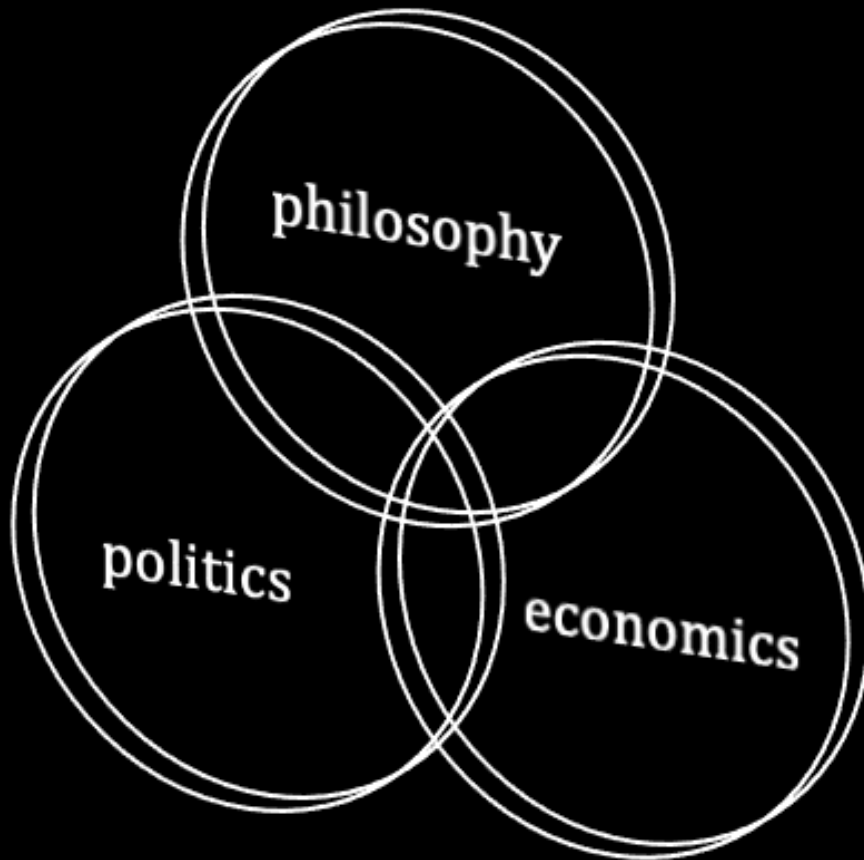


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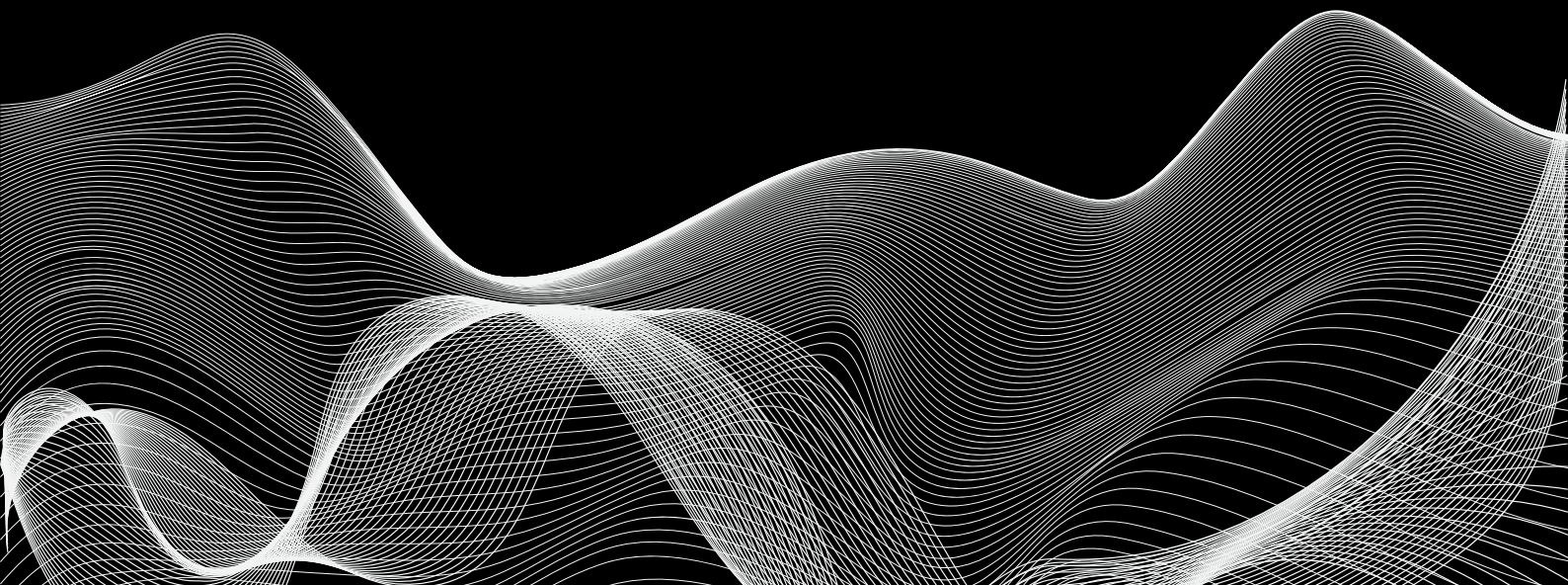


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FOREWORD

Welcome to the eagerly awaited Volume 3 of *Republic*. Once again, we're delighted to bring you a compelling collection of papers that span various academic disciplines while remaining intrinsically connected to the guiding principles of PPE – Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics. These diverse pieces not only reflect the multifaceted nature of our field but also underscore the enduring strength of our scholarly community.

Within these pages, you'll encounter thought-provoking explorations, from the astute "*A Rhetorical Analysis of Volodymyr Zelensky's Address to Congress*" to the profound question, "*Is It Morally Acceptable To Have Biological Children Today?*". These contributions embody the intersection of historical insights and modern inquiries that lie at the heart of PPE.

Lastly, I want to offer a special note of thanks to the tireless efforts of my Publications Committee, whose support has been indispensable in making this publication a reality.

Thank you, and I hope you enjoy reading this publication as much as we did.

Dineshraj S/O Manivannan
Publications Director, AY2022/23
NUS Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Club

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

Lim Jie Qi | National University of Singapore

Abstract

On February 24 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Given the power asymmetry between both countries, many believed that Russia would claim a quick and decisive victory. Yet contrary to popular expectations, Ukraine has put up a surprisingly strong resistance against Russia. This paper argues that Ukraine's ability to do so largely stems from President Volodymyr Zelensky's ability to galvanise the support of the West through his impressive use of rhetoric. Specifically, it examines Zelensky's address to the United States (U.S.) Congress—a key speech that exemplifies his rhetorical ability—by first looking at its context and purpose. It then conducts a rhetorical analysis of Zelensky's speech before assessing its rhetorical and practical success.

Keywords: *Russo-Ukrainian War, Political Speech, Aristotle's Artistic Proofs, Rhetorical Devices*

When Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many believed that Russia would claim a quick and decisive victory.¹ However, Ukraine has managed to defy expectations, largely due to President Volodymyr Zelensky's ability to galvanise the support of the West. This was done through his impressive use of rhetoric, which has been made highly accessible to world leaders and the masses alike via social media and digital technology.² One of Zelensky's speeches that exemplifies his rhetorical ability is his address to the United States (U.S.) Congress, which was delivered via video link about a month into the war. In this essay, I examine his speech by first looking at its context and purpose. I then conduct a rhetorical analysis to examine how Zelensky used Aristotle's three artistic proofs and several rhetorical devices based on his acute understanding of his audience to achieve his aims. Lastly, I assess the rhetorical and practical success of his speech.

¹ Henry Foy et al., "Russia's bid for rapid victory faces forceful Ukrainian response," *Financial Times*, February 26 2022, 11, <https://www.ft.com/content/e814d702-58e2-4df0-b606-e843fce90866>.

² Simon Shuster, "How Volodymyr Zelensky Defended Ukraine and United the World," *Time*, March 2, 2022, 8-10,31, <https://time.com/6154139/volodymyr-zelensky-ukraine-profile-russia/>.

Since the start of Russia's invasion, Ukraine's cities and civilian populations have been bombarded mercilessly. While many countries have swiftly provided Ukraine with aid and imposed punishing sanctions on Russia, Ukraine's survival remains at stake due to the relentlessness of Russia's assault.³ Despite Zelensky's repeated calls for the imposition of a no-fly zone to prevent Russia from using its air power on Ukraine, the U.S. has been hesitant to accede to his request for fear of escalating tensions with nuclear-armed Russia.⁴ Faced with these circumstances, Zelensky sought to achieve two main objectives through his speech. The first was to continue pushing for the enforcement of a no-fly zone while simultaneously laying out less risky ways for the U.S. to assist Ukraine militarily. The second was to garner the U.S. lawmakers' and public's support so that the U.S. would ramp up its assistance to Ukraine and impose more sanctions on Russia—both of which are very costly decisions for the U.S.⁵

From the goals of Zelensky's speech, it is evident that it falls under the category of deliberative oratory. Deliberative oratory is one of the three rhetorical settings which Aristotle had laid out. It is future-oriented and primarily concerned with what should be done.⁶ Having established the speech's context, purpose, and rhetorical setting, I will now conduct a rhetorical analysis of his speech.

Firstly, Zelensky used *logos*, which are proofs that are available in a speech's arguments, words, or logic.⁷ To persuade the members of Congress to impose a no-fly zone, a request that had been repeatedly rejected, Zelensky told them that the Russian army had launched almost 1000 missiles at Ukraine, which is a horror that Europe has not witnessed in over 80 years.⁸ By using facts and figures, Zelensky highlighted the sheer intensity of Russia's attacks. Consequently, Zelensky's plea for the enforcement of a no-fly zone seemed highly reasonable. However, Zelensky followed up by asking if his request was 'too much to ask' and saying that 'if [it was] too much to ask, [Ukraine offered] an alternative.'⁹

³ Shuster, "How Volodymyr Zelensky Defended Ukraine and United the World," 9,33.

⁴ Brian Finucane and Olga Oliker, "Zelensky Wants a No-Fly Zone. NATO Is Right to Say No," (March 25 2022): 4-5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/25/opinion/no-fly-zone-ukraine-nati-russia.html>.

⁵ Paul Adams, "'Shame on you': How President Zelensky uses speeches to get what he needs," *BBC News*, March 24 2022, 25, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60855280>.

⁶ James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 6th ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 91.

⁷ Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 93.

⁸ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," (March 16 2022): 7. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/16/text-zelensky-address-congress/>.

⁹ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 7.

Zelensky's employment of a hypophora in this manner demonstrated his willingness to make a compromise, which stemmed from his awareness of how the help that he was seeking might threaten the U.S.' strategic interests.¹⁰ This enhanced the reasonableness of Zelensky's proposed alternative because despite already providing strong reasons for his initial request, he offered a second option which further addressed the difficulties that prevented the U.S. from acceding to the first.

Secondly, *ethos* can be found in Zelensky's speech. Aristotle defined *ethos* as 'the persuasive potential of the speaker's character or personal credibility'.¹¹ This artistic proof is developed from what the speaker says rather than how he was previously known and perceived. Zelensky's skilful appeal to *ethos* is evinced from how he highlighted that he was 'almost 45 years old', which juxtaposed his age against those of his physical audiences who constitute the most powerful gerontocracy globally.¹² With such a move, Zelensky presented himself as someone who was almost too young to be bearing the enormous weight of having to protect his people from a far stronger aggressor. Speaking metaphorically, he declared that '[his] age stopped when the heart of more than 100 children stopped beating', before paradoxically remarking that '[he saw] no sense in life if it [could not] stop the deaths'.¹³ From both statements, Zelensky appeared as a leader rendered helpless by the death and destruction in his country that he cared deeply about. Zelensky's decision to draw attention to his relative youthfulness and sense of helplessness thus reinforced his message that he, and by extension Ukraine, desperately needed the U.S.' help due to their inability to withstand Russia's assault alone.

Lastly, the speech has strong elements of *pathos*. According to James A. Herrick, *pathos* refers to 'emotional appeals that give persuasive messages their power to move an audience into action'.¹⁴ More specifically, Aristotle was concerned with the ability of emotions to affect the audience's judgement.¹⁵ A speaker achieves this by engaging the

¹⁰ Karrin Vasby Anderson, "'I have a need': How Zelenskyy's plea to Congress emphasized shared identity with US," (March 16 2022): 9-10.
<https://theconversation.com/i-have-a-need-how-zelenskyy-s-plea-to-congress-emphasized-shared-identity-with-us-179349>.

¹¹ Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 95.

¹² Franklin Foer, "Volodymyr Zelensky's Dream Life," *The Atlantic*, March 17 2022, 10,
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/zelensky-congress-speech-no-fly-zone/627080/>.

¹³ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 16.

¹⁴ Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 94.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 1378b.

audience members' firmly rooted beliefs and feelings, which not only influences their reasoning but also pushes them to act.¹⁶ In the case of Zelensky, he appealed to the members of Congress' and American public's emotions by repeatedly using allusion. For instance, he said that he '[remembered the U.S'] national memorial in Rushmore, the faces of [their] prominent presidents'.¹⁷ To the Americans, this is a greatly treasured monument which symbolises 'democracy, independence, freedom and care for everyone'.¹⁸

By bringing up these American ideals and telling the audience that Ukraine similarly aspires towards them, Zelensky showed that Ukraine fundamentally shares the same values as the U.S. Following which, Zelensky alluded to some of the worst moments in the U.S.' recent history like the bombing of Pearl Harbour and September 11 attacks. He then said that 'just like nobody else expected it, [Americans] could not stop it'.¹⁹ Through reminding the audience of their country's traumatic history, Zelensky invoked fear, despair, and confusion, which allowed them to relate to the current situation in Ukraine and feel a strong need to help it out of the dark times that the U.S. once similarly experienced. Moreover, Zelensky capitalised on the fact that he was delivering his speech virtually by pausing his address midway to play a video which, accompanied by solemn music, depicted children's suffering due to the war.²⁰

The song choice and use of visceral images further roused the emotions that he had already invoked, and this served as another push for the audience to act. Zelensky then directly addressed President Biden and said that 'being the leader of the world means to be the leader of peace'.²¹ In doing so, Zelensky made a powerful appeal to Biden's sense of responsibility as the leader of a country that sees itself as 'the leader of the free world'.²² Consequently, the American audience—Biden in particular—was compelled to provide greater assistance to Ukraine. This paved the way for Zelensky's request for the U.S. to supply greater amounts of aid and impose more sanctions on Russia, both of which are

¹⁶ Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 94.

¹⁷ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 5.

¹⁸ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 5.

¹⁹ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 6.

²⁰ Vivian Salama, "Zelensky Pauses Congress Speech to Play Video of Russia's Bombardment," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 16 2022, 1-2,

<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-03-15/card/zelensky-pauses-congress-speech-to-play-video-of-russia-s-bombardment-a3EqTBJPHtPzVxFX23Jj>.

²¹ Federal News Service, "Text of Ukrainian President Zelensky's virtual address to Congress," 14.

²² Stephen M Walt, "The myth of American exceptionalism," *Foreign Policy*, no. 189 (2011): 72.

extremely costly actions for the U.S. to take.²³ Hence, Zelensky's allusion to key figures and painful historical moments which are deeply ingrained in the American consciousness created an imperative for the U.S. to provide greater amounts of aid and impose more sanctions on Russia despite their costliness.

Overall, the speech was rhetorically successful. Zelensky's appeal to *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, coupled with his strategic deployment of rhetorical devices, significantly boosted the rhetorical forcefulness of his address. It drew a standing ovation from the members of Congress.²⁴ Similarly, his speech was largely, though not entirely, a practical success. Just a day after Zelensky's address, Biden announced that the U.S. would provide Ukraine with another \$800 million in military aid.²⁵ Additionally, the U.S. later unveiled new rounds of sanctions on Russia.²⁶ That said, Biden's response (or lack thereof) to Zelensky's continued pleas for the U.S. to support the imposition of a no-fly zone shows that Zelensky failed to achieve one of his key aims once again.²⁷ Nonetheless, Zelensky's acknowledgement of the difficulties that the U.S. faced in agreeing to this request and his ability to get it to back his proposed alternative make his speech practically successful in general.

In conclusion, I have discussed how Zelensky's speech was delivered at a time when Ukraine urgently needed more assistance from the U.S. As such, his speech was geared towards achieving two key aims. The first was to continue pushing for the imposition of a no-fly zone while simultaneously proposing less risky ways for the U.S. to help defend Ukraine. Secondly, Zelensky sought to garner support from the members of Congress and American public so that the U.S. would make the costly decisions of providing more assistance to Ukraine and imposing harsher sanctions on Russia. I then posited that Zelensky utilised *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, as well as several rhetorical devices to accomplish his objectives. Due to his effective use of Aristotle's artistic proofs and rhetorical techniques based on his acute understanding of his audience, Zelensky's speech was rhetorically and

²³ Adams, "'Shame on you': How President Zelensky uses speeches to get what he needs," 25.

²⁴ Adams, "'Shame on you': How President Zelensky uses speeches to get what he needs," 1.

²⁵ Libby Cathey, "Biden details US military aid for Ukraine following Zelenskyy's appeal to Congress," *abc News*, March 17 2022, 4, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-detail-military-aid-ukraine-zelenskyys-appeal-congress/story?id=83479550>.

²⁶ Jarrett Renshaw and Daphne Psaledakis, "U.S. announces new Russia sanctions over Ukraine invasion," *Reuters*, March 24 2022, 1, <https://www.reuters.com/world/g7-eu-announce-measures-stop-russia-avoiding-sanctions-us-official-2022-03-24/>.

²⁷ Cathey, "Biden details US military aid for Ukraine following Zelenskyy's appeal to Congress," 4.

practically successful in general. Given his skillfulness in using rhetoric, it is no wonder that he has quickly become one of the most prominent orators in contemporary politics.

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DESIGNING DISSENT: THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE IN LIMITING STUDENT ACTIVISM

Faith Chng | National University of Singapore

Abstract

This paper explores the interplay between spatial structures and activism by examining the architecture of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Kent Ridge campus. It investigates intentional design decisions during the 1960s, aimed at limiting student activism amidst frequent clashes between the NUS Student Union and the government over academic freedom. The paper reveals deliberate constraints in the campus design, including disorienting spatial planning, rough terrain, and visually homogeneous structures. While budgetary and practical considerations played a role, this paper concludes that certain architectural decisions were intended to curb student activism. However, recent developments, such as the construction of UTown Green, suggests a shift towards more inclusive communal spaces.

