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A Half-theory of Everything

by Fred E. Foldvary, Senior Editor

My late friend Tertius Chandler, a geoist and historian, wrote a huge tome called Chandler's Half-Encyclopedia. He called it a 'half-encyclopedia' because although he knew a lot of facts, especially about ancient history and biographies, including his own original discoveries, he didn't claim to know everything. Only a dozen copies were published, and I have one of them.

In that spirit, I present a brief half-theory of everything. Physicists have been searching for a 'theory of everything' that ties together all physical phenomena. I will go further and put forth a half-theory of totally everything, including biology and society as well as physics. Here goes:

Logic is the ultimate reality. Logic decrees that nothing can come from nothing, so there is a cause for every effect, and things can only come from previous things. The universe is composed of space, stuff, and time, stuff being matter and energy. There are constants that fix the speed of light and the forces of gravitation, magnetism, and sub-atomic particles and strings, which if a tiny bit different, would have left a universe void of the stars and planets that exist. God is and means ultimately the unknowable reality of why the universe is as it is.

Atomic elements are patterned into sets that shape the molecules of which matter is composed. Programmed carbon-based molecules create self-reproducing life, and living beings evolved into ever greater complexity until they achieved the ability to exert deliberate will rather than react as genetically programmed. Conscious choice acting on genetically programmed wants creates relationships, power seeking, and the desire to fulfill desire. Values are subjective to individuals human beings, who have both self-interest and sympathetic interests for others.

Axiomatic is the human propensity to economize, maximizing benefits per cost, or minimizing cost per benefit. Persons rank their desires and seek to satisfy those most important at the moment of choice. Natural resources are scarce, so every choice involves foregone opportunities, the economic cost of choice. Rationality implies economizing to achieve consistent preferences. Benefits are maximized where the extra benefit just equals the extra cost, when the extra cost is rising or constant.

The supply of goods depends on the price, with higher prices enabling the production of goods with a higher cost. The demand for goods is the quantity people are willing to pay for at various prices. Market prices are set where the quantity demanded equals the quantity supplied. If prices are forcibly fixed elsewhere, there are shortages and surpluses, wasting resources. There is a consumer surplus of willingness to pay being higher than price, and a producer surplus of price above production costs, and the producer surplus mostly goes to land rent, the major cause of cost differentials being locational.

As nothing comes from nothing, goods can only come from nature and production. Money created by fiat, by government command, cannot create wealth by magic, but only decreases the money claims of everyone to the economy's wealth. Folks prefer present-day goods to future goods, and the rate of discount for future goods is the interest rate premium for present goods.

Among human beings there is no biologically superior set, so moral equality implies an ethic by which each human being is a self-owner. There is a single universal evil, coercive harm to others, and a single universal moral good, welcomed benefits to others, all else being neutral.

Liberty or individual freedom exists when law only prohibits moral evil. Human or natural rights are the correlative of moral wrong, a right to have or do something implying that it is evil to forcefully prevent or take away the having or doing.

Self-ownership implies the right to one's body, labor, products, and wages, and to voluntary exchange without penalty or tax. Nature is all prior to and apart from human action, and human equality implies that all equally benefit from the resources of nature. Land is natural resources, and its value comes from differences in benefits. Land is fixed in supply, so the benefits of community works and services, adding to demand, create higher rent and site values. The civic works of communities are efficiently funded from these rents, in contrast to forced extractions of wages and profits, which raise prices and reduce quantities, imposing a social burden on present production and decreasing future growth.

Government enforces community rules, whether contractual or imposed. Moral equality implies that proper governance is by consent among peaceful members. Governance is least corrupt when voting groups are small and the groups are voluntarily federated.

The laws of the universe are in harmony as the policy that is morally just also maximizes prosperity while minimizing social inequality under the rubric of self-ownership. True free trade and sharing nature's bounty are the key to social peace.

That's the half-theory of everything, and since we will never fully understand everything, half may well be sufficient for practical life.

-- Fred Foldvary

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