

## Predilection for Single Ordering

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Partial Text in Sans Serif, my notes in Century (a Serif Text)

It's been noted that a person can walk and chew gum at the same time. This typically happens in response to some sort of "Single Ordering" statement. I note that both of these tasks can be performed somewhat mindlessly and the person doing both could very well focus conscious attention on a third thing, but the fact that "Single Ordering Statements" are common enough to be discussed as a "Thing" ought to motivate further discussion.

In the area of less individual and mindless social phenomena I plan to tie Single Ordering to the observation that focused attention on the Vietnam War caused the Civil Rights Movement to falter to the phenomenon. Apparently, whole societies find a mixed focus difficult, and the constant outpouring of information in the present time due to the widespread proliferation of screens and signage can paralyze the ability of folks who submit to inundation from being able to complete tasks requiring concentration, focus and critical thinking.

If we are indeed, by nature, Single Ordering Minds it behooves us to lean into the heuristic where it's helpful and to acknowledge the errors the heuristic generates.

DeSoto himself quotes Thorndike's "Halo Effect" as the single thing most like single ordering. Soon after he quotes several other psychologists, each of them briefly.

The Limitation Philosophy take on the Predilection for Single Orderings is that it's a major heuristic active in human personality and our societies. Evidence of Limitation, and needing to be understood in that light. Consider the following section of the text.

(Reformatted but in Arial)

The classic view of halo is that it shows a reliance on general impressions arising from stupidity or ignorance or carelessness.

In support of this view is Symonds' assertion that halo is especially strong for ratings on traits that are not commonly observed or thought about.

People are especially stupid and careless in handling these unfamiliar, unimportant traits.

But the argument that halo is merely a puerile failing runs into complications with other assertions by Symonds.

He says that halo is also especially strong for traits of high moral importance and for traits involving reactions with other people.

Why should people be especially stupid and careless in dealing with such traits?

Still more difficulty for the argument is provided by Sherif, White, and Harvey (1955), who found that even on a task of Supreme importance to them, handball throwing, boys based their predictions and judgments of another's performance mainly on his status in the group.

It has in fact been suggested by some that halo is stronger for traits that are important to people than for those that are unimportant.

Handball throwing, and interesting salience. Of all the life skills proficiency in sport is seen as important. (A tempting tangent)

But I'd rather focus on the idea that DeSoto uses the word stupid. This is where Limitation Philosophy sees our limitation more clearly. Words like Stupid, Sinful, Irrational and the like are applied when one has deployed a heuristic, and the focus of discussion is on the errors it generates rather than its beneficial use.

The Theistic Mindset, which permeates our secular culture makes a moral issue of every downside there is to being a bounded being with a limited personality. The mindset of Limitation Philosophy is that we are Limited, not Sinful, Stupid or Irrational when the heuristics we deploy generate error.

Loading Every Error With Moral Approbation Accomplishes Nothing But Regret and Neurosis in the Individual, and a Social Neurosis and a Society Suffering from an Unhealthy Obsession with Morality and Blame.

We Are Limited, Not Sinful.

There is no original sin, only limitation.

Ockham's Epiphany by Thomas Laperriere

The Raw Text Starts Here

People are always ready to rate one another.

But their ratings have a certain

defect. They tend to correlate unduly.

Rated voice quality is likely to correlate very highly with rated intelligence, even if they are

in fact quite independent traits. Thorndike

(1920) christened this tendency *halo*.+Since

then it has been one of psychology's bread-

and-butter phenomena. It is a strong, impres-

sive phenomenon, little known to the public,

yet easy to describe, and controllable in some

degree with devices like forced-choice ratings.

But Thorndike's act seems to have taken the

surprise out of it, so that it has remained for

40 years mainly a bother for the practical psychologist, rather than a poser for scientific psychology. So little regard has been given to explaining it, in fact, that the best explanatory discussion Guilford (1954) finds to cite is that published by Symonds (1925). And this is not because Symonds' reasons for halo are definitive. indeed, they seem to suffer mutual inconsistency,

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ments of another's performance mainly on his status in the group. It has in fact been suggested by some that halo is stronger for traits that are important to people than for traits that are unimportant (Asch, 1952, p. 230; Riecken & Homans, 1954).

