

# **Egoism, Ignorance & Choice: On Society's Lethal Infection**

*Jonathan Camilleri*

## ***On the Misinterpretation of Choice and Freedom***

I understand man to be the most complex of creatures, having an innate metaphysical responsibility underlying a largely corporeal existence. While man has the physical attributes necessary to interact with the physical plane, possibly to the same extent as any other corporeal creature, he is burdened with the ability to directly intervene in the timeline of the universe, not just by an action performed – as that would be well within the faculties of any living organism - but by choice taken. Man is burdened with the power of choice, and while all other known creatures simply follow their instinct to reach a goal which contributes to their inborn life-cycle, man has no particularly distinct pre-determined or possibly genetic common goal to speak of.

I also consider man to be the darkest of creatures, not due to the extensive savagery and devastation he has caused, in itself, but because he willingly chose to cause it, even though he almost always had the choice not to. Man only seems to assign ethical terms such as 'good' or 'evil' to fellow human beings, to their actions or to animals man has humanized - such as calling a dog a 'good dog' - because they behave in the way the humanizing owners expect them to. Man is born selfish yet grows up to mask his selfishness with arrogance, believing himself to be absolutely free, mistaking 'choice' for 'freedom', hence misinterpreting both as 'doing as one

pleases'. Ironically it is this misinterpreted form of 'freedom' which suffocates human society in a slow but certain suicide:

[..] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat; for, the day you eat of that, you are doomed to die. Genesis 2:17

### *Clarifying Choice*

I understand choice as doing something as opposed to something else, given that one has the potential to understand one's actions, thereby being able to perform them willingly (not instinctively). Alongside this, I maintain that ignorance of a choice available does not excuse a person from making it. One must always be aware of the extent of our capacity to choose and the underlying complexity of each choice, as forgetting our limitations leads to neglect and chaos. Limitations to our capacity to choose include that one cannot choose to be born, to die a natural death at a certain time, to not exist or to never have existed or to not choose at all, for even that would be a choice. Choices are presented to us every moment of every day and can therefore be taken for granted. Furthermore, I specifically used the word 'presented' because choices are in fact presented to us as a fleeting result or culmination of countless causes, and similarly, they will be the result of countless consequences. Adding to my previous statement, while I maintain that ignorance of a choice available does not excuse a person from making it, neither does ignorance of the causes and of the potential consequences.

## *Man's Suicidal History*

I find man to be a cowardly, albeit resourceful, being. Early on in the history of man, 'nature' posed a perceived threat to man: that of an inevitable death. Man could not see the bigger picture, that life and death are intertwined and that dying is a necessary part of life. Furthermore, this was the one thing that man had no say in. Man could not choose to live forever, and in his eyes this made him no different from any other creature or organism found on earth.

He therefore sought to rise above this threat, by slowly fighting creatures and parts of nature he could overcome with relative ease, and repeatedly 'cheating' death by surviving against ever stronger foes, eventually amassing enough strength - perhaps gained mainly through the resultant weakening of nature rather than the strengthening of man - that nature could slowly be overcome. This 'survival' gave man the illusion of choice: to die now or to live another day. By slowly 'overcoming' nature, man seemingly takes what he wants, provided he finds no visible resistance or that the resistance can be apparently overcome.

It seems society itself must have therefore developed for one primary yet twofold purpose: to work towards the conquering of death: a) by evading death for as long as possible and b) by eventually conquering death itself, thereby 'living forever'.

Man has also developed a god-complex wherein he not only believes that he has an equal standing with nature, but wherein he falsely believes he is a 'creator'. In fact, however, all man does is

change and replace things, for nothing can be designed and made, if not out of something else. In the light of this revelation, man's whole superiority complex is pathetic to say the least. To hammer the nail deeper into Man's inevitable casket, I believe that the only reason that society has not been openly assigned this ego-shattering collective judgement is that man has not yet found a sufficiently complex creature to try and overcome, and thereby compare itself with. One of man's biggest mistakes is the belief that he is above or separate from nature, not part of it.

