

Volume X

Number 1



Fall 2022

Northern Plains Ethics Journal

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Published by Northern Plains Ethics Institute

North Dakota State University

Fargo, North Dakota

https://www.ndsu.edu/institutes/northernplainethics/the_northern_plains_ethics_journal/

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Northern Plains Ethics Journal

Contents

Scholar

Towards a Semantic Ontology: Creating meaningful architecture from inert materials

(1-12)

Ganapathy Mahalingam, Professor
North Dakota State University

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

(15-31)

Dennis R. Cooley, Professor
North Dakota State University

Community

Saving us from ourselves

(35-38)

Tony Bender
Columnist

Building better decision making for better business

(39-47)

Leann Wolff
Great Outcomes Consulting, LLC

Student

The Water Treatment Crisis in Underdeveloped Countries

(51-53)

Mason Kornezos
North Dakota State University

What should the policy to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

(55-63)

Brandon Stariha
North Dakota State University

***Traditional Ecological
Knowledge (65-78)***

Tyler Waltz

North Dakota State University



Fall 2022

Scholar Section



Towards a Semantic Ontology: Creating meaningful Architecture from inert materials

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Abstract: *Architecture is a discipline, where form is given to ideas of inhabitation, and to building materials and structures that make the inhabitation possible. In the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, the soul of a work of Architecture is postulated as the animating principle that enjoins matter and form in its design. This article presents an articulation of this animating principle. It describes a Semantic Ontology that explains existence, being, becoming, and reality in Architecture, in terms of meaning. Meaning is used in Semantic Ontology as a primary ontological category to address these four aspects of Being. The trajectory towards a Semantic Ontology is the quest for the soul of Architecture, the soul which unites and animates matter and form in Architecture.*

Keywords: hylomorphism, semantic ontology, affordance, architectural Being, act, potency, architectural Meaning

Introduction

The aim of this article is to lay out a trajectory of thinking that articulates an ontological exploration of the creation of works of Architecture. This ontological exploration is called a Semantic Ontology. What is a Semantic Ontology? A Semantic Ontology is a theory within Ontology, which is an area of study that focuses on Being. A Semantic Ontology seeks to explain *existence, being, becoming* and *reality* in terms of meaning.

These four aspects are articulated as follows:

- Something exists if it creates a presence in consciousness. This presence is enabled by the thing's

figural qualities. A figural quality is one that enables a figure to stand out against a background, because of the figure-ground phenomenon present in all human perceptions. In a Semantic Ontology this figural quality is generated by meaning.

- This meaning constitutes the thing's being whether it is material or immaterial. Meaning is the primary ontological category that defines the thing.
- In a Semantic Ontology a thing transforms and changes primarily in its meaning. It 'becomes' in its meaning and can 'become' to mean something else.
- In a Semantic Ontology, reality is to be perceived and interacted with, in the realm of meaning.

Meaning is used in Semantic Ontology as a primary ontological category to address these four aspects of Being.

Hylomorphism and creating architecture from 'blueprints'

In the cultural practice of the profession of Architecture, a work of Architecture is created by first creating a set of representations (which may be graphical, numerical, and verbal) that constitute the 'blueprints' for a building. Then an inordinate amount of effort, coordination and legal enforcement is applied to ensure that the work of Architecture being created 'conforms' to the 'blueprint.' There is a premium placed on the 'fidelity' of this process that is often contentious amongst the stakeholders involved. This is fully in line with the Aristotelian concept of 'hylomorphism' (matter made to 'conform' to a form) and has survived intact in the cultural practice of Architecture, the profession.

From the potential of all the forms that a work of Architecture can take, it is actualized by utilizing a particular set of forms designed by the architect(s) of the work of Architecture.

According to the four causes attributed to any ‘thing’ by Aristotle, which are the *material cause*, the *formal cause*, the *efficient cause* and the *final cause*, the *material cause* of a work of Architecture is its raw building materials; the *formal cause* is the set of design representations of the work of Architecture created by the architect; the *efficient cause* of the work of Architecture is its construction process; and its *final cause* is its purpose, which I am proposing, through the concept of a Semantic Ontology, is a primary ontological category of meaning. This ontological category of meaning is the basis of the ‘being’ of a work of Architecture (considered in all the four aspects mentioned before: *existence*, *being*, *becoming* and *reality*), much as the *final cause* of Aristotle is the driver of all the other three causes. It is curious, however, that in Architecture, this *final cause* can mutate in the adaptive re-use of buildings that changes the building’s purpose from one purpose to another. This is discussed in a later section.

Hierarchies of act and potency in Architecture

Here the concepts of act and potency follow from what was explicated by Thomas Aquinas based on the works of Aristotle. According to Edward Feser:

[I]n addition to the different ways in which a thing may be “in act” or actual, there are the various ways in which it may be “in potency” or potential. (Feser, 2009, p. 21)

So, as Aquinas says, “potency does not raise itself to act; it must be raised to act by something that is in act” (SCG I.16.3: Feser, 2009, p. 23). In the case of a work of Architecture, the architectural form is that which is “in act” (in the words of Aquinas). Therefore, the architectural form, and its implementing technologies, are what are instrumental in actualizing a particular potential.

Feser further asserts: it is not for nothing that the first of the famous Twenty Four Thomistic Theses has it that: “Potency and Act divide being in such a way that whatever is, is either pure act, or of necessity it is composed of potency and act as primary and intrinsic principles.” (Feser, 2009, p. 24)

In a finer-grained analysis, an architectural design is created and utilized through a series of actualizations of potentials into a particular design.

First, there is the potency of the substances of building materials that are actualized by the act of the architect, who gives the substances, form through design. Then there is the potency of technology, when the substances are made to 'conform' to the forms. The act creates the actual form of the building materials. Then there is the potency of the assembly of the building materials into constructions or structures. The act creates the form of a building. Then there is the potency of the different ways in which the building can be used based on its affordances¹ (Gibson, 2014). The act is the specific way in which the building is used. Then there is the potency of the building to fall into ruin in many ways. The act is how the building specifically falls into ruin.

From inception to ruin, a work of Architecture follows this course of actualizations of potentials.

The hierarchy of being in Architecture

In a Semantic Ontology, as applied to Architecture, the 'being' of any architectural component is not an isolated ontological category. The 'being' is a composite hierarchy of different levels of 'being.'

The 'being' of 'clay' and 'sand' is subservient to the 'being' of a 'brick'. The 'being' of a 'brick' is subservient to the 'being' of a 'wall'. The 'being' of a 'wall' is subservient to the 'being' of the 'feeling of security.' This hierarchy of a Semantic Ontology in the experience of 'shelter' proceeds backwards from the final teleological experience of 'being' as a 'feeling of security' to the more basic 'beings' of 'clay' and 'sand.'

From Meaning to Matter

In a Semantic Ontology, matter acquires meaning through a hierarchical progression from a meaningful intent to a physical form in the creation of a work of Architecture. This progression is realized by a reversed tracing from the physical form of matter to the meaningful intent at its inception.

The following graphic illustrates how this progression evolves through this reversed tracing.



Figure 1: The hierarchy of transformation from meaningful intent to a particular form of matter in a reversed tracing.

This hierarchy can be described through a scenario. Let us say you begin with ‘a desire to sit,’ which is a meaningful intention. Then you seek all the ‘places’ that afford the experience of sitting, such as a garden ledge or a windowsill (Gibson, 2014). By studying these ‘places,’ you derive what these places have in common, a functional set of forms that comprise a ‘seat’ and a ‘backrest.’ From these functional forms, you generate the design for a ‘chair’ - the form (described using geometry and numbers) that the physical matter that the chair will be made of, will take. You then build a ‘chair,’ using a physical matter of choice, say wood. The wooden chair has now proceeded to gain existence, from a meaningful intent to a form of matter, in an ontological chain of ‘being.’

Adaptive reuse in Architecture and changing ‘beings’ of buildings

In Architecture, a building is created for a purpose. This purpose often determines what the building is used for, by the inhabitants. Take this scenario, for example. A shopping mall that was initially designed as a center of commerce for buying and selling goods and services falls into disrepair and is repurposed through an adaptive reuse project into a medical facility for the community. When this happens, its ‘being’ has changed. This change has happened in the domain of meaning. Its ontology has changed. The physical materials that made up the original shopping mall become the community healthcare facility. Nothing has changed in one aspect of its Ontology (the physical), and everything has changed in its Semantic Ontology (the meaning).

Unchanging ontological properties of materials

The materials of the universe exist. Can their existence be described in terms of unchanging being? Their existence can be described using geometry and numbers in their role as *res extensa*, the aspects of their existence as extensions, presumably in space that distends to accommodate them. This may be an unchanging realm of Ontology. It is also, more importantly, a realm of agreement. Humans can come to an agreement in the realms of geometry and numbers more unequivocally than in the realm of meaning. Materials of the universe can also be described as qualia, the sensations they evoke in perceiving subjects. This aspect of Ontology can change but be consistent as a pattern. But the realm of cultural value demands that we describe them as symbols of meaning. For example, the letter 'S' can be described in terms of the geometry of the font and its dimensions as numbers. It can also be described in terms of the qualia it evokes, the color black. However, its cultural utility is as a symbol of meaning in a language system. This is the most fluid of a material's ontological existence.

Semantic Existence



Figure 2. A minimalist vase (Photo credit: Karolina Grabowska)

Towards a Semantic Ontology

The existence of the thing shown in the image in Figure 2 can be described in terms of:

- geometrical features that are distended in a metric space of numbers as its dimensions
- qualia of the color and texture sensations that the thing produces
- or as a semantic entity – a minimalist ‘vase’

This last form of existence – a semantic existence, is the crucial one in the realm of cultural value.

Making Semantically



Figure 3. A stone wall in vernacular architecture. (Photo credit: Pexels.com)

Each stone in the wall in the photo in Figure 3 is not seen as a geometric entity that must conform to a pre-determined form, but as a ‘building block’ easily manipulatable by hand that is piled carefully to make a ‘wall.’ The wall emerges from a ‘semantic’ process of piling building blocks to create

Ganapathy Mahaligam

a wall and is not a directed activity that forces conformation of matter to a form in the classical sense of hylomorphism. This a typical building process in vernacular architecture that does not use blueprints.



Figure 4. A thatched hut in vernacular architecture. (Photo credit: Denniz Futalan)

A more elaborate example of making semantically in vernacular architecture without blueprints can be seen in the photo in Figure 4:

- The thatch roof is meant to cover.
- The braces for the footings are meant to brace.
- The thatch panels are woven to make a sheet.
- The thatch panels are meant to close the window openings.
- The long pole is meant to brace the wall and roof.
- The pots are meant to protect the feet of the stilts from the wet ground.
- The stilts are meant to raise the floor off the ground.

All these meaningful intents are realized directly through the making of the structure without any recourse to a preceding blueprint.

Creation of a meaningful architecture

Architects take inert building materials and make symbols of meaning from them. They determine the geometry and dimensions of the building materials and their spatial arrangement. They also set the qualia that these building materials evoke, inherent in the choice of particular materials. The aspect of the architectural creation's existence that seems associative and extraneous, is its role as a symbol of meaning. How can this aspect be made intrinsic? This is a significant problem because meaning has always been considered associative and not intrinsic. For that matter, are geometrical and numerical properties which exist in an unchanging realm (the primary properties of John Locke) intrinsic? It would seem so intuitively, only until you realize that the geometry and numbers of this unchanging realm can disintegrate in the process of ruin.

