughout history, the concept of induction, or inductive reasoning, has been used to advance human knowledge. Since even before Aristotle popularized its advancement of "first-principles" from an empirical base, it has served as a means of reflecting upon the facts of the world to determine what is considered possible, to what is considered real. As vague as these statements are, I wish to discuss briefly the importance, and form, of what induction is, casting aside in the beginning any claims as to the metaphysical basis of epistemology, or validation of probabilities, etc. Instead, what is important is the *method* of induction as utilized through history to serve a very simple purpose; induction allows us a reasonable basis to infer from some knowledge base to future unknown events, ultimately with some amount of certainty (depending on what method is used e.g., statistical probability).

Given this general formulation, I will organize a number of variables to represent aspects of this method. Firstly, we have some sort of knowledge base (KB) that induction must stem from. Secondly, we have a series of events (E_i) that empirically form this basis (for most pragmatic uses I am alluding to). Lastly, we have some phenomenal *characteristic* (P) that is the substance of our inference from our knowledge base, to the reasonable conclusion about some future event. The main thing to remember that separates induction from, say, deduction, is that there is no necessary cause-effect, or permanent relationship that this inference from our knowledge base will be sustained for the future. In this case, some k th event could very well prove our inference we evaluated (P) to be wrong. The power of induction is that *it holds as reasonable, given the quality of our inference extended from our evaluation (P) of our knowledge base (KB)*.

To illustrate this concept I will demonstrate the [Mathematical Principle of Induction](#). This follows deductively, because the MPI is substantiated that:

- 1) It is true as shown for the first event
- 2) given some n th event, it follows that it holds true for the $n+1$ event.

This is the "weak" form (while the "strong" shows it is true for all events leading up to n). Regardless, what is important is that the logic behind it is an inductive reasoning method. The reason the MPI works is because you show in the second step that the condition, given what we're evaluating, holds true for the next future event given it is true for some n th event. Since we have shown in the first step that it is true for a real event (usually the first, i.e., given some function $f(x)$, we show $f(1)$ exists or is true), and we know the next event follows to be true, mathematically, then we know $f(2)$ is true. If $n=2$ then we know $f(3)$ is true, so on and so forth.

What is important here is that the second step is the inductive reasoning. In reality we are not simply evaluating a function, and have perfectly discrete events of the natural numbers. This, however, does not remove the method involved. To compare to the two, the first step is essentially establishing our knowledge base. What we know stems from empirical truths as we have shown exist given our experiences. Therefore, it is much like the first step of the mathematical principle of induction. But that is, just as it is in the MPI, worthless by itself. Like the second step, it is important to establish *why* the next event should hold true, given our knowledge base. This is where we establish some characteristic (P) that leads us to conclude the next event should be true. Not with absolute certainty (i.e., not by necessity -- that would be deduction), but the quality of this inference is derived from 1) how "strong" our knowledge base

is, and 2) how good our evaluation is.

To illustrate some extremes, if I see my first and only bird, and it is a white bird, and I conclude "all birds are white" or "the next bird I see will be white" would be quite a stretch. In this case it is a problem with a small knowledge base. We can identify this as quite an absurd inference considering we all quickly establish through our experiences that birds come in many shapes, sizes and colors. It may be so that this person sees the next five events of seeing a bird to be true to his conclusion, but on the 6th lets say we see a black bird. In this case the 6th event was his kth event that proved his reasoning to be flawed. Now his inference will have to change, and we adapt a new inference e.g., birds can be white or black. This now adds to our knowledge base, and this person, the more they learn, the more they adapt their knowledge base so they can make better inferences about the world -- inductively. The other side of the coin would be if someone dropped a tennis ball a billion times. A billion events of dropping the ball he concludes that if he lets go of the ball, it will fall. This is a pretty substantiated claim. The characteristic as to why, of course, isn't even present, so if something happened on the billion plus one event that caused the ball to not fall (e.g., a gust of wind held it level), we would be shown a kth event that shows how weak the inductive reasoning was -- namely, there wasn't much evaluation done.

The point is, we use this every day, and constantly in our lives. Putting aside the causal fact we all use inductive reasoning with differing degrees of certainty and quality, does it have any practical usage as a rational basis for evaluation (i.e., is it good for science or logic, etc)? Under this more rigorous scope it has been attacked by many a philosopher for its weak points e.g., David Hume found it quite erroneous to use. Aristotle, for instance, figured otherwise, establishing that it was the basis for "first principles" that allow us to have some kind of empirical "axiom" to then evaluate more things from, if not deductively from them. Whether that is accurate, or not, the fact is today we find great use of inductive reasoning both in the natural and the social sciences. Extending from my objectivism discussion, physics makes extensive use of inductive reasoning when we utilize our knowledge base of objective facts to then make strong inferences about what will happen in a future event i.e., our scientific knowledge base consists of evidence and proof supporting "laws" and theories we take as valid e.g., the laws of gravity, plate tectonics, the water cycle, etc. The social sciences, too, have made extensive use of inductive reasoning through the centuries, much in an extension from the Aristotelian sense, we build from the facts/data that certain characteristics exist to explain it e.g., given the correlations between measures of GDP, unemployment and inflation, that there exists a relationships e.g., unemployment goes down, *ceteris paribus*, inflation goes up, and vice versa (this is the relation called the [Phillips Curve](#))

