

Coordination: Descriptive or Normative?: A Response to Daniel B. Klein's *Knowledge and Coordination*

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Abstract: *Knowledge and Coordination* presents an argument that economics ought to be reconsidered and placed into the realm of the humanities, and that doing so will improve the rhetorical force of liberal arguments regarding both economics and morality. This paper argues that, despite the ambition of this project, the combination of the positive and normative leads to misunderstanding and weakness in both. In particular, this leads to the imposition of normative significance onto areas of theory where none can be valid, as well as to an underspecified moral standard. These problems are most obvious when considered in light of two central elements of *Knowledge and Coordination*, the notion of concatenate coordination and the role of the allegorical social coordinator 'Joy'.

Introduction

Advances in the liberal project come from effort along two fronts. One is positive social science seeking to understand the effects of aspects of the social order, while the other is moral discourse speaking to the virtues of a liberal social order². *Knowledge and Coordination* represents an ambitious attempt to combine the positive and normative into a single approach. Unfortunately, unlike the peanut butter and chocolate in the famous commercial, an intermingling between positive and normative approaches weakens, rather than improves, the quality of both. This essay explores some of the difficulties created by the absorption, in *Knowledge and Coordination*, of positive social science into normative discourse regarding aesthetic judgments. This paper will proceed as follows. Section II summarizes concatenate coordination and the role of Joy, two of the important aspects of the approach Prof. Klein wishes economics to pursue. Section III provides a critique of concatenate coordination and the combination of positive and normative analysis in general. Section IV raises some difficulties with the use of Joy as a standard for normative evaluation of aspects of the social order. Section V concludes.

Prof. Klein on Coordination and Joy

An interior designer coordinates colors, patterns, and textures to make a pleasing look. The businessperson coordinates factors to make profits. An author coordinates the words of a sentence, the sentences of a paragraph, the paragraphs of a chapter, and the chapters of a book. The verb is transitive, and the result is an overall pleasure from the perspective of the coordinator or of anyone else like her. Components link one to another, forming a chain or concatenation. Call it *concatenate coordination*.... (Klein 2102: 38)

Concatenate coordination can describe the skeleton of activities with a firm, where activities are coordinated “top down,” but it can also describe the pleasing quality of a wider skein of affairs lacking any top-down direction. In either case, improvements can be described as better coordination.... (Klein 2012: 39)

The excerpts above provide an introduction to the notion of concatenate coordination, an idea that Prof. Klein sees not only as driving the work of many classical economists, but also as a key analytical tool modern economists

ought to rediscover. Klein distinguishes this concatenate meaning from *mutual* coordination, a meaning of coordination associated with behavior like that studied by Thomas Schelling, and commonly understood in economic concepts such as coordination equilibria. By contrast, concatenate coordination refers to a pattern or arrangement such as the décor example in the above quotation. As Prof. Klein recounts, the early references to concatenate coordination in economics are in the context of understanding the firm, where entrepreneurs are described as coordinating the behavior within a firm to make profits. Discussions of concatenate coordination were extended to society by Hayek and Coase in the 1930s. In these discussions, Prof. Klein reads Hayek's use of coordination as being of the concatenate sort, referring to desirable arrangements in society. Yet, unlike the case of the firm, in society there is not a clear actor for whom desirability is a well-defined concept. Instead, Prof. Klein argues that Hayek is best understood as thinking of social coordination as concatenate coordination, as if performed by a fictional entity existing outside the social order. However, subsequent to these discussions of the 1930s mutual coordination has become the dominant usage among economists. (Klein 2012: 42-44)

According to Prof. Klein, usage of concatenate coordination has since declined in mainstream economics and instead has been replaced with mutual coordination as well as discussions of efficiency and optimality.