Keywords: *Built Environment, Student Activism, Spatial-structures, Architecture, Public Spaces, Campus Design, Protest Sites, National University of Singapore*

“Spatial structures both reflect and determine economic and political processes. The most difficult problem [...] is to encompass the dialectics of the spatial and the social, in a coherent, analytical framework.”²⁸

Introduction

An underserved area of social and political theory is their relationship with the built environment. This thesis offers two definitions of architecture. The first is that architecture is physical—a “functional space solely for human habitation”.²⁹ The second is abstract; “architecture” is understood to be “a top-down description of the structure of the system”.³⁰

²⁸ Pahl, *Whose City?*, 248.

²⁹ Bianco, ‘Defining Architecture’ 62.

³⁰ Rechtin, *Systems Architecting* 12.

This thesis draws upon historical findings, expert interviews, and features of existing spaces to propose that the architecture of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Kent Ridge campus was intentionally designed to limit the political activity of the student body. It asserts that against the backdrop of the student riots of 1960–1966, the state had a reasonable motive to limit opportunities for student activism during the design phase of the Kent Ridge master plan and did so by limiting the number of central spaces, maintaining the uneven terrain of the campus, designing structures to look homogeneous. It also asserts that structural features of NUS itself, namely its code of conduct and its appointment of politically affiliated management were attempts to limit student activism. However, this thesis concedes that budgetary, expansionary, and territorial factors also play big roles in the design of the master plan and reflects upon the implications of recent developments on the Kent Ridge campus.

The thesis is focused specifically on the Kent Ridge campus' 1968–1970 master planning phase and its 1970–1985 physical design and construction phase. It will examine three structures that were constructed during this period: the Yusof Ishak House, the Arts Faculty, and the Science Faculty. It focuses on Toh Chin Chye, the newly appointed vice chancellor of the University of Singapore (UoS) in 1964, as well as Kent Ridge masterplan coordinator Meng Ta Cheang. Of notable importance is also the NUS Student Union (now known as NUSSU), which initiated and mobilised student protests through the 1960s, and the architecture firm hired to design the campus, USDU.

Historical Context

Clashes between the NUS Student Union and the government, largely regarding academic freedom, were frequent throughout the 1960s. In 1960, a third of the student population³¹ skipped lessons and participated in a union after poet D.J. Enright's comments³² were misconstrued as criticisms of the government. To the outrage of the students, Enright was scolded and had his work permit threatened by Minister Ahmad Ibrahim. The students publicly condemned the government's move to "strangle free discussion in the university" and silence an individual for "expressing views which do not coincide with official ones".³³ The Enright Affair was just the beginning of a turbulent relationship between the government and NUSSU; between 1963 and 1966, tensions continually flared.

³¹ Approximately 500 students.

³² Liao Bolun, 'Reclaiming the Ivory Tower' 45.

³³ University of Malaya Twelfth Annual Report 1960–61' 26-30.

In response, the government blamed student unrest on “communist plans.”³⁴ Synchronously, this immediate post-independence period was characterised by the PAP’s intense paranoia of a communist uprising. In 1963, the government went as far as to withhold \$40 million of development funds because Vice-Chancellor B.R. Sreenivasan refused to abide by the government’s request to refuse admission for candidates “suspected of being subversive”.³⁵ Given simmering political tensions, the paranoia surrounding the communist agenda, and the heavy-handedness of the PAP, it follows that the design process of the new campus would have accounted for and acted against the likelihood of student activism.

Literature Review

While researching the state’s role in the architectural design of the Kent Ridge campus, one might find Lim Pin Jie’s (2009) dissertation “Positioning the Role of the State in the Kent Ridge Campus Master Plan”³⁶ directly relevant to the discussion. His hypothesis that the design of the Kent Ridge campus was meant to “complement the political agendas of the state”³⁷ is backed by the opinions of academics teaching on the Kent Ridge campus that the physical architecture of the Kent Ridge campus is “a witting or unwitting response”³⁸ to the student protests of the 1960s.

However, Lim’s dissertation failed to identify conclusive evidence of the demands made by Toh Chin Chye.³⁹ During an interview with Meng Ta Cheang, the lead architect of the Kent Ridge campus, Lim suggested that the NUS administration’s aversion to large open spaces was due to potential student unrest. To this, Meng replied that although it was rarely brought up during meetings with Toh, he expected the administration to be “quite worried” about large gathering spaces. From here, Lim heavily suggests that these preconceived notions influenced Meng’s design choices.⁴⁰

³⁴ Liao, ‘Student Activism In The University Of Malaya And Singapore, 1949–1975,’ 51.

³⁵ Selvaratnam, *Innovations in Higher Education*, 72. The request was targeted towards candidates from Chinese-speaking secondary schools. Communism was widely associated with the Chinese-educated population during that time.

³⁶ Lim, ‘Positioning the Role Of the State In the Kent Ridge Campus Masterplan’.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 36.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 76.

In stark contrast, however, are the contributions from Tan, Peck, and Lee in *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*.⁴¹ They cite accounts from members of the USDU who were quoted claiming that Toh called the team “nincompoops” for designing “big open spaces” for students to “gather down there”.⁴² According to USDU architect Lim Tuan Seng, the team avoided “wide open spaces” because they were thought to be prime locations for students to congregate.⁴³

Both sources concur that Toh was “ballistic”⁴⁴ about the initial design of the Yusof Ishak House (YIH), which is where the Student Union is located. The initial design of the YIH had one entrance and exit, making it easy to barricade in the event of a protest.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the design team had initially named YIH “Student’s Union Building”, to which Toh objected to because he believed that the name would give the students a proprietary sense and “give them the right to be there”, potentially enabling activist activity.⁴⁶ As a result, the design team made concessions: redesigning the building with “multiple ingresses,”⁴⁷ installing grills in the windows, and renaming it *Yusof Ishak House*.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Savage et al., *Kent Ridge*, 258.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lim, ‘Positioning the Role Of the State In the Kent Ridge Campus Masterplan’ 39.

⁴⁶ Savage et al., *Kent Ridge*, 258.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lim, ‘Positioning the Role Of the State In the Kent Ridge Campus Masterplan’ 39.



Figures 1 and 2: Multiple Ingresses in the Design of the Actual YIH Building.

These accounts show that Toh's worries about student activism were considered and materialised into major design changes. This lends more support to the idea that the Kent Ridge campus was intentionally made to limit student activism.

Defining Features of Spaces for Activism

Spatial planning has an uncontested stake in influencing social interaction. From historic examples of “zoning” by colonial rulers to Bernardo’s “The In-Between as Public Good”,⁴⁹ space undeniably shapes social interaction. Bernardo argues that “in-between”, transitory spaces like corridors or walkways that allow people to loiter create attachment and interaction between the people who frequent them. Similarly, Whyte’s 1988 study⁵⁰ of successful plazas in New York City found that many of them had reasons to loiter—sitting places, food stands, and activities to watch. In such public spaces, people can meet each other, make memories, and feel connected to a larger cause through loitering, especially in educational institutions. In turn, activist movements that support new ideas are based on people’s commitment to a common, larger cause.⁵¹

During an interview, architect and author Chang Jiat-Hwee claimed that spaces for activism in universities must be “significant, visible, and accessible”.⁵² A significant space usually refers to a politically or historically important landmark that is recognisable. “Visibility” refers to the space’s perimeter and size. Large and open areas are typically chosen as protest sites because there is enough space for protestors to congregate and for bystanders to join in or observe from a safe distance. Accessibility refers to the centrality of the chosen protest site. A good indication of this would be a central area that many corridors lead to or a common area with heavy foot traffic. Chang believes that these four features of a space create maximum impact, and thus form the ideal criteria for a protest site.⁵³

⁴⁹ ‘Bloomsbury Collections - Political Theory and Architecture’.

⁵⁰ Whyte, *City*.

⁵¹ Brown and Pickerill, ‘Space for Emotion in the Spaces of Activism’.

⁵² Chang Jiat-Hwee (Architect, Author of *Everyday Modernism*), in discussion with the author, 8 February, 2023.

⁵³ Chang Jiat-Hwee (Architect, Author of *Everyday Modernism*), in discussion with the author, 8 February, 2023.

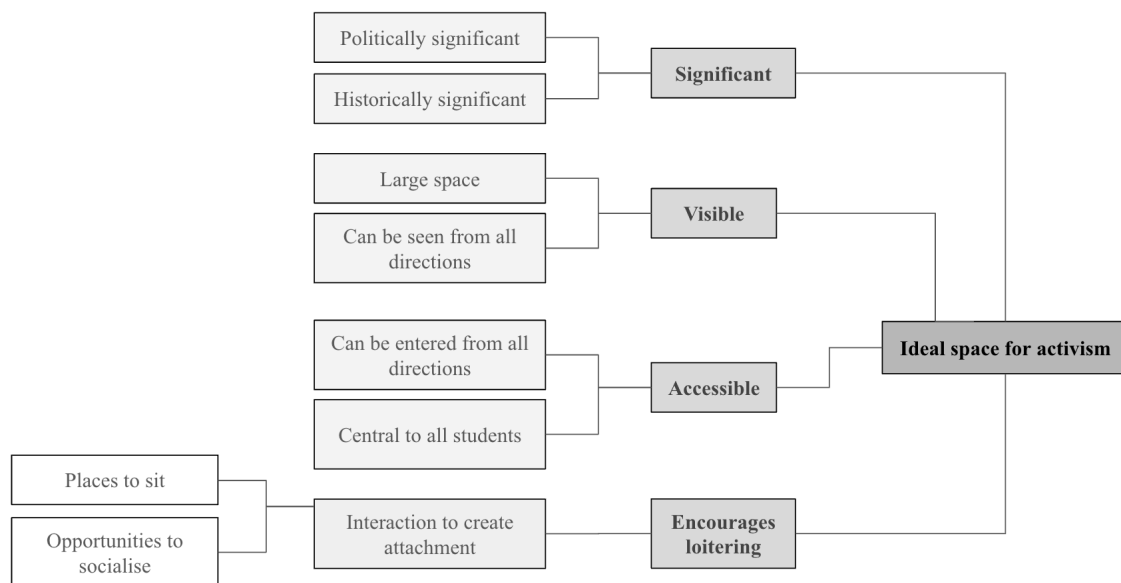


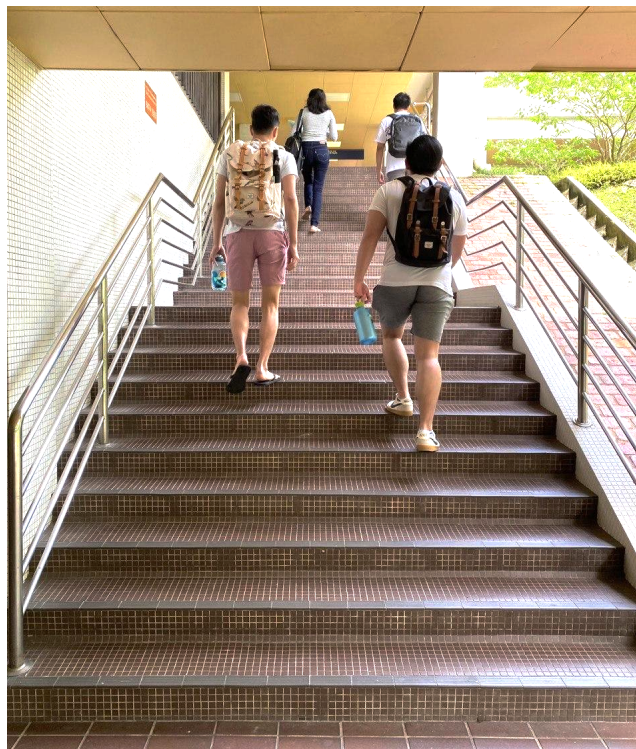
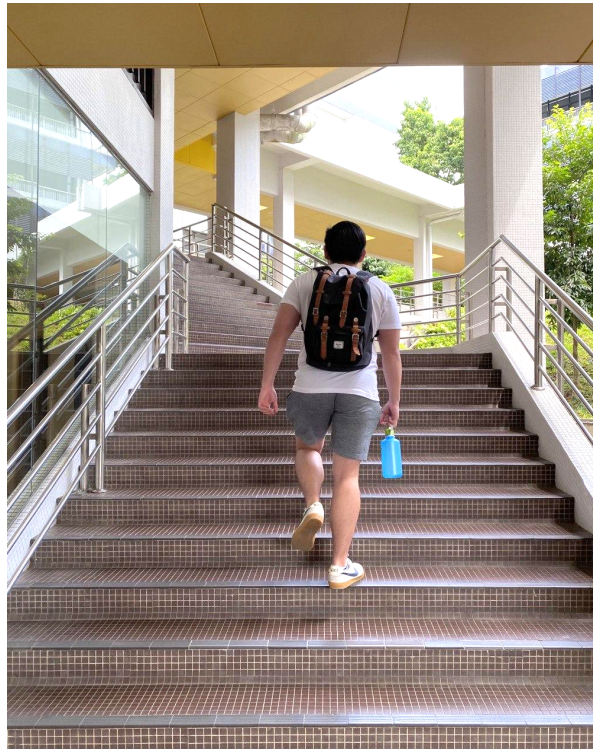
Figure 3: Feature Defining the Ideal Space for Activism.

Limiting Features of the Kent Ridge Campus compared to the Bukit Timah Campus

Chang describes the Kent Ridge campus’ transitory spaces as “disorientating to navigate and physically tiring to use”,⁵⁴ a sentiment shared by many students studying in the Arts and Science faculties today. A key contributor to the disorienting nature of the campus is the lack of a clear hierarchy of space. This refers to the main corridors and branching corridors being of equal width and height, making it hard for students to distinguish the "central" path from the side paths. Furthermore, since the Kent Ridge campus was built linearly, walkways do not converge at a central point. This means that the corridors on campus do not shepherd crowds or suggest a main path, making them physically similar, confusing to navigate, and of equal *insignificance*.

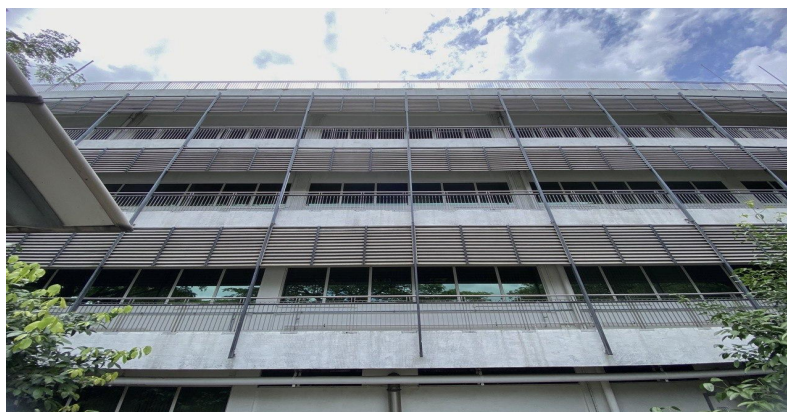
True to its namesake, the Kent *Ridge* campus is built on rough and hilly terrain. Instead of levelling the terrain for the campus, the campus was built to accommodate the terrain, forcing students to recompense with a confusing series of staircases. To get from the bus stop to the main canteen, students need to climb four stories worth of steep stairs. Due to its uneven terrain, the campus is unideal for protest marches since large crowds of people cannot efficiently climb up and down multiple flights of stairs to march down shared corridors.

⁵⁴ Chang and Zhuang, *Everyday Modernism*, 215.



Figures 4 and 5: Route from LT13 Bus Stop to the Deck Canteen.

Furthermore, buildings in the Science faculty are built with identical materials, making them virtually indistinguishable and again of equal *insignificance*.



Figures 6 and 7: Different Blocks (S12 and S13) in the Science Faculty Look Remarkably Similar

If any place on the original campus comes close to the ideal protest site, it would be the space in front of the Central Library. Meng continually refutes critiques of his linear design by citing the space in front of the library. However, although the space in front of the Central Library is significant, it is neither accessible nor very visible. The space only allows access from two directions since the others are blocked by buildings or landscaping. Chang also believes that the space is too far away from the Science faculty for it to be considered central, leading him to conclude that the original campus “had no central spaces easily accessible by all students”.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Chang and Zhuang, *Everyday Modernism*, 215.



Figure 8: The Central Library is Not the Ideal Protest Site

On the other hand, the quadrangles in the original Bukit Timah campus⁵⁶ fit three criteria of the ideal protest site perfectly.

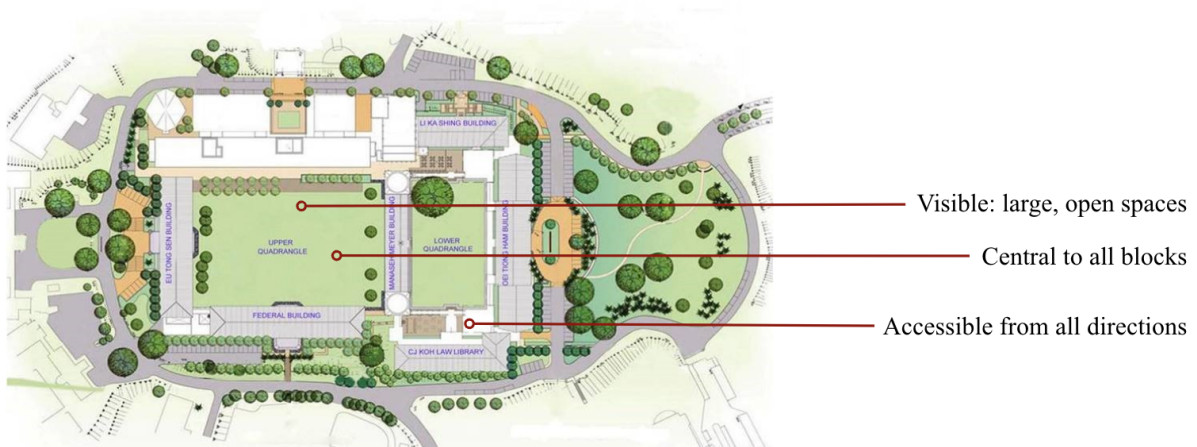


Figure 9: Plan of NUS' Bukit Timah Campus (Plan from NUS University Campus Infrastructure)

⁵⁶ From 1946 to 1980, the University of Malaya and the University of Singapore, which merged to form NUS, used this campus.



Figures 10 and 11: Students Gathering in the Lower Quadrangle of the Bukit Timah Campus in Protest (Images shared by @historyogi on Twitter, Aug 28, 2021)

The upper and lower quadrangles are large, central, open, and easily accessible by all students from all directions; they are ideal protest sites. The removal of prominent landscape features such as the quadrangles from the Bukit Timah campus during the university's relocation from the Bukit Timah to the Kent Ridge campus in 1980 could thus be interpreted as the government's attempt to stifle student activism during turbulent times.

