

Short Subjects and The Shipping News



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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, pre-TSA world traveler, domestic traveler. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FTC-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Obviously, my plan to catch up to my bi-weekly production goal for columns foundered on the rocks of *gang awry*. Now I am even farther behind schedule. It's the summer schedule or lack thereof. When I have teaching duties at the Community College, and when I am involved in my Lifelong Learning courses, I often have several hours at the library or in the computer lab which can be filled with constructive work. In the summer, however, I often find myself working outdoors on the farm during daylight hours, sometimes up until nearly 10 pm.

But now the autumnal equinox is near, and I am getting back into a regular schedule. I'm going to give the serialization effort a more fair trial under these conditions.

Logic Fallacies — Short Subjects

Just a few days ago, I began to meet with a shared interest group (SIG) on Logic and Reason. Our facilitator, a retired math professor from Transylvania University, gave each of us in attendance a set of 5 informal fallacies to explore and present to the group next week.

Veteran readers will know that I have frequently included discussions of logic fallacies in previous columns, and I often have an idiosyncratic view of them. So it is with enthusiasm that I will do capsules here, in hopes of expanding them in future writing.

- Argument to the stone: The story behind this one was that Dr. Ben Jonson insisted that

Dr. George Berkeley's philosophy on immaterialism was disproven by the existence of a stone, which Jonson kicked, thus believing he had proven materialism. Unfortunately for Dr. Jonson, he himself could just as easily have imagined the stone and the kick.

Both doctors insisted on their own versions of reality to reject the other. A modern version would be to counter an assertion with "you can't be serious!"

- Argument from ignorance: My lovely bride and I have been married now for 50 years, but I pulled a stunt during our first year that leaves me amazed that we are still a team. She told me about a huge oceanic whirlpool in the North Atlantic. I was sure that there was no such thing. "That can't be true! Else I would know about it!" It turns out that I just had not consulted the proper sources. This was before the Internet was available to groundlings. If you go to the Bay of Fundy, in the Canadian Maritime Provinces, by boat, you had better be prepared for the "Old Sow Whirlpool" or you may sleep with the fishes.
- Argument from (personal) incredulity: Often we may react to an instance of our own ignorance by insisting that it cannot be so. "That just doesn't make sense to me!" "If that were true, why wouldn't I know about it?"
- Argument from repetition: The propaganda chiefs of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany called it the Big Lie technique, wherein if something were repeated often enough, the hearers would eventually accept it as true. Other examples are: "We have always stood for the playing of the national anthem!" Or more generally, "That's the way we have always done it!" Or more elegantly, "How many times must a philosopher insist that you cannot prove a negative?"
- Argument from silence: This logic problem involves the odd presumption that if a significant account omits a significant topic, then either the account or the topic is suspect. An example would be to insist that since Marco Polo did not mention the Great Wall, he cannot actually have visited China, or perhaps even more extreme to say that the Great Wall must not have existed at the time of his travels.

Voluntaryist View — The Shipping News

It has been 25 years between my readings, but *The Shipping News*, by E. Annie Proulx, has gained considerably, surviving a good but inadequate movie, and becoming a How-To manual on pushing through the obstacles toward a voluntary life. The protagonist, Quoyale, moves from a trailer park life in a desolate part of NY State, back to his ancestral home (that he has never before seen) in a remote part of Newfoundland in the environs of a fishing town named Killick-Claw. In Killick-Claw, Quoyale lands a job as a newspaper man, with the local paper called The Gammy Bird, writing the column called "The Shipping News."

But enough about the surface detail. This book is layered, entwined, densely textured from any view. To me, however, the thematic substance is clear. Throughout the book, Proulx

makes casual reference to knots, nets, moorings, connections, tethers, and webs. Quoye escapes one web, wherein he is a wrecked man-child with very few prospects, then over a complete cycle of Newfoundland's annual weather cycle, he becomes a man who learns that all of his choices are voluntary, and given time, are mostly to good effect.

There is a subplot in which Newfoundland is going through a similar mid life crisis. There is a strong anti-big government and anti-crony capitalism vein here. Proulx wears her heart on her sleeve. See the following passage spoken by one of her characters, Jack Buggit:

"This business about allocating fish quotas as if they was rows of potatoes you could dig. If there's no fish you can't allocate them and you can't catch them; if you don't catch them, you can't process them or ship them, you don't have a living for nobody. Nobody understands their crazy rules no more. Stumble along. They say 'too many local fishermen for not enough fish.' Well, where has the fish gone? To the Russians, the French, the Japs, West Germany, East Germany, Poland, Portugal, the UK, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria—or whatever they call them countries nowadays. ... And even after the limit was set, the inshore was no good. How can the fish come inshore if the trawlers and draggers gets 'em all fifty, a hundred mile out? And the long-liners gets the rest twenty mile out? What's left for the inshore fishermen?"

If you're like me, you just wonder how can anyone in Ottawa, Ontario know anything about fishing in the North Atlantic? The answer, regulate the inshore fishermen some more. Persecute those you can reach. Pretend as though the outlaws are not there beyond your puny state. Instigate programs that will have nothing to do with positive outcomes, but will perpetuate the bureaucracy. And, by the way, when I use "outlaws" above, I do not refer to criminals, only to those being outside the regulatory fictions. Read more from "Finding the Challenges":