OPTIMAL NUMBERS OF VARIOUS PHENOMENA: NATIONS, PEOPLE, LANGUAGES, RACES, MARRIAGE PARTNERS[1]

OPTIMALNI BROJEVI ZA RAZLIČITE FENOMENE: NACIJE, NARODI, JEZICI, RASE, BRAČNI PARTNERI[2]

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Abstract:

What are the optimal numbers or quantities of nations, people, languages, races, marriage partners, wealth, monies, criminals and other such phenomenon? This depends, of course, on the goals of the people answering this question. Two different perspectives will be employed in the present paper in order to wrestle with this question: the libertarian political philosophy, and what I shall categorize as prudential judgment, or economic welfare. For example, it would be unwieldy in the extreme, and unwise, to have a different monetary system for each of the some 7 billion inhabitants of earth; this would amount to no monetary system at all, or barter. Similarly, 7 billion different languages would mean communication would be impossible, surely not an ideal state of affairs from just about any perspective. But can we pin the numbers better down than this? That is the burden of the present paper.

Keywords: *optimal numbers, quantity nations, people, languages, races, marriage partners, wealth, monies, criminals*

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Apstrakt

Koji su optimalni brojevi ili količine novca, bogatstva, nacija, ljudi, jezika, rasa, bračnih partnera, kriminalaca i drugih takvih fenomena? To, naravno, zavisi od ciljeva ljudi koji odgovaraju na ovo pitanje. Kako bi se izborili sa ovim pitanjem, ovom radu su korišćene dve različite perspektive: libertarijanska politička filozofija i ono što autor želi da kategoriše kao razborit sud, ili ekonomski prosperitet. Na primer, bilo bi do krajnosti neprimereno i nikako mudro uspostaviti različite monetarne sisteme za svakog od sedam milijardi stanovnika Zemlje; to bi dovelo do nemogućnosti uspostavljanja ikakvog monetarnog sistema i povratka na trampu. Slično tome, sedam milijardi različitih jezika bi komunikaciju činilo nemogućom, što svakako nije idealno stanje stvari iz bilo koje perspektive. Ali, mogu li se uz različite pojave prikačiti bolji prikladniji brojevi od ovih? To je breme ovog rada.

Ključne reči:

optimalni brojevi, broj nacija, ljudi, jezici, rase, bračni partneri, bogatstvo, novac, kriminalci

1   INTRODUCTION

What is an optimal number? What are "things"? In this paper I shall attempt to determine the optimal number of "things" such as people, races, governments, languages, firms, murders.

Before discussing these matters, let us face an initial objection: Who cares? Why should any rational person interest himself in whether or not there is an optimal number of certain things, and why on earth ask about these particular heterogeneous things? Why should any of us care whether or not there is an optimal number of, say, languages? What will this help us understand?

I offer several answers to this objection, in an attempt to cajole the reader into further pursuing this essay. First, for scholars, there is a general interest in issues, questions, studies, etc. This holds true whether or not there is any short-run pay-off in the answers. "Information for information's sake, alone" might well be the motto of those for whom this rings a bell. Basic research, with no particular pragmatic payoff, is surely a worthwhile enterprise for those interested in ideas. Second, there are obvious benefits in pursuing these issues. For example, if the optimal number of languages is one, and at present there are many more than that spoken and written, then it would be to our advantage, at least not to start up any more of them,[3] and, also we would be furnished with a reason not to

subsidize any marginal tongues that are likely to end. For example, the Quebec government spends large amounts of effort, treasure, good will, in forcing its residents to speak French. If that is one of the languages on its way out, these expenditures would be seen all the more as unwise. We now have some 200 different nations. If the optimal number of them is 10,000, then we ought to encourage Quebec to secede from Canada, the Basques to separate from Spain, Scotland to depart from the United Kingdom. If the optimal number is one, world government, or three, as depicted in the novel *1984*, then these separations should be discouraged. Similarly, if we have more people on earth than is optimal, we ought to applaud the efforts of the People's Republic of China to reduce population size with its one child per family policy; if not, then this initiative should be denigrated. It is difficult to see how more applicable to real world issues can a study be than this one.

Why this particular set of questions? There seems to be little in common between numbers of nations, people, languages, races, marriage partners, etc. That is both a credit, and a debit. On the plus side, if the considerations discussed in this paper can apply to unrelated issues, that demonstrates even the more their explanatory power. If these considerations could only apply to a small set of rather homogeneous issues, that would be a limitation.

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[3]   So-called "Black-English," or "Ebonics" is a dialect possibly in the process of becoming a new language (Google, 2013)

What is optimal? That depends upon our goals. From the libertarian point of view,[4] the optimal number of anything is whatever quantity results from the free choices of un-coerced individuals. From this perspective, what is the optimal number of people? It is exactly that number, no more and no less, that results from their own freely made choices. What is the optimal number of languages? Again, that number, not a single one more or less, than comes about as a result of freely choosing individuals. And ditto for all the other social and economic phenomenon to be discussed in this paper.

