

Comment on Michael C. Munger's "Political Science and Fundamental Research"

Professor Munger's suggestion (*PS*, March 2000) that "the fundamental human problem" lies in the potential for inconsistency between self-interested behavior and the collective good, is, for a political philosopher such as myself, startling. The central issue he raises is familiar, of course, but his phrasings and word choices make it appear that he thinks he has apprehended the problem in the objective terms of the facts and principles of an empirical science. In contrast, I put a much more subjective slant on the problem. I argue that the whole question of private interest versus public interest, personal decision and action versus collective decision and action, however it is focused and phrased, is a characteristically Liberal formulation--and, indeed, a characteristically American Liberal formulation--of its preferred way of viewing the social world.

In other words, Munger's suggestion is not so much an ontological and/or epistemological conclusion as it is a preliminary statement of ideological preference. It is not where he ends his argument, it is how he begins it.

Furthermore, philosophical analysis can show that of the two ways Munger prescribes for tackling the problem, the first, what he calls the Madisonian approach, because of its Liberal bias, renders the problem insoluble, and the second, what he calls the Rousseauian approach, is mysterious and inconclusive.

In contrast, I argue that beyond Liberalism, and in fact in a clear reading of Rousseau, there is a solution to this problem that is logically sound, humanly satisfying, and ready to hand. If I succeed here, Munger's proposals for a research program in this area might have to be rethought.

Knowingly or not, Munger is operating in the Liberal world first etched out in terms of basic principles and perceptions by Thomas Hobbes. Prime among those principles is the notion that in a Newtonian universe each human individual stands as an *ens completum* a substantial self pursuing a personal interest (survival, wealth, whatever). Hobbes, Locke, and the whole of the Liberal tradition after them agreed that the great and chief aim of men's uniting together in governments was the preservation of their property, broadly understood so long as it was clearly theirs, and that they wanted it and would always act to keep it and enhance it.

The difficulty with such an understanding of the social world--and the one which neither Hobbes nor any of his lineal descendants could overcome--is that within its limits, it is impossible to erect a public authority. Power is personal, the consequence of mutual calculations of personal advantage between sovereign and citizen. Hobbes tried with some desperation to tilt the balance of such calculations always in favor the sovereign by making him armed, absolute, arbitrary, and, above all, awful--so that by the terror of his ways his subjects would all be held in awe. But what if those moves proved in this or that situation to not be enough, as when the sovereign comes to take *my* life, or a thief begins his rounds, or when South Carolina reassessed its options on the eve of the American Civil War? In such instances, nullification and secession become very broad concepts indeed.

Put another way, Hobbes solved half--the easy half--of the problem of political obligation: He argued persuasively that people should obey the law when it is in their interest to do so. But then comes the hard part: Why should people obey the law when it is not in their interest to do so?

Americans tend to view these questions with an exact literalness unsoftened by proximity of more socially influenced ethics. Munger's reference to a possible Madisonian solution to his basic problem illustrates the point.

Madisonian Approach: *Take self-interest as fixed and exogenous* and engineer institutions to achieve a coincidence of individual goals and group welfare.

This is presumably a reference to Madison's admonition in *Federalist #51* that Americans should have a Constitution that pits ambition against ambition, and in every instance connects the rights of the office to the interests of the man. This variation on Adam Smith's hidden hand is indeed the clockwork theory of the constitution. If each person pursues what nobody else wants (namely, his or her own welfare), all will all be brought by the hidden hand to what no one is pursuing (namely, the wealth of the nation). Even if framed into clever laws, this would be a less than credible result. The projection begs the question of where in the Hobbesian universe would those public spirited and politically selfless stalwarts needed to write and sustain such a constitution for the benefit of the perpetually irascibles be found? Would they not also tend to be Hobbesians?

Philosophically, the principal error of the Hobbesian/Liberal tradition is that it leads people to suppose that since most men are selfish at least some of the time, all men ought, without exception, to be selfish all of the time--or at least should be assumed to be irredeemably selfish.

