Noesis

Editorial

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God, Freedom, and Immortality: In the critique of Pure Reason Immanuel Kant contended that the three fundamental concepts with which metaphysics is perennially concerned are God, freedom, and immortality. He called them transcendental ideas because he felt that we cannot develop empirical knowledge of these concepts through scientific inquiry but must posit them out of some sort of inexorable intellectual necessity as a sort of precondition for having an intellectual life at all.

My own analysis suggests that these three concepts can be regarded as limiting concepts for epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, respectively. Freedom emerges when we transform the fundamental ethical question "What should I do?" to the limiting question "What can I ultimately do?" Analogously, immortality emerges when we transform the fundamental aesthetic question "Will I be satisfied?" to the limiting question "Can I ultimately be satisfied?" For Kant regarded immortality as necessary primarily for the dishing out of the appropriate rewards and punishments, which are so obviously maldistributed in this life. And rewards and punishments in an afterlife are ultimate satisfactions (or dissatisfactions). Hence, immortality, like freedom, amounts to a limiting concept, only it is associated most immediately with aesthetics (the issue of satisfaction) rather than ethics (the issue of conduct). Finally, God emerges when we transform the epistemological question "Will my anticipations bear fruit?" or "Will my knowledge claims be true?" to the limiting question "Can my anticipations ultimately bear fruit?" or "Can my knowledge claims ultimately be true?" For we might say that the limit of possible knowledge is omniscience, and omniscience, if personified, is God. An atheist can, of course, dispense with the personification and simply speak of omniscience or even just of the limit of possible knowledge rather than of God. Likewise, one can speak of a limit to possible satisfactions without positing an afterlife, & thus one can drop the term "immortality," if one prefers, and simply speak of the limit of possible satisfaction.

Newcomb's paradox and cellular automata: The relevance of the foregoing remarks to the topics of Newcomb's paradox and cellular automata that Chris Cole has brought up in the pages of this journal and at the meeting of this Society in July is that I suspect that Chris is, in his own way, invoking these three Kantian issues. For Newcomb's paradox can be construed as playing off the power of individual freedom against the power of an omniscient being, while Chris's interest in cellular automata centers specifically on its potential for enabling us to create a sufficiently powerful artificial intelligence to enable us to solve the problem of how to achieve virtual biological immortality.

Chris might maintain that he was not deliberately trying to raise the issues of God, freedom, and immortality. My point is that he has nonetheless unintentionally raised them, if not intentionally. And they are clearly three of the most important issues in metaphysics, regardless of whether one views them from a theistic or atheistic perspective.

Three Comments on Newcomb's Paradox
(1) by Dean Imada

While noone was convinced to alter his original position, some common ground was found.
Chris Cole was the lone heretic arguing for taking both boxes, his argument is presented
below in his own words since my disagreement with its conclusions probably indicates
that I don't understand it fully.
Some of us suspect that Chris may have been solving a slightly different problem from
the one the rest were solving, perhaps one of variants in which we would also take two.
For example, in most realistic real world situations, we would probably not be so
deeply convinced of the predictor's reliability, and so the dominance argument
would have more force.
(In a real situation, we might also consider the possibility of there being some trick,
such that the boxes were actually be filled after the choice.)
Also, if it was very likely that would choose both boxes, then a high probaility
that x choosen, given that x is predicted does not neccessarily imply a high probability
that x is predicted, given that x is chosen. This may reduce the force of the expected
value argument, particularly if there is an ambiguity in what it means to say that
the predictor is reliable.
Most of us also seemed to be planning our strategy now, for a future decision
concerning a yet to be made prediction by a yet to be certified predictor.
Were we presented with already filled boxes before the problem was presented for discussion,
it is possible that some of us may have been inclined differently.
(Besides the causality problem, it might have affected our assesment of the
in the predictor's reliability.)
Keith Raniere points out that, under the assumptions of the problem, it may be missleading
to say "which should I choose", any observer might think you were bound to follow prediction.
It might have been interesting to have seen the non-reverse causality argument challenged
in light of Zeno's "time is an illusion" ideas as elucidated by Ron Hoeflin.
Or in light of James Hajicek's suggestion that the only observable universe is the one in which
the observer lives forever. (The only outcome of interest to Schrödinger's cat is the one
in which the atom does not decay)

(2) by Chris Cole

You are presented with two boxes: one certainly contains $1000 and the other might
contain $1 million. You can either take one box or both. You cannot change what
is in the boxes. Therefore, to maximize your gain you should take both boxes.

