

Second Philosophy

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Title	What if Everyone Did As I Do?
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INTRODUCTION

For Sartre, a thing is what it does. Meaning that a thing has an essence before an existence, meaning that before it exists the manufacturer has a conception of it. Before he manufactures a paper-knife he has the conception that the thing will be a means to open letters.

That means that the essence of the paper-knife precedes the existence of that paper-knife. It has a purpose which defines its existence prior to it being made.

But how can we say this about Man (or Woman)?

If we are atheistic, as Sartre is, there is no God to have been a manufacturer who has had a conception or design to human. In effect mans existence precedes his essence.

That way man must choose his essence, he is 'Condemned to Free'. In everything he does he chooses what man is, ie Man is what he does. But consider how common this thinking is, as Sartre writes in 'Existentialism & Humanism': 'many people think that in what they are doing they commit no one but themselves to anything; and if you ask them, "what would happen if everyone did so?" they shrug their shoulders and reply "everyone will not do so" but in truth one ought to ask oneself what would happen if everyone did as one is doing; nor can one escape from that disturbing thought except by a kind of self-deception. the man who lies in self excuse by saying "everyone will not do it" must be ill at ease with his own conscience, for the act of lying implies the universal value which it denies'.

To illustrate the pitfalls of thinking 'everyone will not do as I do' consider this example:

Four farmers having farmland on a hill, and high upon each of their plots are a group of trees that absorb the rainfalls ... without them the good farmland will get washed out.

One farmer gets the idea that by cutting down the trees on his plot he shall increase the farmland that he has and the other farmers' trees will ensure that the farmland does not get washed out. Yet if all of the farmers cut down their trees the farmland will be ruined for all of them.

QUESTIONS:

So in considering that man defines himself in every action he performs I ask us all these three questions

1. As one of the farmers, what you do in that situation?
2. How could you ensure that the other farmers will not cut back their trees?
3. What action is the right one?

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DISCUSSION:

Simulat: you set up a rule so that you get to shoot a cow for every tree a farmer cuts down :-)

Shingles: That would require all of the farmers' cooperation, though

Thoth: I'd like to know what keeps HIS farmland from getting washed out, but I guess that's not the point. ;o)

Simulat: it could be done individually :-)

Shak: Setting up a rule is key - it's not an individual thing with an individual solution.

Dick: why say the man LIES in self deception?

Shingles: Simply because for Sartre, man chooses his own essence for ALL men, Dick

Dick: but the farmer may not agree

Thoth: is rationalizing to justify an action self-deception - especially in such a circumstance? I'd think so.

Simulat: The case of the farmers is an example of the tragedy of the commons - and in fact its a very hard problem

Shingles: So you would not cut back the trees on your plot, Shak?

Dick: so why does Sartre think that?

Reflection: Sartre seems to imply then that the universal value, is a collective rather than an individual value, perhaps individual competition is the universal value?

Shak: I'd talk with the other farmers

Simulat: It does depend on people being cooperative - and having a way of enforcing the cooperation

Patrick: When I read the discussion prep, I was reminded of the argument the US is now having with itself over socialism vs capitalism.

Dick: perhaps the farmer thinks I am isolated from the essence of the others

Shak: Here's a note I prepared earlier. This is really the tragedy of the commons, as exemplified most recently by the behaviour of the world's banks or, more mundanely, by fished-out coastal waters. The rational thing for an individual to do in the absence of an agreed protocol for restraint is to act in his own interest. The skipper who takes a break to allow fish stocks to recover will come back to find them worse than before. Moreover, his colleagues will have money in the bank as a result of their continued fishing, while he'll be in overdraft. In other words, he made a mistake. It is a fact of our existence as a social species that we must talk and agree what we will do together if we are to avoid such catastrophe. Rules are part of the social fabric. Note that while we have a duty to obey agreed rules, that is not to say we must act as if there were agreed rules where there are in fact none.

Shingles: Enforced cooperation would seem to be a contradiction in terms, Sim

Alias: It seems to be more a form of the prisoner's dilemma than the tragedy of the commons

Simulat: Sure - the financial crisis is easy to put into terms of the tragedy of the commons

Reflection: or perhaps the "purposes" of evolution are furthered most by a dialectical tension between sociopathic self interest and the broader community?