The Architecture of the System Limits Activism

The hidden backbone of NUS lies in its code of conduct. The suppression of student activism is spelt out clearly in Article 11, which lists three specific examples.

11. As an educational institution, the University is committed to providing a forum for the exploration and discussion of a diversity of ideas and opinions, including political and social-political issues. Students are free to express their views and opinions on campus, bearing in mind the need to act in accordance with accepted scholarly and professional standards and the laws of the country. In particular, students should avoid the following:
 - a) the purveying or dissemination of pejorative viewpoints along sectarian lines (including but not limited to issues on race, language, religion, gender, sexuality, age, nationality);
 - b) any incitements to engage in disturbance, violence and/or criminal acts; and
 - c) the use of University grounds for partisan politics and/or political fundraising.

Figure 12: NUS Code of Student Conduct

Vague language like “not limited to” in Chapter 11a is not clearly defined and is easily open to manipulation. Article 11b also prohibits “disturbance”, which can also be interpreted liberally and conveniently manipulated to punish whomever the university sees fit.

On a broader scale, the state’s interference with academic institutions is also evident from their history of appointing politicians to key university positions.

Following Toh Chin Chye, prominent political elites such as Tony Tan⁵⁷ were elected to the University's management. Furthermore, letters between Lee Kuan Yew and, B.R. Sreenivasan⁵⁸ revealed that Sreenivasan called Lee out for delaying development funds because of the admission of staff and students deemed as “security risks”.⁵⁹

These organisational features can be interpreted as preventive measures against student activism. By installing ex-politicians into NUS’ top roles, the government can ensure alignment between its stance and the NUS’ stance on issues regarding academic autonomy, which have been flashpoints for activist movements in the past.

⁵⁷ The Minister for Education in 1980. Tony Tan served as vice-chancellor from 198-1981 before he was subsequently promoted to chancellor from 2011-2017 before he was elected as President.

⁵⁸ The first vice-chancellor of the University of Singapore.

⁵⁹ Holden, ‘Spaces of Autonomy, Spaces of Hope’ 20.

Other Key Factors Affecting Design

Besides limiting student activism, budgetary and personal style considerations were likely to be key factors that influenced the eventual design.

Sources, including architects on the design team, showed that despite borrowing 42% of the campus' construction budget from the World Bank, the budget was extremely limited at approximately "one-third cost" of what other campuses were built for during that time.⁶⁰ This caused the architects to compromise on the quality of the materials used, in one instance substituting Shanghai plaster with 50-mm square tiles.

The design team in charge of the master plan also opted to design the university on a grid-based plan to factor in future plans. Building along a central grid would make it easy to build new buildings and cheaply replace old ones that are no longer useful. Future plans for the university included numerous expansion plans to accommodate facilities for developing industries.⁶¹

In an interview over 40 years later, lead architect Meng Ta Cheang recounted that he was inspired by the hilly terrain of the land the campus was built on, which drove him to preserve the terrain during the construction of the campus.⁶² Chang also affirmed Meng's decision to preserve the terrain of the build site, referring to Meng's choice as "a common architect's sensibility".⁶³

These examples clearly show other factors that the master plan was influenced by. Features pointed out in the sections above can be explained by these constraints: budgetary constraints meant that buildings were built out of the same low-cost materials, and the decision to preserve the terrain could have instead been shaped by Meng's personal design choices. Instead of interpreting the homogeneous buildings and hilly terrain as moves to strip the campus of significance in order to limit student activism, they could have simply been explained by other external factors.

⁶⁰ Lim, 'Positioning the Role of the State In the Kent Ridge Campus Masterplan' 74.

⁶¹ Ibid, 42.

⁶² Ibid, 67

⁶³ Chang Jiat-Hwee (Architect, Author of *Everyday Modernism*), in discussion with the author, 8 February, 2023.

Allowances in Recent Times



Figure 13: UTown Green is the Ideal Protest Site.

Today, the campus has a clear space for protest. The UTown Green, which was constructed in 2013, fits the features above perfectly. Designed to be the “campus core that was previously missing”,⁶⁴ UTown Green is significant, visible, and accessible—a return of the quadrangles that were expunged from the original campus. Since it was built significantly later than the rest of the Arts and Science blocks, a reasonable explanation for its conceptualisation and construction would be the design shift towards prioritising large central areas in educational facilities. Before UTown was constructed, there was a glaring lack of communal spaces for students to gather and host events, unlike other European university campuses like Oxford and Cambridge, the Kent Ridge campus was modelled after.

The university’s move to reinstate the ideal protest site—the classic quadrangle—could also be attributed to NUSSU’s declining prominence. With large-scale protests dying down by the mid-80s, the benefit of a new shared event space would likely have overridden the risk of a large-scale protest. While the UTown Green certainly has the capacity to host such a crowd, Chang claims that the state has gotten more responsive and more efficient at responding to dissent, so there is no longer “reason to protest”.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Savage et al., *Kent Ridge*, 279.

⁶⁵ Chang Jiat-Hwee (Architect, Author of *Everyday Modernism*), in discussion with the author, 8 February, 2023.



Figure 14: Throngs of Concertgoers at the Annual Supernova Concert Hosted on UTown Green.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to marry newly published historical accounts with experts' opinions to edge the discourse surrounding the intention of the design of the Kent Ridge campus towards a more definitive stance. It has utilised first and second-hand accounts of the planning team, existing socio-political and spatial theories, and expert opinions to draw up a framework which was then used to evaluate and compare the old Bukit Timah campus and the newer Kent Ridge campus. From historical evidence, we can conclude that certain buildings on the campus were designed to limit activism, although these considerations may also have overlapped with existing budgetary and personal design choices.

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HOW THE RISE OF ECTOGENESIS RESHAPES THE ABORTION DEBATE IN THE U.S.

Vivienne Teo | National University of Singapore

Abstract

Latest scientific discoveries have led to ectogenesis for human beings becoming possible in the next few years. Ectogenesis means that women who wish to abort their fetuses might be obliged to let their babies continue gestating in Biobags. The “my body, my choice” argument for abortion no longer applies, since fetuses no longer need to rely on their mothers’ wombs for survival. Moreover, abortion laws today are heavily dependent on notions of viability, which would change depending on the advancement of medical technology. With ectogenesis, fetuses would be viable from a much earlier stage of gestation, which would erode the legal basis for abortion laws linked to viability. Thus, it is important to consider how the introduction of ectogenesis would reshape abortion laws, especially in the US where abortion has become a heavily politicized issue.

Keywords: *Ectogenesis, Reproductive technology, Abortion, Morality, Pregnancy, Gestation, Viability, Bodily Autonomy*

Introduction

In 2017, scientists at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute successfully developed an external womb-like system to support extremely premature lambs (Partridge et al., 2017). The development of this extra-uterine system, also known as the Biobag, was revolutionary because it showed immense potential to save the lives of extremely premature human infants. Partial ectogenesis, whereby a fetus develops externally for part of its gestation, became possible. In 2016, scientists succeeded in cultivating embryos for longer than previously achievable and only destroyed them because they were approaching the legal limits that required their destruction after 14 days, suggesting that the embryos had the potential to develop further and could subsequently be placed into Biobags for continued gestation (Reardon, 2016). By combining the findings from the two studies, full

ectogenesis, whereby a fetus is gestated externally from the moment of conception, could become a reality soon.

While the ectogenesis of mammals poses many ethical questions such as the morality of consuming factory-farmed meat, the ectogenesis of humans has even more drastic implications. Ectogenesis would radically redefine motherhood and pregnancy, change what it means to be a family, and raise questions about whether society would soon enter the dystopian worlds of *Brave New World* or *The Matrix*. Ectogenesis would also reshape the legal and moral gray areas of abortion by fundamentally redefining notions of viability and bodily autonomy which are prevalent in the language of the abortion debate. In doing so, ectogenesis simultaneously provides answers to and changes the nature of ethical questions relating to abortion. I will draw upon Langdon Winner's (1980) framework for analyzing political qualities in technical objects to understand how ectogenesis could be politicized by the abortion movement. This essay will consider landmark abortion rulings in the United States to argue that the legality of abortion is largely based on the current scientific limitations of a fetus' ability to survive outside the uterus, also known as fetal viability. Thus, the arrival of ectogenesis might lend support to arguments that abortion should not be legal given new forms of viability. Next, I will examine new discussions sparked by the rise of ectogenesis, questioning whether fetal viability should be used to determine the legality of abortion. Following this, I will explain how ectogenesis resolves the dilemma between a woman's bodily autonomy and a fetus' right to life, but at the same time introduces new tensions and controversies into the abortion debate. Overall, I aim to shed light on how advances in medical technology ultimately affect people's bodies and lives through the lens of ectogenesis.

Politicization of Technical Objects

In "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" (1980), Langdon Winner challenges the prevailing perspective that technology is apolitical, arguing that many technologies are affected by socio-economic forces and thus cannot be separated from the prevailing political conditions under which they are conceived (p. 122). Politics is fundamentally about the distribution of power and resources, so technology that shapes the arrangements of power that control people's access to resources will consequently have political impacts. Winner's framework for understanding how political and social life are impacted by technology differentiates

between technical objects that create a “form of order” in society because of their unique features and technical objects that are “inherently political” because they need a certain kind of political environment to work best in (p. 123). Objects that can create a “form of order” can be easily politicized, and their characteristics used to create a new social order that fits the agenda of the powerful political actors shaping the technology. Meanwhile, objects that are “inherently political” are those that require either authoritarian or democratic political regimes to work because they centralize or disperse power, respectively. Winner’s framework is useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of what the social impacts of advanced technology like ectogenesis will be. I posit that ectogenic technology like Biobags fall into the category of objects that create a “form of order” because the characteristics of ectogenic technology can be easily weaponized by various political actors for personal gain, causing a shift in the behavior of stakeholders involved and a reconstruction of the social order in which these actors exist to accommodate the demands of ectogenesis.

The potential political consequences of ectogenesis can be analyzed by drawing upon the lessons learned from ultrasound technology. Ultrasound technology was invented in 1956 to monitor the growth of developing fetuses but brought up unexpected moral concerns soon after. In being able to identify a fetus’ sex and genetic anomalies, ultrasounds led to a rise in sex-selective abortions and abortion of fetuses with Down Syndrome, sparking criticisms about ultrasound technology being discriminatory and ableist (Asch, 1999). Despite ultrasound technology being a technical object created for non-partisan goals, ultrasound technology also radically changed the way women, their bodies, and their pregnancies were viewed and medicalised, and subsequently had profound implications in the abortion debate.

At present, abortion is a very politicized and deeply moralized topic, with people on both sides of the political spectrum using events and objects however tenuously related to abortion to further their political agenda(s). As a result, it is unsurprising that ultrasound technology has also been politicized. The film *The Silent Scream* (1984) is one prominent way the anti-abortion movement has used ultrasound images to humanize fetuses to promote their political agenda of advocating for the right to life of fetuses. The film made use of altered ultrasound footage of a fetus being aborted to convince viewers of the immorality of abortion through emotional rhetoric designed to mislead, such as by deliberately slowing down some parts of the film to make it seem like the fetus was screaming (Petchesky, 1987). On the other hand, feminist scholars have criticized ultrasound imaging for making women

“invisible” (Petchesky, 1987). The rampant politicization of ultrasound technology on the part of the pro-choice movement is epitomized by a tweet from the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL), criticizing a Doritos advertisement featuring an ultrasound image of a fetus craving Doritos for “using #antichoice tactic of humanizing fetuses” (NARAL, 2016). By choosing to focus on one particular instance in the advertisement that could be linked to abortion in some way, NARAL showed that it was intolerant of any event or object that could humanize fetuses and was prepared to politicize it to further their political agenda.

The case study of ultrasound technology illustrates how a seemingly innocuous medical tool could become a source of tension in the abortion debate, showing how easily technology can become politicized, especially when the technology is related to abortion in some way. By the same token, ectogenesis would likely also be used both by pro- and anti-abortionists to further their agenda(s), resulting in significant political and legal consequences on abortion.

Viability

As shown from Winner’s framework, technology like ectogenesis can reshape laws, policies, and social order because of its tendency to be easily politicized. Ectogenesis would reshape the abortion debate because ectogenesis reshapes fetal viability, which forms the backbone of the legal basis for abortion, potentially causing abortion to be restricted or outlawed. Viability is a measure of how likely a fetus is to survive outside the uterus with or without artificial support. At present, fetuses can be considered from as early as 22 weeks gestation (DiGregorio, 2020).

In the landmark abortion ruling *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the court held that while a fetus may not be a life, it had a “potential life”, which the state was obligated to protect. However, the state’s obligation to protect this “potential life” could only be upheld after the fetus became viable. Similarly, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), the court made use of a viability framework, whereby abortions before fetal viability could not be restricted by the state, but abortions post-viability were illegal, except for pregnancies threatening the life of the mother. *Casey* reaffirmed the precedent set by *Roe*, making fetal viability the key turning point in which abortion could be restricted or banned. Thus, if there were significant

advances in technology, such as ectogenesis, that allowed a fetus to be viable before the thresholds on which current abortion laws are based, then to abide by Roe, abortion could be restricted for those periods too. Justice O'Connor acknowledges the weak legal foundation of abortion when she warns in *Akron v. Akron* (1983) that how far the state could restrict abortion would “differ according to the level of medical technology available”. After all, viability, by definition, is not dependent on the stage of a fetus’ gestation but on how advanced the life-saving medical technology is. Thus, ectogenesis might result in abortion becoming more restricted or outlawed because a fetus would be viable throughout all stages of gestation as long as it is given access to a Biobag.

Apart from changing the legal basis behind abortion, ectogenesis also transforms the moral basis behind abortion, because the moral basis behind abortion is heavily tied to fetal personhood, which in turn is linked to fetal viability. While some believe that abortion is immoral because a fetus is a person from the moment of conception, others maintain that non-viable fetuses are not persons so abortion is moral (Marquis, 1989). According to Marquis, one’s judgment on the morality of abortion would depend on whether one believes a fetus in question is a human person. A universal consensus on when an entity attains personhood has not been achieved because the term “person” is defined psychologically and not scientifically (Warren, 1973), so policymakers rely on proxy measures for determining fetal personhood, namely, fetal viability.

By redefining fetal viability, ectogenesis also indirectly redefines the notion of fetal personhood. A common argument for the lack of personhood of non-viable fetuses is that they do not have characteristics necessary for personhood, including the ability to sustain life independently. Anti-abortionists have criticized such an argument, noting that human beings are never fully independent, and are always reliant on other people and medical technology to survive. For example, babies and children are unable to survive “independently” of their caregivers, and patients with heart conditions need a pacemaker to survive. Few would agree that such people were considered non-viable and that it would be morally acceptable to terminate their lives. Hence, it follows that the best argument against the personhood of fetuses would be that viability requires the ability to sustain life independently of the body of a particular person. Using this definition, fetuses able to sustain life independently of the body of a particular person but still dependent on medical technology would be considered viable and awarded the slew of rights associated with personhood, including the right to life,

like how premature babies are regarded as persons despite requiring incubators and ventilators to survive. Hence, by allowing fetuses to survive independently of their mothers' bodies, ectogenesis allows fetuses to be viable at all stages of gestation, thus transferring personhood status to fetuses, eroding the moral basis of abortion for those who believe it is morally wrong to take away the life of a person.

With the rise of ectogenesis having the potential to erode the legal basis for abortion, many pro-choice philosophers have proposed arguments to defend a woman's right to choose. They argue that fetal viability should not singularly be allowed to determine the legality of abortion, because restricting abortion to periods of fetal viability is antithetical to the spirit of Roe, which aims to allow women to choose to abort for a significant portion of their pregnancy (Rhoden, 1986). Accordingly, Rhoden argues for an objective threshold to be used, which would make abortion legal for all fetuses not yet past the stage of "late gestation", which she pegs at 24 weeks gestation. If arguments like Rhoden's are deemed to be sound by lawmakers, then the rise of ectogenesis would pave the way for abortion to be legalized to periods beyond fetal viability.

Unfortunately, by focusing on practical and legal determinants of fetal personhood, Rhoden overlooks the deeper problem of finding an objective moral threshold to determine personhood. Like her "late gestation" threshold, many other proposed thresholds such as the detection of a heartbeat, detection of brain waves, or the ability to feel pain are arbitrarily set (Kushner, 1984; Law, 2019; Derbyshire and Bockmann, 2020). The overriding assumption embedded in personhood thresholds- that points in one's physical development should determine one's level of moral significance- is highly flawed. Moreover, none of these thresholds alone are necessary conditions for determining personhood. Thus, I think it is more probable that the erosion of viability thresholds, a conversation sparked by the rise of ectogenesis, would lead to the outlawing of abortion, rather than the expansion of the legality of abortion to periods beyond fetal viability.

Bodily Autonomy

Having discussed how ectogenesis could redefine fetal viability and personhood, I will now discuss another crucial issue in the abortion debate: bodily autonomy. Some pro-choice individuals believe that the discussion on fetal personhood is irrelevant because

abortion is morally acceptable regardless of whether a fetus is a person, since a woman's right to bodily autonomy trumps the right to life of the fetus, if any exists.

Pregnancy is a unique biological process, where a human being finds itself wholly and singularly dependent on another. Warren (1989) describes pregnancy as an "intimate" relationship where it is impossible to give a fetus the right to life without significantly violating its mother's rights. Likewise, Han (2013) illustrates abortion as a "maternal-fetal conflict", with pro-choicers arguing for the rights of the mother and anti-abortionists defending the rights of the fetus. To illustrate pregnancy, Thomson (1971) proposes a thought experiment known as the Violinist Argument, which likens a pregnant woman to a kidnapped person forced to plug their circulatory system into that of a dying violinist. If the person were to unplug themselves, the violinist would die. However, it seems unreasonable to force the kidnapped person to remain plugged into the violinist, because doing so violates their right to bodily autonomy. Thus, she believes that abortion is not immoral, even if the fetus is a person with a right to life, because the mother's right to bodily autonomy trumps the fetus' right to life, just like how a kidnapped person's right to bodily autonomy trumps the violinist's right to life.

Ectogenesis reshapes the abortion debate because both rights could be simultaneously exercised. A woman could choose to terminate her pregnancy and exercise her right to bodily autonomy, while at the same time a fetus could be allowed to continue living by being transferred into a Biobag. As a result, ectogenesis resolves what Thomson believes to be the main tension in the abortion debate- that of a fetus' right to life and a woman's right to bodily autonomy. With ectogenesis, abortion could be banned, because a fetus' right to life is not in conflict with anyone else's rights and is the only morally significant thing the state has to protect.

