

Mission Creep, Founding Voluntaryists, Rigor



Send him mail. [f](#) [t](#)

"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.

There are many current events to write about this week — more intense dissection of flags and how they should or shouldn't be worshiped, Donald Trump gets another purple heart for having shot himself in the foot again (I've lost count), the state of Greece is bankrupt just like all the other states who are clucking their tongues at Greece, and although the Supreme Court still has no idea what it is doing (happily for same sex partners) there is no inkling that either the media or the populace has much of an idea either.

But I'm going to pass on these juicy bits, giving them time to mellow. Instead, I will focus on some stories that have not just broken in the last two weeks. We will look at the continuing upward spiral of state violence in the US against its own constituents. We will take a longer view through Murray Rothbard's description of the American Independence from state tyranny (Happy Fourth of July!) And then we will look at the fallacy that allows us to put so much emphasis on ritual and rehash rather than seeking value in return for our investment in life.

Mission Creep in Derbytown

I have just, in the last week, begun to participate in a group called Socrates Cafe. The group meets weekly in the Highlands neighborhood of Louisville, KY, the home of the Kentucky Derby, the first leg of the Triple Crown. It is a very interesting and wide ranging set of people.

We spent the first hour of our meeting with a low octane reading and discussion of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This did not catch on either because the philosopher's ideas were too convoluted or the translation was too poor to hold anyone's attention. But the second hour was devoted to a discussion of the intermediate effects of a fatal police shooting in one of Louisville's old neighborhoods.

First, I want to declare that Louisville has not had a lurid cops and miscreants history. But awhile ago a Louisville LEO confronted a man and ended by shooting him twice. There was a business establishment video camera that caught some of the encounter. The video clip is inconclusive and facts have been garbled, at best, by the procedural matters, the law itself, the law enforcement institution itself (both the command structure and the police labor union), the media, the politics. In truth, there is not enough uncorrupted information in anybody's possession to even have an opinion.

The surprising thing at the Socrates Cafe, however, was the willingness of attendees to offer conclusive opinions that stretched hither, thither, and yon. But these opinions were offered with intriguing intelligence, even if with no probability of accuracy, in most cases. Enough so that I will be going back.

But my concern was that, in this instance, we did not raise the discussion to one of principles, logic, and long term learning (with perhaps a consequence of gained wisdom). Some even tried to beg the question by characterizing any debate as right vs. left babble.

So if the debate is going to remain a squabble over details, which no one really knows, how will we raise the level to meaningful inquiry? Is there a police problem in this country? Is the justice system part of the problem or part of the solution. Do we have a spiral of converting all law enforcement to the policy context of SWAT? Do we have an avalanche of co-opting our local guardians into minions of the warfare state? Who is being served, and who is being protected?

The situation was made more fuzzy (pun intended) by the presence of a war for publicity from the offices of the Mayor, the Commissioner, and the President of the Fraternal Order of Police

I tried to introduce the idea of mission creep to the group. As a longtime reader of Radley Balko and William N. Grigg, I have been following developments for quite some time. And I heard an excellent podcast from Tom Woods recently where he interviewed a researcher into some of the very disturbing recent statistics on officer-involved citizen deaths. Deaths are not the only indicator of problems — there are many disturbing additional trends — lack of accountability, bleed through to excessive attention toward pre-crime, killing of domestic dogs, the expansion of military procedures, drones, the perversion of constitutional guarantees, excessive violence.

Rothbard Quote #2

[The classical liberal founders] explicitly strived for the virtual elimination of government from American life. It was to be a government without a standing army or navy; a government without

debt and with no direct federal or excise taxes and virtually no import tariffs—that is, with negligible levels of taxation and expenditure; a government that does not engage in public works or internal improvements; a government that does not control or regulate; a government that leaves money and banking free, hard, and uninflated; in short, in the words of H.L. Mencken’s ideal, “a government that barely escapes being no government at all.”

According to Murray Rothbard, who wrote the above passage in the opening chapter of *For a New Liberty*, mission creep is not a new phenomenon. Common logic tells you that good government is minimal government. Real government, however, (not good government) relies on proliferation to appear to be doing good. After a time (the USA are just over a decade away from a quarter of a millennium in power), the state is like The Blob. Its good works might be listed on a single page of paper — maybe a Post-It Note. I would be hard pressed to say what might have been the golden ages of Rome, Spain, Napoleon, Britain, or America.

In any dimension that Rothbard cites or implies — intervention, militarism, taxation, spending, bloat, overreach, authoritarianism, process constipation — the state in America is teetering on the brink of collapse.

Logic Fallacy #30 — Rigor Makes Right

“Philosophy makes progress not by becoming more rigorous but by becoming more imaginative.” - Richard Rorty

My good friend, colleague and EVC Podcast *aficionado*, Phillip Eger, posted the above quote this week on Facebook. I love it when cosmoes are caught in short sentences. Richard Rorty tells us succinctly that all that glitters is not gold, that process alone is not product, that appearances do not equal reality. We are too often presented with a result that, though arduously produced, turns out to be rather mundane.

I remember a moment in the George Bush (the younger) years when the POTUS himself embarrassingly tried to cover for some embarrassing episode by protesting, “We’re working hard ... we’re working on Sunday!” But what can that mean in a realistic value system? It’s an abstraction without intrinsic worth. No matter how hard the work, the *fiasco* remains.

Rigor, and all kinds of procedural dodges, are used to blur a lack of substance.

I once was the President of the Kentucky Genealogical Society, wherein I frequently may have been at odds with the rigor crowd. I had no objection to them — their point was correct in the long run. It is certain that the permanent record should be maintained at a high level of factuality, that as with good science discoveries should be repeatable, that the process of discovery should be as well documented as the substance of the discovery. But we should never abandon a willingness to take chances on slim information. In the search you are free to reject a bad lead at any time. Rigor is only necessary to validate discovery; rigor cannot be taken as counterfeit discovery. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, even if that step might be in the wrong direction. And we should never assign value to a thing based solely on the amount of hand-wringing done over it.

Philosopher Richard Rorty is telling us that inspiration is the goal, not processing. A ton of process may add weight, but it cannot guarantee a single ounce of inspiration.

In the end, we seem to be permanently misled by hustle and bustle, bells and whistles, shiny objects. We value appearance far more than actuality. The proliferation of law enforcement legions, the metastasis of the state in general, and our curious misapprehension that leads us to believe that process trumps product — these are all signs of a culture, and a dynamic amalgam of cultures, that is disintegrating before our eyes. Do not volunteer to aid and abet the destroyers.

Read more from “Finding the Challenges”: