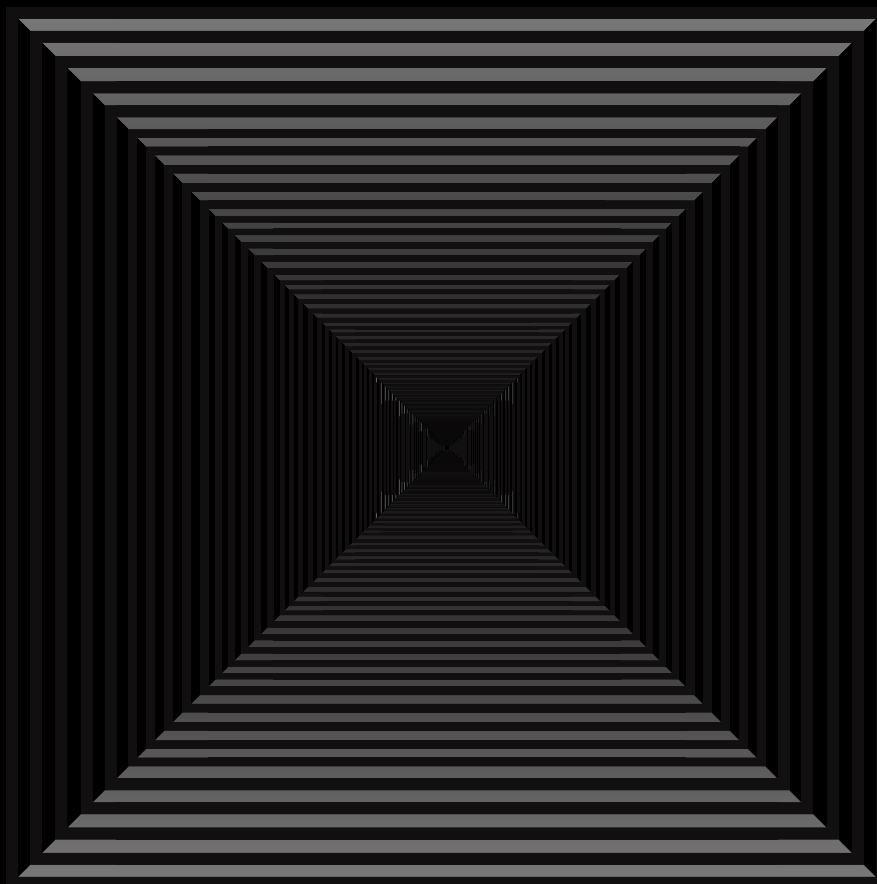


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Founded in July 2020, *Republic* is an undergraduate journal of Philosophy, Politics and Economics located at the National University of Singapore (NUS). We are part of NUS PPE Club, the official academic and interest club for the PPE major at NUS. We publish volumes of academic papers and op-ed pieces once a year in mixed format—covering both the traditional scope of academic journals with non-academic pieces of writing by NUS students.

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FOREWORD

by Tan Xin Yi and Toh Wei Soong

It is our pleasure to present Volume I of the NUS PPE Club's undergraduate journal, *Republic*, compiled and edited by the 2nd iteration of the PPE Club.

Republic was born from the desire to showcase the works of undergraduate students trained in the disciplines of Philosophy, Politics and Economics. It remains our conviction that the knowledge and skills one gains from a training in PPE can help us navigate the increasingly complex and ambiguous world we live in. The works included in this journal are, thus, a reflection of the major's hope that more ideas continue to be brought into the public discourse for exchange and learning.

We are tremendously grateful to our fellow editors for dedicating the time to review papers and for our authors who had the courage to present their works for publication. Your hard work, depth of thought and enthusiasm leaves us assured that *Republic* is in good hands, and that the PPE cohort has the talent, ambition and passion to create something new and exciting for both its fellow members and for the rest of the world.

We look forward to what happens next.

Tan Xin Yi and Toh Wei Soong

July 2021

INTRODUCTION

by Ang Jing Wei

COVID-19 has been a curse for many of us. Whether it be a stumbling block towards varied plans that many of us had intended for, or a life-threatening menace towards our family and friends, it has been an emotionally draining and physically taxing journey for the past year and a half.

Throughout this journey, the original intention of the journal was to be one that focused on the latest occurrences in the world today. Providing nuanced insights towards global phenomenon and expanding upon the minds of our peers was the name of the game. This was not to be given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which stretched the team to its mental limits given the constraints of working from home, facing increased workload, and yet having to manage the same degree of expectations from employers and faculty alike. This led to a pivot towards a goal that was similar but yet vastly different from our original intention: having a journal that showcased the potential of the PPE cohort, but yet ensure that individuals submitting to the journal would not be subjected to the tenuous task of writing—and rewriting—perspectives specifically for the journal itself.

Thus, *Republic* was born. A display of the nuanced perspectives of many individuals from the PPE cohort based on their existing works that we felt had more value than simply graded assignments; a *Republic* made with ideas of our very friends in the major. Over the year, we were heartened to receive more than twenty articles from individuals in the major: Individuals who dedicated time to work with editors, rework their articles, and subject themselves to public scrutiny of their work. We would like to sincerely thank the PPE cohort

for their support in both submitting the articles while painstakingly editing the articles in the process. Without the key contributions from these individuals in what eventually became *Republic*, we would have never managed to realise this vision of presenting our works to the greater community.

We would also like to thank our Mentors, Prof Loy Hui Chieh, Prof Abelard Podgorski, Prof Zachary Barnett, and the administration team from the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Economics for their support in our endeavour to create a community with PPE, and also our first foray into publications for the PPE Club. The support was integral in assuring us to carry on despite the challenges ahead; Assuring us that this path we seek is the very sound of our feet upon the ground. It is with this constant assurance of the value of what we do that eventually gave rise to the Republic you see today.

My Co-Directors, Wei Soong and Xin Yi—along with myself—have been honoured to have been given this chance to give a voice to the PPE Community. Lastly, we would like to thank you, for taking the time to read our little thoughts, and for going on a journey with our authors within *Republic*. We hope that these articles could plant ideas in your mind, challenge your notions on what it means to be alive, and spark an exploration into what it means to be part of humankind.

Once again, thank you all for being here, and we look forward to seeing you all for the journey on our next issue.

Ang Jing Wei

July 2021

CANON OF CHINESE ANXIETY: ON THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM BY LIU CIXIN,
TRANSLATED BY KEN LIU (2014)

By Hanniel Asher Lim Wen Te

The Three-Body Problem by Liu Cixin (2014) is about Ye Wenjie, a physicist who betrays humanity to an alien civilization—and why. Growing up during the Cultural Revolution as the child of professors, she witnessed the irrational persecution of her parents. Her traumas, compounded with the socio-economic failure of post-revolutionary China, leads to her loss of faith, and culminating in her betrayal of humanity. The plot is executed across two timelines depicting three periods of China: Firstly, of China's past of the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent transition to modernity, and secondly, of China's future as a hegemon. Using a vast array of techniques, Liu broaches the issue of Chinese anxiety with incredible nuance.

Yan (2013) identifies Chinese anxiety as the aspect of Chinese Science Fiction (SF) that makes it 'Chinese'. Consequently, *The Three-Body Problem's* compelling solution to Chinese anxiety arguably contributes to its canonical status in Chinese literature: Even prior to the novel's 2014 Hugo Award, the phenomenon of pre- and post-'*Three-Body*' SF had been observed (Gaffric & Peyton, 2019). However, commentaries usually examine Liu's oeuvre in general instead of any work specifically. Moreover, even works studying *The Three-Body Problem* in particular examine its significance in the history of Chinese SF without examining the novel's literary merits that earned it such significance. My essay fills this deficit by showing the novel's merits in dealing with Chinese anxiety. I argue that by depicting Chinese characters as independent critics of Chinese culture and history and as

confident navigators of the future, *The Three-Body Problem* dispels Chinese anxiety, reconciling the past of Chinese cultural inferiority to the West with the nascent triumph of China in a global order of Western knowledge.

The concept of Chinese anxiety has been used variously, from collective anxieties about cultural identity (Visser, 2008) to state capacity (Fan, 2016) to even an application of Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' (Duan, 2015). However, Chinese anxiety as explored in Chinese SF is the question of preserving Chinese culture while securing China's future in the "postmodern scientific age" (Yan, 2013, p. 5). I will apply the concept of Chinese anxiety to the Chinese reckoning with modernity, Western knowledge, and the global order in this examination. This will correspond respectively with my analysis of the novel's three subplots: its depiction of the Cultural Revolution, its metadiegetic virtual reality (VR) game ("3body.net"), and its imagination of the future of Chinese international relations.

Firstly, the novel assuages the Chinese anxiety of modernity by contrasting China's progress under modernity against the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. According to Yan (2013), the question of whether the preservation of Chinese culture is compatible with technological development is part of the quintessence of Chinese SF. In the novel, Liu invites Chinese readers to disidentify themselves with the errors of the Cultural Revolution to embrace modernity.

Liu begins the novel with a tragicomic Cultural Revolution, lamenting and lampooning Chinese anxieties of modernity. Amidst a tragic scene of armed civil conflict, a Red Guard interrogates a physicist, Ye Zhetai—Wenjie's father—with a bathetic ignorance: "Einstein is a reactionary academic authority. He would serve any master who dangled money in front of

him. [...] We must overthrow the black banner of capitalism represented by the theory of relativity!” (p. 9). Yet, the bathos merely enhances the statement’s intrinsic humour to modern readers. Considering Hobbes’ theory that humour derives from condescension (Hobbes, 1981), the statement is intrinsically humorous to modern audiences because their understanding of science’s legitimacy makes the ignorance intuitive. Such mockery induces a low view of Chinese anxieties of modernity in readers, encouraging them to reject it. However, the humour simultaneously induces a contradictory response that nonetheless has the same effect. The uncomfortable dark humour sensitizes readers to the horror of the scene which also encourages a rejection of Chinese anxieties of modernity.

Moreover, Liu shows that the triumph of accepting modernity is greater than the shame of rejecting it, conveyed by depicting the Chinese’s collective amnesia of the Cultural Revolution. Later in the scene, Zhetai is accidentally killed by an interrogator. This severely traumatized his wife, Shao Lin, and his daughter, who both witnessed it: Lin laughs insanely while Wenjie becomes despondent. Yet, both Lin and Wenjie eventually become socio-economically successful individuals in post-Mao China. Lin becomes a vice president of a famous university and Wenjie becomes a global terrorist mastermind. Moreover, even the Red Guards do not find the horrors of the Cultural Revolution comparable to the future of China in modernity. Instead of repenting for their crimes of even murders or bragging of their sacrifices of even a lost limb, they simply lament that “it’s a new age now. Who will remember us? [...] Everyone will forget all this completely!” (p. 329). Even Lin warns her daughter, “Do not try to pursue old historical debts” (p. 324). Rather, it is Wenjie’s remembrance that is anomalous—a view authorized by the narrator: “During the Cultural Revolution [...] [Wenjie] was relatively fortunate. But [Wenjie] had the mental habits of a scientist, and she refused to forget” (p. 292). Liu shows that under the progress of modernity,

the memory of the Cultural Revolution belongs in oblivion, encouraging Chinese readers to embrace modernity for its redemptive potential.

However, while this subplot dispels Chinese shame over the past, it does not address whether the Western knowledge underlying modernity must necessarily sacrifice Chinese culture. This leads to my second point: By disassociating the Chinese from the errors of Chinese history through the novel's VR game, "3body.net", the novel dispels the Chinese anxiety of Western knowledge.

