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The Political Review

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"IN TAYLOR'S DEFENSE"

BY BRENDAN ARMSTRONG

At 34, Taylor Swift has a net worth of 1.1 billion dollars, over 280 million followers on Instagram, and 14 Grammys. [1] Her Eras Tour alone has generated over $1 billion and her public relationship with football star, Travis Kelce, has propelled her even further into the public eye. Whether you're a fan of hers or not, you're likely to understand that her prowess has an impact on the lives of many across the world. While earning a career as a singer and songwriter, some begin to question, with all of this influence, should she move beyond singing and begin using her platform to address political issues? While I think that she absolutely does have a role to play in promoting social justice, equality, civic engagement, etc. I think it's unfair of us to expect her to have a stance on every issue (whether the magnitude) when we don't hold ourselves to the same level of accountability.

The concept of celebrity politics isn't a new one. Oprah and George Clooney endorsed Barack Obama back in the 2008 presidential election [2]. Selena Gomez wrote an opinion piece on immigration in 2019 [3]. Even this year, Christian Bale opened up on a plan to build 12 new foster homes in California to help keep siblings together [4]. It's safe to say that a celebrity's passion for a political issue can do substantial good and just as demonstrated here, celebrities often choose where to involve themselves subject to areas they are passionate about. On top of that, celebrities can often feel more accessible than politicians. Many Americans care more about what Taylor Swift is up to rather than their local representative, and they often care more about what she thinks about something as compared to their state senator, for example. It's no wonder then that both Donald Trump and President Biden are chasing Taylor for a 2024 endorsement as opposed to other less prominent political leaders and candidates. They understand that her impact could profoundly impact the number of votes they receive because of her fan base.

While we might not yet have heard her say anything about the 2024 election, we also haven't heard her say anything about other relevant issues like the situation in Israel and Palestine or Ukraine and Russia. Yet, I voice that she has still done much good surrounding other prevalent political topics. For example, she has done a lot to address issues of homophobia and sexism, both of which are very apparent in American society. On top of that, she has spoken out on mental illness and eating disorders which she herself experienced. So, it's not that she's not speaking out and it's not that these other issues aren't important to her. I think she sees value in addressing issues that she feels her platform can make a real difference on and that she feels confident in addressing. She definitely could stand to take more stances and engage the public in important issues and conflicts, but I'd rather her speak on those issues through an informed and educated narrative, rather than promoting a stance that would earn her greater popularity. She shouldn't say something for the sake of saving face. And, at the end of the day, she's still a celebrity. Her success thrives off of people liking her. By choosing a side in a deeply-contentious issue, she risks losing fans, and therefore, money.

We shouldn't rely on celebrities to inform us about every issue. While I think celebrities can do much good in exposing us to certain conflicts and topics they themselves care about, I don't think we should expect them to have a stance on every issue. On the other hand, we ought to expect that from our representatives. They are the ones who substantially impact how America addresses domestic and international issues. With that being said, if you ask your friends and family who their local representatives are, would they even be able to answer you? Did they vote in the latest local, state, or national elections? Those are the people we should be lobbying for action and change. Sure, it's helpful to learn about issues from celebrities, but at the end of the day, it's unfair of us to expect them to have a stance on every political issue.

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"GIVE TO ALL, EFFECTIVELY"

BY CALEB JOHNSTON

As a church, service is a key tenet of what we believe and practice. After all, pure religion is to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" [1]. Beyond that, Americans are a generous people. We ranked third most generous in the world in 2022, giving just over $499 billion [5]. Giving, whether of time or money, is good, and it generally makes us feel good. Yet I'm sure many of us have felt ambivalence of one sort or another while giving. Recently, I participated in a stake food-packing activity—with three one-hour shifts, they cut off the work about 20 minutes into our shift to save some work for the next shift. Was this type of service really helping anyone?

Having my mind tainted by an education in economics, I constantly ask what effective service and giving looks like. It's no surprise that I found a special report on philanthropy in the Economist intriguing. It turns out I'm not the only one asking this question; starting in 2020, big donors started thinking more critically about the way they gave [2]. Givers started moving more towards giving unrestricted grants and limiting the intensity of the application process [3]. Specifically, Mackenzie Scott, after her divorce with Jeff Bezos, has embodied this approach nicknamed "no-strings giving"—in a short amount of time, she has given away $16.5 billion [2]. Scott's team does their due diligence on finding worthy charitable organizations, but then it spends without demanding reports on effectiveness from the recipients [2, 3]. The approach limits bureaucracy and is based on the idea that non-profit organizations know best how to put their money to work, not the detached donor.