But no one is bound in stone by some universal law to make that assumption. Only Liberals are. They can advance to perspectives beyond Liberalism and, as Munger himself hinted, the place to begin such a move is with Rousseau.

Hobbes had said that, in or out of society, humans are all slaves to

their greeds and fears. (The American stock exchange vindicates him each day.) But Rousseau insisted that when humans enter society they may undergo a remarkable change. By stepping into a socially structured environment, humans could acquire a social liberty. If nothing else, they might predictably be released from the trap of mere reaction to the prodding of appetite. Being able to think, they could think themselves into a social milieu and reconceptualize themselves as members of society rather than savages. Being able to speak, they could make the prideful assertion "I am a citizen!" with full and meaningful emphasis on each word in that phrase.

It must be stressed that what Rousseau was talking about is an intellectual transformation. It may be accompanied by, or in time give rise to, emotional attachments, some valuable, others dangerous. Nevertheless, at bottom, what Rousseau was calling for is a change of mind, of the way people think about them. They must not think of themselves not as *ens completums* but as, in Marx's phrase, "ensembles of [their] social relations."

There is nothing mysterious or esoteric about this process. Ordinary people do it every day in every land. As I become a citizen, I must think of the fights and duties of citizenship that are being invested in me. Or, as men and women enter the state of matrimony, they must reconceptualize themselves and also their relationship, husband to her, wife to him. The same is true whenever people assume a social role, no matter how mundane or, as the case may be, elevated.

Note also that in the Rousseauian vocabulary, individuals must will the result. In broadest terms, "I" as ego must will "my" sociality. If a coward becomes a policeman, he must, through his commitment to the role and the ideals of the force, act the hero. And, strange as it may seem, this sometimes happens.

And notice what in the processes of these Rousseauian equations happens to the supposed dichotomy

between public and private, society and the self. One is not sacrificed to the other or the reverse. Rather, as in a true Hegelian synthesis, they affirm each other, the self society, society the self.

And, most important of all, notice what happens when a person, having become a citizen member, meets up with and recognizes another as equally a citizen in a shared community. The two are prepared for dialogue, about the nature of their citizenship and the sundry projects to which it could be put. Dialogue is the life blood of any democratic aspiring community, and also the tantalizing highest goal of all truly serious attempts to habitualize collective decision and action.

These are the terms of the debate. Stated in the abstract, they raise no deeply troubling philosophical issues, only practical problems. Can humans in their self-realizing societies create commonalties of collective action that do not kill, pollute, starve, or demean others. Can they create democratic institutions that will elevate their collective sense of participation, increase their social understandings, and transform their possibilities? These questions are worthy of our pondering. And as we do that we should always remember that, for Rousseau, participation, education, and revolution were effectively synonyms.

Such are the potentialities of the intersubjective reconceptualized self in a collectively structured society.

H. Mark Roelofs,
New York University

Reply to Roelofs

Professor Roelofs makes a good point: A political science is impossible without a focus on the "self," and its constitution in a family or society. I said as much in my own article, when I claimed that Rousseau is one legitimate starting point for tackling the problem of reconciling collective and group interests. But it is fair to claim, as Professor Roelofs does, that I focused too much on the

Madisonian approach and dismissed the alternative. I am grateful for this opportunity to acknowledge the oversight and will try to set it right. Madison, I think Professor Roelofs and I agree, takes self interest as external, fixed, and legitimate, and seeks (explicitly in *Federalist 51*) to design institutions where ambition is made to counteract ambition. Rousseau (and many other thinkers since) question whether there must be conflict between self and society. If people think of themselves collectively, the nature of freedom in society is different from the dangerous freedom of Hobbesian nature.

My first question in the original article, on "preferences," starts here. It seems inarguable that preferences are created socially. So, if we want to understand the origin of self-interest, we would have to start with the origin of the self. From the perspective of both the individual and society, some preferences are better than others. Consequently, the society, the family, and the individual should want to influence the process of preference formation.

