



Fig. 1—in Lacan's apologue on the **3 prisoners**, a group of gaolers think that all 3 equally qualify to be freed, but they can liberate only one. They have 5 tags, circular disks: 3 white and 2 black. They inform the prisoners that they can be tagged with either. In fact they tag them all white on the back. The first prisoner to figure it out will be set free.

There are two major forms of consistency: *logical* and *contingent*. Logical consistency and contingency: while *logical* consistency is attributed to inferences that follow from known premises and preserve them, *contingency* comes from letting the premises mark mediations that follow from the premises but without a full statement. They are contingent in the sense that they are either *necessary* but not sufficient (calling on the inference), or *sufficient* but not necessary (supporting the inference). Contingency is therefore a way of *extending* consistency beyond the logical statement.

For instance tagging the necks of the inmates with the same shade—in the story of the **3 prisoners**—can be seen as *sufficient* to mark the **3 prisoners** as equals, with the same opportunity to be liberated by their gaolers. It is not a necessary condition. A necessary condition for a logical inference to be upheld is that the *quality* of the decision of the gaolers (given that the **3 prisoners** qualify equally) depends on the *quality* of the process. With the work of time a random/arbitrary allocation of the three spot-tags, will then lead to question whether the **3 prisoners** were equally qualified.

In other words, where random is *thought* to be necessary for a non-partisan treatment of fellow humans, it will nonetheless undermine the quality of the *premises* which were based on the evaluation of their integrity. Ultimately, eroding the idea that one of them should be let free. So, if the tags are random it will ultimately lead to question why *any* of the prisoners should let free. In other words, tagging them equally—as it happens with the white spots—comes with *treating* them equally (rather than treating them randomly). Sufficient for equality, necessary for quality.



Fig. 2—whoever tells the two others what they see, will disqualify. Or, they will simply liberate someone else than themselves. But they can help in other ways.

That is **(a)** sufficient for equality to be located to positions *on site* (as tags/marks on 3 necks), **(b)** necessary for the quality of locating equality *for real*. Here, we are evidently adopting the gaoler's vantage point: they are free—or, at least, judge themselves to be—and want to give the **3 prisoners** an equal chance to be liberated (based on an assessment that they all deserve to be). So, from this vantage point Lacan's story on the **3 prisoners** (or, on logical time) might be seen as an apologue for a certain aspect of *citizenship*. That is, a citizenship not related to a country, nor a state, but a citizenship for an equal chance to *freedom*. But how to conceive freedom?

Or, democratic citizenship with freedom as an *utopian* horizon, rather than **(a)** everyone has the right to a micro-wave oven, or **(b)** freedom of enterprise. The apologue is not about freedom/liberation in this sense. It is closer to an *artistic* sense of freedom: an artistic sense of anarchism, to which the purpose of artwork is to gain freedom, one's own and helping someone else on the way. That is, art with a political attitude: while you help yourself, you can help someone else. Based on the ethics: **(1)** if I am not for

myself, who will be? **(2)** if I am only for myself, what am I; **(3)** if not now, when. It is the logic of oxygen masks, that we are explained each time we are on a plane-travel trip. Each time!

So, this is one aspect of *consistency*: as is the distribution of white tags in *all* the images of this handout. It does *not* follow from logical consistency, however, but from *contingency*. Note that they could *also* have been black tags: the important point—from reading Lacan's ideas on [cybernetics](#)—is that they are the equivalents of **1** and **0**: so, here, white is **1** and black is **0** (based on the idea that **1** is a door *open*, and **0** is a door *closed*), but it could be the reverse (**1** as black/full and **0** as white/empty). This choice clearly is *random*, though it is likely *not* produced/received as arbitrary.

What we will focus on here, however, are Lacan's likely reasons to be interested in cybernetics. Because cybernetics arguably *relates* to logic, but it is *not* the same as logic. Cybernetics defines *sufficient conditions* for logical inference to be drawn, or simply occur. Which is why the algorithm is the core of cybernetics: the *effective procedure* (Minsky's definition of algorithm) rather than logic itself (if the reader has had a look on Pitt McCulloch cells in Minsky's book on [Computation in/finite machines](#), then s/he will be easily convinced—algorithms are *not* the same as formal logic).

Algorithms clearly belong to the domain of *operational intelligence (O)*, while the *necessary conditions*—expressed by contingent consistency—belong to the domain of *distributive intelligence (D)*; featuring in the *distribution* of white dots across the pictures used as illustrations in this handout (**Fig. 1-3**): which are consistent in *that* sense. Since they are not operational they cannot be conceived in terms of effective procedure. So, we need another term. I suggest the term of *retractive affection*. That is, reflecting a care for the subject matter that is *not* productive.

It rather results from a *marks* made as one takes *one step back*: a recedure rather than a procedure. So, in terms of Lacan's interest in time—the *time of logic*, which is the subtitle of the apologue—'effective procedure' (algorithm) operates a change *in* time, while 'retractive affection' marks time distributively (and therefore pertains to the change *of* time). While the algorithm is a sufficient condition for a logical condition that articulates in 4D, retractive affection articulates in 5D. Which is why it is so difficult to conceive. But determining because it relates to *categories*.

The idea that categories articulate through marks made on time, rather than operating changes in time, is what determines e.g. the *permanence* of the gaoler's estimation/evaluation of how the three prisoners equally qualify to be liberated, in the story of the **3 prisoners**. Indeed, there is nothing *a priori* preventing this judgement to erode: with the dystopian possibility that the gaolers forget why/how the prisoners qualify for release (indeed, why any of them should be released at all). It is like Lacan's *mustard pot*: it is not the quantity of mustard that determines it as such.

But its *permanence*: when empty it will have its fill. So, whether it is full or empty: but that it is repleted when depleted. *This* kind of consistency is not the same as what we normally mean by *logical* consistency. Rather, it is the consistency of object, subject and affection. We can take *neither* for granted. Which is why the use of the tag for **1**—which means open—is consistent with the idea that all **3 prisoners** qualify to be liberated. That is, consistent in the sense of preserving that idea.



Fig. 3—if cynical thinking disqualifies boat refugees in bulk, because they seek freedom but will not find it. A less cynical way of thinking is that they all deserve an equal chance.

Boat-refugees seek freedom but are instead incarcerated. The situation may be locked to the entrepreneurial/micro-wave sense of the term. It does not relate to equal chance, in the sense that Lacan arguably discusses in his apologue. In his errand with cybernetics Lacan is that **0** and **1** are not equivalent options since **1** is *opening* and **0** is *closed*: **1** is *cardinal* (machine operative—a *pass*) while **0** is *ordinal* (machine distributive—a *matrix*).