

FIVE REASONABLE PEOPLE

THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF MORALITY

PREFACE

*All things without, which round about we see,
We seeke to knowe, and how therewith to doe;
But that whereby we reason, live and be,
Within our selves, we strangers are thereto...*

*We that acquaint our selves with every Zoane
And passe both Tropikes and behold the Poles,
When we come home, are to our selves unknown,
And unacquainted still with our owne Soules.*

—Sir John Davies, 1599.

Four centuries have passed. Though we know and do much more in the material realm, we are still unacquainted with our own souls. How does society work? What parts is it made of? How do the parts interrelate? Physics has its laws relating matter and energy; chemistry has its reactions between the elements; biology has its systems of cooperating organs; ecology has its interactions between species and environments. How do individuals connect to society? What are the laws of society?

After thousands of years of seeking, we have only patchy and disputed notions of our psychological and social selves.

Three dimensions interrelate five types.

On an autumn evening in 2006 I was walking through the Canberra dusk when I had a sudden thought.

“That’s it!” I said aloud, “That’s how society is put together.” The claim was such a conceit, such hubris, that I laughed. Yet I could see no error and still can’t.

“It” became *Way of life theory* (WOLT), an idea I had been developing since 1997. WOLT explains how individual people are put together morally, and how society—any society—is put together from individual

people. WOLT is a *theory*; it is not constructed from looking at reality but from assumed, theoretical relationships between assumed concepts. Like physics. Like economics. As far as I know, WOLT is the only falsifiable theory in the social sciences outside economics.

WOLT shows that there are five fundamental patterns of social values and interactions—five theoretical “types” of people and organisations—and that the types are interrelated by the locations of their value preferences on three “dimensions.” These are moral values, the matters which we must settle in order to live socially. The three dimensions encompass all possible preferences regarding all rational, social issues.

I had long accepted the existence and logic of the five types; the puzzle was their interrelationship. Two years earlier I had made a 3D model by cutting a five centimetre cube of packing foam, poking three pencils through it, and labelling the pencils as X, Y, Z axes. (A drawing of the cube is in Chapter 2.) My sudden insight that autumn evening was that the model was correct, that every rational, social concept fitted it, and that only the five types could be derived from it.

Origins of WOLT

The five types were first proposed in 1970 by English anthropologist Mary Douglas. She deduced them from two theoretical dimensions she called “grid” and “group.” The meanings of these terms were not so clear but the theoretical types she derived from them could be readily seen in the real world and Douglas’s “grid-group theory” acquired an academic following.

I first encountered it in 1997, and was intrigued that a purely theoretical social theory gave realistic results. I was sceptical (Can we really divide all human beings into five types?), however I had an essay to write and an exam to pass and by the time they were done a meme had infected me.

By then I had discovered some plainer concepts (values, beliefs, concerns) that would serve as dimensions to derive the types in place of the somewhat nebulous grid and group. There were still problems of vagueness, incompleteness and inconsistency and I spent a summer vacation trying to resolve them.

The theory became clearer, broader, and more radical. I presented adult-education courses on it and was gratified to see how the students were drawn in. It seemed I was onto something, though it would be years before it came together as *Way of life theory*—where *all* relevant concepts can serve as dimensions.

Over the years I delved deeper into WOLT and tested it every way I could. My epiphany that autumn evening was later vindicated by the positive reception accorded my PhD dissertation (online at the Open Research Repository of the Australian National University). An ancient, fundamental problem was solved: for the first time, there was a rigorous, scientific (i.e., falsifiable), theory of ethics.

Readership

The intention is to explain *Way of life theory* to the non-specialist. There is some jargon and the Glossary (Appendix 6) should help with that. Perhaps the Glossary can also serve as a sort of summary of WOLT.

In WOLT terms—this will make sense with minimal knowledge of the theory—readers of this book will be high on the X dimension since that is where the taste for social inquiry and criticism is. They will therefore be mainly liberal Type 3s along with a fair proportion of order-loving Type 2s. The go-getter 1s are too busy to bother with theories about society and the fatalist 4s don't read much. Among the detached and relatively rare Type 5s, the intellectually inquisitive will be interested.

Human society is generally seen as confusingly complicated but if you can get your head around the

three dimensions you will find “that whereby we reason, live and be” to be fairly straightforward.

Acknowledgements

Way of life theory has had a long development. It included eight years at the University of Western Australia where what later became WOLT was a hobby and political science staff and students were interlocutors and test subjects, and five years at the ANU where I wrote the PhD. The theory was worked out with the advice and help of many academics and friends, some of whom are acknowledged in the PhD.

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