Questions that arise from the framework of Semantic Ontology

To conclude this article, here are a set of questions to ponder that further articulates the trajectory towards a Semantic Ontology for the creation of works of Architecture:

- How do you create a specific symbol of meaning from inert materials?

This is wide open to possibilities. Matter can be made to conform to myriads of forms, essentially restricted only by the properties of the matter used and the technologies available to make matter 'conform' to the forms. These forms can be associated with multiple meanings based on how the forms respond to meaningful intent.

- Is the process any deeper than arbitrary associations or transient cultural conventions?

The process of integrating meaning with matter can go deeper than association or arbitrary conventions, if the generation of the forms that the matter 'conforms' to is based on semantics and not technical

manipulations of geometry and numbers. The manipulations of form through geometry and numbers have gained a strong foothold in the creation of works of Architecture because of their implementation in computational technologies. A method to manipulate form based on semantics is yet to be rigorously developed, even though it exists indirectly as part of the thought process in the manipulations of geometry and numbers.

- Can a semantic ontology supplant a physicalist ontology?

This is a very plausible scenario. A physicalist ontology in Architecture is needed for many reasons. This includes the commerce aspects of Architecture, where economic transactions have their monetization based on quantities; the safety of the works of Architecture, which can be predicted only with numerical calculations, such as the calculation of the stability of a structure; and its implementation in the process of building, where quantities of materials and labor resources play a crucial role. A work of Architecture is managed and implemented as a configuration of matter using quantities to a large extent, which are a legacy of the physicalist ontology.

- What are the problems associated with understanding an ontology from the point of view of semantics?

The main problem associated with a Semantic Ontology is persistence, and resistance to change, in the ontological entities, in this case, the architectural components and the whole work of architecture. A constantly changing realm of meaning allows the 'being' of a work of Architecture to be continuously transformed, raising many contentious situations along the way.

- Can Architecture be valued in the cultural realm primarily as a semantic commodity?

This is an exciting alternative to estimating the value of a building in terms of elements of a physicalist ontology, such as the square feet of rentable space in the building. As with any cultural process that involves politics and administration, valuation based on a semantic ontology can lead to a lot of strife.

- Can the making of Architecture be guided by semantics in an instrumental way?

This trajectory is what this article aims at - how can you create architectural elements through a process of semantic articulation and actualization. How can *existence*, *being*, *becoming* and *reality* be considered in a realm of meaning during the process of creating a work of Architecture? This seems like a new quest for architects and much work remains to be done. However, there is promise in that rich lessons on how to do this are already available in vernacular architecture.

The trajectory towards a semantic ontology is the quest for the soul of Architecture, the soul which unites and animates matter and form in Architecture.

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ⁱ The perception of our environments based on what they afford to our intentions was articulated by the renowned psychologist James J. Gibson.



*When civil rights shouldn't be
put to a popular vote*

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Abstract: *Although it has taken something of a beating in more recent days, possibly because of various political attacks upon it, most citizens of democracies think it is one of the best ways of answering social and political issues for their communities and nations. It appears to function somewhat like a free market in which buyers and sellers interact in ways that respect each person, treat everyone justly according to Capitalism, and produce the best results. The only difference between a free market and a democracy is what goods are being bought and sold.*

Unfortunately, the same flaw found in the free market is also encountered in actual democracies. Instead of the required adequately informed buyers, sellers, and citizens who act rationally and with prudence, real people often make their decisions non-rationally – or even irrationally – thereby, making it virtually impossible for the market and democracy to function as envisioned by their most idealistic supporters.

As a consequence, it can be morally wrong to throw morally important social issues into the democratic marketplace of ideas.

Keywords: abortion, civil rights, democracy, popular vote, same-sex marriage

Introduction

Former-President Obama and others have claimed a commitment to civil rights, but simultaneously argued some controversial moral and political issues, such as same sex marriages entitlements should be sent back to states to decide for themselves. After the Supreme Court of the United States overturned *Roe versus Wade*, furthermore, Senator Lindsey Graham and others made the same argument about abortion and all women's right to choose to end their pregnancies. This approach's representative democratic

result was that many states immediately banned same-sex marriage and abortion or passed restrictive laws that amounted to a practical prohibition. Hence, although the civil rights intended to protect the vulnerable among us were given lip-service, those in need of those recognized entitlements were denied them.

Although democracy is something for which many should strive, I contend that for matters of great weight, especially those dealing with fundamental rights, popular votes to determine political rights are morally permissible only in certain situations. One of these is not the situation described above. To have an ethical vote, then all alternatives in the contest must be morally permissible. That is, whether the referendum passes or not, each outcome is a morally right one. Although the minority might not get what it wants, it is not treated illicitly if that alternative is selected. In these cases, engaging in democratic participation in their society's legislative process helps citizens create a society in which they want to live, in part, because it is of their own making, and therefore, they can take a sense of ownership for it. This has to be a good thing if we take seriously democracy and the benefits and responsibilities that many of us believe accrue to it.

If one alternative in the election contest is morally impermissible, however, then putting the issue to a vote cannot be morally legitimate, *even if* the winning outcome produces a desirable or moral result. This holds true not only for those *vox populi* contests in which there are only two options but also for polls with multiple possibilities from which to select. The unnecessary risk and devaluing imposed on vulnerable populations is too great to incur merely to let the population democratically make the ultimate decision on those populations' autonomy and flourishing. In these situations, more equitable, reasonable processes must be found.

Democracy's real versus ideal world existence

Democracies were often ideally envisioned as filled with rational, practically educated citizens who use their applied wisdom to make the best possible decisions for themselves, others, and the societies in which they live. They can be relied upon to carefully frame the question they have to answer, seek out all available, relevant evidence on the issue, weigh the evidence in light of intended outcomes and the situations context, and do all

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

of this in a rational manner. They then thoughtfully use their rational decision procedures to arrive at a justified conclusion. If performed in this or a similar way, then the process' outcome would have to be rational, given that the process has that feature. All rational people could accept the results because of this practical wise process being used by practical wise people.

The universal acceptability is not affected if different results come from different rational people using the process: rational thinking in uncertain situations can yield a variety of legitimate answers to a question. The fact that when talking about the empirical world we are unable to have absolutes, such as those we find in geometry and other forms of mathematics, entails that each deliberation's result need not be identical to that of every other rational citizen who underwent the same process. Some might not have had the same evidence available to them; they could have weighed it in a different, legitimate way; they might not have used the exact same decision procedure, and so on.

Even contrary decisions, however, can be rational and reasonable as long as the processes that drove them are rational and reasonable, the evidence used is adequate, and the process is employed in a rational and reasonable way. Perhaps the community is debating introducing unmarked police cars in their crime fighting efforts, which will produce a small improvement at a marginal cost. If after careful deliberation, the community decides to endorse the change, then unmarked police cars are ethical additions to the police force. If they do not, then that result is also morally permissible. In both cases, nothing of great moral significance is being decided. The same holds true if there is something of great moral significant is under consideration, as long as all of the various choices is morally permissible in itself.

Although there will be losers, those who do not "win" the vote have not been treated unethically in any way by putting the issue to a community or representative vote. The mere fact that they were in the minority or were not in the plurality does not mean that they have been illicitly harmed, disrespected, or treated unfairly. Their rights to participate in the democratic process were not abridged or violated because they have a chance to vote

and the election process was rational, reasonable, and fair. In the future, those who lose today might be in the majority tomorrow, but even if that day never comes, their participation and the election's ethical outcome entails that the voting minority is not being disrespected or devalued.

Democracy's reality, of course, is a far cry from the idealized version presented above. Although democracy is a valuable form of government and way to make decisions, in general, it is only as good as those who comprise the democracy and the material with which they work. For example, if the majority of society is terribly bigoted against a particular race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc., then their democracy will have laws, policies, social conventions, and other rules of conduct affecting those vulnerable groups that are, in the very least, heavily influenced by those illicit values and beliefs.

If the citizens are merely overall ignorant, then they might find the right answers to issues the society must address, but it will not be the result of a rational, reasonable decision procedure using evidence as it should be used. Rather, it would be a matter of sheer luck. The ethical treatment of any group cannot be the result of accident, it must be from the moral agents' intentionality to act in that manner. And that requires a reasonable person reasonably using a reasonable decision procedure to come to a reasonable result.

The empirical question, therefore, is whether any particular democracy has a sufficient number of informed, rational people to run it and make the decisions for it, according to the idealized view, or if the more pessimistic view is correct. The odds are in favor of the latter. First, emotions in decision making and reasoning must be given their just due:

Let me put it boldly: No moral judgment has ever been made by a human being for which there has not been another perfectly intelligent and informed person disposed to interpret it as false, pernicious, biased, and narrow minded (Joyce, 2007, p. 131).

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

The reason for the intractability of moral disagreements is that emotions, rather than reason, drive moral judgments (Haidt, 2001a & 2011b). That is, intuitive affective reactions automatically generate moral judgments and interpretations rather than reason being the primary source (Haidt, 2001a, p. 818). Robert Kurzban states that moral judgments preceding moral justifications for those judgments “suggest that one coherent set of principles isn't driving moral judgments” (Kurzban 2010, p. 190). Moreover, not only do emotions come first, reason cannot in the vast majority of cases control emotions (Joyce, 2007, p. 95). The conclusion therefore must be that members of *Homo sapiens* are not rational thinkers most – none? – of the time.

We know that democracies, moreover, do not automatically or intrinsically have well-informed citizens who choose or behave in the society's or their individual best interests - or even rationally:

The central idea is that voters are worse than ignorant; they are, in a word, *irrational* - and vote accordingly. Despite their lack of knowledge, voters are not humble agnostics; instead, they confidently embrace a long list of misconceptions (Caplan 2007).

If Caplan and others are right, then voters make decisions based not on rational processes and evidence, but on irrationality which makes a judgment in favor of a position that is shown likely to be false by the evidence (Somin 2004). For example, someone's cognitive incapacity or false conscious becomes stronger than their reason to disabuse them of their false, but closely held beliefs, and then they act upon these false beliefs. They are not the citizens idea democracy needs to cast their votes wisely in a vote about civil rights for vulnerable populations.

Even if we avoid those who make decisions irrationally, other citizens' decision processes often do not give evidence its proper weight because they do not have the essential or sufficient, relevant information, they lack an adequate decision procedure or use it incompetently, or they

allow their emotions to cloud their reason.¹ This is not an attack on the “average” voter or anyone else, but an acknowledgement of reality. In our society, as well as others, well-informed citizens are sometimes outnumbered by those who are ignorant of both the issue and information relevant to the issue. They vote for those individuals or positions who are most emotionally appealing to them, or say the things they want to hear, even if doing so is not in their or their society’s self-interest.

As a result, automatically trusting in the majority’s ability to select morally permissible outcomes is imprudent, at best. At worst, it puts vulnerable populations under a tyranny of majority, who can force their views on the minority groups and justify doing so by pointing out that the result was arrived at democratically, which is something we should inherently desire. The problem, of course, is that the democratic choice and its implementation does not treat those who want and deserve equal civil rights in the manner they deserve.