However, it might be argued that you can change the probability that the $1 million
is there. Since there is no way to change whether the million is in the box or not,
what does it mean that you can change the probability that the million is in the box?
It means that your choice is correlated with the state of the box.

Events which proceed from a common cause are correlated. My mental states lead to
my choice and, very probably, to the state of the box. Therefore my choice and the
state of the box are highly correlated. In this sense, my choice changes the
"probability" that the money is in the box. However, since your choice cannot
change the state of the box, this correlation is irrelevant.

When I first heard of this paradox, I too argued strongly for opening only box B.
This is what makes this an interesting paradox, at least for me. I think the
amazing thing about this paradox is how easy it is to confuse ourselves with
arguments for opening only box B. I was very confused, so I assume it is easy.
My argument was essentially that I could "force" the being to put the million in
box B by deciding to pick box B. I also used words like "cause" or "determine"
instead of "force". However, the plain fact is that you cannot force anyone to
do anything in the past. The past is done and over with -- you cannot change,
determine, cause, or force it. Therefore, there is no reason to leave the thousand
in box A. You might as well take it. What is in box B is not going to change.
One might argue that if you are the type of person who argues this way, then the
being will know it and leave box B empty, so that if you are the type of person who
understands this and opens only box B, then the being will know this too and will
put the million in box B. Of course you can try to fool the being, but if we
assume that the being can follow all of your reasoning until you have to decide,
then fooling the being is out of the question. The paradox is no fun if we
assume you can fool the being. So we come to the conclusion that we can "force"
the being to put the million in box B by being the kind of person who decides to
pick only box B.
At least this is my best formulation of the argument for picking box B. Now,
suppose we are actually standing in front of the two boxes and trying to decide.
Suppose the boxes are transparent. Now we see either one million or nothing in
box B and one thousand in box A. What should we do? Presumably, you agree we
should pick both boxes. If you do not, I will have to discuss this with you.
So, assuming you do agree you would pick both boxes, I now want to know why you
would pick only B if the boxes are opaque. You might argue that the paradox makes
no sense if the boxes are transparent, but this is not a real argument because I
am only asking what you would do IF the boxes were transparent to point out that
you would open both boxes. If you would open both under this condition, how can
you possibly justify opening only one if you have less information? In fact, I
argue that the paradox makes perfect sense with transparent boxes. After all,
what about the above logic assumes that you cannot see what is in the boxes?
Suppose that you dogmatically decide to open only box B. Wouldn't that guarantee
that there would be a million dollars in it? Well, it might ... but when it
actually comes down to picking, you would be pretty hard pressed to argue that it
makes any sense to forfeit the easy pickings in box A. After, what's in box B
isn't going to suddenly disappear as you open box A, unless you believe in magic.
The point is, no matter what type of person the being thinks you are, the being
made its decision and left the money. You CANNOT change that. When it comes time
to pick, you only forfeit money by picking only B. If this is still confusing,
you might want to consider the case where the boxes are opaque, but you have a
friend peek and write down what you should do. Then you pick and check if you
did what he wanted you to do. Since you know he will always write down that
you should pick both boxes, why bother him. Why not just pick both?
This paradox reminds me of the other self-referential paradoxes. The basic
problem is a meta-level versus level crossing. The exact analysis of this
crossing is not clear to me, or I would explain it to you, which would probably
be better than all this talk above. It is similar to "this sentence is false".
If you can figure out the levels involved, please let me know. This is probably
worth a paper in a philosophy journal, or at least a letter to Robert Nozick
at Harvard, who introduced me to the paradox.

- 3 -

(3) by Keith Raniere

Two occurrences are either coincidental or causal (correlated).
Occurrences are coincidental if they have no mutual causes. Causes are
judged by physics; "A causes B" means we have a physics to explain B
using A. We form our physics by noting repeated occurrences and
forming hypothesis to explain them. Our physics is only as good as its
predictive validity based on past consistencies.

If one observes 100,000 consecutive quarter flips that are heads,
although theory assigns a .5 chance for the next flip to be heads, we
might hypothesize a 2-headed quarter or some other physics to explain
our observation and modify the theorized probability. A new physics is
formed (an old one violated) based on both number and value of
occurrences. In other words the number of occurrences needed to
violate our physics is a function of the value of our physics... if
one is guessing a coin flip preceded by ten heads, they are more
inclined to doubt their physics if there is money involved.

