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Liberty Support for Singerian Inquiring Systems: Designs from Early American Patriots

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ABSTRACT

Adopting the “heroic mood” is a method of Singerian inquiring systems (Churchman, 1971) that promotes the discovery of new knowledge by expedition. The heroic mood fortifies and encourages an inquirer to embark upon a purposeful journey that critically examines the status quo and leads the way to novel solutions. However, if an inquirer adopts the heroic mood, what prevents this adventurer from losing control of the inquiry process and hindering the free inquiry of others? Along with the knowledge-seeking maneuvers emboldened by the heroic mood come risks. This research asks what guidelines should be designed into a knowledge management system to aid a Singerian inquirer’s assessment of liberty, both the inquirer’s liberty and the liberty of others. A tentative set of five guidelines for the design of liberty support are derived from the stories of five early American patriots who performed knowledge tasks in the ethically challenging conditions of social revolution.

Keywords

Singerian inquiring systems, knowledge management systems, liberty, ethics

INTRODUCTION

Churchman (1971) combined systems design with the epistemology of turning-point philosophers to develop five inquiring systems aimed at differentiating truthful knowledge from illusion. The designs of Churchman’s inquiring systems are useful when developing information systems that gather evidence and support decisions (Mason and Mitroff, 1973). Of the five inquiring systems, the Singerian inquiring system is the most complex, and, of all the features of the Singerian inquiring system, Churchman himself conveyed that the design of the “heroic mood” was a challenge. The aim here is to develop design guidelines to assist the development of a heroic mood component. These design guidelines are specifically aimed at enabling and supporting the liberty of the inquirer while also safeguarding the liberty of those that come in contact with the inquirer. The aim is to develop design guidelines that alert inquirers who have adopted the heroic mood to situations in which the exercising of their own liberties may easily infringe upon the liberty of others.

KNOWLEDGE-SEEKING WITH AN ETHICAL BASE

Singerian inquiring systems incorporate many features. They have measurement system capabilities, observation replication facilities, catalogues of “sweeping in” opportunities, and they even incorporate features of other inquiring systems, such as the Lockean community and the Hegelian over-observer. The focus of this research is on the Singerian inquiring system’s heroic mood feature, which embraces the challenging of the status quo. In particular, this research asks what guidelines might support an adventuring inquirer, who is in the throes of the heroic mood, by providing cautionary advice of an ethical nature in hopes of preventing gross misjudgments that could result in the relinquishing of one’s own liberties or the encroachment upon the liberty of others.

Adoption of the heroic mood may place a Singerian inquirer in an ethical dilemma. Ethics is very relevant to the Singerian inquiring system (Richardson and Courtney, 2004). Consider that Churchman (1971), in summarizing a Singerian inquiring system, characterizes it as “above all teleological, a grand teleology with an ethical base” (p. 200). Purpose and ethics are intertwined. The purpose of a Singerian inquiring system is to create knowledge such that correct decisions can be made. Meanwhile, the Singerian inquirer has an ultimate purpose as defined and guided by his or her ethics. The “ethical base” of Singerian inquiring systems can be understood in terms of the inquirer’s need for truthful knowledge. Correct decisions are vitally important as the Singerian inquirer strives to achieve ethical goals in a changing environment.

The connection between knowledge and ethics that is embraced by Singerian inquiring systems is a theme within the research on inquiring systems. Courtney (2001) writes that Churchman’s conception of knowledge is similar to that of Spinoza who regarded knowledge as having an ethical side. Richardson, Courtney, and Paradice (2001) use the Singerian inquiring system design as a framework to assess two organizations and conclude that ethical aspects of a Singerian organization should be

present with the other characteristics of a Singerian organization. Richardson and Courtney (2004) propose imperatives for the designers of Churchmanian Knowledge Management Systems to help guide behavior during the selecting of clients and the protecting of data so that these actions are performed in an ethical manner. Chae, Paradise, Courtney, and Cagle (2005) propose a model for incorporating ethical issues during decision support system design and reference Churchman's belief that "solving the right problem makes an ethical difference" (p. 6). All of these research projects lend support to the idea that there exists a relationship between knowledge and ethics.

