

July 2021 Entry (on the Axiom of Perpetual Instability)

“When the news hit London a few days later, there was a run on the Bank of England by holders of banknotes, attempting to convert them into gold (a right enshrined in the wording that still exists on English notes of ‘I promise to pay the bearer on demand...’). However, owing to the gold standard, and the fact that the total face value of the notes in circulation was almost exactly twice the actual gold reserves held (£10,865,050 of notes, compared to £5,322,010 in bullion), on 27 February 1797, Parliament passed the Bank Restriction Act 1797 (37 Geo. III. c. 45). This act, which turned all banknotes from ‘convertible’ to ‘inconvertible’ notes, suspended these so-called ‘specie payments’ until 1821.

This move was perhaps inevitable owing to high taxation levels in place to fund the Napoleonic Wars, but the Battle of Fishguard immediately preceded the first occasion when banknotes issued by a central bank could not be redeemed for the underlying wealth that they represented, a precedent that has defined the modern use of banknotes ever since.” – from Wikipedia article, “[Battle of Fishguard](#),” captured May 7, 2021.

I find little odd bits in interesting places. I was reading about the Battle of Fishguard – a diversionary landing in [Wales](#) in a failed [French revolutionary](#) invasion of [Ireland](#) (on the theory of my enemy's enemy is my friend) in 1797 – when I saw this interesting bit. I have become increasingly fascinated by the process where [gold standard](#) was replaced by [banknotes](#) which morphed into the concept of [paper money](#) that we have now. I have increasingly regarded [economics](#) as reflective of and the agents of change of macrodynamic social selection forces (in the sense used by Professors Jonathan Turner and Seth Abrutyn, 2017). *One might even define economics as the agency of social selection forces operating at any given time.*

At any rate, the situation above strikes one as inherently unstable, the value of the banknotes in circulation was twice that of the gold reserve, and one could reasonably expect this event to occur. So there are a lot of interesting questions there, how did it get that way, was it a conscious decision, did the government simply print more banknotes to pay bills, did anyone see this coming? I am sure there is a great deal of [erudite literature](#) on the [economic history](#) of currency in the modern era which I have not read. This situation also provides another historical window into the forces propelling European drive to colonize, monopolize, and control the resources of the world via oceangoing sailing ships - politicians, businessmen, economist and monarchs knew they were inhabiting the [House of Usher](#), and needed to keep a constant global influx of economic filling to prevent it from cracking too much!

But the point here is the [instability of the system](#). The inherent instability of the human systems. The inherent instability of evolved life. The inherent instability of the universe which apparently gives rise to life, consciousness, and the Big Bang, etc. And at the bottom of all of it is time, “time is unity” as [Lucy](#) said in the 2014 movie, or as [Aristotle](#) said, “...not only do we measure change by time, but time by change, because they are defined by one another,” and “(time is) a number of change in respect

Copyright July 2021, this blog entry is from the Periodic Public Space blog that is published in relation to Gestalt Genesis/Day Million, a macrosocial simulation game. The blog entry can be found at <http://gestaltgenesis-daymillion.net/#pps>; this PDF is for convenience of the reader.

of the before and after” (Aristotle, [Physics](#), Book IV).

Now, all of this is belaboring the obvious in the modern view, we have increasingly come to recognize time as the inevitable, unstoppable quantifier of reality – but it was new once, it had to be ‘discovered.’ The changeless society, unending perfection is what we call [utopia](#) or [paradise](#), which as discussed in GGDM, implies that nothing can be changed (e.g. getting tossed from the [Garden of Eden](#)) or else it is no longer utopia or paradise (a bit of identity theory from philosophy, e.g. [The Ship of Theseus](#)); I discussed this point in Entropy is Not Constant and The Devil’s Argument, [1 Entropy](#), pp. 214-215 (in game design terms, this is an important discussion to keep the game churning).

