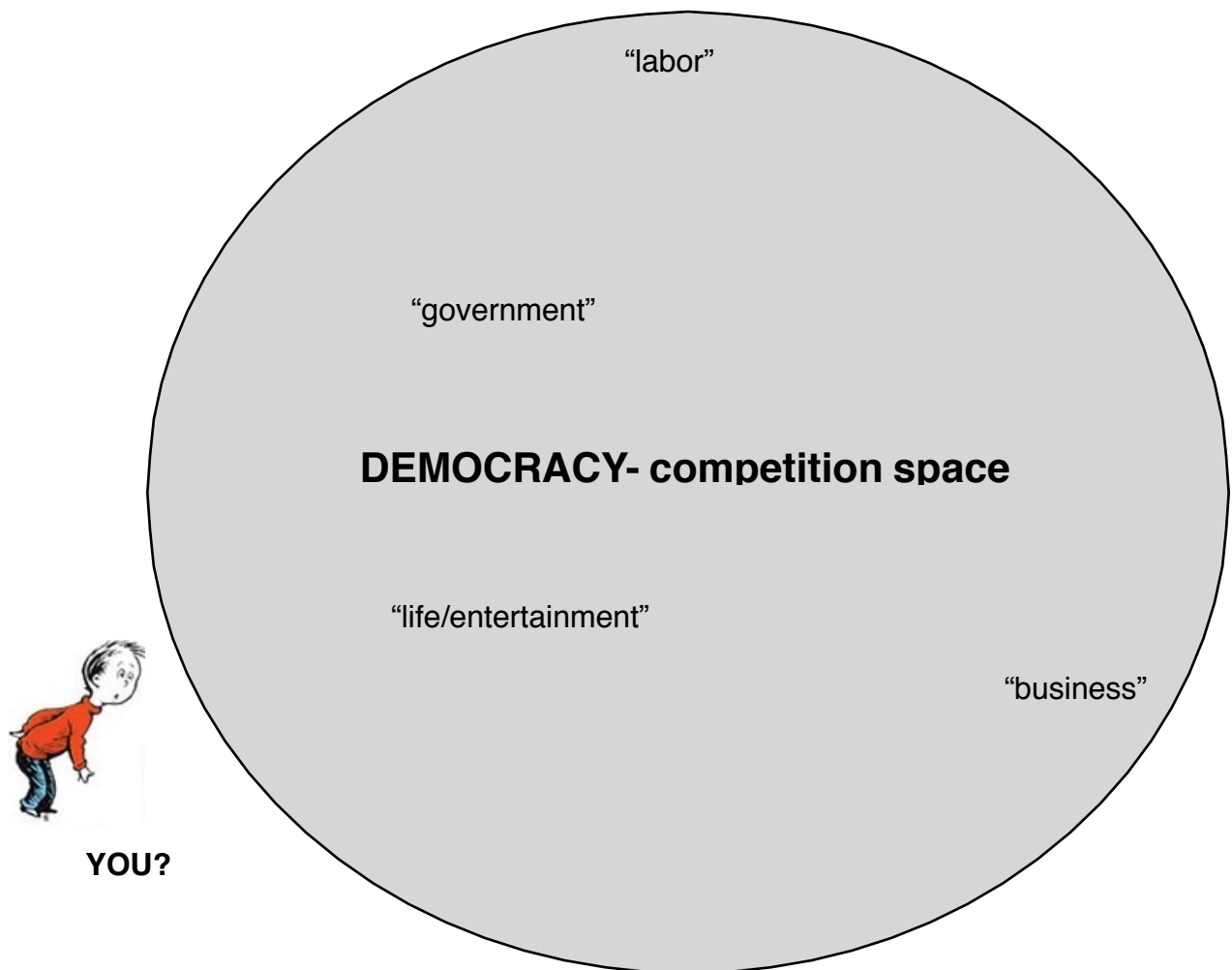


“Theory of Self in a Constitutional Democracy”

By Jason Leggett

Imagine you were deaf and blind. What would government mean to you? A difficult task, I argue, because “government,” itself an abstract idea, in this case is separated from the self. Once separated then, does the “government” know me? Does the government protect me at night when I walk alone? When I sleep? Are you then part of the government or not?



