A is not B, Another Rothbard Quote, Unknown Processes

Send him mail.

"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena, pre-TSA world traveler, domestic traveler. Archived columns can be found here. FTC-only RSS feed available here.

I have not been resting on my laurels, such as they may be. But I have been somewhat inconsistent, production-wise, over the turn of the calendar. I don't know whether I have been exceptionally busy or exceptionally delinquent. In the end supposedly, it makes little difference.

I am reminded of, and I will share, Walt Whitman's observation, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." This is one of my favorites, and it applies to consistency also. In fact, my last column departed completely from my consistently chosen format, but I will return with this writing.

Part 1 is about a logical construction that dawned on me while I was conducting a thinly veiled head-butting with a believer in "The Singularity," wherein computers will supersede their human builders. In Part 2, I will address some of the wisdom of Murray Rothbard. And in Part 3, I will relate Part 1 to a more general logic fallacy, which fallacy causes us to misconstrue our own goals.

A is not B

I wrote recently on Facebook, if A is not B, then there is no process C which may convert A to B while still keeping A. I referred to this also as the rule whereby one cannot have one's cake and eat it too. I could also call this the Alchemist's Lament, since at this writing there still had been no report of a magic process in which baser materials are converted to gold.

Politicians live and die with this sleight of hand. You can fool enough of the people enough of the time to have them believe that there is a free lunch. Sleight of hand is a process. If you can distract an honest person's attention (it is easier with a dishonest person) long enough, you can fool them about what he has seen. One of the greatest distractions is an otherwise hollow process. A bogus process has the added strength of deepening the viewers doubt so that she will harden her attention, focusing to a fault on the wrong thing.

The Singularity is a contrived process, usually described as the point of no return. If your rocket ship gets close enough to a black hole, your ship's power plant cannot overcome the gravitational pull of the black hole. Why, you ask, would one take one's rocket ship that close? But some futurists (perhaps people who have reached the point of no return with trying to figure out the past and present) contend that we humans are deliberately flirting with a Singularity of our own device.

It is quite popular to pretend that the advance of technology will turn on us in the end. Technology singularists insist that computers are developing at such a pace that they will one day, on their own hook, develop intelligence beyond that of humans. Please be sure that this is not a celebration of human aptitude. I think we have set the bar very low. I will be happy to discuss intelligence when humans have figured out war. Until then I am unimpressed with either sort of intelligence — natural or artificial.

We have been building artificial aids for eons, but we are yet to see any dynamic non-biological form that will supplant the builders. The thing that the Singularity crowd cannot produce is a believable process C that contains that magic moment where A becomes B. They will try to fool you by introducing flashy phenomena, partial processes, like Moore's Law (or rule or whatever) that says, so far, that computing power doubles every so often. If Moore's Law, however, remains true until infinity, humans will still be humans, and machines will still be machines. Hammers will never build buildings on their own initiative.

Beware of charlatans trying to dazzle you with fancy tech talk. Up until recently, there was an organization soliciting funds to do research on how to forestall the Singularity. I wonder what may have been their incentive? If you don't know how A becomes B, it is unlikely that the salesperson does either.

Rothbard Quote #13 — Natural vs Artificial

There were two grave consequences of this shift
from natural rights to utilitarianism. First, the purity
of the goal, the consistency of the principle, was

inevitably shattered. For whereas the natural-rights libertarian seeking morality and justice cleaves militantly to pure principle, the utilitarian only values liberty as an ad hoc expedient. And since expediency can and does shift with the wind, it will become easy for the utilitarian in his cool calculus of cost and benefit to plump for statism in ad hoc case after case, and thus to give principle away. Indeed, this is precisely what happened to the Benthamite utilitarians in England: beginning with ad hoc libertarianism and laissez-faire, they found it ever easier to slide further and further into statism. An example was the drive for an "efficient" and therefore strong civil service and executive power, an efficiency that took precedence, indeed replaced, any concept of justice or right.

In the Age of Reason there was a great schism over whether observation should inform reason, empiricism, or whether reason could make observation unnecessary, rationalism, informing our expectations. Other departures arose such as the divide between nature and artifice. Here is another instance of A is not B, as pointed out by Murray Rothbard, in *For A New Liberty*. To the modern mind, it is not a question of either/or. The most efficient route, it would seem by reason, would be to await that which nature delivers, and by reviewing our observations we reason that nature does deliver.

There need be no contradiction in mixing empirical observation with rational calculus. There need be no contradiction between natural order and artificial order that is consistent with natural events. It is a contradiction only where proponents of the one unnaturally seek to seize the day from the proponents of the other. It is natural for humans to devise artificial tools which extend, project, and concentrate our natural powers. It is unnatural for humans to intervene beyond their own natural responsibilities. It is natural for humans to reach voluntary accords with other individual humans. It is not natural to force artificial accords on the unwilling.

Logic Fallacy #42 — Unknown Processes

Remember when Nancy Pelosi said that Congress had to pass a bill before persons could know what was in it? This is a mystery process. Have you ever wondered when a politician promises you that he will "fix" education, what happened to the last dozen politicians who promised to "fix" education? The unanchored promise is a testament to the power of unknown process.

In the case of the first example, Pelosi was dishonestly creating the idea that there was some process by which the bandits would read the bad enactments, and somehow compensate for them, after passage. A further ruse was the implied admission that it was not a perfect process, glossing over two severe problems. The first problem was that there was not, and never had been, a process for fixing this debacle. The second problem is that politicians have no concept of how to blend the dynamic with the static (perhaps the origin of the term "state," a fictional supposition that things do not change).

As replete with disinformation as the above case is, we are talking about a more extreme and vicious truth with the second example. Ignoring the fact that a state (no change) is impossible, politicians promise to effect change through a state. But this is easy. The lying politician (but I repeat myself) posits an A, which is not A but really B, then implies there is a magical process C which will make the illusory A suddenly become the B that it already was. But the B is misrepresented as well.

Every courthouse whittler and auto parts store kibitzer knows that state supplied education is a shambles. They are demonstration projects in the flesh. What they ignore is that the state itself is a shambles, and as such is incapable of producing A, good education, from B, bad education. The unknown process is unknown because it does not exist. Yet every politician who has run for office in a jurisdiction where public schools prevail has done so while promising to deliver the as-yet-undescribed unknown process. It almost seems as though public schools have a designed function of being bad so that politicians can promise to fix them.

It works the same way with law and order, war, economy, consumerism, labor/management, and so very much more.

So when will we stop playing the game? When will we recognize that doing the same thing while expecting different results is folly that trends to madness?

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