In "3body.net", the player is set on a planet that has erratic lengths of day and night and solar intensities. The goal is to solve the mystery of the planet's erratic environment, followed by an endeavour to create a solar calendar. The mystery derives from the planet's triple star system that gives it its extremely unstable orbit. While pursuing the answer, famous Chinese and Western intellectuals from various eras accompany the player. While the Chinese protagonist initially chooses Chinese avatars, he uses Western avatars as he advances. In this progression, Liu criticises the Chinese history of mysticism. When the protagonist was using Chinese avatars, he was surrounded by various ancient Chinese intellectuals from Confucius to Mozi who all failed to solve the mystery. Even Mozi, who dismisses the Chinese "shamans, metaphysicians, and Daoists" (p. 152) as mystics, will be dismissed by Galileo as a "mystic dressed as a scientist" because his "way of thinking was still Eastern" (p. 194). Moreover, when the protagonist proposes the solution, advancing to the next stage, he chose the avatar of the Polish Renaissance astronomer Copernicus in tribute to his heliocentric model. This fact of a Westerner solving the problem of three suns would be later acknowledged by Qin Shi Huang, revealing Liu's intention to cue readers to the protagonist's acceptance of the West's instrumentality in advancing humanity's knowledge. As the

protagonist is Chinese, the Chinese can easily identify with him, easing their discomfort of acknowledging the power of Western knowledge.

However, any capitulation to Western superiority is subverted by the fact that it is a Chinese person playing Copernicus; the Chinese have mastered what the West discovered. Moreover, with the avatar of Copernicus being situated with other Western intellectuals of different eras of similar intellectual stature, it symbolises the idea that the West did not advance because its people were inherently superior, but because they were historically fortunate, having the right people at the right times. In fact, the Western intellectuals are shown to also hold superstitions. It is Galileo who asks the Pope to burn Copernicus at stake for proposing the correct solution. This was especially ironic as the real-life Galileo is known for his persecution by the Catholic Church for espousing Copernicus' heliocentrism.¹ In the face of even greater knowledge, the very symbol of the West's triumph of reason over faith irrationally commits intellectual parricide and suicide. By highlighting the humble humanity of Western intellectuals, Liu invites Chinese readers to measure Chinese intellectual history with more realistic standards. With lesser shame, the Chinese can more easily acknowledge the mistakes of Chinese intellectual history, encouraging them to embrace other forms of knowledge.

Furthermore, "3body.net" posits a non-racial perception of humanity. In "3body.net", anyone can be of any race. In particular, an avatar of the mathematician von Neumann was

¹ This pervasive narrative is an oversimplification. See, for example, the *Osiris* article, "Science, Religion, and the Historiography of the Galileo Affair: On the Undesirability of Oversimplification", by M. A. Finocchiaro (2001), which states that "The relevant documents show that many church men were on [Galileo's] side and many scientists were critical of him" (p. 116). See also James Hannam's *Nature* [blogpost](#) on 18 May 2011, stating that "Admittedly, Galileo was put on trial for claiming it is a fact that the Earth goes around the sun, rather than just a hypothesis as the Catholic Church demanded." My argument, however, rests on veridicality, not veracity. The point is that Liu appeals to this widely held narrative, whether wholly accurate or not. I withhold judgment on whether Liu understood the nuances of the Galileo affair.

discovered to be controlled by a player only when he made a joke, switching to a Sichuan accent. Players can so convincingly inhabit characters of other races that other players do not know whether the avatar is controlled by a player. This emphasizes the universality of the human experience and thus the arbitrariness of race. By removing reason from race, criticizing Chinese intellectual history is no longer self-criticism and praising others' intellectual history is no longer an acknowledgement of racial superiority. These sentiments are embodied in the game's Qin Shi Huang who declares to the Western intellectuals, "The wisdom of Westerners is terrifying. You are not more intelligent than the men of the East, but you can see the right path" (p. 227). In Emperor Qin's self-assurance of his equality, capability, and vast empire, he does not need to fear acknowledging politically inconvenient facts. Liu invites his readers to do likewise with the politically inconvenient fact of Western knowledge.

However, while Liu addresses present Chinese anxieties of the past, he also addresses Chinese anxieties of the future. Thus, it can be elucidated that the novel too combats Chinese anxieties of its place in the global order by depicting the future Chinese state as a hegemon and its people as confident global citizens. Yan (2013) identifies the fate of China as an integral concern of Chinese SF. This is the culmination of the previous two anxieties explored. Very poetically, the first Chinese SF book, published during the late Qing dynasty, was titled *The Future of New China* (Han, 2013). According to Li (2019), Chinese SF was born during the late Qing dynasty when China finally opened to the world and became conscious of itself as a member of an international order, ending its solipsism. This wrought great collective anxieties, indicated by the factions intensely fighting over the direction of China's future, marked by the Qing dynasty's fall. As the quintessence of Chinese anxiety in

Chinese SF, Liu's compelling response to the Chinese anxiety of its prospects in the global order might be his coup de maître.

In the novel, a global terrorist organisation drives Western and Chinese scientists to suicide to prevent their technological innovations from defending earth against the coming alien invasion. Moreover, the global terrorist organisation is dominated by Western and Chinese people, and Wenjie is its co-founder. Even the national armies allying against this organisation are from China and NATO. This means that Chinese scientists, citizens, soldiers, and generals are instrumental in the cosmic drama of saving humanity against greater powers. This optimistic projection of the Chinese in the near future assures Chinese readers that embracing modernity and the Western knowledge underlying it will not harm its culture but enable it to lead humanity.

Furthermore, Liu uses the alien race to mirror Chinese society. Known as Trisolarans for the triple star system their planet orbits, the alien race has an authoritarian society that parallels Qin Shi Huang's empire depicted in "3body.net". It explores an alternate future where China is the hegemon instead of the West, suggesting that Western hegemony is the result of historical accidents, removing Chinese cultural inferiority from ontological or teleological interpretations. However, Liu depicts this future negatively: The earth, with its global market economy, progresses technologically at an exponential rate while the Trisolaran empire progresses only at a linear rate. Moreover, Trisolaran authoritarianism preserves its people's lives but paradoxically prevents them from enjoying their existence. This encourages Chinese readers to see Western hegemony not only as an accident, but a fortunate one, compelling them to seize the opportunities of the current global order.

This is epitomised by the pivotal scene that resolves the novel's main problem. In the Chinese command centre where international officials congregate to coordinate their response to the terrorist organisation, it was Da Shi, the archetypal 'bad cop' who proposed the solution. Shi, frustrated with the command centre's ineffective bureaucracy, inserts himself into the conversation by provoking an American colonel. When he catches on to an English word the colonel used—"Pao-Li-Si"—I heard that word twice." (p. 363)—he leverages this to propose a unique solution enabled by the protagonist's research. Liu thus shows a future where the world is led even by a Chinese-speaking nobody simply because the Chinese are willing to engage the world.

Altogether, Liu's consolation in his confrontation of Chinese anxiety allows his literature to persuade his readers politically and culturally. His vast imagination reframing even the national fiasco of the Cultural Revolution, he earns his authority to address the Chinese anxiety that comprises the *raison d'être* of Chinese SF—and by addressing it with as compelling persuasion, he earns his place in the canon of Chinese SF. With the Chinese state co-opting Liu's works especially due to their unignorable international success (Gaffric & Peyton, 2019) and his works' subversion of Chinese state ideology and narratives, *The Three-Body Problem* can be autopoietic perhaps more than any other work of Chinese SF. It has the potential to continue influencing Chinese SF, China, and China's relationship with the world even when it is opposed for its politically inconvenient ideas—a trait of canonical works.

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HYPOTHETICAL MORAL AGREEMENTS AND MORAL NORMS: FREE RIDERS AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

By Teoh Tai Ker

The issue of free-riders has long been thought of as an issue to social contract theories of morality, the question as asked by Russ Schafer- Landau is: ‘Why be Moral?’.¹ This essay attempts to answer that question. This essay shall first lay out the basis of hypothetical agreements and illustrate that hypothetical moral agreements do not serve the purpose of compliance towards moral norms. Contractarian theories must provide independent reasons as to why we should follow moral norms as agreed. I argue that although it might be rational for us to comply with Rawlsian morals if we are as reasonable as Rawls assumes, I think Rawls does not provide sufficient justification for the assumption of reasonableness. Lastly, I shall attempt to sketch out a rough idea of how Gauthier’s contractarian theory, and specifically the concept of constrained maximization, makes compliance to morality rational and what it might say with regard to free-riders.

Hypothetical Agreements

Many contract theorists have used hypothetical agreements as the basis for their proposed social contracts. These theorists create a hypothetical point of choosing; for Rawls it is the imagined original position behind the veil of ignorance. These theorists use these points of choosing to create ‘heuristic devices’, used to judge present existing moral standards as well

¹ Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2017. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

as to guide moral action.² This ‘heuristic’ purpose of contractarianism is well formulated in a counterfactual (CF1) by Stark: ‘a rule is justified if ideal agents in ideal circumstances would have agreed to it’.³ So, the purpose of the Rawlsian original position and veil of ignorance is that Rawls considers it the creation of ‘ideal agents’ in an ‘ideal circumstance’. Therefore, for Rawls, what moral or political rules we have in actuality are justified only if they were agreed upon in the original position.

At this point, one might object with what Stark classifies as the ‘standard indictment’ of hypothetical contract theories, which states that just because something might have been agreed to under ideal circumstances, nobody has actually agreed to it and therefore there is no reason for anyone to comply to the terms of a hypothetical contract.⁴ Upon closer inspection, it is arguable that moral contract theories are not susceptible to this indictment. That is because as mentioned above, most social contracts are merely ‘heuristic’, they never claim that there is an obligation to follow hypothetical agreements, merely that it is ‘moral’ to do so.⁵ Therefore, it is not the hypothetical contract that obliges compliance. That must come from some other aspect of moral theory itself. This compliance is important because as Campbell puts it, ‘Moral standards must be able to guide the behavior of rational agents if moral standards are to have the practical relevance we expect of them.’⁶ The rest of the essay shall explore whether some contractarian theories achieve this effect of compliance.

² Morris, Christopher W. 1998. "Justice, Reasons and Moral Standing." In *Rational Commitment and Social Justice: Essays for Gregory Kavka*, by Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris, 186-207. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.189.

³ Stark, Cynthia. 2000. "Hypothetical Consent and Justification." *The Journal of Philosophy* 313-334. p.315.

⁴ Ibid, 316.

⁵ Morris, Christopher W. 1998. "Justice, Reasons and Moral Standing." In *Rational Commitment and Social Justice: Essays for Gregory Kavka*, by Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris, 186-207. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.189.

⁶ Campbell, Richmond. 1988. "Review: Gauthier's Theory of Morals by Agreement." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 343-364. p. 346.

Reasonableness

Rawls does not write specifically about the issue of compliance, but I believe it would be linked to his idea of ‘reasonableness’, I shall attempt to extrapolate the idea of reasonableness behind the veil of ignorance and apply it in the search for a reason to be compliant to morality.⁷ For Rawls, parties behind the veil of ignorance are ‘reasonable’, they are reasonable with regards to ‘the concept of right, which include moral duties, and moral requirements of rights’.⁸ This idea of reasonableness is built into the original position, and is not independently defended by Rawls, but rather simply assumed.⁹ Reasonableness is key to compliance because, in Rawls’ own words, ‘merely rational agents (without reason) would lack a sense of justice’.¹⁰ Rawls utilizes the idea of reasonableness together with rationality, which he relates to an ‘individuals’ good’, ‘the rational plan of life he/she would choose under conditions of deliberative rationality’.¹¹ Reasonableness and rationality together form the basis under which agreements are made behind the veil. The contractors are reasonable, willing to compromise, rational and aware of their own ‘goods’, which allow them to visualize and formalize their conceptions of moral and political rules. The aforementioned portion all occurs behind the veil, where contractors are argued to be risk averse and thus adopt the principle of maximin, where one chooses to optimize the worst possible outcome. However, when people are knowledgeable of their differing abilities and positions in society, would it still be rational to obey the rules of the social contract? It seems if we are just fully rational, we should in this scenario become unconstrained maximizers and act in ways which fully maximize our ‘goodness’. This is where I think reasonableness comes in for Rawls, reasonableness obliges us to comply because we have certain ‘moral duties’. Assuming we

⁷ Freeman, Samuel. 2019. "Original Position." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Moore, Margaret. 1996. "On Reasonableness." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 167-178. p.170

¹⁰ Ibid, 169.