If this were the only viewpoint from which to analyze this matter, the present essay would be a very short and rather uninteresting one. Indeed, we have in the previous paragraph just about exhausted our topic. However, there is an alternative: economic welfare, or the prudential judgment of just about most people as to what is "best." Here, we may say that although apart from the viewpoint of murderers, the optimal amount of unjustified killing is zero. However, it might take the entire GDP, and more, to reach this estimable goal; thus, it is only ideal in some unrealistic theoretical or philosophical sense. Given human beings as we find them, the optimal number of murders will surely be greater than zero, however repulsive that may sound. Similarly, none, seven billion different languages, or monies,[5] would spell disaster in terms of communication and trade. The present paper will try to narrow down these quantities optimally from this second point of view.

In section II, we further consider these matters from the libertarian point of view. Section III is devoted to a different perspective: pragmatism, or prudential judgment or the maximization of human welfare. All throughout this paper we will attempt to get a grip on optimal numbers, or quantities, of phenomena such as race, nations, etc. We conclude in section IV.

2 LIBERTARIANISM

2.1 Races

There are some (Gould, 1981) who claim there is no such thing as race, and, thus, there cannot be any number of different categories in this regard. But we shall not follow such commentators.[6] Even a child can distinguish, at least, between whites, blacks and Orientals. If he is even slightly more sophisticated in these matters, he can make far more distinctions than just these three. This claim is also peculiar as those who are the most vociferous in articulating it are also the most intent upon eradicating "racism." But if there are no separate races, there can be no such thing as racism. And if this latter phenomenon does indeed exist, as its opponents continually complain, then it would be a logical contradiction for distinguishable races not to exist. How many races should exist? From a libertarian point of view, it is clear, as many or as few as results from the voluntary actions of people concerned with this issue.

2.2 Governments

What about governments? What is their optimal number, again from the libertarian perspective? If we take seriously that proviso about "consenting adults" then of course the optimal number of them is zero.[7] For the state is the paradigm case

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[4] (Bergland, 1986); (Block, 2008); (Hoppe, 1993); (Huebert, 2010); (Kinsella, 1995, 1996); (Narveson,1988); (Nozick, 1973); (Rothbard, 1973, 1978, 1982); (Woolridge, 1970)

[5] Related to the number of monies is the issue of optimal currency areas. Mundell (1961, 1973) defines optimality on this issue in terms of promoting Keynesian monetary and fiscal policy. For a critique, see Block (1999)

[6] For a critique see Dennett, 1996; Rushton, 1997; Sailer, 2011

[7] Or, paradoxically, 7 billion, one for each person. We are now treading into the realm of anarcho-capitalism, the most radical of the libertarian positions. See on this: (Anderson & Hill, 1979); (Benson, 1989, 1990); (Block, 2007, 2010, 2011); (Casey, 2010); (DiLorenzo, 2010); (Gregory, 2011); (Guillory & Tinsley, 2009); (Hasnas, 1995); (Higgs, 2009, 2012); (Hoppe, 2008, 2011); (King, 2010); (Kinsella, 2009); (Long, 2004); (Molyneux, 2008); (Murphy, 2005); (Rothbard, 1973, 1977A, 1998); (Spooner, 1870); (Stringham, 2007); (Tannehill, 1984); (Tinsley, 1998-1999). In the view of Rothbard (1973, emphasis added by present author) "For centuries, the State (or more strictly, individuals acting in their roles as 'members of the

of an institution that, say whatever else about it you want, is *not* voluntary. Rather, it is coercive, and this applies to all versions of it, up to and including democracy (Hoppe, 2001). For even under this form of government, those ruled by it have not given it their prior consent (Spooner, 1870).

2.3 Businesses

As far as commercial firms are concerned, from the libertarian perspective the optimal quantity of them is however may result from the freely chosen practices of buyers and sellers. Each of us roughly seven billion people can one of our own, or several for that matter,[8] or none at all. Libertarianism places no limits on this phenomenon. Thus, any policy that attempts to increase their number, by placing barriers in the way of mergers, for example, or by breaking up large concerns into constituent elements, would be opposed by this philosophy.[9]

2.4 Murders

Murders are a different story, entirely. Since killing innocent people is just about the polar opposite of the libertarian ideal, we arrive,

unambiguously, at the optimal amount of zero of this crime.

