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SOME HOPEFULLY STRENGTHENING SUGGESTIONS

by

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DISCUSSION PAPER

on

Gerard Radnitzky's

THE EVOLUTION OF THE EXTENDED ORDER

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1/2

Since I agree wholeheartedly with all Professor Radnitzky's main political and social contentions - above all with his commitment to defend and, if possible, multiply that "endangered species" the free society (p.50) - this Comment has for the most part to consist in somewhat scrappy suggestions of ways in which his paper might be strengthened. Many of these suggestions are separately petty. Yet in sum they should contribute significantly to the production of an even more powerful and, because shorter, more persuasive final version; one too rather less exposed to diversionary objections from those unable to discredit his central arguments, yet reluctant to accept his conclusions.

(1) First; it is, surely, quite unnecessary to bring in "The tradition of criticism or 'criticist tradition' in Popper's and Bartley's sense" (p.3). To do this is to make fortune a reckless gift of precious hostages. For this tradition appears to be and, as I have myself argued both at some earlier ICUS meetings and elsewhere, is exposed to two overwhelming objections: first, that it implies that (real) knowledge is humanly unattainable; and, second, that there can be no such thing as sufficient evidencing reason for believing any contingent proposition.⁽¹⁾ In so far as the "criticist tradition" does carry these implications, by denying that even criticism can be substantially justified it undermines itself; allowing only - and at most - that utterances may be faulted on the formal ground that they are internally inconsistent.

This is not the occasion for me to try to sustain an extensive challenge to that tradition. For it is sufficient to point out that the only corollary conclusion which Radnitzky here wishes to draw is "the principal fallibility of the human intellect"; since "The epistemological thesis of ... pervasive fallibility has profound implications ..." (p.3).⁽²⁾ But this thesis, although all too often ignored, can scarcely be outright denied. It therefore neither requires such derivation from what is itself more disputatious, nor is it strengthened thereby.

What, however, is interesting, and what does perhaps call for some further comment, is Radnitzky's commendation: "The tradition of criticism ... is an epistemic resource that embodies the knowledge of how to avoid the trilemma that is inevitable in the context of justification philosophy and of Cartesian methodological doubt ..." (p.3). For, later, Radnitzky proceeds to reject what Hayek pillories as "Cartesian constructivism", and to spell out his own 'criticist' objection to what has traditionally been labelled the method of systematic doubt: "The roots of the pathology go back to Descartes's fusion of criticism and justification and his maxim that every position that has not been proven to be true or correct should be rejected unless so proven" (p.40).

The interest in all this lies in the fact that the grotesquely paradoxical implications of 'criticism' are themselves consequences of other assumptions apparently shared by Descartes and the 'criticists'; while the comment called for is that such persons would do well not only to follow Radnitzky in his Hayekian rejection of "Cartesian constructivism"

but also to question and to abandon some other and ^{even} more fundamental *Cartesian* assumptions.

Two of these misleading principles form a pair. First, it is contended that where we could conceivably be mistaken, and where perhaps we (know that we) have sometimes in fact been mistaken, there we can never really know. Second, 'experience' is construed not in its ordinary everyday sense but in an artificial philosophers' interpretation. In this most factitious reading to have experience is to have only Berkeleyan ideas; or either Humean ideas or Humean impressions. As an illustration of the first contention, take that most devastating sentence from the Discourse: "So, because our senses sometimes play us false, I decided to suppose that there was nothing at all which was such as they cause us to imagine it; and, because there are men who make mistakes in reasoning,... I rejected as being unsound all the reasonings which I had hitherto accepted as proofs." For the second, consider the opening assertion of Berkeley's Principles: "It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge ... that they are ... ideas ..."

The notion that knowledge involves, or would have to involve, not only justified true belief but also infallibility is a recurrent theme in The Logic of Scientific Discovery: "The old scientific idea of epistēmē - of absolutely certain, demonstrable knowledge - has proved to be an idol ... every scientific statement must remain tentative for ever ... The wrong view of science betrays itself in the craving to be right; for it is not his possession of knowledge of irrefutable truth, that makes the man of science, but his persistent and recklessly critical quest for truth"

(pp.280-1); and again, later, "we must not look upon science as a 'body of knowledge', but rather as a system of hypotheses ... a system of guesses ... of which we are never justified in saying that we know that they are 'true' or 'more or less certain' or even 'probable' (p.317).