¹¹ Ibid.

follow the Rawlsian procedure and hypothesize a social contract that meets **CF1** above, that we are as reasonable as Rawls proclaims, it seems that to go against the moral actions prescribed by the contract in this instance would be unreasonable, and a breach of the fundamental moral duties we possess. Reasonableness in the Rawlsian understanding seems to provide us the reason to the question, ‘why be moral?’. However, it seems contrary to the contractarians’ aims to give reasonableness such wide ranging explanatory powers.

Schafer-Landau describes one of the primary aims of the contractarian as ‘want[ing] to show us how to arrive at moral wisdom without first assuming the truth of basic moral beliefs’.¹² By assuming the presence of reasonableness without justification, Rawls seems to embed some basic moral belief into the structure of his argument. This is not an argument that states that Rawls’ contractarian structure cannot create compliance, rather that 1) this is not something that was the explicit aim of Rawls and thus was not well elaborated and 2) his lack of justification for reasonableness seems troubling for those who hold fundamental contractarian aims.

Hobbes and Gauthier, Rationality and Morality

In *Morals by Agreement*, Gauthier seeks to argue that acting morally is always rational. In this sense, compliance to morality makes sense, as to not do so would be irrational.¹³ I shall focus on Gauthier’s formulation and attempt to apply it to the issue of free-riders as raised by Schafer-Landau.¹⁴ This essay (due to a lack of space) sets aside issues related to whether Gauthier’s formulation of rationality is really possible or if it is flawed. Gauthier’s contractarianism has the below form: ‘To justify a particular system of morals M is to demonstrate that if the members of S were to consider whether they could agree upon a

¹² Schafer-Landau, Russ. 2017. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.188.

¹³ Gauthier, David. 1987. *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Schafer-Landau, Russ. 2017. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

system of norms to govern their social relations, under ideal conditions of rationality, each would agree to have M govern interactions, and each would be rationally motivated to maintain this agreement'.¹⁵ Gauthier's contract, like Rawls', is also hypothetical in nature but does not face the above mentioned issue of needing to justify moral assumptions, Gauthier attempts to derive a contract purely from rational theory as well as to show that it would be irrational and immoral not to comply to the agreed contract.¹⁶ In looking at the likelihood of rational individuals cooperating, Gauthier makes the important assumption that it is reasonably transparent what the intentions of each party might be.¹⁷ This is important because Gauthier uses the prisoner's dilemma to illustrate the rationality of compliance and attempts to dispute the conventional rational belief that we are all predisposed to be outright utility maximizers/straightforward maximizers (SM), and instead introduces the idea of constrained maximization. This is stated by Campbell to be: 'In a choice situation involving strategic interaction a person has the Constrained Maximizer (CM) disposition iff: (1) she has property R and (2) she will cooperate with the other agents interacting with her iff she believes that each of them has property R.'¹⁸ In words a CM is for her 'to base her actions on a joint strategy or practice should the utility she expects were everyone so to base his action be no less than what she would expect were everyone to employ individual strategies.'¹⁹ Figure 2 illustrates the second-order choice matrix, taking into account the possible presence of either CMs and SMs. Recognizing if the other is a CM, allows 'prisoners' to move beyond the Nash Equilibrium (C,C) in figure 1.²⁰ CMs are only willing to cooperate if the other is a CM, otherwise they revert to SM behavior.

¹⁵ Campbell, Richmond. 1988. "Review: Gauthier's Theory of Morals by Agreement." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 343-364 p. 344.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 346.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 349.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 351.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 347-350.

		Column	
		Cooperate	Defect
Row	Cooperate	B, B	D, A
	Defect	A, D	C, C

Figure 1: The Initial Prisoner’s Dilemma (In descending alphabetical order of outcome preference, A is the best outcome)²¹

		Column	
		CM	SM
Row	CM	Mutual Cooperation	Mutual Defection
	SM	Mutual Defection	Mutual Defection

Figure 2: Second order decision matrix between a SM and a CM

I think Gauthier’s framework of constrained maximization actually helps to provide rational reasons for moral compliance in instances of free-rider situations, where the free-rider is able to gain benefits by exploiting the costs of others.²² I think it is interesting to think of the current Covid-19 situation and think of public health as a common good. Imagine a scenario where the nation is under a strict lockdown with nobody at all allowed to leave the house. Everyone is having an absolutely miserable time at home and would increase their utility if they were able to go outdoors. However, their utility if they went out would be worse than if they stayed in if any other single member of the nation is outdoors as well (due to the likelihood of getting the coronavirus).

²¹ Ibid, 347.

²² Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2017. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 202.

	B		
A		Stay In	Go Out
	Stay In	B,B	B,A
	Go Out	A,B	C,C

Figure 3: The Covid-19 Scenario, simplified into a 2-person decision matrix. Descending alphabetical order of outcome preference, with A being the best (We can imagine that a large population could also use a similar matrix, such that if any one SM decides to go out, every member of the population reverts to the state of SM and goes out as well.)

In looking at figure 3, constrained maximization in this case is applicable as if every member of the population is a CM, they would be rationally bound by to all stay in, because ‘the utility she expects were everyone so to base his action is no less than what she would expect were everyone to employ individual strategies.’ (this definition for CM is used above)²³. We can imagine that there is a possibility that many free-rider/common good problems can be summarized in such a decision matrix. The free-rider benefits, but if it is the case that everyone becomes a free-rider, the situation is worse for all. Imagine Schafer-Landau’s example of throwing gum in the park. If I am the only free-rider, I gain some utility from the convenience of not finding a bin. However, if everyone was a free-rider and were to throw their gum on the floor, this would be the worst scenario. Thus, I think the idea of CM perhaps might be able to resolve the issue of free-riding and goes some way in explaining why being moral is rational.

²³ Campbell, Richmond. 1988. "Review: Gauthier's Theory of Morals by Agreement." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 343-364. p. 351.

Conclusion

Overall, this essay has sought to answer the question ‘why be moral?’. I think both Gauthier and Rawls do give reasons as to why we should be compliant to certain hypothetical moral norms. Based on my reading of the idea, I think Rawl’s reliance on reasonableness is not sufficiently well-justified. For Gauthier, I have set aside potential issues with his contract theory and instead attempted to use his framework to answer why one would be morally irrational to be a free-rider.

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QUE SERA SERA

By Ivan Tan Zhi Wen

Newcomb's Problem, first presented by Robert Nozick (1969), is a thought experiment of interest to decision theory. It generates deep disagreement over which course of action to take between evidential and causal decision theorists, highlighting the difference between either school of thought clearly. This paper will describe the thought experiment in its original formation and present the case for both one-boxing; typically endorsed by Evidential Decision Theory (EDT), and two-boxing; recommended by Causal Decision Theory (CDT). Finally, I will attempt to show why one-boxing remains a far more attractive option, arguing that one should follow EDT's advice should a genuine Newcomb's Problem ever arise.

Gambling with a Superior Being

Newcomb's problem is as follows: Imagine you find yourself playing a game with a Superior Being¹. For the purpose of this essay, let's name him Zach. Zach possesses vast, incredibly reliable predictive powers. He places 2 Boxes (labelled A and B) in front of you and offers you a choice: **1)** take just Box A or **2)** take both Box A *and* B. Box B will always contain \$1000, but Box A might contain either \$1 million or nothing. Here's the catch, if Zach predicts you pick only Box A (1-boxing), he'll have put 1 million in Box A. If he predicts you pick both Boxes (2-boxing), he'll leave Box A empty. You have enormous confidence in Zach's predictive abilities, and he has never been wrong (to your knowledge). Zach made his

¹ The being can be supernatural or not, they can just as easily be a demon or a professor of philosophy.

prediction a week ago and left the contents of the boxes undisturbed. Now, it's your turn to choose: one-box or two-box. The decision matrix for this scenario can be represented as such:

Zach's Predictions			
Your actions		Predicts you take One-Box	Predicts you take Two-Boxes
	Take One-Box	\$1,000,000	0
	Take Two-Boxes	\$1,001,000	\$1000

Maximizing Expected Utility & Dominance

The Matrix above presents a dilemma for decision-makers. The principle of maximizing expected utility (MEU) states that one should choose actions that give the highest expected utility. Given prior knowledge of Zach's impeccable track record for prediction, the credence you have for the top left and bottom right outcomes (outcomes where he is right are highlighted in green) is very high; close to 1. Conversely, your credence, that he is wrong, is very low; close to 0 (shaded in pink). Thus, the expected utility of One-Boxing is $\approx [\sim \$1,000,000] = [\$1,000,000 * \text{Credence (Zach is right)} + \$0 * \text{Credence (Zach is Wrong)}]$. The expected utility of Two-Boxing is $\approx [\sim \$1000] = [\$1000 * \text{Credence (Zach is right)} + \$1,001,000 * \text{Credence (Zach is wrong)}]$. Here, one-boxing obviously gives a higher expected utility. One-boxing will likely result in you being a million dollars richer while two-boxing will leave you with just a thousand dollars². Thus, the principle of MEU will advise you to one-box.

² While one shouldn't scoff at a thousand dollars, we'll take it that ending up with a thousand dollars leaves one in regret.

An opposing argument can just as easily be made for 2-boxing based on the principle of dominance. The two-boxer argues that choosing just 1-box is irrational. Zach already made his choice a week ago. The contents of either box were placed ahead of time and have been undisturbed since. Taking both boxes will result in a better outcome in all states of the world no matter what Zach predicts (Eells, 2016). In the case where Zach predicted you'd take one-box (and Box A contains 1 million as a result), taking two-boxes would give you \$1,001,00. In the case where Zach predicted you'd take two-boxes (and Box A contains nothing), you could at least have guaranteed that you walked away with a thousand dollars instead of nothing! In either scenario (represented in the columns of the above matrix), two-boxing will always leave you a thousand dollars richer. The case for the dominance principle can intuitively be illustrated as such: Imagine you had a friend in the same room; Xin Yi³, who can see what's in the boxes. She cannot communicate with you directly to tell you how many boxes to take⁴, but then you realise, she doesn't have to! If she could, she would always tell you to take both boxes, regardless of their contents. Thus, with your friend's⁵ advice you can be assured that two-boxing will always result in the better outcome (Schlesinger, 1974).

However, the dominance principle is reliant on the causal independence of outcomes (Bar-Hillel & Margalit, 1972). These are unconditional cases where the actions one takes does not affect the state of the world. Two-boxers might ask: "What's wrong with that assumption? The contents of either box is already fixed, my decision won't magically affect what's in the boxes". If they end up with a thousand dollars, it was simply a case of them

³ Xin Yi, who is also taking this class, is a 2 boxer ☹.

⁴ No matter how good your impression of Brad Pitt screaming "WHAT'S IN THE BOX?"

⁵ Who may or may not exist in that room.

being unlucky⁶. Two-boxing was still the right choice, it was the lack of opportunity, not rationality that wronged them.

Why Ain't Ya Rich

The one-boxer response, eloquently put by Gibbard & Harper (1978) can be summed up as “If you’re so smart/rational, why ain’t ya rich?”. This is a statistical argument, almost every one-boxer ends up with a \$1,000,000 while almost every two-boxer ends up with \$1000. If you prefer a million over a thousand, pick one-box. While your choice might not have direct causal influence over the contents of the boxes, your choice *does* provide *good evidence* of the contents of the boxes (Ahmed, 2018). One-boxing is strongly correlated with a million being in Box A while Two-boxing is strongly correlated with Box A being empty. Ahmed also argues that the two-boxer has mistaken their opportunities in Newcomb’s problem. Instead of thinking of the states of the world as to whether Zach predicted you’d take 1 or 2 boxes (C-Opportunities), one should consider only whether Zach predicted you right or wrong (E-Opportunities). Since you know of Zach’s track record, you are almost certain that he is right. Thus, one only really has the choice between either \$1,000,000 or \$1000 (outcomes shaded in green in the matrix above). Anyone who faces Newcomb’s problem has no evidence that relevantly distinguishes them from every other time the game has been played. You should not think that you’d fare any better against Zach than everyone who came before you (Fusco, 2018). Thus, you should bet on the outcomes according to the statistics present to you.