3 PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENT, HUMAN WELFARE

3.1 GDP[10]

The more people, the higher is the GDP, assuming we are not in the range where discounted marginal revenue product of human beings is below zero. But what about GDP per capita? This depends upon the productivity of a unit of labor per acre of land (holding constant other factors of production, such as capital.) In turn, this is determined by whether the forces of specialization and division of labor outweigh diminishing returns. For example, if there were one person on earth, or just a very few, or maybe even but a few hundred thousand, the human race would be far too limited to take advantage of the vast treasures of the earth. However, with a few quadrillion of us, let alone an infinite number of people, diminishing returns would have long ago set in. Here we come, Malthus (1798), with a vengeance.

What about our present 7 billion? According to our latter day Malthusians ((Commoner, 1990); (Ehrlich, 1968); (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 1981); (Gore, 1992)), we have long ago reached and passed the optimal population size that would maximize GDP per capita. Indeed, for them, we have gone way past this point, all the way to being forced, in some cases, to endure a subsistence level income. But this is clearly false. For if we were truly at subsistence, slavery would be impossible. No one would pay any positive sum for a slave who could not produce more than enough to feed and clothe himself. But this "curious institution" has been with us for all of recorded history and possibly before. So it cannot possibly be the case that we have come anywhere near to having reached this point at present.

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government') has cloaked its criminal activity in high-sounding rhetoric. For centuries the State has committed mass murder and called it 'war'; then ennobled the mass slaughter that 'war' involves. For centuries the State has enslaved people into its armed battalions and called it 'conscription' in the 'national service.' For centuries the State has robbed people at bayonet point and called it 'taxation.' *In fact, if you wish to know how libertarians regard the State and any of its acts, simply think of the State as a criminal band, and all of the libertarian attitudes will logically fall into place.*"

[8] In which case there would be no employer – employee relationships.

[9] For the case against antitrust, see, (Anderson, et al., 2001); (Armentano, 19999; (Barnett, et. al., 2005, 2007); (Block, 1977B, 1982, 1994); (Block & Barnett, 2009); (Boudreaux & DiLorenzo, 1992); (Costea, 2003); (DiLorenzo, 1997); (DiLorenzo & High, 1988); (High,1984-1985); (McChesney, 1991); (Rothbard, 2004); (Shugart, 1987); (Smith, 1983); (Tucker, 1998A, 1998B)

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[10] There are some economists ((Coase, 1960); (Demsetz, 1979, 1997); (Posner, 1992)) who consider all such questions from this perspective. For an alternative view, see (Block, 1977, 1995, 1996B).

Several considerations point to the fact that with our present population we are too few, not too many. Vast tracts of land in the US are virtually empty, even east of the Mississippi. If the entire world's population were located in average middle class homes (two stories, 2500 square feet, small front and back yards), with no provision for anything else such as farms, roads, stories, factories, parks – no one would want to live like this, but work with me here – the entire world's population could all fit into land the size of Texas.[11] Another indication of how few we are is that all of us, every single one of us, could physically fit into a one mile cubic space. Then, too, the advocates of the overpopulation hypothesis are hypocrites.[12] They all have the power, each and every one of them, to reduce the size of the population by one. That they have not done so, and are still, instead, whining about there being too many people, shows that even they do not take their thesis seriously. If they do not, why should we?[13]

3.2   Races

This is a controversial issue in our politically correct times. In order to increase the light, and reduce the heat let us first approach this question by analogy regarding breeds of dog. So, what is the number of dog breeds that will maximize human satisfaction? In the South Park of season 8, episode 6, "They Took our jobs!" (Parker & Stone, 2004) the people coming back to the present from the future were all of a piece: light brown skinned, with no racial differences at all. Should we breed dogs, from now on, so as to achieve this end for that species?

It is difficult to see how this could improve human welfare, or its GDP proxy. At present, there is specialization and division of labor among hounds: bloodhounds can sniff scents and find missing people; St. Bernards can rescue people in the snow; dachshunds can enter burrows and attack ferrets, dogs that that corral sheep, etc. Some breeds can best be used as seeing eyes, or to cuddle, or to guard junkyards (Robison, 2010). If we had only one breed of dog, virtually all of these particular excellences would have go by the boards. GDP would undoubtedly suffer.

It is not clear why this sort of logic should not apply to our own species.[14] Eskimos are better able to deal with icy conditions than anyone else, Arabs with sand and deserts, Italians with cooking, Jews with finance, blacks with athletics and so on (Sowell, 1975, 1981A, 1981B, 1982, 1983, 1994).[15] With a totally homogeneous

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[11] According to Sowell (1983): "Every human being on the face of the Earth could be housed in the state of Texas in one-story, single-family homes, each with a front and a back yard. A family of four would thus have 6,800 square feet- about the size of the typical middle-class American home with front and backyards."