The heroic mood is linked to this relationship. While there may be a quiet and calm atmosphere accompanying the heroic mood, consideration is given to the environment of dissent and disorder, one in which ethical issues readily surface. Schwartz (1996) writes "It is in the presence of conflict that values are likely to be activated, to enter awareness, and to be used as guiding principles" (p. 2). Within this atmosphere, the need for liberty support is considered.

THE HEROIC MOOD AND THE NEED FOR LIBERTY SUPPORT

The heroic mood is the emotion felt by a Singerian inquirer who asks if there is progress or only process (Churchman, 1971, p. 202). Adopting the heroic mood is a knowledge-generation method of the Singerian inquiring system. The inquirer is cast in a role that can be found throughout human history and within myths. The common citizen embarks on the hero-task, risking defeat or even annihilation, to acquire crucial knowledge and to find a way to express these newly discovered ideas truthfully. Adoption of the heroic mood opens a Singerian inquirer to a range of processes, from processes characterized by creativity to processes defined by a "unique individual's relationship to his god" (Churchman, 1971, p. 205). Adoption of the heroic mood may simply result in a critique of the status quo, or it may result in revolution.

Singer's Ideas on Progress

In part, the heroic mood is based upon Singer's (1936) ideas on progress. Singer hedged the belief that science alone could result in progress. He embraced the questioning spirit of science but recognized a responsibility to question the goal of the knowledge being sought. Singer (1936) asks: "Is your purpose to rob a bank? — Then will science set itself to think out for you the best way to rob a bank" (p. 70). Singer wrote that inquirers should be clear about the meaning of morality as a prerequisite to being able to achieve progress.

One issue in Singer's "science" of the bank robbing example is that one inquirer's knowledge quest may exert a form of violence upon another. So, to further the development of designs supporting the heroic mood, this research asks what guidelines should be used to aid an inquirer's contemplation of knowledge and ethics. The particular focus is upon knowledge and ethics as it pertains to issues of liberty.

Liberty Support

Liberty is freedom, applicable both inwardly to the "domain of consciousness" and outwardly whereby one expresses his or her opinions (Mill, 1999). The need for liberty support is within the context of adopting the heroic mood and is based on the possibility that when one exercises personal liberties the action may infringe upon the liberty of others. The heroic mood fosters this conflict by promoting revolution. Meanwhile, Churchman (1971) describes the environment of the Singerian inquiring system as being grounded upon Singer's theory of value, which is "enabling" (p. 200). A Singerian inquirer should, therefore, assess his or her capability to enable others.

The question is how to design a module for a Singerian-based knowledge management system that would support an inquirer's assessment of liberty, both the exercise of liberty and the enabling of the liberty of others. To examine potential designs for supporting liberty, inquiry patterns of patriots who lived during the American Revolution are studied.

EXAMINING DESIGNS OF EARLY AMERICAN PATRIOTS

The aim is to examine how early American patriots managed knowledge under the stressful context of the American Revolution and to glean from these examples possible designs for supporting ethical assessment. The patriots examined below were initially selected because they were regarded by a historian to be a patriot of the American Revolution. A list of patriots was constructed by beginning with a book that was published to celebrate the American Revolution bicentennial. The book, *The Patriots* (Dabney, 1975b), contains fifty chapters, each describing the contribution of a patriot, all written by various historians. From this text, patriots were selected if the patriot's action had an aspect of knowledge management.

Exceptionally famous figures, such as Washington and Jefferson, were passed over. Additional sources of information, mostly biographies, were used to uncover stories about how each person gathered, organized, or dispersed information while

pursuing their revolutionary activities. The final list was comprised of five patriots: Samuel Adams, Nathan Hale, Patrick Henry, Mercy Otis Warren, and Noah Webster.

INQUIRY AND LIBERTY UNDER THE STRESS OF REVOLUTIONARY SITUATIONS

The knowledge-related activities of five patriots are examined below in light of how each patriot's actions suggest a strategy for behaving ethically. Each of these strategies is related to the design of Singerian inquiring systems.