The "no-strings" approach stands in stark contrast to traditional philanthrocapitalism. Philanthrocapitalism relies on intense reporting and data to check the efficacy of a non-profit organization. It mirrors principles of the business world. One example of philanthrocapitalism is the Gates Foundation, which demands on rigorous reporting to direct the billions of dollars that it spends [2]. On one hand, this form of giving can bog down charities in excessive bureaucracy. On the other hand, it may be necessary to keep charities accountable. Moreover, the work done by the philanthrocapitalists may enable the due diligence of the no-strings givers.

While the jury is still out on what the most effective approach is, there are some values in philanthropy that are accepted as fact. Overhead spending is essential to an effective non-profit organization. One-off projects are sexy and look good for PR purposes, yet they may not be sustainable. I fell into this trap about four years ago; looking to make an impactful donation to a charity, I was allured by the fact that one charity sent all my donation straight to the cause—other sources funded the overhead. The reality is that overhead spending yields better results [3]. Instead of focusing on how much of my dollar was being put to the cause, I should have investigated how well-run the organization was, which may equate to a hefty amount of overhead spending. Non-profit organizations need facilities, IT support, and a stable staff to be effective. With that in mind, a large, surprise donation from a no-strings giver may be difficult to manage for a small charity. Measured, incremental giving would lead to more sustainable results.

A new freshman, I took Economics 110 and wondered about this problem on a small scale. How could I give without distorting the free market and worsening the problem? I went in to ask my professor for his thoughts. Not giving me a definitive answer on how to be most effective, he told me that my question was a legitimate one. While a tough question, he pointed out that in one sense, it doesn't really matter. We've been asked to give, and the intellectual difficulty of determining how to be effective does not soften that mandate. We shouldn't use that as an excuse. For the big donors, the excuse of time and effort is no longer valid. Today, consulting wings make it possible to give in an informed manner without expending too much time nor effort [4]. While individuals may not have access to the same resources, we should seek to be effective in the way that we give, and, at the end of the day, we should just give.

“A Practical and Moral Case for a One State Solution”

BY CALEB RINGGER

Last December, I wrote about the underlying causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in light of the recent violence in Gaza. Since then, the death toll has risen to nearly 30,000 people, including over 10,000 children [1]. Seventy percent of all homes in Gaza have been destroyed [2]. Millions of Gazans have been displaced, most crowding in the southern city of Rafah, squeezed against the Egyptian border, unable to escape [3]. Israel has promised to launch a ground invasion of Rafah if Hamas does not free all hostages by March 10 [4]. Calls for a ceasefire in the UN have been vetoed by the United States [5]. Israel has been accused of genocide in the International Court of Justice [6]. Experts have called Israel’s bombing of Gaza the most destructive bombing campaign in recent history [7].

The present-day, short-term reality of death and destruction in Gaza makes talking about the long-term future of Israel and Palestine feel at best untimely, and at worst, callous. And yet, it is important to consider how long-term peace can be achieved. In my article last December, I argued that long-term peace and stability in Palestine could only be achieved by discarding the fundamental geopolitical concept of nationalism and creating a multiethnic republic with a secular constitution.

While I did not say it then, I believe that this situation could only be achieved through a one-state solution. This is not a popular opinion, especially among moderates. Advocating for a “one state solution” usually means advocating for an entirely Israeli state, or an entirely Palestinian state, at the expense of the other nation. I am certainly not advocating for either. I am advocating a third type of one-state solution, a multiethnic republic in which both nationalities exist together, united by a secular constitution, occupying all the land Israel currently occupies, including Gaza and the West Bank. While this prospect looks bleaker than ever in February 2024, I argue that it is both more practical than, and morally preferable to, a two-state solution.

