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1 A polite correction [12 Jan 2019 / 15 Sep 2019]

This piece of happiness needs to be shared. There is a grocery product that I dearly love. The company recently raised its price one-third by packaging fewer pieces per bag. After about a month, the packaging again showed the LARGER count—which should mean that the price went back DOWN. I again purchased the product.

However, after my purchase I found only the lower count of pieces—appearing like overcharging followed by FRAUD!

The best response? Certainly not to call the police! I chose to telephone this small local company, where my call was answered by someone actually involved in the operation, possibly the owner. This person checked the packaging and found that indeed, the bag supplier had provided bags imprinted with the OLD amount, and the assembly line had not caught the change.

Am I satisfied? Yes! If the condition persists, that would become a problem, and grocers would probably discontinue carrying the product. Instead, I anticipate that my alert has already set in motion the corrective procedures. The company can monitor the bag supplier's deliveries, and I can continue to enjoy this excellent product. Producer and consumer acting in good faith realize mutual benefit.

This is more than a story of polite cooperation. It also serves to demonstrate how citizens resolve differences without resort to government force. Good merchants know the value of fairness in keeping customers, and they are as responsive to me, the consumer, as they would be to officers of the law. We implemented constructive action instead of punitive (hurtful) measures. Law enforcement is freed to spend its time on intentional fraud.

2 The promised land: Mexico [9 Mar 2019]

Can we learn to **support Mexico as the Promised Land—the destination of choice**? I'm not thinking overcrowded refugee camps. I'm thinking SEMI-AUTONOMOUS (self-governed) PERMANENT SETTLEMENTS where people of similar (international, primarily Spanish speaking) background can start a new life including agriculture and cottage industry from the start. These people have already entered Mexico, out of the reach of their former persecutors. Strengthening them where they are seems much closer to economic viability (for them and for Mexico) than trying to push water uphill across yet another international border.

Let us not subject these suffering fellow beings to a bitterly divided hostile government that takes their children away from them. Mexico makes a better offer! Willingness to participate in a new life makes refugees a priceless infusion. Let us offer our economic and spiritual resources in a way that Mexico will receive as a blessing and her immigrants will use to create a new world standard.

— This category invites a lot of research: history and sociology of resettlement; economics of diverse spontaneous societies; participatory government by default inclusion; Mexican law. Please post comments indicating where this topic thread takes you. The most promising submissions will be invited to write additional posts to flesh out our study.

3 Healthy happy lucky you [31 Oct 2019]

You have come to the place where happiness is contagious, where sharing makes us happy and happiness makes us share.

Aristotle taught us that the purpose of life is happiness. Maybe we would have evolved without happiness *motivation*, but once we are here, happiness is our *choice*. We *celebrate* the human condition.

Health is the foundation of our happiness. Specifically, mental health called PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) is our capacity to achieve happiness and realize when we have it. *Physical* and *social* health are priceless contributions to our happiness, while *mental* health is the directing force that improves the other two. There are happy people who are crippled; their mindset maintains or increases their mobility and happiness. It is like flying an airplane: Attitude brings Altitude. To rise higher, you must point the aircraft upward.

Let us acknowledge that happiness is contagious. We participate here to bring others to happiness because therein lies the source of our greatest happiness.

4 Cacophony [7 Nov 2019]

When I was in middle school, several of us argued religion on the playground. The object of our contentious discussions was

- a) be right (*superior* subjectively and objectively)
- b) be distinguished (*different* from and *opposed* to someone)
- c) win (prevail *at the expense of* the other denominational viewpoint).

Sixty years later I regard that display of combative ignorance as childish and unproductive. It was shared entertainment, but other games and sports would have had more positive personal and social impact.

Is adult discourse any different from that childhood activity? Do contentious political discussions shed any *light* on our adult topics? Do political camps focus on winning instead of listening to and uplifting other people? Are we missing positive exercises that *increase* happiness?

Are we prepared to grow up?

5 Wishy-washy [14 Nov 2019]

Imagine the pain of loudly supporting one side of an issue only to learn later that the opposite side had the better argument. A legal advocate or a debate team must know the alternatives and be able to present either side at its best, and universities teach us how to refute any proposition. Comprehending all viewpoints elevates discussion from ***assertion*** to ***evaluation***.

