

The Rich, Spooner #16, Godwin's Law



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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](#).

It is a beautiful Spring day here in the Bluegrass — always a good time for spring cleaning. Among those things we need to pull out, dust off, refurbish, or throw away are musty ideas. What is with our obsession from those in the 99% toward those in the 1%? Is it always healthy? It might be when we are learning from clearly seen information, such as a courageous, unblinking review of our past. It might be when we realize that the elite "law"-makers are serving the elite, not those of us whom they promised to serve.

The Rich

One cannot ignore or evade the obvious popular contempt for the miserable folk who fall into the fictional corrals of "the rich," "the robber barons," "the exploiters," "the bankers," "the *illuminati*," "the rentseekers," "the 1%," "the movers and shakers," "the new world order," and so forth.

Here's the problem — in any 100% there will be one hundred 1%'s, including the 1% at the top. So relax, there will always be someone to blame and someone to fawn over.

The second problem is the perceived, by the under-99%, behavior of the uber-1%.

As Thomas Sowell has pointed out in numerous ways and on numerous occasions, the make-up of any stratum in a whole is seldom the same from one point in time until the next. Individual people move in and out of strata. A simple example — the poor college student may or may not stay below the poverty level for long, depending on the size of her government loans. Also, lottery winners often move up (and down) the percentile ladder of wealth in rapid fashion.

But it is only human to dwell on the surface appearances of these phenomena for too long and to no avail. I have an otherwise brilliant daughter, who leans toward the idea that the

rich are to blame for all of our travails. I have burned a lot of midnight oil trying to address that rationalization. Finally, I came upon two ideas that may alleviate this blockage. The Sowell formulation above mostly falls on deaf ears when those earholders are not moving rapidly enough up their chosen ladders.

Idea #1 — Life is good here in the middle class.

Idea #2 — Forgive the rich, for they have no more certainty in life than do the rest of us.

If I were rich, i.e. in monetary terms I had more than I needed, I would have the pressure of having to grow the surplus that guaranteed my richness. I would need to amp up the exploitation, creativity, depravity, beneficence — whatever — that produced my surplus. Therefore, I am exceedingly grateful that I have been able to spend my life in the middle class of the USA. I have always had a salary. My salary has always been at a level that slightly under-compensated my contributions (labor and time). I have always had an incentive to do well, but I have also been able to go home at 5pm with a good conscience to enjoy (immensely!!!) my family, pursuits, and lifestyle. I almost always knew where I stood, and I always knew what to do next to move ahead.

I have worked almost every weekday, and several Saturdays, some Sundays and holidays, since I was 16, for a salary. When I retired from full-time, four years ago, I had been employed all but 5 days (a honeymoon) for half a century. My resume would show at least 30 different work episodes. Some would say I have had a checkered career, but I have been rewarded with happiness, challenge, experience, and satisfaction at every turn. As they say down in Casey County, there ain't nothing like a salary. I have spent a few years in the top 5% and a few years in the bottom 5%, but I would not trade any single time for any other time.

So if I look at my life, I have to regard it as Doctor Pangloss would, with positivity looking back, optimism looking forward, and joy in the present. And toward the percentiles I see that map like the medieval maps of the flat Earth, in the top 1% and the bottom 1% there be monsters.

Now let us walk a mile in the shoes of the top 1%'ers. You can either stay in the 1% — an ever escalating proposition — or you can fall out of it (the strongest likelihood). You can do great damage while you are there, or great good, or you can be neutral by clinging to the NAP for dear life (a very hard row to hoe). But any statistics course will tell you that staying in a single percentile is a dreadful prospect. Any psychology course will tell you that an absolute frame of mind is impossible. You must be 100% committed for 24/7/365/eternity — not unlike some of Dante's or Camus' descriptions of servitude, in the *Inferno* or the Myth of Sisyphus.

Spooner Quote #16

If there be in nature such a principle as justice, it is necessarily the only political principle there ever was, or ever will be. All the other so-called political principles, which men are in the habit of inventing, are not principles at all. They are either the mere conceits of simpletons, who imagine they have discovered something better than truth, and justice, and universal law; or they are mere devices and pretences, to which selfish and knavish men resort as means to get fame, and power, and money.

The lawmonger finds himself in much the same position as the rich man. When will he have fictionalized artificial law enough to stop. She who rides a tiger knows neither where nor when nor how to get off.

When persons or groups depend on finagling with legislation to override natural occurrence, they must take with no giving in return. The giving of the illegitimate favor is only another taking, the recipient is stolen from as well for they will likely bear the brunt of the blowback.

Logic Fallacy #25 — Godwin's Law

The often misapprehended Godwin's Law is a jumping off point for a discussion of a common logic fallacy. Godwin's Law actually offers that if any Internet dialog goes on long enough then the behaviors of Hitler and the Third Reich will come up. And there is a corollary that most people confuse with the Law itself — whoever introduces Herr Schicklgruber in comparison to any other matter thereby automatically loses or terminates the debate. That may be because the guy with the ultra-silly mustache figures in a much more egregious fallacy — the *argumentum ad extremum* (jokingly called *argumentum ad Hitlerum*, others are *ad Stalinum* or *ad Vladus Impalerum*). [Writer's note: I am fabricating some of this Latin.]

The popular hate-the-rich dodge is an example. If you can identify an extreme (significant actions but in sub-significant quantity), then the less extreme may become acceptable.

But the reason I bring this up today is because I have recently been a participant in a lifelong learning series focusing on cultural Germany in the World War interregnum. Misunderstanding of Godwin's Law should not lead us to ignore this historic chapter. Thinking about Hitler and the lessons for statism today is not a moral wrong. If we do not learn from a set of factual historical puzzle pieces, how will we know when Naziism is still an extreme beyond where we are today?

As Radley Balko said recently in a talk at the University of Texas, paraphrased, “we are not in a police state or else I would be arrested, but for those people who have been killed by police, being denied due process, it looks like a police state.” If your voluntaryist lifestyle has been crushed by the state, without reason, how can you possibly see that situation as liberty?

Be not deceived. The laws of physics and the natural universe will apply. If you sow in the land of make believe, you will not reap the rewards of reality, but rather its penalties. Keep your eyes on the prize, which is a clear understanding of that which is true.

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