Let me begin with practicality. No proposed solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is easy, but the one-state solution I propose is clearly more practical than creating two separate states. For one, any two-state solution would have to accomplish the impossible task of determining what land, and how much land, to carve out of Israel and give to the new Palestinian state. Remember, this decades-long feud is fundamentally a land conflict—Israelis and Palestinians each claim the same land, and it is impossible to divide the land in a way that satisfies both parties, especially when it comes to the city of Jerusalem. One such proposed solution was given in 1947 by the United Nations, who proposed giving 56% of the land to Israel, 43% to the Arabs, and leaving the remaining 1% (mostly Jerusalem and the surrounding areas) to be a UN-administered neutral zone [8]. This plan was rejected by the Arab delegation because Arabs were given just 43% of the land despite constituting some 70% of the population [9]. The division would be more fair today, but only because 750,000 Arabs were chased out of the land of Palestine during the 1947 Nakba.

This plan, as well as most proposed modern borders of Palestinian state, runs into another enormous problem—it makes Palestine a non-contiguous state divided between the land around Gaza and the land around the West Bank. Such a division would make Palestine significantly more vulnerable to exploitation, because any travel or trade between Gaza and the West Bank would be forced to go through Israel, and political instability, setting the stage for a repeat of 2006, when a dispute between two political parties in the Palestinian Authority led to one party violently seizing control of Gaza and the other being relegated to the West Bank.

This task is made even more complicated by the 500,000 Israeli settlers who have moved into, and built cities on, Palestinian land in the West Bank since 1967 [10]. While Israel did dismantle and evacuate 18 settlements in the Gaza Strip as part of peace talks in 2005, there are nearly 250 settlements in the West Bank, making forced evacuation a much greater challenge [11]. To be clear, those people should not be there—setting up settlements on occupied territory is considered a war crime under international law [12]. But nevertheless, they are there, and it does not seem practically possible to relocate 500,000 people, many of whom were born in the settlements, in order to give the land over to an Arab-run regime.

These are just some of the practical problems posed by a two-state solution. A one-state solution would avoid them—no need to forcibly remove hundreds of thousands of people, no need to carve up borders through neighborhoods, and no need to administer a Palestinian state that is isolated between two non-contiguous islands.

Additionally, there are strong moral reasons why a one-state solution is preferable to two states. First, dividing Israel and Palestine incentivizes extremism and takes away whatever little incentive Israel has to treat Palestinians with anything approaching fairness. Removing Palestinians from Israeli society simply empowers the furthest-right radicals in Israeli politics and removes a consistent voice for peace and tolerance. Fully incorporating Palestinians as citizens of the state of Israel at least gives them a voice in government, both directly and indirectly incentivizing the government to maintain peace and economic stability, and reduce violence.

Second, any independent Palestinian state drawn along lines resembling the 1947 Partition Plan would be hopelessly underdeveloped compared to Israel, and would doubtless constitute a humanitarian disaster. Despite the many abuses Palestinians currently endure at the hands of the Israeli government, full independence from Israel would be even worse, cutting Palestinians off from the basic utilities they do get from Israeli forces—access to water, electricity, and food. Even in the best of times, Gaza had insufficient infrastructure to support its population. Today, whatever Gazans had is almost utterly destroyed.

Finally, and in a more abstract sense, international conflicts should not and cannot be truly solved through mere segregation. “Solving” the conflict by setting up a Jewish ethno-state and an Arab ethno-state plays into the racist ideology that every ethnicity needs a distinct state to avoid mixing fundamentally incompatible peoples. This is the kind of idea that motivated the Confederate States of America to secede in 1861. Would things really have been better if the North had let them? If the nation was not able to solve the issue of slavery peacefully, would it have been better to just let the South break away and continue to practice it, while the United States of America was limited to just the northern states? Should we have tolerated the slave-holding Confederacy to our southern border, simply because “we’re just so different,” and “it would be too hard to stay together?” I hope the answer is obvious. Conflicts should not be solved by simply building a wall between the two feuding groups—in fact, to do so is to not solve the conflict at all.

To be clear, there are enormous obstacles to be overcome before a one-state solution is even feasible. Most immediately, the bombing must stop. After that, the ideology of Zionism, which asserts that the Jewish people have a divine right to rule the land of Palestine, must not be the governing ideology of the new integrated state. It will not be easy to integrate a population so deeply traumatized by generations of violence. Extremists will still periodically try to tear apart the new state through terrorism. I won’t pretend to have all the answers. But I know that the situation must dramatically change, and I believe that a two-state solution will not lead to long-term peace or stability in the region.

