

Convergence, J. B. Bury, Fallacy #17



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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](#).

Having just survived another national election, poorer, sadder, but wiser, we can now examine some of the forces which collide to produce the current state of affairs. What do we make of the past, present, and future? What do we see by observing objectively or selectively or subjectively? What do we regard as fact or fiction?

Convergence

Nearly all (overwhelmingly nearly all) circumstances evolve from myriad effects, processes, and causes. And every circumstance interacts with other circumstances to become myriad effects, processes, and causes.

The conditions I cite above are convergences.

The word, convergence, was kind of a buzzword in technology for a few years. It was essentially marketware to hype the interoperability of things like computers and cell phones. Well, these were both computers all along, so their combination is more or less remarked upon by using the Texas Sharpshooter fallacy — draw a target around the random holes in the side of the barn, if the holes are close together, then claim after the fact that it was marksmanship.

There is in fact both an abstract mathematical and concrete physical phenomenon of convergence. In math, no matter how complicated a proposition might be, if there are enough data points, the proposition becomes more clear. In a graph, the data points converge upon a true depiction of a proposition. In physics, if certain precedents exist, then if certain impulsions are provided, then we may learn enough about the result that we can expect repetitions of similar results.

In other words, as Mark Twain asserted, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.”

People can blur distinctions so that others may mistake a description of the present for a prediction about the future. Republicans could say today that the election yesterday marks a Renaissance of republicanism, but they must ignore that this same confluence of flow has produced similar results in the past. It is not at all extraordinary that control of Congress may change hands during a midterm election during the lame duck term of a soon-to-be outgoing president.

The more this is hyped as a new dawn, the more likely it is to bite some people in the derriere, as the confluences and the convergences continue to create deltas in the status quo. Every river delta is like others, no deltas are the same.

J. B. Bury Quote

Bury was a predecessor to Bertrand Russell, and he may correctly be identified as a proponent of the idea in the last section of this column, a discussion of Russell's Teapot. In the service of general enlightenment, I recommend Bury's writings.

"Some people speak as if we were not justified in rejecting a theological doctrine unless we can prove it false. But the burden of proof does not lie upon the rejecter.... If you were told that in a certain planet revolving around Sirius there is a race of donkeys who speak the English language and spend their time in discussing eugenics, you could not disprove the statement, but would it, on that account, have any claim to be believed? Some minds would be prepared to accept it, if it were reiterated often enough, through the potent force of suggestion."

People who assert that there is a condition abroad which warrants a war are using this tendency to flush the need for facts from the thinking processes of their followers. Where are the WMDs? The fear can be used until their existence is disproven. But the proof of a true negative is impossible. Therefore clever fictions can be very effective. Although fictions are also unprovable, because fiction is the opposite of fact, the fiction does not exclude the coincidence of a same or similar fact.

A parallel is a fiction which seems to be proven by an incidental fact. Warmongers can claim that there are nuclear processing facilities in Iran, based in part on the fact that the *US government gave Iran a reactor facility when our sock puppet dictator, Shah Reza Pahlavi, was in charge.* "The nuclear program of Iran was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States as part of the Atoms for Peace program.[source][hat tip Scott

Horton Show]” All the agitators need to leave out is that the facility is seriously obsolete.

Logic Fallacy #17 — Russell’s Teapot

“Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of skeptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time.” - Bertrand Russell

Yesterday in his blog here at EVC, Kilgore Forelle (my alter ego, I must admit) asked me to consider whether shifting the burden of proof was entirely illogical or perhaps appropriate in some circumstances. He gave an example in an [earlier blog](#), “I am anxious to see a single example of voting proving to be a solution to any problem.”

The reason I make this connection is that shifting the burden of proof (another description for the fallacy illustrated by Russell’s Teapot) can be either a logical or non-logical approach. One cannot rightfully shift the burden of proof to the rejecter of a proposition that is based on supposition. If I believe in a teapot and you don’t, I cannot demand that you prove there is no teapot and, then, by your refusal to offer proof, claim that as proof of the object of my belief.

In the above case, where Kilgore imposes a burden of proof, he is only doing so to return it to where it belongs, to those who claim that voting is effective or that not voting is futile. The truth Kilgore relies on is that a vote itself is only a component of systems that produce

various and multitudinous results including problems, stalemates, and even rare solutions. There is no logical way to trace a vote directly to one of those outcomes, and to eliminate all the *other* factors which converge on an outcome.

Life is reasonably simple, we just need to arrange things in proper order. But we must understand a lot of phenomena to do it. We are getting very little help from popular channels. Misinformation is the norm, usable information is the rarity. Motives and manipulation are the norms, clear communication is the rarity. Beliefs, misplaced trust, and wishful thinking are the norms, knowledge, wisdom, and reasoned expectation are the rarities. It is no wonder that voluntaryism is a lifelong learning process. It helps immensely as you determine how to separate the wheat from the chaff.

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