

The Philosophical Toolbox

"If your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." I'm reminded of Maslow's 'Law of the Hammer' quote as I read through various comment sections on social media. I find the comments most interesting than the posts themselves as it demonstrates the general tenor of society as a whole. Although the rare cogent comment can be found, the vast majority of comments seem to be banal rhetoric spewed forth with passionate vitriol and willful ignorance. As a Voluntarist, I defend their right to do so of course, but it does shed light on the general public's lack of understanding in one critical element... philosophy.

Like most of you reading this, I wasn't always a Voluntarist and I had a very rudimentary understanding of philosophy until I had my journey toward freedom. When I was "coming of age" in the 1980's I remember being inundated with pro-American propaganda. The cold war with Russia, the space shuttle program, the 1984 Summer Olympics, and of course Reagan's famous "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" moment were examples of the resourcefulness and strength of this country.

I remember the US being a mighty and benevolent nation with the greatest freedoms on earth, but as they say, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things."

As I grew older it was becoming increasingly more difficult to put away the childish beliefs with which I had been indoctrinated through government education and media propaganda. I still wanted to believe that "we" were the greatest nation on earth, that "we" were special having been born within these borders. But then I began questioning what I saw, what I heard and read. I was becoming increasingly aware of the wars and nation building through deception and killing of innocent people, the arbitrary laws punishing people for non-violent crimes, the out of control spending and burdensome taxation. However, emboldened with years of jingoistic rhetoric behind me I dismissed all which didn't fit my "red, white, and blue" narrative as I was able to take any issue, topic, or contradiction and spin it to fit my pro-American mindset.

Until one day I couldn't. The puzzle pieces I had once been able to make fit through trimming and massaging through mental gymnastics left too much debris in my conscience, too many inconsistencies. The cognitive dissonance became deafening. I began seeking out reasons, meanings, and definitions for what I was experiencing, this led me to philosophy.

I'm not saying that philosophy as a whole is without contradiction, however through years of weeding through different philosophies and theories I was able to find what works best

for me. A collection of tools with which anyone can use to truly test whether an idea, concept, law, or edict is just, fair, and equitable.

In no particular order I'd like to present a few of the tools I use when trying to make a consistent, rational, and logical judgement or claim.

Aristotelian First Principles: The basic, foundational, self-evident proposition or assumption that cannot be deduced from any other proposition or assumption.

Logical Fallacies: Errors in reasoning undermining the logic of an argument.

Objective vs. Subjective Morality: Objective morality claims that there are certain morals which make claims true or false. Subjective morality is the perspective that moral claims don't hold a definitive truth.

The Non-Aggression Principle: An ethical stance which asserts that aggression is inherently illegitimate. Aggression is defined as the initiation of physical force against persons or property, the threat of such, or fraud upon persons or their property. In contrast to pacifism, the non-aggression principle does not preclude violent self-defense.

Self-Ownership: The concept of property in one's own person, expressed as the moral or natural right of a person to have bodily integrity and be the exclusive controller of one's own body and life.

Lockean Labor Theory of Property: A theory of natural law that holds that property originally comes about by the exertion of labor upon natural resources.

Misesian Theory of Human Action (Praxeology): The deductive study of human action, based on the notion that humans engage in purposeful behavior.

The State of Nature (as seen from the perspectives of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Montesquieu): *Hobbes* argued that all humans are by nature equal in faculties of body and mind. In this state every person has a natural right or liberty to do anything one thinks necessary for preserving one's own life; and life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". *Locke* believes that reason teaches that "no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty, and or property" and that transgressions of this may be punished. He describes the state of nature and civil society to be opposites of each other, and the need for civil society comes in part from the perpetual existence of the state of nature. This view of the state of nature is partly deduced from Christian belief (unlike Hobbes, whose philosophy is not dependent upon any prior theology). *Rousseau* suggested that people were neither good nor bad, but were born as a blank slate, and later society and the environment influence which way we lean. *Montesquieu* said that human beings would have the faculty of knowing and would first think to preserve their life in this state. Human beings would also

at first feel themselves to be impotent and weak. As a result, humans would not be likely to attack each other in this state. Next, humans would seek nourishment and out of fear and impulse would eventually unite to create society. Once society was created, a state of war would ensue amongst societies which would have been all created the same way. The purpose of war is the preservation of the society and the self.

Whenever I read, hear, or see new information, ideas, or concepts I put it through these filters. Sometimes it's fairly easy to weed out the inconsistencies, sometimes I'll have to do more extensive contemplation. I believe by using these tools, we can have a better understanding of how to communicate with each other peacefully and coexist despite our differences.