

Consciousness, Identity, and Natural Rights

The right of a conscious entity to its own life is an objectively definable outcome of its volitional nature. In other words, the right to oneself and one's extracorporeal possessions are indeed a fact of nature. The critics of the "natural right" premise suffer a misunderstanding of the nature of human consciousness and of life itself. This misunderstanding is partially attributable to the shallowness of libertarian philosophy on the relationship of identity, consciousness and existence. For example, in a recent article, John A. Goodson and David M. Longinotti ("Those 'Natural' Rights Aren't," Reason, September 1977, p. 34) takes some easy but well-merited potshots at some unquestioned libertarian boilerplate. They draw attention to the questionable idea that an objective rationale can be directly inferred from an unrefined standard of organismic existence. Quite naturally it cannot, or when it served our momentary convenience we should permit ourselves to descend to the predatory behavior analogous to some large carnivores. The point is that a well-functioning conscious being does not act merely to sustain its corporeal existence but its ethical self-identity. True, humans employing reason to some extent, prey on others for their sustenance but in the process they betray everything of ultimate significance in their lives in the process. A fully developed human being does not "survive" as a mobile piece of meat which betrays its highest informational patterns for the sake of temporary advantage because by its nature a conscious, self-reflecting, self-directing being lives in its own mind. Consciousness is a phenomenon of nature. The concept of identity, as is the case of all concepts, is also an irreducible and ever-present aspect of nature. Identity is not a reification of simpler, unrelated items of nature, it is the name given to the most interrelated patterning of things -- the abstract of the personality. In a self-conscious being able to reflect on the value of its existence for itself, identity is the abstract for its Self: the thing which ultimately experiences and values. One does not have to resort to Platonist ideal forms to acknowledge the presence of this conscious self.

That many persons are bereft of an "integrated personality" i.e. one in which a central ethical standard guides the preservation of an abstracted concept of self above all else, does not suffice as an ultimate logical coup de grace against the objective validity of ethical standards and, thus, the idea of "right". The term "nature" is often employed simultaneously with two meanings (as it is in the Goodson and Longinotti article). When Ayn Rand employs the term, she means the ultimate and universal structure of the human species which is inescapable in its consequence. This is not the same "nature" as the colloquial "human nature" which indiscriminately incorporates ephemeral, transient and often patently diseased states. For example, it is not ineluctable in human "nature" to suffer cancer or cholera. Just as obviously, one does not have to be a thief or a murderer. But to be human, one must exist corporeally, be conscious, and maintain an identity. These are inescapable consequences of being "human".

Goodson and Longinotti carry over their confusion of ephemeral nature with ultimate ineluctable nature in attempting to argue from the apparent ambiguity of human identity. They assert that if, as Ayn Rand asserts, humans cannot live other than as humans, their conduct is (ultimately), determined by their nature, then their argument follows, that since human's do in fact plunder, that their nature is something other than what Rand asserts it is and, thus, must be! Or as they say, "...to maintain that a human can have characteristics that are not human is to assert that A can be not-A, thus attempting to deny the law of identity." This is a good example of post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy. It posits that since human conduct is often

savage, it is by "nature" ineluctably savage. It confuses ephemeral conditions with the basic structure of human personality. Human identity is the capacity for consciously reasoned choice not the mechanically predetermined necessity of reasoned choice. In fact, intimating that if being capable of reasoned choice demands that all choice be reasoned or the entity is no longer capable, thus, not what it was originally classed, is to misunderstand consciousness itself. It works on trial and error. The world is so constructed that the same action never attains exactly the same result. In fact, the Universe of possibilities is so immense, that consciousness is a natural response of adaptive evolution to complex environmental uncertainties threatening organismic survival. The crucial characteristic of reasoned choice which is a capacity of a developed consciousness is that it is changeable and often lacking. Human nature in order to be capable of reasoned choice must also be vulnerable to error. You can't have it any other way. A is A (once one identifies "A" in its essentials). Savagery is an error. It is a lack of reasoning ability which comes of the overall structure of consciousness.

Rand in her polemic to emphasize the positive aspects of human nature and render it heroic, fails to provide a balanced explanation of the nature of error, thus, leaving Natural Rights theory open to attack.

Human identity cannot be defined by the statistical performance of a diseased population. Goodson and Longinotti miss the entire point of human volitional nature which is, by the way, a phenomenal fact of nature (or there would be no disagreement possible between us).

Though it is within man's range of behavior to initiate violence it is ultimately at odds with his fully developed nature. Not recognizing the justifiable possession of others to themselves is an exceedingly dangerous way of life. It not only establishes a motive for revenge but a precedent for others to do the same. It destroys the fabric of human relationships which produces life-giving wealth. The concept of "right" is not a subjective invention but an objectively derived abstraction from the nature of conscious existence. Awareness of what one is can only have meaning according to a standard. The standard, to be objective, cannot be limited to one's subjective desires but must, insofar as is possible, encompass universal principles. Meeting the highest standard possible is the inescapable basis for happiness of a developed consciousness. It is the basis for satisfaction. The old saying that "virtue is its own reward" is true. To experience one's own integration is more important, more fulfilling than even the perceived certainty of continued existence.

One's "life" is more than biological existence. It is more than consciousness. It is the achievement of an integrated personality which lives for itself and nothing else. One's identity is the uppermost consideration in a triadic hierarchy. Existence is the lowest on the scale. To live as an organ of meat is vastly inferior to living as a conscious entity. But to live as a conscious entity without standard and without self-respect is inferior to the maintenance of an ethical identity. Choices requiring risk to one's existence in sustaining one's ethical identity are as objectively valid as a category. Death for the integrated personality is preferable to an irreparable betrayal of its standard.