Try Numerous Knowledge Management Methods, But Be Wary of Going Too Far

Samuel Adams (1722-1803) was a Bostonian who worked behind the scenes as "head of the patriot infrastructure" (Lodge, 1975, p. 56). Adams published texts, spoke at meetings, and organized revolutionary activities. Early in his life, Adams had read Locke's ideas about government and was greatly influenced by the idea that "sovereign power was vested exclusively in the people" (Lewis, 1973). Adams, convinced that good government rose from the people, dedicated himself to educating people. Early in his career he became an editor-publisher of a newspaper.

The effective and numerous ways in which Adams transferred knowledge can be pulled from Lewis's (1973) biography. Adams simplified tax issues to a straightforward "no taxation without representation" theme. Adams formed alliances with printer-publishers. He organized dock workers and merchant seaman into a group. He saw that "spontaneous" demonstrations occurred in Boston. He worked behind the scenes, publishing with aliases. He used messengers to spread proclamations and letters to other towns. And, behind closed doors, Adams gave rabble-raising speeches.

Given these knowledge-related activities, what patterns can be gleaned that might support the activities of a Singerian inquirer, particularly in terms of being ethically reflective? The Singerian inquirer can learn from the revolutionary activities of Sam Adams that there exists a wide spectrum of capabilities that can be developed in order to achieve one's goals. Adams' goal was liberty. His inquiry was to find a way to prove that government could exist for the public good. The lesson that can be learned is that working tirelessly with a variety of methods may lead to success.

However, Adams appears to have been confronted, at least once, with the prospect of grossly over-stepping an ethical boundary. Adams was associated with the activities of burning down merchant warehouses so as to intimidate merchants. The counterpoint to the lesson learned is that, while experimenting with many methods, one may eventually try one too many and perform a morally objectionable act, one that clearly does not enable others. Therefore, the first imperative is that the Singerian inquirer should, while encouraging a wide number of knowledge transfer methods, reflect upon the plan of each activity thoroughly and be wary of that next method that might harm others.

When Trying Controversial Inquiry Methods, Remain Conscious of Capabilities

Nathan Hale (1755-1776) was a teacher, patriot, and spy. He is perhaps best known for his final words: "I am satisfied with the cause in which I have engaged that my only regret is that I have not more lives than one to offer in its service" (Phelps, 2008, p. 192, quoting E.E. Hale, p. 125). From this statement, Hale is assessed to be adhering to the imperative of Singerian inquiry that one should enable others, in that he wanted to enable his fellow patriots. However, the task is exceptionally risky, and the method of achieving this goal, spying, is despised by some of the very same patriots he seeks to enable.

As Phelps (2008) tells the story, Hale volunteered for the risky intelligence gathering mission: to go behind enemy lines wearing civilian clothes, gather information, and map the positions of British troops. The ethics of the situation are apparent in the reaction of others. When Hale volunteered, the other officers tried to talk him out of it. A fellow soldier and friend asked Hale: "Does your Country demand the moral degradation of her sons, to advance her interests?" (Phelps, 2008, p. 144). Hale is reported to have replied: "I wish to be useful, and every kind of service, necessary to the public good, becomes honourable by being necessary" (Phelps, 2008, p. 144). Disguised as a Dutch schoolmaster, Hale snuck onto Long Island, traveled to New York, drew his maps, and, while heading back, was captured (Brewster, 1975). The next day, he was hanged.

What can be learned of Hale's perspective that might inform the design of Singerian inquiring systems? One answer is found by teasing out the goal and the method for achieving the goal. The overall goal, for Hale, was to aid his fellow patriots. He acted based upon his sense of duty. However, his method for achieving this goal was catastrophically flawed. Hale failed to perform his spying job. Hale's desire to accomplish his goal, achieve an ideal of duty, may have led to his demise, because, as Phelps (2008) reports, an overly patriotic Hale dropped from the personae of his disguise and was duped into confiding with a "friend" that turned out to be a British soldier.

Hale's espionage is controversial. However, arguments for and against this choice are left for other analyses. Here, the focus is on the relative weighing of his pursuit of the goal and his carrying out of the plan. Hale appears to have been striving for an

ideal—no patriots get injured—that can be understood by appreciating the environment of fighting for liberty. However, he appears to have failed because he let the goal eclipse his sense of caution. Nathan Hale’s story, therefore, instructs by suggesting an imperative: Singerian inquirers should soberly assess their goal-achieving capabilities, even while executing their plan, and try to prevent their value-based assessments from overpowering their judgment.