Why popular votes on significant civil rights are morally wrong

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s position on what make a law ethical is useful in developing why basic civil rights should not be left to majority decisions in democracies. In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” King writes that “a just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God” (King, p. 237). The effect of such laws, and the way to tell if they are just or not, is to “uplift...human personality” (Ibid.). I take this measure to mean not only that the individual is respected as a person, but that the law contributes to the person’s flourishing in some way. For example, a right to vote permits each person to participate in the decisions on how the society in which she lives will be run. As a result, she becomes responsible for her society as partially her creation, thereby, increasing her personal development through expanding her knowledge of how her actions will affect others and the care she needs to take as the possessor of such power. In addition, the power and responsibility she has in helping to decide a portion of her society’s rules of conduct give her the respect she deserves as a person. It acknowledges her true value as a person who is capable of

¹ Hochschild finds that expanding suffrage often brings in people who vote out of ignorance (Hochschild, p. 111).

making her own decisions and being an equal in the political process to every other person creating the rules governing all.

The selection of flourishing as uplifting's definition in King's criteria makes practical sense in two ways. First, King makes great use of Aquinas' view of morality being a human law that is founded and supported in natural law created by God. Of course, Aquinas was trying to make Roman Catholic biblical interpretations, doctrine, and positions consistent with Aristotelian thought – as well as develop Aristotelian arguments to support Catholic biblical interpretation, doctrine, and positions. Hence, Aristotelian focus on flourishing in one's life would be part of King's thinking – at least through transitivity.

Secondly, and more importantly, flourishing is a far better way to understand King's choice of "uplift" than a consequentialist "improve" is capable of doing. For consequentialism, a person's overall agent-utility or personal value would have to improve by a small quantitative amount without any additional value being added in order for the person's agent-utility or personal value to be enhanced. Suppose that smoking one fewer cigarettes or eating one ounce less of a fatty food per week produces a modicum of positive overall value to the person's life. Although it has no discernable impact on the person's flourishing, it would still qualify under consequentialism's utilitarian or ethical egoism theories of making the person's life better than it otherwise would have been just as adding 0.05 to 1 million makes the result greater than 1 million on its own.

Instead of really valuing people in the way King implies, consequentialism reduces people and their values to number to be crunched. King's idea is not merely to improve by increasing agent-utility or some other infinitesimal quantitative measure, but to uplift by making the person qualitatively better off in a way that respects her dignity as a person. To uplift, moreover, is to help her to flourish in a way that is noticeable to her and others. If uplifting improves lives, then it must be something that can be recognized, otherwise where is the incentive to value it at all? To see this as a desirable end, which of course requires us to be able to desire it. Hence a moral law is one that makes people flourish.

On the other hand, King characterizes unethical laws as those that degrade humans. For him, an unjust law is variously described as:

1. Out of harmony with the moral law,
2. A human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law,
3. A code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself, and
4. Inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote (King, p. 237).

Each of the four above seems to be a sufficient condition on its own for a law being unjust. What is interesting to note is that the last two criteria make democratic process an integral part of themselves. Also, King states that 3 and 4 are merely different explanations rather than different sufficient conditions, which is a bit confusing. What is easier to understand is that political laws must not violate moral laws, which might or might not be simultaneously natural laws.

Let us examine the third criterion first. It states that a law is unjust if it is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. The fact it is “inflicted” signifies that the code does not uplift anyone, but merely degrades or makes things harder on those who have to follow the code. Second, the majority is forcing these hardships on those who lost the vote not to have the code imposed upon them or were not allowed a free vote in the first place. Because the minority was unable to affect the election, then the law must be unjust because it is a hardship forced on them by those who have power, whilst simultaneously the vote did not respect the minority’s value as persons who should be treated as all other persons in the same circumstances should be treated. Since the majority decided that the code should not apply to them but only on the vulnerable, it has created a double standard that illicitly harms the weaker group and benefits the stronger. Since the stronger does not have to abide by the code, it must,

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

therefore, give the majority undeserved advantages whilst placing undue burdens on the already vulnerable group.²

The fourth criterion states that a law is unjust if it has been inflicted upon a minority and that minority had no part enacting or creating the law because they did not have the unhampered right to vote nor access to the legislative processes. This condition is similar but significantly different from the third one. Here it seems as if the minority, if it is allowed to vote on or authorize a restrictive code that harms them, can make the law morally permissible *because* they chose it for themselves. It is not the majority living with a double standard forced by it upon the minority, but the minority who has accepted a double standard by their own informed, free will. Their autonomy as persons deserving respect for their independent decisions make the standard or code ethical for the simple reason that it is imposed by them on themselves rather than being inflicted upon them by the majority against the minority's will or without the minority even being consulted. Hence, even if it is not in the minority's best interests, the code is morally permissible, regardless of whether it is imposed on the majority as well,

The latter two sufficient conditions for why a law is unjust lead into the argument for why civil rights should not be put to a popular vote, unless all options are morally permissible on their own: The mere fact that a democratic process has been followed, and minorities have been part of the process through their voting does not make the outcome morally permissible. First, in the third formulation, the code that the majority imposes upon itself and the minority might be an unethical one regardless of the universal imposition. That is, people being treated equally neither entails that the treatment is moral nor that the code that requires such treatment is just. If everyone is disrespected as persons, put in states of unnecessary pain and suffering, or have their flourishing made practically impossible, then the code is unjust even if everyone has to suffer equally.

² However, if the majority inflicts this code on itself as well as the minority, then it is at best unclear if what the former does is wrong. They are treating themselves exactly how the minority is being treated.

Second, the mere fact that the minority imposes a code upon itself that harms it does not entail that the code is ethical. Autonomy needs to be respected, but we should not, in general, respect autonomous decisions that are the result of ignorance, reckless imprudence, self-loathing, or other factor which renders the decision illegitimate. Consider, for instance, someone engaged in risky behavior, such as playing Russian roulette, that we have an obligation to stop if we can. Let us suppose that the person chooses to do such a thing based on his autonomous decision. He understands the probabilities of causing himself harm but is willing to take his chances, given that the chance the chamber contains a live round is either 1/5 (20%) or 1/6 (17%). We should not let him carry out his plans, however, because our inaction's consequences are too great to countenance. Human life should not be treated this cheaply. The risk for benefit is also not worth it. He cannot possibly flourish as a person who acts this recklessly and his personhood is far more important than some foolish game, which he does not value appropriately although autonomously. Therefore, autonomous actions are not necessarily actions that can justify bad behavior toward oneself.

The only way to save this criterion is to assume something that had doubt cast upon earlier: that everyone in a democracy is acting as a rational agent, which would prevent imprudent activities. Rational action – which I take to be acting in accord with the evidence available to the agent and the rational goals she has selected for herself, must include acting prudently to achieve such ends. Autonomous, prudent actions, therefore, are always permissible.³ No minority would imprudently impose an injurious code upon itself because it would be irrational to do so. Therefore, it cannot be done with any positive degree of autonomy. For the same reason, the majority will never impose a degrading code on itself, it cannot impose one on the minority. To do so would be to irrationally treat like things in morally different ways, which Aristotle's definition of justice prohibits with good reason. Hence, both the third and fourth conditions only permit codes to promote flourishing or just laws.

³It might be the case that no one can play Russian roulette rationally unless there are some very unusual circumstances at play; therefore, thinking that Russian roulette is something that an agent can autonomously choose to play is irrational.

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

The difficulty with the assumption of rationality equaling prudent autonomy is that there is no guarantee that there is this relationship between the two.⁴ We allow people to vote and make significant decisions affecting their lives without requiring them to know much about those decisions. They can marry, have children, get divorced, buy property, vote for political candidates who will shape their government and community, etc. all while having an inadequate grasp of their actions' consequences on themselves and others. We call these acts autonomous because they are done by a prudent, autonomous being *qua* prudent, autonomous being but need not call the actions rational. The only time they are permissibly limited by society is for the overall public good, which requires a very high standard for society to satisfy. Hence, the minority vote in a democracy might be prudent and autonomous but unethical because it does not fulfill the high standard of preventing degrading codes being imposed upon the majority or the minority. Since they do not do the work they were intended to do, the third and fourth sufficient conditions may be put aside in favor of the first two.

The first two criteria for just laws are much more useful in formulating an argument as to why democracy can be a very bad idea for basic civil rights. Recall that a law is unjust if it is:

1. Out of harmony with the moral law, or
2. A human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law.

The religious view of moral laws being eternal and natural because God designed the universe to be that way is controversial, so will not be used. Instead the argument here will merely adopt some form of moral universalism that says that morality is universal to all people at a particular time or era. We could even make it the case that morality is absolute in the sense that it has always existed and will be as it is for persons. The main point is that no civil law may violate a fundamental moral law. If it does, then it is an unjust law.

⁴ The same applies for rationality including prudence, rational actions being ethical actions, and autonomous actions being ethical actions.

Up until now, what a civil right is has not been defined. Civil rights are the entitlements that exist because a person is a person within a society. I am assuming that civil rights are based on more fundamental moral rights – if such things exist – or moral duties we have to others to respect them in certain way, which then create their entitlements to us acting in that manner. As has been previously been argued, these entitlements are linked to flourishing. Civil rights promote it. To respect someone’s rights would entail that they have to be treated in prescribed manners, such as being treated equally, given a measure of privacy, and all the other rights we assume people have, all of which allow those possessing them to become better in a qualitatively significant way.

But care needs to be taken here: civil rights do not always mirror what morality requires in every situation. These entitlements need to be general enough that they can be protected by the government and society, but not so finally tuned that they readily apply to every situation. After all, the civil right is based upon law or what is right for the society as a whole, which has to strike a balance between being both general and specific enough to be useful. Morality is unlike laws in that it applies to every action, and takes into account all moral factors in each situation to come up with nuanced, complicated answers to nuanced complicated situations. It is extremely fine-tuned in comparison to the very general.

Given that civil rights are not sufficiently flexible to encompass every moral situation, then it might be the case that honoring them does not necessarily entail a morally right action. If everyone has a civil right to private property, for example, then he could evict a widow and her children from their residence into the snow if they are not paying their rent. We would say it is morally wrong to do such a thing, but the owner would have a legal, civil entitlement to act in this manner. So, let us say that civil rights are intended to promote flourishing and should actually do so in general, but they cannot always yield an ethically permissible result, even if none of them is violated in the particular situation.

There is a further important distinction to be made between basic/foundational and significant civil rights, such as life, liberty, vote, and marry, and less important civil rights, such as being able to “they might have

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

declared that a man should have a right to wear his hat if he pleased, that he might get up when he pleased, and go to bed when he thought proper” (Hamburger 1994). More trivial civil entitlements do not greatly affect individuals’ ability to flourish. They may impede what a person can do because he has to respect that other’s right when it is relevant to do so, but not being able to act as he wanted does not entail that his life is not worth living nor is it highly unlikely for him to have a life worth living. These rights may make an individual or society a bit better than they otherwise would have been, moreover, but really do not have much impact on either. Basically, whether people have the right or not makes little difference to the people living there. This insignificance to flourishing means that it is permissible for a vote on whether these rights exist or not. Since having or not having the entitlement are both morally permissible, then it should be left for the society to choose its path. Given that it really does not matter what the outcome is, then the irrationality of some voters will not produce a bad result or taint the process so severely that it is unethical to go through the election. Nor is anyone disrespected by this issue being put to a vote.

Basic or foundational civil rights are inherently linked with individual flourishing. If they are absent, then it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the person to thrive. There are certain things people need in order to be able to flourish in the first place: Some of them fulfill psychological needs, whereas others satisfy physical requirements. Take, for example, the psychological need in our society for privacy. Privacy allows people to decide what information about themselves they want to share with others and how that information should be conveyed and retained. Privacy is also being left alone, which most people need the government and others to do so that the former can act in ways that would be embarrassing to the person if they were made publicly available, but are central to what the person is or has chosen to be. Sexual actions, for example, are something that many want to keep private from those not involved in the activity. Even more fundamental than privacy would be basic civil rights to sustenance, shelter, and having those physical needs met that will preserve the person’s life and let them live in a way that allows them to thrive. To understand these, let us simply stipulate that basic civil entitlements are those that most closely hew to what moral rights would be,

if moral rights existed, and they are necessary for an individual to flourish in that society.