Of course, none of this means anything is absolutely certain. It doesn't mean the next event will follow necessarily. The next time I take a step, or jump or simply wake up, I might find gravity failing for no explainable reason, but such an event would be highly unlikely, given the strength of our understanding of the world, given the strength of our inductive reasoning that has gone on and of our knowledge bases (particularly the sciences). This, however, brings me to my next point. What about if it fails? Does this mean inductive reasoning is worthless? Quite the contrary, because it allows adaption. Just as we have to inductively reason *why* something should follow from E1 to E2, if E2 just happens to be Ek, the failed event, then we can also understand *why* it failed. This key factor, that even in failing we reassess and infer a new line of reasoning to reestablish the new addition to our knowledge base (the next event), makes inductive reasoning very valuable.

Given my economic example, the Phillips Curve was popularized in the US during the 1960s, because conditions were "ideal" (i.e., the supporting data fit the theory), and we could make policy adjustments accordingly, or could explain the tradeoff that inflation would rise as unemployment lowered. However, it was attacked vehemently during the 1970s because it failed. Does this mean the Phillips Curve (which is a

theory) is meaningless? The inference about the tradeoff useless? Quite the contrary, by understanding more details we understand today more facets of the tradeoff e.g., the 70s had issues with what is called stagflation caused by a number of events like OPEC raising the oil prices, and war (events the theory did not account for i.e., it was a "weak" inference since it did not account for exogenous variables such as those). We also know, now, that in the long run there is no tradeoff between inflation and unemployment. We now consider the Phillips Curve, an extension from the Keynesian model of the market, to be valid in the short run i.e., it is a short-run tradeoff between inflation and unemployment that stabilizes toward the "natural rate of unemployment" or more accurately the "non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment". In other words, changes in unemployment (especially by policy actions) will change the rate of inflation (up or down), and in the long run this has no effect, hence "non-accelerating".

The point to be gathered from this example is that the theory in general was shown incorrect because it was too far reaching, much like the absurd case that "all birds are white." The difference, though, was that our theory was not particular enough. Through a failed example we had to evaluate further, and now the theories involved are more robust, our knowledge base and theories expanded, and our induction "stronger". This occurs as well when, for instance, that ball dropping example reaches a kth event, we have to realize our inferences do regard specifics (the real empirical events that make up our knowledge base), and that our future events are not ideal replications of past experiences. In other words, we infer something that, like the examples I have shown, do not always match every variable involved. The concept of concluding that gravity will continue to work and as I drop a ball the billionth time I should expect it to fall, and it doesn't, we investigate why. If my reasoning is based upon my knowledge base e.g., that gravity is why the ball falls, and this time it doesn't because of some wind, or such thing, then our evaluation would clearly demonstrate our inference is not wrong, we just did not account for everything that could happen. Such an expectation on our reasoning would be absurd! Instead, we realize our inference holds, we just have to realize there is more. In the notation that we evaluate some P characteristic, this would be that we re-evaluate that P holds, but now we have $P+v$ where v is some other unaccounted factor e.g., someone grabs the ball as I let go. It doesn't mean P is wrong, but given the next event is not exactly the same as the previous, or past ones, doesn't mean our induction is weakened or wrong.

In conclusion, we have to realize that everything is not going to be accounted for, and our knowledge base is limited to boot. Such limitations, however, do not make inductive reasoning weak, pointless or stupid. Instead, inductive reasoning is effective, from a pragmatic sense, because it works! It has worked, and still does work. We use it casually ourselves all the time, and so do the sciences. Certainly one can point out that our ball dropping example, no matter how good an inference it is, will not tell me exactly where it will land, or at what time, but such expectations or predictive quality extend only to how precise our inference is, or what variables we can account for. Even in physics we have to generalize or leave some variables unknown. But as I said from the beginning, it is not about the quality of specific evaluations we are concerned with. Instead, the fact is, induction works as an effective reasoning tool, as Aristotle understood long ago (of course not to the degree we understand the world today). One can always question about the metaphysical sources of any knowledge base, or how objective or subjective they are, but none of that matters under this discussion so far. Instead, we know now that we do have a knowledge base, we all have one from the moment we're born, and we utilize it to understand and organize the world.