Conversely, some detractors disagree that a fetus' right to life is the only morally significant thing the state must uphold, and believe even with ectogenesis, a biological parent would still have a right to their fetus' death, because a state must consider people's right to not become biological parents. The right to not become biological parents stems from the concept of "attributional parenthood", a damaging social attitude whereby biological parents are treated as though they have the same moral obligations as legal parents, resulting in discrimination against biological parents for "shirking" their "responsibilities" (Cohen,

2008). Thus, biological parents who are forced to place their fetuses into Biobags might still experience psychological harm in feeling obligated or in being pressured to be obligated toward their fetuses. Furthermore, for many women, abortion is seen as a choice to not merely physically sever their fetus from themselves but also to avoid becoming mothers (Dakić, 2019), so forcing women to place their fetuses into Biobags would not circumvent the issue at hand of women not wanting to have a child toward whom they would feel moral responsibility (Cannold, 1995). Accordingly, biological parents should be given the choice to terminate their fetuses to avoid these harms (Räsänen, 2017). Moreover, there is no legal basis for the state to forcibly remove a fetus and place it in a Biobag for further gestation. In *Davis v. Davis* (1992), the court used the legal foundation of a “right to (not) procreate” to prevent a woman from gestating the embryos she shared with her ex-husband, so it seems legally consistent that the state allows a woman to terminate both her pregnancy and fetus because she has the right to not become a biological parent. From a legal standpoint, ectogenesis would not significantly reshape the abortion debate because people would still have the right to not become biological parents and to terminate their fetuses.

Nevertheless, thinkers like Thomson beg to differ, as a fetus' right to life outweighs a person's right to not become a biological parent. Returning to the Violinist Argument, Thomson argues that biological parents do not have a right to their fetus' death, saying that “if, when you unplug yourself, there is a miracle and [the violinist] survives, you [do not] then have a right to turn round and slit his throat” (Thomson, 1971, p. 49). Thomson believes that a person only has a right to kill someone if they did so to avoid their body being used against their will, and not for other reasons. When extended to ectogenesis, it seems morally consistent that a woman has a right to remove a fetus from her womb, but not the right to terminate its life if ectogenesis were possible. Similarly, Singer and Wells (1984) contend that abortion is morally unacceptable if ectogenesis were available because while one has the “freedom to choose what is to happen to one's body”, one does not have the “freedom to insist on the death of a being that is capable of living outside one's body” (p. 135). To them, abortion is morally wrong when the issue of bodily autonomy is not at play. Therefore, the rise of ectogenesis could support the argument that the removal of a fetus from one's womb is morally acceptable, while abortion, whereby a fetus is terminated, is not.

Apart from not having the right to the death of one's fetus, the rise of ectogenesis also calls into question whether biological parents have any rights toward their offspring,

particularly the right to its death. Before the introduction of reproductive technology, the responsibilities that parents have toward their offspring were derived from the fact that the genetic ties that biological parents shared with their offspring were morally significant enough to confer parental responsibility. However, with reproductive technology like in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and ectogenesis, biological parents need not also be the legal parents of a child, and the moral significance of genetic ties has decreased substantially. Whether a person is accorded the rights and responsibilities of a parent will no longer be solely determined by the presence of genetic ties, because the conferring of parental rights and responsibilities is a separate process from choosing to be a biological parent. As such, the rise of ectogenesis could lend support to arguments that mothers are not legally obligated toward their biological offspring on the sole basis of genetic ties. Accordingly, biological mothers who are not also legal mothers would not have any rights toward their fetus, and especially not the right to its death. Thus, ectogenesis might reinforce arguments that women should not be allowed to abort their fetuses because these fetuses are not their legal property, but the property of their potential legal parents.

Conclusion

Returning to Winner's framework, the rise of ectogenesis is likely to prompt conversations surrounding fetal viability and bodily autonomy, because, as Winner asserts, some technical objects inevitably produce certain effects because of the way they are designed (p. 125). The technologies that societies choose to adopt will ultimately guide people in numerous unprecedented areas of social life (p. 127), so ectogenesis has the potential to "encompass purpose far beyond [its] immediate use" (p. 125) of helping premature babies, by having the unanticipated effect of redefining when a fetus is considered viable and reshaping the notion of bodily autonomy.

With ectogenesis, a fetus is viable at all stages of gestation, so to abide by the word of the law, abortion could be banned. In the meantime, concerns on the outlawing of abortion might provoke a re-evaluation of the relevance of viability thresholds to determine the legality of abortion. Moreover, while the issue of a woman's bodily autonomy will no longer be as significant, the thorny moral issues surrounding the rights of biological parents and the right to the death of a fetus will be thrust into the limelight, which could possibly remove both the legal and moral foundations for abortion. Ultimately, determining the personhood of

a fetus and weighing the rights of women vis-a-vis their fetuses remain difficult problems. While the possibility of ectogenesis provokes discussion and forces thinkers to clarify their stances and beliefs on abortion, abortion remains a controversial question with no clear answers foreseen in the near future. The effect of ectogenesis on the abortion debate is merely a snippet of insight into a future where the possibilities of what medical technology can do are boundless. As medical technology continues to advance rapidly, we can expect even more ethical questions to arise, and that laws and policies will continue to shift to accommodate the breakthroughs in development.

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IN DEFENSE OF PROTECTIONISM: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF FREE TRADE IDEOLOGY

Loo U-Hui, Benedict | National University of Singapore

Abstract

It is widely accepted in the field of economics that protectionism has profound ramifications on economic growth and welfare in countries that choose to impose them and even on the international economy as a whole. However, recent geopolitical developments have seen numerous countries and even world powers resorting to protectionist policies once again at an unprecedented rate. This suggests a growing need to analyze and hence, understand the rationale for enacting protectionist measures given its alleged negative implications. It is against this backdrop that I call into question if the theoretical prediction of the benefits of trade liberalization even bears out in reality before arguing that protectionist policies can bring profound benefits to countries which implement them through a comprehensive analysis of their impacts on specific areas.

Keywords: *Protectionism, Trade Liberalization*

Introduction

The fundamental underpinnings of the current world economy are largely founded on the theory of comparative advantage that was first put forth by David Ricardo in 1817 where he famously postulated that trade liberalization would allow countries to make mutually beneficial ‘gains from trade’ by exploiting the benefits of specialization based on relative opportunity costs (Findlay, 1991). It has since remained largely uncontroversial amongst economists that countries should continue to embrace free trade to efficiently pursue economic growth and prosperity. It is, thus, unsurprising that protectionist policies are generally frowned upon given that it acts as an impediment to the mutually beneficial gains from trade that could have otherwise been attained in their absence.

Given the apparent benefits that trade liberalization brings, it is noteworthy that protectionism has been on the rise in recent years (Jones, 2017; Altenberg, 2021), with world powers such as the United States and China engaging in a trade war which has had, and

continues to have, a profound impact on their economies (Kapustina et al., 2020). Although this can be attributed to geopolitical considerations that fall out of the purview of traditional economic analyses, it still suggests a growing need to understand the possible benefits that protectionism can bring through an economic lens.

This essay, therefore, argues in favor of protectionism by first calling into question if the theoretical prediction of the benefits that trade liberalization brings even bears out in reality given that the opposers of protectionism found the basis of their argument on the benefits of free trade. In particular, by using empirical evidence to reveal the meagreness of its benefits and even detrimental impact that trade liberalization has on developing economies. Next, I will shed light on the need for protectionism in protecting infant industries as a way to allow developing economies to enter into higher-value industries to prevent stagnating levels of economic growth in the long run. I also argue that protectionism can bring critical benefits for countries that impose them in the realm of protecting domestic industries, thereby preventing salient issues such as structural unemployment. Due consideration will also be given to the benefit that protectionism has in the form of protecting national security and sovereignty. Lastly, I will shed light on the potential benefits that protectionism can bring in the form of countering the negative ramifications that trade brings to the environment.

The Meagre Benefits of Trade Liberalization on Developing Economies

The theoretical prediction postulates that free trade would benefit developing economies as it will allow them to export more labor-intensive products to developed countries as they have a comparative advantage in the production of such goods given that they are endowed with cheap and abundant amounts of labor (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019). This would, therefore, be beneficial to the workers in developing economies as it would allow them to gain higher levels of employment and earn higher wages which would improve their overall standard of living.

However, the empirical evidence shows that the benefits of free trade to developing economies are meager. For instance, India was forced to reduce protectionist barriers to receive desperately needed funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991 (Pawar et al., 2021). However, contrary to the theoretical prediction, GDP growth in India

initially *declined* in 1991 before returning to its 1985-1990 trend of 5.9% per year which was when protectionist policies were still in place; After which, growth increased slightly to 6% per year between 1992-2004 before increasing to around 7.5% per year from the mid-2000s and onwards, where it has stagnated ever since (The World Bank, n.d.). This illuminates that India's GDP growth saw no significant improvement pre and post-trade liberalization in 1991 as the overall trend remained largely flat. This thus reveals that the benefits of free trade on developing economies may be overstated given that it seemed to have only had a marginal impact on India's GDP growth.

The Detrimental Impact of Trade Liberalization on Developing Economies

Trade liberalization can even bring profound ramifications to developing economies in the form of exacerbating poverty and economic inequality. According to Topalova (2005), India's 1991 policy shift in the form of embracing free trade and reducing protectionist policies saw levels of inequality increasing significantly. In particular, it was revealed that poverty incidence and depth in India declined less in rural areas which had higher exposure to trade liberalization which represented a reversal of around 15% of India's prior success in reducing poverty. This was done through a "Difference-in-Differences Method" which essentially integrates the findings of before-after studies with those of cross-sectional treatment-control comparisons to produce a more accurate assessment (Fredriksson & Oliveira, 2019). To put it simply, Topalova (2005) compared and contrasted the incidence of poverty and inequality across different rural districts based on differing level of trade liberalization pre and post-India's 1991 trade reforms. It is also noteworthy that this trend of rising levels of economic inequality was not limited to India as in silo but was also similarly seen in other countries such as Vietnam and Taiwan (Nguyen et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022) respectively. The above, therefore, critically illuminates that trade liberalization can bring ramifications on developing economies concerning the exacerbation of poverty and inequality.

Core-Periphery Theory

According to basic economic theory, the production of goods requires two key components: labor and capital. This, therefore, suggests that in line with the theory of comparative advantage, should countries choose to engage in free trade, countries that are relatively more endowed with labor should specialize in the production of labor-intensive

goods. Conversely, countries that are relatively more endowed with capital should specialize in the production of capital-intensive goods.

This, however, gives rise to a salient issue which can be best explained by what is known as the *Core-Periphery Theory* which essentially reveals that richer countries (referred to as cores) that specialize in capital-intensive products take the majority of the gains from trade whilst poorer countries (referred to as peripheries) who specialize in labor-intensive products make marginal gains from trade. For instance, Kostoska et al. (2020) revealed that poorer countries specialize in labor-intensive activities such as assembly and processing whilst richer countries specialize in capital-intensive activities such as R&D and design; this “vast and unequal global division of labor” disproportionately benefits the richer nations (p. 20). This hence explains the phenomenon in which the bulk of poorer countries experienced marginal economic gains under free trade despite a substantial increase in their net exports given that they have low levels of domestic value-add. As such, this reveals that free trade can result in the continued ‘subsistence’ of poorer countries in the international economy as they are forced to remain in lower-value labor-intensive industries based on comparative advantage.

The Need to Protect Infant Industries

The infant industry argument in favor of protectionism provides a solution. Oatley (2018) clearly explains that protectionism can bring profound benefits to developing economies by helping them to create competencies in the production of capital-intensive goods by protecting these ‘infant industries’ in the short run. The reason these ‘infant industries’ require protection in the short run is that they do not have the same economies of scale as their foreign competitors at the onset. Only after they have developed these competencies will they then be able to efficiently compete in the international market without the help of protectionist measures. Although this will be costly in the short run as the government will be effectively preventing the import of lower-cost goods and services, this will allow developing economies to develop competencies in capital-intensive, higher value-add, goods and services that will enable them to recognise increased and sustained levels of economic growth as compared to if they stayed focused on labor-intensive industries that have low value-add.

Furthermore, existing literature reveals that this argument does indeed bear out in reality. For instance, Head (1994) revealed that tariffs allowed the initially uncompetitive US local steel rail industry to grow and eventually emerge as a leader in the world market. Hansen et al. (2003) raised another example where he accredited the emergence of Denmark's wind power industry as a leader in the global market with the help of protectionist production subsidies (Hansen et al., 2003). Irwin (2000) highlighted another instance of how protectionism allowed the tinplate industry in the United States to flourish and grow in the 1890s, from being effectively non-existent to the point where the United States eventually became fully self-sufficient. This thus suggests that these successes can be realized for developing economies as well, thereby allowing them to overcome the unequal division of labor that currently characterizes the global economy, and hence, pursue increased and sustained levels of economic growth.

The Benefits of Protectionism on Safeguarding Domestic Industries

Trade liberalization results in increased levels of competition for domestic industries given that they now have to compete with foreign industries to produce the same goods and services. If they are unable to produce the same goods and services at the same price and/or quality, whole industries can be forced out of business which will result in key issues such as structural unemployment. For instance, Storesletten and Zilibotti (2014) reported that China's share of global manufacturing exports increased quickly and significantly from 2.3% to 18.8% between 1991 and 2013 and this resulted in multiple countries being hit by what was termed the 'China shock'. A large number of manufacturing jobs were lost in industries for countries which produced goods that were now produced more cheaply in China, thereby leading to structural unemployment. To illuminate this, Feenstra & Sasahara (2018) revealed that the impact of the 'China shock' resulted in increased imports of merchandise from China to the US which resulted in a decreased demand of 1.4 million jobs in the US manufacturing industry and 0.6 million in the service industries between 1995-2011 and the impacts continue to be felt today.

Although the overall impact of the 'China shock' generated a net demand for about 1.7 million jobs in the US (Feenstra & Sasahara, 2018), due consideration must be given to the structural unemployment that took place in the manufacturing industries. Autor et al. (2016) revealed that the US manufacturing industry's labor market took a considerable amount of time to adjust to the 'China shock' as unemployment rates remained above average

for more than a decade. This phenomenon can be explained by the factor immobility of labor whereby these suddenly structurally unemployed individuals lack the necessary knowledge and skills to gain employment in other non manufacturing industries.

The onset of structural unemployment caused by the “China shock” also resulted in third-party costs. For instance, there was a significant enhancement of transfer benefits (of about \$6 per worker for every \$100 extra in import exposure) from the US government to the structurally unemployed workers; This was done to help them alleviate the adverse effects of the unemployment and decrease in wages that they were experiencing (Autor et al., 2016). The third-party costs here arise because taxpayers are essentially the ones paying for these transfer benefits. Not to mention the fact that there are opportunity costs incurred here as the expenditure used to fund these transfer benefits could have gone to other areas such as healthcare and education which would have improved overall societal welfare.

The above examples, therefore, illuminate the potential benefit that protectionism can bring as a transitional policy to alleviate the unintended consequences of overt trade liberalization. For example, protectionist policies could allow for a smoother transition of labor from ‘sunset’ industries to other emerging, ‘sunrise’, industries. This would account for the factor immobility of labor and hence, prevent the sudden onset of structural unemployment and its resulting negative impacts. This would in turn reduce the third-party and opportunity costs in the form of transfer benefits that are typically provided to the structurally unemployed as well.

The Benefits of Protectionism on National Security

Trade liberalization can also serve to undermine the long-term national security of a country as the loss of whole industries can unintentionally result in an overreliance on imports which can be manipulated against their interests. This can manifest in the form of dumping which is defined as the sale of an export product for a price that is lower than in its local markets (Yarrow, 1989). Firoz (1999) revealed an alleged instance of steel dumping into the US markets in the 1990s which would have decimated the US steel industry if the US had not enacted protectionist measures. Although this seems to be potentially beneficial at first glance as it entails lower prices for consumers and the shifting of labor to more productive and comparatively advantageous areas, this is not guaranteed in the long run. To illuminate

this, the complete loss of the US steel industry would have meant that the US would have effectively been completely reliant on foreign supplies for the manufacturing of all goods that require steel which would effectively put them at the mercy of other nations. Thus, the supply and/or price of steel could be manipulated against their interest. For example, countries that are in control of the production of steel could threaten to limit supply or increase the price of steel if the US refuses to comply with their demands, thereby undermining the national security and sovereignty of the US.

A current example that more clearly illustrates the myopic nature of free trade ideology is the US ban on semiconductor chip exports to China. As reported by Times (2023), the US has not only banned chip exports to China but has also managed to convince its allies such as the Netherlands and Japan to exercise export controls of chips to China as well. This is attributed to the US effort to slow the development of China's Artificial Intelligence (AI) military applications which are becoming increasingly pivotal for geopolitical clout and dominance. This is projected to set China's semiconductor industry back at least 20 years on the technological frontier and China now has no choice but to prepare a US\$143 billion support package to achieve self-sufficiency in semiconductor chip production (Liu, 2023). This reveals how China's initial openness and dependence on imports of semiconductor chips has left them vulnerable as they will lose out on pivotal developments in AI military applications which could have been avoided if they better protected and developed their local semiconductor industries from the onset.

The aforementioned examples reveal that proponents of free trade fail to take into account the self-interested nature of nations in the political economy whereby industry and trade dominance can, and will likely be, used in their favor to undermine the sovereignty and national security of other countries. Although traditional economic analysis shows that it is beneficial for countries to specialize in comparatively advantageous industries and to engage in free trade, this is unlikely to bear out in reality. As Denton (1989) aptly put it, a consideration that needs to be taken into account is the impact that being dependent on foreign suppliers has, both in terms of the industry that is impacted and the users farther down the supply chain, as well as overall national security. Protectionism is, therefore, necessary to protect the national security and sovereignty of countries as the lack thereof could leave them exposed to geopolitical exploitation due to their overreliance on imports.

The Benefits of Protectionism on the Environment

According to research conducted by Vaughan and Block (2002), it has been found that the consequent increase in economic activity as a result of trade liberalization has led to increased levels of environmental degradation. This is attributed to the increased use of natural resources such as energy, timber, or freshwater sources required to drive an expansion in production, through greater volumes of air and water pollution, and also due to higher levels of hazardous wastes or toxic releases. In response, scholars such as Laplante and Garbutt (1992) have offered a possible solution in the form of enacting environmental protectionist measures as a way to reduce the environmental degradation that is brought about by trade liberalization. For instance, tariffs or bans can be placed on goods produced by countries/companies with lax environmental regulations or practices. This would incentivise such countries/companies to improve their environmental standards and may even further spur the development of more environmentally-sustainable technologies and practices which would prevent trade-induced environmental degradation in the long run. This, therefore, illuminates the benefits that environmental protectionism can bring in the form of preventing environmental degradation which has become an increasingly salient concern in recent years due to the negative effects of climate change in the form of global warming.