Shingles: self-interest is healthy isn't it Reflection?

Dick: who defines the community interest?

Simulat: not at all Shingles - cooperation doesn't have to exclude enforcement and is generally impossible without it

Thoth: enforced?

Shingles: So Sim would force his three farmer-peers not to cut down their trees it seems

Simulat: the community perhaps Dick?

Dick: macht ist recht?

Thoth: is acting in mutual self-interest 'enforced' ...or just 'smart'?

Patrick: The farmer who cuts down his trees to have more farm land is like the capitalist who exploits his options w/o regard to the long term consequences of society

Thoth: or any person - not just capitalist.

Dick: what about the birds in the trees .. how does their opinion come in ?

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Simulat: Honest Shingles - I can't see the problem with that - are we forever doomed to be driven by the stupidest and greediest among us?

Shingles: I think it would inconsequential to our questions unfortunately, Dick

Thoth: (hopes we can leave out the ideological stuff)

Dick: if they hold a gun to our heads as they do then we are

Nondescript: Sim, perhaps not the stupidest, but certainly the greediest

Thoth: the 'communists' did plenty of that in the days of the USSR, too.

Patrick: Eventually, he like his fellow farmers is hurt by an initial greed.

Shingles: your intentions there I see as honourable, but using force to achieve ones aims, behaving tyrannously, is that the only method Sim?

Dick: what if the damage is only felt by future generations?

Shak: Seems to me there are circumstances where only agreement, followed by enforced cooperation will avoid a serious problem.

Simulat: The tragedy of the commons is a really serious problem - and its one that we have to solve

Dick: it's the way it works, Shak

Patrick: Maybe I should not have used economic labelling

Dick: but should it?

Simulat: for right now, in many ways we are wasting our commons

Shingles: Shak would peacefully maintain the trees on his plot, then

Shak: What other way can it work, Dick? We agree to pass laws and form a police force to enforce them!

Simulat: and Thoth is right - it's not a problem that's limited to any ideology

Patrick: My point is that society has past the point where we can think in terms of survival of the fittest

Shingles: There will always be exploitative individuals, even in a society of bats, baboons, any social animal
Thoth: there is a question being unaddressed, or rather, an assumption being made that hasn't been examined: is it really necessary for individuals to consider the rights of others above their (regardless of whether they are contemporaries or descendants). Of course, I go for 'yes' personally, and Darwin would suggest that to do otherwise would not be a very good fitness indicator, but IS it really necessary above their own? If course, we may want to make that assumption, but IS it the right one...or does some balance need to be struck?

Shingles: in this case of the farmers it is in ones own interest in the long term not to cut back ones trees

Steve: well Thoth, the assumption in your question is that we are isolated in our own mind and body

Shak: The farmers may not be the best example. Try fishermen.

Thoth: there is no assumption in my question, I don't think.

Alias: Well, since we always argue these extremely unlikely scenarios - what about making it a bit more realistic. Let's say the plots are uneven. The most trees are on the land of the guy with the smallest plot, so he doesn't really have much reason to maintain the plot anyway. And also, he just has to send a child to school and his wife has cancer. So, now what?

Reflection: organically it may be that the radical individualist plays a particular role in evolution, one which is in dynamic tension with the goals and needs of the broader community

Thoth: I am asking WHICH is the right position, and whether or not some balance should be struck before addressing such questions and making decisions.

Shingles: of course its an abstract, we are illustrating something with this abstract scenario, Alias

Steve: we are I believe our relations with others; that is "who" we are; each and every other other

Dick: but who are the others? Is Al-Qaida to be considered also ?

Simulat: it's probably a good argument for having land as a communal resource administered by the community instead of having it as private property - and even then the community needs ways of seeing the problem and deciding how many trees are needed

Shingles: Ok, so say we have established that mutual agreement with our farmer-peers

Dick: is the madman to be considered, the enemy?

Wichard: So maybe we should call it the Game of the Three Farmers and ask about what constitutes winning the game

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Toth: there are two extreme positions: self interest and community interest: which comes first? Or do we need to be a bit less 'coarse' than that and include some 'shades of gray' based on the local and global contexts?