For the purpose of discussing Newcomb's paradox, I am going to
simplify it into a 3 step process. Step 1, the determination, is the
point that the being makes its decision on the participant's behavior.
Step 2, the commitment, is the participants final choice (one or both
boxes). Step 3, the result, is the outcome of the participant's trial.
By the statement of the problem the determination and the commitment
are correlated (certainly the being has some sort of physics to make
the determination). This means that they have some common cause. The
determination is chronologically before the commitment, this implies
any common cause must be at or before the determination (or else we
see reverse causality). In either case the commitment, by the
established physics, is predetermined (either the determination causes
the commitment - a bug planted in the brain perhaps - or they are
mutually caused). This means the statement of the paradox contains an
inherent flaw, the assumption that the participant has a choice at the
commitment point when actually his/her choice was made at or before
the determination. The question "what would you choose to do" is
misleading and inappropriate.

Suppose the determination were made on color-blindness and if
someone were not color-blind they could see both boxes, or else they
could only see the "opaque box". This is equivalent to the paradox (up
to the physics of determining color-blindness) and we can see that the
individuals are forced to do that which is predetermined. If one were
to ask a person what choice they would make, they would answer that
there is no choice.

Like the "chicken and the egg" paradox, Newcomb's paradox is
poorly stated. In the "chicken and the egg" paradox the answer is the
egg - for all chickens come from eggs, but not all eggs come from
chickens. This paradox should be rephrased as "which came first, the
chicken, or the chicken egg". Newcomb's paradox should be restated as
"can one make an absolute determination (up to physics) on choice
without taking away choice".

Everybody agrees to take both boxes if there is no history given
on their preparation. But the people who stay with that choice no
matter what the value of the choice, or the number of previous data
points deny the possibility of forming another physics. To say this is
to use physics to deny the formation of physics. How was any of our
physics formed in the first place ?

If we place the elixir of life in the opaque box, in place of the
million dollars, and change the $1000 to $1, we can shed a different
light on the problem. If one of the "two-boxers" were sitting in the
audience watching the much valued elixir being distributed to many
one-boxers at a loss of only $1 (including his/her friends who come
smiling back to their seat), I bet that the situation would transform
many a two-boxer into a one-boxer. If it didn't, eventually the
one-boxers would be proven correct by longevity.

If we look at the Newcomb "choice" in a different way, we are
offered the "choice" then, just as we are walking out the door, we are
told of the boxes' preparation. Some of us will realize that, at this
point, nothing can change the content of the boxes. By our current
physics we should take both... but... it's possible that the
attractiveness of reverse causality may render us temporarily insane
resulting in our walking out with only one. Another possibility is
that some inexorable force will pull the second box from our hand. The
easiest conciliatory answer is to recognize, in all practicality, that

the being never puts money in the opaque box and is therefore always
correct. I guess the paradox should include the fact that the being
has chosen correctly for thousands of people of both persuasions. To
prove this point; If I gave someone the Newcomb offer, I would have no
trouble guessing their "choice".
    Another thought is whether we can figure out the determination.
We live under the possible illusion of free choice. Newcomb's paradox
sets up a physics where we are unable to choose (at least after the
determination). The question is can we witness the inability to choose
ie, Keith jumps off a building and notes "Keith is falling...". If
there exists a method to determine what our "choice" will be, then we
(or someone) should be able to ascertain the being's determination.
Such a person would do one of three things when presented with the
Newcomb offer: 1) Forget his/her information, never having it occur to
him/her to take both boxes..."Oh gee I don't know what got into me..."
2) Watch him(her)self make the "choice" no matter what he/she
thinks..."I'm falling" 3) Choose both boxes.
    Note: The 2-boxers confess no expectation as to what is in the
opaque box (if they did, they would either go contrary to previous
data or end up expecting more from taking 1 box) - independent of the
previous happenings. What makes such a person think they can come up
with an expectation of their behavior after the determination ? If we
don't have an understanding of the method of determination, then the
only accurate answer to the question of what we would do is "I don't
know"... much like the expectation of what is in the opaque box.
    To summarize my thoughts:
    1) There is no choice at the commitment point. This is indicated
       by the physics of the problem.
    2) The being either causes our behavior, or evaluates our physics
       function (that which causes us to form new physics... a
       function of value, and number of data points).
    3) A rigorous statement of Newcomb's paradox should contain (if
       it doesn't already) something like "the being has predicted
       both types of behavior correctly".
    4) One can't have an expectation of which option they would
       choose.

**Editor's note: For greater legibility, I urge
anyone submitting material for _Neesis_ to use
large, clear type.**

Troy man has a lot on his mind

IQ test proves what many suspected: He's one in 10 million

By Irene Gardner Keeney
Staff writer

You might say that Keith Raniere is one in a million.

