Presumption an the Judgement of Elites

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1.   Definitions and Distinctions: Elites and Second-Order Elites

Elites arise whenever there is a group within whose membership there is some feature of more or less. They consist of those group members that exhibit this feature none the general run—to a greater extent than most. To symbolize this we shall designate by $<F, G>$ the elite constituted by the subgroup of those G members that exhibit the feature F to a greater than ordinary extent.

However, the special focus on the present discussion will be upon *reflexive* groups—those amongst whose membership certain intra-group relations obtain, so that some of them can stand in relation R to others. With such a group there will (or can) be

1. The active elite $<R^{\rightarrow}, G>$ consisting of those G-members that R a more than ordinarily larger number of others.

2. The passive elite $<R^{\leftarrow}, G>$ consisting of those G-members that are Rd by a more than ordinarily larger number of others.

With reflexive groups there will accordingly be second-order elites as for example the people most trusted (or resented) among those who are themselves most trusted (or resented). This second-order elite may be designated by $<R^{\leftarrow}, <R^{\leftarrow}, G>>$.

Let the reflexive group G consist of A, B, C, plus a couple of others (say D, E). We can now contemplate a relation tabulation to indicate who Rs whom as per

	A	B	C	$[D, E]$
A			√	
B			√	
C	√	√		
$[D\ E]$				

Thus *A R*s *C* alone, as does *B*, while *C R*s both *A* and *B*. Such a tabulation can obviously also be viewed inversely to identify items that are *R*d by *A* or *B* or *C* etc. (We suppose too that there are a couple of further items beyond *ABC*, but that the tabular entries are always blank there. Then with the particular relation *R* at issue with this tabulation the <*R*←, *G*> elite will consist of *C* alone because it is the only item *R*d by more than ordinarily many members of *G*. But what about the second-order elite <*R*←, <*R*←, *G*>>. Are there any items that are *R*d by a more than ordinary number of <*R*←, *G*> = {*C*} members. Well yes, there are two of them, namely *A* and *B*.

Various instructive lessons follow. In particular, a second-order elites is thus something decidedly different from ordinary elites. Specifically,

    1.   <*R*←, <*R*←, *G*>> need *not* be a subset of <*R*←, *G*>
    2.   <*R*←, <*R*←, *G*>> need *not* be smaller than <*R*←, *G*>

Again, consider the *R*-relation given by:

	A	B	C	D	E
A				√	√
B				√	√
C	√	√			
D	√	√			
E	√	√			

Here we have the elite <*R*←, *G*> = {*A*, *B*} seeing that *C*, *D*, *E* all *R* both *A* and *B*. On the other hand <*R*←, <*R*←, *G*>> = <*R*←, {*A*, *B*}> = {*D*, *E*} which shares no member with <*R*←, *G*> = {*A*, *B*}. All in all, then, second-order elites are something quite different from ordinary first-order elites.

Display 1:
Some Evaluative Elite-Establishing Features

    Positive
      • admired (people)
      • cited (articles)
      • discussed (themes or topics)

- trusted (people)
- useful (processes)

Negative
- despised (people)

Neutral
- allocated to others (pieces of metal)

2. Second-Order Evaluative Elites

Within reflexive groups, elites will be either positive or negative depending on the positivity or negativity of the defining relationship at issue. Some examples are given in Display 1. As this indicates, what is at issue with second order elites comes to the set of those who are the most Rd by those who themselves are the most Rd. Some examples of evaluative second order elites:

- the papers the most referenced by the papers that are themselves the most referenced
- the people the most respected by the people who are themselves the most respected
- the people most discussed by people who are themselves the most discussed.
- the people deemed experts (i.e., as being among the most knowledgeable) by people deemed experts
- the people paid the most by the people who are themselves paid the most
- the processes the most used within the processes that are themselves the most used
- the film reviewers most highly rated by the most highly rated film reviewers.

Most of the above exemplify *positive* second-order elites with the qualifying criterion for the generative base as something that is to be assessed positively. There are, however, also negative reflexive elites, as for example, the persons most despised by the persons who are themselves the most despised. Further

examples of negative generative bases are: the most hated, feared, distrusted, envied.

3. The Principle of Normativity and its Justifications

The cardinal thesis of the present deliberations is the contention that *normativity comes into operation with positive second-order elites*. We thus arrive at the thesis:

> (*T*) with positive elites factuality can engender normativity in that being *R*d to a greater extent than the ordinary seems to establish being *justifiedly R*d.

With evaluatively positive elites the move to second order elites is valuation justifying in that the valuation at issue is now not just claimed but rather is such that its ascription now comes to be validated.

We thus have it that:

- among people, those esteemed by the most esteemed are indeed esteimable.
- among articles, those cited by the most-cited are important (citation-worthy)
- those people deemed expert by those deemed expert deserve to be seen as experts.

Accordingly, the thesis at issue claims that the status being conceded is deserved, that those so classified are *rightly* so classified. What is at issue is a Principle of Elite Authentication to the effect that the correlative endorsements of evaluatively positive elites can be considered as appropriate.

To reemphasize: normativity here supervenes on factuality. So in this perspective thesis *T* thus has the striking feature of effecting a transit

- from subjectivity to objectivity
- from factuality to normativity

But how can this be? What is the justificatory rationale of this boundary-crossing thesis *T*?

What is it that makes those more than ordinary admired (respected, praised, et.) among those who themselves are so viewed to a more than ordinary extent entitles one to be seen as admirable, respect-deserving, praiseworthy, and so on. Seemingly this is not a merely empirical report on how things go in the world. Nor is such a linkage between perception and value a conceptual one (as J. S. Mill problematically envisioned between being desired and desirability). Something rather different is going on.

What is at operative here is to all appearances a generally accepted working hypothesis—a *standing presumption* projected against a variety of supportive experience and grounded in a pivotal need to effect evaluations in matters of the sort at issue. For the reality of it is that the sort of support afforded by thesis *T* is the best sort of support that we are going to be able to get. In the final analysis it is a matter of practicalistic faute de mieux: The reality of it is that our best-available pathway to people's *being* qualified in judgmental matters proceeds through a consensuality in *being regarded* as such. What better evidence could we ask for in practice in establishing someone's credentials as a bona fide expert that being so acknowledge to a more than ordinary extent by those themselves so regarded more than ordinary extent? But of course what is at issue here is not an established fact but a plausible presumption. And so in matters of this sort we once again see at work the by now familiar principle that presumption tracks the needs of praxis.[1]

1   The author's book *Presumption* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005) offers further detail on relevant issues.