

Futurism, Rugby, The Winning Fallacy



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"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing every other week, usually on 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](#).

When you become aware of how often information is baked, by the media, by politicians, by interventionists, by authoritarians, you must learn to see the data around you, then make it your information, your knowledge, your wisdom.

Futurism

Are we there yet? Well, yes, in fact, we are always at some "there." Will we make something of it, or will we fritter away the opportunity? Furthermore, each of us is the only one "there" at a given time. Whose responsibility is it to occupy and improve that conjunction of space and time? Shall I volunteer to make an improvement, or will I wait until someone else requires it of me?

As readers of prior columns may know, I am engaged in lifelong learning up to the gills. That is how I fill all my time-space allotments. On Mondays, I go to a writers' shared interest group, where I often share things I have written here in this column, then in the evening I go to the Socrates Cafe Louisville group, where we discuss philosophical queries. On Tuesdays, I attend a meeting where we are trying to learn mindfulness. Later in the day, I teach a class on Thinking Like a Computer, and again on Thursday nights. Every other Friday, I facilitate a shared interest discussion group entitled Lifelong Philosophy. All the rest of the times available, I am also making learnable moments out of the data I encounter voluntarily, reading, listening, talking, watching rugby or basketball, working on

the farm, doing everything I can do in accord with nature, and taking advantage of a lovely relationship with my partner of more than 50 years — she and I will mark our official 50th wedding anniversary in the midst of May.

But let's get to the reason that I write, under the topic of Futurism. I am concerned at the number of intelligent people that I see dwelling on things that they do not know and can do nothing about, things in the past, things in a wished-for or feared future.

I read a revelatory piece by David Deutsch this week (I got the link from a fellow laborer in the vineyard of Socrates Cafe Louisville). As usual, things that you learn don't roll to a standstill in a vacuum. I shared the article with friends on Facebook (almost 5,000 now). That evolved into a discussion of whether history repeats itself, to which question I got answers that generally settled into these buckets — 1) Yes, absolutely, 2) Seemingly, but not sure whether it repeats or rhymes, or 3) Perhaps, but events do not match related events repeatedly. Here are some examples of each of the above — 1) People are born and they eventually die, 2) But there is no evidence that any two of us are alike in all respects, or in more than a few respects, 3) I was born in Chattanooga in 1943, there is practically nil likelihood that that will happen again.

Here's what David Deutsch said:

Nor is it true that 'the future is like the past', in any sense that one could detect in advance without already knowing the explanation. The future is actually unlike the past in most ways.

This is to say that we cannot see the future. If we could, it would already be here, or it would be dimming into an increasingly blurry past. We can gauge a few very short-term probabilities. Making our NOW behavior compatible with those short-term probabilities is about all we can do. If you need to know more, then look at all of the predictions — the billions of them — that you and your fellow humans have made in the past. How many are false and/or fall short of what really comes to pass?

Rugby

Nearly 14 years ago, on a visit to Wales, to the home town of Dylan Thomas, Laugharne (pronounced "Larn"), in the legendary birthplace of Merlin, Carmarthenshire, I found myself more than once watching on TV a game called Rugby. I have been a devotee ever since. You can see the family resemblance in American football, but Rugby is on many levels much more satisfying.

The following year, we traveled to New Zealand, and the deal was sealed. Our trip

coincided with the semi-finals and finals of the SANZAR Rugby Union Championship. I developed a strong interest in many of the stars of the champion Auckland Blues — Carlos Spencer, Ali Williams, Doug Howlett, Joe Rokokoko, Mils Muliaina, Kevin Mealamu, and Kees Meeuws. On our last Sunday, The NZ Herald ran a piece on which players would make the tryouts for the national team, the All Blacks (so named after their all black uniforms) for the Rugby World Cup competition.

Oscar Wilde once wrote that “Rugby is a good occasion for keeping thirty bullies far from the center of the city.” That may be true, but the fixture will have drawn an even larger crowd of those interested in infinite variety.

I remember that I first saw and heard about Rugby in Colorado Springs, where a local told me that both teams went for beer together after a match. That appealed to my 21-year-old self. Next I actually went to see amateur Rugby as part of the Derby Festival in Louisville, in the 70s and 80s. It was a confusing game, but visually very appealing, with start to finish, end to end, and sideline to sideline action — a bewildering mix of running, jumping, kicking, and leaping into writhing piles of bodies. If there were coherent rules, you could not get them from me. It was chaos.

But I learned later that chaos is just the transitional order that marks the change from one stasis to another; *status quo* deteriorates, there is turbulence, then a new *status quo* arises. Rugby is mostly about the turbulence. And they only have one referee on the field, I would guess to make sure that there are few halting passages.