The objective consequence of consciousness is the quest for self-perfection. There is no bigger or better thing to seek ultimately. The fact that large numbers of entities enjoying similar physiological characteristics appear to have failed in attaining an understanding of their self-identity is merely more evidence of error. It is surely not an inductive argument for the validation of an even more gross error -- the rejection of ultimate purpose and significance by those who could (and should) know better. In the same spirit, we might as well enshrine moronism as a vindication of epistemological skepticism.

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formal accord as between private firms. Our political apparatus will, of course, not be limited to one party but will operate in all practical spheres - Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, Socialist, etc. Political candidates for office covertly in support of our position (or at least willing to collaborate for non-ideological purposes) will, according to agreement, receive our support in return for their aid in office. All of this will require a powerful economic base able to produce high rates of return on investment. Not only will the black market underground provide funds for "buying" politicians but all-necessary forms of intelligence gathering and illicit skills for the political apparatus.

Our military force must of course be voluntary, however, once volunteers have accepted contractual obligations to serve they may, as stipulated in their agreement, lose their life for failure to perform assigned duties or betraying their associates. These and other problems arising within the revolutionary apparatus will have to be adjudicated by underground courts through the application of our own legal system.

- Parsons Lingg

SPLITTING UP! - Continued from page 12

sion of Anarcho-capitalist theory. We should be glad that Efron is accentuating the differences between minarchists and anarchists, as it will permit the formulation of a revolutionary programme unhindered by constitutionalist republican misgivings or faint-heartedness. The programme must, of course, move irreconcilably and unalterably towards the total abolition and dismantlement of the State. Only by providing a radically different alternative to Statism which is logically consistent can we hope to attract the support of the American people. Efron's minimal statism has no chance of doing this. It may have some transient appeal to that sector of society which momentarily benefits from statist capitalism or who suffer from the chauvinist cultural nostalgia of a bygone era but ultimately it will fail. Anarcho-capitalism is the future, Statism the past. We have a total cure for the ills of our epoch. Those who hate Communism, not only in form but in essence, should join us, for we are the true antagonists and ideological conquerors of altruist-collectivism. Efron and the rest of the Objectivist debacle have no chance of defeating Communism through statism of any kind, they will only contribute to its rise as did the misguided Conservatism of Bismark, Hitler, Nixon et al.

Vanquish the State!

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As things get more complex the chances for error increases and with it the success rate falls. In evolved conscious beings, however, survival is ultimately a concern of the individual. The actual experience of one's consciousness ultimately becomes the overriding value. The disintegration of one's neighbor organisms is not proof for the dismissal of identity. A conscious organism does not live to copy error -- that would be against its developed nature. And, in fact, the whole idea of consciousness is development. The inherent dynamism of consciousness and its ethical crystallization goes against the simplistic Goodson-Longinotti ploy which substitutes a static reification of what has to be a process. A process, which in terms of human experience and psycho-epistemology must take place in the a-historical Now. Thus, ethical identity, the personal experience of one's worth, of one's own existentially consistent geometry of value, is probably the most direct, most knowable phenomenon of a conscious life.

The nature of rational consciousness is essential for the understanding of Anarcho-capitalist ethics and rights theory. Conventional statist ideologies obscure the overriding importance of consciousness and identity. This partly motivated by the altruist-collectivist demand for the egalitarian reduction of the role of the basic egoism of individuals. Our whole philosophy and political ideology rests on volitional consciousness and ethical identity as objective necessities of a developed human nature.

- Richard R. Slomon

WARRIOR ETHIC - Continued from page 17

own credo. And this is fine in capitalist society where rational self-interest leads individuals to create and produce values for voluntary exchange in the marketplace. Each trades goods of lower value to himself than those he receives in exchange. This is the basis for Creator Class life, outside of thwarting certain criminal aberrations, the conflict level of war as I have defined it does not fit. Is there an unbridgeable epistemological and ethical dichotomy between Creator and Warrior in libertarian society?

No there is not. The Warrior does not surrender a higher value for a lower value which is the essence of a sacrificial act. The essential idea of a libertarian Creator is that as a being he maintains integrity by living according to his nature. This means his life's profession, is to meet the challenge of real conditions and triumph over them. The consciousness that he is doing this is the basis for his self-esteem and fulfillment, i.e., his happiness. The sum of the values he consciously holds and the attitudes which he has carefully adopted the requirements of his life are the components of his identity. His physical existence is not denied but ultimately it is the values which he identifies as himself which are supreme in his life. The requirements of being a Warrior or meeting the challenge of reality fully and unequivocally are exactly the heroic requirements in principle which rule the life of the Creator. By triumphing in meeting the requirements of his profession, the Warrior is being selfish in the most ultimate sense. He will permit nothing from interfering from his maximizing of his own self-identity. Not even the continuation of his own physical existence.

In fact, this primacy of self-identity is the basis for the heroism of the fictional characters depicted in Ayn Rand's novels Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead. It is discernable in a number of professions. These include architect, steelmaker, miner, and scientist. The principle interest of each characterization is in the integrity of their work as the central validation of one's life to oneself. The primary interest is not in physical survival per se but in maintaining an integrity of values with the requirements of life as a whole. Ironically, it is the Warrior's epistemological requirement in the necessity of his work, of his mission, which highlights the true heroism of libertarian selfishness. A selfishness which springs from a maximal identification with truth. A selfishness which is the willingness to wrench a consciously explicit self-identity from the jaws of fear and ambivalence.

- Richard R. Slomon

FOOTNOTES

1. L.A. Frost, "Military Affairs - Warrior Ethic and Free Society", Quest, Vol. 1, No. 1, February, 1975, and in "Military Affairs - De Novo", Quest, Vol. 1, No. 2, March, 1975.