At first glance, it might seem that these complications make halo a more subtle and important phenomenon than the general-impression hypothesis would have it, but an augmented general-impression hypothesis triumphs over them. It is argued that in these cases the affective reaction toward a person governs judgments of him, preventing differ-

entiated judgments. It might seem surprising that emotion should consistently override thought. It might even be supposed that the affective reaction itself could be differentiated, permitting differentiated judgments. But no serious doubts have been expressed about this view of halo, and it remains the commonly accepted one, with little elaboration and less competition.

There is, however, another kind of difficulty which is harder to incorporate under the general-impression hypothesis: people have a positive predilection for the real-world counterpart of halo, for a high correlation between the variables on which people are ranked. A



number of studies, mostly by sociologists, demonstrate this fact. Lenski (1954) has shown that if a person has discrepant scores on the status variables of society at large (income, occupation, education, ethnic background), he tends to be dissatisfied. Adams (1953) found that the morale of bomber crews was positively correlated with the average intercorrelation of their status variables, rank, flying time, education, reputed ability, popularity, length of service, combat time, and position importance. Homans (1953) showed that discrepancies between pay and prestige of office jobs produced dissatisfaction. Exline and Ziller (1959) found that congeniality in small groups depended on the correlation of the membersq

ability and voting power, which were controlled experimentally. And Whyte (1943), in his

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famous study of a street-corner gang, the Nortons, describes how the members of this gang actively made bowling scores correlate with status in the group, by appropriate encouragement and heckling. Indeed, Benoit-Smullyan (1944) argues that what produces discontent and rebelliousness in people, whether in a small group or great society, is not so much oppression or low status itself,

as it is the possession of disparate statuses.

The rebel isn't the man who is low on all ladders; he is the man who is low on some and high on others.

It is hard for the general-impression hypothesis to cope with these cousins of the halo effect. The general-impression hypothesis can directly explain only why people misperceive, not why they might be dissatisfied with what they perceive. It is possible that in some cases misperception plays a mediating role, leading to inappropriate behavior which results in punishment and dissatisfaction with the social structure. But in many cases the discrepant orderings are clear enough and misperception

unlikely.

It seems indeed that people have a predilection for single orderings, an antipathy toward multiple orderings. This is not to say that the predilection itself is not rooted in the relative ease with which people can handle single orderings as compared with multiple ones. In recent years psychologists have realized that people find many ways and go to surprising lengths to avoid cognitive strain (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958). But there is a big difference between the trivial statement that multiple orderings are naturally harder than single orderings and the statement that they are so much harder that people are discontent with

them and actively seek to transform them to single orderings.

Since social scientists are people first of all, it might be predicted that they bear the same predilection. Do they? It appears that they do and that the predilection is a prime source of difficulty for social theory. Benoit-Smullyan (1944), Lenski (1954), and Rose (1958) all have chided their fellow social scientists for their tendency to treat society as having a single hierarchy or ordering rather than distinguishing the ordering variables of wealth, power, education, prestige, and so on. Lenski says that from Aristotle on, most social philoso-

phers and social scientists have made this particular oversimplification. Despite recognition early in this century of the desirability of considering these ordering variables separately, there is a stubborn, recurring urge to reduce them to a single ordering. The modern, sophisticated way to do it is to average each subject's ranks on the several orderings, an involved procedure which loses much and gains nothing, according to Rose and Lenski. Another way, one discussed by Benoit-Smullyan, is to insist that only one of the ordering variables is important, the others being only direct or indirect expressions or consequences of it. Thus a Marxist might say that what counts in a

Western society is wealth, and power and prestige are merely derivatives of wealth.

Pareto might say instead that wealth is only the material expression of social power.

In treating societies and cultures and social systems themselves, social scientists have also suffered from the predilection for single orderings. The early sociologists and cultural anthropologists taught, for example, that there is a single ordering of cultures from primitive to advanced- the so-called doctrine of unilinear evolution (Steward, 1953). This teaching is rejected by most anthropologists today. What is wrong with it? Not that there are no ways in which cultures are ordered from primitive to

modern, but that there are many. A given culture might occupy a high rank in the ordering by metallurgy but a low rank in the ordering by mathematics, The early anthropologists blinded themselves to this multiplicity of discrepant orderings in their predilection for a single ordering. Even today some anthropologists cling to the conception of cultures as having a single ordering by reducing the number of steps in the ordering to a paltry three or four. %savagery,+%barbarianism,+%civilization.+This degradation of the doctrine keeps it alive for the sake of the predilection, but in a form that is as useless as it is unassailable (Steward, 1953).



