

# Opinions, Treaty of Versailles, the Manhattan Project



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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](#).*

Last time, we discussed lies and their pervasive place in everyday life. This column we will explore a kind of lie, more complex, more insidious, more difficult to sniff out: poorly founded opinions. And a few columns back, I began to discuss the Winnies, a series of citations of what I considered to be the biggest train wrecks of American foreign policy. Parenthetically, let me remind you that the Winnies are named for Winston Churchill, who in my view was the epitome of the calculating, miscalculating statist. If I were to devise such a list today there might be some omissions and additions to that earlier list, since I am continuously involved in new acquisition of information. But I feel certain that my top three would stay in the top three, perhaps four or five. So with this week's writing I cover two of the top three, and I will get to the Yalta Conference with the next edition.

## **Opinion is Dominated by Suspect Communication, Poor Thinking Skills**

If an utterance is "just" an opinion – not, for example, a reasoned argument or the product of critical thinking – it is bad at a minimum, but worse, usually has bad consequences. Opinions are useless. Think how humiliating it would be to call anything that you have invested time and effort toward an opinion. And yet opinions abound. Are we under the illusion that others cannot see that these are opinions? Sure, there are those who are fooled by opinions, but there are those who are not.

An opinion, that cannot be lifted by evidence to the level of a supported view, is a trivial, but damaging, missile, launched from a platform of garbled communication. The Obamacare "debate" and the illusion of fiscal responsibility in government are two battlegrounds for which the air is filled with these missiles, mostly armed with stink bomb warheads. Two of the stink bombs are: people have a right to health care (we can't even decide what a right is, but in no event is it a thing which can be doled out by government), and it would be fiscally irresponsible to provide health care for everyone (which begs the

question of when government was ever fiscally responsible).

As I think about this problem, I don't see it as a tight topic for one column. In a way, all of my writings are about this cognitive disconnect. At the heart of the disconnect seems to be the modern idea that having an opinion is a positive happenstance. The motto seems to be, if you can't know something then the next best thing is to have an opinion. We also labor under the misconception of a beast called an "informed" opinion – sometimes an informed opinion is built on someone else's informed opinion, which in likelihood is an uninformed opinion. How much – and what type of – information would push the needle beyond "informed" on the knowledge meter?

Incomplete knowledge and opinion are two different things. An opinion is an attempt to negate the passage of events, a denial of time. An opinion is often based on a snapshot of known things, but it is very seldom updated with new data. And often people will resort to violence rather than going to the trouble of gathering new data. I site the bogus confederate flag controversy in my native South as a persistent example.

Why wouldn't a voluntarist, finding himself in a state of incomplete knowledge, voluntarily pursue enough knowledge to be able to dispense with opinion to dwell rather in the realm of likelihood for the nearest future?

**The Treaty of Versailles** – It is incredible to contemplate all of the magical thinking that has plagued Europe since its colonization by the Roman Empire, but the Treaty of Versailles, purportedly ending World War I, was perhaps the finest distillate of a millenium of unforeseen consequences of desperately bad decisions. And who went out of his way, to defy his own principles, to enable the outrage? It was Woodrow Wilson. The Treaty of Versailles, in punitively crushing Germany economically, merely perpetuated and did not resolve at all, the anti-human presumptions of a thousand years of monarchy and repressive religions in Europe. The treaty was something worthy of a pissing contest, but nothing higher. We suffer today from the horrendous missing of an opportunity to introduce freedom and individual self-determination among our species. Wilson skulked away from his responsibility here just to keep his fantastical League of Nations alive in his pedantic mind.

Of course we all know today that turning Germany into a waste land was the gateway for Hitler. It was also step one in the march toward global financial depression. And finally, it set the stage for the highly predictable World War II, which was, in true perspective, just another episode in the statist, monarchical, religious wars that had swept Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire.

We will see a parallel with FDR and WWII, but Wilson sidestepped an actual peace because he did not have the solidity to insist upon it. Instead, he cloaked himself with the fairy tale

mantle of the man who made the world safe for democracy (see earlier Winnie on democracy) and who was the champion of the League of Nations (even his own Congress would not agree to this failure in the making). Just as we continue to kick the can down the road on the critical issues of today (such as the national debt), so did the politicians of yesterday – ensuring that we would have their cans as well as our own.

By the way, there are many excellent analyses of the Treaty of Versailles, so I encourage you to begin reading.

**The Manhattan Project** – The Hiroshima-Nagasaki results of this project were, along with Yalta, as the Treaty of Versailles was to World War I, the cowardly legacy of statism from World War II that would burden the world for generations, if not all time, thereafter.

Of course, I am being a skylarking optimist when I predict that this is just a burden that may last for all time. It may eventuate as the termination of human existence, in which case there will not be a thing called “all time.”

Letting the genie out of the bottle. Opening a can of worms. Ringing a bell that cannot be unrung. Squeezing the toothpaste out of the tube. Unleashing the furies.

I am sure we can come up with even more imaginative ways to kill great numbers of ourselves, if we have a future in which to do so, but it is hard to imagine a more myopic use of science. We can now see, for instance, that the average scientist has no real concern for knock on outcomes, as long as he can get a government to pay for his/her noodling around. In one sense, how do the antics of the Los Alamos crowd differ in kind from the experiments of Dr. Mengele, the syphilis trials at Tuskegee Institute, or any other “what if?” exercise conducted with disadvantaged humans as lab rats?

Well, I am sure that we can come up with ever more maniacal ways. I live just tens of miles from one of the largest stock piles in the world of nerve gas. And the clapper is that the geniuses who dreamed this up, don’t know how to stand down – the government and its army have no clue as to how to neutralize and destroy their invention. Once you have a tiger by the tail, how do you release it?

Worse yet. Other countries lower in the pecking order of world powers have followed in the pursuit of atomic warfare. Some of these are “civilized countries,” such as the UK (heh heh) and France (heh heh) who between them have been in every war in modern memory, not to mention the great kindness of colonialism. Then there is Israel, one of the most traumatized groups of people ever, who live in the midst of other people who consider them to be invaders. How about Saudi Arabia, who some people say have booby-trapped their oil fields with dirty nuclear devices? India? Who knows? Pakistan and North Korea are two completely bat droppings crazy regimes, products of the lovely idea of partitioning (a proven winner for peace, he wrote satirically).

One must ask the question, will we improve posterity by evolving or by extinguishing ourselves?

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It is easier to tolerate the resting condition of a usable opinion than it is to cope with the unrest of learning new facets of the real world, but it is intellectually lazy and, even worse, likely to produce a long term future of friction and dislocation. It's very much like kicking the can down the road, as we have done with statism for a thousand years. But it is extremely dangerous, particularly when we fool ourselves that we are pursuing science. We don't just have a nuclear cloud hanging over our horizon, we are eternally exposed to the possibility that, in the pursuit of science, we will make a grave assumption that obliterates us for the remainder of time. More voluntary seeking of truth and considering its import may be the most effective means of forestalling such an event.