He's a member of Mega, a high-IQ society with a minimum requirement at the one-in-a-million level.

Actually, the 27-year-old Troy resident is in an even more exclusive category. By answering correctly all but two questions on a 48-question, self-administered test, Raniere moved up to the rarified one-in-10-million level. To qualify for membership in the Mega Society, aspirants must answer correctly at least 45 questions. According to the society, that corresponds to an IQ of 176 or more. People of average intelligence, by contrast, have IQs that cluster around a score of 100.

A number of IQ societies go beyond Mensa, the well-known organization limited to the top 2 percent of the population, or those who score higher than 132 on a standard Stanford-Binet intelligence test. Each of these little-publicized societies is more selective than the next.

The mastermind behind many of them is Ronald K. Hoeflin, philosopher and librarian, who has made an avocation of forming increasingly more elite clubs for geniuses such as himself (he has an IQ of 150).

Hoeflin says curiosity about his own IQ led him in 1969 to join the Mensa Society. Six years ago the New York City resident founded Mega. After it grew to include 26 members — and lost some of its exclusivity — he restructured it to include only two persons, Eric Hart of Long Island and Marilyn vos Savant of Missouri. Raniere is the most recent member. All three will be listed in the next issue of the *Guinness Book of World Records.*

(vos Savant, who writes the "Ask Marilyn" column for *Parade Magazine*, is listed in the record book as the woman with the highest IQ. Last August, Savant, whose surname means "learned person," married Dr. Robert Jarvik, inventor of the Jarvik 7 artificial heart.)

Geniuses, apparently, are born, not made. Raniere says he was identified early as a bright child. By age 2 he could spell the word "homogenized" from seeing it on the millk

carton. He was precocious in math development and says he had an understanding of subjects such as quantum physics and computers by age 4.

By the time he was 16, the Brooklyn-born genius says he had exhausted the curriculum at his high school. He dropped out of school and entered RPI where he simultaneously earned undergraduate degrees in math, physics and biology. To do that he had to take 60 credits in addition to the 124 credits required for a single major. RPI spokesman Matt

KEITH RANIERE
. . . joins exclusive Mega Club

McGuire termed Raniere's three degrees "an extremely rare accomplishment."

Currently, Raniere works for the state and is an independent educational consultant.

He's not your stereotypical genius. Watchful blue eyes look out from behind aviator glasses. His brown hair is parted stylishly in the middle. He has the physique of an athlete, which he is. He was East Coast Judo champion at age 12, tied with the state record for the 100 yard-dash, is an avid skier, swimmer and wind surfer. He says he plays seven musical instruments and also sings "high tenor" in local musical productions.

He also rides a unicycle and likes to juggle — not necessarily at the same time — but one gets the impression that this amazing young man, who requires only two to four hours of sleep, could do both — if he put his

— 7 —

mind to it.

The questions aspiring members of the Mega Society have to answer are real brain busters. Raniere says they took him two weeks.

"There's no enforceable time limit. Some people take up to a year to answer the questions. It's suggested you limit yourself to no more than one month," he explains.

Unlike with some tests, applicants are encouraged to use such reference aids as dictionaries, thesauri and pocket calculators, he says. Guessing is permitted. There is no penalty for wrong answers or guesses so guessing is advantageous.

Assistance from others, however, is prohibited. "But," says the young genius, "who would give you assistance?"

Who, indeed.

Try this one-in-a-million test

Some of the questions Keith Raniere had to answer to qualify for membership in the Mega Society appear below. Try them and see how well you do. Don't look here for the answers, however. They are never published.

"You could not be admitted to any of the societies if the answers were published," he said.

THE ONE-IN-A-MILLION IQ TEST

A verbal analogy asks;

1. Heel is to Achilles as box is to _____?

2. Teeth is to hen as nest is to _____?

3. Winter is to hibernate as summer is to _____?

A spatial problem poses the following question:

What is the maximum number of completely bound volumes that can be formed by three interpenetrating cubes, considering only the surfaces of the cubes as bounds and counting only volumes that are not further subdivided?

A numerical problem:

A crystal consists of 100,000,-000 layers of atoms such that there is one atom in the first layer, three in the second, six in the third, 10 in the fourth, 15 in the fifth, and so forth. Exactly how many atoms are there in the entire crystal?

If you think you might qualify for membership in the Mega Society, contact Hoeflin Research Group, P.O. Box 7430, New York, N.Y., 10116.

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