Concatenate coordination was done in, perhaps, by the desire to have an exact and separate science of economics. Many economists have tried to evade the loose, vague, and indeterminate part of conversation by supplanting concatenate coordination with efficiency, optimality, and social welfare functions. Those concepts would enable economists to enclose economics within an exact grammar. (Klein 2012: 52)

Prof. Klein attributes this to economists' desire for a modern study of economics, in contrast to the "discursive approach to political economy" (2012: 52). Along with this desire for exactness, the rise of mutual coordination as an area of economic study contributed to the decline of the concatenate coordination as the predominant use of the word.

What separates Prof. Klein's notion of concatenate coordination from modern consideration of efficiency and optimality is concern over the contents of the maximand, as follows:

One might say, "So, essentially, concatenate coordination is efficiency, right?" There are reasons to resist such translation.

Terms like *efficiency* and *optimality* suggest a clearly defined maximand, or objective function or social welfare function, while concatenate coordination allows considerations in the realm of the aesthetic... “coordination” talk (in the concatenate sense) readily allows the discussion to open up, explore, debate, and reform *our sensibilities* of what is good or beautiful in society, while “efficiency” talk restricts itself to instrumentalities, not questioning the maximand. (Klein 2012: 39-40)

This evaluative component is especially clear when discussing the coordination of alternative concatenations, in which discussions of coordination are comparative; conventions can be better or worse for coordination (that is, have a positive or negative impact on the broader concatenation they take place within) while concatenations themselves can be better or worse in the level of coordination (Klein 2012: 68-69).

Prof. Klein uses this approach to reinterpret Kirzner’s work on entrepreneurship. Discussing the critiques of Kirzner by scholars working in the ‘radical subjectivist’ tradition, Prof. Klein sees their objections as interpreting Kirzner’s claim that entrepreneurship is necessarily coordinating, as referring to *mutual* coordination. Prof. Klein, however, argues that Kirzner is best understood as referring to concatenate coordination. As for Prof. Klein, concatenate coordination by definition involves a normative evaluation, this necessarily means that we cannot be certain that an entrepreneurial act leads to more or better coordination. In Prof. Klein’s view, there can be acts classified by Kirzner as entrepreneurial that do not promote concatenate coordination, because they are not beneficial to the overall social order.

Given the central role that normative evaluation takes in understanding concatenate coordination, it is important to understand exactly what normative standard is in use. Prof. Klein explains his standard for judging concatenate coordination at the social level by use of an allegorical entity which stands in relation to society much as the interior designer stands in relation to her coordinated décor. Naming this allegorical being Joy, he explains its aesthetic sensibilities with respect to society as follows:

We cannot spell out what she values for society and hopes to witness, but it is not hard for us to understand. In her humanitarianism, she is basically like you and me, a genuine liberal, in the broad sense. Her pleasure increases when human society exhibits widespread prosperity, comfort, personal fulfillment, excellence, irony, and affection...[Allegorically] Joy

coordinates the concatenation of our activities, like the way we coordinate colors in decorating our home. (Klein 2012: 62)

This provides the broad standard Prof. Klein uses to evaluate alternative conventions and social orders as more or less coordinated (or better or worse for coordination). Prof. Klein speaks of better or worse coordinated activities in terms of Joy's pleasure in beholding the concatenation. (2012: 62) Concatenate coordination's normative component thus forms the language in which Prof. Klein expresses moral claims, while the contents of Joy's preferences represent the substantive moral propositions regarding the appropriate contents of the maximand.

Prof. Klein admits that, often, there are disagreements between individuals as to what particular sorts of social orders Joy would find pleasing, but contends that "in some ultimate sense there is only one, universal Joy." (2012: 223) As such, although this is never explicitly stated, I take one of the central claims implicit in Prof. Klein's presentation of Joy quoted above to be that, in his view, that formulation of Joy's preferences represents his belief as to the "ultimate" contents of Joy's aesthetic. To sum up, concatenate coordination refers to the coordination present in a pattern or arrangement, and for Prof. Klein, discussions of this coordination contain by nature reference to an aesthetic standard. When considering the aesthetics of social coordination, Prof. Klein sees the relevant aesthetic as being that of an allegorical being external to society, Joy, with a broad but in some sense objective set of preferences.

