**An Enquiry into the Tradition of Political Discourse in the Grindstone**

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This work will focus on three claims supported by reasonable inference from relevant source material for the purpose of examining the systematic success of the Grindstone Model for political discourse as contrast by the default Open Model used by the general populous. The three premises are as follows:

1)In the absence of Excellence, political dialogue descends towards entropy[[1]](#footnote-1).

2)In the absence of Brotherhood, political dialogue descends towards hostility.

3)In the absence of Reason, political dialogue descends towards madness.

The Grindstone Model hereafter, referred to as GM is based on three guiding principles which have their roots in ancient Greece. They are, λόγος (Logos, Reason), Φιλος (Philos, Brotherhood), and Αρετή (Arete, Excellence)[[2]](#footnote-2). These words have been preserved through centuries of constant academic and practical use and have been referenced and incorporated into numerous religious and ethical systems by thinkers who value erudite knowledge.

By contrast the open model, hereafter OM, is the free expression of ideas without regard to any rules, order, methodology, or direction. Quite simply, the OM is by default what passes for political discourse in bars, the workplace, media, among current politicians, or any other public forum. The only rules are, there are no rules.

For the purpose of this work, political dialogue represents the common occurrence of opposing political ideas and the resulting exchange of statements supporting respective positions in the matters of prescriptive politics. By reference to the OM as the default model, I simply mean that unless intentional care is taken to do otherwise, it is the model used by everyone.

In the three claims listed above, the word ‘descends’ denotes a negative quality rather than a physical direction. Imagine a hypothetical hierarchy with complexity and order at its top and chaos and confusion at its base. Therefore, ‘descends into’ or ‘descends towards’ represents an ontological inferiority to ‘ascends’ or ‘transcends’ which would indicate greater, better, or of higher quality.

The GM is supported by its mission statement,

The Grindstone is a historic group made up of men dedicated to the history and development of Shasta County, and to handling all the problems of government -internal, national and global- through erudite discussion on the relevant issues of the time (and of all time) amongst a Brotherhood of peers while enjoying some of the finer things in life (GS).

The first matter to address is the question, “Why do politics matter?” This in fact has led to many public places saying things like, “We don’t discuss politics here.” Which is an acceptable position to take other than the dubious fact that ‘We don’t discuss politics here’ is a political statement with political claims and implications. It amounts to asserting a statement and not allowing a response. In even the worst political discourses, unchallenged fallacious statements presented as fact that cannot be responded to, are not generally tolerated.

Aristotle wrote at length on the importance of politics in the development of happiness for humans existing together in groups. He focused primarily on the relationships between individuals, families, villages and the πόλις (Polis, city-state). In his estimation, everything was motivated by political concerns. Every individual is seeking for a good that is something other and something more than one’s self. In this case our happiness is involved in the happiness of others who surround us. Therefore, in Aristotle’s estimation, when we cheer for a local sports team, or brag about the mountains in our region we are simply expressing political statements about our πόλις (Kallen, 1979).

Similarly, the idea of Οικος is the basis for the words ‘family’ and ‘economy’ suggesting that both have their foundations in the relationships and interactions between people trying to be happy while living in the same area with the same concerns (Kallen, 1979). This is exemplified by the tale of two cities called Redding and Shasta.

In 1872 the tracks of the Central Pacific Railroad reached from the south northward to a place called poverty flats located about five miles east of the city of Shasta (CALAFC). As buildings were being constructed in what would become the city of Redding, there were already men in the old town of Shasta sitting atop grindstones on main street discussing the “weighty matters” of the day (GS). Amongst these weighty matters must have been the growing settlement to the east.

The conversations and discussions were likely opinions on the future prospects for the new city and the consequences that would mean for the old city. Without having been there, I am persuaded that there were men on both sides of this issue at those early Grindstone Board meetings.

Some evidence for this is Mr. James E. Isaacs, who was an attorney in Shasta, ultimately moved his practice to Redding. He is recorded as having been the only known member of the Grindstone Board in Shasta who was also a part of the Grindstone Club in Redding (GS). From 1880 to 1900 the city of Redding grew more than 500% (Census). There were likely others from the old Grindstone Board who attended the Grindstone Club; but not everyone made that move and I believe it is Reasonable to infer that not everyone was happy about the new city.

