

On Values



Send him mail.

"Food for Thought" is an original column appearing every other Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Norman Imberman. Norman is a retired podiatrist who loves playing piano, writing music, lawn bowling, bridge, reading, classical music, going to movies, plays, concerts and traveling. He is not a member of any social network, nor does he plan on becoming one. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FFT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

In November 1989 my daughters, Valerie and Jill, who were the ages of 23 and 21 respectively, asked me some philosophical/political questions about values, that deserved a thoughtful answer. This article is the result.

The Unabridged Random House Dictionary defines barbarous as, "emphasizes the inhumanity and cruelty of barbarian life," and defines barbarian as "a man in a savage primitive state; uncivilized person." Civil is defined as, "marked by benevolence; pertaining to the rights of individuals."

Humans have the distinct characteristic of having free will. This means that man has the ability to choose his own goals and thus has the constant task of determining what methods he must use to achieve his goals. His knowledge does not come automatically. Mental and physical effort must be expended for man to attain his goals in order to survive.

When we observe human action we notice that individuals behave either in such a manner as to try to gain and/or keep things, or they try to avoid things. The things towards which man acts to gain and/or keep are called Values. Such values can be material, such as tables, chairs, houses, automobiles and money, or they can be spiritual (non-material) such as friendship, love, beliefs, discoveries, inventions and life itself. Values also exist in a hierarchical structure, which varies from person to person and is constantly changing in the same person minute by minute. Individuals are also capable of making mistakes so that what an individual perceives to be a value may eventually turn out to be a dis-value or non-value.

Since a value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep, one must determine the various generic methods that one can utilize to gain and/or keep values. Man exists possessing certain faculties or abilities. Nature, in its raw state also exists as the given. When man

incorporates his abilities with what Nature supplies, he becomes a producer.

Some examples of production are the act of picking an apple off of a tree, the planting of the apple seeds, the cutting down of the apple tree in order to make a table out of the wood. In each case the individual holds the apple, the orchard or the table as a value. He can utilize each item himself, or he can trade it for something else which he wants more than the item he originally possessed. In the case of trade, he would rather have the thing received than the thing given or he wouldn't have made the exchange. He can also give it away as a gift, in which case he values the enjoyment he receives from giving, more than continuing to possess or use that which he gifted. Notice that during all of these transactions no individual is being harmed.

Values can also be obtained by other means. An individual can steal it, extort it by threatening harm to the owner, or he can perpetrate fraud to attain it.

We can now see that values can be attained by one of two generic methods — voluntarily or involuntarily. Voluntary exchange of values is called trade. Involuntary exchange is called theft or plunder. All values can be traded whether it is money, chairs, automobiles, etc. or whether it is love and friendship. Values can also be attained through the use of a gun, by the threat of the use of a gun, by the threat of bodily harm, or by fraud. Realize that when force is used, it is no longer a trade. The use of force or fraud is called coercion, which is the source of all plunder.

How can one determine whether or not a value was given up voluntarily? It's certain that one can't ask the person who gained the value. One must ask the person who relinquished the value, for only the person who no longer has the value knows if he gave it up freely or if it was coerced from him. Therefore, individuals can deal with one another voluntarily, by choice, or involuntarily, by plunder. Note there is no third alternative.

Let's consider the following examples:

You break into my home and you take my \$5,000 and make it your own. Did I relinquish my value voluntarily?

You tell me that if I do not give you my \$5,000, you will force me into a locked room in your home. I therefore give you the \$5,000. Did I relinquish it voluntarily?

You convince your friend to break into my home and take my \$5,000 and it is OK because I'm not a nice guy anyway. Did I relinquish it voluntarily?

You convince Hitler and his Gestapo that it is OK to take my \$5,000. Did I relinquish it voluntarily?

You convince the entire world to do the same. Is it voluntary?

The good humanitarian people of your community get together and by consensus decide to give you permission to take my \$5,000, without my permission, in order to help build a new hospital in the community, and they will even let me use the hospital if I should need it, as long as I pay my hospital bill. Is it voluntary?

Does the number of people who approve of the act determine whether or not it is voluntary or involuntary? Does the purpose for which the plundered value is used determine if it is an act of coercion? Does the extent or type of harm suffered by the victim determine if it is coerced?

In my mind and in my life the characteristics of a civil individual is one who attains his values by voluntary means and more importantly, does not sanction or condone involuntary behavior, whether it be perpetrated by an individual or by a group of individuals. Performing or sanctioning involuntary acts is the hallmark of the barbarian. There is one principle that I consider to be undebatable when it comes to human interaction and behavior. I state it as follows:

“No individual or group of individuals should use involuntary means (coercion) to attain values from others.”

This means that the initiatory use of force or fraud in dealing with a fellow man is not part of a civilized person's behavior, nor is it the type of behavior a civilized person sanctions or condones in others, especially if he desires to live in a peaceful civilized society. The use of coercion or its threat against one's fellow man is as much an act of war or aggression as is the initiatory attack of the soldiers of one country against the citizens of another country. Peace and war are opposites. Voluntary acts and involuntary acts are opposites. (Self-defense is not aggression and is a viable concept).

How do you rate yourself in your desire to live in peace? Do you sanction involuntary behavior? I know that you personally would not behave in such a barbarous manner, but do you think it is a good idea when groups of others do it? Do you ever ask other groups to behave in such a manner on your behalf or on the behalf of others? Can sanctioning involuntary acts against your fellow man, for what you consider to be a good cause, be considered as a benevolent position?

To be truly benevolent one has to be civilized and practice and preach only voluntary behavior. An important point is that a good intention may seem to be benevolent but an intention *per se* is without any substance. It is only action that can be classified as either benevolent or malevolent and has any substance. It is an old but true cliché that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Look at the world today. Are there truly any civilized countries? We have a mixture of extremely barbarous lands and less barbarous lands, including the United States of America. In the United States, what percentage of values is obtained involuntarily? Our entire social structure is based upon plunder.

Values can be eroded so slowly that it may be too late to do anything about it by the time one recognizes that the methods used are through plunder. Look at what happened in Nazi Germany. Look at what is happening in our country today. Freedom was one of our greatest values. It was the main value upon which this country was built. But freedom means being free from having involuntary acts forced upon you. It is no coincidence that the U.S.A., (the country with the greatest degree of freedom) has the greatest number of voluntary transactions and therefore the greatest amount of prosperity and security. But notice how as our freedom becomes eroded, (through an increasing number of involuntary acts forced upon us), all of our social problems become aggravated. Increased crime, increased urban decay, increased homelessness, increased drug problems, increased illiteracy, poorer education, increased problems with healthcare, increased child and spousal abuse, and a general feeling of insecurity are some examples. This is no coincidence. There is a correlation between the degree of voluntarism and the extent of social problems that exists at any one time in a society.

Chose one or the other! There is no third alternative. Voluntarism or involuntarism is your only choice—civilized behavior or barbarism. It is a matter of life or death in the long run. Those who chose involuntarism, realize what you stand for. Such behavior must result in the destruction and an eventual end to civilization. You are part of the very social problems that you are trying to solve. For those who chose voluntarism, I applaud you. Your benevolent behavior and ideology can help create a more constructive and progressive society and a more secure civilization. You are to be commended and held in the highest esteem by others of good will towards their fellow man. You are part of the solution.

Let's try benevolence. Let's try only voluntary action. Let's try to recognize all behavior as voluntary or involuntary and speak out against those acts that we recognize as involuntary. Let's spread the idea of civilized behavior.