Balance

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Competition and Cooperation:

One fundamental principle of human relations is that all individuals pursue self-interest, *i.e.*, competition. This is observable in all living organisms, for survival and reproduction in nonhuman species, as it is in humans. But human interests may be seen to be more varied and individually defined, less simple. Evolutionary biologists have no difficulty explaining competition – individuals who survive and reproduce pass behavior that promotes survival to their offspring; hence, what is usually called "social Darwinism.". But species, subspecies, and other groups also have another survival characteristic - cooperation. The evolution of cooperative behavior in individuals is more difficult to explain, since the cooperating individual may be compromising its self-interest, but it is generally observed, and must promote the survival of species. Naturalists report an almost infinite variety of cooperative behaviors for survival and reproduction: hive insects, pack animals, harems, and pair bonds, to nurture offspring. But it is noteworthy that the patterns of competition and cooperation are limited, and particular to the species. The human species, in contrast, varies widely *within* the species, from culture to culture, and individual to individual. But the fundamental duality of competition and cooperation remains.

I would suggest that we should see competition and cooperation as two basic assumptions for reasoning about human custom, law, and ethics, since they are universally observable in all living things, as in humans. All individuals do, and should, pursue self-interest in some sense, and in human relations, these interests vary. But all human societies and groups define limits to protect cooperative interests: laws (enforced by government coercion) and ethics and customs (maintained by social disapproval). In nonhuman species the forms and limits are mostly genetically prescribed, whereas in humans they may be learned and may even be negotiated.

An amusing example familiar to most of us might be behavior at a traffic light, and street behavior generally. Upon observing that the light has changed from green to yellow, some drivers stop as quickly as possible, others speed up to get through, and yet others go through even after it has turned to red (possibly with a raised middle finger to others!). There is presumably traffic law operating here, but also custom and courtesy, and significant variation among individuals. It is interesting to notice that much cooperative behavior seen here seems to have developed spontaneously, with little

intervention by police officers, or lecturing of moral teachers. Deterioration in unorganized cooperative behavior might reasonably be a sign of deterioration in society.

Rhetoric of religious, social, and political activists tends to frame the duality of competition and cooperation in polemic terms. On the political left, "capitalism" tends to be the term of supreme evil, and "socialism" the obvious good; on the right, traditional conservatives exactly reverse these two. There are even anarchistic radicals on *both* sides who each seem to say that if government could be abolished, we might enjoy (as they prefer) a socialist utopia or a market (capitalist) utopia! Pietistic rhetoric of many religions exhorts believers to abandon self-interest entirely, in service to others or to some holy cause. Political rhetoric (with which we are all too familiar) takes a predictable form: join and contribute to our cause (cooperate) to defeat our proclaimed enemies (compete).

It seems to me that much of this rhetoric is misguided; rather we should acknowledge the duality of competition and cooperation and study how to negotiate laws and customs that protect peaceful pursuit of individual self-interest, encourage productive, cooperative intercourse, and are acceptable to as many persons as possible.

Powers of Human Society and Government

For example, public (*i.e.,* government) schools and libraries are a current point of bitter contention. It is understandable that conscientious parents want to control their children's education and character formation, and believe this is their right. This said, we should concede that any society has a reasonable interest in education of children to become good citizens, *i.e.* able to support themselves and live at peace with others, and that some parents do exist who either do not care about their children's education, or would even like to educate them to attack or exploit the society they live in. Some compromise must be found between individual rights and social order, acknowledging that children are not the property of either their parents, a church, or society, but are or will be self-owning individuals.

For another example, conservative moral reasoning often seems to assume that sex exists solely for reproduction, and thus there are only two sexes, male and female, and only male to female relations, sanctioned by church and state, are moral. This seems to me to drastically understate the complexity of human (and nonhuman) sexuality and how we can observe that it actually works. We observe that all societies set limits of custom and law on sexual relations. (The traditions of our society prescribe separate bath and toilet facilities, and separate athletic competitions, for males and females. Practical arguments might be made easier for the second than the first.) We observe also that some people claim sexual preference or identity other than what seems obvious to others. Can they have this right without violating the rights of others? We

may reason that different sexual inclinations and practices of consenting adults do not infringe on any rights of those who do not share them. We must weigh what sort of constraints do indeed guard the rights of all parties, including children not yet able to assert their rights.

Another point of current controversy is citizenship: the right to vote and seek public office. No one denies that those entitled to vote should be encouraged to do so, but many express fears that noncitizens are often voting, and demand protective measures that might discourage lawful voters, especially the poor and elderly. It is noteworthy that, here as elsewhere, fear of lawbreaking is used to justify risking lawful rights. (This issue arises over gun control, as well as police powers, with "left" and "right" on reversed sides!)