Concatenate Coordination Reconsidered

Descriptive Concatenate Coordination. Having now discussed the central elements of the approach to thinking and talking about social orders proposed by Prof. Klein, I now move to the areas where I found that approach objectionable. Central to my objection is that Prof. Klein's discussion of concatenate coordination omits even the possibility of discussing the phenomena under consideration in a purely descriptive fashion. For Prof. Klein, concatenate coordination is always at least partly normative. However, it is not necessary to simultaneously describe a concatenate coordination and evaluate its aesthetic merits: the two are separable. The descriptive aspect becomes more relevant as we move to situations where the relevant goals of the coordinator or the presence of an actor-as-coordinator become more distant to us.

To illustrate the difficulties in forcing our description of a concatenate coordination to involve judgments regarding the aesthetic merits, consider one

of the canonical cases of this coordination cited by Prof. Klein: that of the interior designer. Should the designer happen to be coordinating the colors, patterns, and textures in her own home, it seems likely that her evaluative criterion would be to create an arrangement which results in overall pleasure for her, exactly as initially described by Prof. Klein. Should the interior designer be renovating her home for sale, however, then our understanding of the referent evaluative criterion would have to change: the resulting design would be tailored not to aesthetic pleasure from her perspective, but rather from the perspective of homebuyers. Yet, it would seem odd to claim that, as Prof. Klein's usage would imply, *homebuyers* coordinated the décor of the designer's house³. Perhaps the claim could be that the designer coordinated her house to maximize its sale price, but this modification transforms the aesthetics of the resultant coordination into an intermediate good, valued only instrumentally by its creator.⁴ And, even more removed from the possibility of aesthetic evaluation by the coordinator herself, imagine the designer were removed and replaced by a process of randomization. Then, there would, by construction, be no evaluative criterion by which the relevant arrangement was assembled, but the question "who coordinated this décor" would not be incoherent: it would have only a positive answer: "a randomizer."

In situations where the concatenation under study is a product of a more spontaneous or emergent order, the same scenarios as considered above remain possible. Consider a house simultaneously decorated by a group of elementary school children each trying to please their mothers (and without much regard for the designs of the others). Here, would it be proper to say the mothers coordinated the resulting emergent decoration? Finally, consider asking the children for their favorite colors, patterns, and textures and then decorating the house by following those recommendations in a formulaic way. Here again, certainly there is no aesthetic standard by which the house was decorated, yet there is still an answer to the question of by whom (or perhaps how) the décor was coordinated.

The four examples discussed above illustrate an important aspect of the concept of concatenate coordination not considered by Klein, namely the fact that the positive notion of (non-mutual) coordination and normative evaluations of those concatenations can, and often must be distinct, such as when we have no epistemic access to the actor's aesthetic standard or such a standard is absent altogether. Once we have approached a particular instance of concatenate coordination using this positive notion, there is of course a separate normative notion, in which onto situations where we have access only to the positive we superimpose some external normative or aesthetic standard: "A randomizer coordinated these colors, and *to my eye* they're dreadful." But we need to be clear that this is an imposition: a structure external to the problem

situation being considered. As noted above, this is a distinction that is absent from Prof. Klein's description of the nature of concatenate coordination and the roles it can serve as an analytical tool of social science.

