Homo Constitutionalus: Rule-Bound But Not Fully Rule-Determined Choice

Behind the analytical narratives of this book is a conception of human nature that I have termed homo constitutionalus (Congleton 2019).

This model provides a logical basis for concluding that rules affect behavior and, with additional assumptions, that the effects of "rule internalization" can be characterized with rational choice models similar to those routinely applied in game theory, economics, and rational choice political science.

Homo Constitutionalus

- **The homo constitutionalus model begins with the observation that individuals are born into the world knowing very little.**

- New borns know nothing of their family, their home, their native language, the community in which they will live, their future friends and career choices, nor very much about how their action may affect all those things.

- **They are "naturally ignorant," although they are not blank slates.**

- Humanity has many **shared genetically transmitted dispositions**—because the species repeatedly confronted similar choice settings during its long migratory period and a subset of genetic variations included dispositions that solved the problems of survival better than others. (Our "Firmware.)

- As a consequence, we all cry to attract parental assistance as we enter the world—or shortly thereafter.

- **We all have similar data provided by our sense organs**, and we all have propensities to interpret the data provided in similarly useful ways using our "untrained" brains.

Homo Constitutionalus

- **However, left to one's own innate propensities, an individual would neither survive nor flourish. Parental support and lessons taught by them and others are both necessary.**

- <mark>**This fact demonstrates that the ability to learn from and to teach others are among our most important inherited facilities. (Our Software.)**</mark>

- Before knowledge can be passed on, however, **it has to be invented or worked out. Thus, an equally important facility is our ability to "make sense" of the world**, by which is meant the ability to distill various sensory data into a variety of **"if-then" relationships** and regularities—**not all of which are correct**—beginning with if we cry, then mother or father will come.

- Over the course of life, we discern a huge number of such relationships from our experience tasting, listening, watching, and thinking about what we've tasted, heard, and seen.

- **The ability to invent new "if-then" relationships is logically prior to our ability to learn from and to teach others, but without the other two capacities it would be far less useful.**

Homo Constitutionalus

• Even though both our firmware (genetic dispositions) and our software (learned dispositions) jointly determine much of our character, **it is the latter that is focused on in this course.**

• **Our software is the part of our character that we can be said to have some control over because learning rules from others, refining what is learned, and creating new rules is always an active process. Observing others and listening to stories and other lessons always requires interpretation.**

• **As a consequence, we are all "self-programmed at the margin," rather than fully determined by our genes and culture. And because our software is accumulated during a lifetime, it changes far more rapidly than our DNA.**

Rule Bound but not Rule Determined Choices

- Together these **three** abilities (**learning from other, inventing new rules, teaching others**) allow us to understand the world far better than any lone individual could ever hope to because knowledge can be accumulated from a myriad of experiences and conclusions about "if then" relationships shared without the requirement that every individual undergo the same experiences and reach similar conclusions.

- Some of the if-then relationships prove to be useful, and these are the ones most likely to be taught to (and accepted by) others. As a consequent, a person with a "trained" brain lives a longer, richer life, than would have been possible without the lessons learned from others.

- Together these three capacities support both social evolution and progress.

- **A fourth capacity that arguably is a consequence of our capacity to invent new rules and refine old ones is that we have the ability to revise and ignore rules that we have learned from others and also disposition that are genetically transmitted.**

  - Not every rule that one learns or invents is true or useful and the least useful and less true rules tend to be weeded out through time.

Rule bound but not rule determined choice

- **Rules as "if then" Relationships**

- **The term "rules" is used as a synonym for "if then" regularities and relationships**. We use rules to understand the world as it is, to determine what can be done to change it and how to choose among the alternatives that we discern (or think we discern).

- Most of our rules fall into three rough categories: (i) rules that characterize the external world (science), (ii) rules that characterize how our actions can alter the world (technology), and (iii) rules for assessing the relative merits of alternative actions (ranking rules).

- **Systems of rules can be internalized**.

- There is a special form of learning in which new rules are incorporated into a person's own internal rule system, after which they are normally used reflexively (without much thought) to evaluate situation, alternatives, and make choices.

- Adam sees Eve pick up an apple and throw it at him, he realizes that he can catch it before it bumps into his nose, concludes that that is a good idea, catches it and takes a bite of the apple—all without much conscious thought.

- In such cases, throwing an apple could be a good strategy for Eve if she wants to befriend Adam even though it violates the logic worked out above (which implied that gently offering applies is a better way to befriend others than throwing them).

- **It turns out that there are exceptions. Exceptions do not as some say "make the rule," but they do make our systems of internalized rules more complex and conditional and somewhat less certain.**

Numerical representations of choices

- **When the choices that these rule systems induce are at least locally consistent, we can use numerical representations of the goals of choice (as with utility levels or net benefits) to characterize the decisions made, although they do not fully explain the manner in which those choices are made.**

- Thus although the homo constitutionalus model is richer than the homo economicus model, special cases of that model also support the analytical approach of rational choice based, economics, political science, etc.

- Such internal consistency need not be universal to be used for modelling particular types of decision.

- It is such numerical representations that are used in all the game matrices of parts II and III of the course (parts I and II of the book).