The Structure of Your Principles

Part of the challenge of lifelong learning is to understand that the goal is not to add to your collection of "well what do you know's", but to assimilate your new knowledge with the creation of, revisiting, modification of, or withdrawing (shedding) from your current set of principles.

It does one no good to regard new information as just "interesting," one needs to test that new learning against the structure, the principles, of one's information system.

For instance, my information system is built, in the main, on the principle that all human interactions should be one-to-one and voluntary on both sides. An incorporated principle is the Golden Rule.

I have other principles that are complementary to the above. I believe that I am personally responsible for myself. I believe that I own my space and time. I believe that unnatural violence is always wrong. I believe that it would be wrong to infringe on others' space and time unless they give them voluntarily in full view of consequences.

What is the structure of your principles? First of all, your principles should be connected, each to each of the others. This is the way the Internet is structured. If a node on the Internet becomes inoperable then all of the undamaged nodes can still reach all of the other undamaged nodes. The Internet can survive the temporary nonavailability of any node, part, or segment, short of total loss.

Voluntary individuality works the same way. For every relationship that a voluntaryist keeps, all of the dependencies should be strictly on a one-to-one footing. All features of the relationship are voluntarily agreed upon between the two parties. Each party is able to maintain as many similar relationships, independently, as she chooses. One-to-one relationships do not require a license from some 3rd party individual or collective. In software engineering, my professional calling, we refer to a system having high cohesion and low coupling. Cohesion is the degree to which an object fulfills a single function (desirable). Coupling is the degree to which an object is dependent on more than one other object (undesirable).

As one's set of principles is an interlocking complex, effectiveness and efficiency are raised by high cohesiveness, but low coupling. Let's look at some examples.

The non-aggression principle (NAP) is a mainstay of libertarian voluntaryism. It is cohesive in that it governs only one aspect of any human relationship. Is it violent? Yes or no? I define the NAP as prohibiting violence, in all cases. If the relationship is violent it cannot be under the NAP, because it does not follow the principle. The rest of this piece concerns

itself with coupling.

There are a few critical subsets of the principle. Has the individual initiated the violence —
as children may insist, "he started it?" And, did one party act in self-defense. Note that
self-defense does not comply with the NAP; it is only an exception by which the perpetrator
may not be condemned (dependent on the clear cut definition of the behavior). I repeat,
for clarity in a seldom acknowledged fact, self-defense does not comply with the NAP, it is
merely a condition under which the NAP may not be applicable. Likewise, non-initiation is
not an excuse for ignoring the NAP. It is merely a possible mitigation for analyzing the
NAP. If either party initiates violence, the NAP is moot — it cannot be stretched to fit the
case.

Some people will say that the NAP is not a pacifist doctrine, but despite popular opinion to
the contrary, it is pacifistic. The composition fallacy often arises because self-defense (in a
true sense) is a natural right, and it appeals to common sense when considering complex
or fuzzy cases. Some extend this composition fallacy to cover retaliation (committing
delayed violence in retribution for an earlier violence). It is not true that capital
punishment or any form of revenge is under the wing of the NAP.

The NAP is a principle that requires very careful and close parsing or expression. This is
true as well for its associated principles: self-defense is a natural right and if violence is
initiated then the NAP is out of the question for the initiator.

The purpose of a principle is to set a plan for action for similar cases in the future. The
NAP, for instance, gives us a narrowed selection of choices when we encounter violence
from another or feel compelled to initiate violence. But all cases do not fall into neat rows.
 The ability to deal with fuzziness arises from a multitude of highly general (one size fits
most) principles, along with very few and very specific exceptions.Every event in the
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Every event in the present and past should be reviewed with principle in mind. Important
questions are these:

- Does the event invoke a principle?
- If the event is not within the four corners of a principle, are there associated principles
  that account for the differences?
- Are there other principles that come into play?
- How do these other principles relate to the primary principle?
- How clear is each of the principles that apply to the event?

In consideration of the last question above, let's look at an example, the Golden Rule:

- The Golden Rule is "Treat others as you wish to be treated."
- Treat others as **they'd** like to be treated.
- Treat yourself as you'd treat someone else.
- Don't let other people treat you badly.
- One should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated (negative or prohibitive form).
- What you wish upon others, you wish upon yourself (empathic or responsive form).

As we can see the Golden Rule covers its own scope, but there are related maxims outside of its literal scope. The individual must decide for each rule and the area covered by it.

Lastly, we might consider the mathematics of interacting entities. If two individuals interact on one principle, there are 4 possibilities; both are right or A is right while B is wrong or A is wrong while B is right or both are wrong. If two individuals interact on 2 related principles:

	Principle Y True	Principle Y False	Principle Z True	Principle Z False
Individual A	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
Individual B	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
Individual A	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
Individual B	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE

Horizontally, there are 16 cases, while vertically, there are 16 cases; 32 in total. By adding one related principle, we have increased the possibilities by eightfold.

If we add a third related principle, we multiply by 8 again, arriving at 256 different sets of agreement/disagreement. The same kinds of multiples show up if we increase the number of individuals.

It is very daunting to keep multiples of principles straight, or multiples of individuals straight. That is why a voluntaryist wants to keep interpersonal relationships on a one-to-one footing, and principles as close to Ockham's Razor as possible. My version of Ockham's Razor is: the simplest set of matters which fits all of the facts, no more, no less.