⁶ They might shrug it off with an “it be like that”

Time's Arrow

Two-boxers and CDT supporters might protest this reasoning by accusing the one-boxer argument as irrational, akin to subscribing to backwards causality. To this, I ask: what is causality? Ahmed describes “B as causally dependent on A whenever the statistical correlation between A & B survives the hypothesis that A is open to a free agent’s direct manipulation” (2014). Under normal circumstances, causality seems to go hand in hand with means-end rationalisation. Price & Liu (2018) define this as such: A causes B, if and only if, it would be rational for an agent who desired B to do or bring about A, in order to realise B. Newcomb’s problem is one case where rational means-end deliberation diverges from our everyday view of causality. Lin and Price think our intuitions about causality fail us in this scenario; we should trust means-end rationality and correlation. Dummett (1964) points out that in exceptional cases like Newcomb’s, we should challenge our assumption that causation is unidirectional in time. He defines causes as just the “beginning of explanatory chains or processes”. We have no definitive evidence to treat the direction of Time’s Arrow on causation as fixed. The strength of Zach’s predictive powers will serve as strong evidence that we should treat a sort of backwards *quasi-causation* as possible. The challenge for CDT is to justify an understanding of causality that is independent of correlation and rational means-ends deliberation.

In a Humean understanding of causation, all we really have is quasi-causation, comprised of very strong correlative relationships (Beebe, 2006). In the case that Zach’s predictions are almost never wrong, truth-ratio induction (Sinhbabu, 2019) would have us treat his predictions themselves as reliable processes to knowledge. As counterintuitive as it seems considering your decision comes *after* the contents are placed, any prediction Zach makes,

you would have to take as true. One can do no better than to *act* as if Zach plays after you (Bar-Hillel & Margalit, 1972).

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has presented arguments for one-boxing and two-boxing briefly. I assert that the predictive powers of the Superior being in this problem makes the argument for Quasi-causation in favour of one-boxing far more attractive than two-boxing. This may sound like too high a price to pay for the one-boxer, after all, not only is this argument asserting a sort of causal determinism, it does it in a backwards quasi-causal way. What about free will? My response to this is that if a superior being with infallible foreknowledge really existed, perhaps that would be good evidence that free-will really is an illusion. Such is the result of the thought experiment investing absolute predictive powers in Zach⁷. Of course, we don't know whether such a being really exists. This naturally leads to another question: Are actual Newcomb's problems really possible in the real world?

⁷ The aforementioned Superior Being.

Appendix: Death in Damascus

Another thought experiment commonly brought up in the CDT vs EDT argument is based on a story called ‘*Death in Damascus*’. In this story, Death operates using a highly accurate appointment book that states the time and place that a person dies. The book is made up weeks in advance based on extremely reliable predictions⁸. An appointment has been made for you tomorrow. You know that it is either for Aleppo or Damascus. You must decide now whether to stay in **1) Damascus** or **2) ride to Aleppo**. Much like in Newcomb’s problem, you are playing the game against someone who can predict your move. Everyone who played this high-stakes game of cat and mouse has lost, so you have reason to think you’ll lose to. Ahmed (2014) modifies the thought experiment in ‘*Dicing with Death*’, it is clear that in cases where your opponent can predict your next move, the best course of action is a mixed strategy. That is, leaving your decision purely to chance. Ahmed recognises this and offers an out in the story: a nearby merchant offers you a coin flip to decide where to go. The coin is immune to Death’s predictions, a true mixed strategy in this scenario. Taking the coin flip will result in Death being able to only random guess where you will go. Intuitively, this is the right call. Ahmed also shows that in this scenario, CDT would advise not flipping the coin at all⁹. Thus in ‘*Dicing with Death*’ CDT seems to recommend the wrong advice. While ‘*Death in Damascus*’ is not exactly the same scenario as Newcomb’s Problem, I think that ‘*Dicing with Death*’ serves as an additional reason to favour EDT over CDT.

⁸ Death is like the superior being in Newcomb’s problem.

⁹ I will not go in greater detail into Ahmed’s calculations here. For detailed analysis, do refer to Ahmed’s piece as cited on causal decision theory.

Appendix: Time Bias in Newcomb's Problem

Melissa Fusco (2018) observes that time-bias may be a pervasive feature of decision-making. She shows this with a modification she calls '*Newcomb's Hospital*¹⁰'. Imagine you wake up in a hospital suffering from amnesia. You know you played Newcomb's problem with Zach¹¹ yesterday and you are going to play it again later today. Given a choice, even CDT supporters would much rather prefer having found out that they took one-box yesterday and choose to take two-boxes today, rather than the other way around (two-box in the past and one-box in the future). She also shows that EDT is not immune to epistemic time bias by formulating a different scenario. The point made is that shifting temporal reference points influence our decisions and preferences immensely. Perhaps this was not surprising, given our experiential intuitions about temporality. One might choose to push aside all considerations of shifting timelines like Wedgwood (2013) quoting Gandalf¹², but I think epistemic time-bias deserves more consideration when we deal with decision theory and preferences. I've asked several classmates who are two-boxers if they would change their decision, if Zach¹³ made his prediction using a brain scanner, just a second before they made their decision to one or two-box. Some of them changed their decision to one-boxing while others maintained their original choice¹⁴. However, most of them agreed that changing the prediction to just a second before made the intuitive pull towards one-boxing stronger. Perhaps looking more into time as a shifting parameter in Newcomb's problem might give us yet more findings from the thought experiment.

¹⁰ This is a variation of Parfit's Hospital, a thought experiment that displays *future* bias and *near* bias.

¹¹ Again, this is what we're calling the predictor in Newcomb's problem for brevity.

¹² 'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'" – Tolkien (1954)

¹³ Predictor

¹⁴ Tai Ker changed his stance, Xin Yi did not. Others felt that the pull towards one-boxing was much stronger with the change.

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WHAT CONSTITUTES GOOD GOVERNANCE: SHOULD A COUNTRY ADOPT A LOCKDOWN?

By Ang Jing Wei

What should be the aim of a good government? According to JS Mill, it would be to obtain the “best result possible (Mill, 2011).” At minimum, this would include keeping everyone alive and well as far as possible. Today, what constitutes good governance has been expanded to include economic, political and social well-being, with governments being held responsible for many aspects ranging from making sure food is available on the table to deciding how resources are allocated between civil agencies (Weiss, 2000).

One notable measure that has been implemented to ensure well-being is a lockdown of major cities (Kaplan, 2020), which was instituted/ put in place/ done to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases, and to prevent overwhelming the healthcare system (Thunstrom, Newbold, Finnoff, Ashworth, & Shogren, 2020). This includes the closure of shops, crowd limits in public transportation and instituting curfews, leading to drastic social and economic disturbances. Massive unemployment has resulted in many countries, along with widespread volatility in the stock markets (Buera, Fattal-Jaef, Neumeyer, & Shin, 2020). As these lockdown measures have infringed upon what many treasure as individual freedoms whilst eroding economic growth, the current pandemic has stirred up much resentment towards the perceived tyranny of the government. This is especially observed in the United States and Western Europe, wherein widespread protests have erupted against such lockdown measures (Siglar, 2020; Thomasson, 2020). In this essay, I seek to defend the rationality of the

lockdown and explicate the ways in which global lockdown measures have been more beneficial to societies than harmful, having fostered a more equitable society.

The paper will firstly explain the traditional roles of governments, and thereafter examine the rationality of governments' decisions in their bid to preserve prevailing healthcare systems via the aforementioned lockdown measures, drawing upon notions of equity. Following this, the paper will elaborate on the views of the opposition protestors. The paper will conclude by highlighting the two-sided nature of lockdowns, highlighting the need for governments to institute realistic measures to alleviate the economic inequities resulting from such lockdowns.

The limits of governance and exceptions

One claims that governments can conduct their matters to the extent that they do not violate the rights of individuals to their own "concerns." Ideally, a government should not be able to dictate the choices an individual makes in his private life. Such choices include what to buy, what sports teams to support and when he may leave his home. If such is committed, the government would be violating the individual freedoms of its citizens. "All errors that he commits against advice and warning is outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constraint him to what they deem his good (Mill, 2011, p. 138)."

However, "acts injurious to others" are notable exceptions to this norm (Mill, 2011, p. 144). One such act is "selfish abstinence from defending them against injury". Ranging from not standing up for another against bullies at school, to simply not wearing a mask in the context of a global pandemic, are potential acts that one may ideally choose to abstain from, yet this choice will lead to injury of the other. A bully unopposed might lead to someone getting

potentially injured, while one not wearing a mask will risk getting infected and passing the disease onto others.

The need to preserve equity amidst a pandemic – The role of the healthcare system

A notion of equity exists in the above paragraph in that one should be free to conduct his matters however he pleases in his private life insofar it does not violate the freedom of another to be able to do the same. This is a primary purpose of many governments in today's society¹. The lockdown implemented by governments exemplifies the severity of the measures that governments are willing to sanction to ensure the wellbeing of their people. The primary rationale for the decision to lock down stemmed from the need to prevent the loss of lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. One result desired from the lockdown was also to prevent the healthcare system from being overwhelmed, given its inability to cope with a large influx of COVID-19 patients at the same time

As explained below, "Each will receive its proper share (Mill, 2011, p. 134)," highlights this notion, and this aforementioned "proper share" is further defined as whoever needs this share more is who deserves it. As such, the government has an obligation to, at least, ensure that the available resources are provided to those who need it. In the case of the healthcare system, this would mean prioritizing those who require a greater portion of medical care in order to survive. However, if the healthcare system is overwhelmed, it is observed that this would no longer be the case due to the issue of wealth in society, resulting in inequity that is unjust in nature (Bambra et al., 2020).

¹ This applies mainly to governments that endorse individual liberties as a key tenet of fundamental rights. This is mostly observed for Western European states, the USA, and also some East Asian countries such as Taiwan and South Korea (Scully & Slottje, 1991).

The healthcare system and ties to equity

The above occurs as the worst off will be worse off in a society (Rawls, 1971) with an overwhelmed healthcare system. One principle for a just society is an arrangement of social and economic inequalities that would benefit all (Rawls, 1971, p. 213). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rise in demand for healthcare resources. According to the laws of demand, this has in turn increased the cost of healthcare. Due to the shortage of medical supplies, doctors, and adequate hospital capacity in light of this sudden increase in demand for healthcare, the healthcare system is threatened, rendering individuals from lower income groups unable to access proper healthcare. These lower income individuals will only have access to the already exhausted and overloaded public healthcare systems as opposed to wealthier individuals that can afford private healthcare systems that charge a much higher amount and which are able to procure more of the necessary healthcare resources much quicker. The threatened healthcare system will thus result in a state of further inequality; those with money have a higher chance of survival due to their ability to afford superior private care, and those without have a lower chance of survival given they are less likely to obtain adequate healthcare. Furthermore, a degree of mutual exclusivity will take place, wherein the rich squeeze out the poor in the healthcare system. In such a situation, the following table for chances of survival in a threatened healthcare system would be observed if a state is unable to provide healthcare for all. In the model below, two citizens of a society are living in a state with a threatened healthcare system, with limited beds and increased costs.

