Complexity, Stasis, and Duality

Send him mail.

"Finding the Challenges" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena. Archived columns can be found here. FTC-only RSS feed available here.

In my first column, we looked at three problem areas: *language*, *collectivism*, and *war*. It will most certainly not be the last time we look at those. Our method was that we looked at each problem to see if it presented a challenge which could be addressed with a positive, voluntaryist outlook. That worked rather well, so in this column we will examine *complexity*, *statism*, and *self-ordering phenomena* in a similar way.

Complexity and Occam's Razor

Is there too much complexity in the modern world? Is it greater than in the past? A very, very good friend of mine wryly acknowledges the ills of our world by saying that things are more complex because there are more (too many?) people. I, on the other hand, observe that the human world is only as complex as we have made it, and that that suggests a process which could be reversed, if it were undesirable. I also harbor the strong suspicion that things are not more complex – the Rule of Unforeseen Consequences has dogged every human in the species' history who has mistakenly presumed that foresight was in the human toolkit. Whatever the cause of complexity, we must understand some good tools for dealing with it. Sherlock Holmes would say to take away everything that is false, then what you have left is the truth. Occam would take that further to say that all truth that is repetitive or excessive is not needed. One may say casually, "it is a nice Spring day today, and the traffic light is green." Holmes would say this is what is true, while Occam would say that each is independently true and does not need the other for substantiation.

William of Ockham was a monk and a philosopher. His formulation, purportedly was the Latin, "*Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate*", (i.e., "Plurality is not to be posited without necessity") from Duns Scotus' *Ordinatio*. The first reference that I ever heard to Occam's Razor restated the idea, paraphrased, as "The simplest answer which fits all of the facts is most likely to be the best answer." I use this frequently when solving software

engineering problems, but I have found it to be tremendously effective in unraveling all kinds of knots. Occam's Razor is also frequently called *Lex Parsimoniae*, the Law of Parsimony, where "parsimony" means using the least amount of resources or explanations to solve a problem. Think of how Occam's Razor may apply in your day-to-day, then make up your own statement of it.

So, how shall we use it to solve problems here and now? Simplify! But we also must remember not to oversimplify, or not to seize upon the first simple proposal. We must also assure that a solution *fits all the facts* and that it relies on nothing that is untrue, or even an untested assumption. Then test the result.

I will frequently use Occam's Razor to break down problems into challenges and to suggest a way to answer those challenges. Other good, related tools are the null hypothesis, the dichotomy, and the proposition that negatives cannot be proven. I will cover each of these in the future. I would be glad to cover the idea of common sense, but I can't imagine why you would be here at EVC without having a sufficient grasp already.

Statism as Lock-Down

The discussion so far has brought us to the question also of how not to deal with complexity. Dealing with complexity and disorder and change makes us crazy. A crazy response is to adopt the deer in the headlights posture. Be still, do nothing, maybe change will not see you, kick the can down the road a little. Stasis is the appropriate response to the dynamic? Maybe for peer groups, mobs and other collectives this seems appropriate, but for living individualists and voluntary associations stasis is toxic.

Note that the word "stasis" is the condition in which we experience a "state." And a state is something that will not change unless a cause of change is allowed to happen. A state (powers that be, government) is an attempt to freeze change under the deadly notion that the dynamic might hurt someone. Therefore the government locks us down against (so they say) the things of which they have made us afraid. The outcome for the unsuspecting herd is a loss of individuality and a loss of true choice – a loss of voluntaryism.

Another part of this discussion would describe the stasis point. A stasis point should be the critical point in any critical thinking. If two people can operate on an agreed basis, then it makes further agreements possible. If there is ignorance or deceit about the stasis point, then an agreement is impossible. For instance, when the government lies to or withholds from us for decades the behavior of the CIA, it is impossible for anyone to reach an agreement for the future. The whole idea of democracy dies – there is a false stasis point, relying on the idea that people will determine the behavior of their own government. Another example would be negative campaign ads which keep us away from the true stasis point: are any of these candidates competent to serve?

How should a good voluntaryist deal with such an insidious state (double entendre intended)? Place yourself and your mind outside the lock-down zone. Understand critical thinking, to include Occam's Razor. Look up critical thinking ASAP, and get a better understanding of it, then apply it to at least three cases over the next few days. Be alert for the stasis point; you find it, refusing to rely solely on others.

Yin and Yang

Think of all the things that are related yet are distinct, light and dark, bright and shadow, I and we, land and sea. This is an infinitely repeating phenomenon, both within the finite and the infinite. The Eastern idea of the Yin and Yang captures the essence of duality, status, dynamics, choice, determination, past, present, and future. I wrote above that in the future I would discuss dichotomy, and this discussion is both a small preview and an important discussion in itself. The idea of the Yin and Yang is attendant to the idea of self-ordering. Voluntaryists (many libertarians, individualists, and anarchists, too) base their precepts on Natural Law. Self-ordering and self-organization are fundamental to Natural Law. Many things, left alone, will take care of themselves – the Yin and Yang will balance, and they will do this dynamically, perpetually.

The self-ordering of existence makes it impossible to control. But control is really letting go. Voluntarily release yourself. If the Yang is troubling, the Yin will be quieting. There is always a Yang; it clarifies the Yin. This is not an argument against free will. We are usually taught that we must use our free will to resist determination. But choosing, voluntarily, to allow natural order is a positive exercise of free will. To form a state as a bastion against natural order is a negative exercise of free will by stealing the will of others.

My last thought today is that, in a nutshell, an effective voluntaryist will combine his or her life to include appropriate balances, between simplicity and complexity, between voluntaryism and living in a statist society, and between control and self-ordering.

ps – I was listening to Adam Kokesh on "Adam vs the Man" for March 18, 2013 as I prepared to complete this article. There were two news articles he shared which, it seemed to me, presented food for thought to the committed voluntaryist. The articles dealt with 1) the recent revelation that Blackwater may have been breaking laws at the requests of the CIA, and 2) a new tax on private savings proposed by the government of Cyprus. We'll discuss these in the next column, two weeks from this publication, which will give the stories time to develop so that we can make some principled observations about the challenges presented to voluntaryism.