If we take all this at the foot of the letter, and if it is to be applied consistently not only to the most abstract and general scientific theories but also to any and every claim to know even singular and concrete facts, then, as was suggested earlier, Popper's entire philosophy of science reduces to absurdity: there ~~is~~ neither is nor could be any knowledge of the public world; and hence no growth of such knowledge, whether scientific or other.⁽³⁾ Certainly if I know I cannot be wrong; in the sense that from 'I know p' it follows necessarily that 'p is true'. But what does not follow from that premise is that I am or was, even on this count alone, infallible. The same misconception about infallibility generates the notion that any knowledge which we might achieve will have to be confined to our own private ideas. For it is (falsely) assumed that about these, and about these alone, we could not conceivably be mistaken.

Para [A third misleading principle also derives ultimately from Descartes. But in Popper and other 'criticists' it takes the form of what Popper calls "Hume's refutation of induction". Representing the nerve of argument from experience - Hume never employs the semi-technical word 'induction' - as involving an attempt to deduce universal conclusions from always and necessarily less than universal premises, Hume certainly succeeds in demonstrating that any such syllogism must be fallacious. This exercise can, nevertheless, only be accounted a refutation of argument from experience,

and a demonstration of the error or 'justificationism', if we are prepared to allow that Hume's representation of the nerve of such argument is correct, and if we also grant the Cartesian assumption that the only adequate or even relevant evidencing reasons for believing any contingent conclusion must be some premise or premises from which that conclusion may be validly deduced.⁽⁴⁾ Yet whyever should we concede anything so wildly counter-intuitive, thus burdening ourselves with the consequent intolerable paradoxes?

(2) Second: Radnitzky, like our mutual hero Hayek, is not nearly rough enough with Rawls;⁽⁵⁾ and, where Radnitzky does write ill of A Theory of Justice, it is on the wrong grounds. For he wants us to reject "the various contract theories of society (some of them highly popular, e.g. that of John Rawls)" (p.40). But Rawls is not introducing the notion of a social contract as part of an account of any actual societies, their origins or ~~at~~ present working. His concern is solely with what, he thinks, ideally ought to be. That introduction is, therefore, of a kind properly licensed by Hume: "This, however, hinders not, but that philosophers may, if they please, extend their reasoning to the suppos'd state of nature; provided they allow it to be a mere philosophical fiction which never had, and never cou'd have, any reality."⁽⁶⁾

On the other hand, although Radnitzky does make some excellent and too rarely recognized points about justice, he fails to bring out how

perversely wrongheaded is the currently fashionable, socialist, identification of justice with a Procrustean enforcement of equality. For instance, he insists that "injustice is the primary concept or, expressed differently, 'justice' is defined negatively as the prevention of injustice, whereby the injustice that is to be prevented is the infringement of the protected domain of one's fellow men" (p.7).⁽⁷⁾ However, in listing the formal characteristics of justice (p.4), Radnitzky does not mention equality. The truth is that the rules of justice, like all rules, necessarily require that all relevantly like cases be treated alike. But what justice most certainly does not require, either formally or substantially, is that all cases, whether relevantly like or relevantly unlike, should be treated the same and equally. A system of criminal justice, for example, which prescribed that convicted offenders were to be treated in exactly the same way as those who had never ever been charged with any offence would - as Kant might have said - refute itself as a system of criminal justice.

(3) Third: there are two or three places where Radnitzky loses tricks which he could have taken.

(a) It seems that at the time of writing he had yet to learn of Robert Axelrod's hugely exciting book on The Evolution of Cooperation.⁽⁸⁾ This reports the results of a computer-assisted study of the results of following different strategies in Prisoner's Dilemma situations. It shows that in

the long term the best-paying policy is one in which a willingness to cooperate is combined with a robust determination to penalise bloody-minded selfishness. (This is especially relevant to Radnitzky's 2.1 and 3.3.2.)

(b) Radnitzky very correctly complains of "governmental stealing ... through inflation, debasement of currency, etc." (p.8). In a period in which most NATO governments seize, and either spend or redirect, over 40% of national income, the repetitious *phrase* 'debasement of currency' should surely be replaced by 'confiscatory taxation'?

(c) At another point Radnitzky, writing about the egalitarianism of the social insects, asserts: "The individuals are interchangeable: they are pure species beings" (p.15); adding notes comparing these realities with the ideals of National Socialists and Marxist Socialists. I wish that he had noticed, and said, that Rawls too - though he repudiates the socialist name - wants all the differentiating characteristics of the individuals in his supposedly just society to be treated as a collective asset; or, presumably, as the case may be, a collective liability.⁽¹⁰⁾

(d) It is, of course, a truth of logic that "No individual or collective could have deliberately designed a natural language." The contingent truths here are that no individual or collective could design an artificial language unless these designers already had another language, whether natural or artificial, in which to work. For in what language would the committee assigned to such a task conduct its deliberations?