Still another topic on which thinking may be blurred by the predilection for single orderings is leadership. Scientists and laymen both call a number of different attributes and functions leadership- popularity, power, skill, prominence, for example. All of these are variables which to some extent order the members of a group, and in principle it is quite possible for these orderings to be discrepant, with different members at the top. But of course people will expect all the orderings to be the same, will expect the most popular member to be the most powerful and most skillful and most prominent, to be, in a word, the leader. It seems so fitting to say, %First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his country-

men.+This expectation lands the social scientist in a curious impasse. To begin with, he has the predilection, like anyone else, and his discussion of leadership is likely to show it. But at the same time as a wiser colleague criticizes him for confusing popularity with eminence and skill with influence, there may be justification for him in the fact that his subjects, having the predilection too, tend actually to bring about the single ordering, investing a single leader with all these things. In fact, if the leader renounces some of his leadership functions and tries to distribute them among his followers, as many enlightened social scientists would have him do, what is his reward? He has violated his followersq

expectation of a single ordering and they are likely to be displeased rather than grateful (Berkowitz, 1953).

Even in colloquial language one can detect people's tendency to act as though there is only one ordering of a set of people. They seem to delight in gross expressions like "Joe's tops," or "Joe's the greatest," avoiding any hint that there may be orderings on which Joe does not stand uppermost.

Probably in any case where people are made to think of an ordering, even an ordering of elements other than people, they will resist thinking of any disparate ordering. If so, a

kind of halo effect may be a more pervasive problem for judgments and ratings than is ordinarily realized. The study of social desirability of traits and behaviors seems to have run afoul of this problem. At first, it would seem a straightforward matter to have the subjects judge items drawn from personality inventories as to their social desirability (Edwards, 1957). But it does not turn out to be straightforward (De Soto, Kueth, & Bosley, 1959; Johnson, 1955). These items were originally selected so as to vary widely on desirability for personal well-being or health, and this variation seems to provide a salient ordering of the items for the subjects. As a

consequence, they have a troublesome tendency to judge their desirability for personal well-being when they are supposed to judge their social desirability.

Even in defining the key mathematical property of an ordering relation called transitivity

transitivity of a relation is usually stated something like this: If A bears the relation to B, and B bears the relation to C, then A must bear the relation to C. It is sometimes convenient, however, to state it thus (De Soto & Kuethe, 1959): If A bears the relation to C,

and C bears the relation to B, then A must bear the relation to B. These two formulations are equivalent, mathematically speaking. But people find the former much easier to apprehend than the latter, which seems to confuse if not mislead them. It asks them to think

the ordering  $A < C < B$ , a task that would be easy but for the obtrusion of the overlearned disparate ordering  $A > B < C$ . In the other formulation, of course,  $A > B > C$  is the only ordering that presents itself, and understanding is quick.

## 1 Summary Part 1

It was proposed, as an inductive generaliz-

tion, that people have a predilection for a single ordering or ranking of a set of people or other objects, an aversion to discrepant orderings of the set. In ratings, this predilection shows up as the halo effect- the tendency to reduce discrepant orderings on different traits to a single ordering by merit. In social structures, including small groups and large societies, it shows up in general dissatisfaction with discrepant orderings of the members and in efforts to eliminate the discrepancies. In the theorizings of social scientists about society and culture it shows up as a stubborn urge somehow to reduce discrepant orderings of people, or classes, or cultures, to single orderings. And in other judgmental and intellectual

tasks people show difficulty in handling discrepant orderings which contrasts strongly with their facility in handling single orderings.

Once the generalization had been established by appeal to such phenomena, an effort was made to give it context and explanation

## 2 Summary Part 2

through experimentation. The difficulty of learning two discrepant orderings of a set of people was compared with that for five other tasks in which subjects also learned two social structures at once. It was found that two orderings of a set of people were relatively



difficult to learn, providing one more instance of the generalization. From the pattern of difficulties over the six conditions, however, it was inferred that the aversion to a set having discrepant orderings is a special case of an aversion to a set having more than one organization of a given kind. Certain other possible explanations appeared to be ruled out by the data.

Finally, a discussion was given of how schemata might operate to produce the above and related phenomena.