In comparing the earth to, say, an animal or insect, one can clearly picture the insensitive perversion predominant in the way man interacts with his surroundings. Thus, in the following analogy I liken earth to a creature which man has so severely and frequently abused and operated on, that it is covered in the scars of every tiny little incision - scars which have never fully healed - leaving the creature damaged beyond repair. With grotesque brutality, man has also seen fit to remove some limbs and extract some cells and organs from the creature itself, taking of the entrails and amputated limbs and sewing them to different parts of the creature's body. On many occasions, man also uses the limbs and entrails as tools or as fuel, to further the abuse upon the creature itself. While the creature inevitably dies out and calcifies, remaining nothing but a shell, it is deemed beautiful, in man's uniquely macabre sense of the word. Such barbarity is testimony to what man is in fact capable of: great, but terrible things.

One might argue that since man has or has made the means necessary to use the earth's resources and can use them to their full

capacity, there is nothing wrong in using them, especially since the earth is seemingly at man's disposal. Some would even say it is man's duty to use his supposed intellect to 'plough' that which 'has been given to us'. I wholeheartedly disagree, for it is with arrogance that man assumes anything 'belongs' to him, simply because of his superiority complex. Even if earth 'belonged' to man, does 'having something' necessarily imply how it should be used, if at all? And does knowing a fraction of physics give man the right to turn nature against itself? No, on the contrary: man has yet to grasp that every variable in his life is simply another choice that has to be made. Man unthinkingly assumes the right to manipulate nature, yet it only takes a little thought to notice that this is not the case. Having access to nature presents yet another complex choice in itself, a choice man has often neglected to actively ponder.

### ***Ignorant Choice: Infecting Society***

Man, being as much a living creature as any other animal, has an innate survival instinct. He is fuelled by a selfish desire of self-preservation, and will form a society in so far as it benefits himself. When man no longer has a common 'enemy', he starts turning against himself, constantly re-dividing society into smaller subdivisions. Each subdivision has a common cause, or rather, something they are commonly against. An issue would stand before a society, and society is burdened to choose. People are divided on what to choose, because a choice at face value can only benefit one side and not the other in some way, even if on a tiny technicality. These sides will similarly have some form of internal disagreement over another lower level choice or detail, and further divisions start

to develop, and so on until we reach the lowest level – that of the individual. Therefore, the more one thinks one knows about the choices and their consequences, the more one is prone to disagree and cause conflict. For a ruling body to be in power, at least in a democracy, the people make a choice on who is the most likely to make the eventual choices that would be beneficial to them. Therefore, when a governing body experiences a revolt, it would have taken the wrong choices, in the eyes of the people.

While the higher levels of society seem to be moving in line with what the people think they need, underlying the system one can find dark reality, where the rulers (being after all individuals themselves) are guided by self-interest and self-preservation, not by authentic and genuine caring for the greater good. Furthermore, as man is unaware of the bigger picture, and therefore his choices always contain at least a measure of ignorance, he can never be sure that what he wants is really what he needs, or what he wants for society is what society really needs. On many occasions man cannot even distinguish between the two.

### *In Conclusion*

Yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves: For they see their own wit at hand, and other men's at a distance. (Hobbes, 2006, p. 69)

The lethal concoction of our instinctive selfishness combined with our ignorance and our ability to choose, is largely manifest in one incontrovertible fact: Our choices are affected by previous choices, not only our own, and that therefore, the moment man started

existing was the moment man had an infinite number of possible worlds to live in. With each choice, man creates a further infinity of possibilities and if one choice is the wrong one, the whole infinity of all possible future worlds are affected. To sum up, the ability to choose and our innate selfish, or rather, self-preservative urges are a recipe for disaster. Combining this with man's ignorance by definition and especially his general refusal to accept it, inevitably leads to Man's demise as a species. It is our false notion of freedom which contributes directly to our collective death, and therefore, man's trying to escape death is, in the largest of ways, counterproductive.

## ∞ References

Thomas, H 2006, *Leviathan*, Dover Publications, USA.

The New Jerusalem Bible 1973, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Bath.

