

Good Coercion versus Bad Coercion



Send him mail.

"Food for Thought" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Norman Imberman. Norman is a retired podiatrist who loves playing piano, writing music, lawn bowling, bridge, reading, classical music, going to movies, plays, concerts and traveling. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FFT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

(Editor's note: Originally written, but never published, in 1969.)

In most political discourses with others, the conversation usually evolves into the following basic premise on the part of my opponent: he asserts that "we have got to have rules or else there will be chaos." When I ask him how those rules are to be determined and eventually accepted by the population, he states that they must be enacted into law, with the penalty of punishment by the authorities if the law is disobeyed. A criminal is anyone who disobeys the law and the punishment should fit the crime and can vary as a fine, imprisonment or the killing of the perpetrator. He ultimately sees that behind every law lies a gun because in order to persuade the law-breaker to pay the fine or not to resist his imprisonment or his killing, the government must expose their guns. In other words, *coercion* is the only way to run a country. When this analysis is pointed out, he is forced to agree that he is advocating coercion, but he asserts that he believes in "good coercion."

For a person to make such a statement, the following is what must be the cognitive process guiding his thinking. "Since I am a humanitarian (my intentions are to do good and help my fellow man), good coercion is to be defined as that method and degree of coercion that I think is proper to secure the goals of peace, harmony, security, and prosperity of my nation. Bad coercion is that method and degree which opposes these goals." As the conversation continues this assessment becomes more and more evident.

It is at this point that the humanitarian erects the guillotine, the gallows, the gas chamber, the electric chair and the concentration camp. The humanitarian also realizes that it is impossible to impose his "humanitarian" policies by himself. (There have been some attempts at this feat by the various dictators of the past). So the "humanitarian" looks for other "humanitarians" to collectively join him to decide how to dictate the behavior of others and Collectivism is born. After all, since they know what is best for everyone, why

shouldn't they have the final say as to what constitutes proper behavior? Legalized, collectivized ethics is the name of his game and other people's hopes, desires, aspirations, efforts, pocketbooks and lives are the stakes. Such is the mindset of these little dictators. Such dictators come from both the Left and the Right.

Is it looking familiar? Setting aside the truly blatant tyrannies of today or that existed in the past (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Communist Russia, Communist Cuba, the various Islamofascist States and the absolute monarchies of England), there have been many democracies which functioned on the same "humanitarian" premise. Ancient Athens and Rome, the Third Weimar Republic and Bismarck's Germany are a few examples and they all voted themselves into oblivion.

I agree with my opponent on one point. There must be rules or principles to guide man's actions if he wants to live in peaceful coexistence with his fellow man. The most important principle underlying every subsequent rule is the following: "no individual, group, or organization (this includes government) may *initiate* the use of or the threat of the use of force against another." (Self-defense is not the same as the initiation of force). No subsequent man-made rule can violate this fundamental and essential principle, for without it no subsequent rules can function successfully if the goal is peace, freedom and security.

At this point in the conversation, due to his inability to use a calm, logically derived line of reasoning to support his position, he either resorts to intimidation, bible quotations, laughter, condemnation-by-association, *non sequitur* and sometimes even name-calling (*ad hominem*). A common retort is "that's very well and good in principle, but not in practice. It won't work." You ask him why it won't work and his answer is "because." There is no way to refute such a mind-boggling response and the conversation must come to an end.

There is another common response as follows: "We are dealing with people who are irrational, immoral and who do not know what actions to take in their own best interest." Once again this person is implying that he and his fellow humanitarians know what others need for their own good because they are true humanitarians and smarter than the average person. This brings us full circle to the beginning of the argument and what I wrote earlier in this column.

There exists a simple syllogism, which is appropriate here. It reads as follows, granting the person his original premise:

1. People are irrational, immoral and do not know what is in their own best interest,
2. The State is run by people, who are in turn, elected by other people,
3. (I leave the conclusion to be completed by the reader.)