[soccercadforlife](#) brings up a good point about generalizing induction to be, "that we reason from the particular to the general." As true as this is, however, I think the generalization of this analysis does not give induction or inductive reasoning the justice it deserves. I say this because the interworking involved in the possible ways one can inductively evaluate something can vary from this generalized maxim.

Certainly our inductive reasoning takes particular examples (i.e., events), and upon analysis we conclude some characteristic by which we can make a general theory (by which we may then deduce things, possibly). The way I establish the conceptual linkage of the components involved in induction are such that we are not necessarily inductively reasoning from a collection of events (i.e., the particular), to some general theory from them. Instead, we have a knowledge base that is made up of numerous things (e.g., events, theories, etc). Certainly our knowledge base does contain events or experiences, and each successive event that is evaluated in relation to some inductively reasoned proposition is then added to the knowledge base (as being evaluated as either holding to the previous evaluation or not). The distinction of referring to the knowledge base as opposed to simply generalizing particulars is that it is not exactly the same as simply saying we're evaluating some $f(x) = E = \{\text{event1, event2, event3, ...}\}$.

The main distinction is that our knowledge base contains more than "a collection of events". An event itself *is not* knowledge. This is why I make the distinction. It is the knowledge we are analyzing -- the information -- that is most important in inductive reasoning. To illustrate this point, in the Mathematical Principle of Induction, the first step is simply to show it is true for an event, or maybe a series of countable events, but the real "meal" of the analysis is when you have to use inductive reasoning i.e., you have to use the induction assumption, otherwise you have shown nothing. Likewise, in inductive reasoning, it is the inductive part that deals not with the first step of simply establishing that some events are true of what we are evaluating, but the informative analysis on the knowledge about them.

To compare with the previous $f(x)$ above, which is nothing but saying we have a collection of events, instead, we have an $f(x)=x/x!$ or something, which gives us something we're evaluating (which evaluating the particular is required, otherwise we haven't shown it exists in reality). I fear this elaboration is not as clear as it can be, and when I write more on systems of logic, I shall formulate it better, and in regard to other systems, but until that time, this shall have to suffice.

Sunday, September 09, 2007

Why I am not a Christian

Without regarding too much detail, I wish to endeavor a small explanation as to why I do not believe in Christ as our Lord and savior, and why I do not believe in the God of the Bible (new or old), nor, as an extension, do not believe in Islam. Essentially, I will briefly outline the major elements of these faiths that are simply appalling to me, and under no circumstance will I put my truth (i.e., faith) into them as being even possibly true. One can, of course, simply inquiry that if these are removed, then would I believe in this or that God? Most likely not. These reasons are why I will *not* believe in these Gods, but the fact of the matter will still remain that I am a skeptic, I am a scientist, and unless I have positive reasons *for* believing in this or that God, I will still not simply afford my faith to that belief. In other words, any belief that has these issue, that I am about to address, in their philosophy, then it is in no way possible for me to believe such a philosophy to be sound or reasonable.

1. If God is all powerful and all-good, then why is there evil in the world
2. If God is the final word in jurisprudence, and forces any entity to go to eternal damnation (i.e., Hell), or even temporary damnation (e.g., purgatory, or punishment in general), then he is not in accordance with moral outcomes.

It should clearly be identified I am concerned with moral issues. These are also not new problems that Christians (and others) have had imposed against them. I am also not unfamiliar with the possible responses they give. These responses, the likes of which I am sure I will hear in response to this post, are far from adequate, as far as I am concerned. Instead of posing these counter-arguments, I shall address each of these issues in theoretical elaboration, and why God is not valid under any possible response that attempts to clear his name or point blame on the mortals in question.

In the first, just as in the second, followers tend to alleviate God of any responsibility, because it was *our* choice to allow evil in the world, and our choice to go to hell for abandoning God, or not believing, or whatever other excuse one might consider reasonable for punishment. There's two possible metaphysical structures to this which, in either case, must be address simultaneously, less we contradict ourselves, and God is ultimately still responsible. The concern, of course, is the question of "free will"[1]. The concern is not so much that we are free beings, because we always will have limitations in the scope of our behavior and possible choices. Instead, it is considered that humans are simply free from God to will (i.e., choose) what they want in life e.g., to follow God's teachings or not, to believe in Him or not. In the clearest explanation, human will is capable (possible) of choosing evil by which God would not make into the world. But if the address is that God did not create evil, then this capability would not exist in man.

Systematically we have God created Man, and Man allowed/created evil into the world i.e., $G \rightarrow M \rightarrow E$. Simple transitivity, or shall I say a hypothetical syllogism, we can see that $G \rightarrow E$.