Before we investigate who you are and who you think you are, you need to understand, as visualized above, I am asking you to consider yourself as an outsider looking in. In a democracy, the participants are engaged in a competition of ideas, actions, and words, in order to influence the larger collective, sometimes in their own interests, and sometimes in the interests of others. My ultimate point is that space, represented as a circle above, goes on with or without you, and is designed that way.

One should have encountered or considered the following question by now: **Who** am I? An answer could be that you are you as much as here is there. But then again where is there? Is it here? In other words, you cannot “be” you from the subjective point of you, can you? Who you think you are is very important, but how others see you, and believe you to be has real effects and consequences.

Another way to ask the question could be: **What** am I? An answer to that question could be just as frustrating and vague - one is one as much as there is here. The connection is that who and what you are must be “relative” to something. Einstein and others helped show us that time is relative¹. For example, if you set your watch with someone at one place and time, you might not believe it (so try it), but at a future date, time, and place your watches will have different times. While your mind is still spinning consider a more productive question: **what are you to do?**

What is really important to understand in constructing a theory about your role in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people is “self-evident” law of nature: **You are free**. You know this from the Greek and Latin words of Liberty (ελευθερία, libertas, la liberté). Liberty? So what **makes** you free? Are you truly free? Or are you bound and tied to your choices? And even the choices of others? The relativity of freedom is difficult to understand at first.

Let’s take a pop culture break. Watch the following youtube clip: Matrix - [the Desert of the Real](#). As referenced in the “wake up, follow the white rabbit” scene, this concept is actually part of a larger critique of our concepts of the real, from the book “Simulacra and Simulation” by Jean Baudrillard. Simulacrum is a copy without an original and simulation is our blind adherence to the copy as if it were the original. Think about a Google Map that actually has something in the wrong location. Which is real?



¹ For a fascinated and mind blowing experience of the relativity of time, listen to NPR’s Radio Lab episode here: <http://www.radiolab.org/2007/may/29/unlocking-the-secrets-of-time/>

Question: Why was it so difficult for Mr. Anderson, “Neo,” to accept that who he thought he was, was actually a social construct that he had adapted to?

As if this wasn't abstract (and perhaps a little frustrating) enough, let's keep pushing our brains past our comfort level into an area of new learning. Let's add more context and depth to the question I asked earlier that grounds us back in reality: **what are you to do?** What are you going to do in this classroom? In your neighborhood? In your precinct? In your Legislative District? In this city? In this Congressional District? In this State? In this Country? In this World? In this universe? ha, maybe a bit too far. But to **understand government**, and particularly the United States government, you must be able to ask, explore, and eventually begin to answer the question - what will you do in a particular context.

Mini-Assignment: Make sure you click all the hyperlinks above. I suggest you either copy and paste these websites into a document that you can easily access anytime (see dropbox.com for free storage space) or save them as bookmarks in your web browser (see Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox for auto bookmark syncing). These are very valuable tools for your life as a citizen but also important resources to better learn the content for this class and ultimately to finish your final project.

Government or Governance?

We now need to analyze the theory of self from a larger point of view. We need to look at it from the individual all the way to the larger collective. We have gotten used to this larger collective being defined as country, in other words, “American.” What does that mean? Is that changing with globalization? For now, let's imagine a larger collective as just a defined group that the individual chose to be a part of and could leave if they don't like the group. They could either go out alone or join another group.

We are going to look at this concept from the view of two problems the collective faces toward the individuals. When I say problem I would like you to think of it like a mathematical problem, like what is the square root of 16?, where we would show our work by showing **why 4 times 4 is the correct answer**. The first problem is government, the second is governance. You should memorize these two problems.

Why would humans, free in all absolute terms, ever give up this freedom and join a collective? (There is no definite answer to this question. We seek to answer it together in this class). This question is the central question to **the problem of GOVERNMENT**. In which areas of our lives should we protect as ours? Would you call those areas liberty? Is it a limited freedom? Individual sovereignty? Most of the historical writings that influenced our form of government referred to this problem as social contract theory.

Question for class discussion: Why do you PERSONALLY give up your power of liberty to join the U.S. “collective”?