Chances of survival with a threatened healthcare system

	A is wealthy	A is poor
B is wealthy	0.4, 0.4	0.6, 0.2
B is poor	0.2, 0.6	0.2, 0.2

This table compares the chances of individuals falling ill with and without masks. In this scenario, the healthcare system is failing and inefficient, given it is unable to treat patients. Using arbitrary figures, it is observed that the rich have higher chances of survival, due to the fact that they have greater access to more resources. If both individuals are rich, a conflict over private healthcare will ensue, leading to decreased chances of survival for both parties. If one is wealthy, and the other poor, chances of survival for the poor will be much lower as the wealthy individual is able to obtain priority through payment. If both are poor, both have lower priority against other rich individuals, and thus have a low chance of survival. This renders society unjust, as the poor are more disadvantaged than the rich due to mutual exclusion from the limited healthcare system.

For the government, the lockdown is an attempt to ensure the continued functionality of the healthcare system at large. This is due to the need to prevent the above case of inequity, where the poor have a lower chance of survival as a result of the allocation of resources in governance.

Chances of survival with a functional healthcare system

	A is rich	A is poor
B is rich	0.7, 0.7	0.5, 0.7
B is poor	0.7, 0.5	0.5, 0.5

The rich will still have access to more resources in this circumstance due to access to better healthcare in the form of private healthcare, explaining their higher chances of survival. However, the state of the healthcare system ensures that the system is as fair as possible given the circumstances; that the entrance of the rich does not reduce the chances of the poor being able to access the healthcare they need to survive the illness. The lockdown has an added potential of decreasing the chances of individuals getting the virus, which is accounted for in this model with additional base chances of survival for both the rich and the poor.

The flipside – Violation of equity prompted by the lockdown

However, it is observed that the lockdown also has an effect of worsening the worst off. The lockdown has the counterproductive effect of making the worst off physically worse off, due to continued exposure to the virus in search of work, but also furthering economic inequity. The lockdown then would be in fact not beneficial for the worst off in society. The lockdown was established with notable exceptions, as many low-income workers deemed essential were forced to continue working, while many professionals were able to conduct their duties from home. Labourers, supermarket assistants, delivery partners are examples of such low-income workers being coerced to continue working due to a fear of job loss. However, it is often that in the thick of lock-down, many low-income labourers were laid off if not deemed essential, such as sales assistants and movie theatre attendants. The treatment towards these individuals due to the inability to carry out their work at home and their lack of necessity meant an increase in job-loss for the lowest income groups.

Equitable chances at wealth are thus violated due to the lockdown. Through its actions, the government has worsened inequity, and has indeed made the financially worst-off segment of society, worse off, through lockdown policies. Arguably, the damage that is done economically has the same effect in causing potential deaths in the long run.

With many individuals being laid off due to the lack of jobs, the issue of security itself is violated, with the lack of food and resources for many. In the US, with unemployment at an all-time high, severely insufficient medical resources due to government insufficiencies and significant inequality, the first case of the dilemma has already been realized. The rich are often able to rely on substantial savings, while the poor have to continue working just to get food on the table. Without being able to go outside, there is no work. And without work, the very security of the individuals is violated.

A defense of the lockdown with regards to equity

With these arguments in mind, I seek to defend the rationality of the government lockdown despite worsening inequality for society. Firstly, the lockdown itself ensures that workers that are out and about are exposed only to people absolutely necessary, such as other essential workers. With a decrease in the number of individuals traveling around due to the lockdown, the workers have minimal exposure to potential carriers of the disease, and hence have a minimal chance of contracting the contagious virus. Certain jobs, however, require frequent interactions with other individuals, such as shop assistants in supermarkets. For such individuals, the amount of interaction might remain constant as compared to without a lockdown. However, what matters is the decrease in social interaction for individuals who visit these stores. This would mean that individuals working, even in scenarios that require interactions, would have a lower chance of getting infected. Overall, this would mean that

society is more equitable as both the workers and visitors have a reduced chance of falling ill. In the words of Mills, "Individuality has its own proper field of action," and ones that risk another's life, not just livelihood, should be beyond the field.

The equity that is being proliferated by the lockdown is also one that is higher order in nature. Allowing for equitable chances at life, versus equitable chances at wealth, it would seem that chances at life are superior. With the betterment of the healthcare system due to the relatively fewer cases as a result of lockdowns, the poor will be able to obtain healthcare if necessary, without being excluded due to a lack of space. The result would be a system that is more equitable in ensuring access to life. When the government is unable to prevent an overwhelming of the healthcare system, the resulting mutual exclusion that occurs would mean a disaster for the poor that are unable to outbid the wealthy in the free market. However, a caveat in this argument exists as it can be the case that for some, the economic suffering created is indeed threatening the lives of individuals, such as being unable to afford food. However, the shorter-term threat to life, that of the virus, is more immediate a danger and should be treated as such, before the secondary threat to life or potential lack of food is addressed.

The lockdown as a representation of systemic inequity

However, it must be noted that such policies are indeed sources for inequity and are representative of rooted systemic inequalities that would ensure that part of a populace is effectively enslaved to work. Exclusion from healthcare of the poor still occurs, notably with many individuals losing access to healthcare, due to policies other than the lockdown itself. However, this is indicative of systemic issues with the way healthcare is allocated within governance. In this instance, the lockdown itself is highlighting the vulnerability of

healthcare in the state.

The weaponization of inequity by politicians in the far-right resulting from lockdown measures has indeed played a significant part in propelling the movement, but beyond politicization, the movement is representative of unequal education, economic and material resources available to these individuals. In the case of several countries, even medical staff were not spared from economic consequences contrary to popular belief, with many being put on leave without pay as a result of a decrease in demand for other forms of urgent care. This suggests further systemic inefficiencies that ought to be remediated by political leaders. After all, an equitable society is almost impossible to achieve without being able to utilize resources at its disposal efficiently.

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JASON BRENNAN'S 'AGAINST DEMOCRACY' (2016): CRITIQUE OF BRENNAN'S
'ANTI-AUTHORITY TENET' USING THE HARM PRINCIPLE

By Nicholas Soh Zhi Wei

Abstract: In Brennan's (2016) book, *Against Democracy*, he argued that an epistocracy, which he defined as a political regime whereby "political power is formally distributed according to competence, skill, and the good faith to act on that skill", is likely to be better than a democracy. In particular, one key reason in his claim for endorsing epistocracy is what he calls the '*anti authority tenet*':

When some citizens are morally unreasonable, ignorant, or incompetent about politics, this justifies not permitting them to exercise political authority over others. It justifies either forbidding them from holding power or reducing the power they have in order to protect innocent people from their incompetence.

Introduction

In this article, I will contend that Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' is false and therefore hope to severely weaken the case for epistocracy. While this does not conclusively prove that democracy is superior to epistocracy, it will rule out the possibility of using Brennan's 'anti authority tenet' as a key reason in the case for preferring epistocracy over democracy. Prima facie, Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' is premised on the Harm Principle (Mill, 1863). The harm principle can be generally but not completely encapsulated in the following quote from Mill's paper, *On Liberty*:

That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

By using the Harm Principle to invalidate Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet', I seek to convince the reader that Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' is erroneous. Therefore, I will contend that harm to innocent citizens from the incompetent use of political power by some citizens does not always justify restrictions of political power on these citizens. This is done by looking at (1) the severity of expected harm, (2) the extent to which the risk of harm is consensual to those citizens affected, and (3) whether harm prevention is a strong or weak sufficiency in justifying the restriction of political power.

I. Applying The Harm Principle To Brennan's 'anti Authority Tenet'

In Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet', there is an implicit assumption that the harm done to innocent citizens justifies the restrictions of political power on citizens who exercise their political power incompetently. In Mill's Harm Principle, Mill sets out necessary conditions for harm prevention to justify the restriction of basic liberal rights. It is pertinent, therefore, to apply the Harm Principle to Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' to assess whether the harm from the incompetent use of political power satisfy the stipulations that would warrant the restriction of liberal rights in the Harm Principle.

While the two principles are not identical, I will assume there is no morally relevant difference between the ability to exercise political power and basic liberal rights. Also, it will also be presumed that it goes against the will of citizens when they are compelled to renounce their ability to exercise political power.

II. Severity Of Expected Harm

Why should we assess the severity of expected harm? In the Harm Principle, Mill argues that not all kinds of harm justify the restriction of basic liberal rights. In assessing whether the

harm done to innocent citizens from the incompetent use of political power by some citizens justify the curtailment of political power on those citizens, it is necessary to assess the severity of harm done.

It is important to note Mill distinguishes between harm and mere offence. The latter refers to undesirable consequences that are relatively inconsequential and impermanent. To constitute harm, however, Mill posits that an action must be injurious and pernicious to the interests of particular people in which they have rights. That said, I will contend that the harm done to innocent citizens in Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' tends to be more of mere offence than serious harm. Moreover, epistemic uncertainty and imperfect information in the real world makes it hard for citizens to correctly gauge the value of each choice available to them when they exercise their political power. Hence, Brennan cannot clearly justify the restrictions of political power by classifying the harm as serious.

The reason why the expected harm done to innocent citizens in Brennan's 'anti authority tenet' tends to be mere offence is because the probability that a citizen's vote would change the outcome is extremely low. Brennan (2011) would likely agree with this, given that he argued in his book, *The Ethics of Voting*, that the probability that a vote is decisive in changing the electoral outcome is unimaginably small. Even if the disvalue associated with a certain outcome that is considered a bad political choice is extremely great, the expected harm would still be minuscule or negligible.

That said, epistemic uncertainty and imperfect information in the real world makes it hard for citizens to accurately discern the value of each choice they can select when exercising their political power. In the context of contentious, complex, and ethically-laden issues, it is

not easy to clearly identify the superior or morally righteous solutions. For instance, these issues include whether euthanasia should be legalized, whether driverless cars should be allowed, and what policy-makers should seek to promote.

In response, Brennan might retort that there are clear-cut cases in which the harm to innocent citizens is overwhelmingly great. For instance, climate change issues have the potential to cause great harm to innocent citizens in present populations and future generations. It is well-documented that climate change can cause severe infrastructure destruction, massive displacement of people, and disruptions to food security. In this case, Brennan might argue bad political decisions that exacerbate global warming and environmental degradation can cause serious harm to innocent citizens. Therefore, Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' is justified.

While Brennan is right in pointing out there may be some cases where harm from the incompetent use of political power is serious, these cases are exceedingly rare. Rather, in most cases, the difference in expected value between competing outcomes that a citizen can choose from is not epistemically discernible or clearly differentiated. Given that harm can be variegated in their type, nature, and severity, it is morally unjustifiable to indiscriminately apply Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' in all cases. Furthermore, it is premature to draw the conclusion that Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' should be accepted even if the expected harm is great. Other less coercive methods based on libertarian paternalism (Thaler & Sunstein, 2003) such as nudging citizens to vote in the desired way are possible solutions to mitigate the harm done to innocent citizens.

III. Extent To Which The Risk Of Harm Is Consensual To Citizens Affected

Why should we assess whether harm is consensual to innocent citizens? This is because Mill only considers the prevention of non-consensual harm to others as a plausible reason for restricting liberal rights. This means restricting liberal rights is generally justified when there is no explicit assent and approval by those being harmed beforehand. Mill thinks that when harm is consensual, that is to say, those being harmed have knowingly and willingly allowed themselves to be harmed; it is not justified to restrict liberal rights.

In deciding whether citizens would permit the risk of harm to themselves from the incompetent use of political power by others, it is useful to hypothesize what rational and self interested agents would choose to do behind the veil of ignorance (Rawls, 1971). This is otherwise referred to as the Original Position by Rawls. Employing Rawls' social contract theory is useful in proving an impartial conceptual framework to assess the moral defensibility of Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet'.

Brennan would likely argue agents in Rawls' Original Position would choose a political system that distributes political power in a way that completely minimizes the risk of harm. For one, this would lend support to Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' as a mechanism for organizing society to achieve this aim. Secondly, Brennan can argue harm is non-consensual to innocent citizens given that rational and self-interested agents behind the veil of ignorance would choose not to willingly accept or tolerate any kind of harm from the incompetent use of political power by other citizens. Therefore, Brennan can justify his 'anti-authority tenet'.

