

More Fallacy, Schooling, Perspective



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"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](#).

We are still enjoying the winter wonderland-aganza-paloosa here in Central Kentucky, formerly known as "the Bluegrass," which may again be known as that, but for the time being is more accurately called the white grass with icy trees. Here we are, nearly to Valentine's Day, and it is still like January somewhere north of the 45th parallel. So I have thrown another log in the old wood stove, while I dream of fields bursting with blue chicory blooms. I am recuperating from a tire changing episode as the mercury stayed under 20 degrees F. today.

But now I am warm and partly rested and ready to bring to you my contributions for the fortnight. We will start off as I said last time continuing to study logic by looking at another of the fallacies we may encounter. Then we will continue with an unusually positive recounting of a story of two of my granddaughters in their new school. And we will conclude with more observations (my alter ego, Kilgore Forelle, shared his thoughts with us on the EVC blog) inspired by the writings of an astrophysicist.

An Extremely Popular Fallacy

This fallacy is extremely widespread, and encompasses several specific fallacies with which you may be more familiar. I refer to the logical fallacy of Juggling the Stasis Point. Some of the more specific fallacies that fall into this category are *Ad Hominem* (which we discussed in the last column), Straw Man, Begging the Question, and Moving the Goal Posts. We will talk about the latter three in detail in future essays.

But what is the stasis point of an argument, a debate, an analysis, or a discussion? The stasis point is the balance point, often called the fulcrum, where that which is agreed is clearly divided from that which has yet to be agreed. The participants in a formal argument will make every good faith attempt to recognize the facts, the assumptions, the relevant

matters, the ground rules, and the general objective of the discussion – at least this is done in a debate that is meant to be productive. But we should acknowledge that many would-be debaters enter debates with hidden, subjective agenda. That recognition goes before the stasis point of a discussion about the related fallacy.

The first thing that must be placed before the fulcrum is an understanding that all agenda must be open. Then pare down the agenda to relevancies.

The failure to firm up the stasis point of any consideration of any issue is the thing that destroys rational communication. The worst thing to leave on either side of the stasis point, the fulcrum, is an idea from either side that the debate is a contest rather than a mutual exploration. “Winners” of arguments are usually accidentally crowned by procedural tricks and pitfalls, leaving lots of anger, offense, and unresolved issues in their victorious wake.

Examples of poor recognition of the fulcrum are:

- one participant assumes he is superior to the other discussants
- one or more participants seek to reach a false conclusion (perhaps even an impossible one)
- members of the discussion are out of control of their own lapses into other logical fallacies
- too many unrelated issues are brought in to the discussion

One of the reasons I enjoy the Internet and the web so much is that I can find many more people who like to discuss issues, and many more people who can engage in the kind of give-and-take that will clarify what comes first, where the stasis point is, and what the purpose is. This one concept has made a cosmos of difference to me, as I try to maximize my lifelong learning.

As a voluntarist, you can simply walk away from discussions where one or more persons will not address the stasis point. If you have a need to declare a winner, that is a topic that you need to debate alone – be sure you know where the stasis point of that issue is.

A School as Lightning in a Bottle

Although I am very much an advocate of unschooling, home schooling, and free market private schools, I must confess that such opportunity has largely passed me by. I was schooled by government, and I spent all of my time in that environment, and the five decades since, rising above that fact. And I have spent even more time helping my children and grandchildren develop some critical appreciation for independent thought. Furthermore, I am just starting with a pair of great-grandchildren.

There is a spectrum of effects that can happen to you in your educable years (ie. all of

those years you spend on Earth). Let's look at those effects, moving away from the worst end toward the best end. I'll not attempt to identify the worst and the best absolutes, since I have not learned these yet, to my knowledge. We can start near the end with slavery, where any skill other than that required by the master is systematically withheld from the slave – most language, books, and school are banned. And we can observe the other end of the spectrum by viewing the lives of Thoreau, Einstein, da Vinci, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and the like, where no prescribed education could possibly keep up with their intellect.

And there is another distribution of formal educational opportunities; I am referring to the bell curve. At the low end, less than 5%, you might find criminal operations, imposter schools in it for the government largesse. In the middle 80-90%, you will find mediocre schools, some better than others, probably depending on how authoritarian the school is. Then at the top will be the places that encourage creative thinking, problem solving, and contemplation. These last are few and far between, and to find one of them is like catching lightning in a bottle.