The issue is to, as has been stated, to allow humans to be free from God, and thus the evil is generated by man alone as if man has the creative abilities that God is supposed to have. This is quite the cop out, and impossibility for the second system which must be also addressed. This second issue is that God still *allows* evil to exist. The easy coordination between these two alleviations of the responsibility of God is to claim that since God made us free, he also will not interfere in our wrong choices to be evil (yet, which doesn't address the fact if God has a policy of non-interference, then miracles, etc including Jesus dying

for our sins, would be out of the question!). This is bunk. Not because of his garbage non-interference policy, but because if God stands outside of time, beyond all existence, and knows the final outcome, then everything has already happened, and who is going to be damned or saved is already determined, and what goes on in the world already exists, to God. In other words, time is of no meaning, and to Him, what choices we have are not choices, but already determined because the consequences of them, up until the end of Time, has already occurred. Under this system, we already have all of reality $R = \{\text{event}_1, \text{event}_2, \text{event}_3, \dots, \text{event}_N\}$ where N is the end of time. From our perspective, we cannot see where N is because we're only existing on the i -th interval at any given moment, and thus our will is, to us, not-determined, but it already is, because R already exists, as God has created it as it is. If this is already created and exists, then the evil in it already is created and exists, as God has allowed and created. The ability for humans to choose to put it in is either fanciful garbage, or ignorance on the followers to blame themselves instead of God.

Ultimately, my issue is not with these systematic contradictions, but with the fact as God is supposedly a moral being (in fact THE moral being), then allowing bad things to happen to believe for any reason is hardly moral, by my petty human standards. But of course, the simple response is that God is above my moral code which is "not objective and universal." Well, that's beside the point. If I'm going to adhere and follow these principles and teachings and philosophies on faith, *ex vi termini*, then it had better mesh with me as moral. It doesn't, it sickens me that God is an irresponsible fantasy that is irrelevant to the problems of the world.

The latter problem of eternal damnation also fails to be a moral outcome. Given under the systems of the first analysis, God is responsible for the world and what goes on in it because 1) he created it and 2) he can change it. If God already knows the conclusions, as it was his creation, and he must (he's all knowing), then why create any of this or that which is going to then need to be damned? In fact, what is the point of creating any of it if you already know who's going to be saved and who's going to hell? He sounds like an irresponsible kid with an ant farm, who gets off on the suffering of his little peons. That being irrelevant to this point, the main problem remains of that God feels the need to punish! On what moral ground can any being claim the right and justice of imposing suffering on another being? Not only is God irresponsible of what he does, he's above any moral consequences as well! Instead of positively effecting the world, and maybe protecting his flock (which should include all humans, not just those who follow him blindly), he punishes those that go astray. Not only is any punishment absurd for a moral being, especially one who is all powerful and all good, but in the case of *eternal* damnation, the absurdity is taken to the infinite extreme!

For these two main reasons, there is no possible way I would even consider following a being like this. Now, another possible issue is that God doesn't send us to hell, but the devil does. Well, Lucifer is also part of His creation, and should have known his response, and the second system I addressed still holds that God is irresponsible. It is also God who still sentenced this punishment, whether it be on Human or Angel, it is still immoral. If God is all powerful, he should also have no issue with a rebellion and disagreement by his "staff". Of course, this is all OT stuff, and Christians of the NT can simply brush it off that God "changed his [irresponsible] ways." But if we have any continuity, and God is all knowing, all powerful, and doesn't screw up, then such issues should never have been in the first place! It makes Jesus dying for our sins sound like a cop out "let me make it up to you!"

Even if all this were simply brushed away as nonsense, which many Christians do for themselves, it still won't give me a positive *reason* for believing in him, because of the many other issues with simply I don't believe in something without good reason (i.e., evidence) to support such a belief. Irrational beliefs based on emotion, subjectivism, etc does little to support my positive affirmations. Since God does not want to

objectively quantify himself to us, then there is no reason for me to add that [God] hypothesis to my notion of reality.

In regard to what would make me believe in these beliefs, I think a quote [NQbass7](#) used in his recent post suffices:

"For the Christian belief system to be the result of reliable methods that converge on more and more accurate models of reality, like all my other beliefs about what *is*."

[1] Free will is a loaded term, which essentially is stating that the will is free to will what it wants, but this is absurd, for a will is only as effective as what it can effect. I certainly am not free to will myself a pair of wings, nor am I able to simply will myself from dying when I fall 1000m. There are constraints upon our will, just as in any choice we have, and therefore I will not further attempt to regard this volition as free will, but simply human will, or will in general.