[12] More technically, they are guilty of a performative contradiction. See Hoppe (1993, 1995)

[13] For a general analysis of the relation between world population size and well being, see Robbins (1928, 1966). For the view that the ideal population is far less than our present seven billion, see Commoner (1990); Ehrlich, Paul & Anne (1981), Ehrlich (1968), Ehrlich, Ehrlich & Daily (1993), Gore (1992) and Sachs (2008). For a critique of this over population thesis, see Boudreaux (2008), Rothbard (2011) and Simon (1981, 1990, 1996). For commentary on ideal nation size in terms of population, see Friedman (1977) and Wittman (2000). For the view that is most congruent to that of the present author, see Friedman (1972).

[14] One wonders if these kinds of diversity numbers are at play within countries for, say, race. In the U.S. we tend to divide people into White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, Jewish, and Middle Eastern, more or less. But if you look at Mexico, for example, you would find that within that nation there are divisions among the European, black, and natives, among others. But Americans would group the Euro- and native- and mixed Mexicans as being Hispanic, or just plain Mexican, without making those other distinctions. Given these social phenomena, there is in a real sense an "optimal" number of races -- but it seems to be contingent on our psychology and geographic boundaries. To what degree these groups will get along will be determined at least in part by the institutions in place.

[15] Heaven Is Where The French are the chefs; The Italians are the lovers; The British are the police; The Germans are the mechanics; And the Swiss make everything run on time. Hell is Where: The British are the chefs; The Swiss are the lovers; The French are the mechanics; The Italians make everything run on time; And the Germans are the police

species such as depicted in South Park, most of these comparative advantages would be lost. Woe betide us if ever we had to face an alien enemy of the entire human race; we would have placed all of our eggs in one basket.[16]

3.3 Governments

At present, there are about 200 separate countries in the world,[17] each with its own government. Should we move to a one world government, under a U.N. type arrangement? Maybe we would be better off with three, Oceana, Eurasia and Eastasia as depicted in Orwell (1949). Or, should we go in the other direction? If Quebec seceded from Canada, there would be one more state apparatus. The same for the war of northern aggression in 1861, had the South beat the North. This applies, too, to Scotland separating from the UK, or the Basques from Spain. Perhaps we should go all the way to individual self sovereignty with a state for each person, or some seven billion different countries, each with but one citizen in it.

The anarcho-libertarian would favor the latter concatenation on moral grounds. Then, there would be no archical orders emanating from any president, leader, dictator, prime minister, or tyranny of the majority in any manner, shape or form. But that is a subject for the previous section, when we considered the libertarian view on these issues. Right now, we are concerned with the relationship between the size of a country (the bigger they are, the fewer of them there can be) and its GDP per capita; that is, we are looking at these matters from a pragmatic point of view.

Hong Kong and Singapore are two of the most successful countries in the world in terms of the economic freedom that produces wealth (Gwartney, 1996). Let us extrapolate from their size, to attain at least one measure of what might be a desirable size for a nation. There are seven billion people on earth. There are now some 200 countries. The average sized country must therefore contain 35 million citizens. Hong Kong has a population of a little over7 million; Singapore's is slightly less than that. Let us take the average between the two of them and call it 7 million, roughly. If all nations on earth had this many people in them, there would be 1,000 countries on the planet.

What about looking at this issue from the vantage point of reducing the number and severity of wars between countries. There is some evidence[18] attesting to the claim that deaths per capita are larger when big nations go to war. This too would incline us in the direction of more but smaller countries.

3.4 Languages

States Hieber (2010): "There are 6,909 languages alive in the world today. Seventy-four are indigenous to California alone — languages like Hupa, Kawaiisu, and Shoshone — while Papua New Guinea has over 800, with a median of just 1,200 speakers per language."[19]

If we all spoke the same language, our ability to communicate would be enhanced. Better verbal interaction would obviously increase wealth. For one thing, we would no longer have to waste

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(http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/jokes/bljoke heavenhell.htm)

[16] For studies that have shown a negative correlation between racial diversity and economic prosperity, see Sobel, Dutta and Roy (2010), Easterly and Levine (1997) and Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999).

[17] Estimates differ:
196
(http://geography.about.com/cs/countries/a/number countries.htm;
http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0932875.html);
189, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195 or 196
(http://www.worldatlas.com/nations.htm);
206
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_stat es);
193 (http://www.wisegeek.com/how-many-countries-are-there-in-the-world.htm)

[18] (Alesina & Spolaore, 2003, 2006); (Alesina, Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2000); (Bolton & Roland, 1997); (Buchanan & Faith, 1987); (McGuire, 2002); (Mises,1919); (Spolaore, 2008). Others argue for smaller nation size on related grounds: (Sale, 2010); (Rockwell, 1996) (increased freedom); (Livingston, 2012) (better representation).

[19] Also see Hieber (2012).

scarce labor on translations.[20] They could all now be free to create goods and services that are at present unobtainable, since they are at present busy doing work that would no longer need to be done.

