Process, Spooner #11, Specious Accuracy

Send him mail.

"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.

Wow! We are 15 years into the second millennium, with only 985 left to go until 3K. *Tempus fugit*! One wonders how many more times we will do the same things while expecting different results. For instance, will we fix computer coding and architecture in time to avoid a Y21C (*year 2100*) crisis? Each of the three topics for today are about human foibles. Will we ever come to terms with them?

Process Kills Product

There is an inseparable pairing within everything. All products are born of processes. Each person, place, event, or object has a history with an origin and a process. Nothing springs consummately from the ether. So, in a natural sense, process is a creative behavior that leads directly to results. By extension, one or more processes must be initiated to produce change. There lies a problem.

People with various interests have various degrees of patience with change. This covers a spectrum from those who are content to await the rhythms of the Universe to those who must have a continual maelstrom of artificial change in their sphere of influence. You might also see that this spectrum stretches from the self-contained individual to the one who is driven mad by lack of outward control.

In any event, to the extent that one feels the need and power to change reality for herself and others, there must be introduced an artificial process. The artificial process must take that which pre-exists in reality (input), subject it to a transformational process, and realize concrete change in affected people, places, objects, and events (output, or product). But you have to wonder, as Bastiat did, are the architects of these processes made of a finer clay than those of us who are willing to await the natural outcomes? By what right do they intervene?

Now, we come to the most perverse effect of process, that in which a process outlasts its original intent, but then is prolonged through further, and more dissociated, artificial processes. War is a horrendous example of this. Each war is an artificial induction of change that spurs newer control freaks to seek to adjust for the unwanted change. As my Grandfather said, "the more you stir up [something that stinks] the more it will stink."

Do you recognize this scenario? Aren't we looking at the operation of the Law of Unforeseen Consequences? These consequences produce two relative populations, those who are satisfied with the *status quo* and those who are dissatisfied with the *status quo.* The ones who are profiting through the state (a word that comes from *status quo*) will fight like demons to preserve the processes, more specifically the side effects, that inure to their benefit. In doing so, they will often turn the processes in upon themselves so that they no longer produce change but they continue to produce side effects.

Government schools are an excellent example. Although hindsight informs us perfectly that government schools are the perfect indoctrination and control mechanism. They do not produce individual education, as surely was originally intended, they produce groupthink. And they produce pieces of the machine that obviously have more control, power, and influence than would a more natural construction. Soon every activity becomes one designed to keep certain functionaries in control, in power, and with extortionate influence.

The next time you see the application of a process, ask yourself whether the ruling in question is intended to improve the outcome or to preserve the machine. If the balance weighs heavily toward the preservation of a machine, you may need to consider removing yourself from the sphere of influence of the machine.

Spooner Quote #11

> *That the principle of allowing each man to have, (so far as it is consistent with the principles of natural law that he can have,) all the fruits of his own labor, would conduce to a more just and equal distribution of wealth than now exists, is a proposition too self-evident almost to need illustration. It is an obvious principle of natural justice, that each man should have the fruits of his own labor; and all arbitrary enactments by governments, interfering with this result, are nothing better than robbery. It is also an obvious fact, that the property produced by society, is now distributed in very unequal proportions among those whose labor produced it, amid with very*

> *little regard to the actual value of each one's labor in producing it. And this fact is not the result – except in a partial degree – of the superior mental capacities, which enable some men, consistently with honesty and fair competition, to compass more of the means of acquiring wealth than others; but it is the result, in a very important measure, of arbitrary and unjust legislative enactments, and false judicial decisions, which actually deprive a large potion of mankind of their right to the fair and honest exercise of their natural powers, in competition with their fellow men. –from* Poverty: Its Illegal Cause and legal Cure

Lysander Spooner, in every quotation we pull, is always addressing the degree to which any system has drifted away from the natural toward the presumptive allocation of power. So here is a good rule of thumb for choosing voluntaryist behavior: does any event depend more on your individual power and that of another individual to make a voluntary agreement on your mutual association, or does it involve a presumption of superior or inferior power in the other individual. If the latter, then think about changing it by voluntary agreement or leaving it.

Logic Fallacy #20 — Specious Accuracy

Oftentimes, the persuader will cover for his lack of information by dithering with over-exact information on small matters. I'm not here to start another debate about climate change, but whenever humans begin talking about weather in tenths of degrees, that is not a level of accuracy that is supported by the available information. The difference between 0.4 and 0.5 is most frequently an artifact of the calculation, not a reflection of a discernible difference.

On the other hand, the law of large numbers may make predictions of averages possible within a few decimal places. If you have enough temperature sensors distributed randomly around the Earth, you can be relatively confident of long term averages. But this is provided that you have no threats to validity which may produce distortions greater than the accuracy you are claiming.

Here's a threat to validity to consider. Temperature sensors are NOT distributed at random. True randomness is usually unreachable. But let's take the case of the climatologists. Have you ever heard any of them claim that temperatures are derived totally at random? I'll dare say not. So are they telling us the full story or just trying to

create an impression when they say that the Earth's climate has a temperature of such-and-such POINT such-and-such, and that it is changing at a rate of such-and-such per such-and-such.

When some one tells you that the Great Lakes comprise one-fifth of the Earth's fresh water surface by area, shouldn't one pause to think who is in charge of assembling all of the data on fresh water surface areas? Do Russian scientists measure Lake Baikal and the River Volga? Or does the UN send scientists to all member countries? And who might be the countries who participate?

Most quantitative expressions are made up of knowns, estimates for unknowns, and factors for unknown unknowns; in other words, one precise part, and two guestimates. Very seldomly do we also get the ground rules for the precision or the guesswork.

If you don't think that fallacies committed with numbers and statistics are extremely serious just reflect on this one, paraphrasing, when we take over Iraq again in just a few weeks, the oil alone will more than pay the cost of the operation. Or we can take the Social Security program, where we did not have enough knowns, we had no clue about how to put a perimeter around the unknowns, nor any idea to limit the extent of our lack of knowledge.

When one makes giant-sized bad assumptions, what good does it do to process the resulting information with precision to multiple decimal places? A friend once told me that there is no amount of processing that will turn manure into ice cream.

As the squad room sergeant used to caution on Hill Street Blues, let's be careful out there. I don't make New Year's resolutions, but I am resolved to look out for the reality beneath all levels of information exchange. I am going to evaluate processes that have been designed by others for some purported good, and I am determined to be wary of processes that have been subverted to hidden agenda. Also I will be aware that the only way to enter a voluntary agreement is when there are no presumptions about a foregoing unilateral right of authority. And I will not be deceived by numerical tap dances, hand waving about precision, scope-a-dope calculus, and percentage-wise folderol.
Have a great new year!

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