Dick: or only "US"

Steve: so we are responsible

Wichard: If one of the farmers is to win, we need one set of rules

Steve: rather than as Sartre says "free"

Shingles: Lets move on to question 2: How do we ensure the other farmers will not cut back their trees?

Shak: It is rational to act in our individual interests when others will clearly also do so. Restraint requires agreement, surely?

Wichard: If the species of farmers is to survive (win) we need different rules

Dick: kill them? Rational choice?

Shingles: Rather drastic, Dick

Alias: Why is the survival of the three farmers a "good" anyway?

Wichard: If the birds in the trees are to win, then there need to be other rules

Reflection: it is possible that the pirate explores potentialities which others will not, and that these potentialities provide opportunities for future generations of pro-social individuals

Dick: it's philosophy, not politics shingles

Toth: that's the thing, though.

Magenta: they feed the community, Alias

Alias: I think they should sell out to International Harvester - and get a job in Detroit

Toth: it should not always be a case of A or B. Sometimes A is best, sometimes B, and sometimes some mix in different proportions.

Dick: good point alias; no irony

Alias: I think the farmers should think outside the box - so should we

Shingles: But when faced with an exploitative individual what is the best course of action, Toth?

Renald: ah...

Toth: yes, Alias...and that's the problem with many ideologies. They create boxes and we get stuck in them.

Wichard: Maybe we should make sure that the trees win by giving them protective armour or weapons that will dissuade the farmers

Steve: our responsibility to others is to restrain him/her

Dick: by force you may have to kill him if you can't imprison him

Renald: Shingles... you just asked a good question :-)

Toth: well, then, that's a problem shingles...and one we face now in the world. They should not be tolerated. At least not beyond a certain point.

Dick: restrain is a euphemism

Steve: no

Alias: Restrain? You must be joking

Steve: means stop the exploitative behaviour

Shak: The whole point of the dilemma is that people will always act in their own selfish interest in exploiting a limited resource if they see that others are doing so. And that the way out of the problem is to agree a set of enforceable rules.

Dick: what if he can fight back twin towers for example?

Shingles: but what can the farmers do? The other three could sabotage his land, igniting a longer conflict

Toth: that is largely the basis of the problems ALL societies face, however well intended the 'design' or idea they are founded upon.

Alias: Who defines which behaviour is exploitative?

Dick: good point Alias; it's the crux

Toth: another good question.

Shingles: that which exploits another I think will do here

Toth: and at what point does self-interest become exploitive?

Second Philosophy

Dick: famer may believe it's in all's best interests

Alias: I think not, Shingles. There are reasons why they are bringing back the predators to Yellowstone

Shingles: if another suffers as a result of one's own gain, exploitation is a present operating factor

Nondescript: exploitative is taking more than one needs

Thoth: everyone should be able to consider their own interests to some degree. at what point does it become harmful to others enough and need to be stopped?

Wichard: The farmers exploit the land and the trees and each other. What other exploitations are possible

Dick: Steinbeck @ wolves gave the birds the power of flight @

Thoth: Nondescript, you can define that differently...

Patrick: Whether the farmers think innovatively or not, the issue of whether the driving force is individual gain or what preserves and serves society

Alias: Who defines how much you need?

Steve: well what about global poverty and millions of deaths a year due to it

Reflection: this seems to assume a generally egalitarian model, whereas human beings are historically hierarchical. So is the chief exploitative if he designs things for his own self-interest? (Which would include, of course a strong tribe to support him)

Thoth: you can also make it taking so much that it affects others adversely ... so...

Shingles: the circumstance would dictate that I think, Alias

Nondescript: how would you define it Thoth?

Renald: I don't think pinning exploitation to "taking more than one needs" is likely to get us very far.

Steve: we who are overusing global natural resources are depriving others of the right to life, no?

Thoth: there has to be a balance between what you said...and the condition I just mentioned.

Dick: Reflection, 100% RIGHT!

Thoth: exactly, Ref.

Dick: and man is supreme over other species

Thoth: despite our 'ideals', we have to consider reality and human nature.

Dick: what's their rights?

Steve: to life

Steve: so why not use 1% of global natural resources to eradicate global poverty?

Simulat: Alias - in a democratic society that has knowledge about the world and the consequences of actions it seems pretty easy to decide what to do as a community. Is that really a hard idea to understand?