On the other hand, there may be some losses if each language, or many of them, or even some of them, can contribute unique insights into the human or economic condition. Eskimos are thought to have many descriptions of snow and ice conditions. But this need not be lost if we all adopted any one language, English for instance, for all of these situations can be described by if only by several words in that tongue. And the same goes for special conditions in the desert, in the jungle, under water, etc.

For years the present author has been conducting informal research with regard to multi-lingual people. I have asked them if there are any thoughts they have gleaned from one of their languages that they could not have, or did not, garner from the other(s). From bi-lingual anglo and franco speakers I have been told that there are words for wine and food, etc., in the latter but not the former, but that no unique insights have emerged from knowledge of this additional language skill. I have had similar results from dozens of people. The only exception has been Hebrew. There, each letter of that language, aleph, base, gimmel, daled, comes attached to a number, too, so words and sentences have a numerical value. Some of these are significant. One wonders whether or not this experience can be replicated with other languages. Possibly so, although, presumably, the significance of such statements would be very different. If not, then, unless we all adopt Hebrew as the one lingua franca, an unlikely occurrence, this loss will have to be added to the debit column.

Then, too, many of the romance languages divide ordinary household objects into male and female words. For example, el lapiz, a male word, is "pencil" in Spanish, while la pluma, a female word, means "pen" in that language. We would

lose these distinctions were we to shift to any non romance language. However, it does not seem to be too much of a stretch to say that this is of less importance than increased communication ability to be derived by any one language.[21]

Consider another example. In Spanish there are two words for "corner," one for a corner when seen from the inside, and another when seen from the outside. But each of these concepts can be accurately rendered in English, as has just been done. Thus, the only loss of the Spanish language, in this one context, is that several words must be substituted for one in order to clarify precise meanings.

If we are to adopt a single tongue, it will probably be one spoken by many people, at least as a second language. That means, in all likelihood, Mandarin.[22] In my prudential judgment, the advantages of communication outweigh the losses of giving up numerous languages. The fewer the tongues spoken and written, the better in order to maximize human welfare, and one is the fewest of them all.

3.5   Firms

According to mainstream neoclassical economists, the more business firms in an

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[20]   Anyone who thinks that this would create a depression, since translator's jobs would vanish and they would then buy less from the rest of us, should read Hazlitt (1946).

[21]   See Vuolo (2012) for an interesting perspective on this issue. For an alternative view, one which claims that knowing more than one language makes you smarter, see Bhattacharjee (2012). In the view of the *Economist* (2009): "A fierce debate exists in linguistics between those, such as Noam Chomsky, who think that all languages function roughly the same way in the brain and those who do not. The latter view was propounded by Benjamin Lee Whorf, an American linguist of the early 20th century, who argued that different languages condition or constrain the mind's habits of thought."

[22]   http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_most_popular_second_language_in_the_world: 1. Mandarin Chinese - 882 million 2. Spanish - 325 million 3. English - 312-380 million 4. Arabic - 206-422 million 5. Hindi - 181 million 6. Portuguese - 178 million 7. Bengali - 173 million 8. Russian - 146 million 9. Japanese - 128 million 10. German - 96 million; http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_most_popular_second_language_in_the_world#ixzz22jCcJrMP

industry, the better. As we approach an infinite number of them, we get closer and closer to "perfect competition." Of course, if we have an infinite number of firms in any one industry, or anything close to that, there will be no capital left for any other industry. Mainstream economics hardly aims at that. Their solution? Each of these infinitely many firms will be very small, infinitesimally tiny. My pay grade in mathematics is not sufficient to determine what the result will be of multiplying teeny companies approaching zero in size, with an indefinitely large number of them, but common sense ought to indicate that these considerations are just plain silly. According to Hayek (1964, p. 96) "In perfect competition there is no competition…"

This confusion between competition and the number of competitors has percolated out from ivory tower economics into the wider community. All too many journalists have fallen for this conflation. For example, Coyne (2012) states: "Well, there is one thing we (Canada) got very right and they (the U.S.) got very wrong: financial industry regulation. Wasn't it that same Paul Martin, … who bravely forbade the banks to merge? Yes, it was, and it was good policy: Canada needs more banking competition, not less." More competitors means more competition, eh? Too facile by half.

To this end, four and eight firm concentration ratios have been concocted, along with the more sophisticated Herfendahl index. One fatal flaw in all these calculations is that all these numerical measures are arbitrary and capricious. For they are based on the number of business firms in an *industry* and the latter concept has holes in it big enough to drive through with the proverbial truck. For example, is the proper denotation of the industry cold or warm cereals, all breakfast cereals, or anything else that people might eat for this meal (bacon and eggs? Fruit?), or does it include lunch (dinner? snacks?) What about meals at home versus restaurants? Do we include them all? Obviously, there is lower concentration in the entire food industry than there is in any one part of it. Or take the automobile "industry." A car is a car is a car, it would appear, so matters seem to be more clear cut. But what about SUVs? Do they count in the "industry?" What of small trucks with room for five

passengers? Big trucks? Motorcycles? Used vehicles? Nor can it be denied that sometimes the next best alternative to any given automobile is not another such vehicle, but something that at least looks quite different, such as a sailboat, or a piano, or a room full of furniture, or a trip to Europe, or music lessons or psychotherapy for a few years. Should these things, too, be considered as part of the auto industry for purposes of counting the number of competitors? There is simply no unobjectionable definition of any industry to call upon.