Coordination in the History of Economic Thought. This distinction suggests an alternative way to approach the contributions of Hayek and Coase. Rather than the interpretation provided in *Knowledge and Coordination*, this author suggests possibly a positive use of coordination: Hayek and Coase are here describing by what mechanism the arrangement comes about, without reference to a judgment on its desirability. Thus, rather than "entering a realm... that is loose, vague and indeterminate" (Klein 2012: 45) when we depart from explaining within-firm coordination, they may be merely explaining at the same level of generality the descriptive mechanism of social coordination. (That is, to the extent owner/manager is a general description of a firm coordinator, the price system is an equally general description of a social coordinator.) To be as precise as possible, the question considered by theorists examining the firm (the area of economic thinking that dealt with coordination prior to social coordination in Prof. Klein's account) was twofold: "Who coordinates the firm?" and "How do we know if a given firm is well coordinated?" The answers economists found were owner/managers and profit and loss. When Hayek extended the project to society, the questions "Who (or perhaps what) coordinates society?" and "How do we know if a given society is well coordinated?" are similarly conceptually separate from each other. For Coase and Hayek, the answer they arrived at to the first question is the price system, but to assume that answering the first requires answering the second seems a logical error, much as discovering which of several possible interior designers renovated a home does not entail determining (or even considering) by what standard the aesthetics of interior design ought to be judged. This again is not meant to suggest one question or the other is not worth asking, but to reinforce the idea that they are conceptually distinct questions. Certainly these economists considered (extensively in Hayek's case) the answer to this second question.

Another area worthy of reconsideration is Prof. Klein's reading of the theory of entrepreneurship of Israel Kirzner. One of the central complaints Prof. Klein raises with respect to the Kirznerian view of entrepreneurship is that, for Prof. Kirzner, entrepreneurship is (within an appropriate institutional environment) always coordinative. In seeking to bring the theory more in line with his own, as described above, Prof. Klein explains that two aspects of the theory are re-interpreted, as follows: "First, we must admit that the judgment of goodness inhering in the idea of concatenate coordination is not exact and grammatical, but instead is somewhat loose and vague, somewhat like an aesthetic. Second, we need to weaken the claim by admitting exceptions:

Entrepreneurship is coordinative, not in every single case, but *by and large* – and yet quite often enough to make for a strong presumption.” (2012: 77) The objections this author has to the first will be addressed here, the second later in this essay⁵. With respect to the first reinterpretation of Kirzner, as with the abstract notion of descriptive concatenate coordination, this interpretation errs insofar as there is no *inherent* judgment of goodness necessarily contained in discussions of concatenate coordination. Especially when placed in the paradigmatic context of Kirznerian entrepreneurship of pure arbitrage, the coordination discussed by Prof. Kirzner is of a purely descriptive character. The theory, placed into the language used above, might proceed as follows when understood at its most basic in the one-market, one-period arbitrage model, such as presented in the introductory section of Kirzner’s seminal *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (1973).

In a world of perfect information, the price system coordinates (in the concatenate sense) the factors of production in such a way as to ensure that all trades actors wish to make are made. However, in a world of imperfect information (and absent entrepreneurship) there will be trades that would (in the case of perfect information) be conducted, but are not due to the ignorance of potential traders. Thus, in such a world the price system coordinates only to the extent that it is able; when an entrepreneur is alert to a pure profit opportunity, the effect of their exploitation of that opportunity is to increase the extent that the price system coordinates that society. As such, entrepreneurial behavior is *by necessity* coordinative, coordination being understood as referring to a system of arrangements rather than some evaluative standard.

Coordination and Rhetorical Clarity. Having made clear the distinction between the descriptive and the moral project, I now turn to the costs associated with combining these two distinct levels of analysis. First, there is the risk of misinterpretation, where the economic project and arguments made within it are wrongly placed in the moral project. Second, a loss of clarity, in which the lack of a separation between moral and economic arguments leads each to be less convincing than they could be when offered distinctly. I turn first to examples of the interpretive problem.

