

Roads, Natural Statism, the Singularity



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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](#).

It is always useful, it seems to me, to refine the purpose of this column – it is to find some agreed upon problems to use as opportunities to integrate voluntaryist principles into the solutions to what may seem to be just workaday problems or huge intractable obstacles.

To pursue this purpose, let's look at three areas. A big stumbling block for ridding ourselves of statist, even authoritarian, excuse making is the idea of roads – who will provide them in a voluntaryist world? A related problem – governments – will lead us to a consideration of what they are, how they arise, and whether they arise naturally in the human condition; with consultation from Aristotle. And the last problem for this week will be a view of that which is called "the Singularity," and what it may purport for the future.

Roads

Making usable trails has been a natural skill of every animate species in natural history, until the terrorists discovered that they could make people reject their innate capabilities to become dependent on terrorists. This was largely accomplished through the introduction of clocks and the concept of tardiness.

Here I use "terrorists" as a metaphor for bureaucrats who insist upon justifying themselves by sowing fears (terror) among their constituents. Roads are an excellent example of one of the clubs with which we are to be beaten by the collectivists.

There are a few very serious problems with government roads, most of which are as immediate as your last trip in your car, and others which are as close as the evening news. The ability to move from one location to another is a prerequisite to freedom only falling behind sustenance, shelter, and meaningful security in terms of importance. Yet the state intervenes more in transportation than food or shelter. The massively expensive infrastructure is falling apart before our eyes. Traffic patterns from decades ago – the

interstate highway system was inaugurated in the Eisenhower administration – still grip the system in an ironclad fist. After all, the planners didn't even see the coming growth of the trucking industry. Safety is not even worth discussing. Allocation of resources is still decided by the political process, not by analysis of true objectives, not by market choices.

The secret priesthood in Washington is nowhere near a realization that our streets and highways are of an outmoded system. And I for one am not interested in what bureaucrats believe are the viable alternatives. I want government out of transportation. I want politicians out of transportation. I am tired of driving 50% of the time through construction zones and midnight traffic jams on major routes. I don't know what will be next, but humankind have been solving their translocation problems through the open market for millennia. I say we try it again.

Maybe we voluntaryists should think of ways in which we will free ourselves from the the webs that authoritarians weave.

Natural States per Aristotle

"Nature does nothing uselessly." – Aristotle

Furthermore, Aristotle suggests to us that we are, by nature, builders of political hierarchies, and that we naturally separate society into tiers so we can manage the need for superior persons to tell inferior persons how to behave within a formalized structure. So the question that occurs to me is: will collectivism be the end of nature's developments for the human race, or is there more? I could not agree more with Aristotle's brief but brilliant four word assertion above, but I will not agree with him that it all leads to politics and government for social man.

I should give this credit: Aristotle is about the last place I would look for enlightenment, but by listening to the podcast, "The Partially Examined Life" (Episode 60: Aristotle: What's the Best Form of Government?), I nevertheless found ideas of great interest. Sometimes you may want to expose yourself voluntarily to ideas that you otherwise would not seek. I find that podcasts are golden for this purpose. As an aside, in some future column I hope to devote considerable space to recommendations on really good podcasts for expanding the voluntaryist horizon, but for now "The Partially Examined Life" is a good one.

First I would say that Aristotle does not answer the question, "What's the Best Form of Government?" Nor does the podcast, but that's philosophy for you. But I will briefly outline my take on Aristotle's politics. He poses two taxonomies. One of them pertains to the growth of social units from smallest to largest, as in self, partners, family, household, clan or tribe, town or village, then polis (the Greek word for city, which is also a root for politics, policy, police, polity, and so forth). Beyond the household, Aristotle suggests the following forms or categories of hierarchy: Monarchy, Tyranny, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Constitutional

Government, Democracy – in three pairs respectively, each pair (say Monarchy and Tyranny) represents the initial form, for the good of all, and the perverted form, for the good of a subset. The first form (temporary) precedes the second form (permanent).

So here are my observations on Aristotle's arrangement:

- taxonomies must contain space for that which does not fit – other forms,
- taxonomies must consider before and after, particularly when they are meant to describe development from simpler to more complex forms,
- Aristotle saw the city as the ultimate social form, while he overlooked nations (similarities of birth, language, and culture) and countries (e.g. geology and geography) and combines such as the EU (economies) and alliances (power distribution and war).
- Aristotle's arrangements tended to be linear and dichotomized,
- but we can accept, as a qualified idea, that the various forms of human organization are, in fact, natural.
- by no means, however, should we beg the question that if a form is natural then it is unavoidable or conclusive or the most appropriate.
- Aristotle's efforts were to explain "what was" rather than "what ought to have been."

