

# Standardization's little secret

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Humans display an inherent desire for universal, objective standards.

Standardization is an execution of authority. We frequently ask questions such as: "how long is the table?".

This answer, regardless of personal opinions as to whether it is long or short, is given in a standardized measurement: i. e. 4 feet long. Standards are a result of subjectivity synchronized. They bring harmonious consensuses to which we all agree upon.

4 feet long, independent of context and subjective interpretations, remains identical. Between 13th and 17th century, the humanity experienced vast social and political changes. Unprecedented ideas and innovations paved the way for "progress" and the drastic transition from the Dark Ages to the Age of Enlightenment took place. Rationality as both a disposition and a discipline spearheaded countless sociopolitical and cultural movements. Sparked by the ideals developed and upheld during the Renaissance, humanity gradually achieved religious and political liberty.

One of the many forefront innovations was the invention of clocks. Despite the common belief that the first clock was invented around 13th century, this tool to measure time and systematize the temporal dimension had existed before: water clocks were used in the Old Babylonian period and mercury-powered mechanical clocks were devised by an Arab engineer Ibn Khalaf al-Muradi in the 12th century. It is, however, crucial to remind ourselves that "new" and "progressive" innovations were glorified along with certain sacrifices. In order to further explore this idea, we must ask ourselves a simple yet fundamental question: what's the significant of the first

mechanical clock and why? Since its initial development, clocks continue to hold an indestructible authority to an extent. It is hard to imagine a world without a device that records time.

For example, it is at least expected, in a normally functioning community, that every individual's conception of one hour remains consistent. Lack of such coordination and consensus of an objective sense of time will cause inconvenience, confusion, and disorder. It is fascinating how we have become completely dependent on our very own invention: we voluntarily succumb to the tyranny of clocks for the sake of security and convenience. Among countless other objective standards devised by humans, a measurement of time is inevitably contingent on human reason. When inspected closely, it becomes evident that rationality and standardization have played powerful roles in justifying European conquest, specifically Spanish, of the New World.

During the so-called "glorious" centuries of human history, movements such as the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, Reformation, and Enlightenment took place. The most remarkable concept that drove various social and political movements leading to "progress" was rationality. An emphasis on human reason was, unsurprisingly, not a novel concept introduced for the first time in the Renaissance. The notion of rationality preexisted centuries ago as explored by Aristotle. What calls for attention is the way in which rationality was dealt in a different manner. The belief that rationality holds a special metaphysical status began to manifest itself post-Renaissance.

In other words, humans blindly embraced, honored, and passionately followed whatever catered to human reason. It is reasonable to ask, then, whether we perhaps respect rationality to an extent wherein it has become a vice. Have we become rather too dependent on rationality as we do on clocks? Do we perhaps irrationally hail the standardized clock of rationality? In both Sepulveda and Las Casas' arguments, rationality, believed to be an attribute of nature, is given absolute authority to justify the Spanish conquest of the New World. Juan Gines de Sepulveda, in his Excerpts from Democrates Alter, provides the readers with a compelling argument to support the Spanish rule over Indians that is "just according to the laws of nature (Sepulveda, 70-1)". Sepulveda wholeheartedly embraces Aristotle's notion of natural slaves and he claims that the "domination [over] barbarian inhabitants (2)" is only reasonable.

In "the name of natural rights and laws (31)", he asserts that "the gravest sins are doubtless those committed against the law of nature (210-1)". As if the separation between Indians and Spanish conquerors was predetermined by nature, Sepulveda argues that the "superior" men have no choice but to follow the course of nature in ruling the "inferior" with the duty to standardize what is "common by all wise men (46)" - rationality.

Furthermore, in Apologetic History of the Indies, Bartolome de Las Casas displays a more passive and lenient attitude towards Indians. Unlike Sepulveda, Las Casas distinguishes Indians from those categorized as "conventional barbarians", analyzing different attributes. However, his attempt to standardize rationality and justify and practice western hegemony was not unprecedented.

Similar to Sepulveda, Las Casas de-fined barbarians to be inherently “ in discord with the nature and common reason of men (La Casas, 124)”. Bringing the concept of commoditization and commonly shared “ writ-ten language (125-6)” into the discussion, Las Casas touches upon the value of “ main-tain[ing] communication... buying, selling, trading, renting, directing (154-5)” -all benefi-cial aspects of standardization of human reason. Both Sepulveda and Las Casas’s view of human rationality is contingent on establishing an objective, universal standard that engenders not only convenience but also “ good” for humanity as a whole.

It is commonly believed that rationality freed us from ignorance and the Middle Ages which was dominated by Christianity. Human reason is believed to be the instiga-tor for a chain reaction of the greatest innovations which guided us towards truth, knowledge, and liberty. However, it is questionable as to whether we are still “ free” if we hold rationality itself to be the authority that dictates human behavior. To a certain ex-tent, we simply replaced what used to hold absolute power, Christianity, with rationality. As soon as a human invention begins to hold “ legitimate authority (Sepulveda, 50)”, we become slaves.

The sphere of human reason, just like our temporal dimension, is standardized and imposed on each individuals. We must ask ourselves, on what basis do we have the right to standardize the clock of rationality for the sake of our own con-venience and enforce it upon others? Works Cited Las Casas, Bartolome de. *Apologetic History of the Indies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. Print. Sepulveda, Juan Gines de.

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