The difficulties of interpretation begin with the narrative offered for the decline of discussion of coordination in the concatenate sense amongst the published work of economists. In particular, the reasons that Prof. Klein cites for the replacement of concatenate coordination relate primarily to the subdiscipline of welfare economics and its infatuation with what Hayek would call scientific approaches to questions of the social good. Yet, in doing so, Prof. Klein seems to be treating the entire discipline of economics as being identical to welfare economics, without regard to those who see economics as a

search for an accurate understanding of the social world. Prof. Klein's narrative, blaming "the desire for an exact and separate science of economics" (2012: 52) or the "value-free' values of putatively scientific economics" (2012: 53) for the decline of discussion regarding concatenate coordination, seems to suggest that he believes such a science cannot in principle exist, a view he reinforces explicitly much later: "economics is part of the humanities... of a piece with moral and political philosophy." (Klein 2012: 300) While he is free to hold such a position, in seeming to equate welfare economics and economics, as well as in his interpretation of the work of other economists, he seems to be imposing his "ought" onto the "is" that others subjectively consider themselves to be pursuing. In this way, even usage of the term "economics" becomes confused: if one interprets the term as referring to a project in moral and political philosophy, the idea of a study of such a project in an 'exact' or 'value-free' way likely seems nonsensical. Yet, for those who see such an exact (or at least descriptive) project as possible, these statements represent not only an aspiration towards certain meta-values (candidates include predictive capacity, accuracy, subjectivity, *verstehen*) that we as social scientists (mutually) coordinate upon, but also as potentially a descriptive claim as to what a particular thinker was trying to achieve. Prof. Klein can (and indeed seemingly does) disagree with the usefulness or desirability of the former, but makes an interpretive error when he discards the latter and presents a history of economic thought as if his interpretation were the only one being pursued, with modern economists to be faulted for their dishonesty or delusion in claiming to be engaged in a positive project when they are "really" engaged in a normative one.

These issues of terminology are but one way in which combination of the descriptive and the moral project decrease the clarity of our discussions of both. Another is the difficulties this combination causes in discussion of specific events and their consequences. When there is a substantive issue of disagreement, making clear the two distinct levels on which disagreement can occur is a substantial aid to clear debate, especially given that the ground rules of what constitutes an acceptable argument differ between economic argument about what did or likely will happen, and moral argument regarding what ought to be the case. Without a clear separation between these two levels, both areas tend towards confusion.

As an example, consider the relatively uncontroversial microeconomic concept that a binding price ceiling will result in a shortage of the good in question. As a statement of a concept I hope the reader will agree that it has no normative content and no direct policy implications. We might furthermore look at this concept in the context of the idea of concatenate coordination as a descriptive notion: that is, to look at an arrangement and ask who/what causes

it to come into being. In this case, we might arrive at the following description of the situation: in a world with no binding price ceiling, the price system would bring about a particular arrangement with respect to the buyers and sellers of this good. However, insofar as the price ceiling binds, the price system can only coordinate buyers and sellers up to the point where the price is equal to the price ceiling. After that point, we introduce (any one of a number of) new mechanisms of concatenate coordination, such as queuing or the creation of a *nomenklatura*.⁶ Of course, as well as examining how the allocation of this good will be coordinated, we can then further make a few predictions regarding how moving from a market coordinated purely by price to one with some mixed coordination will do to the results of the allocative process itself. In this case, one such prediction would be that less of a good will be supplied.

At this point we still have made no normative statements; here we could go on to make normative statements as a consequence of this analysis, plus some external decision criterion. For instance, should the good in question be copies of *The Communist Manifesto*, which Prof. Klein regards as “pernicious” (2012: 287), it seems possible that he might judge this reduction in quantity supplied as desirable and thus possibly support such a price control⁷. On the other side, someone who finds the Communist Manifesto valuable and desires that it be more readily available could conclude that the price control ought to be opposed. The key point is that these conclusions are made on a separate level of analysis where the matter that is up for debate is the moral or aesthetic preferences of the individuals, rather than the descriptive (economic) analysis of the policy which is taken as given. Arguments regarding these questions must take a different form than those made regarding the descriptive results of a policy, mainly because the event in the world that is the subject of a descriptive study is in some sense objective.⁸ In contrast, moral questions are addressed not to the world, but to the other person or persons involved in the debate. Since the starting point of moral disagreements rests at some level with a difference in preference between the two sides, the argument cannot proceed merely by additional claims of preference, but by some sort of argument as to the desirability of those preferences as judged by some meta-standard.