How can government best (where I mean with some scientific certainty and efficiency) **provide GOVERNANCE in a way that doesn’t destroy the social order, our desire to be free, and the moral notions most of us live by?** This is the central question to the problem of government. To begin our analysis we explore both of these concepts as abstract.

Question for class discussion: What do you need from the collective to live? What do you want for happiness from the collective?

Government

What is the natural order of human beings?

In Class Assignment: You will form groups in class. Your group’s task is to solve the following riddle: Why is a raven like a writing desk? You must clearly and concisely describe each step your group takes in your effort to solve this problem. While I do expect you to solve the riddle only groups that document the decision-making process will be given full credit. Please be prepared to discuss in class and select one person to be the “historian” for the group and email your final, edited notes about the assignment to me at jasonmleggettkbcc@gmail.com

Before we explore other types of government what is (it) that we find ourselves 22 in? I might tell you, based on some political science journals and \$200 textbooks, we

live in some kind of democracy, republic, representative democracy, a constitutional republic, a union of states, a free market of (fill in the blank), and so on. But let us begin with the assumption that we are in a “constitutional” “democracy” and from there we will try to define each (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary).

Constitutional: of, relating to, or entering into a fundamental makeup of something; being in accordance with or authorized by the constitution of a state or society or government.

Democracy: A government by the people: rule of the majority; a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically free elections; the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges.

It should be clear (take a break, come back, and read the definitions again if it isn’t clear yet) that **we: entered into a state of being where rule of the majority, by representatives who are elected, form a government in which equality is guaranteed by a written agree of the people (society).** Whether that is actually what we do in practice is for us to analyze in this class. In order to further explore, and to turn you into critical thinkers, let’s assume that my definition and premise could be wrong.

Let’s think about the first term, constitution. Great Britain doesn’t have one. India has one that is over 500 pages long. The South Africans focused on a comprehensive bill of rights. New York’s is older than that of the United States. So what is this thing? What makes it different? Is it “special”? We will consider this in great detail in the future weeks when we go over the document but you should begin to think about the differences and similarities of these documents and why that matters.

The second, democracy. I want to draw your attention to the idea of **two contradictions that I hope you bring up again at the end of the course.** The first is rule by the people and rule by the majority. The people cannot constitute anything less than all of the people for all of them will be ruled but not all will be rulers. Yet many people consider democracy to be simply the majority rules. What does this mean? Could equality actually exist in this context? Then there is the problem of powers being exercised directly or indirectly. Is it better to rule yourself or is it better to elect someone to rule over you? Did you make that decision? Both of these questions were considered in 1776 - and beyond - but we have the advantage of hind sight.

Putting the “self” in Rule by the People.

The preamble to the US constitution begins “We the People of the United States.” Looking back at the model for the competition space in a democracy it is

important to understand that the term “majority” is incredibly difficult to define or really comprehend without severely simplifying it. To keep the significance of the term in our mind I think it is best to consider the democracy space as a competition of ideas of governance. Most of the time, or at least today, these ideas are presented to the government, our elected rulers who govern us. Are your ideas represented in the majority presented ideas?²

Your ideas could be represented if:

you are active in government,
own or run a business,
contribute art or entertainment,
organize and petition,
or if you produce news, information, or education.

If not, the ideas (and interests) are usually those of people who:

are active in government,
own or run a business of which you are an employee,
contribute art or entertainment of which you are a consumer,
those who organize and petition on your behalf if you are in a union or collective,
or those distribute news, information, or education of which you are reader, thinker, or student.

The difference is dramatic. Either your interests are put into that space or they are not. Therefore, you are either participating in the ruling or you are simply being ruled. Without self-rule or participation you are simply not free. You have no liberty. This should greatly influence how you look at government, particularly the United States government that we are studying.

Questions for author- Bring to Class:

1.

2.

² One professor states it, “why do you think most of the policies are directed toward the elderly and the rich?” They vote and participate.

Theory of Self-Evaluation

1. What do you know about government, politics, and current events? Be specific about what you do know not what you don't know.
2. What issues do you care about most?
3. What bothers you about what you have learned about the U.S. government before this class?