

The Control of Nature, Rothbard on Human Nature, Appeal to Common Belief



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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.

You can control yourself. You have a reasonable amount of discontinuous control over things that impinge on your time and space. But one cannot control that which must be, by failing to believe in the nature of things.

Voluntaryist Book View — The Control of Nature

My intent here is to introduce you to a book you may not have encountered, but this is a book that has had a long term influence on me and my point of view. The title of the work is *The Control of Nature*, written by John McPhee.

Why do I hold this work in such high esteem? First, the events documented in the book are eminently important in the lives of humanity. Next, and most importantly to me, are the abstracted concepts that I take away from the book. Then, most importantly for you and me, is that McPhee is, in my mind, the most consummate writer of non-fiction working in the English language today.

The events documented by McPhee in *Control* are some of mankind’s attempts to control nature. Divided in three parts, the long struggle of the US Army Corps of Engineers to come to grips with flooding on our mightiest river, the Mississippi (and this was written in 1989, prior to the infamous drowning of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina), the fight by Icelanders to save their commercial harbor from lava flows with sidebars in Hawaii and other locales where similar fights are waged, and the battle against mud flows in the San

Gabriel Mountains outside of Los Angeles.

It might be informative to hear from McPhee on what his intent was in writing *The Control of Nature*, but my takeaway was that mankind has a very imperfect conception of the consequences of trying to put Nature in its place. A voluntaryist understands this idea with clarity. Jason Stapleton recently called a more current instance, "... action masquerading as accomplishment." The shoe fits. And Isaac Newton pointed out long ago that every action has an equal and opposite set of reactions, i.e. what goes up must come down. The imperfect stratagems are deployed by the federal government in the case of the Mississippi, by social groups and a local government in Iceland, and by individuals in Hawaii and California — none successful to any measurable degree.

The third reason that I recommend this compendium so strongly is that if you have not previously read John McPhee, you are long overdue.

Rothbard Quote #9

The true utopian is one who advocates a system that is contrary to the natural law of human beings and of the real world. A utopian system is one that could not work even if everyone were persuaded to try to put it into practice. The utopian system could not work, i.e., could not sustain itself in operation. The utopian goal of the left: communism—the abolition of specialization and the adoption of uniformity—could not work even if everyone were willing to adopt it immediately. It could not work because it violates the very nature of man and the world, especially the uniqueness and individuality of every person, of his abilities and interests, and because it would mean a drastic decline in the production of wealth, so much so as to doom the great bulk of the human race to rapid starvation and extinction.

Here, Murray Rothbard addresses a segment of Nature that cannot be thwarted, human nature. As is the case with events, places and things, no two are quite alike except that all exist within the control of natural process, but not as contradiction to the control of Nature.

This is not an anti-communism diatribe by Rothbard, it is rather a recognition that it is not in the nature of reality that everything becomes the same. If that happened it would be a perfectly awful dystopia — the utopian guru often holds forth only because he knows that utopia will never be achieved, because he has a lesser agenda that he is promoting, the

control of the nature of others.

Logic Fallacy #38 — Appeal to Common Belief

The “silly season” has started way too early. We see a mess of politicians addressing nothings while avoiding anythings that could possibly be construed as somethings. All of them are horsepersons of the apocalypse, and their horses are the appeal to common belief. The trick is that except for a few unavoidable things, such as fear of death and love of the most known, all else is extrapolated. There are no common beliefs, because beliefs require brainwork, but no two brains are alike, in either nature or nurture.

So the scoundrel office-seeker sells subliminal beliefs in fairy tale ideas. One such idea is that no civilized society should accept hunger, want, danger, and sickness for any of its members. And, in the case of politics, the implication is that there has to be some statist solution, usually only perceived by the implying politician.

This is the common belief being sold — that there is a solution and that it is just recalcitrance on the part of the voter, in the opposition party, that is preventing success. Ask one of these promisers which identifiable community of common belief has ever accomplished the riddance of hunger, want, danger, and sickness, and the promiser will damn you for being an obstructionist.

The further implication of these political promises is that there is some state in which an institution exists which can foster and incubate a sub-institution to solve this type of problem. Because there is no one who would freely admit that he desires to actually neglect those in need, there is a presumption that we hold a common belief in a secondary, political solution.

Catch 1: There is no direct line from problem to institution to solution. Catch 2: Each of us who thinks he has a common belief has only an individual variety of that ideal belief. Catch 3: Agenda, too, are like snowflakes with no two being alike — and even if two alike snowflakes are possible, same agenda are not.

Commonality is a delusion. The desire for others to be common with you is a desire for an unattainable condition. It is not a rational belief. It may be an emotionally driven belief, but there is no amount of emotion that can make a fiction into a fact. It is OK to have emotional dreams, such as an aim to take a trip to some beauty spot, but the emotion of that dream is entirely suspect if the factual beauty spot does not exist or the means of getting there do not exist.

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