Expressing Ethical Aspects of Knowledge May Require Many Modes

Patrick Henry (1736-1799) was an orator from Virginia, a lawyer by profession, and a statesman. As “The Tongue of the Revolution,” his oration “galvanized” leaders (Dabney, 1775a, p. 75). Before the Continental Congress, Henry made his famous statement, “Give me liberty, or give me death” (Henry, 1775). In the same speech, Henry indicated his dedication to inquiry: “For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 81). For Henry, his inquiring and expressions of knowledge were most evident in the speeches he gave in public forums.

Henry’s oratory changed minds. People’s perspectives were changed, and not wholly because of the logic but also because of the style of speech. Henry’s spoken words impacted people. John Adams said, “I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old Pacific Quakers of Philadelphia” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 75, quoting Barton, p. 4-5). A judge, upon hearing Henry for the first time, “sat with his mouth and eyes open in perfect wonder” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 120, quoting Tyler, p. 365). “Men leaned forward in their seat with their heads strained forward, their faces pale and their eyes glaring like the speaker’s” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 228-229, quoting W.W. Henry, p. 1:267-268). From the comments of Henry’s effect and the historian accounts of the devastating impact that his debating had upon the opposition, an imperative is generated to recommend that the presentation of knowledge be considered with respect to liberty support. In short, consideration is given to the aesthetics of Singerian inquiry and the expression of ethically-based arguments.

The great impact of Henry’s speeches is attributed to Henry being “sincere and earnest in his delivery” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 228). Information can be communicated in a wide range of modes (Mason and Mitroff, 1973), each of which may impact people’s perspectives differently. The concept of “perspective” and “points of view” are partially biased because these concepts have meanings related to vision. A particular proposition may also be influenced by a filtered concentration of listening or a perceived physical threshold of girth and texture. If the accounts are accurate, Henry teaches us that perspective can be communicated by speech. From this, extrapolation leads to the consideration of all senses. An information system that guides an inquirer to consider an ethical assessment of new knowledge should strive to move beyond visual information (e.g., text) and promote the examination of ethical ideas in terms of media dedicated to other senses (e.g., audio).

Take Risks with Words

Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) was a poet, playwright, and historian. Her words were “explosive as gunpowder” (Rubin Stuart, 2008, p. 5) and “when she took pen in hand she faced the world and the future” (Waters, 1975, p. 232). Her work had a popular appeal, evident in how the names of the characters in her plays become commonly used nicknames of the political figures of the time. She wrote satire in the form of political poetry and plays. For example, one play depicted mandamus councilors (political appointees) as “sycophants, hungry harpies and unprincipled danglers” (Stuart, 2008, p. 67).

However, can satire go too far? What is the cost of lampooning a person? One perspective reads satire; another perspective reads hateful treason. Letters from Abigail Adams encouraged the self-doubting Warren to write. In letters, Adams praises Warren’s work as being for “the love of virtue” (Rubin Stuart, 2008, p. 69). The plays and poems may be for the common good, yet this is from the American perspective. Those satirized may have felt differently. Calling a British general a “bow wow” does not seem exceptionally slanderous, especially when considering that Boston, near where Warren lived, was under martial law at the time. Satire may perhaps be fully acceptable when you are satirizing a despot. Satire may be a fair, non-violent confrontation against suspected corruption. Cohen (1980) concludes that Warren’s writings (e.g., *History*) can be considered “moral art” (p. 204), art because the writing contains a viewpoint expressing political ideas, and moral because it serves future readers by inspiring them. This view is applied here to all of Warren’s writings.

