

Logic Fallacies, No Regrets, Hard Winter



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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](#).

This week I will share with you an amazing web site for Voluntaryists and introduce a new series of discussions, hoping to weaken one of the greatest classes of obstacles to critical thinking – the logic fallacy. Then I will look at the philosophy of intent versus acceptance in how we deal with the past, present, and future in terms of our own accomplishments. And then I will finish by talking about the weather.

A Voluntaryist Wiki

The heading of this section is a link to a wonderful web site created by David Robins. I passionately urge you to check it out. Maybe you will want to be a contributor. Get a feel for it, and see what you think. Another excellent link is "Your logical fallacy is ..."*

My favorite part of David's creation is called "Statist Fallacies." And this brings me to the introduction of a new series of discussions in this column – Logic Fallacies. For the most part, fallacies used by statist are special cases of the broader general category of Logic Fallacies. I think one of the best actions that a voluntaryist can take is to study logic fallacies, along with logic itself. This is so that you can begin to recognize some of the faulty arguments against voluntaryism, then quit using fallacies yourself, and then help your family, friends, associates, and acquaintances to quit using them (very diplomatically, of course).

In each column, I will cover 1, 2, or 3 classic logic fallacies. This time I will cover the *Ad Hominem* logic fallacy, because we all know it – it is the uncivilized conversation stopper that we have all experienced. If you make a rational overture to another, presumed competent, person, but they respond with a negative, discounting your query or you personally, then you have experienced an *ad hominem*. Most of us experienced it initially very early in our childhood ("You're not old enough to talk about that yet" or the always

pleasant “That’s just dumb”).

As you grow older, you will see more sophisticated *ad hominem*s, such as “I didn’t know you couldn’t read, because if you could you would know ... blah blah blah.” The uses of this fallacy are polluting intelligent analysis almost everywhere you look.

A formal definition of the fallacy is — An *ad hominem* (Latin for “to the man” or “to the person”), short for *argumentum ad hominem*, is a general category of fallacies in which a claim or argument is rejected on the basis of some irrelevant fact about the author of or the person presenting the claim or argument.

So, first an *ad hominem* is an attempt to avoid intelligent discussion. Second, it may be an attempt to intimidate. And third it may be a maneuver to steer the discussion to a less relevant path where the respondent is more comfortable.

Rest assured, when your interlocutor has fallen back on this ploy, the argument is already over. The trouble is that often the other person does not know this, except for a vague unease that they have made the wrong choice. It is usually best to change the subject, for the time being, because people will defend a wrong choice for an amazing amount of time, if challenged on it.

A voluntaryist will try again at a more propitious time, until she determines that the other person is just not amenable to the line of conversation. Whatever you do, don’t take the *ad hominem* ploy (often called “attack”) personally. It is irrelevant.

No Regrets

One of my voluntaryist Facebook friends posted a quotation the other day that said this, “The deepest personal defeat suffered by human beings is constituted by the difference between what one was capable of becoming and what one has in fact become.” This comes from Ashley Montagu. I shared the quote because I thought it was quite profound.

But a few days later, I began to have second thoughts. I began to realize there is more to it than this. And the more has to do with voluntaryism. If you have lived your life as a voluntaryist, I believe that such a personal defeat is unlikely. Even if you have just recently converted to voluntaryism, but plan to be this way for the rest of your life, your personal defeats go away.

I thought of Robbie Burns’ observation, “The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men, Gang aft a-gley [often go awry] ... ” So I looked up that poem, “To a mouse,” and it is a beauty. Here’s a full version. We all remember the best-laid schemes line, because it is universal, but the finish of the poem carries the tale. The mouse is able to live in the present, enjoying or fretting about the fullness of life, without the burden of the past and the torture

of trying to see the future.

In every moment, there is a difference between what is and what might have been. Sometimes the difference is a shortfall, but think about how many times the difference has surpassed your wildest dreams. Do not get hung up in central planning, even if it is yourself planning your own life. To always regard the difference as a personal defeat is to always see the glass as half empty, maybe empty. Others cannot gauge your life. To see your life, and your principles, and the people that you love, and the structures that you build as positives is the highest aim of voluntarism.

Even before I became a voluntarist, the difference between what I am and what I could have been has been amazing. And it changes every day – I can't wait to see what's next.

A Hard Winter

At last, all the jamokes who predict winter from “signs” are correct. They have been predicting hard winters here in Kentucky every year since I moved here in 1947. Every great once in a while, they get it right. I can remember half a dozen or so of these deep freezes in that time, and even a snow drift or two. Ice storms? Yeah, we've had a few, because we live in the belt where the winter doesn't usually know what it wants to do. My fellow old-timers out here in the country always predict the coming of the next ice age, that way they will be pleasantly surprised for the most part.

But truth be told, Kentucky has been in the global warming belt since time immemorial, or at least since Reelfoot Lake was formed. I remember once when the Dr. Pepper thermometer at the Liberty Furniture Store read 122 degrees F. in the shade. But it wasn't a dry heat. In fact, heat or cold, it wasn't dry here in Kentucky. Low humidity is 94% in these hills. Well, I'm getting at two things here: I'm enjoying this winter, and humans couldn't predict tomorrow if the information was tattooed on the inside of their eyelids. The only things I can predict for tomorrow is that the State of the Union address will not have said much, and that the calendar will have a date for then. But to paraphrase some great advice that Amanda Billyrock shared, even when you're having a bad day, look at your track record – it says you have survived 100% of your bad days so far.

I'm glad to be anywhere, even on a cold winter's day. Thanks to my cold weather gear from the local farm supply store, I have been able to be outside for a couple of hours every day, hauling hay, feeding horses, carrying water, riding the tractor, and moving mountains of manure. When I think of this, and my 70 years, I'll quote another friend, Merle Haggard, when he sings “My Life's Been Grand.”

An old friend once suggested that one could build a house on a cog railway going up the side of one of the Smokey Mountains. Then one could just move the house up or down until the climate suited. But if I did that – and it worked – my built-in inertia would mean that I

never got to experience a hard winter again – and that would be a loss. And I’m not sure it would work in a “polar vortex.”

I’m not predicting anything, but Spring will likely arrive around St. Patrick’s Day.

If I can spot a common theme in the above essays, it could be about the eternal balance between that which may be chosen versus that which is inevitable. Some may argue that there is no choice, that there is no free will, that all is predetermined. But the tens of thousands of choices that we each must make in a day, together with the results of these choices – an extremely complex one-day history – do not attest to predetermination. The massive heap of communications and miscommunications that we endure every day do not attest to predetermination. The tremendous variety of our environment, changing as it does everyday, does not attest to predetermination. All of these, rather, speak to self-determination and the power of the individual.

** I will gently nudge the author of the site for a few subtle gaffes: A fallacy cannot be logical – an oxymoron, a fallacy can only masquerade as logic; the illustration of the three philosophers is an appeal to authority; and the celestial background is an appeal to emotion, in my view. None of this ad hominem observation, however, cancels the fact that this is a wonderful poster and web site. I encourage all voluntaryists to use it, and internalize it. I have no financial interest in the admirable business that offers this site, but I have an immense interest in the cessation of the use and tolerance of logic fallacies.*

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