Meanwhile, in 1914 the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated which led to the Great War (1914-1918). All citizens of the United States, especially members of Grindstone, had to wrestle with their opinions on the role America should or should not play in world-wide politics. In 1917 the draft was instituted for the 3rd time in the United States and at least one member of the Grindstone (2nd Patron Saint John Bartosh) was drafted (GS).

I believe it is self-evident that economic security of a city-state is among the highest political priorities to ensure a population’s potential for happiness. In 1910 the economy of Redding largely consisted of mining for copper and iron and other mineral extraction. By 1920 the Redding area saw a severe reduction in mineral extraction and mining and as a consequence suffered a rather sever economic downturn (Redding). Additionally, in 1918 California was hit by a world-wide pandemic which would affect nearly everyone[[3]](#footnote-3).

All these historic events are easy to read over without appreciating the seismic political shifts they must have been at the time. These shifts represent a sufficient condition for political discourse to have occurred. Without having been there, I cannot assume what was said or by whom; however, based on the sufficiency of the political events, the purpose of the Grindstone Board and Club, and the professions of the members (professionals and influential businessmen) I can imagine the conversations that necessarily occurred.

Do we pursue progress, or do we preserve the past? Should security outweigh liberty? Should religious morality be a matter of law? What is the role of government? Is Sacramento able to represent our interests in the North State? What should we do about flooding in the Redding area? How much should we worry about the pandemic?

Wherever two or more people discuss a political matter there are necessarily two opinions, perspectives, experiences and orientations. While there are large matters wherein many agree, if we delve deeply enough into the smaller matters, it becomes more and more likely that even in likeminded people, disagreements will occur. It is in these disagreements that the greatest opportunity for growth in knowledge and understanding arise. New information, if true, should change our minds.

This leads us to the first claim within the GM, 1) In the absence of Excellence, political dialogue descends towards entropy. In this claim ‘entropy’ is not the thermodynamic properties of matter within systems; rather, it is here as a combination of two ancient Greek roots meaning roughly ‘a decline into disorder.’ In this case, disorder within a model. There is a manifold difficulty in expressing complex and subtle political ideas. Add to this the imperfect process of formulating thoughts into statements. Order then become at best difficult. Without the intentional intervening power of a commitment to Excellence, entropy follows.

By ‘Excellence’ I refer to the principle of Αρετή. This idea contains far more conceptually than I can speak to here; but for the purpose of this work we will assume Excellence to be the sum of the cardinal virtues (Wisdom, Justice, Courage and Temperance) applied to everyday life. So, the claim essentially is then expanded into “One should have such character that the exercise of habitual wisdom, justice, courage and temperance is present in every aspect of his life.” Only then can we maintain the assemblance of order necessary to present and respond to truth preserving arguments.

By truth preserving arguments I mean statements that are comprised of true premises (cogent) supporting a conclusion (a strong argument). The cogency of the premises is generally the strength or weakness of an argument; however, quite often in the OM, people in political discussions only state conclusions to one another. This practice loads the speaker’s language with meaning and subtext to which listener does not have access and therefore, cannot respond to.

Within the OM is used the modern idea of an argument. By modern standards, an argument is simply casting emotive statements towards another person. Enough of these piled one atop the other in ever quickening succession leads to raised voices in order to be heard. This behavior amounts to conversational chaos and lacks every meaningful property contained in the idea of Excellence. The GM by contrast uses the word ‘argument’ as simply ‘to give and answer’ in the exchange of ideas. In this model, argument is a process used to arrive at Reason through truth preserving statements shared.

The second claim in the GM is, 2) In the absence of Brotherhood, political dialogue descends towards hostility. In this sense I am referencing the Φιλος or Brotherhood. This is the bond of friendship that endures through time, difficulty, and conflict. It amounts to an unspoken oath of loyalty to a person. Contained within the oath is the idea that the most important bonds between people are not the things they disagree about; rather, it is those things on which they firmly agree. If there is sufficient foundational agreement, then Brotherhood is a maintaining force in any subsequent disagreement.

While the OM has no prescription for Brotherhood being necessary in political discussions, we should not say that it does not exist at all. Certainly, pubs and restaurants wherein political discussions occur are usually populated by friends, or a least those with a minimal commitment to friendliness. However, the informal friendship most commonly found within the OM does meet the level of Brotherhood found in Φιλος.