But there is more. How far away from a given competitor does another one have to be in order to be counted in these sweepstakes? Suppose there is but one hardware store in a small town in the middle of Arkansas. Is he a monopolist? How far from the next village must he be in order to be counted as such? 10 miles? 20 miles? 30 miles? Posit that there are dozens of hardware emporia in the closest city, but it is located 20, 40, 60, 80 miles from our merchant. When does his "monopoly" status disappear, and our shop keeper, magically, becomes a "competitor?" There are of course no non ambiguous answers to any of these questions, including whether or not grocers count as competitors for these merchants, given some overlap: can openers, etc.

Another difficulty is furnished by the taxi industry in a large city. There are about 50,000 licensed cab drivers in New York City (Brooklyn, 2013). But are they competitive? Not by any stretch of the imagination. Yes, they are rivals with regard to picking up a given passenger. But in every other way they are tightly regulated. They cannot charge any prices per mile they wish, or at different times of the day. They must all use government approved vehicles, pass the same exams, etc. Worst, they are not subject to competitive entry. No person without a statist permit may enter the field and compete with extant taxi operations.

When IBM first began operations, it was a single seller of computers. They were subjected to a decades-long antitrust law suit (Wright, 2002) (DeLamarter, 1986). But *any* company that blazes new trails, introduces a new product, service, whatever, will *necessarily* be a single seller of it, at least at the outset. Are they all to be

harassed as "monopolies?" Evidently so, at least according to this economic philosophy that conflates competition with number of competitors. But IBM *was* competing, even though it was the only one, at the time, in this new field. It did so against typewriters, widely used at the time, against stenographers; against every other alternative use of the consumer dollar, for that matter.

No, a far better way to analyze this issue is via the Austrian School of Economics. Here,[23] as long as entry is legal, there is competition. It matters not one whit how many entrepreneurs choose to provide a given good or service, as long as there are no legal barriers to anyone else competing with them. The *Times Picayune* is the only daily newspaper in New Orleans. Are they a monopoly? Who knows, according to the mainstream economic view. But in the Austrian perspective, they are clearly not a monopoly, rather they are competitive. And this is not because there are magazines, blogs, journals, radio and television stations, movies, other newspapers outside of New Orleans. The *Times Picayune* is competitive simply because it is *legal* to start another daily newspaper in this city.[24]

What, then, are the true monopolies in the U.S.? There is only one U.S. Post Office, but it is a monopoly, since it is illegal for anyone else to compete with it for the delivery of first class mail. There are thousands of taxicabs in New York City, but they all constitute a monopoly, since anyone competing with them will be punished by law. There are numerous doctors in the country, but they also constitute a monopoly, since it is

against the law for unlicensed people to offer medical services for a fee.[25]

So, what is the optimal number of firms in an industry? There is no such thing that can be determined independently of the free actions of participants: buyers, sellers, customers, entrepreneurs. Whatever number the market determines is the appropriate one.

It is not just an article of faith that more competition will lead to higher human welfare. It is also a matter of pure logic. If people are allowed to compete, they will better satisfy consumers, than if they are not. Firms that fail to do so lose ground, and tend to go bankrupt, leaving the field for those better able and willing to increase GDP in this manner. There is a wealth of empirical data illustrating this fact. But it applies, only, to competition, e.g., legal entry, not to the mere number of competitors.

3.6 Murders

At first glance, the optimal number of murders would appear, obviously, to be zero. Certainly libertarian considerations previously mentioned would mitigate in this direction. But we are not now considering the rights of the matter, nor justice. Rather, we are focusing on pragmatic considerations. If we could wave a magic wand and end all such killing, then, without much doubt, human well being would be increased. But in the real world, the only way to reduce the number of murders to zero, if we could do so at all, would be by spending virtually all of our wealth on body guards, and then have to worry as to whether or not they could be bought off.[26] But to expend all of our money in this way would pretty much mean the death of all of us, as we

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[23] (Barnett, Block & Saliba, 2005); (Block, Barnett II & Wood, 2002); (DiLorenzo, 2011); (Gordon, 1997); (Hayek, 1964, 2010); (Lewin & Phelan, 1999); (Machovec,1995); (Reisman, 2005); (Rothbard, 1961); (Salerno, 2011); (Salin, 1996).