However, I will disagree with Brennan that agents in Rawls' Original Position would choose to completely minimize the risk of harm. By doing so, agents are infinitely risk-averse and

therefore irrational. It would be irrational because agents would have to endorse a political system that puts severe restrictions on the scope of individual liberty when any harm is committed to others. Rather, it is more reasonable to think the more rational choice for agents is to accept the risk of some level of harm to preserve basic liberty to pursue their interests.

In response, Brennan might refute that the level of risk-aversion increases when the stakes are higher. Even if agents in Rawls' Original Position are not infinitely risk averse, they are likely to be highly risk averse due to the high stakes involved when the risk of harm is overwhelmingly great. Using the earlier example on climate change, the risk of harm could be overwhelmingly great for those who are disproportionately affected by climate change. For instance, this could include people whose livelihoods and standard of living are drastically affected due to natural disasters caused by climate change. Hence, Brennan might argue agents behind the veil of ignorance who are unable to tell the extent to which they will be negatively affected by the incompetent use of political power by others would unanimously choose to completely minimize the risk of harm. This would make harm non-consensual and justify Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet'.

While Brennan is right that in some cases the risk of harm is overwhelmingly great, Brennan is wrong in saying that rational and self-interested agents would certainly choose to completely minimize the risk of harm to them. Rather, it is more reasonable to think these agents would face a moral dilemma. It would be hard for agents to decide whether to completely minimize the risk of harm due to the harsh restrictions that must be imposed on liberal rights to prevent any form of harm to others. In some cases, when harm is relatively inconsequential, the harsh restriction to liberal rights would be overly punitive to citizens responsible for the harm. This would make these citizens worse-off since their liberal rights

are compromised in the name of completely minimizing the risk of harm. Hence, it is likely that agents in Rawls' Original Position would choose to permit some level of harm to them in exchange for a broader scope of liberal rights. This means harm is consensual and Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' is not morally justifiable.

IV. Extent To Which Harm Prevention Is A Strong Or Weak Sufficiency To Justify The Restrictions Of Political Power

In the earlier sections, I have argued that when harm is great and non-consensual to those affected, this would generally justify restricting the political power of citizens. However, one final caveat in Mill's Harm Principle is that harm prevention alone is a necessary, but not sufficient reason to restrict liberal rights. This means harm prevention may not always justify the restriction of liberal rights, especially when there are strong countervailing reasons to consider.

One countervailing reason is that Brennan's 'anti-authority tenet' would lead to an unstable political system. Those who are deprived of their ability to exercise political power are likely to view the outcomes determined by those who can vote as illegitimate. Therefore, those citizens barred from exercising political power would seek to overthrow and reform the system. For instance, this can be seen through the political movements spearheaded by historically disadvantaged groups, which seek to bring about an egalitarian system that distributes political power equally.

Even if we grant that these countervailing reasons provided are not strong, it is still hard for Brennan to assert that harm prevention is the sole, legitimate basis for justifying restricting political power. Brennan would have to downplay the role of liberal rights, which are

commonly seen to be highly valuable and sacrosanct. Such a move, however, would not be good for Brennan given he alludes to the notion in his ‘anti-authority tenet’ that harm prevention is necessary to protect the liberal rights of innocent citizens. Since the countervailing reasons are strong and worth taking into account, Brennan should not hastily make the strong normative claim that harm prevention always justifies the restriction of political power.

Conclusion

All in all, I have argued that Brennan’s ‘anti-authority tenet’ is erroneous, thereby severely weakening the case for epistocracy. This is because for Brennan’s ‘anti-authority tenet’ to be morally defensible, he needs to specify that the harm to innocent citizens must at the very least be great and non-consensual. However, this is shown to be a gargantuan task, since harm can vary in severity, and it is reasonable to think that the risk of harm to citizens is consensual. Ultimately, the critical flaw of Brennan’s ‘anti-authority tenet’ lies in its assumption of highly questionable normative premises, such as the premise that harm prevention alone is always sufficient to justify the restriction of political power.

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ROBOTIC PAIN THROUGH THE LENS OF UTILITARIANISM AND ITS VALUATIONS USING THE FREE MARKET

By Nickson Quak Jun Hao

I. Introduction

Robots are becoming increasingly human-like, as they don humanoid skins and mimic human behaviour (Pinkstone, 2018; Javelosa, 2017; Goddard, 2018).¹ Human compassion is generally reserved for living organisms, but as robots begin to look and act more like living beings, it becomes increasingly difficult to not see them as such (Polgar, 2017). Quintessentially demonstrating this process of anthropomorphism is the widespread backlash on the Internet, in response to a video showing Boston Dynamics employees repeatedly kicking a robotic dog to demonstrate its robustness (Parke, 2015).² Therefore, this essay shall examine whether recent efforts to build pain-capable robots can be justified using utilitarian ethics (Moravec, 2008). Utilitarianism perceives pain both as an **intrinsically bad** thing (bad for its own sake) and an **instrumentally good** thing (Mill, 1863; Bentham, 1789). Section II presents a direct utilitarian argument for how building pain-capable robots might seem morally wrong because it seemingly introduces more pain into the world. In direct opposition, Section III argues that building pain-capable robots is, in fact, morally right since

¹ Whether or not there is a difference between humanhood and personhood, and whether or not robots have the capacity to feel pain, without flesh and blood, are two big questions that strike at the heart of the ontology of being and the ontology of pain—questions which warrant entire treatments by themselves. This goes far beyond the scope of this paper, and even then, I confess, I may not even come close to answering them. Realistically, therefore, the aim of this short paper is to tease out our intuitions regarding robotic pain by approaching it from a perspective of human sentience.

² Why people seem to display such visceral reactions to robots being kicked is not quite well-understood phenomenologically. Plausibly, it could be due to the projection of sentience onto robots (that may not necessarily be sentient beings) through which people come to perceive robots, especially those that look like familiar sentient animals, as almost animal-like; the more a robot looks like an animal, the stronger the projection of sentience onto the robot.

it could prevent greater pain overall. Section IV strengthens this position by revealing that the very ability of robots to experience pain also avails them the ability to experience the contrasting sensation of pleasure which is, according to utilitarian ethics, an **intrinsic good**. Recognising that to weigh pain against pleasure requires an empirical method of quantifying pain and pleasure, Section V attempts to provide a method – the “Market Price Method of Valuation” – to express and compare units of pain and pleasure in monetary terms (Broome, 1994). In the final analysis, Section VI shall raise several objections to the Market Price Method of Valuation and discuss resolutions to these objections.

II. Direct Utilitarian Argument

The direct utilitarian argument against the act of building pain-capable robots is against the idea of introducing more pain, an intrinsically bad thing, into the world. The argument is as follows:

Premise 1: Pain is the only thing that is intrinsically bad.

Premise 2: If pain-capable robots are built, more pain is introduced.

Premise 3: It is morally wrong to introduce more pain.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is morally wrong to build pain-capable robots.

III. Objections To The Direct Utilitarian Argument

Premise 2, however, can be challenged because pain can also be an instrumental good, if its introduction achieves less pain overall. Parallel to the human pain response, the experience of pain can also enable a robot to detect possible sources of damage which serves as a motivation to avoid them, thereby preventing more serious pain to itself in the process (Best, 2016).³ Furthermore, the experience of pain also allows pain-capable robots to know *what it*

³ I acknowledge, however, that the experience of pain as we know it is not entirely equivalent to a detection of possible sources of damage combined with a motivation to alleviate further damage as

feels like to feel pain, thus deepening its *a posteriori* understanding of painful experiences with each passing experience of pain. Hence, pain-capable robots can learn and recognise recurring painful experiences that other robots and humans suffer from and act upon them to prevent more serious pain to other pain-capable robots and humans. Therefore, building robots capable of protective pain could prevent more serious pain overall to itself and others, meeting the utilitarian requirement of introducing less pain (Waldman, 2012; Kuehn & Haddadin, 2017).

IV. Pain As A Contrasting Sensation

In fact, pain can be an instrumental good not merely by preventing greater pain overall, but also by introducing more pleasure overall (Bastian, Jetten, Hornsey, & Leknes, 2014). The ability to feel pain in pain-capable robots facilitates the ability to feel the contrasting sensation of pleasure—a utilitarian intrinsic good. Early thinkers like Aristotle, Bentham, and Descartes, have long hypothesised that pain and pleasure are polar opposite sensations that exist on a continuum and therefore believed that pain and pleasure are mutually-dependent experiences, much like how hotness and coldness, or brightness and darkness are (Ogren, 2004).

Supporting this, modern neurological research has demonstrated that pain and pleasure share a common neuroanatomy. The source for modulation of both pain and pleasure originates from neurons in similar locations, such as the amygdala and the pallidum (Leknes & Tracey, 2008). Such evidence therefore suggests that pain-capable robots that are wired neurologically identical to human beings could very well also be pleasure-capable.

such. However, that is also not a claim that I wish to assert as being necessarily true; instead, my position is one that is much less demanding: I assume that if we could imagine the experience of pain as *somewhat* akin to a detection of possible sources of damage combined with a motivation to alleviate further damage as such, then an argument that pain can be an instrumental good becomes a plausible one.

Reconciling the classical pain-pleasure continuum postulated by early thinkers with modern neurological research, I posit that a robot's first experience of pain confirms the possibility that the robot is not only pain-capable, but also pleasure-capable.

Furthermore, prior experiences of pain could enhance subsequent experiences of pleasure. Commonly experienced, the state of euphoria after intensive exercise causes positive stimuli to be experienced as more pleasant, and negative stimuli as less unpleasant (K.S. & K.C., 2007; J.K., et al., 2001). Leknes and Tracey explain that since a painful sensation is a deviation from homeostatic balance, any form of relief naturally feels pleasurable as it restores homeostatic balance. When a pleasant stimulus acts as a relief, it is hence experienced as more pleasurable than it would have otherwise been experienced without pain. Therefore, if it is indeed true that the introduction of pain introduces more pleasure overall, than pain, for pain-capable robots, we are obliged, under utilitarian ethics, to build them.

V. The Market Price Method Of Valuation

Yet, pain and pleasure are unquantifiable entities in nature. Weighing pain against pleasure empirically is difficult, if not impossible. Hence, I propose the use of a monetary proxy as an attempt to quantify, approximately, units of pain against units of pleasure. Money, as a finite and scarce resource, imposes a trade-off between reducing units of pain and enhancing units of pleasure. As a base unit, the willingness to pay \$1 to treat an ailment corresponds to the desire to reduce 1 unit worth of pain; Likewise, the willingness to pay \$1 to consume a good/service corresponds to the desire to enhance 1 unit worth of pleasure. To illustrate, let us take Jeremy as an example. Jeremy suffers from a bad headache. It would cost Jeremy \$30 to seek treatment to alleviate the 30 units of pain that is plaguing him. Doing so would force Jeremy to forgo \$30 that could have otherwise been spent on 6 McDonald's meals that would

have given him 30 units of pleasure. Asking Jeremy how much he would be willing to pay to treat his headache tells us, explicitly, the degree of pain that he is in, in terms of how many units of pleasure he is willing to forsake.⁴ If Jeremy is willing to pay more (or less) than \$30, that means he is (not) willing to forsake \$30 that he could have spent on 6 McDonald's meals, or, 30 units of pleasure. Thus, the Market Price Method of Valuation provides us with explicable and unambiguous information about the monetary values people attach to the varying degrees of pain (or pleasure) that they seek to reduce (or enhance).