Navigating arguments is like driving a vehicle that must be able to turn to the right or to the left in order to stay on the road ahead.

When readers expect me *invariably* to take positions on the right or on the left (as they perceive), I do not *invariably* meet their expectations. Perhaps they might call me wishy-washy. If they do, it is like saying my car is wishy-washy because it can turn to the right or to the left according to road conditions.

In my multi-dimensional world, the road to progress is neither unique nor linear.

6 Let's be (positively) real [21 Nov 2019]

Eagerness can tempt us to take shortcuts to wrong goals. An example is the mythical deity ("jealous god of wrath") who establishes calm by destroying perpetrators ("the wicked"), a classical quick fix that does not solve problems. In contrast, patience is a long path to the right goal. An example is Christian longsuffering that sees the Paul inside every Saul, offering a solution of construction instead of destruction--improving, not removing.

We do not expect that every perpetrator will be immediately transformed. However, the patient offer of redemption strengthens both the mover and the one moved upon and the *situation* is transformed.

In this blog we share this love and patience. We do *not* broadcast and dwell upon what is wrong. Our energy is not consumed condemning greed. We *do* construct a more successful world by occupying ourselves generously so that *selfishness disappears by atrophy*.

You are now invited to this world where we will endure together.

7 Single-party state? [29 Nov 2019]

Like this blog, society is about positive relationships among empathetic people. Today's post is another encouragement to diversity and pluralism.

Lack of empathy leads to adversarial polarization, which is a primary threat to domestic tranquility in the family or in the state. Polarization is a path to gridlock, which is a barrier to progress. A two-party political system is inherently an invitation to polarization. Shame on the two-party system!

Should the two-party system be replaced? The one-party alternative typically poses even worse prospects. A very limited reference to the Soviet Union might illustrate a shortcoming of having the Communist Party essentially coincident with the State. History (discussed [here](#)) recorded political jockeying before Nikita Khrushchev became premiere of the Soviet Union. Instead of being expressed as variant political party platforms, different viewpoints were driven by hostile factions within the party / state. Instead of a democratic selection process, there was essentially a power play among political actors, producing a mixed scorecard of favors and repression. Victims released from some of Stalin's harsh policies probably felt more tolerance than did Hungarians and Ukrainians. The single-party state was not a homogeneous panacea with equal treatment of all.

In principle, political parties within a democracy are more functional than factions within a power-driven state. For example, if I rebel against a state policy of slavery or capital punishment, the state and I both suffer a degree of mutual destruction. The extremes of destruction are pogroms (against individuals) and revolutions (against states). *On the other hand, if I rebel against a party platform on either issue, I retain options for other party affiliations while remaining in good standing with the state.* Functional democracy avoids forceful suppression while it accommodates the freedom of judgment expressed in the above [Wishy-washy post](#) of November 14. As the test of time, applied with proper checks and balances, weeds out improper party platforms, the state itself continues constructive organic evolution. Hurrah for a party system!

The next post will suggest a way to rise above the limitations of the one-party and two-party systems.

8 Ranked Choice Voting (Instant Runoff) [3 Dec 2019]

Multi-Party civility:--A one-party state tends toward oppression and a two-party state tends toward gridlock. These weaknesses detailed in the prior post can be addressed by *adding* parties so that achieving majority requires forming *coalitions* based on civility. People behave better when they hope that the opponent on the current issue will be an ally on the next issue.

Multi-Party balancing:--Furthermore, multi-party democracy allows even a small party to influence larger parties away from excesses. Gridlock between nearly equal political forces can be tipped one way or another by a less powerful party that shifts the balance. Finesse and agility lead to continuing cooperation.

Third-Party unpopularity:--Despite these multi-party advantages, there is simplistic appeal in having only two options, leaving supporters of less popular positions deprived of real choice. Minority voters who do choose *other* options are condemned by the larger parties for throwing their votes away. The argument is “you could have put us over the top.”

Fortunately, this deterrent to discourse can easily be removed.

Viable alternative:--There are systems with names like Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) or Instant Runoff. In those systems, every ballot has a means for *ranking all candidates in order of preference*. (It may or may not be required that *every* ballot must assign a ranking to *every* candidate.) When it is determined that one candidate has received the lowest count of first choice votes, the corresponding ballots are redistributed to the candidates ranked second choice on those ballots. The process is repeated until a winner is determined.