It should be starting to become clear why allowing basic civil rights to be determined by democratic vote is a bad idea, and unethical as well. Civil rights respect each person's value by respecting who the person is and the fact that person should flourish. Civil entitlements maximize utility by allowing all members of a society to flourish, if they can. Civil rights provide justice because flourishing is deserved by all people as people. Hence, depriving civil rights from any person is at least a violation of Kantian (1964 and 1996), utilitarian, and justice principles, and possibly more if we look hard enough. Given individuals' flourishing and how civil rights foster that thriving, then on a variety of ethical grounds, civil rights should not be something that is granted based on some sort of poll. The latter is a form of Cultural Relativism, which makes moral facts depend on the will of the majority – regardless of how bigoted or ill-informed it is – rather than being grounded on a more independent, universal foundation, such as *Homo sapiens'* nature.

To allow a democratic vote on basic civil rights is also prohibited by the very same objective deontological and consequentialist theories of morality above mentioned. By telling a group that they only receive their basic civil rights if the majority determines that they should be so benefitted is to inform them that their value and flourishing is insufficient on their own to show their social worth. Instead, the decision is being made by a relative poll argument - which might or might not go their way based on bias or not – instead of that value being objective and independent of popular approval. Therefore, using democratic voting for basic civil rights shows disrespect for the value of the vulnerable individuals whose fate is at risk, as well as treating them in a way they do not deserve. No person who is already valuable based on being a moral agent or some other objective, independent fact should have to undergo an election that confers worthiness upon her.

In addition, by creating vulnerable groups that can be placed at risk in this way or have their vulnerability exacerbated – they might not get their basic civil rights or they could be taken away whenever public opinion shifts against them – then social utility cannot be served. If people can win or lose

When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

their entitlements by an uninformed, prejudiced vote, then they can never feel comfortable as members of society. They always need to be on their guard to protect themselves if the fickle winds of relativistic convention should change. Since no one can feel free when one person is enslaved or degraded by the state, then fear and distrust take the place of social virtues and emotional responses needed to maintain healthy social interaction. Therefore, social cohesion is reduced and the society endangered, which can only make the situation worse than it would have been if basic civil rights were given to all.

It has to cause resentment, moreover, that the majority can enjoy its basic civil rights, which no one questions, but the same majority thinks it not fitting for the minority to do likewise, therefore, the minority has to go without the foundational elements of a flourishing life. And that is the situation even when the minority group's members have equal moral worth as persons *qua* person. Following Aristotle's principle of justice, it is manifestly unfair to treat like objects as different in a morally significant way. It is also irrational.

Before concluding, one more thing should be said about some voters and what their ignorance would do in a vote. It is one thing to be denied basic civil rights by a group of well-educated people who have thoughtful arguments to do so. That is not to say that it is right, but reasonable people could see that there is no maliciousness involved because it is an honest, unfortunate mistake. However, if the voters are the irrational people mentioned above, then being denied by them the foundational entitlement to what is owed to a person because he or she needs it for his or her flourishing is degrading, angering, and destructive. Remember that the irrational voters make decisions despite having evidence that they are wrong or use decision procedures that are irrational. It is degrading for bigots to be given the power to deprive people of the rights they deserve and who can only be respected if they have such rights. Not only will this cause much resentment and social turmoil, but it privileges the irrational in a way that they should not be given such power. By giving them the right to decide the fate of others, they have been enabled to harm vulnerable populations for

no reason other than their irrationality bigotry. Such a condition should not be inflicted on any person, much less people who are in the minority.

Conclusion

Even if the right decision is made about granting basic civil rights, democracy should still not be used when it comes to the contentious issue of basic or foundational civil rights. To put people at risk when they should not be endangered is disrespectful, not the best thing one can do, and places them in underserved jeopardy. It is much like playing Russian roulette with a sleeping roommate. Even if the roommate is physically unharmed, the fact that dire threat was imposed upon him without his agreement shows an immoral callousness toward a moral agent that should give us great pause.

Given the fact that civil rights are not necessarily moral rights, the question might arise as to how civil rights should be granted to anyone. The solution is simple: if flourishing demands the right, then it deserves to be a basic or foundational civil right for all people in that society, regardless of whether it is written down in some document. Hence, if one person gets a right then everyone gets it. That is, people should have civil rights of these types unless it can be shown not to be a civil right for anyone rather than having to wait for the majority to gift to them what they already deserve.

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When civil rights shouldn't be put to a popular vote

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Fall 2022

Community Section



Saving us from ourselves

Tony Bender

Columnist, Author

Keywords: politics, political system

There are some movies I can't just click past. "Charlie Wilson's War" is one of them. A favorite scene is when one of his staff hotties informs this irascible playboy (Tom Hanks) that he's been appointed to House Ethics Committee. His sardonic response: "Everybody knows I'm on the other side of that issue."

When it comes to putting his power to work, however, defending the Afghans against the Russians, his heart, or at least Tom Hanks' heart, is in the right place. And anyway, I'm not a purist. Humans are complex, which is to say, imperfect.

Maybe political heroes don't exist anymore. Maybe they never did except in screenplays. Or maybe they're stuck like hamsters on a wheel, forced to spend too many hours each week fundraising.

So they can get back on the wheel.

In our political system of legalized bribery, where money is everything when it comes to getting elected by low-information, short-attention-span Americans, do we think that when big donors need a favor, senators and representatives aren't taking the call?

If they don't want to get primaried, they are, likely reasoning that subsidizing corporations is the necessary trade-off if you truly want to make things marginally better through legislation for working families.

Tony Bender

In your spare time.

Money is power, always has been, and the wealth disparity has never been greater, so Citizens United put the system on steroids by further empowering the most powerful. They've got a growing sympathetic audience too—51% of Congressional members are millionaires, there's the opportunity for insider trading, and dang, another tax break for the top 1% does sound amazing. When do we cut Medicare and Social Security?

By the way, that's a position taken lately by some Republicans which proves they can't be good at math because it's a direct assault on their biggest voting block, those 65 and older. Best to stick with polarizing reproductive rights legislation because if it impacts any members of that constituency it'll be the biggest miracle since Bethlehem.

The Citizens United case was brilliantly, if wrongfully argued. “Corporations are people, my friend,” Mitt Romney explained afterward. (No, corporations are not people. AT&T has never invited me to a bar mitzvah or a gender reveal. Maybe Twitter will.) This argument from a man who'd be well-cast as an automaton on Westworld. Reminds me of the time I was watching Richard Belzer shill a book on how to be funny. My roommate wondered, “How would he know?”

But, legally, I guess, algorithm-driven corporations, some of which have lifespans of hundreds of years, are human. And money is free speech. Also, the Detroit Lions are going all the way this year.

You have your Big Lie, I have mine

Let's tug at that thread a bit. If money is free speech, then essentially the Supreme Court decided that some of us get more speech than others. Cuz, it sure ain't free.

It helps if what you're saying is smart, however. After a disappointing midterm election, one conservative e-mailed me with a sure-fire solution. Raise the voting age to 21. But 18-year-olds could still buy Uzis, though, right? Plus, there should be an IQ test. Well, if the bar is

Saving us from ourselves

Herschel Walker, then by my calculations—carry the one, move the decimal point, divide by the square root of eleveny—that eliminates... absolutely no one. In fact, now my pug can vote.

A Bismark radio host agreed that voting is too easy for people that don't "think" like him. He "thought" it would be great if only property owners could vote. I knew they were trying to take us back to the Fifties. I didn't realize it was the 1750s. I almost drove my surrey with the fringe on top right off the road. Wait. Does my buggy actually have a radio, you wonder? Of course not, but the pickup beside me at the stoplight, the one with the chrome truck nuts, was playing his very loud.

Solutions? We could ban political donations altogether and implement public financing. (Sorry, acid flashback. There for a moment, I thought that was possible in this political climate and that Herschel Walker had a punch-drunk puncher's shot at becoming a senator.)

What about Congressional term limits? And for the Supreme Court... Well, what's good for the presidency is good for the gander. Turnover is healthy, an opportunity for a representative government that more closely represents the population. Call me an ageist, but I don't think Chuck Grassley is the man to address Internet regulation. Not that I think his investigation into Frogger is going anywhere.

It might work out great for corporations, too. Newbies can always be hired for less. But that's just me being cynical because I'm paying attention.

Now, there's an idea. What if more Americans paid attention and used the power they have?

What if, instead of fear-mongering over the faculty teaching actual history, we taught students, through actual curriculum, how to be smart news consumers, the difference between news and opinion? And civics, even.

Tony Bender

Perhaps we could revisit the Fairness Doctrine and this time contemplate the Internet as an information source and not a utility. Public airwaves are the public's, and arguably, so is the web, and the public is people, my friend.

Yes, to all of the above.

In the meantime, while we're waiting for Senator Godot, what if, instead of expecting Congress or the Supreme Court to save us from ourselves, we, as Americans, actually studied the issues from a variety of sources—yes, they're still out there—and voted in our own best interest just like corporations do?

What if these informed voters actually voted? An estimated 47% of eligible voters turned out on Nov. 8. My 22-year-old daughter scoffed at the notion that her peers had done enough with an estimated 30% turnout. She gets it. If 60% turned out like the gray hairs, they'd rule. Overnight, a more representative government. That scares the hell out of those behind the curtain.

The system exists because we allow it to. Indifference. Apathy. Complacency. But we're not bystanders at a train wreck. We're passengers.

Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man, that he didn't already have.

Tom Hanks for Engineer.

Tony Bender, a former radio personality, has been a columnist for more than 30 years. He's published two novels and is the owner and publisher of two newspapers.

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Building better decision making for better business

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Abstract: *Everyone in the business world is expected to be a good person doing the right thing at all times and in every situation encountered. One of the problems with achieving this ideal goal is that many people do not know how we as human beings living in a real world actually make our decisions. Further complications arise when we forget why we are doing something when earnestly engaged in any decision making process. In these cases, the process wrongfully becomes the core focus to the detriment of why we are involved in the process in the first place. Below, I will consider several elements of decision making that are overlooked, and then show how building better decision making leads to better business.*

Keywords: business, decision making, retention, strategic planning

Building a better understanding of how decision making works

I've had my fair share of discrimination when someone questioned my capabilities to run the company because I am a woman, and research shows that women express emotions more frequently than men. However, I recognize that when emotions are high, intellect runs low so I always have to be assertive to act with integrity, purpose and passion and come up with an educated decision at all times (Ming Zhao).¹

The words from above caught my attention: “research shows that women express emotions more frequently than men.” A quick search of

¹ “Women of The C-Suite: Shiela Mie Empleo-Legaspi of Cyberbacker On The Five Things You Need To Succeed As A Senior Executive”

research indicates women *do not* express more emotion than men. Bias *attributes* more emotion to women, but that is merely a stereotype.²

So what else should be questioned from Ming Zhao's claims? Consider "when emotions are high, intellect runs low so I always have to be assertive to act with integrity, purpose and passion and come up with an educated decision at all times." This statement makes two important and distinct points: 1. Emotions *can* hijack our ability to make sound decisions. 2. Emotions enable us to make sound decisions.