Thus, he appeared to be an apologist for slavery and for class distinction. And he also settled for the idea that the tiny cities of his day were the highest expression of civilization. Furthermore, he was stuck on the idea that the intellect of Hellenic man was all with which we would ever deal.

The main point I want to make today is that natural order may include both bad and good, but natural order also includes development toward further stages. In my mind a voluntarist should never draw a line beyond which the end is dictated and acceptance mandated.

I will continue to consider these ideas in future writings.

The Singularity

Aristotle was too wise to make projections about the future of man without adequate evidence, but some "futurists" today demonstrate no such reserve.

Yes, Virginia, there is no Singularity. Or perhaps not, at least. It is not a done deal.

The track record of the human race in prognostication basically stinks. The Great Yellowstone Volcano is hundreds of thousands of years overdue. Y2K. Nostradamus, fuhgeddaboutit. The Aztec Calendar – it looks good on the wall. Although the Weather Channel is making bushels of money predicting cataclysm, but as my daughter says, they are big on promises, bad at fulfillment. The WMD in Iraq belongs to the Pentagon. Life as

we know it is not going to be over any time soon – and then when it happens, who will care? Are there any historians in the Universe that feel like the 19th, 20th, and the so-far part of the 21st centuries need to be commemorated in any special way?

Things we didn't predict: the leaning of the Tower at Pisa, the fall of the USSR, the rise and fall of Sarah Palin, the Housing Bubbles, FDR's perfidy at Yalta, the Interstate Highway system needs maintenance.

Things that we never figured out: Lotteries are a tax on people who can't do the math. In fact, taxes are taxes on people who can't do the math. Laws can't control human nature. The human race is probably a failed evolutionary trial of animals inflicted with reason. Public schools are about indoctrination.

But one thing I have figured out for sure is that the Singularity is bunkum. What, you rightly ask, is the Singularity? Well, a link to Wikipedia should suffice – [The Singularity](#). I know, I know, everything on Wikipedia is not necessarily true. But the Singularity is not true, either, so good enough. A bunch of folks out there believe that technology is growing so fast that it will eventually spin off intelligence of its own. Sorry computers, there ain't no free lunch. You would have to be invented by an intelligent source first. The term "artificial intelligence" is a badly crafted phrase that rests on the presumption that there is natural intelligence in the first place.

Now, be sure to get the idea – I am not saying that hardware will not eventually overwhelm many well-defined problems. I am just railing against the tried and untrue canard that computers are capable of ganging up on us. We are quite capable of ganging up on ourselves, thanks just the same. The least of our problems is that computers may be able to put 2 and 2 together someday.

Belief in the Singularity comes from the same benighted swamp as religion, superstition, and wagering. Control freaks cannot bear to go on without pretending to know "what's next?"

I am far more concerned with the libertarian angle of this concept than the technocratic. Sorry, but I think AI is a grant writers' buzz phrase. I am all for machine intelligence for well-defined tasks, but I believe cognition is beyond the scope of an artifact. Therefore, I believe that AI in the Singularity sense is a red herring.

Moore's Law notwithstanding, I cite Murphy's Law: If it can go wrong, it will.

One of the problems for the singularity is – a human resource has a finite capacity for pursuing input, so a priority evaluation system has to be employed, but priorities are different for each individual human who has ever existed. I consider it to be a waste of time to make more out of programmed conditional responses in machines than is there.

No matter how much power Moore's Law allows, computation is limited in utility by the mathematics of the human tasks to which it is applied. The effective limits of practical input and output, however, are far lower than the processing speed. Moore's Law does not apply to throughput.

Useful information systems will always be composed of people, hardware, software, data, procedures, and communications. Moore's Law only applies to one component. The problem of the mythical man hour - diminishing returns - applies to all of the others.

No matter how fast you can go on straightaways, it just gets you into the problems of curves, brakes, inertia, and traction sooner. Every circuit has as many corners as it does straight runs.

The advancement of science is an advancement of explanations, definitions, problem descriptions, and implementations. It is not the increase of magic and superstition. It is not the production of new paradigms, willy nilly. It is not the breach of the fundamentals. Chemistry is not alchemy, and astronomy is not astrology.

Speculation is necessary to advancement except when speculation is falsely resolved by legerdemain.

We are all stuck in the time and place where we are. And the combination is just a little bit different for each of us. Maybe the best voluntarism involves patience. There are no magic tricks. The ideas of transportation have taken millennia to mature. The fact that government has played the opportunist, using our very infrastructure and the cost burdens of it, to saddle us with the most severe government intervention in history, does not mean that that will be how it always is. We must be smart and patient. Things have not changed much since Aristotle's time. Although modern times make it seem that everything is going volatile all at once, we need to seek a balance, being as eager to stress calm as to spread anxiety. Paradigm shifts may be farther away than they appear in the crystal ball.