I always pose the question this way to my students: Suppose you went to the mall and there, nestled between the Gap and Mr. Dunderbak's, was a store new to you. It is "The Preference Store." You walk in, realize you don't have any preferences, and would like to get some. But which ones? How would you choose if you don't have any preferences over which preferences are best? Standard rational choice theory provides little guidance here, since preferences are generally conceived as fixed and exogenous.

Rousseau gives a clear answer. We should give little weight to primitive preferences (in man's original, unfree state). Instead, we should focus on the sort of preferences we would all want to have in the best society. Since this is a theory of metapreference, it comes before a theory of preference. To be fair to Professor Roelofs, this view (which I believe) is barely hinted at in my essay. If, as my own mentor, Douglass North, often

claims, moral systems and ideologies are the means by which we all prevent ourselves from acting "rationally," then an understanding of how humans learn and react to moral claims is the first step on the path to wisdom.

An interesting analysis of the tension between the Madisonian and Rousseauian prescriptions for a political science is that of Coles (1996). He reconsidered the notion of "coalition," a common analytical tool in rational choice theory. Rightly conceived, Coles argued, the only principled coalition politics depends on an ethic of "receptive generosity." If this is true, it stands the rational choice conception of contention among

self-interested coalitions on its head. Coalitions do not form around prior interests in this view. Rather, interests are developed by deliberation among members of a coalition. Coalition, a society, comes first.

As I close, one dissenting note is necessary. Professor Roelofs is right to say my article was deficient in its treatment of the Rousseauian alternative. But I think he goes too far in dismissing the insights of Madison. He criticizes me for assuming people are selfish all of the time; his solution would require that we are selfish none of the time. The tension between the Madisonian and Rousseauian approaches represents a difference

in ontological perspective because they differ on the constitution of the self. I would argue that neither view is capable of a decisive refutation of the other. To solve the fundamental human problem of reconciling the self and the society, we need to study both the self and the rules that control selfishness.

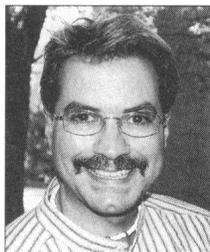
Michael C. Munger,
Duke University

Reference

- Coles, Romand. 1996. "Liberty, Equality, Receptive Generosity: Neo-Nietzschean Reflection on the Ethics and Politics of Coalition." *American Political Science Review* 90(June): 375-88.

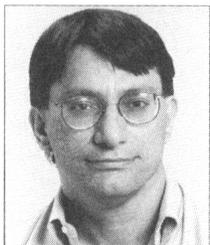
Contributors to "Latino Politics in the United States"

Tony Affigne, associate professor of political science



and former director of black studies at Providence College, organized this symposium. He was founding co-chair of the APSA Organized Section on Race, Ethnicity and Politics and the APSA Fund for Latino Scholarship. His research interests include comparative racial politics, political participation, Green Party politics, and labor politics. He is coauthor of *Race and Politics in the Americas* (New York University Press, forthcoming).

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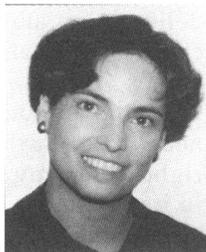


on *the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate* (University Press of Virginia, 1996), and coauthor, with Rodolfo O. de la Garza, of *Making Americans/Remaking America: Immigration and Immigrant Policy* (Westview, 1998).

John Garcia is professor and former head of the department of political science at the University of Arizona. He was a principal investigator for the Latino National Political Survey, and has authored numerous books, chapters, and articles on Latino politics, including "The Chicano Movement: Its Legacy for Politics and Policy" in *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic and Political Change* (University of Arizona Press, 1996).



Edwina Barvosa-Carter is assistant professor of social and political theory in the department of Chicano studies at UC-Santa Barbara. She has published in *Contemporary Justice Review* (1999) and is currently revising her doctoral dissertation (Harvard, 1998) into a book titled *A Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identity and Democratic Citizenship*.