First, when "emotions run high, intellect runs low" has been confirmed in research. When the amygdala is activated with high emotion, the neocortex does shut down. Why is that? Because when the emotional decision-making center of the brain is highly engaged with certain emotions – anger, frustration, distrust, fear – the body is perceiving potentially serious danger that calls for immediate action. In short, less thinking and more reacting. Regardless of gender, when we are feeling strong emotions of fear, anger or repulsion, our neocortex is less likely to be engaged.

The next statement is much more intriguing and leads to an important and different conclusion: "I... have to be assertive to act with *integrity, purpose and passion* and come up with an educated decision at all times." [Emphasis added.] Integrity and passion as well as purpose are emotions – positive emotions. When we are feeling strong positive emotions of passion, purpose, integrity, trust and respect, we engage our neocortex much more readily to make informed and educated decisions. Emotions, therefore, are not antithetical to good decision making: they are essential to it.

Emotional competence is the ability to recognize the emotions that are signaling us to be uncomfortable or wary, to name them and seek the reason why "warning bells" are going off, to step back, and to reconnect with our values and purpose to make the decision of how to proceed. Emotions also signal when to move forward, engage, connect and make the decision of how to proceed. We readily recognize when uncomfortable or,

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisonescalante/2021/11/12/men-are-just-as-emotional-as-women-says-new-research/?sh=159938a42e96>

Building better decision making for better business

one might say, negative emotions threaten to derail decisions; we need to also know when positive emotions move us forward faster. Consider the bestselling business book *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen Covey. Trust, one of the most powerful, pivotal emotions, either speeds us forward when it is present or puts on the brakes when it is missing and other emotions tell us to be careful.

It is worth saying again: No decision can be made unless an emotional value is assigned to it. Warning emotions signal reasons to slow down; positive emotions can speed up the decision making. Let's stop talking about "rational decisions" versus "emotional decisions" as if there is a dichotomy. All decisions are *emotional*. Decisions are also rational when grounded and confirmed by data received that leads to trust.

Building better retention with better supervisors

Are people born great leaders or are they formed by their experiences and training? Of course, the answer is both. Some people have an intuitive sense of how to encourage and guide teams that engenders respect and loyalty. These people benefit from learning techniques and tools that further increase their effectiveness. Other leaders lack the intuition but make up for it in how much they care about their teams and their dedication to learning what it takes to bring out the best in their colleagues.

The bigger question is: Why don't more businesses invest in helping managers learn to manage more effectively? Often, they pay top-dollar fees to leadership development consultants to work with their senior executives to help them operate better together, and yet spend precious little teaching their team leads and supervisors core supervisory and management skills. When businesses do pay for training they do so because it promises to teach the 5, 10 or even 15 core skills that will transform participants into great managers in as few hours as possible.

The content of these rapid-fire courses is actually pretty solid in most cases; the problem is that it is delivered with the equivalent of a fire hose: 10 topics in eight hours. Most employers are lucky if the participants retain one or two bits of information. In most cases, almost nothing is retained after a few weeks back on the job.

Good training that builds skill takes time and real investment. If you want great teams to do great work, you need to invest in those who oversee the work and build the teams, not as an afterthought but as a core principle of success.

It is less expensive than losing good people because of unskilled supervisors who have learned techniques from untrained managers. Hiring and training a new employee costs six to nine months of that employee's wage or salary. Companies that are losing workers earning an average of \$15 per hour are incurring a cost of \$15,000 to \$23,000 *per person*. Most of these former employees leave because of unskilled and inept supervisors. If you doubt poor supervision is the cause, do a search for top reasons why employees leave: most of them tie back to bad management in one way or another. Do another search for why people *stay* and you will discover the reasons tie back to good leaders.

The best way for people to learn and hone skills - any skill - is with focus and practice. Acquiring a leadership skill is the same as developing any other technical skill: it takes time, dedication, and practice; all of which require investments of both time and money on the part of the business.

Let's do the final math. If it costs a minimum of \$15,000 *per* departing employee because of poor supervision, what are you willing to invest in training people to be good managers and leaders? Retaining more workers who want to do good work is the obvious smart business decision. Training supervisors and managers to lead workers is the wise business investment.

Reasons to hate and to love strategic planning

I have a love-hate perspective of strategic planning. Let me start with what I hate.

Hate #1: The binder on the shelf

I hate strategic planning that delivers a binder filled with data that buries the essence of the process. Once on the shelf, no one ever pulls the damn thing off for any reason, not even the people who put it together. The process of getting to the binder does have value because the process *is the*

Building better decision making for better business

thing. Having gone through a process of considering the future and where they want to take their teams, managers have had something important imbedded in their brains, often unconsciously, that guides them to fulfilling the vision. The binder is no more help than the elf on the shelf at Christmas, and just as annoying.

Hate #2: Creating project plans from the strategic plan

One company worked with a consultant who helped them craft a strategic plan that generated three strategic “pillars” under which multiple projects proliferated prepared by the “lieutenants” of the “captains” of the “pillars”. A whopping total of more than 24 plans were developed with varying degrees of specificity. Another company identified 10 - yes, TEN - initiatives from their strategic planning process.

I had one practical question for them: When are you supposed to implement these plans in the midst of doing the work of the business? If this amassing of project plans sounds like a waste of time, you have hit upon why they are ill-conceived and unhelpful: they amount to make-work. More specifically, make-work under the direction of consultants who strive to demonstrate they are adding value when they are simply detracting from what really matters: good work. Good work makes a difference to the organization, the people who work there, the people they serve and their communities.

Hate #3: Little or no integration

I could simply say “See #2” because time wasted on peripheral project plans is often central to the lack of integration. Time spent on unworkable project plans is time not spent identifying what needs to happen with the work of the business as a result of the strategic plan. If nothing changes with the day-to-day work, then the organization cannot actually get where they want to go. Something has to change to make space and capacity to accomplish the direction envisioned in the strategic plan process. The adjustments aren’t necessarily big, but, over time, the shifts in how work is done create significant changes.

Hate #4: Short timeframe

The benchmark for strategic plans is two to three years. And this timeframe is reasonable...as long as it doesn't limit the bigger vision for the organization. In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins refers to these visions as BHAGs – Big Hairy Audacious Goals. In his words, “BHAGs are bold, falling in the gray area where reason and prudence might say ‘This is unreasonable,’ but the drive for progress says, ‘We believe we can do it nonetheless.’”³

Consultants have latched onto the concept without clear understanding of what those goals actually entail for an organization – how big should the goals be and how long will they take to achieve. Okay, to be fair, some consultants get it...usually the ones who have spent a fair amount of their career leading teams in accomplishing BHAGs as part of their organization's vision and plans. BHAGs take effort to change processes, which require integration, collaboration, and commitment throughout an organization, which takes time and focus. BHAGs aren't the vision itself but the *strategy* to get to the vision. Which means, one or two BHAGs every two to three years to get to that 10 or even 20-year vision.

Hate #5: Missing the point of strategic planning

Too many organizations enter into strategic planning processes as if the “plan” is the point. It isn't. Fulfilling the organization's purpose in the midst of the constantly changing marketplace and communities is the point. The purpose of the process is to reflect on the current hits and misses; to consider what it will take to do more and better for the people and communities served by the organization.

This last statement may make it sound as though I am referring to nonprofits. Not the case. For-profit companies that exist for a mission bigger than the necessary profits they generate do better for their teams, their customers, and the communities. Why are people leaving some organizations in droves? Why are some companies struggling to hire and retain while others retain more and struggle less with recruiting? It all comes down to purpose, culture and leadership.

³ See James C. Collins and Jerry I Porras. 2002. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. Harper Business Essentials: New York, NY.

Building better decision making for better business

Note that I did not say profit was not important: no profit, no company, no way to fulfill the mission. Profit is required to ensure sustainability. But profit without a grounding in mission sucks the energy and joy out of the work. Sure, lots of profitable companies don't focus on purpose. In the short run, they will do fine, even great for their executives and investors. But, eventually, there will be a fumble, a choice or series of choices that spiral out of control. Remember Enron or Tyco, WorldCom, and Wells Fargo.

What I love about strategic planning arises in part but not fully from the flip side of what I hate.

Love #1: Purpose is central

The planning process reconnects and grounds people in why the organization exists. The purpose of the organization – the mission that drives the work and guides the decisions of executives and their teams – can get clouded in the day-to-day tasks without periodically reflecting on where they came from and what they have learned in the journey.

Love #2: The work matters

Taking a step back to look back, people recognize that the work they do matters. Not just for their pay check or driving the success of the organization, but to those they serve and the communities in which they live. It confirms for people why they work as hard as they do and the difference they are making.

Love #3: People already are thinking about the future

The process uncovers and confirms what has been percolating just beneath the surface. All the “what-ifs” and “I-wonder-about” bubble up and out in the conversations about where the organization could go with the right investment, the right people, and the right focus.

Love #4: The hurdles are real

The process shines the spotlight on the challenges to fulfilling the mission and what is possible when those challenges are faced head-on. Doing the work the way it has always been done is soul-withering and business stagnating. Problems and missteps can lead to making the work

better and innovations that go beyond incremental improvements. The question of what is getting in the way is among the most critical to defining the future.

Love #5: The vision hits the mark and they feel the connection

There is a moment after the hard and no-fun work of articulating the vision when people *feel* the rightness of the words that describe the vision. That moment never gets old. The words come together in the most extraordinary way. People throw out words and phrases that churn and bounce off each other until somehow – almost magically – the right connections happen and the words align and vibrate with the energy of the first notes of a symphony. These few words sum up the two or at most three strategies that will echo throughout the organization, creating a cascade of adjustments and changes that lead to the future imagined.

Of course, the articulation of the vision and the fleshing out of the strategies is only the beginning. As executives and managers take the concepts to their teams, the work begins to adjust, sometimes only recognized in retrospect, as teams and individuals collaborate and integrate their work in ways that improve results and drive toward the vision. The work is rarely easy and is never without hurdles and setbacks. Sometimes the setbacks cause adjustments to the strategies, even to the point of dropping a strategy that isn't working. But fulfilling the mission and honing in on the vision bring focus and increase engagement throughout the organization.

Conclusion

In the end of any decision making process, whether that involves strategic planning, retention, or one of the other myriad processes confronting business managers and supervisors, only one thing matters: Good people doing great work to make the world better.

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Building better decision making for better business

built many high-functioning teams and facilitated hundreds of training, brainstorming and decision-making sessions with teams ranging in size from three to 100. In her consulting practice, Wolff focuses on helping clients identify their mission, values, strategic potential and visions. With those key elements in place, she works with individuals and management teams to improve their leadership and business execution. In addition to her consulting work, Wolff teaches Ethics & Leadership at Concordia College



Fall 2022

Student Section



The water treatment crisis in underdeveloped countries

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Keywords: crisis, filtration, engineers, stakeholders

Solving the water treatment crisis has become an increasingly prevalent problem in underdeveloped countries of the world. I believe the implementation of a hybrid ceramic and sand filter is an efficient and equitable method to treat water while abiding by my professional code of engineering ethics. This technique would combine both natural and artificial techniques of filtration while increasing filter longevity and decreasing costs. This approach will also adhere to health organizations' standards and protect the health and welfare of those in need by preventing them from getting infected by some of the most harmful diseases and conditions.