So perpetual instability seems to be an underlying theme of the universe running through all four of the identified orders of natural phenomenon (inorganic, organic, mental, and social, Clarence Marsh Case, 1924) and of course the agent is time. We all know that, of course, and it’s mostly an unstated and undeniable principle of science, math, and our entire concept of reality, but since we can identify it and identity is useful in cognition (that’s why [nouns](#) were invented), we ought to call it an axiom (because to deny the truth of it would create an insoluble cognitive dissonance – which is basically why utopia and paradise fail to be convincing ideals, see discussion in The Devil’s Argument [2 Entropy](#)); *I will call it the Axiom of Perpetual Instability.*

I have wondered quite far afield here, so what does this have to do with our long-running GGDM conversation? The Axiom I have expressed here is the starting point for social dynamics and social selection forces, that human civilization is perpetually unstable – a point that is rather proven by the identifiable existence of social selection forces and dynamics (it is the reason we survived the Cold War, see [Inherent Failure](#), [2 Disruption](#), p. 268). That is, we often talk about things without consciously stating their starting point, and so we float around a bit like a boat without anchor down. It is also the reason for human interpretation, which is a major element in my proposed system of macrosocial thought expressed in GGDM.

Aside from the discussion of money (or paper banknotes), this little nugget provides an example for GGDM game play of how the Concierge might use Interventions to create story events that might or might not be considered connected to in-game events caused by the players – e.g., notice that while it is not directly stated that the Battle of Fishguard caused the run on the Bank of England, the [temporal proximity](#) and possible [causal relationship](#) of the first occasion to the battle is noted as is the government’s response. There may in fact be dozens of factors leading to the run on the [Bank of England](#) – I am sure there are books and articles out there exploring this issue – but possibly the Battle of Fishguard is a trigger event.

Continuing Thoughts on the Axiom of Perpetual Instability (September 2021):

Copyright July 2021, this blog entry is from the Periodic Public Space blog that is published in relation to Gestalt Genesis/Day Million, a macrosocial simulation game. The blog entry can be found at <http://gestaltgenesis-daymillion.net/#pps>; this PDF is for convenience of the reader.

“Science and religion ask different questions about different things. Where religion addresses ontology, science is concerned with ontic description. Indeed, it is what Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart calls their ‘austere abdication of metaphysical pretensions’ that enables the sciences to do their work.” – [Michael Robbins](#), “Atheists Used to Take the Idea of God Seriously. That’s Why They Mattered.” Slate Magazine, July 8, 2014.

I argue in [1 Entropy](#) that we never get an answer to ‘why’ and most of the time when we ask ‘why?’, the answer we give is really ‘how’ (e.g., a mechanical description), for example, ‘gravity caused it to fall’ is not an answer to why it happened, it only describes ‘how’ it happened. Because we almost never get a ‘why’ answer or anything close, we have become confused on the issue, and often or usually accept ‘how’ answers as ‘why’ answers without thinking about it too much. It’s a lazy intellectual habit of our civilization or humanity.

In the modern sense, I believe this is an enhanced result of the scientific revolution and empiricism. Michael Robbins points out (above) that for science to do its job, free of metaphysical pretense, it must strictly deal in ontic description and leave ontology to philosophy and religion. While humans may have a tendency to accept ‘how’ answers to ‘why’ questions in the larger sense, certainly science and empiricism, which regards the ‘why’ ultimately as beyond the scope of science, has made ‘how’ answers almost universal in our current civilization. We’ve stopped asking why or expecting an answer to why because it makes us nuts.

Yet, I think we are so much poorer for it; it has robbed us of our humanity. We already know humanity is nuts, Erasmus knew it too:

“I doubt if a single individual could be found from the whole of mankind free from some form of insanity. The only difference is one of degree. A man who sees a gourd and takes it for his wife is called insane because this happens to very few people.” – Attributed to [Desiderius Erasmus](#) (b. 1466, d. 1536).

Now, in concrete terms, I have offered in the above entry that my Axiom of Perpetual Instability is the starting point for all of the social selection forces and social dynamics. It is at least a partial ‘why’ sort of answer to the ‘how’ of social dynamics (or maybe a ‘how’ to a ‘how’ – we all get confused on that point too). And in this, I suggest that an axiom approach to macrosociology as I have envisioned it (and recall that I have argued that sociology is more related to philosophy and religion than it likes to admit) is capable of adding a ‘why’ to the ‘how’ (not the ultimate ‘why’ but a few millimeters closer) of macrosocial theory. It’s the missing glue.

By Charles W. Phillips