Conclusion

In summary, this essay has illuminated the benefits of protectionism by first revealing the empirical meagreness of the benefits brought about by trade liberalization and even shedding light on the detrimental impacts that it brings to developing economies. Next, it demonstrated the benefits of protectionism in helping developing economies enter into higher-value capital-intensive industries as a way to achieve increased and sustained levels of economic growth. It has also successfully recommended the employment of protectionism as a transitional policy to prevent the adverse effects of structural unemployment that results in unintentional third-party and opportunity costs. It also displayed the necessity of protectionism for integral industries due to concerns about national security and sovereignty. Lastly, it revealed the way in which protectionism can be levied as a way to counteract the negative ramifications that trade brings to the environment. This paper, therefore, illuminates the need to reconsider the widely accepted belief that trade liberalization is the only way for countries to pursue economic growth and prosperity as due consideration must also be given

to protectionism given the benefits that it can bring.

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IS IT MORALLY ACCEPTABLE TO HAVE BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN TODAY?

Vivienne Teo | National University of Singapore

Abstract

This paper seeks to challenge the popular historical worldview that procreation is good. Firstly, the philosophy of antinatalism argues that procreation is morally wrong because of the asymmetry of pain and pleasure in existence and non-existence. Secondly, there are a large number of children who would benefit greatly from being adopted, but who would not reap those benefits should people continue to procreate. Lastly, the significant environmental costs of having a child means that procreation leads to huge negative impacts on people in less economically developed parts of the world.

Keywords: *Procreation, Existence, Antinatalism, Charity, Poverty, Adoption, Environmental costs*

Introduction

The 21st century saw the rise of movements like the Zero Population Growth and Childfree Movement. With the rise in global temperatures and inequality, the uncertainty surrounding the future has made people question the assumption that procreation is good. From Prince Harry to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, celebrities and politicians alike are recognising the adverse effects of procreation, and it is worth our while to evaluate whether it is morally acceptable to have biological children today.⁶⁶

There are several main arguments against having biological children today. The views are broken down into two categories, firstly a “child-centred” category that considers the negative impacts of existence on the child, which includes Benatar’s arguments for antinatalism. The second category is “other-centred”, considering the negative impacts of procreation on third parties, including the global poor and those who will suffer the impacts of climate change. Discussion will consist of Singer’s Drowning Child Argument and

⁶⁶ Williams, “To Breed or Not to Breed?”

environmental concerns. In this essay, I will be arguing from the point of view of individuals in developed countries who are procreating intentionally.

Antinatalism

Antinatalism is the philosophical belief that it is morally wrong to procreate. Benatar argues that there is an asymmetry between goodness and badness in existence and non-existence.⁶⁷ If a person were to procreate, the child would experience pain ('bad') and pleasure ('good'). However, if that child did not exist, they would not experience pain ('good') and not experience pleasure ('not bad'). Benatar's arguments are in line with commonsense morality. People generally believe that we should avoid bringing suffering beings into existence, as shown by how the abortion of foetuses with genetic illnesses is seen as more acceptable than the abortion of healthy foetuses. Thus, preventing pain by not bringing a suffering child into existence is 'good'. Moreover, for people who regret not having children, they grieve for themselves only, and not for the children whose existence they have deprived. As such, the absence of pleasure (on the part of the non-existent children) is 'not bad', as the absence of pleasure is only bad when someone is being deprived of it. Comparing the presence of pain in existence ('bad') with the absence of pain in non-existence ('good'), non-existence is advantageous. Comparing the presence of pleasure in existence ('good') with the absence of pleasure in non-existence ('not bad'), Benatar argues that existence is not advantageous because for existence to be a real advantage over non-existence, non-existence would have to be 'bad'. However, the absence of pleasure is 'not bad'. To Benatar, there is nothing bad about non-existence, but some bad associated with existence, and thus it is morally wrong to have children.

Benatar's position is controversial. His argument seems to go against what people see as a natural, biological drive that should not be painted as a moral issue. From an evolutionary perspective, human beings are biologically wired to reproduce.⁶⁸ However, just because we have a biological inclination to do something does not make the action morally right. The MAOA gene, known in popular culture as the 'serial killer gene', is linked to hyper aggression and violence.⁶⁹ Similarly, research has found a genetic basis for pedophilia.⁷⁰ Few

⁶⁷ Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*.

⁶⁸ Morgan and King, "Why Have Children in the 21st Century?"

⁶⁹ Hunter, "The Psycho Gene."

⁷⁰ Alanko et al., "Evidence for Heritability of Adult Men's Sexual Interest in Youth under Age 16 from a Population-Based Extended Twin Design."

would agree that individuals who are genetically predisposed to serial killing and pedophilia would be morally justified in doing so just because they had a biological inclination towards it. Thus, the argument that procreation is morally acceptable because people have a biological urge to do so is flawed.

Other critics reject Benatar's asymmetry argument. They argue that Benatar's assertion that the absence of pain for non-existent beings being 'good' is flawed because it only makes sense as a claim about impersonal value. DeGrazia argues that Benatar's asymmetry is not so much an asymmetry about pleasure and pain, but rather an asymmetry between impersonal and personal (person-affecting) views,⁷¹ as nothing can be 'good' or 'bad' for non-existent beings.⁷² If no child is created, no one is benefiting from the absence of pain, and thus the absence of pain is 'not good' (rather than 'good'), and no asymmetry exists. However, Benatar clarifies that he is comparing between two hypothetical, alternative worlds of non-existence and existence, as the argument would be moot if we argued that the world of the non-existent did not exist. Moreover, 'we have stronger duties to avoid harm than to bestow benefit', so the argument for not bringing a person into existence holds.⁷³ On this perspective I agree with Benatar since his argument is in line with commonsense morality— it is morally obligatory of me to not cause pain to X by torturing him, but not morally obligatory of me to give pleasure to X by buying him an ice-cream. Thus, Benatar's asymmetry argument holds against these objections.

However, Benatar's argument also presumes that goodness and badness can be measured in terms of presence/absence of pleasure/pain. Some deontologists believe that existence itself is an intrinsic good that is infinitely better than non-existence, and thus the badness caused by all the pain in the world cannot outweigh the goodness brought about by mere existence. Similarly, utilitarians like JS Mill would argue that existence is better than non-existence because of the existence of 'higher pleasures'. Mill disagrees that pleasure and pain are the only intrinsic goods, and claims that there are some 'higher pleasures', like intellectual pursuits, that are intrinsically good too.⁷⁴ Only through existence would one get to enjoy these goods, and thus existence brings about more good than non-existence. In the face of such objections, Benatar's argument fails because of his assumption that the benefits of

⁷¹ Magnusson, "How to Reject Benatar's Asymmetry Argument."

⁷² DeGrazia, "Is It Wrong to Impose the Harms of Human Life?"

⁷³ Benatar, "Still Better Never to Have Been."

⁷⁴ Brink, "Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy."

existence are finite. To deontologists and Mill's brand of utilitarians, the goodness brought about by existence makes up for the suffering in existence, and thus having children is morally acceptable.

The Drowning Child Argument and Environmental Concerns

Singer argues that if we can significantly help others with relatively small costs to ourselves, we ought to do it. He proposes a thought experiment known as the Drowning Child Argument, likening children in need of humanitarian aid to a child drowning in a pond, and the aid that we give as the help we offer the drowning child.⁷⁵ If we were to walk past a pond with a drowning child, he argues that it would be immoral of us to not jump in and save the child as the cost of us getting our clothes dirty is much smaller than the harm done to the child if he were to drown. Similarly, it is immoral if we do not donate to charity, because the cost to us of losing that money (for example, eating a less luxurious meal) is smaller than the cost of a child overseas dying from starvation due to lack of aid. We can apply Singer's argument to the idea of having biological children.

Assume that Sue and John intend to live frugally and donate all their savings to charity. If they were to procreate, they would have to spend a significant amount of money raising that child. In the United States, they would spend approximately \$233,610.⁷⁶ Put into perspective, \$233,610 can save 67 lives if given to the Against Malaria Foundation.⁷⁷ Rachels argues that we have a moral duty to take care of people who already exist and who are living in poverty, rather than create more people who would also require these resources.⁷⁸ Resources are finite and whenever someone chooses to procreate, they are giving money to feed the children they have created rather than the global poor, taking resources away from the Drowning Child and indirectly causing them harm. Thus, it is immoral to have biological children as doing so imposes large costs on others, such as the cost of starving children dying.

However, most people who do not have children will not donate their excess money to charity. Instead, the money they would have spent on their children would simply go to frivolous pursuits. To rebut this counterargument, we need to have a more comprehensive

⁷⁵ Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality."

⁷⁶ Lino, "The Cost of Raising a Child."

⁷⁷ Statistics obtained from the calculator on Peter Singer's website, *The Life You Can Save*

⁷⁸ Rachels, "The Immorality of Having Children."

consideration of costs involved. The environmental costs associated with having children are significant. On estimate, having one fewer child saves 58.6 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent per year.⁷⁹ Moreover, climate change disproportionately impacts low-income individuals in the Global South, so the environmental costs of having biological children falls on the metaphorical Drowning Child we were originally meant to save.⁸⁰ To Rachels, regardless of whether Sue and John's extra income is spent on humanitarian aid or a yacht, having biological children remains immoral because of the additional environmental costs that would not exist if they did not have a biological child.

Nonetheless, the emotional and psychological costs of Sue and John not having children might be great, and may even outweigh the cost of a starving child dying. To some, having a child brings about great joy and fulfilment that cannot otherwise be achieved. From a utilitarian perspective, it would be immoral of Sue and John to not have a child, since that would decrease the overall pleasure in the world. Meanwhile, pluralists would argue that both donating money and child-rearing are intrinsic goods that cannot be compared. Each is unique and we cannot evaluate the value of child-rearing vis-a-vis altruism.⁸¹ To people who think in this manner, they should adopt. Rulli advocates for adoption over having biological children to avoid increasing the number of people in need.⁸² Adoption allows couples to enjoy the fulfilment of child-rearing while simultaneously meeting the needs of a child for a family, which is morally superior to procreation as it does not create additional needs. Given the ease of adoption and large numbers of children in need, adoption is a morally superior alternative to individuals who desire children.⁸³

Timmerman counters Singer's Drowning Child argument by arguing that donating is morally supererogatory, not obligatory. Timmerman invites us to consider the example of Unlucky Lisa, who on her journey to work walks past hundreds of shallow ponds each with a drowning child inside. Moreover, suppose that the same thing happens to Lisa every day for the rest of her life. Thus, she is repeatedly faced with the choice to save a child.⁸⁴ In the story, Timmerman illustrates that although the cost to Lisa of saving one child is smaller than the cost of the child drowning, she is compromising on her quality of life in saving every single

⁷⁹ Wynes and Nicholas, "The Climate Mitigation Gap."

⁸⁰ Islam and Winkel, "Climate Change and Social Inequality."

⁸¹ Andes, "The Ethics of Procreation and Parenthood in Affluent Nations."

⁸² Rulli, "The Unique Value of Adoption."

⁸³ Friedrich, "A Duty to Adopt?"

⁸⁴ Timmerman, "Save (Some of) the Children."

drowning child. I agree with Timmerman, as we would not blame Lisa for deciding to spend one day resting instead of saving drowning children, showing how we view charitable giving, once a person has given a certain minimum amount, as morally supererogatory. We can believe we are obligated to give certain sums to charity, but this does not mean that, as Singer advocates, we need to donate to the point of marginal utility. Thus, it is morally obligatory to contribute to famine relief but also morally acceptable to have children as long as having children did not compromise one's ability to give the minimum morally required amount.

Besides, the aforementioned arguments have assumed that procreation always leads to more harm than good on the global poor and environment. Let us assume a hypothetical scenario of Greta, who was raised with environmentally conscious values. Greta grows up to become an environmental activist whose actions inspire many others to reduce their carbon emissions and live sustainably. Greta becomes an overall investment to the global climate movement, and her existence is more than enough to cover for the negative environmental impacts that she brought about. Similarly, suppose Bill's parents decide to procreate instead of helping a starving child, but Bill grows up to become a rich philanthropist, and his existence results in more Drowning Children being saved. In these scenarios, actual consequentialists would say it was morally right for Greta and Bill's parents to procreate, since their child brought about more goodness overall.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Benatar and Singer have very strong arguments that suggest having biological children today is morally wrong. At the same time, if existence itself is intrinsically good, antinatalism fails and having biological children is not morally wrong. Similarly, if we were to view donating as supererogatory and have children that brought about more goodness to the world, it is not morally wrong to procreate. Ultimately, depending on one's personal moral beliefs and how one views existence, the value of children, and giving aid, there would be disagreement on whether having children is morally acceptable today.

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**NUDGING AND PATERNALISM:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THEIR PERMISSIBILITY AND POTENTIAL
IMPLICATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POLICY MAKING**

Loo U-Hui, Benedict | National University of Singapore

Abstract

This essay critically examines the permissibility of nudging and paternalism, highlighting their potential benefits and pitfalls. It argues that while nudging is generally considered permissible, paternalism raises concerns regarding freedom of choice. The essay discusses the mechanisms through which nudges and paternalistic laws can lead to desirable outcomes and considers the implications of both approaches in policy making, and the nuanced act of balancing individual freedom and societal welfare when implementing nudges and paternalistic laws.

Keywords: *Nudging, Paternalism, Freedom, Welfare*

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the level of interest shown by governments and public officials in making use of the behavioural sciences in order to advance the goals of public policy (Krawiec, 2021). In particular, governments have been increasingly employing the use of nudges in policymaking which effectively allows them to alter the choice environment of their citizens to steer them towards better options without limiting their freedom of choice (Schmidt, 2019). Meanwhile, governments have also continued adopting a paternalistic stance in their policymaking decisions where paternalism is defined as "the interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced" (Dworkin, 1972, p. 65). This typically manifests in the enactment of paternalistic laws where the government essentially removes a citizen's freedom of choice which is done to allegedly protect them from harm or to promote their own well-being, even if they are against their own wishes or interests. The above, thus, reveals that nudges and paternalistic laws are similar in the sense that they both aim to improve citizen satisfaction and outcomes in the context of contemporary policymaking. However, they differ with regard to their

degree of interference - while nudging is seemingly permissible given that an agent's freedom of choice remains intact. Paternalism, on the other hand, is seemingly impermissible given that it infringes on an agent's freedom of choice since it mandates citizens to follow the law that has been set by the state.

This essay, therefore, endeavours to engage in a critical examination of the permissibility and potential implications of nudging and paternalism in contemporary policymaking. In particular, by first examining the mechanism in which nudges can lead to beneficial outcomes. After which, we will consider the use of paternalistic laws by governments – where we will reveal that despite the fact that it limits an agent's freedom of choice, it can indeed lead to beneficial outcomes which warrant its permissibility. Having said that, due consideration will be given to the potential pitfalls of enacting paternalistic laws before also considering the potential implications that may arise from the outright removal of paternalistic laws.

The Benefits of Nudging

Schmidt (2019) postulates that the use of nudges in policymaking does not limit an agent's freedom of choice given that their set of options remains unchanged – but instead changes the way in which choices are presented to them. Nudges can, therefore, be beneficial as they can be used to guide agents to seemingly better options and hence, outcomes – without interfering with their personal choice or autonomy.

For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Singaporean government employed the use of nudges in their pandemic response to increase the uptake of vaccinations amongst Singaporeans. More specifically, the government introduced “vaccination differentiated safe management measures (VDS)” which made vaccinations necessary in order to enjoy certain benefits such as the ability to dine in at eateries or to enter shopping malls (Khalik, 2021). This policy choice was attributed to the fact that non-fully vaccinated people infected with Covid-19 “are more than seven times more likely to become critically ill” which is not only detrimental to their own health but also further reduces the already strained healthcare system's capacity (Poa, 2022). The employment of the VDS in Singapore effectively presented the choice of becoming vaccinated as more desirable than remaining unvaccinated given that more conspicuous privileges are afforded to the vaccinated which contributed to the increase in overall vaccination rates (Poa, 2022). This is not only beneficial for those who

choose to become vaccinated (since they are less likely to become critically ill if they contract Covid-19) but for society as a whole (since the strain on the healthcare system would be alleviated as there are fewer non-vaccinated individuals who are critically ill in the ICU). It is also important to note that this policy choice does not infringe on the freedom of choice to remain unvaccinated should Singaporean citizens want to do so since it is not a vaccine mandate.

The above example, therefore, illuminates the benefits that nudging can bring in contemporary policymaking as it allows governments to steer individuals toward options that are beneficial not only for themselves but for society as a whole as well. Furthermore, nudging simply alters the choice environment and does not infringe on an individual's freedom of choice and hence, warrants its permissibility.

The Benefits of Paternalism

Dworkin (1972) defines paternalism as the interference with a person's freedom of choice justified by considerations of their own “welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests, or values” (p. 65). Thus, revealing that paternalistic laws that are enacted by governments differ from that of nudges in policymaking because the former restricts the freedom of choice of their citizens out of the paternalistic belief that it is beneficial for them. In response to paternalism, libertarians such as Mill (2001) argue against it on the grounds that “neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it” (p.70). To put it simply, libertarians argue that paternalism is unjustified because people are more likely to understand their own interests better than the government, and should therefore be left to make decisions pertaining to choices that affect their own selves without interference. Having said that, although people are rational most of the time, this does not always bear out in reality.

For instance, let us consider the case of the Central Provident Fund (CPF), which is a *mandatory* social security savings scheme that was created by the Singaporean government to provide retirement, healthcare, and housing benefits for Singaporean citizens and permanent residents; Where both employers and employees are required to make monthly contributions to the CPF which are calculated based the employee's age and as a percentage of the employee's wages (Central Provident Fund, n.d.). Although the Singaporean government

provides an attractive compounding interest rate on CPF savings of up to 4 percent, it is important to reiterate that contributions to the CPF are mandatory which means that Singaporeans are essentially forced to contribute to it without their consent given that they are unable to opt out even if they would like to do so (Central Provident Fund, n.d.).

However, research has found that individuals tend to suffer from bounded rationality in the form of hyperbolic discounting where individuals under-save and/or under-invest for the purposes of retirement; This is attributed to the fact that people have an increased propensity to discount utility from a future event at an increasing rate given the psychological preference for present levels of utility, or in other words – immediate gratification (Benartzi & Thaler, 2007; Love & Phelan, 2015). For instance, an individual may choose to splurge on a lavish holiday instead of saving for their retirement because they are unable to accurately perceive the benefits that retirement savings would entail for their future self in comparison to the immediate gratification that they can get now. Thus, revealing that Singapore's paternalistic CPF policy is justifiable given that it helps Singaporeans to more amply save for their retirement than they would have done so in its absence given the negative ramifications of bounded rationality. This, thereby, reveals that enacting paternalistic laws can be permissible despite the fact that they essentially eliminate a person's freedom of choice since they can lead to beneficial outcomes due to the fact that people are not always fully rational.