The stakeholders within this situation can include the management and ownership of the filter manufacturing company, corporate investors, and employees and managers of various health and humanitarian organizations. Externally the most important stakeholders are the individuals who are a part of these low-income communities and the governments that serve them. The internal stakeholders want to be able to successfully implement their product while making a profit. Their success is going to be based on the efficiency of the filter and its reception by the community members. The external stakeholders are going to want a product that will serve their basic need for clean water. If this isn't met, the basis of exchange is pointless for both sides. Businesses and consumers both need the product to work effectively and economically.

The stark contrast in cultural values between the various stakeholders will be one of the main gaps to bridge in this project. The

western companies that are sought out to manufacture these filters exemplify a set of values that directly correlates with their robust economic and personal endeavors. These include but are not limited to independence, assertiveness, control, and competition. The perception of these values can vary by region and individual, but one can conclude that countries in North America and Europe are solely driven by the production and development of products and services. Each person that is a part of these societies is valuable in the correlation of what they provide for themselves and their superiors. In this case, developing an environmental device for disenfranchised countries comes at a price, even if it's for an entirely good cause. On the contrary, the communities these companies will be serving are on the opposing side of the ideological spectrum, whether these people reside in Africa, South America, or Asia, they're most likely going to be a part of a communal unit that has close and extended kinship ties. This strong sense of community is the basis for many of these peoples' cultures and serves as a basis for their attitudes toward this product. They are least concerned about the monetary value of this filter but of its value to contribute to themselves and their community's well-being. To be able to cross the line between these completely different groups of people would be difficult, but there are ways the hybrid filter serves its purpose.

Having a product based on natural elements such as sand and clay, will allow for less strain on the environment and make individuals less susceptible to harmful chemicals and pollutants such as chlorination. Creating a filtration process that involves various filtration devices and techniques will create a sufficient desire for implementation within the western world by creating a complex product that can be manufactured and contributed to by multiple companies and stakeholders. Additionally, having a filter with a ten-year lifespan is also pivotal to this project because most members of these communities will not have the time or the money to maintain these devices over a short period, this will also prevent the need for increased oversight or possibly relocation of company employees and managers to oversee this process, which could cost severe amounts of time and money. My National Society of Professional Engineers Code states that its number one rule of practice is to hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public. Creating a solution that combines technological advancement with natural elements will directly affect the health and

The water treatment crisis in underdeveloped countries

welfare of the public by providing a means to produce healthy drinking water in an environment that does not have the means to create it themselves, which will positively affect their personal and communal developments for years to come.

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What should the policy to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

Brandon Stariha

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Abstract: *In answering the question “What should the policy pertaining to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?”, I use Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative with a strong emphasis on the distinction between means vs mere means in the paper to assert 1) the use of slurs outright ought to be banned on the basis that the act of using slurs treats people as a mere means, something impermissible, and 2) that the mention of slurs for academic purposes is distinct from the use of slurs and does not treat people as a mere means but as a means, something that is permissible. Having set out the ground for the possibility of mention slurs being permissible, I then further asset that mentioning slurs for academic purposes should be allowed in the classroom on the basis that denying students the responsibility of mention slurs goes against our already asserted belief, by the fact they are in the classroom and in college, that students are rational, responsible, and moral beings. It also denies students the important opportunity of cultivating their rational capabilities and denies the process of becoming moral beings. Denying someone’s rationality denies their dignity, something impermissible.*

Keywords: college policy, gender, Kantian ethics, rationality, slurs, use/mention

There is a need to address the growing tension about whether the mention of sex/gender slurs is appropriate in the college classroom. I contend that there should be a policy that supports the mention of slurs for academic purposes in the classroom while the use of such terms will clearly be prohibited. I will argue for this policy using Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative.

The meaning of Kant’s Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative can be unclear. Perhaps the difficulty of explaining it shows it is not clear, regardless I am going to quickly explain what I think it means so when it is used in this paper it will make sense.

So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.¹

An important part to address is the distinction between “as a means” vs “merely as a means.” The word “merely” plays a vital role. To treat someone *merely* as a means is to treat them without due consideration, upon your actions, to their values, wants, and moral being. To treat them as nothing more than an object, like a tool. We can treat people as a means, on the other hand, when we recognize their values, wants, and moral being or when we recognize, upon our actions, that someone is an ends-in-themselves which is another way of saying we recognize their dignity. In other words, treating someone as a ‘mere means’ is always an impermissible act while treating someone as a ‘means’ is permissible. This distinction is why we can go against people’s wants and values, at times, while still respecting them.

To put it more clearly in an example, if someone is genuinely morally responsible for a morally wrong act, we can punish them while not treating them merely as a means or an object because in doing so, we are recognizing that they are a being with dignity and are the type of thing that has responsibilities. We recognize their rationality by punishing them (so long as we treat them as a human in doing so). Despite their emotional inclinations to not wanting to be punished, if they were in a rational state of mind in where they are able to consider and understand their acts and consequences, they would recognize that they should be punished because they know they have done something worthy of punishment.

Imagine a situation where someone had drove drunk and arrived home safely. The next day the person decides to turn himself in saying their reason to do so is that despite not killing anyone, he made a choice that deserves punishment and despite how negatively it affects him, he is willing to face up to the consequences, he says. Some may say this person is foolish, but I would reject that and argue that this is someone who deserves the respect they clearly demonstrated being worthy of.

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 38

What should the policy pertaining to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

Another example of treating someone as a ‘means’ and not a ‘mere means’ is interactions with wait staff. We use waiters/servers as means all the time, but we can permissibly do so as long as we do not degrade them in the process and recognize they are humans. We can do so even if they would much rather be at home, not waiting on us.

It has not escaped my notice that while the second formula can be vague and abstract, all that has been done is make it somewhat less vague/abstract. It has not been made as concrete as I would have liked. However, there has been given some ground for my definition of it, enough to understand my interpretation and further points.

Understanding the distinction of how we can treat people in ways that they may not like but at the same time with respect to their dignity allows us to create a policy that, as a byproduct, may offend certain people while at the same time respecting them. In other words, it allows for the possibility of the mention of slurs.

Using slurs is not permissible

Before getting to how that is possible pertaining this policy, I want to address another issue, so it is out of the way. This policy will have a hard rule against the use of any slur, whether people refer to themselves or others, in the college classroom. This is because slurs are clear cut examples of treating someone as a mere means. To call someone a slur is to call that person something less than they are. In most cases it treats someone as an object or reduces them to an object; clearly denying them as a rational person of worth. ‘Bitch,’ ‘Cunt,’ ‘Dick,’ ‘Faggot,’ and ‘Pussy’ are quintessential examples of referring to someone as less valuable than they are.

While not all slurs refer to someone as an animal or body part or mere object - those I think are the most heinous as they reject someone’s humanity, even if they are not the most emotionally striking - the ones that do not still fail to recognize someone’s dignity. The focus being on gender/sex, slurs that are not referring to animals or objects are, for

example, 'Butch' and 'Sissy'. These are trickier because while the meaning behind them is not an animal or object it may not be as clear as to why these slurs treat people as a mere means. The key here is that the important function of degrading and intentionally disrespecting someone is still present in words like these or especially in the use of these words directed at individual people or a group.

It is possible to go so far and say the any word could be considered a slur. For example, if person A called a person B 'schmop' and person A had a private understanding of this word and used it as if it were a slur like 'Bitch' or 'Faggot', it would be an act of treating someone less than they are. It would of course have little emotional effect or trauma because it lacks the power of shared understanding for person B to recognize what person A has done, but regardless, person A knows what they were trying to achieve. This is the minimal type of slur and slurs only get worse from here. Given that the use of any slur, no matter the type, minimum and up, treats someone merely as a means, grants us the moral justification to ban this outright in the classroom.

While I spent some time arguing for something that seems uncontroversial, what this does is allows me to reject the use of slurs while, at the same time, opening up the possibility that the mention of slurs is not using someone as a mere means as using slurs does. This is because the mention of slurs does not devalue or consider someone as less than human. It may offend, of course, but it does not assert a person to be less than a person. When I mention the word 'Bitch' to demonstrate a type of slur, for example, one has not attached the word to any particular person (such as Sally) or abstract group (such as Women). I have only mentioned a linguistic tool used to degrade particular persons or abstract groups. The mentioning alone cannot devalue someone because it has not been directed towards someone or some group. This is much like mentioning a knife, a tool vs using a knife to stab someone, a tool and a directed action. When one uses 'Bitch', on the other hand, one is using the tool to intentionally devalue someone.

Some people might push back on this claim by saying that it is impossible to even mention the slur without directly degrading a person or

What should the policy pertaining to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

group. The mere mention of ‘Bitch’ degrades women. This type of objection is why I wanted to bring out the *means* vs *mere means* distinction. It may be true that some people may get personally offended when the word ‘Bitch’ is used in a mention way, but because the mention of the word is not directed at a person or group with the intent to degrade that person or group, the distaste of the word comes from a personal preference. Not because someone has been devalued at that time of the mention.² What this means as I see it is that with due considerations, we can go against someone’s person preference to not have the word mentioned while at the same time respecting particular persons or abstract groups and not devalue them when we mention the word.

Why it is permissible to mention slurs

As of now I have ideally shown why we should reject the use of slurs and shown how it is possible to mention the slurs without treating someone as a mere means, which would be morally impermissible. This has not shown why the mention of slurs should be allowed in the classrooms. At this point it may seem that while yes, it is possible to mention the slurs without degrading people, the question is why we would allow it to be mentioned in the classroom. Surely the discomfort and possible slippage of mention to use by some students is not worth the risk. This could become detrimental to the groups of people that would be most affected, those being the typically intended receivers of the slurs such as woman, or non-cis orientation. I think it would be easy to imagine that people from those groups or everyone, would be more comfortable if ‘Bitch’ and ‘Faggot’ were not mentioned at all, even if they agreed that the mention of the word in itself does not reduce someone to an object.

This is a fair consideration. In order to say it is justified to allow the mention of slurs despite this objection it is important to show why not allowing students to mention slurs, if they so choose, fails to recognize their rationality, which is something that devalues someone’s dignity, unlike how the discomfort of the mentioning of slurs does.

² See the previous knife example.

Recall how it is possible to respect someone's humanity while at the same time punishing them for some immoral thing they have done. This issue is distinct from reducing someone to an object by the use of slurs. What this aspect of the issue is about is that we can fail to recognize people's dignity in other ways than just calling them an object. One of those ways is not recognizing that they are rational or humans who possess the ability to be moral. When we punish someone for something they have done that is morally wrong, we have acknowledged that they are a person. They are a person who has understanding, has power over their actions, they are not just robots without thought or control. If we failed to punish someone for an immoral action, then we fail to recognize their dignity. We in effect are saying to them that their actions are not worthy of praise or blame, that they are less than human, something who does not have sufficient power, ability, autonomy, and responsibility over their actions. We are treating them more like a dog or a child, as something that cannot have autonomy or responsibilities. That they lack any understanding of right or wrong.

When we look at this idea of failing to recognize someone's rationality and focus the idea in a different direction, we can see how we can devalue or deny someone's rationality when it comes to not allowing certain people responsibilities, actions or powers that they possess by virtue of being a rational and autonomous being or prevent them from cultivating their rational and autonomous nature.

What this means when applied to the situation of use vs. mention is that denying students the ability to mention and *learn* how to mention slurs, we treat students, who are developing moral beings, as incapable persons. It fails to recognize that students are intelligent and responsible people who autonomously control their lives.

