UMPLEBY STUART TWO SYSTEMS OF ETHICAL COGNITION

From Wikipedia: "According to Jonathan Farley, a mathematician at Stanford doing applied work on national security issues, Lefebvre's Reflexive Theory was a Soviet alternative to game theory which had been widely adopted by the American defense establishment."

Game theory has been thoroughly examined for its implications and applications in national defense, but the same cannot be said for Lefebvre's work. There is an opportunity for productive inquiry, not just to elaborate upon Lefebre's work, but also to consider how reflexivity -- an integral feature of all social and behavioral systems -- is accounted for in defense assessments and strategy. This phenomenon has been under-appreciated as well as under-theorized, as is evident in, for example, renewed attention to blowback, escalation, surprise, and other products attributable to reflexive processes.

In the 1980s Vladimir Lefebvre created a theory of two systems of ethical cognition: to oversimplify, either the end *does not* justify the means (first ethical system, characteristic of the West) or the end *does* justify the means (second ethical system, characteristic of the USSR). According to the theory people grow up with one or the other ethical system and people believe there is only one ethical system. When two people, one from each ethical system, meet, each presents himself or herself as a person of high ethical status, but interprets the other person as a person of low ethical status. Misunderstandings then escalate. However, people can learn the two ethical systems and use whichever one is suitable for a particular situation.

 During the break-up of the Soviet Union Lefebvre's theory was used at the highest levels in both Washington and Moscow in order to prevent a misunderstanding that could have led to war. I learned about this theory from Lefebvre, whom I met at a cybernetics conference in the early 1980s. I found the theory to be very useful in my work with Russian scientists in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2004 I was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I presented a series of lectures on organizational behavior to a group of middle managers. At the end of the course I asked the managers which theory of organizational behavior they found most

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interesting. To my surprise they unanimously chose Lefebvre's theory. They said that the theory not only explained why the Balkan War in the early 1990s happened but also why people in Bosnia still struggle to work together.

I had thought that Lefebvre's theory primarily explained relations between the US and the Soviet Union. The reaction in Bosnia convinced me that it also applies elsewhere. However, Lefebvre's theory is not well-known among American social scientists, though there is some awareness of it in the Intelligence Community (IC). I think it could be used to help us understand the conflicts in the Middle East. Americans struggle to understand the thinking of terrorists, and I think Lefebvre's theory could help there as well. Whereas those who use the first ethical system place limits on the means they use, in the second ethical system the willingness to use any means necessary to achieve one's goals is thought to be correct and honorable.

A fundamental disagreement between the US and Russia is whether movements for free speech and civil liberties lead to democracy and social and economic progress or to "internal disorder, societal conflict and the loss of the sovereign integrity of the state" (Zakaria, 2017). Americans tend to assume the former, Russians the latter. The two conceptions of cause and effect reveal whether one is using Lefebvre's first or second ethical system. For a further explanation see Umpleby, 2016. For additional examples of the second ethical system see Umpleby (1987).

Lefebvre's theory might be helpful in distinguishing law-abiding citizens and people who are willing to break the law when pursuing an attractive goal. Domestically, Lefebvre's theory might be useful in helping the Securities and Exchange Commission anticipate when the managers in a firm may be about the break the law, for example, if their annual report says that the firm "will do anything necessary" to ensure the survival and profitability of the firm.

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