

Can the Internet Save Us?

Writes Robert Higgs:

Many of my freedom-loving friends have great confidence that communication via the Internet and the World Wide Web will prove to be a game-changer in the fight against the disinformation and propaganda disseminated by the state and its running dogs, and that the greater ease of spreading the truth will shift the balance in favor of those who seek to protect and extend liberty. I have always had my doubts.

For one thing, the state continues to have a preponderance of physical power, and should its domination ever be brought into genuine challenge, it can always resort to sheer violence. The Internet has intrinsic strengths, to be sure, but the state's goons can always smash in your door, crush your computers to shreds with sledge hammers, and haul you off to one of its dungeons. At present, the state is not challenged seriously, and therefore it need not resort to such primitive, though effective, measures. Moreover, it needs to preserve the use of Internet communication in order that industry and commerce will thrive, and thereby provide a great volume of wealth for the state to plunder.

A second reason for my doubts is that although the Internet and the Web lower the cost of disseminating the truth, they equally lower the cost of disseminating the state's lies. Perhaps more important, today's technology permits users to create many forms of distortion and illusion, so that when we encounter information on the Web, we must always ask, "Is this real or fake?" We simply cannot believe everything we see with our own eyes. Some hoaxes are easily revealed; others require great expertise to expose; and few of us possess such expertise. The masses therefore remain vulnerable to

what governments and their key supporters have done for millennia—namely, fool most of the people most of the time.

Finally, unless the friends of liberty can bring about a significant change in the dominant ideology, none of our communications will matter, however much they reveal the state's deceptions and offer truth as a substitute. Ideology is not simply ideas; it has a powerful element of values as well. If people do not place much value on freedom and prefer, as many Americans now do, creature comforts, entertainment, and the illusion of security, then their ears will be deaf to our efforts to spread the truth, regardless of the technology we employ.

But I'm going to continue using what has been the best resource available to me for disseminating my ideas!

Skyler.