

Greatest Learning, Rothbard #1, Excluded Middle



Send him mail. [f](#) [t](#)

"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. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FTC-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Perhaps the greatest function of this column, and others at EVC is to emphasize the importance of learning in a voluntary life. In service of that function, I will cover three related ideas. First, there is a discussion that shows the utter importance of learning, from your earliest ancestor through to your last descendent. Then I will introduce a new series of Murray Rothbard quotes from his work, *For a New Liberty*, that will stress individualism and freedom in a voluntary life. And to close, we will examine clear, critical thinking in terms of the analytical tool of excluding or including a middle.

When Does the Greatest Learning Happen?

This is not just a rhetorical question. Two of our grandchildren visited this weekend. They are going on eleven and nine. They are awesome learning machines. They just returned from traveling (and I have frequently enthused on the wisdom potential of travel, here and here) on a combination school trip and camping trip to, about, around, and in the miraculous place called Charleston, SC. I always ask them, whenever I see them, "what did you learn today?" On this weekend, I asked them, "what did you learn on your trip to Charleston?" It was an avalanche. It was amazing.

I generally hold the opinion that the greatest gains in learning happen in the first five years of a child's life. Children first acquire species knowledge innately, at conception and throughout gestation. Also in gestation they learn physics (as in gravity and heat), and the use of human senses. And I totally agree with those parents who believe that they can transmit love, feelings, and knowledge in to that babe in the womb. Don't embryos encounter many parts of the real world — don't they experience language and emotion? Isn't it an enormous idea?

Then when children are born, they are engulfed in the physical reality of things. On a day

to day basis they are making incalculable advances in proportion to what they absorbed the day before. Think of it, they are exposed to language and the attachment of language to thought and the attachment of thought to cases — sights, sounds, pain, pleasure, hunger, thirst, touch, feel, smells, tastes. They discover and incorporate causality, intention, motivation, analysis, and initiation. They begin to blossom as intentional, individual beings.

As much in awe as I am of this huge matter, when I look at each age of the human being I am astounded. I see another granddaughter becoming a virtuoso on the flute. I see a grandson starting, with his wife, a family of my great-grandchildren. I see other grandsons becoming professional makers of things and events. Then I look at the mothers of these children, our daughters who are in the middles of highly effective careers, both as producers and as parents. The learning load is huge, and the stakes are massive.

Next, I see my lovely Lin, and I, in retirement, novice farmers, still learning at a mighty clip — at an impossible rate. She is learning, among countless other things, the secret lives of plants. She has turned our sunroom and yards into the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

I have recently become reconstituted as a philosopher. I see now that there is no end in sight, that there is no end of knowledge. As I was amazed in my teens at jazz and romance; twenties that there was marriage, parenthood, and property; thirties seeing travel, food, and Cash, Williams, Wills, Rodgers, and Cline, and living in Colorado; forties that there were Opera, Talking Heads, Mozart, Orbison, New York City, and computer science; fifties bringing foreign travel, college professorship, research, graduate studies, and true romance; and sixties experiencing illness and returning health, the Internet, EVC, and moving to a farm; I am now amazed by my starting to lead a philosophy discussion group at the lifelong learning program at a local university. And as I wrote this paragraph, I learned that I have told you only about the tip of the iceberg, of a life bursting at its seams.

Rothbard Quote #1

If a man has the right to self-ownership, to the control of his life, then in the real world he must also have the right to sustain his life by grappling with and transforming resources; he must be able to own the ground and the resources on which he stands and which he must use. In short, to sustain his “human right.”

This seems to me a perfect formulation of the inevitable existence of the self, the self-directed individual, individual rights, and necessary property. This is also an example of how Rothbard could catch lightning in a bottle — in one sentence! I know there are two

sentences above, but they each, separately, speak to a universal truth. There is an undeniable individuality to a human who must occupy a physical space and time. She owns that space and time. This ownership is a natural right.

In the recent past I have listened to a specific podcast three times. I usually listen once, then move on, ever in search of new ideas. This podcast, however, an episode of the *Robert Wenzel Show*, features Lew Rockwell talking about what Murray Newton Rothbard has meant to the libertarian/voluntaryist/anarchist/agorist world. Based on that podcast, I have now begun to read Rothbard's *For a New Liberty* for the second time. If I am to share my voluntaryism with you, I feel it is necessary to share Rothbard with you. This does not signal an end to the Spooner series that you usually find in this space, interspersed with the occasional Twain, Bastiat, or Mencken, but the addition of Rothbard. I will also add Robert Higgs and Sheldon Richman, who are my favorite two commentators currently in the hustings.

Logic Fallacy #29 — The Excluded Middle

Like most logic constructs, which can be turned to fallacies at the flick of a Boolean switch, the principle of the excluded middle is an essential tool for defining truth — eg, either it is raining or it is not; either the rain will continue for a significant period or it will not, either we will have sufficient rains to end the drought or we will not.

In some circumstances there is no middle, no partial pregnancy. But zealots and “neo-cons” create fantastic fables by dodging real middles. Here are some examples:

- If Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction it is an instant threat that he can deliver destruction to the shores of the United States ... or it is only a matter of time.
- If Iran wants domestic nuclear energy, that instantly gives them the capability and ambition of building nuclear weapons. In other words, they will immediately pervert a positive capability into a stupid negative capability.
- If one ex-Olympian can swap genders and one crusader can swap races, at will, then the center cannot hold; we will all be flung into chaos and anarchy.
- Since it is in human nature to be at war, there is no possibility of non-war.
- If a person could commit a crime, then that person is guilty of pre-crime.
- If there is any transgression then it will escalate into a life threatening situation for a law enforcement officer, who then is justified in ending that threat in any manner.

These are all constructs to cause opinions which fail to take into account the massive weight of reality that must be moved to get from one place to another.

Again, for contrast, let's look at a positive use of the excluded middle. Murray Rothbard tells us that the natural occurrence of a human being creates, inherently, all of the truths

which attend. Either an individual human exists or she does not. If she exists, she has all of the accouterments that are inseparable from a human, including her inalienable rights. There is no need for a subsequent massive shift of factual matters, no need for intervention.

In conclusion I would say that the main takeaway for today's column is the importance of learning. An alert human cannot help but learn constantly, but a wise person will optimize learning. It helps to have gurus, such as Spooner and Rothbard. They will guide you toward true formulations, not toward stripped down fallacies with excluded truths.

Read more from "Finding the Challenges":