Two-state solution: Combination of both flags

"WHAT'S OLD IS OLD -- PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AGE AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION"

BY ISABEL HALLOWS

As the nation prepares for yet another presidential election matchup between Donald Trump and Joe Biden–a scenario where the two oldest presidents ever elected to first terms face off against each other again–it's hard not to notice that the average age of our candidates seems to be creeping higher and higher. That President Biden and former President Trump are both well into their early eighties and late seventies, respectively, begs the question: are we stuck with old geezers as the only viable options for leading the free world?

In a country that prides itself on its capacity to set a global example of progress and innovation, it's perplexing to see the top contenders for the presidency skew towards the older end of the spectrum. How did we find ourselves in a situation where age seems to be a prerequisite for the highest office in the land? Does there come a point when older doesn't really mean wiser?

One factor to consider in this age increase of presidential candidates is the incentive structure inherent in politics. Politicians often find that power and influence grow proportionally with their tenure in office. The longer they serve, the more entrenched they become within the political landscape, accumulating seniority, and accruing greater sway over legislative decisions. This accumulation of power can serve as a compelling reason for some politicians to remain in office well into their golden years. Additionally, the absence of term limits for Congressional positions further fuels this trend, enabling incumbents to maintain their seats for extended periods without facing the pressure of turnover. This combination of increased influence, lack of term limits, and the potential for long-term stability within the political arena creates a powerful incentive for politicians to prolong their tenure in office.

Nevertheless, this reasoning doesn't apply to outliers like Trump, who entered the political arena from an unorthodox background. Despite lacking political experience, Trump's candidacy marked a departure from traditional qualifications for the presidency, challenging the notion that political experience is indispensable. His success demonstrated that qualities such as authenticity and anti-establishment rhetoric can resonate with voters. Trump's outsider status appealed to those disillusioned with career politicians, indicating a shift in public perception about the qualifications for office. Still, why don't voters opt for younger options with the same appeal–like Vivek Ramaswamey?

Recent polling data suggests that public approval ratings for both Trump and Biden are heavily influenced by party affiliation, with only little correlation to age. However, as Gen Z emerges as a politically engaged generation, their views on age and representation may play a significant role in shaping future elections.

Data suggests that a majority of U.S. adults perceive both Biden and Trump as too old for another term [1]. Despite concerns about their age, however, both Biden and Trump remain among the most electable options, as evidenced by their previous electoral successes and continued relevance in political discourse. This suggests a complex dynamic within the U.S. electorate, where voters may prioritize other qualities or policy positions over age–though it is clearly a widespread concern–when making their electoral decisions. The fact that two candidates perceived as too old by a majority of the population still emerge as viable contenders highlights shortcomings or limitations within the electoral system itself. It feels as if the main considering factors in elections are age, name recognition, party affiliation, and campaign strategies. To what extent does the electoral process truly reflect the diverse perspectives and priorities of the American populace?

Looking ahead, the implications of having older candidates on the ballot extend beyond mere numbers. If there's a perceived lack of representation for younger demographics, voter turnout, particularly among these groups, may suffer. Additionally, concerns about the competency of older presidents to effectively address the challenges of a rapidly changing world are becoming increasingly prevalent. As citizens, we must ask ourselves: do we deserve better than a choice between septuagenarians?

In a world that champions diversity and inclusion, it's crucial to rethink our criteria for selecting presidential candidates. While experience and wisdom are undeniably important, I firmly believe they shouldn't automatically equate to older age. As we look to the future, it's essential that we strive for a democracy that truly represents the diversity and more importantly desires of our population, while also ensuring that our leaders possess the skills and competence needed to address the challenges of our rapidly evolving world.

"AMERICA HAS A .GOV PROBLEM"

BY JANE DRINKWATER

On a freezing December day in 2020, I realized the government had a technology problem. My mission companion and I had dropped by a friend's house for a visit, but noticed sounds coming from a car in the driveway. Sure enough, our friend and her 15-year-old daughter were sitting inside, surrounded by piles of blankets and enough food for several days. As it did for many people, COVID-19 brought dramatic upheaval to her life, and she ended up unable to pay her bills. Technically, anticipating several weeks of bitter cold, the state of Indiana had passed a bill that would allow people like her to have emergency energy assistance. The assistance required her to fill out an online form–an interesting choice, considering that the program was aimed at rural people unable to pay bills, the very folks least likely to have reliable internet. When she went to the library to fill out the form, she found that she couldn't submit the form due to problems with the sign-in process. The help for which she should have qualified was inaccessible.