The Potential Pitfalls of Paternalism

The enactment of paternalistic laws, however, places a great amount of faith in governments and public officials to make the right policy choices for the benefit of their electorate which can have negative consequences albeit unintended. To illuminate this, let us consider the aforementioned mandatory social security savings scheme in Singapore, the CPF. Husain (n.d.) showed that empirical estimates indicate that increases in mandatory CPF savings in Singapore were offset by decreases in private voluntary savings. This could be attributed to the fact that Singaporeans view the mandatory contributions to their CPF accounts as sufficient for their savings/retirement goals and hence, makes them less likely to engage in private voluntary savings which is a form of compensatory behaviour. This can be problematic as it may result in Singaporeans becoming over-reliant on their CPF savings for their retirement. This has proved to be the case with surveys revealing that most Singaporean workers rely solely on their CPF savings for their retirement even though the payouts from the CPF may not be sufficient to meet one's retirement income needs (Chong, 2018).

Thereby, revealing that the Singapore government's use of mandatory social security savings in the form of CPF contributions may inadvertently harm Singaporeans albeit unintended as Singaporeans may understate private voluntary savings as necessary for their retirement. As such, this serves to illuminate that paternalistic laws/mandates can result in adverse effects which suggests that extreme caution needs to be exercised by governments and public officials when choosing to enact such policy choices. After all, these policymakers are humans and hence, are fallible too.

The Potential Implications of Removing Paternalistic Laws

Now that we have established a potential objection libertarians have against paternalism and the potential pitfalls that paternalism entails, we will now consider the potential implications of removing paternalistic laws. To illuminate this, let us consider the case of Canada in 2021, where they passed a law to allow patients who suffer from intolerable psychiatric illnesses to use euthanasia which is assisted suicide in the form of death by physician-administered lethal injection (Komrad, 2021). It is important to note that the legalisation of assisted suicide for the mentally ill is effectively the same as removing the paternalistic law of deeming suicide as illegal. This is desirable in the eyes of libertarians as it allows individuals suffering from intolerable psychiatric illnesses to have the freedom of choice to end their lives and thereby, to end their pain and suffering as well. It is also important to note that it is fair to assume that such individuals would best understand their own pain and suffering as compared to policymakers who are unable to share the same lived experience.

Having said that, the practical implications of enacting this policy change were not considered and this resulted in a delay in implementation. For instance, some clinicians were concerned that the healthcare system was unprepared to handle complex cases given that a set of "best practices guidelines" had yet to be established amongst them (Cecco, 2022). This is problematic because assisted suicide involves potentially lethal medications or procedures which makes it essential to ensure that patients are fully informed and have given informed consent. As such, the lack of clear guidelines entails that there is an increased risk of errors, miscommunication, and other problems that could jeopardize patient safety.

More interestingly, Favaro (2022) revealed concerns that the Canadian government's move to legislate assisted suicide for the mentally ill came at a time when Canadian health

services were under immense stress; For instance, “the wait times for our [mental health] treatment programs in Ontario are up to five years”. This sheds light on the possibility that the legalisation of assisted suicide could be a tactical move that has been made by the Canadian government for the purpose of reducing the strain on healthcare services under the guise of expanding the liberties of its citizens. This is due to the fact that if assisted suicide for the mentally ill is allowed, more pressure will be alleviated from the healthcare system since such individuals can choose to engage in assisted suicide and hence, no longer require mental healthcare services. Braswell (2021) corroborates this by postulating that the legalisation of assisted suicide of the mentally ill “would only make it easier [for the Canadian government] to avoid the hard but necessary work of meeting the needs of disabled people”. This is because the legalisation of suicide for the mentally ill provides a simple remedy to the problem of an overstrained healthcare system since it would reduce the need to allocate time and resources to other alternatives such as therapy and rehabilitation services.

Moreover, the fact that the legalisation of assisted suicide is specifically for the mentally ill makes it inherently discriminatory. The Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (2012) propounds that this “two-tiered system” of legalising assisted suicide for the mentally ill would mean that such individuals will receive suicide assistance when they request it whilst the non-mentally ill would receive suicide intervention in the form of therapy or rehabilitation services, for example. This could potentially signal to society that the lives of the mentally ill are worth less given that it implies that trying to intervene on behalf of the mentally ill is deemed ineffective. Not to mention the fact that this would eventually result in the ‘death’ of the socially inferior group of the mentally ill because they will no longer receive suicide intervention should they request to die.

The above case study, therefore, reveals that the removal of paternalistic laws needs to be increasingly scrutinised by the electorate given their potential implications. This is because the sudden removal of paternalistic laws without the establishment of clear guidelines can be potentially harmful. Furthermore, it could also be done out of the government’s desire to find simple remedies to complex policy making issues as opposed to the enhancement of liberties which would result in poorer resource allocation, governance, and even the protection of vulnerable groups such as the disabled. Due consideration must also be given to whether the removal of a paternalistic law is for all peoples or if it is

‘two-tiered’ given that the latter is inherently discriminatory and can lead to undesirable outcomes.

Conclusion

In summary, this essay has engaged in a critical examination of nudging and paternalism in contemporary policymaking. In particular, we first examined the mechanism in which nudges can lead to beneficial outcomes through altering the choice environment of agents whilst preserving their freedom of choice. Next, we considered the use of paternalistic laws by governments – where we concluded that it is indeed permissible despite the fact that it limits an agent’s freedom of choice given that it can lead to beneficial outcomes. It also illuminated the potential pitfalls of enacting paternalistic laws owing to the fact that policymakers are human and hence, fallible as well. Lastly, it gave due consideration to the potential implications that may arise from the outright removal of paternalistic laws. This essay has, therefore, revealed that although nudging and paternalism do indeed have an indisputable place in contemporary policy making, they need to be used with a great amount of care and consideration due to the fact that it profoundly influences the day-to-day lives of civil society and its peoples.

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PERMISSIBLE NUDGING: AN EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENT NUDGES USING AN AUTHORITY-GROUNDING ACCOUNT OF RATIONALITY

Ng Shang Wen | National University of Singapore

Abstract

This paper considers the circumstances under which nudging is compatible with an authority-grounding account of treating agents as rational. It argues that salience nudges are more permissible than default nudges and proposes that certain information-boosting nudges can enhance our rationality.

Keywords: *Nudging, Rationality, Expressed preference, Transparent*

In this paper, I consider the circumstances under which nudging is compatible with an authority-grounding account of treating agents as rational. Opponents of nudging claim that it is wrong because it fails to treat agents as rational. Andreas Schmidt proposes an alternative ecological view of rationality that better reflects decision-making, suggesting that nudging, based on this perspective, does not treat people as irrational and is therefore permissible. However, I argue that even in invoking ecological rationality, Schmidt insufficiently addresses the moral value of failing to treat agents as rational. I account for this moral value by adopting an authority-grounding account of rationality. Next, I argue that it is difficult to evaluate whether nudging *generally* coheres to this account of rationality; instead, any evaluation must consider the specific type and implementation of the nudge. I propose that the principles of expressed preference and boosting information should guide nudging. The former principle is sufficient to respect an agent's authority, while the latter principle can enhance one's authority.

Let me first begin by defining nudging. According to Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, a nudge is “any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives” (6). Crucially, nudging precludes *changing* the option set and preserves freedom of choice. By working through agents' behavioural traits, nudges typically change how options are presented (Schmidt 512).

With this working definition, I examine the Rationality Objection set up by Schmidt (516).

- A. Public policies that involve treating agents as irrational are wrong as such, at least pro tanto, in virtue of treating agents as irrational.
- B. Public policy nudging implies treating agents as irrational.
- C. Therefore, public policy nudging is wrong as such, at least pro tanto, in virtue of treating agents as irrational.

In response to the Rationality Objection, Schmidt accepts Premise A but rejects Premise B. He argues that from a perspective of ecological rationality (ER), instead of heroic rationality (HR), nudging is compatible with treating agents as rational; hence, Premise B is wrong (527). Unlike HR, which claims that the agent should always consider all options and aim to maximise their expected utility (518), ER claims that the extent to which an agent's decision is procedurally rational depends on their choice environment (521). Hence, behavioural heuristics, which nudging often operates through, can be rational in some choice environments and do not have to be irrational.

I do not dispute Schmidt's accounts of ER and HR. Instead, I argue that in distinguishing between HR and ER, Schmidt misses the point of the Rationality Objection. Schmidt claims that because he "do[es] not question Premise A, accordingly, it makes no difference for [his] argument as to whether A is based on respect, autonomy, a duty not to manipulate, or all three together" (516). I find this claim problematic. Given that Premise A is grounded in the moral value of treating agents rationally, the problem with nudging not treating agents as rational (as per Premise B) is not just literal, but also has a moral dimension. Hence, to reject Premise B, it is insufficient for Schmidt to claim that nudging treats agents as rational on a literal level (as per ER). It is possible that nudging *literally* treats agents as rational without respecting the moral value of doing so. For example, using Schmidt's account of rationality, it seems that the best way to treat someone as rational is to increase the likelihood that they will *generally* decide and behave rationally⁸⁵. But this is at odds with our intuition – even if we recognise our limited decision-making capacities, we tend not to like others helping us make better decisions.

⁸⁵ One way that this might be done, as Schmidt later talks about in his Stronger Argument, is by changing the choice environment to match agents' decision-making processes.

I propose that an Authority-Grounding Account (AGA) of rationality can account for this seeming contradiction. It is morally valuable for one to treat an agent as rational because agents should have the authority to make their own decisions and claims against each other. Crucially, freedom of choice is a necessary but insufficient condition for nudges to satisfy AGA⁸⁶; instead, expressed preference is required. Expressed preference means nudges should prompt agents to choose between options by themselves. This can safeguard against situations in which presumed consent violates an agent's actual preferences, most egregiously in the case of sexual assault.

One might argue that treating agents as rational is morally valuable for other reasons. A possible Value-Grounding Account (VGA) of rationality is that one should treat someone as rational by responding to the intrinsic value grounded in their rational capacities. However, VGA cannot make sense of the Rationality Objection. This is because in trying to enhance people's rational decisions, nudging does not diminish rational capacities; instead, it simply improves decisions when agents do not engage these rational capacities. This seems to give more credence to AGA.

If AGA is correct, then a more accurate way to respond to the Rationality Objection is to examine whether (or when) nudging sufficiently respects one's authority. I argue that default options often fail to meet the bar of expressed preference and thus fail to respect AGA. In the case of organ donation, many countries have adopted an opt-out policy, in which one's consent to donate organs posthumously is presumed, unless one explicitly withdraws their consent to be a willing donor (Thaler and Sunstein 218). This policy (Default Nudge) has significantly increased the traditionally low rates of organ donation. In theory, default options can be compatible with AGA if the default reflected what agents would have chosen if prompted to decide themselves. For example, in this specific context, if the *actual preference* of agents is to be either indifferent or prefer to donate their organs, then I would agree that the default option would be morally permissible. However, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that organ donors prefer to donate their organs; certain Asian religious groups, for example, are principally opposed to organ donation (Tai 91-92). Moreover, agents' inaction could also occur for various reasons, such as their lack of

⁸⁶ Nudges, by Thaler and Sunstein's definition, preserve freedom of choice, but I hope this makes it clear that even so, it is not necessarily the case that all nudges are compatible with AGA.

awareness of their ability to make a choice. Hence, agents may not have developed carefully considered preferences; thus, their inaction cannot reveal anything about their preferences.

A proponent of Default Nudge might argue that it generates morally valuable social benefits that outweigh the moral value of being over-inclusive or wrongly assuming the preferences of agents opposed to donation⁸⁷. These social benefits arise because Default Nudge can capture a significant proportion of the population who prefer to donate their organs but only revealed this preference through the default. However, this objection assumes that we can only achieve these social benefits through Default Nudge. If we can rely on another nudge to achieve a similar rate of organ donation (perhaps slightly lower) without being over-inclusive, then this objection is much weaker.

I argue that Salience Nudge, which seeks expressed preference, can achieve social benefits while being permissible under AGA. Imagine a school cafeteria in which students can freely take food. To encourage healthy eating, the cafeteria places healthier foods, such as carrot sticks, at eye level to make them more salient to students. In contrast, less healthy food, such as fries, is placed below the carrot sticks and thus below eye level.

What are the morally relevant differences between Default Nudge and Salience Nudge? The first key difference is the agent's act of making a choice. In Salience Nudge, the agent must choose what food to eat. In contrast, in Default Nudge, there is a non-trivial possibility that the agent does not have the *opportunity* to make the choice. The option to make a choice is provided, but the agent may not always be able to exercise it. In fact, the success of Default Nudge arises precisely because the agent does not exercise their choice.

The second key difference is the option set. In the case of Salience Nudge, the fries are placed below and not too far away from the carrot sticks. Given that the choice of what food to eat must be made, it is reasonable to think that a student who strictly prefers fries over carrot sticks would invest some effort into looking for fries. If a student simply takes what is at eye level without discerning between fries and carrot sticks, this reveals that they only weakly prefer fries to carrot sticks. Hence, Salience Nudge has not violated their

⁸⁷ Such agents are opposed to donation but would only have expressed this preference if prompted.

preferences.⁸⁸ In contrast, in Default Nudge, because the agent may not even be aware that they can make a choice, we cannot assume that their inaction reveals their preference towards organ donation.

Given these two key differences, I argue that while Salience Nudge likely accurately reflects agents' preferences, it is uncertain whether Default Nudge can accurately reflect them. If we accept that accurately reflecting agents' preferences (most obviously through an agent deciding) is sufficient to respect an agent's authority, then Salience Nudge is compatible with AGA. Policymakers should hence make an option more salient (where possible) over defaults. This is particularly useful when there are many options which may result in decision fatigue. Even expressed preference has limits – as per Schmidt, ER “also endorses procedures that deliberately ignore available information” (522), because of an agent's limited time and cognitive capacity.

This might not appear immediately relevant to organ donation which only has two options. However, one can make the option of being an organ donor more salient by incorporating it into other everyday decisions. For example, the UK requires people applying for a driving license to answer whether they wish to be organ donors. Agents who prefer to donate can express their preference, while undecided agents are prompted to carefully decide. This helps to raise organ donation rates while preserving authority.

A possible objection is that it is insufficient for a nudge to give active choice to an agent to respect their authority. For agents to fully exercise their authority, nudges should present options equally to agents. In other words, framing the choice situation in a certain way already violates AGA. I disagree with this claim because I argue that this imposes an overly demanding and unrealistic bar for respecting one's authority. Given that framing is unavoidable in many cases (as in Salience Nudge), if framing still allows agents to reflect their preferences accurately, it should be compatible with respecting one's authority. In Salience Nudge, some food items must be placed at eye level – hence, even if the cafeteria has no intention of promoting any specific behaviours, *some form* of framing is inevitable (Thaler and Sunstein 2). The most reasonable alternatives that the cafeteria can adopt seem to

⁸⁸ The caveat to this is that the fries must not be in some remote corner of the cafeteria such that excessive effort is required to access this option. This would effectively amount to changing the option set, and thus, strictly speaking, not even count as a nudge.

be either (1) display a random food item at eye level or (2) display the most popular food item at eye level. While adopting option (1) seems the most neutral, it does not make sense in the cafeteria setting. Some thought should go into the ordering such as placing salad next to the dressing (Thaler and Sunstein 2). Given that random ordering imposes only costs to agents without any benefits, it does not seem optimal. Option (2) seems appealing initially, but it assumes the cafeteria can accurately reflect students' preferences⁸⁹. Wouldn't such an assumption undermine authority *even more* than making healthy food salient? Given that both alternatives do not seem to respect authority any more than Salience Nudge, it seems that it can be justified on its potential social benefits.

I would now like to make a stronger argument (akin to Schmidt's Stronger Argument⁹⁰) that certain nudges, specifically information-boosting nudges, are not only compatible, but can also *enhance* rationality according to AGA. It is important to distinguish between educational campaigns and information-boosting nudges – while the former only aims to add to consumers' knowledge, the latter does more than that. By playing on consumers' behavioural biases, these nudges synthesise and frame the most relevant information to be easily understandable and catch consumers' attention. One example is Nutri-Grade, a nutrition label introduced in Singapore that assigns one of four grades to beverages based on their sugar and saturated fat content (Ng). Technically speaking, Nutri-Grade does not add new information for consumers because nutrition content can already be found on the packaging. Instead, Nutri-Grade provides a simple framework to understand the implications of such information easily. For example, if a beverage contains 10g of sugar, the grade tells us how "healthy" this is relative to other beverages (Seah). In making the relevant information more salient, the nudge informs agents' decisions without excessively taxing agents' cognitive capacities (as per ER), hence enhancing their authority.

At the same time, in synthesising what is "relevant" into a single grade, NutriGrade excludes certain information that it deems "irrelevant" such as vitamins and calcium. A possible objection is that such omission of information fails to respect AGA. For example, NutriGrade tells us that fruit juice and milk are less healthy than Coke (Seah), which a

⁸⁹ One might counter this by arguing that the cafeteria can determine this by observing which food item students take the most. However, this may be in part circular, because the framing of the options also affects the accuracy of revealed preferences.

⁹⁰ In gist, Schmidt's Stronger Argument argues that the state has hefty reason to employ nudging because nudging can make one *more* ecologically rational.

consumer may not intuitively understand. I agree that it is morally important for consumers to be aware of what information is omitted and rationalise these “strange” cases. Hence, I propose that such nudges must be transparent about how information is synthesised⁹¹ to be permissible. The nudge *itself* does not have to be transparent since it may be overly demanding and point-defeating to include excessive information. Nevertheless, publicity efforts should be conducted alongside the nudge to explain its workings. For example, the government should make it publicly clear that NutriGrade aims to reduce sugar intake. Supermarkets can also put up brief explanatory signs in the beverages section to facilitate this.

Alternatively, information-boosting nudges do not always require synthesising and framing information. Nudges that provide facts to remind agents of social norms are also permissible. For example, some tax notices come attached with a reminder that most taxpayers file their taxes on time. Such nudges *allow* the agent to decide whether this information is worth accounting for, and for agents who consider social norms when making decisions, it boosts their rationality on AGA.