In contrast, when what is being objected to is not our judgments about events but instead what exactly the event is (or would be), a separate set of rules exists, the ones which govern economic analysis⁹. Similarly to how while having the moral discussion, the facts of a case being considered need to be taken as given, while having the discussion regarding the facts, the moral standard must be set aside or at the very least held constant. To use the same example as before, we could imagine two individuals both of whom preferred for there to be fewer copies sold of *The Communist Manifesto*, but who differed in their support for the price control due to differing beliefs as to the relationship

between the policy and the quantity supplied¹⁰. If these two were to discuss the policy, it would be odd and likely ineffective for one or the other to make an argument based on the aesthetic or moral value of the book: from the point of view of what will happen to the book should a price control be imposed, those qualities are irrelevant. Thus, while ultimately individuals can disagree despite agreeing on the facts¹¹, it at least necessarily becomes clear on what level the disagreement lies, and thus what sorts of arguments are appropriate. However, if we combine both levels into composite statements (or indeed, eliminate the idea that there are any claims that are not normative), it is difficult to understand when there is disagreement, where the basis of that disagreement lies. This lack of clarity both makes the arguments relatively unconvincing and unlikely to spur much debate mainly due to the difficulty of understanding how to engage in the conversation.

Can Joy do heavy moral lifting?

The confusion inherent in treating these two levels of argument identically is exacerbated in *Knowledge and Coordination* by the combination of the inexact nature of the moral/aesthetic standard and the lack of argument for why that moral standard leads to some of the rather specific claims made in the book¹². As was discussed earlier in Section II, the most complete statement of the moral standard Prof. Klein is using to judge which social orders and conventions are desirable and which are not is a description of the elements of the social order Joy finds pleasing: “widespread prosperity, comfort, personal fulfillment, excellence, irony, and affection.” (Klein 2012: 62) As a standard for evaluating elements of society, I find this definition to be underspecified and highly problematic. Terms such as personal fulfillment, excellence, and even comfort have meant different things to various societies and individuals within societies, definitions which are often mutually exclusive. Indeed, several of these (prosperity and comfort especially) have often been considered antithetical to individual and social moral virtue. It further offers little in the way of guidance as to what might be called “economic” questions regarding this set of virtues, including how we are meant to judge policies that result in tradeoffs between them, or whether considerations of coordination are made at the margin or in some absolute terms.

Perhaps now the response might be that *of course* this description is unclear, since as part of the nature of this Smithian project, things are ‘loose, vague, and indeterminate’ and so putting a point on the evaluative standard would be to overstep. However, if this is the case, then we might be similarly overstepping our bounds to make very specific claims, at least without a clear argument for how those claims result from such an ambiguous moral standard.

Yet, Prof. Klein offers several very specific claims without sufficient argument for how they can be derived from the previously established aesthetic standard.¹³ To omit both a chain of reasoning that leads from the first principle to the conclusion for these propositions, as well as any method of adjudicating between contending claims, is a crippling flaw in the rhetorical strategy being undertaken here, because without such arguments, any and all debate on the substance of those undefended propositions collapses to assertions of the conflicting preferences of the individuals involved.

