

Heuristics, How Much, Religious Wars



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"Finding the Challenges" is an original bi-weekly 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.

The adventures of Verbal Vol in the last two weeks included the following: continued individualism on the Internet, which has led to the consideration of further guidelines in the voluntary life, to the rehashing of how much government is enough, and to a substantial discussing of the relationship between religion and war.

Thoughts for the Voluntaryist Life Instruction Manual

Everybody needs a set of simple guidelines that are flexible but durable, simple but powerful, clear but meaningful. In computer science we might call these heuristics (rules of thumb, reliable paths, helpful hints). YourDictionary.com says "The definition of heuristic refers to techniques, activities or lessons that allow someone to discover something for himself or by finding solutions through experiments or loosely defined rules." In other words, having an orderly method for learning and acting through trial and error.

Here are a few heuristics I have found that enable the voluntary approach to living:

- Try not to act on anyone else's snap judgments. And rely on your own snap judgments as little as possible.
- Education is life, a part of which may be school, a part of which may be educational, if you understand what education is.
- The Golden Rule is excellent.
- Don't try to do too many things at once. Two things are usually too many.
- You can multitask, but you will still be responsible for each task being done as well as though it received your full intention.
- If you get an offer, it is not because it is a bad deal for the offerer.
- Trust is guesswork. Reliance on experience is analytical work. Expectation is knowledge at work.

- When a human is prepared for self-reliance she will be prepared for interpersonal reliance.

How Much Government is Enough?

My brand of voluntaryism tends to anarchy – the kind where natural law applies to the max, while man-made law is very suspect, therefore I often get into vigorous discussions with others over what should be the role of government. I started as a libertarian thinking that limited government was a good and attainable thing. Then I began to lose the idealistic hope that government could govern itself, so I became a libertarian minarchist. Some say, however, that the difference between a minarchist and an anarchist is about six months. The only part that a minarchist could possibly want to keep would be the part where the government exacts compliance through a threat of violence. If we ask government to help us be secure from violence, then we will have violence *and* government *and* government-initiated violence.

In future columns, we can discuss some factual ideas about anarchy, but space and time prohibit that here.

Looking at the experience in the US. It started as a minarchy, then Alexander Hamilton saw how his whiskey tax central plan was about to go a glimmering. Then the government enforced a central plan, not for the safety of the people, but for making war on the people, but for the preservation of its extortionate central tax plan, and it was off to the races. Let it be permanently recorded that the first “defense” of America was to protect its taxing power in the Whiskey Rebellion.

Minarchy is no more attainable than anarchy, while the state is still in play. Government will not quit buying drones, urban tactical armored vehicles, and other attack gear for law enforcement, sci-fi weapons for the Pentagon, nor surveillance technology for the espionage crowd. People who believe that incremental change works, within the system, are falling farther and farther behind the curve. We can change this today. Start by leaving others alone. Do not use any detached institution to gain personal objectives. Adopt a set of heuristics based on the Non-Aggression Principle, the Golden Rule, and the human gift of reasoning.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in *Notes on Virginia*, “An elective despotism was not the government we fought for,” but Facebook friend RM responded, “Yes...it was!”

Exactly, RM! Maybe Jefferson was clear-sighted enough to envision something other than a mini-British Empire; probably not. But many of them already knew of Alexander Hamilton’s propensities, and shame on them for handing him the micromanagement reins. We really didn’t fight the revolution to throw off the British imperialist model, we just wanted to be in

charge of our own model.

Statists often counter by insisting that we would merely return to serfdom without a civilized state. Statism means, however, that statists support every wretched excess necessary to maintain government in absolute control, so that we don't have to fear the very occasional occurrence of a feudal lord.

Religious Wars

A while ago, one of the my favorite libertarians on facebook, Chris Lyspooner posted an observation, "When I point out religion is used to promote war then I am 'pro-atheist'... when I claim the state is immoral I am 'anti-society.' I wonder where this logic comes from?"

To me this is not logic, it is conflation, the pairing of two distinct, not necessarily connected ideas. Conflation can be useful, a lowering sky may mean rain. But conflation is more likely illogical. The *uses* of religion are separate from the religion itself. The *misuse* of religion is anti-religious. The misuse of religion to promote war is anathema.

The illogic of crying "pro-atheist" is a further, but unsupported conflation. Religion could be used to promote war whether there were a deity or not. Asking for a cessation of using religion to promote war says nothing at all about whether the asker believes in the core values of the religion (or of any religion).

The illogical mashup of government, morals, and society is just as much a *non sequitur*. Government is amoral regardless of the society in which it practices its parasitism.

This discussion was taken on a slight tangent when someone asked whether Buddhism promoted war. The question was not whether religions promoted war, but whether religions were used to promote war. I contend that any religion can be used to promote war whether the religion contains a war promotion philosophy or not. There is often a conflation of the religion itself with the misuses of its practitioners. For instance, should Christ be blamed because his followers continue to be involved in a 2000-year war?

I am not saying for a moment that there may not be war-friendly religions, but I intuit for the most part that religions as a class of objects are based on unwarlike goals. Wars are of this Earth; religions are by their nature not temporal or situational.

There is a further, more subtle conflation here. Religion and belief are often compounded for ill. Religion is the support system for a supersystem of faith. Faith is usually comprised of shared premises and a philosophy. The philosophy has to do with why we follow natural precepts (eg. Why is it wrong to kill another human?), the religion on the other hand is about the memory devices we use to perpetuate the philosophy. We use hymns, buildings,

statues, paintings, garb, scripture, incantations, symbolism, music, and rituals to remind us of the premises of the philosophy. We use religion because it is a powerful incentive to practice the philosophy.

Unfortunately, others may use the great motivational power of religion to sell other commodities. To promote war is possibly the most egregious abuse of religion. To cry out against such a practice has nothing to do with whether you are religious or whether you believe in God.

Religion is also misused in government schools. A token observation of Christianity is used to deliver the subtle message that certain behaviors, certain similarities are demanded. It is the logical fallacy of appeal to authority. Even more onerous is the practice of the religion of Statism, as if citizenship and enlightenment were the same thing.

So we will conclude today by drawing a thread through the parts we have discussed. It's all about using rationality, using your unique rationality as an individual thinker. We can make useful notes to ourselves by thinking ahead, and by making the most of what we have learned through trial and error. Make your own voluntaryist suggestion box and fill it with good heuristics. I am not advocating trapping yourself in rigid plans, but using your imagination to see how what you already know may be applied to novel situations.

Now spend some more time thinking about whether your gifts should be dispersed in worrying about how much government we should have. Develop more heuristics to guide you through the minutia of civics and political science. Try to put the ins and outs of officialdom in their proper perspective.

Then use your heuristics to guard against conflation. Although conflation can be useful, it can more likely lead one astray. Think about which things truly go together and which ones should be kept apart.