Another objection to information-boosting nudges is that the act of framing information does not truly respect an agent’s authority. To meet the bar of expressed preference, agents should be given a choice over how information should be framed. Indeed, in cases where the agent’s decision has high stakes, this might be true. For example, in the case of a patient deciding whether to go for a risky operation, it would intuitively feel wrong for a doctor to influence a patient’s decision by framing information in a certain way. Yet, beyond cases with such high stakes, it does not seem feasible to ask agents how they wish for everyday decisions to be framed. That seems to be an overly high bar of expressed preference. I argue that in most cases – as long as framing is (1) not misleading⁹²; (2) does not *remove* information and only emphasises information⁹³ – expressed preference should be limited to agents’ ability to actively choose between options, rather than choose between frames. A more fundamental objection to my general conception of nudging is that in

⁹¹ Schmidt offers a *weaker* version of this claim by saying “if Transparency is fulfilled, it should not be too difficult and costly for a nudge to become aware they are being nudged” (533). For Schmidt, transparency is a good-to-have and not *necessary* as I am arguing.

⁹² While “misleading” is subjective and can be argued, the larger point here is that information should not be overly exaggerated or played down. One example would be changing the axes on a graph to make charts seem larger or smaller than they actually are.

⁹³ For example, all nutritional information is still available alongside NutriGrade. The agent is not denied any information they could have viewed previously; it is just that certain information is made more salient.

prioritising an agent's authority, I overly restrict the scope of nudging, hence limiting its effectiveness. While I acknowledge that AGA constrains the range of acceptable situations for nudging, I disagree that such a narrow scope necessarily limits the effectiveness of nudging. First, in these situations, nudges can still (potentially) result in substantial social benefits relative to minor change. Second, even if the scope of nudging is limited, policymakers can still employ other policy levers to achieve their ends. When an agent's authority is less important relative to a significant social benefit/cost, it might seem more permissible to *coercively* nudge agents without respecting authority. But if the social benefit is so significant, policymakers⁹⁴ may prefer a stronger "shove" over a nudge. First, the former increases compliance. Second, if we accept that coercion should be transparent, then a shove does that better than a less visible and potentially insidious nudge. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, most governments preserved freedom of choice by not mandating vaccines. However, governments also went further than nudging by imposing consequences on the unvaccinated, such as restricting their access to shopping malls. The significant social benefits of getting vaccinated were deemed to outweigh the agents' rights to have authority. Nudging is only one of several policy levers; other levers include regulations to alter one's option set and fines to change one's incentives.

In conclusion, I have argued that Schmidt's distinction between ER and HR, while not wrong per se, is not relevant in considering the permissibility of nudging. Instead, the more important normative question to consider is the moral value of treating agents as rational, to which I have proposed AGA as a possible response. At the same time, authors such as Schmidt have often treated nudging as a broad umbrella of interventions. I have suggested that it seems difficult to have a good discussion about nudging and treating agents as rational without talking about what the intervention looks like. Using AGA as an account of rationality, I have demonstrated how Salience Nudge seems more permissible than Default Nudge. Further to that, I have also considered how information-boosting nudges can *enhance* authority and rationality.

⁹⁴ Here, I deliberately limit my scope to policymakers rather than corporations, because the social benefits that the former can achieve in nudging (as compared to profits in the latter) make for a stronger moral case to nudge with fewer restrictions.

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THE MULTIFACETED ADVANTAGES OF FREE TRADE: ECONOMIC GROWTH, FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND CONSUMER WELFARE

Faith Chng | National University of Singapore

Abstract

This essay argues that free trade helps countries in four main areas: economic growth, foreign direct investment (FDI), job creation, and consumer welfare. Free trade increases productivity and output, leading to higher economic growth rates. Trade liberalization policies also attract FDI, encouraging technology transfers, creating comparative advantages, promoting export-led growth, and setting the stage for new businesses. Additionally, freer trade has a positive impact on job creation by increasing the demand for goods and services, causing companies to hire more workers. These policies also lower consumer prices and offer a wider variety of goods and services, improving consumer welfare. The essay also challenges the infant industry argument and other criticisms of free trade for developing countries, arguing that protectionist measures make rent-seeking worse and become difficult to remove. It also refutes these claims by pointing to the growing rate of technological advancements and the possibility of retaliation from trading partners.

Keywords: *Free Trade, Economic Growth, Comparative Advantage, Deglobalization, Universal Applicability*

Introduction

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the recent phenomenon of deglobalisation has called into question the sustainability and universal applicability of free trade as a one-size-fits-all solution to economic development. Despite the emerging trend of globalization, free trade policies have remained the dominant framework for international economic relations in recent decades (Rodrik, 2018). Major international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have consistently promoted trade liberalization in Afro-Asian developing countries (World Trade Organization, 2021; International Monetary Fund, 2021). To understand the rationale behind the continued support for free trade, this essay examines its benefits using empirical evidence from trade liberalization policies in developing countries.

This essay thus argues that free trade leads to higher levels of economic growth, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), employment rates, and consumer welfare. It also explores the implications of deglobalisation by challenging the infant industry argument, arguing that early protectionist measures are hard to remove, technological advancements are developing rapidly, and modern international economic norms significantly disadvantage protectionist policies.

Economic Growth

Free trade spurs firms to specialize and innovate to remain competitive, leading to increased productivity, reduced costs, higher revenue, and accelerated economic growth. Countries adopting trade liberalization policies typically experience higher economic growth rates compared to those that do not (Frankel & Romer, 1999).

For example, China opened its doors to foreign trade and investment in 1979 after being isolated from the global economy. Since then, China has achieved an average real GDP growth of 9.5% up to 2018 (Morrison, 2019). The World Bank attributes China's exceptional economic growth to its free trade reforms (World Bank, 2005). Before these reforms, China operated a command economy with state-controlled prices and restrictions on foreign and private enterprises, which made firms and workers unconcerned with product quality and uncompetitive. In 1979, the government introduced market reforms, including trade liberalization policies with attractive tax and trade incentives to draw foreign investment (Jain, 2017). Transitioning from a command market to a free-market system led to productivity gains through knowledge transfers and competition, contributing to China's remarkable average real GDP growth from 1979 to 2018 (Morrison, 2019).

A study of trade liberalization in North Korea, a country known for its isolation from international trade and economic hardship, also suggests that the decline in North Korea's real gross national income has been caused by a decline in trade openness in the North Korean economy since 1974. The study unveils a "strong feedback relationship" between economic growth and openness in North Korea (Jin, 2003, p. 26). North Korea's historical detachment from international trade and economic protectionism reduces confounding variables and magnifies the effect of trade liberalization, allowing for a more pronounced

observation of the causal link between economic openness and growth. Hence, this study is a robust example of the positive relationship between trade liberalization and economic growth.

This trend extends beyond the three mentioned countries – data from a sample of 17 liberalizing countries in the Middle East and East Asia demonstrates that the overall index of economic freedom is "positively and robustly correlated" with economic growth and that trade openness is a positively associated and statistically significant determinant of growth (Razmi & Refaei, 2013, p. 376). A comparison of 95 developing countries also highlights trade liberalization policies as the driving force behind rapid economic growth, as Asian developing countries, which tended to be more outward-oriented, experienced significantly faster growth than Latin American or African developing countries (Dollar, 1992). Hence, empirical evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between economic growth and trade liberalization.

Foreign Direct Investment

Alongside economic growth, trade liberalization policies also attract FDI, which results in technology and knowledge transfers from established foreign firms to domestic firms (Khan, 2016; Coe & Helpman, 1995). When markets liberalize, privately owned Multinational Corporations (MNCs) enter the market and establish joint ventures in the host country. This process leads to a transfer of technology, management practices, and expertise to the host country. If taken up by firms in the host country, these new skills improve productivity and competitiveness (Dash & Sharma, 2010). An increase in a domestic firm's productivity and competitiveness can lead to lasting long-run impacts, like new areas of comparative advantage, increased Research and Development (R&D) efforts, and the creation of new firms (Apostolov, 2015).

Trade liberalization policies promote Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by fostering the development of new industries with comparative advantages, leading to export-driven growth. During the 1980s, Vietnam underwent the Doi Moi Reforms, transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one, which attracted significant FDI (Nguyen H. H., 2020). In 1989, electronics giant Samsung established manufacturing facilities in Vietnam, boosting local supply chains and, by 2022, contributing to 9% of

Vietnam's total trade turnover (Nguyen D., 2023). As a result, Vietnam's top exports shifted from an agriculture-focused industry to phones, electronic goods, and machinery (Nguyen M., 2023; Anh et al., 2015). The Samsung and Vietnam case demonstrates that trade liberalization policies encourage FDI, helping developing countries cultivate their comparative advantages and establish new export markets.

Investigations into FDI streams from industrial nations to 69 developing countries provide further evidence that FDI plays a vital role in facilitating technology and knowledge transfers (Borensztein et al., 1998). Notably, Ireland's exponential average economic growth of 9.4% between 1995 and 2000 has been largely attributed to FDI (World Bank, n.d.).

An OECD (1993) report assessing Irish FDI policies – encompassing grants to foreign enterprises, support for potential areas of comparative advantage, and the implementation of an extremely competitive 10% corporate tax rate – determined that FDI substantially contributed to Ireland's productivity growth, industrial output, export expansion and diversification, and overall economic growth. Throughout the 1980s, multinational corporations such as Intel, Microsoft, and Apple established extensive manufacturing facilities in Ireland, which significantly stimulated growth in the country's electronics and technology sectors. By 2022, Intel had invested \$30 billion in Ireland since entering the market in 1989 (Taylor, 2022). Presently, Microsoft has also established its European Development Centre in Dublin, where engineers and developers collaborate on innovative projects, including cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and machine learning (O'Brien, 2023). Consequently, American companies have enhanced Ireland's technological capabilities by transferring cutting-edge technologies, enabling its technology sector and export-oriented manufacturing sector to maintain competitiveness.

In the long run, FDI ushered in by trade liberalization policies can lead to lasting R&D efforts and the creation of new domestic businesses. When firms enter a liberalizing economy, technology transfers from foreign firms to local workers inspire entrepreneurship in related industries (Sasidharan & Kathuria, 2011).

The Singaporean government's pursuit of trade liberalization, exemplified by the 1967 Economic Expansion and Incentives Act and the 1966 Free Trade Zones Act, bolstered Singapore's appeal as a location for multinational corporations (MNCs) seeking to establish

regional production bases. Notably, MNCs such as Texas Instruments, National Semiconductor, and Hewlett-Packard set up manufacturing facilities in Singapore, leading to technology transfers that endowed the nation with the necessary expertise to position itself as a hub for electronics and semiconductors (Soon & Stoeber, 1996). Subsequently, new Singaporean technology firms like Razer and Sea emerged, building upon the foundations laid by early liberalization policies. This case study aligns with a study of 28 developing African countries, which demonstrated that FDI spillovers stimulate novel entrepreneurial activities (Munemo, 2018). Therefore, trade liberalization promotes FDI, which in turn catalyzes R&D initiatives and fosters the creation of new domestic businesses. Hence, trade liberalization leads to FDI, which results in R&D efforts and the creation of new domestic businesses.

Employment Rates

Free trade enables domestic firms to access larger international markets, resulting in higher demand for their products and services which prompts them to hire more resources, including labor. Consequently, job opportunities and employment rates rise. A study focusing on Pakistan from 1972 to 2010 found that trade liberalization had a considerable positive impact on job creation, with a 1% increase in the globalization index leading to a 0.48% increase in employment opportunities (Faridi & Chaudhry, 2013).

Trade liberalization may also cause a reallocation of resources within an economy as comparative advantages shift among industries (Fuss & Zhu, 2012). Industries focusing on a country's comparative advantage typically experience increased demand for their goods, leading to higher production levels and a greater need for workers. Conversely, industries without a comparative advantage might face a decline in demand, potentially resulting in structural unemployment.

Nonetheless, research generally indicates that economies witness a net gain in employment as resources are directed towards sectors with comparative advantage (Hasan & Jandoc, 2010). This was evident in Latin American countries following the Uruguay Rounds of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which led to significant tariff reduction. Despite job reallocation rates averaging 21%, Chile, Mexico, and Colombia benefitted from reduced unemployment rates (Haltiwanger et al., 2004).

It is important to acknowledge that most experts contend that even if trade liberalization policies do not directly lower unemployment rates, the economic growth resulting from these policies tends to decrease unemployment rates in the long term. Consequently, cyclical employment is more likely to increase compared to structural unemployment (Feldmann, 2007; Hakimi & Hamdi, 2016).

Consumer Welfare

One of the primary benefits of transitioning to an open economy is the availability of lower prices and a greater variety of goods and services for consumers, which enhances consumer welfare (Tarakan & Thisse, 2001). During liberalization, the removal of barriers such as tariffs, quotas, and subsidies leads to reduced import costs (Lim & Breuer, 2019). These cost reductions are often passed on to consumers in the form of lower prices, thereby increasing their purchasing power, overall utility, and well-being.

An analysis of India's 1991 trade liberalization demonstrated that trade liberalization significantly contributed to a 13% decline in poverty in India between 1987 and 1999 (Topalova, 2010). Furthermore, empirical evidence from American Sugar Duties between 1890 and 1930 suggests that tariff reductions are fully passed on to consumer prices, while increased tariffs are 40% borne by consumers and 60% by foreign exporters (Irwin, 2014). This asymmetry emphasizes the significance of eliminating trade barriers – particularly through tariff reductions – on increased consumer welfare. The reduction in poverty in India and the substantial consumer surplus resulting from decreased tariffs further support the argument that free trade leads to lower prices for consumers.

Additionally, free trade promotes an increase in the variety of goods and services, which also enhances consumer welfare. Free trade increases access to foreign firms, leading to a greater variety of consumer goods and services (Baker, 2003). With a broader range of choices, consumers can find products that better suit their needs. The value of expanded import varieties between 1972 and 2001 for American consumers was approximately 2.6% of the USA's GDP (Broda & Weinstein, 2006). This quantifiable increase in consumer welfare due to a larger variety of imports demonstrates that free trade enhances overall consumer welfare.

Rebuttal of the Infant Industry Argument

Although the previous paragraphs have highlighted the advantages of free trade, it is important to address and counter the concerns raised by critics, particularly regarding the infant industry argument.

The Infant Industry Argument posits that nascent industries require time to grow and become competitive in the global market (Hamilton, 1791). According to this argument, protectionist measures such as tariffs and import quotas can create a supportive environment for "infant" industries. By implementing protectionist policies, young industries can gain experience, benefit from economies of scale, and enhance their technological capabilities. As these infant industries mature and become globally competitive, protectionist measures can be gradually phased out, enabling the industries to maintain competitiveness even in the face of foreign producers (List, 2011).

Opponents of free trade have also pointed out the hypocrisy in many developed countries, such as the United States and Western Europe, advocating for free trade and market liberalization policies for developing countries when they themselves used protectionist policies to support their own infant industries during industrialisation (Chang, 2002, p.90). Opponents argue that developed countries have "kicked away the ladder" and are now exploitatively denying developing countries the same policy tools they used to achieve their economic growth. They claim that policy recommendations of trade and market liberalization from organizations like the WTO and the IMF are detrimental to the economic development of poorer countries as they prevent these countries from nurturing their own infant industries.

In response, proponents of free trade should first argue that protectionist measures are likely to catalyze rent-seeking behavior and that such measures will be difficult to remove (Krugman, 1992).

Case studies of India and Brazil support these claims. Before economic liberalization in the 1990s, India had a highly-regulated economy with protectionist policies in place. Under the License Raj system, businesses had to obtain government licenses to operate, which led to rent-seeking behavior that manifested in bribes and favors (Asher & Novosad,

2023). This corruption and rent-seeking behavior is reflected in India's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score of 40 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean (Transparency International, 2022). In Brazil, one notable case of rent-seeking is Operação Lava Jato⁹⁵. Key Brazilian companies linked to Petrobras, a state-controlled oil company, were accused of accepting bribes from contractors in exchange for lucrative contracts at inflated prices (Silva, 2022; Fabio, 2022). These examples clearly exemplify the prevalence of rent-seeking behavior within protected industries.

Both India and Brazil also faced significant resistance when attempting to remove protectionist policies. In particular, India's automobile industry, which has historically been protected through high tariffs and import restrictions, remains well-protected even as other sectors of the Indian economy have begun to liberalize (Athukorala & Veeramani, 2019). Similarly, in Brazil, the computer and electronics industry was heavily protected by the Brazilian government in the 1980s and 90s. By the time the government moved to liberalize the computer and electronics industry in the late 1990s, Brazilian computer and electronics companies had grown too reliant on government support and lacked crucial access to cutting-edge technology along with resultant knowledge transfers from abroad (Thaker, 2018). In both Brazil and India, strong lobbying by domestic manufacturers and concerns about job losses led to the sluggish liberalization of these protected industries (Yadav, 2011).

Secondly, it is essential to consider the timing and historical context of global economic competition when addressing the infant industry argument. During the industrialisation of the United States and Western Europe, global economic competition was significantly less intense compared to current levels (Gschwandtner, 2012). Developing countries now face a highly competitive global market, making it increasingly challenging for them to nurture infant industries under protectionist policies. These differences are particularly evident concerning the rate of technological advancements and overall global interconnectedness.

Unlike in the past, domestic firms in developing countries may struggle to keep up with rapid technological advancements if protectionist measures shield them from global competition today (Mahidhar & Davenport, 2018). This trend is observed in the development

⁹⁵ Translates to "Operation Car Wash".

of AI and machine learning, which could redirect investment away from developing countries and into already advanced economies where automation is well-established. In the current context, protectionism could exacerbate the outflow of investment and result in worsening unemployment and economic growth (Alonso et al., 2020).

Lastly, protectionist measures may result in retaliation from trading partners, particularly in today's interconnected global economy characterized by complex supply chains and trade networks (Foley et al., 2021). An analysis of 166 countries indicates that implementing protectionist measures is likely to provoke trading partners to retaliate by raising their own trade barriers. This could ultimately lead to trade wars, which would not only damage each domestic economy involved but also negatively impact global economic performance (Gnangnon, 2017).

In the emerging era of deglobalisation, the US-initiated trade war with China has had unintended consequences, forcing American companies to contend with reduced profit margins, lower wages, and fewer job opportunities. This situation has simultaneously raised prices for American consumers and businesses due to China's retaliatory measures (Amiti et al., 2020). Moreover, ongoing tariff escalations have adversely affected trade partners, such as the European Union, Canada, and Mexico, further downstream in global supply chains (Mao & Görg, 2020). Consequently, protectionist policies may lead to disruptions in supply chains and increased tariffs, generating inefficiencies for the protectionist economy and its trading partners alike.

Therefore, the infant industry argument is considerably weakened after consideration of protectionism resulting in rent-seeking behavior, current rapid technological advancements, and chances of retaliation from trading partners.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that free trade benefits developing countries in four main aspects. In terms of economic growth, free trade encourages growth, which enhances productivity and increases output. Trade liberalization policies also ushered in FDI, which created technology transfers, developed comparative advantage and laid the foundation for the creation of new firms. Freer trade also had a positive impact on employment rates as it

generated greater demand for goods and services, causing companies to hire more labor. Trade liberalization policies, particularly reducing tariffs, have also lowered consumer prices and increased the variety of goods and services available for purchase, raising consumer welfare.