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

The Liberty of Opinion and Discussion

Upon reading John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, in Chapter II he addresses "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", by which I was moved to compare it with my own analysis and belief. In short, the context of this comparison is that, according to Mill, we need to allow the freedom of every person to, without harming anyone else, not only have their own opinion (thoughts), but need to let them express it. It is not enough to have a freedom of speech, as we have in the USA, granted by our Bill of Rights, but we need the freedom and forum by which to have discussion of these thoughts. Whenever, through law, custom or simply majority opinion, dominate and remove the effects of heresy, of heterodox, or opposing opinions, we are only hurting ourselves, as thinkers, as a society, as a collective of people with rational thoughts.

Considering my own analysis, well before I read Mill's words, I understood these defects, but I also have grown up studying science and the beneficial effects of opposing views. Through my own experience I know the benefit, and I know the logical implications of whatever stance one takes -- especially considering I often play "devil's advocate". With that said, I would say there are three general positions people can take in regard to their own belief of truths, and how they interact with heresy to it.

- 1) Close-minded (or intolerant): They have their opinion and they are right, and disregard what others have to say.
- 2) Tolerant: They listen to what the opposition has to say, they may even promote hearing it, and seek out books, information, and discourse with the opposing ideas, but they are still mentally shut off assuming they are in the right, and all the opposing information is in the wrong. Their zeal, if they have it, is simply to know the alternative position and why it is *wrong*.
- 3) Engaging: Like the tolerant, they wish to hear the opposing view, and are more likely promoting it for understanding its value, but the evaluation of the alternative position is not simply to contrast with their personal right view, but to analyze its position for why it is *right*, and to understand the position, and is mentally comparing their own truth with this alternative truth. Through the collision of these ideas do a new realization spring forth that is more in the right.

One may be a capitalist and completely loathe the idea of communism, but they are only tolerant of it if they read up on, say, Marxism to know why it is wrong, and how it doesn't work, to support their own idea that capitalism is good. An engaging thinker is one who analyzes communism, in this example, to know why the theory holds true, what is good about it, what has been supported and in what areas, and where it has failed. This analysis is more *complete*, and when considered with one's previously biased view, they develop a better perception of not why capitalism is the right, but what makes it right, *if it so be*.

The next point I wish to bring up is the fact that truth is not so diametric. People who are biased, and stuck in some form of tolerant (or intolerant) perspective, have a black-and-white view of the world. They presume with absolute, or near absolute certainty that they are right. When they conduct themselves, they present themselves as in the right, and the opposition is wrong. But this presumes they have a complete knowledge and a complete truth of the matter. For instance, it is often presented in ethical arguments that the Christian ethic is in the right, and the atheist is in the wrong. Not only is the atheist wrong, they have no means by to establish anything ethical (or rational or anything else apparently). This is not only intellectual arrogance, but it presupposes that their view of morality, that what the teachings of the New

Testament provide is a *complete* ethical theory. I am not even addressing the fact that no system of ethics, has ever been fully derived. Instead, it is more of a buffet of quotes to support some relative instance with what one should do. But the idea that what is provided, then, is still considered complete, and anything the atheist, the heterodox opinion, has to offer is null and worthless.

This kind of position, tolerant or intolerant of hearing and discussing these ideas, is still mentally close-minded to understanding the analysis. Point in case, the Christian criticizer of the atheists lack of foundation for anything is not in the Engaging position, and is not understanding the opposition. They simply shut the ideas out and conclude there is not only no truth to it, but no benefit. This could not be more wrong. The problem behind many of these kind of debates, between the Religious and the non-religious, is that one of them is so diametrically opposed to the other that they are not willing to be engaging, and will not be able to understand the other side. It is one thing to claim there is simply so large a schism between the two perspectives that the "systems of logic" they are using are unable to make sense of the other position, but that is intellectual apathy (or laziness). It is precisely the shifting of one's paradigm to expand beyond their system of logic, and put themselves "in the shoe" of their opposition that allows them to see it from their side of the coin, and thus make sense of it and see how it holds true. When a Christian says to the atheist that they are wrong, there is no way they can have an ethical basis, they have already stigmatized the entire discussion and mentally blocked themselves off. The ethical naturalist, for instance, can present an entire system of ethical theory, and because the Christian is blocked off, they have no basis of understanding it, and discussion becomes worthless, to the Christian anyway. Speaking from personal experience, and education, I can understand the position of many theists, and see the value in their belief, just as I value many of their beliefs! But being atheist (at least in the a-monotheist sense I am), I am not asserting the foundation and basis of that belief to be true. It is not that I discredit everything about the belief or what it has to offer, but I do discredit how it is formulated i.e., I discredit the god hypothesis. A Christian, on the other hand, who simply resorts to discrediting any ability for an atheist to say anything unless they believe as they do, or analyze as they do (requiring the god hypothesis), are not engaging and are intellectually simplifying their view of the world to something, intellectually, that is worthless and unproductive (unable to progress or improve).