Democratic Decision Making:

Note that the authors of the Constitution did not favor a broad "democracy". Most of them considered it obvious that power should be held by an elite (white, male, propertied). Moreover, they needed equity between states, not people; thus, they constructed the Electoral College for the Presidency and the (two members per state) Senate, and left the determination of who voted to the states. These compromises were essential to secure ratification of the Constitution by the thirteen original states; it does not follow that they cannot be modified to suit a nation of 50 states, seeking equity among persons the authors did not imagine as potential citizens.

Note also that the definition of "democracy" is not obvious and is even subject to paradox in case there are more than two choices. (See George G. Szpiro, *Numbers Rule*, on the mathematical problem.)

There is a natural tendency to want a political process that generates the results one wants, thus, to see a fair election as, "My side wins!" But a more dispassionate thinker recognizes the need to work with those who disagree on many points, but may agree on a general process. There might be a broad agreement on reform of the Electoral College and some sort of "ranked choice" in elections to choose from three or more candidates, if any agreement at all is possible under present circumstances. (See also William Poundstone, *Gaming the Vote: Why Elections Aren't Fair (and What We Can Do About It)* on election reform.).

We might ask what a "reasonable" citizen's desires and expectations of an electoral system are, and what compromises they should be open to. (We assume that "reasonable" implies both that one is aware of consequences of one's choices and that one is willing to allow rights to those with whom one disagrees, as one expects for oneself.)

1. The system must reach a clear, non-contradictory conclusion, as promptly as possible.

2. My choice should affect that conclusion if "sufficient" others agree with me, and on a like basis to others.

3. Some essential rights (of mine, and thus also of others who may disagree with me) must not be violated even with sufficient agreement.

Conditions like these could be a basis for negotiation and compromise. (See also Guy Ottewell, *Approval Voting in the Balance,* Universal Workshop, 2019.)

It is also reasonable to suppose, in a *representative* democracy, that each citizen wants a representative sharing the citizen's critical values or qualities. (These might be ethnicity, culture, or location, but not necessarily so.)   Modern technology might enable a better way to accomplish this than geographical districts. Suppose that any citizen could declare candidacy as a representative by paying a suitable fee, and thus be allowed to publish their values and qualities. Others would be allowed to choose that person as representative if they agree, and the representative would exercise power proportional to the number of supporters. Candidates with some designated number of supporters would be entitled to be seated in the representative body, casting a vote proportional to the number of such supporters. Candidates would be allowed to form alliances to reach the designated standard.

Some have speculated on more equitable standards for participation, other than ancestry, property, or formal education. It seems desirable to restrict decision making to those who can and will take their responsibility seriously. We take it for granted that immigrants seeking citizenship should pass examinations and pledge public service if called, though no such requirement is asked of natural born citizens.   (Young men are required to register for a draft, but have never been called.)   Consider a piece of unconventional reading on the subject: the novel *Starship Troopers*, by Robert A. Heinlein. (It should be understood that this is a work of fiction, not necessarily a proposal.) Heinlein imagines a future society in which citizenship can only be obtained by a satisfactory term of public service, which would often include personal risk. Applicants are accepted without bias as to sex, age, or ethnicity. The volunteer is allowed to express preferences as to the form of service, but is required to serve as assigned. Fans of his era of science fiction will know that Heinlein is famous for "future history." In this novel he goes into great detail as to how this practice developed, how it works, and its philosophical justifications. I do not argue (nor is it clear that Heinlein was

arguing) that we should adopt such a practice, only that it is provocative to consider. (Note: Read the novel; avoid the movie based on it!)

Generalities

Observing the balance of self-interested competition and social cooperation in human custom and law, we might speculate on what compromises are possible and what assumptions would make them possible. We can observe that some cooperative behavior develops naturally in human associations without coercion or obvious planning, without disappearance of competitive motives. Individuals could agree on compromises if

1. they recognize each other as similar in behavior and motivation,

2. they anticipate benefits in cooperative action,

3. they can conceive an interest in limiting immediate self interest by allowing rights to others which they expect for themselves.

Clearly, failure or weakening of these conditions may account for the fragility of human societies. It may be fatal to democratic consensus if significant groups conclude either

1. "We are strong enough that we don't need to compromise with them!"

2. "We have no hope of enough strength to protect our rights peacefully, and thus must resort to fraud or violence!"