

Euphemisms, Spooner #12, Fallacy #21



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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](#).

You will be relieved to learn that this column is not about the movie, "The Interview," and the scarcely credible idea that we are under cyber-attack from the henchmen of Kim Jong-un. But the column is about some of the fuzzy thinking that leads to ridiculous events such as the POTUS and the CIA giving fresh publicity to the moguls of Hollywood and the Lillipution empire of North Korea.

Euphemisms

We are surrounded by euphemisms constantly. Some, such as "enhanced interrogation" are fairly recent, but others are as old as the original ideas that the euphemist sought to obfuscate.

The particular instance that I am thinking of is in the title of the OLLI course of which I am now the facilitator. I have named this course, "Whatever happened to the age of reason?" As I was doing the early research for authoring this course, I frequently encountered the idea that the Age of Reason was part of the Age of Enlightenment and/or the Renaissance. To me, the use of reason is a far more specific behavior than being enlightened and/or "renaissanced." The exercise of reason is a concrete activity in which one will try, through logic and observance, to separate the true from the false, the probable from the improbable.

I would suspect that enlightenment was used in a way to convince the masses that they were being washed with light from an external source. They were receiving knowledge from a giver. They were being led to know on what side their bread was buttered. The term, renaissance, which means rebirth seemed to imply that the beneficiary was getting a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate — again received from someplace outside herself.

I think of the awakening of reason, in a human, to be a very voluntary and freeing

experience coming from within the individual. One reasons by way of synthesizing received knowledge into individually verified conclusions.

You reason. Note the active verb, to reason. You are enlightened. See the intransitive verb-adjective, to be enlightened. It is something that happens to you, not something that you make happen. You are reborn — again not a behavior initiated by you.

Initiation is a very strong, and critical, word in the world view of the individualist, the rationalist, the voluntarist, the libertarian. First of all, we take responsibility for the consequences for all initiated behavior. Secondly, we reject the initiation of violence toward others. And thirdly each of us initiates the use of reason in dealing with life's events.

Now, we have to ask ourselves, why did the spokespersons of the past try to equate the Age of Reason with the Age of Enlightenment? I intuit that it was to fool others into submissiveness. Enlightenment, in and of itself, is neither a good nor a bad thing. Enlighteners can indoctrinate others in any set of assumptions, true or false. I imagine that government school minions see themselves as “enlighteners.” But, individuals who use reason to navigate their lives directly, without unnecessary intervention from third parties, can rationally guide themselves to voluntary results — all to the good. Even small children are able to learn quickly what does work and what does not.

So collective interests had the incentive to bend the light so that we would see their institutions as the source of the light, we would see church and state as the cause of rational thought and the scientific method.

In actuality, one of my heroes of reason, the brilliant mathematician and logician, Blaise Pascal was also a hero to those who revered both the prevailing religious and aristocratic (unreasoned) presumptions. He was a day-to-day agent for both the church and the state. Fortunately for us, many of his greatest ideas were acceptable to his rulers, and so they are handed down to us today.

Spooner Quote #12

“... whoever desires liberty, should understand [this vital fact], viz.: ... [t]hat no government, so called, can reasonably be trusted for a moment, or reasonably be supposed to have honest purposes in view, any longer than it depends wholly upon voluntary support.”

This advice is among a list of 6 “vital facts” that Lysander Spooner would ask the reasonable man to consider as part of attaining liberty. The complete list can be seen at

Wikiquote. It says simply that there is not possibly any concrete evidence that a government can be trusted. Reason and trust are very incompatible ideas. Reason arises from observation, while trust can only arise from presumption. If one observes all of the evidence about government, the only conclusion can be that government is, in the vast majority of cases, untrustworthy. So a citizen, using rational powers, can have expectations about the performance of government. And he can make decisions about the risks of tolerating the consequences of government. But “trusting in government” is irrational. This irrationality is often made worse by adding to it the delusion that government can make other people conform to arbitrary standards of the majority

Logic Fallacy #21 — Appeal to Authority

If it makes no reasonable sense to trust in institutions, like government, then it makes no sense to accept the claimed authority of its minions, its officials, and its bureaucrats. I may have written before about this logic fallacy that has resulted in the loss of trillions of monetary units and billions of lives all over the world. But I am writing again in light of the foregoing ideas in this column. It's a chicken and egg question whether euphemisms come first, or ill-based trust in the institutional authors of euphemisms, or illogical appeals to the authority of the speakers of euphemisms.

The rational individual must actually base his or her life, and behaviors, on observations and lessons from the small window that he or she has on reality, and one's own reason derived from that reality. While your window may be small, so is everyone else's window. No one else is any more capable of making conclusions and decisions about your own life than you are. Where we go astray is when we accept, unexamined and unquestioned, what someone else claims for truth. There are no shortcuts. You have to deal with your own reality directly.

If we can believe our elders, Socrates said something like, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Or so some authority claims who could translate from the Greek the words that Plato wrote, claiming he had heard them from Socrates. I don't really care where the idea came from, but I do think that it is an idea based on reason. One must, as a voluntarist, take responsibility for examining every received notion for truthfulness and for applicability to one's own life. It is not easy. It is not the lazy man's way. Euphemisms are naked attempts to direct your attention away from the reality. The Age of Reason was an awakening among thinking individuals of the recognition that each is the master of her fate or the captain of her soul. And it was also a recognition of the importance of the self in navigating the universe. It was further a recognition of the falsehood that you can somehow relegate your responsibility for knowing things to some external institution or authority imbedded in such institutions.

Clean your window on the world. Scrape off the layers upon layers of grimy presumption shopped to you by those who have no better a view nor any cleaner a window. Use your reason until you become good at it. Understand the nature of trust versus informed expectation. And confess to yourself that beyond your voluntary exchanges with other individuals there are no authorities.

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