Three advantages are immediately apparent:

- (1) A blatantly unpopular first choice vote is not wasted because the same ballot will be counted in favor a more popular lower choice candidate on that ballot.
- (2) There is no repeat election because the reassignment of ballots accomplishes the runoff function within the first voting.

(3) An unsuccessful first choice is recorded like an *official* poll result. While opinion polls do not rise to the significance of binding elections, the first selections on “unsuccessful” ballots constitute valid and important expressions of voter choices submitted within binding elections. They will not be dismissed lightly.

The first two features are comforting reassurances by themselves. The primary advantage, though, is the *discourse* assured by the third item.

(3a) Voters are not motivated to ignore their true feelings in making their first choices. Public expression is not stifled by practical concerns over “thrown away” votes.

(3b) Political parties will take note of voter sentiment. The additional expressions, far from being discarded, influence office holders and future candidates who want to appeal to a broad base. In a sense the “opinion” votes are the *coalition mechanism* praised above: they deliver the message without requiring that there be an additional organized party.

Counting:--Rules, examples and concerns are plentiful on the internet, where readers are invited to do research on this worthwhile issue. Toward further discussion of the counting process in a future blog post, you may leave me a private message in the blog footer or share your insights in the public comments section below.

Recommendation:--I am urgently asking readers to engage with this topic for the benefit of our democracy. We need to open up elections to diverse viewpoints *without* throwing away votes, and we need to eliminate the fatigue, expense, and rehashing associated with runoff elections. Getting neighborhood discussions to agree on specific implementation is a small effort compared to the enormity of the benefit.

9 Counting votes – RCV [6 Dec 2019]

This is the promised discussion of counting ballots in a system of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) discussed in the prior post.

First story:--Consider a sports club that is voting on a location for its annual picnic. Among four alternative locations, the meadow wins the balloting. After the vote, someone suggests yet another location. When the vote is repeated with five locations, two votes shift away from the meadow; the baseball field emerges as the winner. Why should a seemingly irrelevant, unpopular alternative change the location of the picnic? In RCV, the two unsuccessfully shifted ballots revert to their second choices, restoring the original winner. ***The two “unsuccessful” voters have the satisfaction that their***

votes did contribute to the result they wanted if they could not have their first choice. Their votes were not wasted.

Second story:--Consider a mathematical streamlining process. This story is set in a country where all taxes are paid with coins that are accurately equal in weight. There is a reliable report that the tax collector in one province has rubbed off exactly one gram from *every* coin he submitted. The problem is to learn which collector cheated. The long solution is to weigh a coin from every province. The short solution is sampling: since counting is faster than weighing, take one coin from the first province, two from the second, and so on; weigh all those selected coins in one single step. The number of grams shortage is the ordinal number of the faulty province. (For example, if the second province is at fault, the shortage is two grams because there are two altered coins in the sample.)

This story illustrates efficient data collection. A *single* test (weighing) suffices because the *sample* is designed for that method of analysis.

Third story:--A single-elimination tournament bracket starts with a simple lineup of all the teams. Of every pair of teams in the first level, only one progresses to the second level. The process of elimination continues until one team reaches the final level. In this system there is the nagging possibility that a team was eliminated in the first level by an unusual circumstance. In a different sequence of contests, that team might have reached the top. A much more thorough testing process is the round robin in which every team plays every other team (usually twice, once at home and once away). The final winner is based on accumulated successes, not single instances.

Suggestion:--The first story encourages finding an intuitively satisfying outcome with no abrupt surprises. The second story motivates thoughtful planning of a process for reaching the outcome. It compresses the research into a single selection step; it is unitary. The third story serves as a model for scoring and ranking based on the most complete available data set.

Combining the stories might lead to this formula: Give every candidate a score that is the inverse of ballot ranking, then find the highest total score. If there are four candidates, the highest (first) ranked candidate scores four and the lowest (fourth) ranked candidate scores one. (In an incomplete ballot, unranked candidates receive no score.) The total score is a measure of overall support for a given candidate, making this counting system logically appropriate.

Let us soon implement an agreed form of RCV that will deliver the advantages laid out in the prior post: (1) avoiding wasted ballots, (2) eliminating repeat elections, (3) expanding discourse among multiple viewpoints. This is our easiest step to better democracy.