Thoth: never ever do egalitarian models work except for small communities, and with good reason.

Alias: In addition, the phrase "If one suffers as a result of one's gain" is paradigmatic for the "limited pie" approach. However, it is usually predators who show you that pies can be increased. In fact, the people who whine that their pie is shrinking are exactly the ones who hurt everybody else by now allowing larger pies.

Shak: Cutting down the trees on one farm would be damaging to all, potentially.

Dick: Alias!

Thoth: Right.

Shak: And damaging to the wider community.

Shingles: the pie is limited of course, that's another use of coercion there, alias

Thoth: why not check out the valley?

Simulat: and Alias, in the absence of a democratic solution, then who do you think should decide? And on what basis? Shall we have warlords, or kings, or what?

Renald: Alias... there are limits, though... and denying that does it's own harm.

Dick: who defines what is the wider community?

Thoth: how finely can hairs be split?

Shak: Why should there not be a democratic solution?

Dick: are Palestinians the wider community or not?

Steve: giving the impoverished the means to generate wealth would be a larger pie for all

Thoth: we need to find a workable model for such decision making, is the issue.

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Alias: The pie does not have to be limited. You could make one field of the three and lease it out - and all three could retire

Shingles: Well we were all pretty welcoming to threatening or 'NOT TOLERATING' the exploitative individuals you know, Sim

Shingles: That we must use force to contain them. Why were we so accepting of that?

Dick: I am not accepting of it

Alias: Well, the tolerant will finally starve over their disappearing pie . . .

Simulat: I can't see the problem of it shingles - either a community has a means of enforcing its common values or it gives renegades the power to harm everyone else

Alias: Good riddance

Dick: Simulat who is in the community and who is its enemies

Shingles: but what makes those rule-enforcers any better than vigilante bullies, Sim?

Dick: who decides?

Simulat: it's a harsh world - we can make it less harsh - but we can't get away from reality

Patrick: Alias, I think you are onto something with "limited pie" The world will reach a point where wealth is finite. If that is true redistribution seems more logical

Alias: Sim, in your community of three or four there is simply no solution along the lines you have in mind

Renald: Shingles, nothing automatically makes any rule-enforcement "better" than others.

Alias: Well, wealth is not finite

Simulat: you tell me first why that is a hard question that you think doesn't have an obvious answer Dick

Shak: Yes there is a solution. They get together and agree not to cut down the trees.

Shingles: at a select moment in time resources are limited of course, alias

Dick: is Al-Qaida part of the democratic community?

Patrick: Redistribution is a way of maintaining a middle class

Alias: Let's say one of them hates the other's guts

Simulat: I already spoke in favour of a democratic solution

Thoth: hmm. but there ARE practically unlimited resources IF we are able to access them...

Shingles: That's the right answer Renald

Thoth: ...if one wants to limit oneself to a given domain, then yes, there are limits.

Steve: Patrick why not distribution of the means to generate wealth

Thoth: but if, as a species or society, you keep expanding your domain, then you can continue to grow; but this doesn't mean you must not also do so reasonably.

Steve: like literacy, and computeracy

Shingles: democracy being established by force, and bullying the community into cooperating is what we're affectively proposing Sim?

Shak: Sorry to repeat. I'm not keeping the dialogue. If you said that, you were right!

Alias: I have no problem with "distribution" - if you don't steal first what you want to distribute

Renald: Alias... an excellent point.

Simulat: well Alias - you seem to think that the situation is impossible - is that right? - and if you don't what is your solution

Steve: well ownership of land is theft in the first place

Thoth: evolution happens in social contexts, too, though shingles...not just in biology. ;o)

Renald: The problem may in fact be a poor understanding of who owns what, to begin with, and whose actions steal what from whom.

Shingles: oops, that's very tricky, Steve

Steve: how is that tricky, Shingles?

Dick: there is no solution if people have no innate morality

Reflection: it may represent an inherently insoluble problem to define an axiom by which the balance between individual and communal interests can be weighed, insofar as the ecology which this balance must address is constantly changing

Second Philosophy

Thoth: and it is true; it is not a 'nice game' in many ways.