Through the Market Price Method of Valuation, pain can be weighed against pleasure in utilitarian terms, using money as a proxy. Utilitarian ethics would support building pain-capable robots if there is more lifetime pleasure than pain for each pain-capable robot. A pain-capable robot that feels like humans do is also likely to be motivated in a largely similar fashion and thus, act, and live like humans do as well.⁵ Hence, living a human way of life, a pain-capable robot would spend just 8% (\$4,612) of a total annual expenditure of \$57,311 on medical treatments. In comparison, it would spend a combined total of 21% (\$11,919) on food, apparels, and entertainment (Bloom, 2017). In other words, the average pain-capable robot would experience about thrice as much pleasure than pain every year,⁶ regardless of its

⁴ Here I assume that Jeremy's preferences are stable, such that his desire to treat his headache is time-consistent. In other words, Jeremy does not drastically change his preference to treat his headache between different time periods. Such an assumption is required in order for the rational choice mechanism to work in the Market Price Method of Valuation. I further adopt a *ceteris paribus* assumption, such that Jeremy's willingness to pay for, or give up, each McDonald's meal is dependent only on the degree to which he desires to treat his headache, and does not further depend on other factors such as hunger or subjective cravings.

⁵ Here I assume that feeling pain unlocks the gateway of emotional experiences for robots. In other words, if they could feel pain, then they could also feel other subjective experiences of emotive states. A robot that is pain-capable but not emotive-capable is hence not discussed in this context.

⁶ Some critics may point out that some pleasures are immaterial, such as doing charitable deeds or basking in the sun, which I acknowledge as a strong limitation of the Market Price Method of Valuation. At the very least, however, quantifying pleasure in material terms unlocks a previously untapped empirical avenue for which a vast majority of pleasures can be quantified and weighed against the vast majority of pain.

lifespan, providing compelling evidence for pain-capable robots to be built on utilitarian grounds.⁷

VI. Objections To The Market Price Method Of Valuation

However, there are several possible objections to this method. Firstly, robots are not paid wages, so it may seem inconceivable that they could utilise the price mechanism to express the degree of pain that they suffer from. Be that as it may, actual wages are not necessary for the expression of pain/pleasure in monetary terms. Inputting a simulated constraint of a finite income into the decision-making apparatus of pain-capable robots could still allow them to explicitly communicate the degree of pain that they suffer from (or the degree of pleasure that they seek) in monetary terms. Furthermore, in the previous section, I have discussed how a pain-capable robot living a human way of life—earning wages and spending them on goods/services that enhance pleasure or reduce pain—is not as inconceivable as some may think.

A second objection is that degrees of pain and pleasure are in flux because of fluctuating market prices. To which, I reply, is precisely the point of the method. The Invisible Hand⁸ allows people and robots alike to constantly adjust their valuation of units of pain and pleasure according to the fluctuating market prices. Suppose the cost of treating the same headache that Jeremy suffered from yesterday costs \$50 today. It simply means that Jeremy

⁷ It could also be argued that humans, unlike robots, are self-healing to a certain degree. While I think that is a fair point to be made, I argue that the flipside is also true; robots, while not self-healing in the strictest sense of the word (i.e. able to heal by itself alone), have a much broader range of recovery if they are assisted by another agent—human, robot, or otherwise—whereas the frailty of the human physicality dictates that there exist some conditions from which human beings can never recover from.

⁸ The Invisible Hand, first introduced 1776 by Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, describes price mechanism as the unobservable market force that achieves greater social welfare through self-interested acts of private individuals.

must forgo 10 McDonald's meals to treat his headache today, an increase in the opportunity cost (4 more McDonald's meals) of treating the same headache that he had suffered yesterday. If Jeremy is aware of this increase,⁹ asking Jeremy how much he would be willing to pay to treat his headache today tells us the degree of pain that he is in today, relative to yesterday. If he is still willing to only pay \$30, then it tells us that Jeremy is in as much pain as he was yesterday, and would rather forsake the treatment, that now costs \$50, that could otherwise alleviate the pain from his headache, that is giving him 30 units of pain, than to forego 4 more MacDonal'd's meals, that could give him 20 more units of pleasure. Therefore, it matters not how much market prices fluctuate because base units of pain and pleasure are ultimately quantified with the base unit of money—a single dollar.

VII. Conclusion

In sum, under utilitarian terms, pain is first perceived to be intrinsically bad, leading to the seemingly valid conclusion that building pain-capable robots would hence be unethical. However, reconsidering pain as an instrumental good, pain can prevent greater pain and introduce greater pleasure overall. As a proxy to quantify and weigh pain against pleasure, the Market Price Method of Valuation concludes that for the average pain-capable robot, pleasure decisively outweighs pain. Since pleasure, the only thing that is intrinsically good, outweighs pain, the only thing that is intrinsically bad, it is only ethical under the utilitarian lens that pain-capable robots be built.

⁹ If Jeremy is not aware of this price increase, simply giving Jeremy this piece of information can bridge this informational gap.

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STRUCTURAL TENSIONS IN SINGAPORE-CHINA RELATIONS: WHY HEDGING IS NO LONGER ENOUGH

By Nelle Ng Jia Shin

“In the end, history lauds not conflicts of societies but their reconciliations.”

- Henry Kissinger, *On China* (2011)

Introduction

The bilateral relations between Singapore and China is perhaps best characterised by a seemingly paradoxical phrase: continuity and change. This relationship has been one notoriously difficult to navigate as the notion of identities have been centre stage from the beginning. Coupled with the evolving roles and capabilities of both nation-states in the international order, relations have never been so fragile yet so promising with opportunities for cooperation.

This essay seeks to explore the approaches taken to manage the tensions arising from the structural conditions faced by Singapore and China. Firstly, I provide a framework for understanding how structural tensions are managed. Following which, two key structural tensions will be explored: the Singaporean ethnic Chinese identity and the liberal international order. Finally, an overall analysis of how the approaches of both countries in managing these tensions have developed over the years in light of the evolving challenges that they face will be presented.

Framework for understanding the management of structural tensions

Structural tensions emerge from the process of states forming perceptions of a structural condition, developing national interests around it and a foreign policy approach to fulfill said interest. It is when these approaches, in whole or in part, are antagonistic to each other that structural tensions arise¹. States therefore turn their attention to optimising their survivability through managing tensions. This is done through refining their approaches to minimise the vulnerabilities faced while maximising the benefits received. Since perceptions are the most malleable factor in the aforementioned process, states will try to effect on the other states' perceptions of a particular structural condition to reduce the antagonism between their foreign policy approaches, thereby alleviating tensions.

For clarity, this essay will use Kuik's framework of hedging to illustrate how the Singapore state works towards an optimal outcome. We pursue multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects of risk-contingency (indirect-balancing and dominance-denial) and return-maximising (economic-pragmatism, binding-engagement and limited-bandwagoning) (Kuik, 2008). These hope to change China's perception of the structural condition in consideration of strategic gains and survival, thereby moving towards an optimal outcome for Singapore. Conversely, since Kuik restricted the framework of hedging to small-state behaviour only, a more general cost-benefit analysis to analyse China's optimisation approach will be used.

Going forward, we will explore two key points of structural tensions: the Singaporean ethnic Chinese identity and the liberal international order. We will examine the post-1965 *estrangement*, post-1978 *informal* and post-1990 *formal engagement periods* for each

¹ This is especially so if the states frame security in the realist view, in which relative gains are king in an anarchic international system (Waltz, 1997), therefore they perceive the fulfillment of the other's national interest to be at their own expense.

structural tension to clearly flesh out the trends and turning points in the approaches to managing tensions.

Singaporean ethnic Chinese identity

Estrangement (1965-77) and Informal Engagement (1978-89).

For a newly independent Singapore suddenly left to fend for itself, its majority-ethnic Chinese-ness was perceived to be an existential vulnerability. It was an eyesore for our Malay World neighbours which made it difficult to secure economic and defence interests despite the “urgent imperative predicated on (our) innate vulnerability” (Leifer, 2000) and threatened our sovereign status as there was fear that “racial affinity between Singapore and mainland China would mean easy manipulation as a *Third China*” (Enright, 2019). The Chinese people, however, perceived this to be a betrayal of ancestral ties and ethno-national loyalty, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought to capitalise on this opportunity to arouse nationalism for the Cultural Revolution. While it was in Singapore’s interests to announce multiculturalism and meritocracy over Chinese majoritarianism, China sought to emphasise kinship. This led to antagonistic foreign policy approaches of rhetoric and structural tensions as Singapore distanced itself by carving out a distinct Southeast Asian image while China shamed the lack of ethno-loyalty and claimed the illegitimacy of the PAP as the “Lee Kuan Yew puppet-clique” being a “running dog of US imperialism” (Fang, 2015).

Yet by 1970, just as quickly as tensions arose, it had faded with the shifting dynamics of power among the key players in the Asia-Pacific. Singapore sought to optimise the situation with the tactic of economic-pragmatism by proposing a separation of economic trade from political foreign policy, which China reciprocated as it wanted a counter against the USSR in Southeast Asia in light of the Sino-Soviet Split. Since profit-maximising did not carry any

value of power acceptance (Kuik, 2008, p. 167), a working solution for both sides was achieved. Singapore also gained strategically as bringing China in meant further denying dominance of major powers in the region (Kuik, 2008, p. 169), which is one of its foreign policy goals (Lee, 2009).

The optimal outcome was fully realised with the 1975 Goodwill Mission and the ascension of Deng Xiaoping as the PRC's new leader in 1978, as he relentlessly pursued economic pragmatism regardless of ideology, relegating ethno-national interests. Singapore and China's foreign policies towards each other now complemented almost perfectly and structural tensions mellowed, ushering in the 'Golden Era of Sino-Singapore relations' (Koh, 2016). Singaporean ethnic Chinese-ness was subsumed under the dimension of economic interests as cultural similarities were peddled as a facilitator of business by both countries (Lee, 1981).

Formal Engagement (1990-present)

Singapore's ethnic Chinese identity continued to be an asset to both countries, especially in the LKY-era. Not only did economic-pragmatism continue to flourish, both sides gained largely by using it as a tool for diplomatic interests. The unique identity allowed Singapore to gain prestige as an interlocutor between the world and China as the latter sought to recover its international reputation and establish solid diplomatic ties in light of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident and the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Its sovereign identity was also enforced when it acted as a quasi-mediator by providing a neutral forum for cross-Strait meetings, further distancing itself from being regarded as the *Third China* (Hsieh, 2018). With Lee being recognised as an "old friend of China" (Lianhe Zaobao, 2021), structural tensions from Singaporean Chinese-ness were very well-managed; the outcomes were near-optimal for both countries.

However, in the post-LKY-era, structural tensions seemed to have arisen. The son-successor, Lee Hsien Loong, was criticised by the Global Times, a newspaper with links to the CCP, that he was just “not as skilled as his father” in balancing Sino-US relations (Stolarchuk, 2017). While the predecessor was able to negotiate with Deng to stop Communist insurgencies and the calls for diasporic patriotism, the current Lee was “struggling” to broker a solution. Economic pragmatism is no longer as effective a tool as China has developed more robust ties with other Southeast Asian economies such as Vietnam and Malaysia (Harada, 2020). This has led to a loss of control over structural tensions, as Xi appears to have restarted the *charm offensive* and influence operations to target the Chinese diaspora through ancestral hometown visits and educational programmes (Heath, 2018). This, coupled with the aggressive nationalistic rhetoric of ‘wolf warrior diplomacy’ (IPDF, 2019), has exacerbated the identity threat. Singapore must now re-convince China that there is greater benefit elsewhere than exploiting its ethnic Chinese identity to ‘help the Motherland’ (Qin, 2018), or it will greatly upset racial harmony and our sovereign citizenry.

China’s Rise and the Liberal International Order

China’s rise is increasingly seen as a “geopolitical fact” (Liu, 2018) which has increasingly challenged the liberal international order’s institutions, norms and underpinnings by American pre-eminence. This has put stress on Singapore-China relations, but it is not a new challenge.

Estrangement (1965-77) and Informal Engagement (1978-89).

During the 1960s, revolutionary Maoist Communist ideology spearheaded foreign policy approaches of sponsoring insurgencies and exporting revolution (Enright, 2019). Singapore perceived this to be antithetical to our security and sovereignty and, thus, replied with our

own foreign policy approach of seeking to eradicate communism by first extinguishing Malayan Communist Party (MCP). This threat to the liberal international order was eased by the 1970s, but the PRC fundamentally remains a Communist one party-state. Singapore has had to keep up its binding-engagement tactics to integrate the rising regional hegemon into the established (capitalist) order and to neutralise its revisionist tendency (Kuik, 2008, p. 166). For example, by enmeshing China in ASEAN-driven institutions of the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN-China Dialogue.