We helped our friend sort out her energy crisis, but from that point on, I've been paying attention to how the best-intended government programs get foiled by the technology designed to implement them. I watched my grandmother go without social security payments because she struggled to navigate the SSA website; I met students whose abilities to pay for higher education were threatened by confusion with the FAFSA website; I myself spent hours trying to perform simple online tasks like renewing a driver's license or registering to vote.

These anecdotes seem to match larger national trends: According to a 2023 White House report, 60% of government websites don't meet accessibility standards [1], and Accenture found that 46% of people would use government services online if the technology was easier [2]. Many people find it challenging to navigate government websites, but the difficulties are especially salient for elderly people, non-English speakers, or folks with unreliable access to computers (as 45 percent of Federal websites are not mobile-friendly [3]).

Of course, the primary concern is getting Americans access to the services they need as government programs go digital. But these technological struggles also influence the way people see their government and its legitimacy. Political scientists generally agree that people's first-person experiences with government services shape their views of the government, for better or for worse. Even the details matter: a friendly election administrator can increase trust in the government as a whole, while a long wait to cast a ballot can decrease trust. As peoples' interactions with government become increasingly digital, the government's best PR is a site that's effective, helpful, and intuitive–and not just by public sector standards. People are comparing these government products to the very best tech from the private sector, and it's historically been an unfavorable comparison.

Lately, Congress and Biden's white house have made great strides to clean up the federal government's digital act. In September 2023, the Biden administration issued orders for all federal websites to modernize. Specifically, all sites must now meet higher accessibility standards, officially identify themselves as government sites, use .gov domains, and comply with best practices for visual design. This builds on Congress's 2018 21st Century IDEA Act. Pioneering these proposed solutions, the SSA website has been overhauled with larger text for its elderly audience, forms that can be filled out entirely online, and a complete Spanish translation.

These efforts to improve digital governance in the US have already improved many lives. Satisfaction with federal websites is up, as is trust in government programs. Still, there is work to do. At the federal level and beyond, other agencies need to follow in SSA's footsteps. State and city websites in particular need to consider how to keep their services up-to-date. This will require significant changes in staff, budget, and general approach, but it is hard to imagine a better use of resources. From paying bills to applying for citizenship, people's most important interactions with the government happen online. As public service goes digital, no one should be left behind.

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"FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: YOU AREN'T ALONE"

BY NATHAN CHASE

In BYU's last graduating class, about 11% were considered first generation students [1]. Although there are many ways people consider what a first generation student is, it is generally accepted that the parents of these students did not complete a four year college degree, or that they have had very little exposure to college growing up [2]. Many times, these students face specific challenges that add more stress and unfamiliarity to an already challenging college experience. Studies show that the largest obstacles for these students are "lack of college readiness, familial support, and financial stability, racial underrepresentation, low academic self-esteem, and difficulty adjusting to college." [3] This can be especially true if both parents are immigrants from another country.

Although first-generation students are sometimes underrepresented in some universities, 56% of undergraduates nationwide are first-generation [4]. This means that future leaders and trailblazers most likely are first generation students. First generation students need to know where to turn for resources and help as the college experience is already challenging on its own.

Some first generation students were willing to share their stories and give advice for those who need it. Brandon is a junior at BYU studying Exercise and Wellness. His parents immigrated from Mexico. Valeria is a senior majoring in Political Science. Like Brandon, her parents came from Mexico.

Q: How has your family's background shaped the major decisions you've made in your life?

Brandon: *There are two sides to it. It has given me more drive to the things that my parents were not able to do. I also have felt more grateful for the opportunities that I have now. However, sometimes I get feelings of doubt and imposter syndrome because it feels like my parents never received a formal education, so I feel like the guinea pig of the family.*

Valeria: *It has made me want to work harder to be able to give back and make their sacrifice worth it. I have been more determined to take advantage of the opportunities and be grateful for their sacrifices.*

Q: Growing up, are there any specific challenges you faced because of being a first generation?

Brandon: *Growing up in a hispanic home, I have faced a language barrier where we spoke Spanish at home, but I had to learn English at school and outside the home. When it came to applying to college, because my parents had not gone through the process, I was unsure what to do.*

it came to applying to college, because my parents had not gone through the process, I was unsure what to do.