If we require students to pay substantial amounts of tuition money, if we expect them to complete class assignments, to have appropriate conduct in and out of the classroom, we are already recognizing that students are rational and minimally moral beings. If we did not recognize that students were people who were able to have control over themselves and understand their actions, pertaining to the previous things listed, it would be an awful crime to even assign homework. That would be like

What should the policy pertaining to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

assigning calculus homework to a child or a dog, and genuinely expecting they finish it, and then punishing them accordingly if they did not. That would be absurd.

This is the issue that appears when we do not allow students, those people who we already admit being responsible, rational, moral beings by the fact that they are in the classroom, the ability to mention slurs. We:

- 1) go *against* what we already are supposedly asserting (they are responsibly rational beings) and
- 2) we fail in general to recognize their control over themselves and ability to be responsible.

Ultimately when we fail to recognize someone's rationality, that is when we have treated someone as a mere means. By refusing students the ability to mention slurs in the classroom we treat them as less than they are, as a mere means. They become cash cows, beings that we are not genuinely taking into consideration. Students do not have to be forced to mention slurs but need to have the ability to if they so choose.

There is another factor that some may come up with that is initially worrying. That being that we can recognize people's rationality and responsibility that is appropriate for their age without failing to recognize their rationality or dignity overall. We do not fail to recognize a 20-year-old student's rationality if we deny them the ability to be the U.S. President. The student must be genuinely able to handle the responsibility we expect of them. Which is why it is cruel to give a 5-year-old calculus homework and hold them responsible for it. Why it is not cruel to restrict a 20-year old's ability to be president. So, the question is, are (generally) 18-year old's and up able to handle the responsibility of mentioning slurs?

I would like to start with the power of handling the mention of slurs seems to be something far less difficult than taking on thousands of dollars of debt and committing to around 4 years of your life (and more) at the age of 18 to some life path/direction. Besides that, and before talking about the

youngest members of college, I would like to point one's attention to professors. It seems that if anyone at all, outside of college or in, professors are responsible and are able to responsibly mention slurs in the classroom. If, generally, the most educated members of our society are incapable of the ability to reasonably mention slurs, it would seem hard to believe that any one is, or any group is.

To refocus on the youngest members of colleges and to see if they are capable, I am going to take the harder route and assert that students may in fact not be able to responsibly or more accurately be able to responsibly mention slurs *right away*. The absolutely vital point is that they may not be able to because of their lack of knowledge and practice doing so. Not because it is impossible. What students may be lacking is the moral practice. One cannot *be* a moral person without *becoming* a moral person. Without allowing students the opportunity to practice becoming moral beings, they may never achieve that end in their lives. Why this is so important is that preventing people from learning in this way denies people the ability to cultivate their rationality, moral being, and reasoning skills. Which in turn does not respect people for what they are, people with dignity. To illustrate, most would agree that preventing someone from learning how to read would be an awful thing. This is so because it limits one's rational capabilities which is tantamount to failing to recognize one's dignity. Albeit restricting the mentioning of slurs does not compare to restricting one from reading, the parallel of the principal is genuine.

Conclusion

Using Kant's second formulation is difficult. I hope that my explanation of my understanding of the principle in such a short space and time is clear enough to help understand my further points. With the distinction of means vs. mere means, this gives us the ability to say that the use of slurs can rightly be banned from the classroom but still leaves open the possibility of the mention of slurs not being morally impermissible because of the way they are used. If my distinction makes sense, it also allows us to recognize someone's dignity or treat someone as an end-in-themselves while at the same time acting in a way that they may personally and understandably find distasteful. After that, restricting the student's ability to mention slurs fails to match up with our presupposed recognition of their rationality and ability

What should the policy pertaining to the use/mention of slurs in the classroom be?

to be or become responsible moral beings, as well as fails to help cultivate their rationality and capabilities. Limiting them would be treating them without dignity. Something impermissible.

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Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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Abstract: *Historical and on-going socioeconomic disparities have largely displaced and harmed Indigenous communities. Generations of archaeological studies have ignored, underplayed, or whitewashed Indigenous peoples' traditional and technological knowledge — from architectural feats to ecological knowledge. Genocide, broken treaties, cultural cleansing, and assimilation, display a long pattern of treating Indigenous peoples as inferior beings. Colonial settlers' justification for acting in this manner ranges from viewing Indigenous peoples as savages and incapable of civilization to the conviction of Manifest Destiny which meant domination over all the things colonial settlers encountered. Indigenous peoples remain second class citizens on their own ancestral lands, as many are largely underrepresented, have poor socioeconomic power and lack adequate access to higher education or fields, which tend to be male-dominated or white dominated positions.*

Natural resources management seeks to maintain adaptive management and sustainable design features for the sake of urban design and conservation of resources and species. As science is decolonized, Indigenous people are included, and Eurocentric research methods are coupled with traditional ecological knowledge and interpretation, fruitful collaborations and partnerships are built to promote more perspectives in professional settings. This is useful for community development when forming dialogues and relationships with Indigenous communities' member or Indigenous experts and professionals. With the increasing effects of climate change, droughts and flooding will shift what is grown and where. We will likely be relying on traditional ecological knowledge and refining it further.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge, two-eyed seeing

Community-engaged research entails a wide breadth of collaborators, contributors, and partnerships dedicated to thorough analysis from various perspectives. There are opportunities which unlock new pathways in social

sciences which helps reframe viewing Indigenous tribes as historical subjects to persons and collective bodies with their own stories and experiential data which can reexamine historically biased events.

Indigenous knowledge (IK) encompasses every area of knowledge while Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), such as knowledge concerning plant identification, medicinal uses for plants, and locations and habitats best suited for plants is exclusive to ecologies or the environment. Prescribed burns or plant identification would be TEK, while both things including knowledge of building or cooking would all fall under IK. However, it is worth noting that these categorizations are Western labels to make sense of how Indigenous peoples have historically interpreted and interacted with the environment. As Kyle Powys Whyte indicates, these terms vary within literature depending on the stakeholder (Whyte 2013). He suggests that the concept of TEK should be viewed as an outlet for increased participation and collaborations amongst Indigenous groups and leadership.

In addition to the utility of traditional ecological knowledge, having more voices at the table fosters greater equity for communities that are often underrepresented. The number of Indigenous professionals in academia or operating in some role as a researcher or instructor is low. Creating a more accessible environment allows for a wider range of perspectives in a professional setting, while at the same time, decolonizing science. Western science is based upon empirical evidence through scientific inquiry. TEK can operate in the same way, but it does not account for all types of Indigenous knowledge, such as meaning derived through dreams. However, there is much to be gained through forming dialogues surrounding ancestral history and generational knowledge.

I argue for the integration of TEK into the sciences by establishing collaborative partnerships to share epistemological methodologies. This will be a challenging task, as Indigenous traditional knowledge has often been neglected, intentionally overlooked, and discredited in the research community and elsewhere.

Why TEK has been disvalued

Although Indigenous knowledge has gained standing in science and became recognized as Indigenous Archaeology, this credit was not easily won as many colonizers refused to acknowledge Indigenous' innovative feats and technological accomplishments. The Mound Builders is one such example. Colonizers sought to both suppress and supplant Indigenous peoples. By discrediting the Indigenous Mound Builders' technological achievements, sowing doubt helped justify colonizer behavior and mistreatment toward Indigenous groups (Trigger 1984). Others, such as Erich von Dankien, stirred controversy as he undermined beliefs in Indigenous peoples' ability to construct the pyramids in Egypt, and elsewhere, thus promoting the view that ancient cultures were visited by extraterrestrial beings who decided to provide considerable aid to indigenous cultures and assist them in building their acclaimed engineering feats (Little and Zimmerman 2010). In this case, conspiracy theories are used as methods to discredit IK and justify colonizer behavior and actions in cultural genocide while taking away ancestral lands.

These dismissive flights of fancy should be thought absurd, especially given what physics tell us about space travel. Since TEK is not as well understood in the same manner as Western science, however, it invites conspiracy theories. In absence of understanding or not having all the facts, some people prefer conspiracy theories when no workable theory exists—or a poor understanding of something persists. Although it would be useful at times to disabuse people of false beliefs, debunking and expending energy against conspiracy theory engines can be exhausting. Furthermore, not everything warrants a response. Claims made with no evidence in their favor can be dismissed easily with the slightest bit of evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, extraordinary claims require the extraordinary evidence. Saying that there were space aliens helping indigenous populations or that TEK has no value, especially given its long history of successful use, requires extraordinary evidence in its favor.

There has also been a disconnect and lack of recognition for Indigenous ecological practices based on Traditional Ecological knowledge, which modern science was too quick to overlook unless it was useful enough or corroborated existing Eurocentric research. It has been

well documented why TEK does not have equal standing with science (Holtorf 2007; Little and Zimmerman 2010; Trigger 1984). While these opinions have gradually evolved amongst archaeologists and colonial regimes, there remains the question of how TEK is valued. Firstly, and historically, TEK has been intentionally rejected, dismissed, or scoffed at by colonizer attitudes to prop up their worldview and justify their actions toward Indigenous groups. A long, global history of colonization and cultural genocide has undermined Indigenous knowledge while discrediting Indigenous accomplishments and observations. In this view, science and Indigenous knowledge should remain separate and isolated.

Despite the stated goals of the scientific method, Western science has lacked representation from minority groups and actively suppressed Indigenous communities as identified by Trigger's "Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist"; thereby, undermining science's stated method and reducing the quality of its results (1984). For years Indigenous TEK was decontextualized, misrepresented, stolen, or discredited. (Cochran et al. 2008). Furthermore, due to these disparities, TEK tends to have a small footprint in academia. A lack of familiarity may not breed contempt, but it certainly does not lend itself to inclusion.

Indigenous communities, in addition, have largely been affected by colonization on a global scale. The decoupling of TEK from ancestral lands and waters management has had a profound effect upon Indigenous communities. The passing of intergenerational knowledge has declined and led to a deterioration of TEK among Indigenous communities (Bohensky et al. 2013). Plant blindness, for example, is the loss of Indigenous knowledge surrounding the natural environment and ability to identify plant species. Historically, Indigenous communities relied heavily upon basic recognition of plant identification because they benefitted from their uses and modified their environments to harvest desirable species. Furthermore, the loss of intergenerational TEK and the damaging effects of colonization have largely forced Indigenous peoples into socioeconomic hardships, rampant cycles of poverty traps, and excluded them from equal access to natural resources and within policy making positions (Sutton 2009). Consequentially, these conditions have eroded the legacy of Indigenous knowledge and the ability to pass down traditional ecological knowledge —

whether taking place within an Indigenous community or shared with the larger world.

During the past few decades, natural resource managers have pursued mending strained relationships with Indigenous peoples to ensure thriving partnerships, with an added effort of “decolonizing the sciences,” as Dr. Kim TallBear puts it (Reardon and TallBear 2012). To achieve this goal requires reassessing what TEK offers to Western science and understanding the contributions it has always brought to the table.

Why and how should national resource management incorporate TEK?

Natural resource managers, climate scientists, and policy makers are looking for what they view as new techniques to mitigate climate change, since the current Eurocentric ones are not functioning as well as needed to address the issue. Adaptive management techniques and sustainable designs are at the forefront of these efforts, yet few of those professionals realize that their implementation has existed for generations in Indigenous communities.