[24] Note, we say "legal," not "costless." It is *expensive* to begin and run a daily newspaper in a large city. But this does not constitute a "barrier to entry" as the neoclassical economists would have it, and thus render the *Times Picayune* a monopolistic enterprise. *All* enterprise is "costly." The only barrier we are here concerned with are *legal* ones.

[25] For a brilliant analysis of this dire situation, and the case for eliminating these monopolistic licensing arrangements, see Friedman (1962, chapter 9).

[26] We do have it within our power to radically reduce the number of deaths almost by legislative enactment. We could legalize drugs ((Block, 1993, 1996A); (Block, Wingfield & Whitehead, 2003); (Cussen & Block, 2000); (Friedman, 1992); (Szasz, 1985, 1992); (Thornton, 1991)), or privatize our highway system (Block, 2009). The latter might save some 30,000 U.S. lives per year, the former, far more.

would have no food, shelter, etc.[27] Paradoxically, then, the optimal number of murders is not zero. As it happens, we can at least theoretically pin point the "proper" amount of them. This would be where the costs of preventing one more, or the marginal murder just equals the losses (to society) of the contribution of that additional victim. The only trouble with this is, it is impossible, without interpersonal comparisons of utility (Rothbard, 1956), to capture any such number.

3.7   Speed limits

At present, speed limits on most limited access highways are a minimum of 40 miles per hour, and a maximum of 70 mph. But as anyone who has actually driven on these thoroughfares full well knows, these are merely de jure limits, not de facto ones. Most people drive at 75 mph on clear days, and many approach 80.

There is some empirical evidence that a slower rate of speed will save lives, which presumably is the desiderata of speed optima. During the days of the double nickel (55 mph speed limits), instituted mainly to save gasoline, not to promote safety, the death rate did fall.[28] Does this demonstrate it would be optimal to drive more sedately, again on the assumption that we are mainly concerned with lowering highway fatalities?

One difficulty with this surmise is that, in all probability, the single nickel (5 mph) would do even better. If we crept along in our autos at this fast walking speed, it is likely that road deaths would be literally eliminated. But the benefits of this mode of transport would almost completely be vitiated. Airplane deaths might well rise as a result.

Another problem with this sole focus on optimal speed is that we have so far been considering only minima and maxima. But there are other dimensions. For example, variance. Perhaps, just perhaps, the standard deviation of speed is the real culprit. Maybe, just maybe, the difference between a lower level of 40mph, and an upper bound of 70 mph (de jure, but 75-80 de facto)[29] is just too wide, and thus to blame. Possibly, just possibly, the minimum should be raised to 55 or even 60mph? We will never know unless our roads can be used as laboratory experiments, instead of having their rules dictated to us by Washington D.C.[30]

But there are yet other dimensions. Who knows, who knows, if instead of one speed limit for all three lanes of a highway, maybe deaths would diminish if everyone in the left lane had to do 80mph, all motorists in the middle lane 70, and 60 on the dot was the compulsory speed for the entire right lane? Would this work better? Again, it is hard to say with a monopoly road manager entirely in charge of this resource.

Numerous jurisdictions ask the "slow traffic stay to the right," or inveigh us to "pass on the left." Perhaps it would be better to enforce these all too often mere suggestions, e.g., raise them to compulsions, again as a means to reducing fatalities. Which of us has never been faced with some old duffer doing a perfectly legal 55mph in the far left lane, leading others to unnecessary and dangerous lane changes? Which of us has never ridden behind a truck taking 15 miles to pass another such vehicle on a two lane highway?[31] Should there be a law compelling the "loser" of this race to slow down even a few mph so that this process can be shortened? Again, if highways were privatized, it is very likely that the competitive process would lead in this direction.

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[27] Another way to reduce the murder rate lies not in the costly using of funds to increase the probability of capturing murderers, but in raising the severity of punishment, including the death penalty. See on this Ehrlich (1972, 1973, 1974, 1975A, 1975B).

[28]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Maximum_Speed_Law;
http://www.thecarconnection.com/news/1015758_is-the-double-nickel-coming-back

[29] This gap between law and actual practice cannot but reduce general reliance on "law and order," promoting disrespect even for just laws.

[30]   One way to do this would be to privatize all such thoroughfares. See Block (2009) on this.

[31]   This incentivizes motorists to speed up to pass both trucks before this attempt on the part of one of them can get started.

3.8 Number of people in a marriage

As far as libertarian theory is concerned, marriage, whether homosexual or heterosexual, should be none of the government's concern. There ought to be as great a divide between this relationship and the state as between it and the church. All consenting adults, no matter how many of them[32] should be able to engage in any relationship with one another they wish on a voluntary basis. The government, at present, thankfully, has not yet regulated friendships, neither compelling or prohibiting them. It specifies no minimum or maximum number of friends a person may have. The same should hold true for marriage, with is either yet another type of friendship, or a business arrangement, or both.