Now, I have been watching Rugby regularly for more than a decade, but I am still not sure of a complete application of its small set of rules. I learn as I watch. The players either seem to know the rules, or they show remarkable philosophical flexibility when they get caught in a collision of events.

The thing that amazes me, however, is that of the 30 players on the field (15 to a side), each has a definitive role but also the indefinite role of playing in lieu of any of his 14 teammates, who could be indisposed for any of myriad reasons (being in the wrong place at the wrong time is a general way of stating this). And the variant possibilities are doubled because teams change from offense to defense in lightning quick dynamic fashion. The lingo of the game reflects this, referring to set pieces where a hooker is always a hooker and a scrum half is always a scrum half. The set pieces are lineouts, scrums, rucks, mauls, and restarts — if I recall correctly — and as is implied they have more-or-less well defined structure and distribution of responsibilities. Between the set pieces, on the other hand, all hell breaks loose. And the parts between the set pieces account for about 90% of a full match.

I am also a big basketball fan, mostly because it is a game that presents a bewildering set

of possible choices for which intelligent decisions must be made. But that only involves 10 players at a time. Rugby involves 30 players in a far less structured event. Basketball essentially has three positions, guard, forward, center (with minor specialties for point guard vs shooting guard, and strong forward vs quick forward), and when the game shifts from offense to defense counterparts defend against counterparts.

Again, I would observe that no player on a rugby pitch has any guarantee from moment to moment as to whether the job description is well defined or off the wall. Rugby shares with basketball the predominant attribute of it being a team game. There are very few solo variants of basketball, but there are some such as dunking and 3-point shooting contests. I could be unimaginative but I can't see component elements of rugby that could be broken out into separate solo events that would command any interest.

So you might ask, if the game is so collectivist, how can it appeal to an individualist? First of all it is a collective that is voluntary. Of what use would a requirement to play rugby be? Beyond that, music is mostly performed by collectives but there are, nevertheless, Mozarts and Thelonious Monks. And like music, using a fairly constrained set of components, rugby is infinitely variable.

The secret is that rugby is a very high density opportunity for learning. It is not a thing that you memorize and perfect, rather it is, in each case, a freely self-organizing phenomenon.

Logic Fallacy #47 — Winning

It may seem odd that I would go from a celebration of a form of sport to a non-appreciation of the idea of winning. But victory seems always to be costly and usually Pyrrhic. All the "great" generals of history were only winners until they started losing — take any empire in the record of humanity and note that each comes to an end, and only in a way that must be called losing. In fact, most so-called wins when viewed in terms of opportunity cost, or Bastiat's ideas on what is seen vs what is not seen, lead us back to TANSTAAFL — there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. There must be trade-offs.

This week I was confronted with the idea that arguments could be won. This led me to look up arguments in several dictionaries. Although there were several definitions, none appeared to describe a thing that could be "won." If we select the denotative definition of argument, it is the input to a process. If you buy a car, specifying the color blue, you have passed the argument "blue" to the color attribute of the car buying process. An argument is a proposition. The word "win" in this context is a *non sequitur*. Even the connotative (figurative) uses of "argument" — as in disagreement — refer more to negative outcomes than to resolutions that could be called a "win."

An egregious fallacy using the idea of winning was in teaching in US History that the nation had always won wars (before the Korean War). In *For A New Liberty*, Murray Rothbard

opines,

For war and a phony “external threat” have long been the chief means by which the State wins back the loyalty of its subjects. As we have seen, war and militarism were the gravediggers of classical liberalism; we must not allow the State to get away with this ruse ever again.

In the Revolutionary War, England lost, and if we hadn't immediately adopted British political institutions, we may otherwise have retrieved our natural rights. In any case it was not a win. It was a trade-off. When you think of World War II (the good one), you must realize that one of its outcomes was the enslavement of Eastern Europe for more than 70 years.

Too many libertarian advisers talk of how to “win” debates with non-libertarian people. You do not win allies by defeating them. Except for fictitious contests like games, where losing has low consequences, winning is a misrepresentation of reality. Medals, ribbons, and gold stars are memos of accomplishment, they are not the accomplishments themselves.

I seem most of the time to come back to the grabbing of knowledge, but that is the process. Socrates discounted knowledge as the ultimate goal, saying that knowledge was a process on the way to wisdom. Knowing things is not the end-all, being able to see the data in terms of dynamics is the goal. Heraclitus said that one cannot step in the same stream twice. We must learn the facts of fording streams, and understand why we would do it, to include recognizing the consequences.

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