



Epistemic Vulnerability & Tolerance in Society

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Project Background



GWR Fellowship

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Research Silo

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Publication

*The Philosophy, Politics,
and Economics Review*
(2024)

**What can an economic lens teach
us about the relationship
between church and state?**

Overview

Introduction

States & Religions as Institutions

Vulnerability & Tolerance

Modelling State-Religion Interaction

Conclusion

Q&A

Introduction

- Alignment of state means with religious motives results in a decrease in the diversity of ideas.
- Because of...
 - Dual-level norm enforcement
 - Epistemic influence of institutions



Institutions & Organizations



Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure social interaction



Informal constraints: sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct



Formal rules: constitutions, laws, property rights



Within institutional frameworks, individuals form organizations to capture gains from specialization and division

[North 1991; North 1986]

States & Religions as Institutions

Religions are sets of informal constraints and rules that provide existential resources for their members and are based on supernatural assumptions

States constitute the set of formal constraints that aim to create and maintain social, political, and economic order

Epistemic Markets

Markets are the structured socioeconomic situations in which individuals are able to exchange goods and services [Herzog 2021; Rothbard 2007]

Since states structure the interactions between constituents, it follows that they create markets

Shared mental models are “myths, dogmas, ideologies and ‘half-baked’ theories” which “arise in peer-based conversations ... [and] that can become embedded in the institutions that shape interactions” [Denzau and North 1994; Shugart et al. 2020]

Epistemic Environment

Sources of knowledge

- *a priori* (non-empirical): knowledge which can be known with rea-son alone
- *a posteriori* (empirical) knowledge: knowledge which can be known through the utilization of the traditional human senses (experience) in addition to reason

Forms of knowledge

- *knowledge-that*: knowledge with the understanding "that such-and-such is so."
- *knowledge-what*: knowledge-that that can be characterized by the standard "what," "whether," or "why" interrogatives
- *knowledge-how*: knowledge of how to do something: how to ride a bike, how to pack a suitcase, etc.

Vulnerability & Ignorance

- Willful Ignorance: An intentional state of ignorance because it appears in one's favor to be so [Gilson 2011]
- Epistemic Vulnerability
 - Openness to not knowing
 - Openness to being wrong and venturing one's ideas, beliefs, and feelings, nonetheless
 - Possessing the ability to put oneself in and learn from situations in which one is the unknowing, foreign, and perhaps uncomfortable party
 - Openness to the ambivalence of our emotional and bodily responses to reflecting on those responses in nuance ways
 - Openness to altering not just one's beliefs, but oneself and sense of oneself

Vulnerability + Tolerance

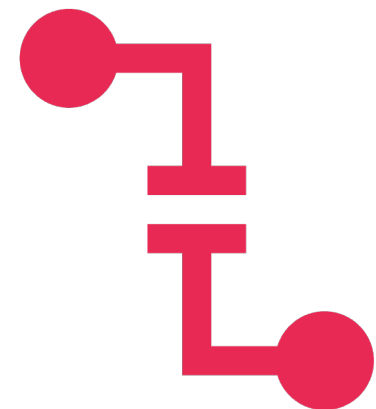
- Epistemic vulnerability also requires tolerance
- Tolerance is not just allowing the existence or practice of beliefs/knowledge that one does not wish to partake in, but also the acceptance of such behaviors or beliefs
- To accept a mental model is to recognize and understand without necessarily agreeing
- Epistemically vulnerable individuals discuss critically not just the seemingly incoherent and invalid mental models among themselves, but also those which seem to be the most robust

Modelling State-Religion Interaction

		State	
Religion		<i>Invulnerable</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>
	<i>Invulnerable</i>	Cognitive Capture	Teleological Entrenchment
	<i>Vulnerable</i>	Legal Entrenchment	Social Malleability

Conclusion

- When institutions shape epistemic exchange, they also impact individuals' epistemic vulnerability
- To allow arbitrage between mental models is to be epistemically vulnerable for institutional structures



Thank You!

Q & A