The point to be made from this example and analysis is simply that truth is not so one-sided or black-and-white. Instead, opposing ideas can carry truths that the orthodox does as well, and where they differ one may be wrong and the other right, but regardless, only through the collision of ideas can they be ironed out to improve upon the theory. This is how science operates and benefits itself to progress. Even if someone was absolutely correct, and the opposing view wrong, it is prejudiced (to use Mill's terminology) to leave it at that, and the acceptance of that truth becomes almost dogmatic. The merit of the truth is that we know it is true, and continues to be true as standing against the alternative views that continue to collide against it. Again, this is the mechanism that science utilizes, as even though we have a well developed understanding of gravity, we still test it to make sure it is true, and through this continued process, we eventually find new discoveries, or new perspectives or more accurate measures, etc. Therefore, to say when we are engaging that we are being scientific, I do not find this in error. Instead, I think we should all be scientific in that sense, in how we approach ideas and truths, and anything in opposition to this process of ideas, thoughts (opinions) and discussion is a matter of dogma that should be avoided for it only ruins our education and our society and the mental cultivation (a well-being I will assert) of our populace. If I have an issue, by this analysis, with religion, it is not because it is religious in belief or thought, but that it is dogmatic, which causes the problems I just alluded to.

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

Our Founding Fathers: Examining the Federalist Papers, Voting and Democracy

There are three topics I often find myself addressing in political discussions. I do not find them to be disjoint from each other, but they share at least one obvious connection. When discussing issues of government in an American context, the founding fathers signify the democratic ideology. The goal of the American separation from the British was one of attaining social autonomy and self-governance. To refrain from evolving into a system of tyranny as they revolted against, they crafted the American constitution. This document exemplifies a number of issues brought up in the Federalist Papers. Therefore, with the founding father's message in mind, I wish to examine certain points of interest in the Federalist Papers, topics of voting and democracy. I do not wish to address these as merely a libertarian view of "this is what our constitution says; this is what we should do if we want to be American." I am not merely an American because I also live in a global community. For that, I am a human being and share many things with my human brothers the world around. I also acknowledge the fact America does not reign supreme and has many ills that should have been avoided if we followed the central ideas of the founding fathers, had we not been so rigidly tied to the constitution. It breeds problems that they could not have anticipated that are in direct violation of what they warned against. Furthermore, today we can see other countries doing something better than us. I am an American and proud to be in this country, but if someone is doing something vital better than we are, that is a problem. Healthcare is one such issue. Voting is another. These issues can be readdressed with American qualities to improve the conditions of American lives. I don't find that being a likely outcome however. I will try to keep the scope of this article down, but as I have espoused so far, there is much to be discussed. I will address these individually, but they are not wholly separate.

The Federalist Papers, numbers 10 and 51

To truly appreciate the value of the American constitution you have to read what the founders argued in favor of ratifying it. The collection of these arguments is found in the Federalist Papers. Two papers stand out as vitally important to the discussion of democracy. The federalist paper 10 is quite popular and discusses the fear of interest groups dominating political representation, and how the constitution is geared toward avoiding it. In federalist paper 51 we have the essential argument for the strength of a federal government. I think we have come to an age where what the founders argued for with the constitution is not able to adapt to modern times, and through socio-political evolution that has naturally occurred in the past two-hundred years we have altered the power relations; so much so, we should consider alternative structures that may improve what the founders intended, i.e., democracy and just representation.

The federalist paper 10 sets up that factions, or interest groups, can become a great ill of political life. The causes cannot be considered for correction; therefore, the effects are the measure of dealing with factions. The entire basis of representative democracy over pure democracy is on this ground: If the tables are turned toward the majority than the process of representation will demonstrate that relation. The issue arises, then, of minority rights. The primary goal of the republic is to (1) eliminate corruption as brought on by factions, and (2) maintain the interests of the minority of any electorate. "By enlarging too much the number of electors, you render the representatives too little acquainted with all their local circumstances and lesser interests; as by reducing it too much, you render him unduly attached to these and too little fit to comprehend and pursue great and national objects."¹

¹ James Madison, The Federalist No. 10, The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection (<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>)

The method federal paper 10 supposes the republic resolves corruption by numbers:

"Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other. Besides other impediments, it may be remarked that, where there is a consciousness of unjust or dishonorable purposes, communication is always checked by distrust in proportion to the number whose concurrence is necessary."²

Why then do we see today a strict and rigid two-party system that only ameliorates the general interests? When do minority interests get represented? Today we have several key differences in social life. The most prevalent is the extent globalization has tied foreign interests and power into our society. The second is the extent to which communications have tied an ever growing nation the size of which they certainly could not have imagined. If their criticism of direct democracy was on its scale of small size, the republic was fathomed within the domain of a relatively small size in comparison to today's Union. The structure of government they established as federal works much more nicely on our state size than it does on the national interests. The federal government of today has become disjoint from the individual save through those who have enough sway and swagger with their dollar. Our nation is bought and sold by media time and business concerns. The greatest fear is that the businesses need not even be American. Multinational businesses and foreign interests leak into the decisions of our politics; so much so, they push out the interests of the individual and minority American who fails to get the representation they need. This separation of the federal from the individual, I would contend, evolved from our growing size, advanced technology, especially communication and particularly by globalization.