Dick: hence this world as it is

Steve: so why not use 1% of wealth generated by land to fight poverty?

Shingles: How does morality come into it, Dick? I don't understand

Thoth: 'we' insert it, Shingles.

Dick: morality means considering the interests of all others

Shingles: does it?

Dick: yes

Shingles: because much of civilised society cannot operate without ownership, Steve

Alias: Sim, I am making the assessment that SOME of the inherent scenarios will have no good outcome - and ALL three farmers will die or go out of farming because the field WILL be ruined. For some reason our discussion rests on the unspoken and unexamined assumption that all three farmers must be saved at any price.

Dick: it does not actually exist on earth

Steve: not against it; just saying the truth, historically

Shingles: we all become thieves if we establish that

Wichard: I sometimes think that "morality" usually means defining controls so that the promulgator of the moral code can exploit everyone else, eg., the vast wealth of churches

Dick: ownership = civilised? lol!

Steve: Native Americans for example inhabited states

Thoth: or that of states.

Shingles: It's a proposition which I find to be a semantic trick, Steve

Reflection: right Wichard, about morality

Steve: had no concept of legal ownership

Dick: do the Indians own the USA? Real question

Steve: no they had no concept

Wichard: So how do we build a solution that is not exploitive?

Shingles: Now we're reaching the real meat and bones of it, Wichard :)

Alias: As Matthew Arnold once said: "We are here on earth to help others. What the others are there for, I have NO idea."

Thoth: ... especially when the interests of the 'state' becomes divorced from that of the individuals.

Steve: so we "stole" laid claim if you prefer to the land in the US

Wichard: Rather than a democratic solution, consider a collaborative solution

Shingles: I would say that we cannot, Wichard, that exploitation is inherent to societies

Dick: yes Thoth, clearly

Simulat: Alias - the situation is an example of the tragedy of the commons - and the tragedy of the commons is a very important problem in the real world - in many parts of the world fisheries are being wiped out for that reason, air and water pollution are other examples - what do you think should be done in situations like that? Just let nature take its course?

Wichard: How can we all work to forward our self-interests and preserve the life of the species?

Thoth: what nation has NOT stolen land though?

Sage: I am not sure if I see the dilemma... the farmers just need a contract that as long as their trees are planted they are entitled to some fraction of the production of the other farmers being protected. That internalizes the externality and everyone can go back to acting in their personal self interest.

Steve: all I am saying is why not give back 1%

Nondescript: If everyone lived to make the world a better place for those around themselves, the world would be a much better place :)

Shingles: So let's remind ourselves of question 3: Existentially, what is the right action?

Dick: doesn't make it right, does it?

Shak: I don't feel exploited. I feel warm and comfortable, and well-fed.

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Alias: Sometimes people - even large groups of people - will go out of business - like the manufacturers of horse and buggy buggies did. There is no guarantee in the lay of the universe that says those three farmers MUST survive

Renald: Sage... what if a farmer will not sign?

Shingles: Is man an exploitative creature in his nature, everybody?

Steve: no

Sage: Renald, then they won't receive a significant portion of the wealth being produced by their trees - they can then cut down their trees, but they get less in farm-produce then they would if they kept their trees up

Steve: man does not have a nature

Dick: Shingles, he is!

Shingles: how is he not, Steve?

Steve: at least according to Sartre and here I agree with him - existence before essence

Dick: groups together to be a better exploiter

Shingles: ah, but for our esteemed friend Sartre man generates his own nature, Steve

Renald: Sage, then he can undermine the productivity of the others' land over time.

Steve: yep

Alias: Yes, in principle, I do agree with Sage. But as I said before, what if one of them hates the others' guts. Good outcomes are not always guaranteed. I mean, there is an even easier solution than Sage's - they all could go and have a three-way marriage and live happily ever after . . .

Steve: exactly

Renald: heh

Sage: Renald, I don't see how that follows at all

Shingles: So if man exploits, man defines himself as exploitative, does he not, Steve?

Steve: the person who exploits does

Wichard: Alias, a wonderful manipulation of the cultures!

Sage: their own self interest is to sign the contract, because then they each get individually more value from it then if they don't.

Thoth: so, any method we use for such decision making has to acknowledge and allow for our exploitive nature... and allow it to some degree... but limit the excesses.