At this point, this essay will return to Prof. Klein's discussion of the Kirznerian theory of entrepreneurship, specifically the argument that entrepreneurship cannot be always and everywhere coordinating. Here, Prof. Klein is confused in two ways: the first is that, as discussed above, this treats the descriptive claims made regarding entrepreneurship and the moral claims regarding the desirability of those outcomes as the same concept without distinguishing them, leading to a situation where the use of terms becomes esoteric. When Prof. Klein contends entrepreneurship can be discoordinative, a clearer way to express this point would be to say that an act of entrepreneurship could possibly not promote or increase the degree to which human society obtains the list of qualities preferred by Joy; when Prof. Kirzner contends it is always coordinative, he might (in the dialect used in this essay) say that an act of entrepreneurship causes the price system to coordinate (for good or for ill, from a moral perspective) more of human behavior. The second issue is that, as brought up above, the standards by which Prof. Klein judges entrepreneurial acts are unclear and seemingly arbitrary, and certainly do not, even on his own terms, conclusively prove the claim he sets out to make. To see why this is the case, let us return to the discussion centered on *The Communist Manifesto*. Prof. Klein's claim is as follows: "it is reasonable for those who regard *The Communist Manifesto* as pernicious to judge this entrepreneurial act as discoordinative." (2012: 287) Given the definition used by Prof. Klein for "discoordinative," this is an unobjectionable statement, but has an important corollary, that it is equally reasonable for those who regard the work as beneficial (or indeed, perhaps even merely not pernicious) to judge that same entrepreneurial act as coordinative. Is there a threshold for the number of individuals that claim to be in one group or the other that determines whether any particular act is 'truly' coordinative or not? Or, to modify the question somewhat, might Prof. Kirzner's claim for entrepreneurship to be always coordinative be true (at the normative level of discourse regarding coordination) *for some person* who judged there to be no acts of successful voluntary entrepreneurship that are not conducive to the qualities of human society that would lead our allegorical being to experience aesthetic joy?¹⁴ If so, then it would seem that all of the analytic content contained in a judgment that

a certain act is discoordinative is that the spectator making that judgment has a preference against that particular act or class of acts. If not, by what criteria are such people ruled out, and how is the claim that this view of coordination requires no “particular ideological sensibilities” (Klein 2012: 53) sustained? If, as the absence of argument for these assertions suggests, the entire basis for the claim that a particular act is discoordinative is the individual, subjective evaluation of a particular observer, how does the claim constitute a general understanding of the phenomenon?

Conclusion

The fundamental issue this essay has tried to identify and address is the attempt, in *Knowledge and Coordination*, to combine two levels of analysis which have been kept distinct by modern economists, one which examines the social world in an attempt to understand what, how, and why the multiplicity of events we observe do, in fact, occur, and the other which develops external criterion for evaluating the desirability of these events and applies those criterion. Perhaps a suitable analogy in another field would be that this project is something akin to arguing that the study of comparative religions is or ought to be identical to apologetics. While this approach may have benefits in forcing economists to avoid errors in the direction of certain types of overly specific social welfare models, it comes at a high cost to both our rhetorical clarity and force of argument.

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Notes

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² We could also understand this as argument over which costs and benefits ought to matter for evaluating alternative social orders: in the case of liberal-minded arguments, this would include arguments as to the intrinsic value of liberty, self-determination, tolerance, etc.

³ Perhaps the claim would be that, should the tastes in décor of homebuyers and the designer differ, the décor was well coordinated *for* homebuyers but poorly coordinated *for* the designer. Regardless of whom it was coordinated *for*, the question of who it was coordinated *by* has a definite, separate answer.

⁴ As an aside, this would be an example of an evaluative criterion which in principle could be evaluated by outside observers as a positive claim: if the new décor leads to an increase in the sale price we might say the décor was well-coordinated, while a decrease might suggest the décor was poorly coordinated. Contrast this with the renovation with the goal of making the space maximally aesthetically pleasing to the designer (or, we were renovating the space with that goal). There, we could only judge the success or failure of the coordination by being informed by the designer herself regarding her self-reported satisfaction with the outcome. The first situation mirrors that of the firm, where the ‘goodness’ of the coordination is at least in principle knowable by outside observers “objectively.” The second, in contrast, more closely resembles evaluating the degree of coordination present in a society.