The checks to corruption by both the interests groups and realpolitik constructions of the State are evaluated further in federalist paper 51. The usual checks and balances derive partly from this, but the real contradiction to this system today is the concentration of power. The solution, like in paper 10, comes from numbers. With an increase in numbers and interests and passions, the founders expected that no concentration among people would be practical to cause corruption. They had no idea how much power can be concentrated by air time or the mighty dollar, which our politics today rely heavily on (just on campaign contributions alone). The solution for the structure of the government goes beyond the mere "checks and balances" schema we are so used to by our high school government courses. The founders knew that for a successful government, "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."³ Like society, the government has expanded both its size and its roles in everyday life. The idea that sheer numbers will result in proper maintenance and "hopefully" proper incentives fails to be a reality. Power can easily concentrate in the few by proper associations who concentrate proper means to make their goals come true. How can this be resolved? "A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions." The real solution of a democracy, including a representative one, is through the people. The auxiliary precautions come from the structure, which as many examples and volumes of books have shown are failing. I say we need to bring the structure back to the people and bring the people more power. This starts with both the media (transparency, i.e., information and responsibility) and with voting. Since media is another topic altogether, I will address how voting needs to get back to representing the interests of the people.

² Ibid.

³ James Madison, The Federalist No. 51, The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments (<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm>)

Voting systems and the goal of representation

Voting serves to bring government participation into the political structure. It bridges the gap between society and the social institution that government is. It ties the goal of government and its power to the people itself. It is the crux of democracy. What happens, then, when the will of the people is not reflected in government? How do we provide proper representation?

The American electoral system is a modern approach with archaic structures operating under a plurality voting system which can be referred to as "first past the post" (FPTP). The origin of this name extends from horse racing in which the first horse past the post wins while all others lose. In short, "winner takes all." Specifically, American uses a single-member district with plurality system. As any introductory political science class teaches, voting is done within districts. These districts are then pooled together in votes so those within the district vote for a single person FPTP, just like the Electoral College pools the votes of the state into a "representative" FPTP vote nationally. This kind of voting system has its advantages for the fact it makes things easier to do for both the system and the voter. It also makes majority parties dominant promoting a two-party system. It is also wrought with possible defects, e.g., Gerrymandering. It inherently promotes misrepresentative voting (which Gerrymandering capitalizes on), and minority representation gets swept under the rug for popular (two-party) consensus. The Electoral College is also a worthless archaic structure to make things easier and further promotes this misrepresentation as the likeness of single-member plurality voting has on the district. The problem is, the Electoral College does the misrepresentation on a national level!

This system, as far as I can tell, is essentially holds to these traditional institutions for customary reasons and the fact they are simple. We have the technological and organizational abilities to deal with direct voting (true one-person one-vote). But such a restructuring would be a huge leap and by no means are we stuck with these two options. Proportional representation (PR) electoral systems are now widely used in the European countries. Started in the late 19th century, there are supposedly more countries using the PR system now than plurality voting systems.⁴ The distinct nature of this kind of system is that it allows for minority parties to be represented regardless of districting. There are a number of varieties to this newer style system, and certainly they can become quite convoluted. In fact, even if you're German, a country which uses a PR electoral system, you may not fully understand it!⁵ Usually these systems take a certain minimum percentage requirement to be a party, e.g., 5% threshold. Parties also need not be single parties but grouped parties under Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems. Germany, for instance, you vote for a major party (still two-party) with a minor party. For legislation seats are awarded on the basis of proportion, therefore if 5% of society wishes for Green Party representation, then 5% of congress will be Green party members.

The problems with this kind of system are that power loses its concentration and it can be quite difficult. Like the evolution of most institutions it will take generations to map out a customary system that the society likes, which is something the American plurality system is bound to (too much so in my opinion). I don't see how this loss in concentration is a problem since plurality, as can be considered in the American system, is too concentrated! That is, of course, the nature of politics. The goal of democracy, however, is to bring that power into the hands of the people. Does that power get represented by the people? Simply because we have a two-party system that is powerful does not mean it's powerful and in the interests of society. It also doesn't translate into the intricacies that society demands (minority interests). If the rest of Europe is more democratic due to its electoral system I find it a necessary that America adopts some measures of the PR system to improve our democratic representation. Sadly, most Americans are not much aware of this system at all! Furthermore, tradition has a crafty way of interfering with change. This needs to be addressed and brought to the fore of discourse on topics of government and democracy.