Steve: defines his/her self

Renald: Sage, that was in the original question, I think. The properties adjoin, so that the clearing of one increases the erosion, etc., of the others.

Sage: right Renald

Shingles: are we assuming that man is an exploitative creature Thoth?

Thoth: reasonable?

Dick: evidence proves that

Alias: I don't see what Sartre has to do with it. I think an old saying covers it much better: "Sh-- happens." But if we have to have a learned approach, as Sim suggests, then I think we should see this as a version of the Prisoner's Dilemma - because of the few people involved. It is a matter of who first "betrays" the others

Thoth: I think we have to, no? Or what do we do?

Dick: want to survive at all costs!

Shak: Sage by name and Sage by nature. That's the key point. It's in everybody's best individual interests to cooperate!

Thoth: we DO exploit; we always have; intrapersonally, and globally. So, how much more proof do we need? Biology is exploitive.

Dick: kill the Indians then we Europeans have all the trees!

Thoth: we are biological...well, our meatheads are, anyway. Or so I hear. Perhaps one approach is to redefine what 'morality' means....

Shingles: that's a problem then, if mans essence is exploitative we get a degenerative spiral, everyone will act this way and we will all be exploited and miserable, Thoth & others

Second Philosophy

Shak: Morality means sticking to the rules.

Thoth: ...perhaps make it something which limits excessive exploitive behaviour in a way most people can agree with...

Steve: well Thoth ethics means putting the other first

Thoth: ...and then enforce it consistently.

Steve: ethics

Shingles: I'd prefer Immorality as an approach, Thoth

Thoth: I don't think that's THE definition though, Steve.

Dick: not if we kill the opposition first

Alias: What rules? Whose morality?

Renald: Shingles... I suspect we are overloading "exploitation" at the moment.

Steve: I do

Thoth: I think at most, it means at least considering the rights of others in relation to our own. ...not ALWAYS putting them first.

Shak: Alias, the rules we agreed.

Steve: well, try Levinas: Ethics as First Philosophy

Dick: Indians want the land - Europeans want the land

Alias: Well, I would advise those farmers, first, to buy a few cameras - and then get some good dogs.

Dick: how do we consider that?

Shingles: its connotations are not as profound as we are making them, yes, I also see exploitation as something not to shy from, but to be embraced, Renald

Alias: Did the farmers agree to something?

Dick: vote?

Thoth: and to control the excessive practice of, shingles...let's not forget that.

Shingles: Ethics? That's a very concrete system, Steve

Steve: well no, Shingles

Shak: Alias, I'm saying they should agree, in order to solve the problem.

Shingles: ah, please do educate me then, Steve

Renald: Should... always problematic

Alias: They should? - Who is 'shouldding' them?

Shak: Alias, it's a providential should. If they want to serve their own best interests they should ...

Steve: it is based on the "face" of the Other, which is not a system; the face says do not do violence to me

Shingles: what is that 'face'?

Steve: your face

Shingles: no should is unconditional, that's just obvious, everybody

Alias: What if one of them hates the others' guts? If the problem could be solved with a group hug, we would not even have to start the discussion.

Steve: your face expresses your infinite singularity

Dick: right, Alias

Alias: What in the world is "the face of the other?"

Marya: I don't understand what you mean Steve, can you explain that?

Steve: the literal "face"

Dick: who gets the trees in Palestine? Not soluble by any vote

Steve: is also you can say your "spiritual" face

Sage: well I suppose my solution only works if the farmers are producing complementary goods that must be traded with one another. If they are all producing the same thing it doesn't work. But if they are specialized farmers, then the contract solution would work. So I'm relying on the increased productivity of specialisation, though I suppose there might be circumstances this doesn't apply.

Renald: Steve... good luck with that :-)

Second Philosophy

Shingles: I'm just thinking that if we do define ourselves in how we behave then aren't we awful beings by exploiting or worse bullying laws and regulations on others, is that what Man is?

Alias: Drug laws? Immigration laws? Prostitution laws?

Shak: Dick, democracy depends on the rational search for solutions to problems. It's stymied by overriding group and ideological loyalties.

Shingles: all laws that are imposed on us, yes, Alias

Alias: Three farmers do not a democracy make . . .