Many of the techniques used by researchers, such as prescribed burns or clam gardens¹ along the coasts are practices which have been adapted from historical IK and have existed for many years (Lepofsky et al. 2020). *Ecology and Society* showcased an article highlighting the importance of local, traditional, and ecological Indigenous knowledge (Folke et al. 2005). As one of the first articles crediting Indigenous contributions to ecology, Folke et al. reexamined the need to improve social-ecological systems with the help of local populations and Indigenous insights. While perspective of Indigenous techniques and innovations were

¹ Among natural resource managers, traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly recognized due to its importance in design features. Increased awareness indicates the extent at which Indigenous peoples designed and shaped their environment through prescribed burns and clam gardens. These practices have been used by Indigenous peoples for generation which are being incorporated into contemporary sustainable designs. Like prescribed fire which promoted new vegetational growth or encouraged foraging within a system, clam gardens were used to create habitat where none existed before using rock. This is achieved by constructing rock walls in lower tidal areas by building a flat area which otherwise sloped from the bank of a coastal area. This new region was filled with sediment and formed a new beach which encouraged clam presence with his success.

not instantly treated with respect and care during this time, the acknowledgement of Indigenous people's epistemology launched renewed interested into holistic attitudes and approaches to the environment. This development generated new aspects of ecological philosophy and began dismantling restrictions and limitations placed upon Indigenous peoples by the scientific community. As a result, Indigenous inclusion within the sciences gradually occurred, opening new discourses, and forming partnerships.

Fostering equitable, respectful, and enduring relationships between Indigenous communities and Western science requires a firm understanding and acknowledgement of the weight that colonial narratives and Eurocentric-dominated research has had upon the treatment of Indigenous peoples (Fidel et al. 2014). As a keystone to this foundation, and by understanding the responsibility and commitment to rectify these historical wrongs and disadvantages, it is possible to promote wider representation in science with new narratives of multivocality. These collaborations and partnerships are slowly acquired and require a great deal of trust. Therefore, Western science must take great care in ethical considerations to respectfully represent artifacts, or belongs, as well as promote transparency and trust with Indigenous communities

TEK is best supported and understood when it is done so in a collaborative process. Collaboration is not only an exchange of knowledge and ideas, but also an active form of participation in forming a dialogue surrounding different approaches to observational data. In this process, a broader audience is served because a diverse community is working together within the sciences. Indigenous representation, as well as minority groups and subcultures, help expand the perspectives within Western science and contribute in several ways. Long-term sustainable processes and designs are likelier to develop; policy makers have a better grounding of management policies; and efforts to decolonize science and broaden participation are a few of the immediate benefits from this approach.

Incorporating TEK into natural resource management is not without its issues. TEK is a colonizer or nationalist concept, as the name 'traditional knowledge' does not exist within Indigenous groups. Instead, it is a way to

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

interact with the environment. Similarly, while TEK is useful for natural resource managers and climate scientists operating as environmental stewards, this misses the mark when discussing TEK, because Indigenous groups do not have a concept of or term for ‘environmental stewardship’ as Western philosophy has identified. Environmental stewardship is a position born out of understanding duties and responsibilities to the environment. For Indigenous groups, acting as a good environmental steward does not ring the same because the environment is not separate and other life forms hold different meaning. Integrating well-intentioned goals, therefore, requires researchers to properly reach out to Indigenous groups and inform them of their goals while extending an invitation to participate in the process.

Indigenous knowledge is gathered, much like Western science, through observation and inquiry. As with any culture, one’s worldview orients one’s thinking and this worldview is often affirmed and validated by others within their community. Indigenous knowledge is coupled with values containing strong spiritual, emotional, and physical ties to the environment (Cardinal, 2001). According to these perspectives, there is a connection to and respect for the natural environment, and these values are imprinted upon the lands and waters which they interact with and reside. Indigenous research records these events in various ways from depictions in various art mediums to oral storytelling and dance. While scientists may be influenced by spiritual and emotional passions in their research goals, these methodologies are concerned with empirical data, objectivity, testing observations, and replicating results in similar settings and conditions. Spirituality or subjective experiences are effectively excluded in Western research.

Two-Eyed Seeing is a perspective created by Chief Charles Labrador of Acadia First Nation, and the later refined and implemented by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall of the Eskasoni First Nation (Bartlett et al., 2012.) As explained by Bartlett et al, Two-Eyed Seeing is:

learning to see from one eye with the strength of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye

with the strengths of Western knowledges, and to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all.

The technique was designed to bridge knowledge systems and to promote collaboration between Indigenous communities and Western science. By championing multivocality, including a diverse set of voices and ideas, this pursuit helps balance perspectives and provides an opportunity to form new dialogues about the natural environment.

Where TEK and Eurocentric science's dissimilarities are most clearly seen is the latter requires far more objective evidence to satisfy epistemological standards. That is, IK permits strong subjective experiences and labels them as strong evidence, which can be sufficient to justify a belief to the level it becomes knowledge. These are instances, recalled upon by personal accounts, which cannot be understood or replicated as science usually conducts its methodologies. For many Indigenous communities, dreams are a significant source of knowledge and operate in guiding one's decisions and help navigate community goals. Though there are observation data collected through activities, such as hunting or herb collection, epistemological methodologies sharply differ due to IK relying upon strong subjective experiences. Knowledge, such as dreams, cannot be written and recorded as scientific methodologies. Yet, dreams, as well as dance, serve a myriad of communal functions by imparting knowledge and integrating customs within society.

Creating respectful TEK collaborations

If TEK is to be given its just standing in natural resource management, then decolonizing scientific methodologies must occur for true inclusion and representation within the sciences. To ensure successful collaborations, these efforts require some guiding principles. The Cause No Harm principle and Free, Prior and Informed Consent are necessary to ensure Indigenous rights and sovereignty are upheld. The Cause No Harm Principle is a core component in medical law and surrounds the principles of the Hippocratic Oath (Kish 2011). Operating as a firm reminder, this principle is crafted to ensure one is thinking critically and rationally about potential consequences, while simultaneously ensuring no one is made worse off in decisions, as can be seen below:

Cause No Harm Principle

1. Define the roles and responsibilities of all partners clearly and carefully,
2. Define what information will be shared,
3. Establish use, ownership and means to interpret or share information at the outset of the project, and
4. Respect, Trust, Equity and Empowerment

Collaboration between Indigenous peoples, agencies, tribes are dependent upon mutually beneficial relationships based upon transparency and trust. This requires establishing all parties' motivations while understanding that, at any time and at any stage, this partnership may cease if Indigenous groups no longer desire to participate. Establishing ownership at the onset of a project ensures the security of intellectual property and any obligations associated with TK; thus, reducing exploitation or misunderstandings. The final segment of the Cause No Harm Principle lists critical values, which are designed to treat all fairly while recognizing the power displacement between Western science and Indigenous tribes, peoples, and agencies, including Indigenous experts and scientist operating in both capacities.

Relatedly, Free, Prior and Informed Consent was established in part from the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to address how interactions between scientific studies and other actions should go. The following breakdown of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent helps provide clear guidance when working within the sciences (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Free: The terms for the agreement ensure a fair process of treatment in negotiations.

Prior: Throughout the procedure, Indigenous peoples will be contacted and involved in the process at the onset of the process. At each stage, information must be communicated and consent given

Informed: Participants must be properly informed despite any language and communications barriers. included in this information are any risks

and costs during the process, as well as opportunities and benefits that are discovered. This process is dynamic; as new information arises, each participant must be properly notified, and the researcher must confirm the notice has been received and reviewed.

Consent: This assures each participant that they reserve the right, at any stage, to disengage and leave the cooperative project. Declining or saying “no” should not have any legal repercussions as legal obligations have been fulfilled during the process.

Due to colonization, broken treaties, and cultural genocide, Indigenous groups had little reason to trust or work with governmental organizations. Further, Indigenous participants had been taken advantage of during scientific studies where the researchers were not being transparent with the participant, not informing the participants at every stage during the study or misleading the participants about the objectives of the study. Lack of transparency, of course, fragments trusts and restricts any ability to build professional relationships. UNDRIP, therefore, helped establish policies to ensure that participants were fully informed, treated fairly, and had the ability to opt-out at any stage. Furthermore, Indigenous persons working in research setting or assisting in consultation may rescind all materials and data at any time.

Bringing Two-Eyed Seeing to fruition among researchers and Indigenous communities requires parties to operate in good faith, transparency, and trust. Researchers are considered outsiders to Indigenous communities where trust is slow to build. Bridging these communities calls for these groups to foster relationships as both professionals and colleagues; to use ethical research practices and respectful cultural awareness; and to form partnerships that are equal in nature, as Two-Eyed Seeing seeks to remove power dynamics. Indigenous knowledge is informed by both subjective experiences and objective experiences. Because this differs from empirical science, these new partnerships need help when building trust between each perspective.

Building trust begins with author positionality, or introductions between members. Author positionality is the researcher’s intent and

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

introduction of their credentials, experiences, knowledge, and purpose for their involvement within the research (Kovach, 2009). These partnerships are not always dichotomous. Indigenous researchers operating throughout various universities tend to their research with a dual lens: asking questions through scientific inquiry while maintaining a sacred and emotional attachment to the environment in which they are working. This openness and sharing is an effort toward transparency, and it may also involve expressing where one comes from or their ancestral knowledge.

Trust building comes in other areas as well. Concerns may arise when attempting to satisfying everyone within a workplace due to barriers preventing cultural identity and expression and that of empirical evidence and objective data. Dorothy Lippert exemplifies this issue well in her essay “Not the End, Not the Middle, But the Beginning.” Lippert, an Indigenous member working in collections at the National Museum of Natural History, describes a situation where she hosted Cado leadership taking possession of human remains. During this event, the Cado contact arrived and performed a prayer on the human remains. Despite being a sacred moment of honoring an ancestor, this took place in the collections office where a drawer was opened containing the catalogued human remains and the ceremony taking place within the office. The act of reverence and emotion did not cease other activities, unfortunately. As this prayer took place, employees disembarking the elevator walked down a nearby hall, laughing, and obliviously unaware of the emotional impact taking place within the office (Lippert 2008).

Lippert describes the dynamic sequence of events: her frustration toward and embarrassment resulting from these employees, though they were unaware of the situation, her sense of pride in honoring ancestral human remains and making connections with Indigenous members, and the continued research conducted by her fellow coworkers and collaborates. With TEK, two-eyed seeing likely involves discourse and opens unique dialogues. Some knowledge is sacred and requires respect and care, such as human remains, while other knowledge may be limited and restricted to outsiders, such as cultural belongs or plant identification. Identifying and communicating these considerations operates to serve better working relationships, while maintaining the integrity of IK and respect among professionals.

A second approach seeks to achieve the reverse of the isolation position: it considers both Indigenous knowledge and scientific inquiry as credible endeavors, both of which provide useful knowledge to one another. Both are considered valuable pursuits of knowledge but remain separate. Each discipline can validate the other and is useful to some degree, though neither is a complete knowledge base.

Conclusion

Genocide, cultural cleansing, and broken treaties remain a habitual pattern of the U.S. government's treatment of Indigenous peoples as second-class citizens on their own ancestral lands. As attempts are made to decolonize science and promote Indigenous inclusion and representation, fostering fruitful partnerships and collaborations requires Eurocentric research methods to couple with TEK epistemological methodologies. Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, historically, has proven effective in creating resilient and adaptative regimes. As TEK receives further recognition on the global stage, natural resources managers and climate scientists are implementing these techniques, such as prescribed fire and coastal fisheries practices, as the baseline knowledge for sustainable design.

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Tyler Waltz

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