⁵ This is not to indicate that the interpretation of Prof. Kirzner’s theory expressed here perfectly coincides with that of Prof. Kirzner himself, but is trying to at the least show that requiring of it a moral component is a category error stemming from the omission of the possibility of descriptive theories of non-mutual coordination. For Prof. Kirzner’s own response regarding his theory, see (Kirzner 2010).

⁶ We could here introduce any of the myriad complexities in the description that occur inevitably when moving from blackboard to real world. These complications certainly require us to be more complete in our descriptions, but this does not change the point of the section, which is the level upon which an argument takes place regarding what the effects are is different than the level for which the discussion is the value of those effects are.

⁷ I stress possibly here, because nowhere does Prof. Klein explain what the policy implications (if any) of his discussion of moments of voluntary successful entrepreneurship that are in his view discoordanative in fact *are*. For the purposes of this example, it is immaterial whether this is accurate or not.

⁸ That is, there is at least a single intersubjective truth that is the subject of analysis: quantity supplied did or did not fall in the event of a price control’s imposition. This is not to say that there is a ‘true meaning’ in some phenomenal sense.

⁹ As well as sociological, anthropological, or other analytic frameworks, when the facts in question result from their analytical tools rather than economics.

¹⁰ Or indeed they could agree on the price control despite one being a detractor and one an admirer of the work, precisely because they have different opinions as to the effect on quantity supplied.

¹¹ Although it is often the case, at least in the experience of this author, that obtaining agreement on the facts in a debate on substantive policy is a significant concession in its own right, and an area where a command of positive economics is particularly powerful.

¹² When introducing his vision of economics as a protreptic discourse, Prof. Klein explains that normative use of concatenate coordination does not require any “particular ideological sensibilities” (2012: 53) and “can accommodate concerns about public goods, externalities, natural monopolies, distribution, addictive behavior, ways of life, identity, and the public culture.” (2012: 53-54, footnote removed) All of this is true, precisely because concatenate coordination can accommodate *anything* given a requisite set of aesthetics. Concatenate coordination as used by Prof. Klein, as noted above in Section II, is not a standard in itself, but one particular language in which to discuss moral claims.

¹³ A few of the specific claims asserted regarding conventions good for concatenate coordination (and thus conducive to all?/Some?/Most? of the values listed above) include the metric system and the gold standard (Klein 2012: 70), while some acts labeled discoordination or bad for concatenate coordination (and thus presumably hostile to all?/some?/most? of these values) include the Chinese system of writing (Klein 2012: 70), brothels (Klein 2012: 290), and opium dens. (Klein 2012: 290) Most of these pass without any comment regarding their derivation from the aesthetic standard, but Chinese writing is noted that it “generally requires a distinct symbol for every word.” (Klein 2012: 70) While this may decrease social comfort, it could also increase opportunities for excellence in mastering this difficult communication style, personal fulfillment in having achieved such master, and may even allow for more expressions of irony than more traditional writing. How, from these sort of possible relations and counter-relations to Joy’s set of aesthetic criterion, we can construct claims that place one or more of these values above others is left unexplained.

¹⁴ Even for examples as extreme as *The Communist Manifesto* (including laying at its feet much of the policy of political leaders who claimed to be following its directive), an argument that retains the same broad evaluative criterion as expounded by Prof. Klein is possible, based on which of the various values attributed to the allegorical being are regarded as preferred over others. If, in our observer’s estimation, Joy has a lexicographic preference for irony, *The Communist Manifesto* may have markedly increased the quantity of irony over the alternative and thus be preferred compared to alternative outcomes. Our observer could also have a view of excellence or personal fulfillment that highly values perseverance in the face of oppression, martyrdom, and active subversion of coercive social orders, in which case again they might be willing to trade off the losses in prosperity and comfort.

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