In China thanks to their horrendous on child per family policy coupled with a cultural preference for boys vis a vis girls, there is a tremendous gender imbalance (Hesketh, 2009) (Hesketh & Xing, 2006). There are 119 male births for every 100 females born. By 2020, there will be some 24 million men who will not be able to find wives, at least not in that country.[33] Polyandry might better maximize human welfare (of which GDP is but a poor proxy) in that nation. This sounds horrendous, but the numbers do not lie.

The black community in the U.S. faces the opposite problem. Due to the disproportionate number of black males in prison,[34] or who have had their lives tragically shortened due to murder,[35] and to the fact that there is more intermarriage between black males and white females than between white males and black females ((Schoen & Kluegel, 1988); (Melnick, 2011), (Lee & Edmonston, 2005); (Passel, Wang & Taylor, 2010)), there is thus a disproportionate number of unmarried women of color. If we confine focus to this one group[36] then polygamous marriage would appear to be the only way that numerous black females can enter into matrimony.

However, U.S. law prohibits relationships of this sort (see judicial finding of 1879: Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145). Even the mainstream Mormons have ended this practice. But we are here concerned with maximizing the marriage rate, or at least tearing down barriers to this end, on the ground that so doing will promote human happiness. Under our present assumptions, there does not appear to be any other alternative.

We cannot close this section without citing Gary Becker (Caplan, 2006) on the issue of polygamy. He states: "Some oppose polygyny because they believe too many women would be 'swept off their feet' by smooth-talking actual or potential polygamists. If that were a great concern, women could be required to be older before they could legally marry into polygamist households, or a 'cooling off' period could be mandated before they could do that. Yet isn't it offensively patronizing to women to believe they cannot make their own decisions about whether to enter into marriages that contain other wives? We do not offer men any special protections against the 'wiles' of women, so why do women need such protection? Indeed, I believe that in marital decisions women are more thoughtful and far-sighted than men, partly because marriage has meant much more to women than to men."

Becker concludes "with two questions. Why the strong opposition to polygyny if it would be so rare? If modern women are at least as capable as men in deciding whom to marry, why does

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[32] Heinlein (1966) writes of a group marriage, with some half dozen husbands and wives in it.

[33]

http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/archive/ldn/2010/jan/10011104;
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5953508/ns/world_news/t/china-grapples-legacy-its-missing-girls/;
http://www.economist.com/node/18651512

[34] http://www.usariseup.com/sticky-wicket-questions/prison-population-shows-disproportionate-number-young-black-men;
http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122;
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129379700

[35]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_in_the_United_S

tates;
http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/homicide/race.cfm

[36] We need not. If we consider unmarried Chinese men, and unmarried black women, we have a pairing made in statistical heaven

polygyny continue to be dubbed a 'barbarous' practice?"

3.9 Homosexual marriage

There are no statistical gender imbalances in this community. So how many gays should marry each other? Two? That cannot be wrong. But, any other number will do equally well. As far as our present interests are concerned, this is akin to asking for the optimal number of participants in a business or any other such partnership. The proper answer is, whatever is chosen by the consenting adults involved.

4 CONCLUSION

We have probed optimal numbers of things in several arenas. If this inquiry were to be extended, it might address the following issues: what is the optimal height, weight, pulse rate, blood pressure, for various callings, such as marathon running, chess, swimming, golf, boxing and other athletic endeavors. Are there any implications of these four numbers for musicians, public speakers, writers? We shall go no further in any of these directions, content, at least, to having made a start in this analysis of optimal numbers.[36]

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[36] Collins (1998) discusses the "law of small numbers," or the fact that the typical number of diverse positions in the philosophical networks of a given society are 3-6, with increased diversification when it dips below 3 and increased synthesis when it grows above 6. This suggests a certain optimality within a given social network.

Why is what we have so far done of any importance? There are several reasons. One, nothing like this has ever been done before; that alone ought to guarantee that there is at least, perhaps, some benefit from so doing. But, there are many, many studies that have never been explored; probably this is all to the good, because they are not worthwhile. Why is this initiative different? A second benefit is that it sheds further light on libertarianism, and it is my contention that it is impossible to focus too much on this philosophy, the last best hope for mankind. The present paper demonstrates that the optimal number of phenomena is precisely that quantity that arises from the freely made decisions of free people. Thus, it is important to focus on optimal numbers of things not from any philosophical viewpoint, including libertarianism, but from the vantage of prudential judgment. There are an indefinitely large number of options compatible with liberty; not all of them are wise. From this perspective we can explore issues of nations, races, languages, from a utilitarian point of view. Should we (voluntarily!) devote, or donate, money to the various initiatives explored in this paper? Hopefully, what we have considered herein will lead to greater wisdom in this type of decision-making.

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