The Psychologist George Kelly concluded that hostility is the result of a person’s perceptions of the world being threatened. When one’s worldview is challenged they can either accept it or face a cognitive dissonance resulting in hostility (Kelley). By hostility I mean the American Psychological Association definition of, “An overt expression of intense animosity or antagonism in action, feeling or attitude (APA).” By this standard hostility has nothing to do with the object (the focal point of the perceived threat) and everything to do with the subject (the person perceiving the threat).

Oliver Wendell Holmes famously stated, “Between two groups of people who want to make inconsistent kinds of worlds, I see no remedy but force.” Without getting too far into the idea of force, I want to point to the portion of Holmes’ statement, “Between two groups . . . [wanting] inconsistent kinds of worlds.” The very nature of Brotherhood does not allow this. At least not in the vague sense of Holmes’ assertion. Rather true friendship is concerned with, “the good of the other party . . . the friend as another self (GM).”

Within the GM, Brotherhood and hostility are as incompatible as light and dark. Where one is, the other is not. However, without this commitment to true friendship whenever one’s perspective of the world is at stake, they will either submit to the threat, or commence hostility.

The final claim in the GM is, 3) In the absence of Reason, political dialogue descends towards madness. The use here of the word ‘madness’ is not meant to be hyperbolic; rather, it is simply in contrast to what we will define shortly as Reason. Madness will represent the incongruence of thought into mutually exclusive conclusions or non-sensical statements. Quite simply on a continuum Reason would be on one side and madness the other. The problem that we often see in political discourse is the confidence that comes with madness. To paraphrase Chesterton, above all men the madman is most sure himself. The mind of a madman, he continues, “is not delayed by things that go with good judgment. He is not hampered by a sense of humor or by clarity, or by the dumb certainties of experience (Chesterton, 2008).”

In this claim Reason rests entirely on the philosophic tradition of λόγος. This idea of Reason is foundational in the works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Frege, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Kripke *et al*. The construction of arguments, truth preserving statements, and the principles of deduction and induction are only possible through the application of Reason. Without too much controversy we could say Reason is the thing at which all thoughts aim. That is not to say that all thoughts, or thinking, are equal or even proceed towards Reason.

In my estimation the difficulty in Reason is twofold; namely, thinking and language. Thanks to Descartes, we can conclude, all conscious beings think, but they do so in isolation and by degrees (Descartes, 1996). I would say, each person’s mind is a locked room accessible only to that person. At first glance it seems we as thinking beings face cognitive limits such as our intelligence, experience, opportunity, aptitude and capacity for Reason. However, breaking through those limits is a necessary exercise to unfold meaning; by this process we are able to arrive at enlightenment.

As described by Kant, “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity (Kant, 2009)” or “[Wonder and awe at] the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me (Kant, 2002).” This amounts to asserting, any knowledge of the external world and my own internal world can only be accessed through the active process of Reason. We must have the wonder to suppose that knowledge can occur and the courage to rigorously pursue it. Enlightenment then for our purposes can be simply called an arrival into right thinking. This should not be confused with orthodoxy (which is right thinking as conventionally agreed upon).

Right thinking is a matter of effort rather than being given instruction. Feeding yourself rather than being fed by others. For the sake of the reader I will not attempt and exegesis of the often cited analogy of Plato’s cave, other than to say that the problems of the cave were those trapped remained perpetually unenlightened; and those who escaped the cave did not possess the language to describe the external world. The former did not have the capacity to understand and the latter did not have the tools to share the information contained in the locked room of their minds.

This leads us to the second problem in Reason, which is language itself. This problem has gone by many names, but I prefer W.V. Quine’s phrase, “The indeterminacy of translation (Quine, 1960).” This indeterminacy describes a problem wherein there is no way I can truly and completely convey my awareness of phenomenal things to another person. I can come pretty close in basic matters such as clear and distinct things like watching the winning touchdown at the end of a football game where a friend says, “Did you see that?” and I reply, “Yes, that was a great play!” In this case, it is clear we are talking about the same distinct thing. However, using the same instance say there were a flag on the play indicating a penalty, now there is judgement involving three parties (three mental locked rooms); the referee who threw the flag, the friend (or everyone else who is not me) who perceived what they saw, and myself, with my own phenomenon. Now things quickly become less clear and distinct as we try to explain our perceptions of the event in question which we all separately experienced.

