Common Preferences and Solving Problems Non-coercively

Submitted by TCS on 19 July, 2003 - 07:47

"Finding common preferences" and "solving problems non-coercively" have exactly the same denotation (meaning), but somewhat different connotations (suggested implications).

To illustrate this distinction, imagine answering the question "how many squares are there on a chess board?" One could reply "64" or "8x8" or "1000-936". Each of these answers has the same denotation (they all indicate the correct number of squares), but a different connotation: "64" ... if you count them, that's what you'll get; "8x8" hints at an explanation as well as a literal answer, by referring to the board being an 8 by 8 square; 1000-936 is extremely confusing because it seems to imply that the difference between the number of squares and 1000 is important, which is false.

"Finding common preferences" may, for many people, carry the connotation of some sort of method, ritual, or process (such as sitting in a circle taking turns expressing feelings while everyone else is required to listen) but this is a mistake. On the other hand, "solving problems non-coercively" does not have such connotations. "Finding common preferences" and "solving problems non-coercively" are, in fact, the same thing. If you genuinely prefer a solution (it's a common preference) then you cannot be coerced by it: you are getting what you want. Moreover, all cases of coercion can be regarded as failures to find common preferences, because the coerced parties did not get to enact a solution that they preferred.

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Comments

new word, denotation, thanks...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 19 July, 2003 - 09:03

new word, denotation, thanks, I think. :)

I feel that finding common preferences happens in all manner of different ways. Mostly it happens without anyone even noticing we're doing it. It's very rare in my family that anyone announces we should find a common preference. That's not because we're not doing so but because we do so without thinking about doing it, we just do it.

When we first heard about TCS we used to have more conflicts where we or one of the kids would say "let's find a common preference" but that was when it wasn't feeling so natural to us and we had to remind everyone that we could find a common preference instead of having a win-lose conflict. Somewhere along the way it all fell into place and we don't think about it now.

Seemingly Effortless Problem Solving

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 19 July, 2003 - 10:39

A reader wrote:

> *It's very rare in my family that anyone announces we should find a common preference. That's not because we're not doing so but because we do so without thinking about doing it, we just do it.*

Yes, this seems to be a common experience in TCS families. I think this is because you have now internalised the ideas. Once you all have built up good feeling and joint creativity, you tend to do less of the meta level thinking *about* solving problems. (This is one reason TCS folks sometimes can't think of any examples of finding common preferences: because the ones you remember tend to be only the ones which have been found after something has gone wrong and there has been a moment in which someone was not happy. That is not what usually happens. I think this may be why people sometimes don't realise that finding common preferences is something we do all the time, including when there is no apparent problem.

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