⁴ Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proportional_representation#History) as seen Tuesday, December 11, 2007.

⁵ Michael G. Roskin, *Countries and Concepts: Politics, Geography, Culture* 7th ed. (Location Unknown: Prentice Hall, 2000), p. 192.

Democracy and the will of the people

Thus far the discourse has been on how government's goal is to represent the will of the people and provide for their security among other things. In that, they also provide a self-initiative for securing the people from the government. One great fear came from interest groups dominating the culmination of power. That fear was to be subdued by the strength of numbers in a federal system of government. Unknown to the founders a couple centuries ago, technology and the economy have evolved in such a way that this culmination does not require numbers to be effective. Furthermore, outside interests beyond the nation-state have residing power on the will of the government over the governed. The people's strength in representation comes from its knowledge of government affairs, the structure of the government as well as the electorate that represents the people in all of this. Voting is dismal in American politics and the two-party system that has rigidly stayed by our single-member districts with plurality is not achieving the goal of representation. PR systems certainly can be better but have many downsides as well; though I would posit the benefit certainly outweighs the costs, and an improved PR system can most certainly be designed. The sole problem of PR voting systems is the separation of power and a lacking in concentration (which may or may not be a bad result, especially compared to the current power relations). Now I wish to discuss one last topic of interest and that is how the concentration of power needs to go back directly to the people.

Direct democracy was considered impractical for a large scale nation. We often see it that way now, and the founders saw it that way, too.⁶ A number of states have found inventive ways to change that fact by bringing power directly back to the people. California provides an example of this methodology. There are three facets of California's democracy that are substantially important in large scale direct democracy: initiative, referendum and recall. "In 1911, in attempts to reduce the influence of parties and elected officials, California became the 10th state to adopt the initiative process."⁷ The initiative process is simple; it brings the legislative powers to the citizen by allowing a medium by which the people may propose and pass laws and constitutional amendments.⁸ Californians are well aware of the polling people asking if one is a registered voter and if they'd sign some petition. This is the process through which these citizen drafted initiatives get put into congress. It certainly requires money to get the required number of votes, and it takes enough interest from the voters to get the required number of signatures, but once that criteria is met we have a demonstration of the initiative's importance and it gets put into congress for assessment. The initiative process allows the citizen to be directly involved in legislation.

Though there are numerous types of referendum, the essential characteristic of this citizen granted power is the ability to overturn laws already passed by the legislature and signed by the governor.⁹ These are not frequently used, but it certainly is a power worth having. They cannot overturn laws that were enacted with 2/3 vote, however. "Since 1912, there have been approximately 50 attempts to qualify referenda for the ballot. Of the 50 attempts, 39 qualified for the ballot, 25 of which were approved by voters."¹⁰ It can be said this provides both a bit of judicial and executive power to the citizen.

Lastly, the recall power is obvious from the historic example of California's Davis recall in which Arnold "the Governor" Schwarzenegger became California's latest (and greatest!) governor. The power is simple, if the voters are unhappy with the performance of their elected official they have the power to "impeach" him, i.e.,

⁶ Madison, Federalist No. 10. They refer to it as a "pure democracy" by which is meant "a society consisting of a *small* number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person." (emphasis added)

⁷ Pamela Fiber, *California Politics Supplement for American Government* 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2004), p. 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

they oust him from office and form an early election like the shamble that allowed the Governor to win. Like the other processes it all begins with the voter's power to sign a petition and pool the interests of the people to make a decision.

The point of this assessment is that these kinds of processes, which other states have some or maybe more, allow the citizens to have direct governmental power and bypass the possibly self-interested or other-interested officials who may also be corrupt. These kind of powers need to be a federal power and need to be represented, also, in the voting strength. I do not think there needs to be a completely nation wide direct-vote for offices, as multi-member PR districts can work more effectively in organization and outcomes, but direct democratic powers need to be returned to the people (and the state) that the federal government has taken away. Furthermore, with these kinds of sentiments possible on the national level it only opens the doorway for citizen power, and interests, to be reflected in international relations and the growing international level of governance. I think this kind of method for social organization holds more to what the founders truly wanted; thus it reserves their interests and protects against their fears. At the very least, what I have suggested here should be considered and brought to the fore of political discourse. We have become complacent in our way of life and that only seeds the corruption that allows elected officials and outside-interests (or business-interests) to lobby away our rights and powers to their own by working the system we don't question. We have the ability and examples of how government can operate more democratically and effectively. It is our right to have these powers as the very foundation of what our independence stands on. Just read the Declaration. It is all there.