

Cats and Dogs, Dysfunctions of a Collective, YALFE



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"Finding the Challenges" is an original 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](#).

Last week I started to write an essay on the human condition, but it turned into a tangent where I compared and contrasted cats, dogs, and people. I had to put it on the back burner, but now having re-read it, I have decided to share it with you as an allegorical piece having to do with views on natural law and collectives. I also discovered notes to myself that I had made nearly half a year ago about an audiobook to which I had listened, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* by Patrick Lencioni. A team, whether voluntary or not, is a collective, therefore I have transposed these dysfunctions to the broader generic group, collectives. We will review the dysfunctions but not recommend specific remedies, mostly because I remain convinced that these dysfunctions are features of collective systems, not bugs. The only general remedy is probably the disbanding of the collective itself. Then I will finish this column with YALFE (yet another logic fallacy essay.)

Cats and Dogs

An allegory is an extended metaphor in either a factual or fictional mode intended to demonstrate one or more principles by storytelling. Two of the most famous allegories are Plato's Allegory of the Cave and George Orwell's Animal Farm.

A few days ago, on my 71st birthday, I finally admitted to myself that I am a cat person. This is a development by which cats everywhere are unconcerned, beyond a casual recognition that this is as it should be.

I don't mean to imply that cats are uncaring about their human acquaintances, in fact I suspect that they have a great deal of affection for humans who can take care of themselves.

I have always been a dog person, and I love them still, but really they are too much like humans and too intertwined with humans. For instance, I would predict that if humans

ceased to occupy the Earth that dogs would follow within a generation. But cats, on the other hand, would remain as well as continue their domain atop the mammalian world. The biosphere would become at once much simpler and more complex.

These observations are coincident with another concern I have about humanity; we tend to react to events as a pack of dogs (often converted into rage and violence by an easy attitude toward individual responsibility, logic, and reason) not as separate, and distinct, cats who view everything, individually, in the long term, and in enlightened self-interest.

If we read Henry Hazlitt's single economic lesson - that all things should be measured for both short term and long term effects, as well as their effects on all possible interest groups over both periods, we can see the comparisons and contrasts among dogs, people, and cats. In an aside, I think that Hazlitt's lesson is true of all endeavors, not just economics. Hazlitt's complaint, in my view, about humans is that they usually focus on the short term, and only the groups that have short term interests. Dogs are entirely concerned about nothing but the current situation and specifically what are their own interests in that situation. Humans do a little better - they always react in the short term but they repent in the long term (I'm not claiming that they set things right in the long term). Cats, on the other hand, always react to both the short and the long term, never repenting either behavior and never sacrificing the latter for a better piece of the former. In short, dogs are egotists, people are statisticians, and cats are anarchists.

The other day, we had quite a thunder and lightning show at the farm. My dogs ran crazy wherever I happened to be, with their tongues out, showing excesses of the whites of their eyes. I only moved about in my pickup truck, only touching foot to ground when the storm appeared to abate. Meanwhile, all of the cats disappeared not to return until the coast was clear. The dogs acted as though the storm would have no ending. I acted as though there were certain judicious short term things I could do with proper care. The cats reasoned that there were no short term benefits whatsoever that would outweigh their long term expectation that the storm would end.

Another view would be of how natural law applies in this comparison. The dogs, although ruled entirely by natural law, would have sought intervention from any source, such as a congressional bill to outlaw lightning. The common human, although the completely contained subject of natural law, always entertains the notion that big brother is a lightning rod who will always absorb the lightning bolts on his behalf. The cats, the knowing beneficiaries of natural law who reject all artificial legislation as immaterial, just hunker down until natural law becomes auspicious again.

If there is a next life, I want to come to it as a cat. Otherwise, I may as well become a pure and simple dog.

Dysfunctions of a Collective

A while back I read Patrick Lencioni's work on improving team work, and while I was reading it I began to feel that what he called dysfunctions of a team were really obstacles, and that the decision to use a team approach (say the founding of a nation-state) was an affirmative decision to invoke these obstacles. When we ask the logical question, "*cui bono* (who benefits)," we begin to see that it may not be us!

- Absence of trust—unwilling to be *vulnerable* within the group. Most groups seem to be run on peer pressure, not the efficient interaction of peers (equal stations in a network of similarly resourced producers). Peer pressure often manifests as *ad hominem* appeal. Motivation by fear is a prominent example.
- Fear of conflict—seeking *artificial harmony* over constructive passionate debate. Informal taboos are indoctrinated in the group, both formally and informally. Social and legal sanctions are implemented against those who do not support group action, for instance those who do not support a war.
- Lack of commitment—feigning buy-in for group decisions creates *ambiguity* throughout the organization. In the case of government, buy-in is synthesized by allowing "freedom to vote," which essentially only allows a token behavior with out any palpable outcome. The method becomes very *pro forma*, not allowing the consideration of real change.
- Avoidance of accountability—ducking the responsibility to call peers on counterproductive behavior which sets *low standards*. If the organization does not create workable accountability measures, there is no practical way that individuals can overcome this inertia. How is representative government working out for you?
- Inattention to results—focusing on personal success, *status and ego* before team success. Ritual buttons and bows pop up all over the place. Gold stars, ribbons, red circles with red diagonal lines, and color-coded threat levels are substituted for real world conditions. Nearly all results are obfuscated.