It would have been, and would be, well here to refer to Julian Huxley's essay 'Biology and Sociology'. He argued there that "By means

of tradition-inheritance, man is virtually enabled to 'inherit acquired characters'; thus ... it is possible ... eventually to substitute conscious purpose for blind selectionⁱⁿ man's future evolution."⁽¹¹⁾

(e) Radnitzky writes, truly, "Only those nations are rich in which property rights are protected. A command economy does not create wealth and it precludes freedom eventually even in the market of ideas" (pp.46-7).

In The Times for today (20/VIII/85) I read that President Nyerere, stepping

bigotted socialist down after 24 years of socialist dictatorship, is at last admitting that his policies have produced progressive impoverishment. So the government of Tanzania is now taking some "belated measures to halt the slide into economic ruin." It is, therefore, an apt occasion on which to emphasize that the first and only great treatise of development economics was published in 1776, under the unmisleading title An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.

(4) Finally, I have two wryly constructive footnotes to add.

(a) Had Radnitzky been able to study Charles Murray Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980 before mentioning kindly proposals for "a negative income tax" he would have learnt, as - ruefully - I have myself, that the one scheme of this sort adopted and systematically studied so far has had - as perhaps we ought to have expected - most spectacular, unintended, unexpected and ^{mainly} undesirable consequences.⁽¹²⁾

(b) In his concluding paragraphs Radnitzky reiterates the quite desperately important thesis that "The market order under the rule of law opens the way for the possibility of a society of free men; it is one of its preconditions" (p.50). A pluralist, competitive economy - that is to say - is a necessary though not of course a sufficient condition of a pluralist, competitive politics. This embarrassing truth is now widely recognized, even among those who - in the Benno-Bolshevik ascendancy of the British Labour Party, and elsewhere - still pretend to be not only socialists but also (in the Western, vote-the-scoundrels-out sense) democrats. That is why, with sneering references to Chile, the thesis is so often first misrepresented, and then easily refuted, as being a contention not about a necessary but about the supposedly sufficient condition.

The same vital truth is equally clearly recognized, and much more frankly stated, by the most dedicated enemies of both freedom and (in that *only* honest sense) democracy. Thus in 1971, with its eyes most immediately upon Chile and France, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow sketched a programme for achieving, through 'United Front' or 'Broad Left' tactics, irreversible Communist domination. (It was, as he explained in his conversations with Regis Debray, just such a programme which President Allende intended to implement after his democratic election (by 36% of the voters); *which* and, had he not been forestalled by General Pinochet, undoubtedly would have been implemented.

The key phrases in that Moscow manifesto were: "Having once acquired

political power, the working class implements the liquidation of the private ownership of the means of production ... As a result, under socialism, there is no ground for the existence of any opposition parties counterbalancing the Communist Party."

NOTES

- (1) Since my prime purpose is to persuade Radnitzky not wantonly to invite hostile criticism, I refer ^{MSW} _h not to my own friendly objections but only to David Stove Popper and After: Four Modern Irrationalists (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982).
- (2) By the way: what is the adjective 'principal' doing in the present context? Also - while I am nagging about such minutiae - what is "the abstract society" of Radnitzky's 'Summary'?
- (3) I examined these paradoxes of a too bold Popperianism in the second section of a 'Commentary' in the Proceedings of the Xth International Conference in the Unity of the Sciences (New York: International Cultural Foundation, 1982), Vol. II, pp.1263-81.
- (4) For a more extensive discussion of this topic compare Chapter IV of my Hume's Philosophy of Belief (London, and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, and Humanities Press, 1961).
- (5) Compare 'The Mirage of Social Justice', to appear in a collection of Hayekian studies edited by Eamonn Butler.
- (6) A Treatise of Human Nature III (ii) 2 (p.493 in Selby-Bigge). For

some discussion compare Part II of my 'Three Questions about Justice in Hume's Treatise', in The Philosophical Quarterly for 1976.

- (7) Or again, as J.L. Austin would have said, "It is the negative use that wears the trousers." See his Sense and Sensibilia (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p.70.
- (8) (New York: Basic Books, 1984). This is perhaps the moment to mention, in the comparative privacy of a Note, that none of the works of F. Knight, (?R) Nisbet or Peter Bauer, works all quoted or recommended in the text (pp. 21, 36 and 50), is listed in the Bibliography.
- (9) (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
- (10) For some discussion of this sinister proposal - so inconsistent both with any traditional idea of justice and with the high value which Rawls himself says that he puts upon individual self-respect - compare my The Politics of Procrustes (London, and Buffalo: Temple Smith, and Prometheus, 1981), Chapter IV.
- (11) Julian Huxley Essays of a Biologist (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923 - first Pelicanned in 1939), p.73.
- (12) (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp.147-53.