The Singerian inquirer asks whether there is progress or merely process. Warren, as described in Cohen’s (1980) biography, apparently felt that her own inquiry was not a given. Her writing provoked aggression from a militaristic foe. She struggled with doubts, not only fighting prejudices about the proper roles of women but also questioning her abilities as a writer. Even though Warren viewed her role as a writer as an ethical role, one whose task was to strike at corruption, she recognized the “imminent possibility of catastrophe” (Cohen, 1980, p. 215). In this way, Warren appears to have adopted the Singerian inquirer’s heroic mood. In Churchmanian terms, she traversed the “dark forest” while attempting to find words that expressed a truth about ethical conduct such that it guided people during revolutionary times and afterward. Warren’s writings view the revolution as a struggle against powers that were corrupt and greedy, a struggle fought by patriots who sought freedom to

pursue competence and happiness. The historian-satirist design pattern is drawn from Warren's story and reads: the Singerian inquirer should use satire to intensely examine the status quo.

Social Revolution Leads to Other Mini-Revolutions Which Lead To...

Noah Webster (1758-1843) was an educator, lexicographer, and textbook author. He wrote dictionaries and spelling books that helped to standardize spelling. Most textbooks of the time were written in England, and Webster, dissatisfied with these texts, began to write elementary books for children. Webster wrote about his ideas of education: "An attention to literature must be the principle bulwark against encroachments of civil & ecclesiastical tyrants" (Snyder, 1990, p. 50-51). Webster felt so strongly about the importance of education that he not only produced spelling, grammar, and reading books, but he also set out to reform the English language. He wanted to communicate these ideas, as a treatise. However, rather than writing a philosophical treatise, he selected the format of a "little fifteen penny volume" (Snyder, 1990, p. 52) so that there would be a wide audience.

Webster's actions reflect his belief that people needed to be educated for a good republic. They also directly translate to one particular objective of the Singerian inquiring system, the goal of creating knowledge that is understood by everyone one. One of Webster's design goals for his speller was to create a uniform standard. Because with a standard, citizens of each state might avoid gross differences in pronunciation, something which might help to avoid gaps in understanding. Webster produced texts that were different from the imported texts. He tried to reflect usage that was already in existence and he innovated.

Webster innovated and made changes to English, changes which he felt were appropriate for an American language. His own heroic mood motivated him to write spellers and grammars, to change pronunciations schemes, and to alter the division of syllables. Webster's design was guided by standards, universal undisputed practices and the principle of analogy, standards that he had developed when in college (Snyder, 1990). Webster envisioned that everyone would agree to his designation of proper usage because he had based his designation of proper usage upon his observations of actual practice. And, the purpose of this single standard was "a unity of spirit among Americans" that would help to make a political union possible (Snyder, p. 93). However, even while he was developing a new standard, Webster recommended that "no one person or class of people shall set themselves up as authorities and dictate the rules of proper language" (Snyder, 1990, p. 91).

What is found in Webster's actions that may be transferable to the Singerian inquirer? The issue, with respect to Singerian inquiry, is that the current standard should not neglect the process of innovation that created it. Webster, the innovating lexicographer, apparently denied the activities that would incite the revolution to overthrow Websterian textbooks. He resisted the next standard that would replace his innovations. The imperative derived from this lesson is: when creating the new standard, the potential for its creative destruction and sensible replacement should be included within it.

CONCLUSION

Five guidelines for the design of liberty support are derived from the stories of patriots who performed knowledge tasks in the stressful and ethically challenging conditions of the American Revolution. Further research is necessary to establish how useful these guidelines are when used to design knowledge management systems that support Singerian inquiry. However, rigorous testing of the designs based upon these guidelines may be difficult because any such "smoke test" implies revolutionary conditions.

The five imperatives are tentative design guidelines to be applied during the development of modules that supports an inquirer's contemplation of liberty. The design objective is to enable Singerian inquirers to freely inquire about topics that they desire to inquire about, thus leaving open the possibility for the discovery of new knowledge. But, the design should also help Singerian inquirers in being careful that the exercising of freedom does not hinder another's equally legitimate freedom to inquiry. Tentative patterns to support liberty in the context of the heroic mood (and the patriot who inspired the pattern) are as follows:

- When innovating methods, be wary of going too far. [Adams]
- Try to prevent the emotions of value-based purposes from overwhelming one's ability to be effective. [Hale]
- Be mindful that the expression of conviction may require the expression of knowledge in many modes. [Henry]
- Consider the use of satire as one way to express knowledge about ethical issues. [Warren]
- Ask what system may one day revolutionize the system currently being built. [Webster]

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