Steve: they put a blindfold on the face of the man in front of the firing squad so the squad does not have to look into the face of the other when they are killing him

Shingles: what happened to the fourth farmer?!

Dick: but what is the group? Who is in and who is outside of it?

Renald: Laws are not inherently good or bad, either. Law is an opportunity.

Shingles: an opportunity? Not an inhibitor Renald?

Alias: The fourth farmer thought out of the box, sold his plot, and immigrated to the US

Renald: Shingles, inhibition is also an opportunity.

Marya: Well, for as long as we live in a world that contains other people, there are going to be differences of opinions, of feelings, of inclinations etc - we are never all going to agree on the everything in every way - so, we find common ground - that common ground is what we believe to be best for us and we work from that in. It is our differences that create the need to have laws that allow us to co-exist in relative 'peace'.

Reflection: it does seem that evolving ethics have progressed toward a "golden rule" model because individuals have becoming progressively empowered over time (in the time of the pharaoh there was no need for this), and as individual power continues to be ever more distributed (like networks), accommodating the competing self interests of ever greater numbers of people will likely become more and more important

Shingles: precisely, he who has the gold makes the rules, Reflection

Renald: As individuals and societies, we face choices. Laws are among them.

Shingles: and we are annoyed by this because we envy his position, Reflection

Marya: However, if anyone is looking for an ideal situation, of total personal freedom - then one may as well lock oneself away from the world - because that ideal does not exist outside of ourselves.

Nondescript: The simplest solution between the farmers would be to appoint a leader

Dick: I lock myself away

Steve: nor in "ourselves" if there is such a thing?

Shingles: I refer to Starship Troopers here to illustrate my thinking 'Something given has no value', it must be taken

Thoth: I just teleport away, Dick.

Renald: Shingles... that I don't understand. Unless modified... that it must be received.

Shingles: if mans nature is exploitative, which we all said was fine, then we are in constant competition with our peers,

Sage: Hmm... I suppose if the question is whether it'd be ok for 2 farmers to threaten to take a portion of the 3rd's land if they cut down their trees

Steve: I for one, did not say it was fine, Shingles

Thoth: I don't know that any solution is easily found to such questions unless we are a) more honest with ourselves about ourselves, and 2) use that honesty in making a reasonable platform of some sort for defining morality and making moral decisions.

Marya: Sounds good, Thoth

Sage: Shingles, our nature is both exploitative and cooperative, surely.

Shingles: Man is defining his essence as devious, opportunistic and egotistical, would that be fair to say?

Steve: some are

Renald: Shingles, devious? I don't think that's entailed.

Reflection: singles, wouldn't that be the natural transition in society as individuals become more, each of them, like the kings of the past?

Second Philosophy

Shingles: yes it would be, but what then is left of Ethics, Renald?

Sage: So is it ok for 2 of the farmers to threaten to take a portion of the 3rd's land if they cut down their trees?

Shingles: ok, from what authority's view, Sage?

Sage: yours lol

Renald: Shingles, I think it's a matter of degree. One who always immediately exploits everyone else to the fullest has no safety net.

Reflection: Renald, I think anyone who does that, pretty much gets beat up straight away, don't they?

Shingles: my view is that it's a use of force, which I cannot reproach, but I'm concerned that in allowing for that, man acquires an unpleasant quality in his nature, Sage

Renald: Reflection, yes, once it becomes known :-)

Shingles: well that would simply be poor strategy I sustain, Renald

Alias: Well, actually I don't agree that people are exploitative by nature. I think they are made exploitative by an ethics/morality based system. I think in a pleasure-based society people would not be exploitative

Reflection: might not the intensification of "self-interest" and the exploitation of others, be the natural consequence of increasing egalitarianism in society?

Sage: the thing about this situation is that it's a one-time thing -- there are no other interactions with the other farmers. If they were interdependent in other ways, or had expectations of future business relations, the problem vanishes. It's only in once-in-a-lifetime decisions where the problem is.

Alias: Well, clearly an ethics/morality based society is unsustainable - so you better look for an alternative

Renald: Yes, Sage, the lack of a larger framework tends to distort the problem... in order to simplify it.