Valeria: *I did not have anyone I could ask for help, and I had to learn as I went. Since my parents were learning English, I had to work a little harder to catch up to everyone else.*

Q: What guidance would you offer to those torn between honoring family traditions and values and achieving personal goals, especially when there's a concern about potential resentment from their family?

Brandon: *I don't think it should be looked at in a negative way. You have to look at it in a way where you are honoring your parents and their sacrifices to build something better for future generations. There are times where you feel lonely or the outcast of the family, but you have to look at the big picture.*

Valeria: *Become your best friend and follow your dreams. Offer yourself the same grace you would to anyone else. You are being a role model in more ways than you think you are, and I am not sure how, but the sacrifices will be worth it. Trust God, He is the one who knows all.*

Q: What do your accomplishments mean to your family?

Brandon: *It means a lot to them, but it does not change my worth in their eyes. Even if I didn't go to college, they still love me the same and are proud of me no matter what.*

Valeria: *It makes them proud. I've noticed they like sharing with others of my accomplishments as a way to show their sacrifices and feeling grateful I am able to pursue my dreams and taking opportunities that they were not able to.*

Q: What advice do you have to first gen/second gen students at byu who feel like they are disadvantaged or not sure where to turn for help?

Brandon: *I would talk to friends who have experience with college and advisors. Get to know the first generation college students on campus so that you can relate to them and you feel like you are not alone.*

Valeria: *Find mentors and don't be afraid to rely on them. It was scary at first for me to talk to my professors, but they are there to help you. Take advantage of those resources. Believe in your worth and know you have as much to offer than any other student at BYU.*

Universities should make a concerted effort to provide the resources required to help first-generation students *succeed. Students who have family members who have attended college should be aware of the special problems these students face and offer assistance wherever possible.*

“LICENSE TO SWIM: UNDERWATER SPIES IN UNLIKELY PLACES”

BY SCOTT SAWAYA

It is not easy to hide when you are a runaway Russian spy. It is even harder to hide when your hiding spot happens to be an island in northern Finnmark whose population hovers right around 70 people [1]. Hiding becomes nearly impossible when you are also a 14 foot long, 2,700-pound beluga whale.

This is what Hvladimir learned when he first swam up to a fishing boat near the Village of Tufjord in 2019, still wearing a Russian camera harness strapped to his torso. He has since spent the past four years drifting down the coast of Norway and Sweden, becoming a bit of a local celebrity along the way due to his personable nature around humans. At the same time, Hvladimir has faced challenges too as he tries to share the water with boats not accustomed to his presence.

While his story is endearing, it is also an ethical alarm bell regarding the dangers of weaponizing animal intelligence. I strongly believe that animals and nature should not be readily accepted as collateral damage in modern warfare. If we are to train animals to participate in human activity, it should only be for search and rescue, not as a tactical approach to geopolitical conflicts.

Training marine life to take part in human conflicts is not a new or uncommon practice, with examples dating back to World War I where the United Kingdom’s Royal Navy would bribe circus-trained sea lions to find submarines [3]. Currently, four countries have marine-mammal programs connected to their defense sector: the U.S., Russia, North Korea, and Israel [4]. All of these programs vary in scope; notably the U.S. Navy’s website makes it clear that the dolphins and sea lions they work with are trained in the detection, location, and recovery of objects and are not trained as offensive weapons [5]. Russia, North Korea, and Israel are not as candid about the limits of their programs.

The emerging moral debate connects to how we choose to honor and respect the natural world that surrounds us. It’s the age-old question that permeates scientific experimentation perhaps best stated in Jurassic Park, “your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn’t stop to think if they should” [6]. There is no question that we can train animals to do incredible things, but to what extent should we exploit their intelligence to fight our wars for us? I believe that the answer is perhaps disturbingly simple, animals should only be trained to preserve and protect life, not destroy it.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this in application comes from the organization APOPO, who trains Giant African Pouched Rats to detect tuberculosis and landmines around the world. These rats are specially trained and have careful work schedules to ensure they are happy, healthy, and humanely treated. Although they often work in dangerous environments, not one has ever been injured as they work to help diagnose people who need treatment and remove explosives leftover from wars and conflicts [7]. This is an incredible application of humanely using animals to protect and preserve human lives, and one that I wholeheartedly support. That line can become slippery, however, and is not one that everyone agrees on.