Ludwig Wittgenstein describes this as the problem of ‘saying and showing.’ Simply put, he claims, anything we say must be clearly and distinctly said, e.g. “All bachelors are unmarried men (Wittgenstein, 1961).” Anything else must be shown through expressing the world in mental images we share through the often inaccurate brush strokes of language. This is a subtle but important distinction; the language does not say anything, it shows what is meant. This does not do away with the idea of precise language; rather, it encourages the best practices in language speakers.

Wittgenstein’s claim that “The meaning of a word, is its use in language (Wittgenstein, 2009).” In this case, language is more like a game played between two or more speakers, than an exact science. It is up to the players of the game to determine agreed upon rules by which to play.

This becomes clearer in cases like the following example. An ancient Greek culture worshiped a deity they referred to Hesperus (the evening star) who was the son of the goddess Eos and Phosphorus (the morning star). The issue here is that the evening star and the morning star turned out to be simply the planet Venus, the same celestial body.

Therefore, anything said about either Hesperus or Phosphorus was non-sense because the speaker had neither a sense nor a reference to an object (Frege, 2011). Nothing about these can be said clearly or distinctly; therefore, nothing can be said about them at all.

What we can do is provide descriptions of a) The celestial object that appears over the horizon in the morning. b) Based on observation we have determined that same celestial object is visible on the horizon in the evening. c) Other than the moon, it is the brightest object in the night sky. And on and on until we arrive at some description we could call a scientific, necessary, definition of the planet Venus. The philosopher of language Saul Kripke called this a “rigid designation;” a thing necessarily true in all possible worlds that we could imagine (Kripke, 1980).

The point being, according to Wittgenstein, in everything I have written herein, I have said very nearly nothing. The only thing I have been able to attempt is to show through some broad strokes of language something a reader may apprehend that was otherwise only available to myself.

The idea then of Reason as contained in the GM is that the meaning behind our thoughts is contained in the language we use to share them. Now the reader may say, “Congratulations, you took all that time to argue, ‘language is the tool we use to convey our thoughts to each other’?” The short answer would be, “Yes. Sorry.” But I think it is important in order to solve a problem we must agree that a problem exists.

One of the essential elements in Reason is the Socratic idea of defining the things we are talking about. Instead of the easy, and over-used assumption of meaning contained within the OM, the GM operates in the realm of knowledge and understanding. To those who wrestle with her, Reason give rewards that she shares with no one else.

Currently, it is well known and agreed upon that the state of political discourse locally, nationally and globally has become untenable. There are entire platforms wherein the OM has become a toxic cesspool of rhetoric. News channels contain no news, facts are no longer simply ‘facts,’ everything is disputed by those who neither understand nor care to understand a speaker’s statements. As Yeats says, “Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . . the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity (Yeats, 1959).”

The good news though is this; none of this is new. People have been their worst selves when politics is concerned for as long as humans have existed together. The obvious reason is found in Aristotle’s idea that politics matters so deeply that people cannot separate themselves from it. As things stand now, it is safe to say, no one is happy with the current state of affairs.

In my estimation the GM of political discourse offers the best glimpse into what is possible and what should be pursued and preserved. Those sharing the traits of Excellence, Brotherhood, and Reason in political forums will ideally set the example for others to follow.

In architecture it has been said, “Form follows function.” This implies the purpose of a building will dictate what sort of shape it takes. This may be true in buildings, but it does not seem so in successful political discourse. This work’s claim amounts to the idea that the functionality of political discourse relies entirely on the form of its practitioners.

The form then would be a model of Excellence, Brotherhood, and Reason over that of entropy, hostility, and madness. Some political dissidents may say, “This is madness!” to which those of the form would reply, “This is Grindstone.”

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1. In this work I will capitalize the words Reason, Brotherhood and Excellence when they reference the Grindstone ideals. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Here we have used the modern Greek Eta rather than the ancient Epsilon. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This was the Spanish Flu which caused an estimated 500,000,000 deaths. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)