Now, in the book from which I got this list, there was a small group with complementary goals. They made the defeat of these dysfunctions their only goal and did nothing else until the transformation was done. And they all reported directly to the same CEO, and were answerable to no one else. But it doesn't take much imagination to see that the chances of overcoming any one of these problems are very small in a voluntarist world. If each obstacle only has a 50% chance of being overcome, there is only a 25% chance that any specific pair will be solved, and only 3.125% that all five will be overcome. Yet the chance of destruction if any one is failed is nearly 100%. Do you see government or government schools when you look at these numbers? Do you see collectivism?

YALFE — The False Cause

This is the case when a premise is presumed that a real or perceived relationship between

things means that one is the cause of the other. A classic layman's example is, "the sidewalk is wet so it must have rained." But there is a wide and deep variety of this logic error plaguing the very foundations of human discourse.

The base error here is misdiagnosing cause and effect. Rationalizations often take the form of the mental lapse of saying, I see an outcome, so there must be a cause, and working backward I can jump on the first thing I see as a candidate. Entire systems of justice are based on this. Think of the trial by ordeal, wherein the accused is exposed to some grave danger, such as being made to walk a bed of hot coals. If she survives the ordeal, then obviously the fairies have deemed her "not guilty." Jurisprudence throughout the world is not far advanced from this idea. Nowadays, a more poignant model is frequently seen in "If you have nothing to hide then you have nothing to fear." This should be restated as "If you have nothing to hide AND you expect no more quality of life than an earthworm then you have nothing to fear."

The misunderstanding of how things came to be is a widespread outbreak of the false cause. It is essentially the forgetting of the original WHY question. Why do we do it this way? Well because that's the way we have always done it (a fallacy on its face). We substitute an impossibility for the true answer to the WHY question. In other cases we come up with new reasons to gloss over that the current activity is no longer based on specific facts. SWAT teams were once justified by the facts that in certain high-crime environments very complex law enforcement conditions could arise. Now the presence of SWAT teams is mostly the outcome of keeping up with the Joneses.

Another source of confusion is that true cause-and-effect contains an overwhelming set of probabilities. Almost every effect has multiple causes, nearly all causes have plural effects, and very few of either yield to effective isolation for analysis.

I recently had a dust-up with a lawyer over the meaning of due process. I had used the phrase to advance the principle that humans should not have property (in the broadest sense) taken away without due process (in a broad natural law context). The lawyer argued that since "due process" appeared specifically in the Constitution of the US (does it really? yes.) that I must be making a legal argument, so that since I wasn't a real lawyer, I didn't know what I was talking about. Our cultural version of due process comes down from the Magna Carta and English Common Law. The idea did not arise with the codification of law, through legislation; it in fact preceded the written code. The barrister also stated that "due process" was a tool reserved only for the use of the statist practitioners of statist legislation, therefore real humans need not apply. Let's understand this clearly, the abuse of deliberation, the rush to judgment, preceded any man-made legislation (as opposed to natural law). Observance of law that is not based on a true human need is the observance of dalliance.

At some future date we will explore more deeply two related ideas, whether a man can agree in advance to waive either property or due process by voluntarily joining an association, and whether something that is clear in natural law can be modified away in legislation.

All three of the above challenges impact our ability to function in a voluntaryist world. If we perceive them clearly, we can make the transition to voluntaryism. By making comparisons among identifiable groups, like cats, humans, and dogs, we can see the value of adjusting our perceptions to see things in both the short and long terms, and we can see how actions affect our own cases over the short and long terms. The history of mankind is fraught with miscalculation, then compounded with inappropriate response. This is due more from failure to understand the threat of false cause than from all other sources combined. Clarity is a basic tool for living — grasping causality, and understanding that most causality is so complex as to defeat what we think of as common sense or practical knowledge. And we can see how perceptual problems warp our day to day responses. We must seek to see the multiverse of effect by understanding how changes in any causality, say the passage of time, affect outcomes. We can strive to minimize the tendency to try to solve everything through teamwork for the sake of teamwork and permanent collective for the sake of permanent collectivism (or worse, for the sake of power and control). We must come to see causality as natural and complex, not simple and simply solved.

“Explanations exist; they have existed for all time; there is always a well-known solution to every human problem — neat, plausible, and wrong.” - H. L. Mencken

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