Killing Fictional Babies, Spooner Quote #5, Logic Fallacy #12

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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 seems that there is so much going on in the world right now that we cannot, as individuals, keep contact with everything we need to know to survive. The answers are found, not in absorbing tidal waves of news, but in formulating and observing simple principles. Just because we hear something does not mean it is true. Just because emotions have a way of crowding out cool consideration of facts and truths does not mean that we should either ignore or let feelings overwhelm us. And just because someone else asks us to abandon reason in favor of feelings does not mean that we need to follow as unthinking sheep.

Killing Fictional Babies

Yesterday, over on the Facebook group that I moderate, Another 2000+ Libertarian Quotes, someone posted the shocking "news" that ISIS is beheading Christian children. This was, I hope, an honest perception of what is otherwise misinformation. Furthermore, I will presume that there was no harm meant in the spreading of this misinformation.

Now, here is another piece of misinformation (this time meant as satire, but circulated by third parties on social media as actual journalism): An NYPD police officer killed a baby following a breastfeeding dispute with the child's mother.

But soul help me, I feel that these are both attempts to goad me and others into precipitous action that will serve someone else's agenda. The war drums are thrumming loudly in Iraq. The heat is rising in the zone between the American people and its own law enforcement institutions. But now the zealots may be using and, figuratively, killing babies?

The technique would be to play on our confirmation biases. The definition of confirmation bias is "[i]n psychology and cognitive science, confirmation bias (or confirmatory bias) is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions, leading to statistical errors." In other words, we decide in advance what we want to believe.

Voluntaryists have to stop doing that. There must be a baseline of what is true, and what are the acceptable logical extensions of what is true. BOLO, be on the lookout, for people and groups who may try to play you. The person who posted the ISIS story had no possibility of being an eyewitness to such event, yet posted it without any indication otherwise. The "satirical website" that carried the breastfeeding story gave no warning that their post was fictional.

Yesterday, I suspected that the first baby killing above was unconfirmed because I am acutely aware that, and am opposed to, the same crowd (some people call them neo-cons) as usual is trying to talk us into another Middle East war. Yesterday, I suspected that cop-kills-baby yarn was true, because in my opinion, police departments everywhere, for political reasons, are reversing the strong American tenet that any person subject to American law is innocent until proven guilty.

Further research revealed that the first story arose without a factual source (although it could theoretically be true), and the second story is someone's idea of humor, but many others seized upon it as a confirmation of their biases and spread it like wildfire — remember the story of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds*.

Another thing to remember is, "Among the calamities of war may be justly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages," written by Samuel Johnson.

Spooner Quote #5

With every new wave of legislation that gushes from the so-called halls of government, I ask the same question, "Isn't that ***already*** against the law?" This is further and more true of the libraries full of administrative regulations. In my view, even the Ten Commandments are guilty of redundancy, overstatement. Why do we need any more than not killing, not stealing, and not lying as precepts for a natural life?

Lysander Spooner wrote "The ancient maxim makes the sum of a man's *legal* duty to his fellow men to be simply this: '*To live honestly, to hurt no one, to give to every one his due*.' "

I see the Golden Rule therein. I see enough guidance to make a whole life with others and with one's self. Try as I might, I can see no situation in the past, present, or future that

would need more. I could concede that the future has things in store that may be a major surprise, something new under the sun. But I am content, like the country judge, to await the event. I could grant that I don't know everything about the past, but I will fall back on patience, waiting for history to repeat itself in an uncomplicated way. I am quick to agree that I do not have full awareness of the present, but neither does anybody else, and in any event that does not invalidate Spooner's observation.

What Spooner suggests is that we live as close to reality as possible (honesty), that we practice non-violence (hurt no one), and give to others that which cannot be ours (his due). And part number three even means that another may be due some force if he is not practicing part number two.

The most important thing in this precept to me, however, is that I see no possible way to delegate any of these activities to a state that is supposed to enforce these duties on an individual's behalf. We are supposed, by natural law, to govern ourselves — not as a group but as individuals.

Logic Fallacy #12 — Appeal to Emotion

One should always rely on both your head and your heart in processing information, but we should also recognize that there are those, who in search for undue power, seek to engage your heart in order to deceive your head. The baby-killing lies cited above are perfect examples when used with the sort of ill-intent discussed.

Another example would be when a statist school official may try to create self-doubt in someone who hopes to try unschooling. How many arguments are made with the appendage, " … for the children?"

There are good applications of an appeal to emotion, such is always possible when emotions should be involved in decision making. In where and how you teach your children, emotion is always important, maybe the most important factor. But one needs to recognize the danger of abandoning logic in favor of emotion.

It is a clear signal that one is being subjected to bamboozlement when someone else wants to tell you how you should feel about a situation. As in, "there are millions of starving children who would like to have your food," trying to invoke guilt feelings to get a certain performance. Will the guilt ploy ever go away in our culture?

But tempting us to go to war based on emotions, to my mind, is inexcusable. Hoping we will forget the Golden Rule based on fear, revulsion, and hatred is, in my rational construction, despicable. This is particularly so when the goads to emotionalism are based on lies or half-known possibilities, no matter how well intended.

I didn't embark on this column a year-and-a-half ago, intending to link the three parts of each edition, but again, with this column, it appears that I have done so. All three segments above deal with the idea of emotions as an adjunct to rational behavior. The infanticide untruth and the logic fallacy warn us that others may see their best interests served in our acceptance of emotional appeals and our rejection of our own reasoning powers. Many see this as the legitimate role of politics — inducing nonthinking in the populace while acting with impunity on the inclinations of the elite. In the middle segment, the "Spooner Segment," we see that our individual interests, however, can only be served by self-governance according to simple, but powerful principles.

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