Hvladimir’s future remains uncertain as he continues to roam the Nordic waters, still too domesticated to live in the open ocean and yet not entirely suited to the human occupied waters of boats and ports [8]. I believe that his story and personality offer a compelling case for the protection of animal life and innocence from human conflict. Some may say that the cruelty and violence of the animal kingdom offer justification for their application in our own wars and conflicts. In response, I think that Jane Goodall offers powerful insight, saying, “It’s an unfortunate parallel to human behavior—they have a dark side just as we do. We have less excuse, [however], because we can deliberate, so I believe only we are capable of true calculated evil” [9].

“Extract, Consume, Destroy: A Tale of 2 Americas”

BY JACOB LEAVITT

In the 1900s, the now largely abandoned dependency theory ruled the study of international relations. It claimed that developing nations were economically dependent on developed (mostly European) nations that benefited off of that dependency. As such, it was in the interest of developed nations to control and limit the development of poorer countries and the interest of those poorer nations to become independent from the developed world. Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) is an economic policy that many developing nations applied during these years to overcome their dependence on the developed world. ISI meant, as the name suggests, substituting importation of secondary goods from the developed world with domestic industrialization and emphasized state support of specific industries. Some countries in Latin America (such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico) and Eastern Asia (such as Japan, South Korea, and China) implemented the policy. Notably, while in Latin America this policy made little difference, the countries in Eastern Asia that applied ISI have become world powers and significant global trade partners. Why?

Culture. In Latin American countries, corruption and poor planning caused the state-associated industries to flood the market with low quality goods and siphoned most of the profits into the pockets of a few political and business leaders. A famous example of ISI production failure, admittedly from Yugoslavia not Latin America, is the “Yugo” car brand known for a design that was “hard to view on a full stomach” and quality so poor some said it was like it was “assembled at gunpoint.” Meanwhile in South Korea strong dedication to collectivism, and high social value on honor and integrity contributed to stellar electronics and steel industries producing companies that are household names such as KIA, LG, and Samsung. The wealth from these companies flooded the government and country with cash it invested well. This feat took a level of social trust unimaginable in most of the world. For the western hemisphere, it might as well be magic. Since their boom, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore have established more fair and inclusive economies and institutions that have made them economically indistinguishable from Western Europe.

In the landmark book Why Nations Fail by Acemoglu and Robinson, the authors explore another related question. Why has the growth of the United States outpaced the growth of Latin America every decade since colonization? In the early 1800s, for example, Mexico and the United States were more similar than different. Today, the border stands between two different worlds. In a page turning inquiry, Acemoglu and Robinson conclude the most influential difference is the nature of the political and economic institutions. In Latin America, countries’ “extractive institutions” were established with the sole purpose of extracting value from the land, labor, and capital of the New World. In the American colonies, “inclusive institutions” that had checks and balances, were transparent, and needed approval from those they governed, converted land, labor, and capital into high quality of life and supercharged the economy. In recent decades, Latin American countries have sought to establish inclusive institutions with the power to pull them out of their centuries-long rut. Despite the efforts, many of these countries have not been able to overcome the cynicism of the constituents and the corruption of the captains.

We have some well-researched theories with quasi-experimental evidence that argues the key to success is cooperation in good-faith, charity for neighbors and descendants, and high integrity. A poorly designed system will succeed if its participants cooperate in good-faith and integrity. Likewise, even a well designed system will fail with intransigent or untrusting participants. The “Asian Tigers” of East Asia succeeded in spite of poor theory and practice because of their collectivism. Meanwhile, parts of Latin America often continue to fall short in spite of good ideas because of their deep-seated mistrust. Successful governments are sewn from a strong social fabric. In the U.S. right now one half of the country wants to “overthrow capitalism” while the other half is calling for the dismissal of university presidents and professors. The only thing these two Americas have in common is that they don’t trust the government, they have misgiving toward their neighbor, and they think the other is going to destroy the rest. Simply put, I believe if the U.S. were to start again today we would fail because we lack social trust. Our wealth-machine extracts life from the people, our people endlessly consume products and media, and our media destroy the wealth-machine without creating—endangering our people. Fortunately, we have overcome this divide before and there are signs we can do it again.

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