My daughter has caught lightening in a bottle for her two girls. Last summer, she was concerned about school issues for her older girl, going into the fourth grade. When she, my daughter, was in high school, she became dissatisfied as a student with the big diploma mill in the county, so she convinced us that we needed to pay tuition so she could transfer to the small town city school which had a few hundred students – about 800 fewer than the county school. She went immediately from a C average to an A++ average. I normally don't place much weight on grades, but the change here was startling. And the change in her was even more startling.

I'm sure that she looked back on her experience as a guide in her decision making. So now the two granddaughters have transferred to the small town district by way of a tuition plan. The change has been even more dramatic. Last week, their grandmother and I went to a talent show at the school, and we were blown away by the openness, encouragement, and creativity. Last year, both of the youngsters had a troubled look most of the time (and there was a much longer, deeper story involved, to be sure – and that issue has now resolved itself), but now one look at either of their faces tells a wondrous story.

The older has bid farewell to her math difficulties and has become a standout cross-country runner. With the younger, she had been doing so well previously we feared she might be messed up by the change – but the change has been spectacular for her as well. This week she sat me down in her pretend classroom, and led me through a discussion of the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People.” Her favorite habit, and mine, is “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” I sure didn't do anything like that when I was in the second grade.

For this year at least, my granddaughters, my daughter, and we have caught lightning in a

bottle. And the organizational culture of the school is such that we expect to continue this way for the duration of their public school career.

Children are like the canary in a coalmine. They communicate in one way or another when their progress as a unique being is impaired. Pay very close attention to your children. If they are not flourishing, try something else.

The Long View

This topic revolves about logical perceptions, spiritual perceptions, and an inquiry about whether in the long view these perceptions may be blended. Far too many set the stasis point at a place that denies consideration of the question. As Skyler Collins pointed out on the EVC blog, there has been a recent debate about the scientific old Earth and the Biblical young Earth, and this is a spin-off from a fairly permanent disagreement on whether we shall have state schools teaching evolution or creationism, as if the two were mutually exclusive. We act as if knowledge of the one would obliterate knowledge of the other.

Why do we need to decide that either evolutionary theory or creationist theory must eclipse the other? Darwin's view is but a scrap of the natural laws that apply in the world. The Bible is but one source of spiritual contemplation. And I'm sorry, but I don't even see how the two are related enough to come into conflict with one another.

But I have learned multitudinous amounts from reading this thoughtful response, "22 Messages of Hope (and Science) for Creationists," from Ethan Siegel to earnest questions asked by intelligent design advocates after the debate referenced in Skyler's blog post, "On Indoctrination".

And this is one of my favorite questions, with its response from Siegel:

5.) *How do you explain a sunset if [there] is no God?*

I think this is an outstanding question. How can you explain the sunset, in all its beauty, without appealing to the divine? You and I may have differing opinions on what makes something beautiful, but you'd have to be someone I couldn't understand at all if you said that the sunset didn't fall into the beautiful category. But this is something that science can explain quite wonderfully, including the different colors, gradations, atmospheric effects and visual illusions. To me, at least, everything is more beautiful the more you know about it.

Why do we need to explain a sunset? Last night at my place the sunset appeared through a visual network of ice-covered branches, and it was breathtaking.

As Skyler asked, what about the question of whether school is even the correct place for compulsory teaching of either topic? This sounds like a stasis point problem to me. Why not let spiritual scholars be spiritual scholars, and scientific scholars be scientific scholars – or horror of horrors, why not let humans be both or neither. Then why not let them learn these things freely? Schools can pound the desire to look at sunsets out of you. They cannot teach you how to see a sunset. And they cannot teach you to invest profound personal joy and understanding in that sunset.

Well, I'm hoping for a break in the weather before we meet again, but I sure do enjoy those sunsets with the ice-glazed bare trees. In the meantime, take a few opportunities to reflect on these ideas. Take extra care to observe where people put the stasis point – on newscasts, on game shows, in meeting places, in head-to-head conversation, noting on each occasion whether it has confused or enhanced the intended communication. Think seriously about whether you are satisfied with the current educational status quo for you and your loved ones, and what the alternatives are. And lastly, don't get wrapped around the axle of debates that may not even be worth having, where a definitive answer may be unknowable, and where the so-called issues are just camouflage for authoritarianism's hidden agenda.

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