Finally, this essay rebutted the infant industry argument for developing countries, arguing that rent-seeking will worsen under protectionist measures, which will also be hard to remove. The essay also refutes these claims by identifying technological advancements and potential retaliation from trading partners. While the essay strongly substantiates the case for free trade, it is noteworthy that factors unique to each country and cyclical developments also contribute significantly to the indicators evaluated above. Hence, the scholarly debate may remain divided on the effects of free trade on developing countries. However, with the benefit of hindsight and based on empirical evidence from a large variety of economies, this essay has shown with overwhelming empirical evidence that free trade is largely beneficial in terms of economic growth, FDI, employment, and consumer welfare.

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THE PERSISTENCE OF POLITICAL IRRATIONALITY: RETHINKING APPROACHES TO MISINFORMATION

Ho Kai Liang Austin | National University of Singapore

Abstract

The problem of political irrationality is a pressing social issue that hinders cooperation and solution-finding in society. It often arises from beliefs driven by non-epistemic motives, which results in the spread of inaccurate rationalizations. This paper examines several proposed solutions to combat this problem, including government regulation, fact-checking organizations, consumer-based approaches, and vector-based approaches. Each approach is found to have limitations, due to misaligned incentives and unrealistic assumptions about rationality. I then advance a trustless system of crowdsourced Testimonial Scores on social media platforms which aims to prioritize more veracious information. While still non-ideal, this seeks to better address the complex nature of political irrationality and foster rational discourse in society.

Keywords: *Political irrationality, Polarization, Misinformation, Partisan rationalization*

“The problem of political irrationality is the greatest social problem humanity faces [...] because it is a problem that prevents us from solving other problems” (Huemer, 2016, p. 467). Political disagreement inhibits cooperation among individuals in society, as coordinating solutions first requires individuals to hold the right beliefs about the issues at hand and how to resolve them. One source of disagreement, political irrationality, can be traced to preferences for beliefs people hold for non-epistemic purposes (Huemer, 2016; Williams, 2023), such as the social utility of communicating loyalty to a partisan group. Because producers of rationalizations—which provide epistemic bases for these beliefs—are catering to partisan consumers’ predetermined beliefs, the rationalizations are often in reality partial and subjective (Williams, 2023). In the terms of Williams’ “marketplace of rationalizations”, the spread of partisan misinformation would constitute a market failure due to asymmetric information; producers are more aware of the completeness and accuracy of the rationalizations than consumers, and are leveraging this asymmetry to profit from rationalizations in a manner that is suboptimal for society. Recognizing that it is imperative to correct this market failure to prevent political polarization and gridlock on irrational grounds,

philosophers and social scientists have raised multiple suggestions to combat the problem. In this paper, I will analyze some of these approaches to the problem of inaccurate partisan rationalizations: government regulation, fact-checking organizations, consumer-based approaches, and vector-based approaches. I will establish why each is prone to miscarriage, either as a result of failing to address the problem, or introducing more issues of their own. Finally, I will advance a modified vector-based approach which, while still non-ideal, appears the most promising among the proposed solutions.

Government Regulation

When addressing asymmetric information perpetuated partly due to a misalignment of consumer and producer incentives, it is natural to look to third-party intervention to adjust the asymmetry. Government intervention in the marketplace of rationalizations is often the first solution that comes to mind as the state is expected to protect the public interest, which could include guarding against misinformation that may undermine democratic institutions or public health. A direct method governments have employed to combat false information is the use of legislation to control its spread, such as imposing sanctions and censoring falsehoods. For instance, in 2016, the European Parliament introduced fines for companies that disseminated falsehoods (Schmermund, 2018). These methods aim to flag falsehoods and arrest their spread.

However, two related problems emerge when governments intervene in the marketplace of partisan rationalizations: the curtailment of free speech, and the potential monopolization of the marketplace to represent state interests. Sanctioning firms and individuals for spreading misinformation is tantamount to censorship, which is unjustifiable to some because it restricts one's freedom of expression. Mill (1859/2015) argues against censorship thus: "Men are not more zealous for truth than they often are for error, and a sufficient application of legal or even social penalties will generally succeed in stopping the propagation of either" (p. 30). Even if, *arguendo*, governments are completely neutral and impartial, they are fallible and thus unjustified in censoring opinions with any certitude (Mill, 1859/2015). In other words, he warns that censorship is susceptible to error and creates a chilling effect on free speech, which indiscriminately deters the spread of truth as much as it discourages falsehoods. For instance, a 2017 bill in the Philippines employed a definition of fake news which gave the government wide latitude, sparking criticisms that it would silence

legitimate dissent (Schmermund, 2018). Indeed, in practice, censorship could inhibit free speech by instilling an atmosphere of fear and encouraging self-censorship, especially when contentious political matters are concerned.

This brings us to the next point, where we relax the earlier assumption of state neutrality. Direct regulatory actions by the government *ipso facto* make them producers in the very same market, resulting in a conflict of interest. In general, they cannot regulate rationalizations for a view, e.g. producing evidence against the claim φ , without themselves providing epistemic support—and thus producing a rationalization—for the contrary, i.e. the same evidence inadvertently supports the claim $\neg\varphi$. This challenges the idea that states can intervene neutrally; the very act of regulation, coupled with their legal authority, could grant them undue dominance in the marketplace of partisan rationalizations as they are able to sanction competing views and promote rationalizations like their own as legitimate. This monopolization of the market is problematic as dissent may be crowded out by rationalizations which support the government's incumbency and views, and it would be remiss to ignore the fact that governments tend to have interests in sustaining their power and influence. As Williams (2023) points out, the tendency of states to preferentially support “research conducive to upholding certain nationalistic or ideological convictions” (p. 111) is ubiquitous throughout history. The potential abuses of direct governmental regulation is thus a major reason why it has failed to gain popularity as a solution with the politically engaged, especially in countries where even the judiciary is distrusted as an independent arbiter of facts on the suspicion of political motivations.

Fact-Checking Organizations

An alternative, indirect means of regulating the spread of misinformation is promoting non-governmental, non-profit fact-checking organizations. These refer to projects such as PolitiFact.com and FactCheck.org, which work to verify statements made by a wide range of sources (Schmermund, 2018). This seemingly counters the potential problem of state interference, particularly if they do not receive public funding and are thus not financially beholden to state interests.

However, two sets of problems call their reliability into question. The first is an inability to carry out their job effectively, caused by two factors that pertain to the job:

fact-checkers tend to rely on other news media themselves, and frequently attempt to verify normative opinions rather than descriptive facts (Allen, 2020). A reliance on other news media leads to a chain of testimony, and fact-checkers may inadvertently falsify statements on the basis of false information further up the chain. Additionally, when the information under verification is normative rather than positive, it becomes unclear whether fact-checkers have the relevant expertise to verify an opinion on complex policy matters, and by whose lights the information should be judged—assuming it would even be appropriate for fact-checking to reflect one’s normative positionality.

This links to the second issue with fact-checking organizations, which is that some of these projects are in fact partisan. For instance, Accuracy in Media and the Media Report Center are explicitly conservative projects seeking out liberal media bias, while Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting has been accused of falsifying conservative sources more often than liberal ones (Lombardo, 2020). Partisan affiliations risk compromising the objectivity of the fact-checking exercise, and importantly, mere accusations are enough to erode consumer trust in these enterprises altogether. Partisan fact-checkers could further insulate the echo chamber by discrediting alternative voices, exacerbating the problem. As this compromises the willingness of partisan consumers to rely on fact-checking organizations, this may ultimately render the cause ineffective at combating misinformation.

Consumer-Based Approaches

With an ostensible inability to rely on governments or fact-checking organizations, the onus seems to rest on individuals to be responsible in consuming rationalizations. Generally, this may be formulated as an appeal for media literacy; philosophically, it may be understood as the cultivation of epistemic virtue. For instance, some philosophers think there is value in exposing oneself to alternative viewpoints, even ones that are false (Mill, 1859/2015; Worsnip, 2019). Mill (1859/2015) argues that when individuals fail to entertain alternative views, “errors harden into prejudices” (p. 51). Worsnip (2019) asserts that we have both epistemic and moral duties to maintain diverse, non-partisan media diets, in order to burst the epistemic bubble which filters out opposing views and gain a more complete picture of evidence for political opinions.

To be sure, these are important steps to address what Huemer (2016) calls the “Ignorance Theory” (p. 456), which holds that political disagreement is caused by inadequate knowledge, but they do not address the political irrationality which he thinks is primarily responsible for disagreement. To that end, he suggests a list of four remedies: comprehending political irrationality, reconsidering beliefs prone to bias, being skeptical of evidence in light of others’ irrationality, and being civil in discussions.

While I agree that these are valid suggestions for cultivating epistemic virtue and combating irrational polarization, they appear to fly in the face of what we understand about partisan motivated reasoning from social psychology. Generally, these suggestions seem to be epistemically demanding, and the calls to vary our media diet fail to recognize the overwhelming sway of the social reasons for doxastic preferences which give rise to partisan rationalizations to begin with (Williams, 2023). In ignoring the effects of constraints such as limited time and cognitive capabilities, they also appeal unrealistically to notions of Heroic Rationality, glossing over the need for tractable, reliable, and accurate decision-making procedures characteristic of the more realistic model of Ecological Rationality (Schmidt, 2019, pp. 521–524).

Keeping the above in mind, I will now sketch out an account of how the consumption of partisan rationalizations might be epistemically virtuous, and the solutions suitable under such a framework. Rini (2017) argues that shared partisan affiliation might, *ceteris paribus*, rightfully give a testimony greater credibility. The thought is that individuals who share partisan affiliations (call them “co-partisans”) are likely to share normative views, which makes co-partisanship a viable signal for “normative peerhood” (p. 52), or a reliable provider of normative testimony. Rini (2017) thinks that in political matters, this extends to descriptive testimonies, and thus that it is reasonable to ascribe co-partisans greater credibility in testimony. Therefore, given the same constraints set out earlier, Rini (2017) concludes that accepting partisan testimony is an individually rational practice, and that the proliferation of misinformation is a failure of rationality at a societal level. She argues, and I concur, that consumers have no incentive to change their behavior “in our epistemically non-ideal world” (p. 54) and thus consumer-based approaches are likely to fail; solutions instead lie with institutions which can promote and enforce norms—specifically, firms which act as vectors for partisan rationalizations.

Vector-Based Approaches

I now examine solutions which rely on actions taken by the companies that facilitate the spread of information, whether they are news organizations or social media platforms. As firms profit from the production and dissemination of partisan rationalizations (Williams, 2023), they will be unlikely to change their behavior unless governments compel them to, or their reputation is at stake in a way that would damage profits. When it became incumbent on Facebook to counter the spread of fake news following the 2016 US presidential election, they introduced a tool to mark out dubious information, but found that such flagging counter-intuitively reinforced beliefs (Schmermund, 2018). I attribute this to the effect of red flags inadvertently acting as a salience nudge, where the label of disputation increases the salience of misinformation and reaffirms existing beliefs. Additionally, fact-checking is a time-consuming process, which Rini (2017) contends prevents labeling from keeping up with the pace of dissemination on social media. As I intimated earlier, it also suffers from issues of reliability, which may impair the efficacy of such a measure.

An alternative Rini (2017) proposes is the display of “Reputation Scores” (p. 57) on social media platforms, which track users’ rates of disseminating dubious information. She argues this will create accountability and make reposting information an act of assertion and thus explicit testimony. This coheres with Williams’ (2023) understanding that consumers are actually searching for trustworthy sources, rather than rationalizations *per se* (p. 114). However, I submit that this proposal will face the same issue as labeling contentious information in inadvertently raising the prominence of dubious sources. Rini concedes this, but says the score aims to help unpolarized consumers, instead of individuals who would rejoice at being branded as dubious and are likely to already be trapped in an echo chamber (PPE at UNC, 2020). While not entirely satisfied with this answer, I think it is the most promising approach discussed thus far if narrowly construed to Rini’s proposed context, and in the next section I will develop it into what I argue will be an improved solution.

An Improved Approach

My proposed approach to the problem of irrational polarization will rest on several assumptions and problems surfaced throughout the analysis of solutions in this paper, namely: that while suggesting normative solutions, we are operating in a non-ideal world; that every party’s incentives are misaligned in a way that does not inherently favor truth; that

consumers have cause to distrust everyone except co-partisans; that truth is merely instrumental to the expression of doxastic preferences for the attainment of social utility. Finally, it is important to underscore that the approach seeks to combat *irrational* polarization, which centers on a misunderstanding of descriptive facts rather than disputes about normative orientations. These assumptions shape the contours of the approach as such: it must not be idealistic in its assumptions of rationality, and it must neither assume consumers know best, nor naively assume that consumers will trust institutions or lone sources in handing down authoritative judgements of truth. In short, an improved solution would look like one that does not require trust in any particular party to implement, and on the contrary, embraces the distrust and partisan incentives to approach truth.

Keeping these parameters in mind, my improved approach is a trustless system of crowdsourced “Testimonial Scores” on social media platforms that rank individual pieces of information rather than sources themselves. Every post would display two metrics: the number of upvotes for “True”, and the number of downvotes for “False”, neither attributed to any voters. The votes would be rationed such that each user is entitled to a hundred votes a day, with users limited to ten votes per post. The Testimonial Score would be the difference between the average number of upvotes and the average number of downvotes, and it would be used to sort the salience of posts in a user’s feed from top to bottom, corresponding to the highest to lowest score. It can also be aggregated across all of a user’s posts and averaged to compute a Reputation Score to be displayed on their profile, as with Rini’s proposal.

Each stipulation is a feature of the system that attempts to address a facet of the problem. The crowdsourcing aspect decentralizes the authority to fact-check information, which is likely to create greater assurance of a fair judgment in the eyes of an individual consumer, as opposed to trusting a single institution like the government or a fact-checking organization. Furthermore, in terms of approaching an objective truth—at least when it comes to positive facts—the systematic error caused by biased partisan users should be mutually canceled out when posts are voted on by sufficiently large numbers.⁹⁶ Ultimately, the primary motivation of a collectively-determined Testimonial Score—and by extension, Reputation

⁹⁶ Admittedly, strong assumptions will have to be made such that jury theorems endorse this feature. Nonetheless, as a cardinal voting system, it is capable of simultaneously achieving the conditions described by Arrow’s impossibility theorem (Vasiljev, 2008). Rigorous applications of social choice theory will, however, exceed the scope of this paper.

Score—is to invest the metric with greater credibility and accuracy, through appeals to the wisdom of the crowd.

The second feature concerns the nature of voting. Labeling votes as “True” or “False”, or variants thereof, shifts the norm of engagement from approval and disapproval to one focused on veracity and falsity. Such labels draw a consumer’s immediate attention to the credibility of information on a post, and primes them to approach a post with skepticism even before they engage with its content. The ability to place multiple votes on a given post allows the consumer to express the degree of their belief in the veracity or falsity of a post, accounting for instances where a post may express some descriptive facts correctly and some wrongly. The rationing of the vote seeks to discourage users from voting solely on the basis of political alignment, as they then consume votes that could have gone to verifying or falsifying other posts they might feel more strongly about. Again, this primes the user to engage with content selectively and carefully, should they choose to cast their vote. The anonymity of the votes encourages honest voting, and also prevents consumers from drawing inferences from the votes of their co-partisans (or indeed, their political rivals). However, this remains vulnerable to the practice of “brigading”, where users coordinate downvotes to express dissent (Graham & Rodriguez, 2021). It also does not preclude consumers from creating multiple accounts for the same purpose, unless platforms prevent them from doing so. These can be combated with a variety of mechanisms, which shall not be discussed in this paper.

The calculation of the Testimonial Score as the difference between the average numbers of upvotes and downvotes allows the score to track the net mean level of veracity that consumers assign to a post, which aids in sorting the posts according to adjudged veracity at a granular level. The predicted behavior of this system over time is that posts which are simultaneously engaging and truthful will appear at the top of a user’s feed, while posts that are laden with misinformation will be pushed to the bottom and branded with downvotes; posts which are controversial or less engaging—perhaps because they are politically neutral—will appear in the middle as their scores will be near zero. This sorting helps to diversify the sources consumers are exposed to by prioritizing truthful news, regardless of political alignment.

Overall, the Testimonial Score should be capable of raising the salience of epistemically useful information in consumers' media diets, and transforming the incentive structures which perpetuate misguided partisan rationalizations. While this solution will not stop polarization as a whole, it will minimally prevent polarization on irrational grounds. By refusing to hand down a judgment from a central authority, this method also preserves liberal respect for the rationality of consumers even as it seeks to nudge them in the direction of carefully evaluating the information they see. Fundamentally, however, the success of this approach still hinges on consumers across all ends of the political spectrum having a common understanding of what constitutes positive facts, and how to discern them from misinformation. This is because their ability to distinguish fact from fiction seems to be contingent on the cultivation of basic social scientific knowledge and media literacy. Thus, while I have discounted the efficacy of consumer-based approaches on the account of Ecological Rationality, it would still be useful to some extent to incorporate elements of education in approaching the problem.

Even so, one issue remains: while social media is arguably the most notable vector of misinformation today, this solution fails to address propagation through other means like traditional news media. To that end, it seems the partisanship of fact-checking organizations might be an unfortunate necessity to combat the larger problem of political irrationality, and we can only hope an inter-partisan combativeness akin to that envisioned in the vote-casting of the Testimonial Score will cancel out any systematic bias that plagues the process.

Summary

In this paper, I have analyzed different approaches to solving the problem of irrational political polarization due to inaccurate partisan rationalizations. Firstly, I showed that direct government regulation is too heavy-handed. Secondly, I showed that fact-checking organizations are unreliable. Thirdly, I showed that consumer-based approaches are too idealistic. Lastly, I showed that vector-based approaches miscarry in practice due to unintended consequences.

I then advanced an improved approach which modifies the Reputation Score while mindful of the previously discussed limitations, acknowledging the necessity of media literacy and the inability to address traditional sources of rationalizations. This approach remains non-ideal, and rests on several assumptions about the present distrust in institutions

and a propensity for partisan rationality, all of which may be falsified or rectified over time. Nonetheless, I hope this has highlighted the persistence and depth of this problem as a wedge in society that we have no easy solution for.

On a final note for future research into the project of solving the problem of political irrationality, I believe it is essential to avoid the myopic single-mindedness that seems to plague the approaches suggested thus far. A clear-eyed analysis of existing institutions and behavioral tendencies, without illusions about the incentives of all parties, is antecedent to understanding the complexity surrounding the problem; integrating interdisciplinary insights from philosophy, politics, economics, and social psychology will pave the way forward to address it.

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