However, China has not been a passive “joiner” of the US-led world order and has often chafed against it. Its engagement with the institutions, rules and norms has been “partial, incomplete, often passive and sometimes outright cynical” (Mazaar, Heath & Cevallos, 2018). While the optimal outcome (China’s peaceful rise) was somewhat achieved, its support for the elements of the international order has been largely limited to those that directly promote its national interests. Fundamental structural tensions continue to bubble underneath the surface.

Formal Engagement (1990-present)

The early part of this period encapsulates a wavering of China’s commitment to ‘peaceful rise’. More recently, festering fervent Chinese nationalism has been said to be driving the aggressive slant of Chinese foreign policy (Abbott, 2016). The slip of control over public expression in the proliferation of the internet has led to the CCP being increasingly obligated to take an interest in higher-stakes interests such as the re-acquisition of territory (Zhao, 2000). They are pressured to do so despite knowing that this infringes the current international laws and norms as it is paramount of their foreign policy to maintain domestic stability (Jakobson, 2013, p. 4). Therefore, China’s optimal way is “creeping assertiveness” to

manage tensions while slowly acquiring their high-stakes national interests (Parameswaran, 2017). This is most evident in the South China Sea, where it has asserted its historical claims to the Nine-Dash line, alarming Southeast Asia. This includes Singapore, who perceives this as a precursor to a slippery slope to Chinese hegemony of the seas, a situation which would gravely threaten its territorial sovereignty and national security.

While the official foreign policies of both countries seem to complement each other in how both seek to abide by international law, in reality China continues to incrementally challenge the current world order as it has continuously pursued aggressive island-building and military exercises in the disputed waters. It now pursues its national interests through the approach of “reconciling assertiveness with cooperation” which entails a mix of soft and hard power (Li, 2010). Singapore’s worst fears may have come true: economic-pragmatism and binding-engagement has become less effective in containing tensions. We have had to resort to the tactic of indirect-balancing by holding a military drill with China in February 2021 as an attempt at appeasement (Khaliq, 2021). The island-state appears to be at a loss for how to convince China to continue peacefully integrating into the current international order rather than creating an alternative on its own using the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as a starting point (Oguzulu, 2019).

Managing these tensions have also become increasingly difficult - bilateral communications are not effective in persuasion (the confiscation of the *Terrexes* in 2016 was a sign of displeasure towards our decision to support the Hague Ruling), and multilateral avenues such as ASEAN to secure national interests have been weakened due to China’s strategy of pursuing bilateralism over regionalism (Tai, 2016).

Overall Analysis

Throughout the *Estrangement and Informal Engagement* periods, we can observe a consistent use of economic-pragmatism and binding-engagement which has convinced China to avoid exploiting our ethnic Chinese identity and to abide by the current international order as its capabilities grow. However, the *Formal Engagement* period has seen the emergence of a new structural condition, namely China's inevitable rise as a regional hegemon. It has demonstrated increasing willingness to use explicit policies of counter-hedging (Chung, 2004), such as bilateralism over multilateralism and alternative world governance (CFR, 2021) which impedes the binding-engagement tactic, overwhelming economic leverage which may render economic-pragmatism irrelevant. With the "old friend of China" gone, China no longer needs to feel compelled to give special treatment to Singapore by trying to find a mutually agreeable solution (Zheng, 2015). It has willingly escalated tensions which forebodes that we may be forced to use limited-bandwagoning in the near future. This tactic is problematic and has never been used before (Kuik, 2008, p, 166) as the state has strived to keep up the impression of political neutrality to facilitate economic-pragmatism "irregardless of ideology".

On China's end, its foreign policy approach has only been complementary insofar as it fulfilled its national interest. It seems to be testing the waters to make its next move as it no longer limits itself to the realm of economic interest and apathy towards international issues. It has shown interest in being a "responsible global power" (Xia, 2010) by perceivably helping Third World countries develop economically and its attempts at leading the Covid-19 response in Asia (Saich, 2021).

On a final note, ‘the world’s premier China watcher’s’ words continue to provide wisdom beyond the grave. Chinese fundamental belief is still that it should be the world’s greatest power, like how it was before its ill-fated century of humiliation. Lee saw no reason why China would not want, if it could, to replace the United States as Asia’s ‘number one’ power (Boon, 2015). Going forward, this essay posits that Singapore can no longer rely on economic-pragmatism and binding-engagement alone to govern its relations with China. Hedging may no longer be enough. To be pragmatic is not to stick to old ways, but to be prepared to take sides if and when China announces a conquest for regional supremacy over America.

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BOOK REVIEW ON RONALD L. NUMBER'S 'THE CREATIONISTS' (2016): A
SPECIAL CREATION ON THE CREATION AND SPECIATION OF CREATIONISM

By Hanniel Asher Lim Wen Te

In the beginning was creationism, followed by the deluge of Darwinism, then the confusion of tongues as creationists who sought to create a Babel of their movement fell into a babble of communities speaking doctrines with mutually exclusive premises. Yet, creationism, which used to be a preserved remnant largely confined to the United States, eventually became the mission to make disciples of all the nations that it is today. This is the account of creationism according to Ronald L. Numbers in *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design, Expanded Edition*.

Seeking an objective account of creationism post-Darwin, Numbers sets himself a standard of refreshing objectivity that has scarcely been afforded on this highly partisan controversy. In the introduction, he writes that despite extensive efforts to “discredit creationism scientifically or theologically [...] only a few have examined the movement historically, and then primarily from a legal or pedagogical perspective. None has looked carefully at the intellectual origins of scientific creationism.” His account of creationism has no ancestors—it is a special creation.¹

The standards Numbers appealed to even before his history began were unflinchingly pursued from beginning to end. Damning words against both evolution and creation flood the book:

¹ A pun on the argument of *special creation* which Darwin had to rebut for his theory on the origins of species to be accepted.

whether it is the evolutionists' concessions, even from Darwin himself, or the scientific unsophistication of creationists with "scientific pretensions", Numbers refused to sacrifice any fact upon the altar of partisanship. With scarcely any bias inferable from his book, it is unsurprising that it has been praised by both evolutionists and creationists—and "historians of science and religion", according to a quote of praise from the Pulitzer Prize-winning Edward J. Larson that graces the back of the book.

Additionally, Numbers has a steadfast intellectual integrity, willing to risk angering evolutionists who claim that their science is completely 'scientific' by conceding that there is no real distinction between 'science' and 'pseudoscience', being "much more interested in how persons and parties used 'science' and 'pseudoscience' to further their ends". Though he "hasten[s]" to qualify the "*practical and historical significance*" (emphasis in original) of these terms, he readily concedes that

Lately many scholars, including the philosopher of science Larry Laudan and the sociologist of science Thomas F. Gieryn, have shown the sterility of efforts to demarcate between science and pseudoscience on analytical grounds. Laudan has gone so far as to dismiss the demarcation problem as "a pseudo-problem". I agree.

In an era when 'science' fanatics elevate Stephen Hawking's or Bill Nye's ('the Science Guy') opinions on philosophy as if they were the pronouncements of the Pope exercising his papal infallibility, Numbers once again shines in his steadfast objectivity amidst cultural pressures.

Numbers surprises us with many counterintuitive trends and statistics, such as creationism moving from theistic evolutionism towards literal readings of Genesis instead of the reverse.

A huge thrust of his narrative is debunking “the common assumption ... that one creationist is pretty much like another”. Perhaps it was the natural choice of a myth to debunk since his study of creationist figures inevitably revealed great nuances of difference between creationists. Not only does he prime readers with the various cosmological timelines from the prevailing creationist schools of thought, Numbers also gives extremely nuanced characterizations and depictions of the notable creationists he writes about. He shows both the precision with which they disagreed with each other and the imprecision with which they agreed with one another. An especially humorous account was the case of day-age creationists contradictorily espousing the views of flood geology by the eminent creationist George McCready Price. Whether he was analysing their educational backgrounds, their theological convictions, or their disagreements and agreements with each other, the creationists are not caricatured as religious fanatics, but are humanized in these depictions, their strengths and weaknesses bared for our scrutiny. Though the creation-evolution controversy is largely seen as a conflict between reason and delusion, *The Creationists* forces us to appreciate each creationist with both their objectivity and ulterior motives, and both their expertise and ignorance, even if it means inadvertently confronting our epistemological assumptions.

However, herein lies a seeming contradiction of Numbers’ motivation in authoring this account of history: It is unclear for whom he writes the book. On the one hand it seems that he is writing for those already closely following the creation-evolution controversy with his use of unexplained jargon such as “the Scopes Trial”, “Higher Criticism”, “antediluvian” and “diluvian”, and “Mendelian genetics”. On the other hand, the amount of myth-busting Numbers does gives the impression that he is writing to people unfamiliar with the controversy. There is a possible harmonization of these seemingly contradictory approaches

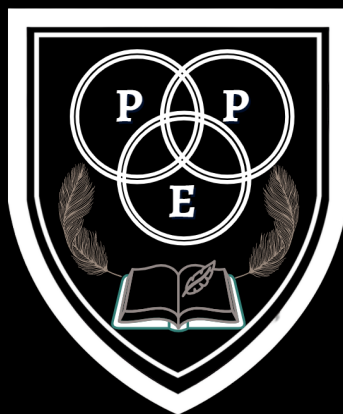
to his writing, but it is much less comforting than Numbers writing in an inconsistent framework: Could it be that Numbers has much debunking to do even amongst those faithfully following the creation-evolution debates? If so, there is much polarized misinformation amongst evolutionists and creationists. Given the social, cultural, and political conflicts raging in the United States and the world today, it would be unsurprising.

In fact, the past conflicts between creationists and evolutionists depicted by Numbers bear an uncanny resemblance to public conflicts today. William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate whose clout made him a valuable contribution to the creationist movement, saw the motive of establishing the teaching of evolution in schools as “the attempt of a few thousand elite scientists” wishing to “establish an oligarchy over the forty million American Christians.” Even Numbers himself agreed that “so long as discussions of evolution remained confined mostly to scholarly circles, Christians who objected to evolution on biblical grounds saw little reason to speak up”. Moreover, Numbers elsewhere cites that in 2005, the Pew Research Center discovered that “nearly two-thirds”—almost a supermajority—“of Americans say that creationism should be taught alongside evolution in public schools.” Similarly, in the United States today, the institution of LGBT rights has been characterised by conservative Christians as the imposition of postmodern philosophy by an academic and political elite upon the entire nation.

In Singapore too has there been a silent majority resisting the advance of LGBT rights driven by a minority of academic and political elites. Such a resemblance is perhaps not uncanny at all if we consider the current conflicts over LGBT rights as conflicts over the implications of Darwin in an era shaken by the Enlightenment. We see religious conservatives and liberals clustering in similar ways. In fact, a common opposition to LGBT rights is the appeal to

creationism, because if God created only two genders and spoke of marriage as between a man and a woman, then that is what gender and marriage is.

Ultimately, whatever the motivations of Numbers were in writing this book, its relevance to the cultural battles today and its uncompromising objectivity are especially welcome in the already highly polarized and still increasingly divisive political climate today. Non-partisanship and understanding of those we disagree with are increasingly rare virtues Numbers brilliantly displays, though they may be virtues he could not depict much for the lack of it in both the creationists and evolutionists he researched. Though the conflicts in the United States are increasingly proselytizing to the rest of the world and though there is an increasing babble of partisans claiming to be in the correct ark that will escape the deluge that will consume all who disbelieve them, hopefully this season of tribalism will ebb. When it does, we might see that it is with the virtues that Numbers displays that tribalism found the beginning of its end.



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