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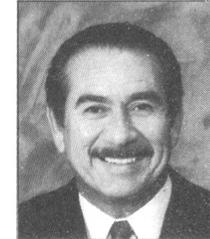
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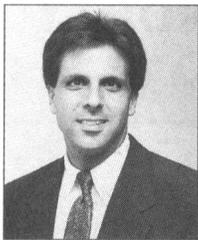
F. Chris Garcia is professor of political science and former provost at the University of New Mexico. He was a principal investigator for the Latino National Political Survey, and is the author, coauthor, or editor of numerous books and articles in the area of Latino politics, focusing on electoral behavior, political attitudes, and political socialization. He is editor of *Pursuing Power: Latinos and the Political System* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).



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Rodney Hero is professor of political science at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His research and teaching interests include U.S. democracy and governance, race and ethnicity, Latino politics, state and local politics and policy, and the intersection of these issues. He is author of *Faces of Inequality: Social Diversity in American Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1999).



Linda Lopez is an assistant professor and director of the legal studies program at Chapman University. She teaches courses in public law and is currently researching hate crime legislation and its impact on minority communities.



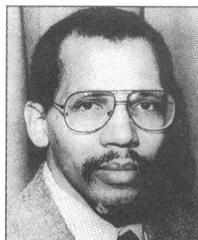
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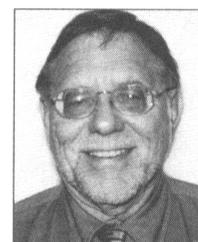
Michael Jones-Correa is associate professor of government at Harvard University. His research interests include immigrant politics and interethnic relations in the United States. He is the author of *Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City* (Cornell University Press, 1998).



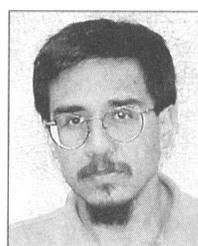
Valerie Martinez-Ebers is an associate professor of political science at Texas Christian University who specializes in policy analysis and program evaluation, especially the consequences of educational reforms for low-income, minority children. She is chair of the APSA Committee on the Status of Latinos y Latinas in the Profession.



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Arturo Vega is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Texas, San Antonio. He is also the interim director of USTA's Metropolitan Research and Policy Institute. Vega teaches courses in U.S. Congress, ethnic and racial politics, research methods, and public policy.



American Political Science Association
MINORITY IDENTIFICATION PROJECT

THE CONCEPT

The Minority Identification Project is a collaboration of undergraduate and graduate political science programs to attract talented minority undergraduate students to graduate study and, ultimately, to increase diversity in the political science profession.

Faculty in university and college undergraduate programs talk with minority students about professional careers in political science and send the names of promising minority candidates for graduate study to the APSA. Participating graduate institutions actively recruit students identified by the Project, and make special efforts to provide financial aid to those admitted to their programs.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The Minority Identification Project is open to all schools and students. If you are interested in any aspect of it, please contact:

Sue Davis at sdavis@apsanet.org
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Here are some of the basic steps for participating:

Students: If you would like more information about a career in political science and about the Minority Identification Project, contact your undergraduate advisor. Ask him/her to submit your name to APSA. You can also contact APSA directly.

Undergraduate Faculty: Please meet with your minority students as soon as possible in the academic year, and send APSA the names of those a) who would be promising graduate students, b) with whom you have met and discussed professional careers in political science, and c) who have expressed an interest in being included in this program. Send the name, current and permanent address, phone number, E-mail address, race/ethnicity, GPA, graduation year, and a brief comment (optional) that would offer insight into the student's academic and personal strengths to a graduate school recruiter. Please submit names of seniors and second semester Juniors by mid-April for the Spring Round and by mid-October for the Fall Round of the Minority ID Project.

Graduate Schools: Core graduate schools receive names of students and mailing labels by the end of April and October and may begin contacting students immediately. Other graduate schools interested in receiving the names of students identified in this program should contact Sue Davis or Titilayo Ellis at APSA.

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