Shingles: rather this ethics/morality based society has perpetuated itself for centuries, Alias

Sage: Right Renald -- but in practice, the benefits of cooperation are so immense that the farmer who cuts down his trees is stabbing himself in the foot -- but i suppose it's interesting to consider those rare cases this isn't true

Alias: Well, yes, if we were to embed the situation into a larger society - it should be easy to create an outcome that lets each of the farmers come out ahead

Renald: Sage, I've been resisting pointing that sort of thing out, myself :-)

Reflection: wasn't it Greenspan this past week, who admitted surprise, that those in the financial markets had not better considered their own broader self-interest?

Renald: yes...

Shingles: what could we say of man's essence then to summarize? 'Man is driven egotistically'?

Renald: Which man?

Patrick: A system that appears altruistic may actually be in everyone's best interest. Societies with the largest middle classes experience the least violence and revolution

Sage: Alias - all you really need is specialization of production - if they are producing 3 different things the problem also vanishes, because they depend on trade. It's only when they are each stand-alone independent and isolated except for this one thing that the dilemma applies.

Alias: Greenspan was disingenuous. If anything, the banks were justified in their lending because they relied on the ratings companies. It was Greenspan who should have realized that there was a problem, not the banks

Shingles: they left the table after their big wins, Reflection

Alias: I perfectly agree with you, Sage. And if you add a larger world, then you can even find a place for one of them to let off steam, even if he hates the others guts. I said it at the very beginning - we always discuss these completely unlikely isolated events that have no connection to real life

Reflection: I think most people involved, for a living, with the financial markets, whether bankers or others, are left very much with the general chaos of this situation

Sage: Well, I think it is interesting though, to consider how that connection occurs, alias -

Shingles: but we cannot form principles from colluded realistic situations, we must at some point refer to logic, Alias

Sage: a system of almost-independent people have no incentives for classical ethical behavior, but economically interdependent people do.

Reflection: to the extent that they see themselves as interdependent sage

Second Philosophy

Shingles: it really amuses me when we talk of ethics and morals as 'beneficial'

Renald: Sage, I think there's almost always SOME incentive... if nothing else, some incentive to become interdependent. :-)

Alias: Well, it's all a matter of incentives . . .

Sage: Renald, in a more realistic situation I think that's true -- but I don't see how that's true here...

Sage: And there may well be specific situations irl that mirror this

Renald: Maybe so.

Reflection: I think even very bright people tend not to see the profound connection which they have to others

Sage: You think Greenspan was disingenuous alias? It sounded to me like he was utterly shocked at the need for increased regulation

Shingles: beneficial tactics and rules that promote gain DO NOT morals make

Sage: lol shingles, depends on your definitions

Reflection: the way that the current financial crisis has developed suggests that very astute people with highly specialized knowledge have not seen things, that are fairly apparent in retrospect

Renald: Disingenuous or foolish... he can't win.

Shingles: for me it's a problem of, as Sartre puts it, we have a 'law without a lawgiver', Sage

Renald: Not only that, Reflection. They resisted seeing what was pointed out, when it did not fit what they expected. Very human of them, of course.

Patrick: Reflection, you may be right about public perception. Until the other night I thought there were actually a limited number of Al-Qaida, but I saw a documentary that asserted there are over 28,000 boys schools in Afghanistan training over four million potential terrorists.

Reflection: yes indeed Renald

Sage: I don't see a 'law' shingles... just recognition that my interests aren't entirely separate from yours...

Alias: Well, Sage, it depends on what he wants to regulate. If he wants to regulate the ratings services - and credit excesses, like late fees - that's fine - but if he wants to regulate banks in some blanket way, I hope not

Shingles: never separate, no, yet at times mutually exclusive, Sage

Alias: Well, I saw a documentary that says that all of Al-Qaida is a myth. And I would think that more likely

Sage: Well I think there's probably a need for regulations of transparency, if that's what you mean, Alias.

Though I suppose you could make a case that the industry would be smart enough to place inherent value in the practice and adjust their valuation accordingly

Shingles: that train really ran away with itself tonight, Patrick :)

Alias: There is basically NO terrorism in the world. In ALL of the last year in ALL countries fewer than 200 people died from terrorism - and only 64 Americans died. That is half the number who died from peanut allergies.

