

Snowden, Rothbard, Seeing the Future



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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.

Perhaps at the risk of repetition, let’s view some ideas on the fallacious use of corrupted information, Then we can further pursue what might be the destructive effects on a voluntary, and necessarily informed, life.

Snowden and Tyson

Yesterday and today I listened to two episodes of the Star Talk podcast from Neil DeGrasse Tyson. His guest, by cyber-legerdemain, was Edward Snowden. I encourage others to listen to these episodes.

I am left with a number of impressions:

- Snowden violated “legislation” (this is what I call extra-constitutional attempts to create rules which pad the bureaucracy or special interest cohorts).
- Snowden believes in the Constitution and his duty to uphold it.
- The true law breakers and betrayers of the Constitution were the government minions upon whom Snowden blew the whistle.
- If Snowden can be prosecuted and convicted then the state has reached the ultimate Catch-22 where to refrain from breaking the law one must break the law.
- Snowden is a very intelligent person who has had a most unique career so far.
- A person has no real choice but to make the choices that are proximate to one’s point of view. There are no laws which can contravene this idea.
- I am convinced that the state is out to make an example of Snowden; it has no interest in determining the rightness of his position. The state wants to convict everyone, via fearmongering, of the pre-crime of questioning the state’s motives — another Catch-22.
- Which is more wrong, to “leak” classified information, or to “classify” information for the purpose of hiding wrongdoing?

- Tyson is too broad-minded to be put in some political envelope. Although I disagreed with him once when he seemed gratuitously to grant the liberal global warming doctrine on “Cosmos,” I have found the majority of his views to be centered on fact-finding and implication analysis.

I do not ask anyone reading here to accept either Snowden or Tyson as a hero of Liberty. Listen and value them for yourself — it’s the voluntary thing to do.

Rothbard Quote #7

With the land area of the globe now parcelled out among particular States, one of the basic doctrines and tactics of the rulers of each State has been to identify itself with the territory it governs. Since most men tend to love their homeland, the identification of that land and its population with the State is a means of making natural patriotism work to the State’s advantage.

This tendency, if it exists, is an egregious misuse of conflation. One could almost say that if you are listening to a politician you are listening to conflation. Conflation is drawing a false association between two disparate things.

A very contemporary example can be found in the posturings of debating (I use the word advisedly) presidential candidates. They all know that, if elected, there is not a thing that they could realistically do to eliminate “illegal” immigration, and they know further that they cannot even deliver a measurable difference in whom are the members of the populace. In fact if they thought there was a way to verify their promises, then they would never make them.

Rothbard gives us a clue in the passage above that this kind of conflationary conceit has a great deal of usefulness to those who would mislead us. If we have a truly effective government, we could love it. If we have a truly abundant territory, we could love it. If we have people who are unlike those found anywhere else in the Universe, we could love them. But in no case, can one borrow love from another to make itself loved. We might accept an average quality to allocate our love among the three. For instance, amazing natural features might make us tolerate bad government and bad people, for awhile. But such an arrangement is inherently unstable; it cannot last for long. Some force will exploit it. Politicians who would have us suffer a horrible tyranny to otherwise have freedom of association with people or freedom of movement to see the wonders of nature make us a poor offer that can be bested by any charlatan who comes down the street.

Logic Fallacy #36 — A Better World

Above we have looked at a particular type of conflation, and in earlier columns, in the Logic Fallacy section, we have looked at the overall fallacy of inappropriate conflation. Now we will examine another type of conflation fallacy which arises, often, from the same emotions that support the nation/territory/state conflation. That is the conflation where a tangent from the past is assumed to be the inevitable direction of the future.

It is very disappointing to me that when I talk to people of demonstrated wit, they still would rather talk about the future in terms of optimistic gobbledy-gook like self-driving vehicles, 3D printers, and machine intelligence beyond human intelligence. And there is a converse view wherein some see simplistic disaster scenaria (see climate change nee global warming).

First of all, we need do no more than look at humans' past predictions of the future to see how bad we are at it. I was debating the GAI (general artificial intelligence) question with a friend recently. GAI supposes machine learning on a par with animal learning. But we really have no indication that either animal intelligence or machine intelligence will continue to advance. The false conflation here comes from a misapplication of Moore's Law, which essentially states that the data manipulation power of computer hardware doubles every few years. Using this as a false premise, some will then say the hardware will overcome, even if it has to rely on brute force, the dependency on human intelligence at some point in time. And some people have even started raising funds to "plan" for the supposedly likely situation that may ensue.

The mechanics of the future are that they proceed from the gumbo of the present. Not being able to see all current things at once, and feeling insecure because of that, we seize upon spectacular but short-lived ideas to bring the future into focus. But all phenomena are moving toward the future, both the seen and the unseen. In fact, the seen to unseen is likely as a tip is to the body of the iceberg. We try to make a guess as to how best to skirt the iceberg by examining its top. This does not always work — another trend from history.

Now we need to evaluate where is conventional wisdom leading us. The likelihood is that the direction is toward primroses. Occam's Razor implies that there are explanations of three kinds: oversimplified, overcomplicated, and likely. Further, an interpretation of Occam may convince us to err on the side of not explaining that which we don't really know. And then he encourages us, one might imagine, to learn more before leaping. Conflation too often leads us in the opposite direction. We are told that because a man breaks one law that he must have broken all laws, that he did not make a good faith attempt to observe the reasons for the laws. We are often led toward an ever darkening night, of fear and insecurity, and fear of insecurity, and insecurity about fear, when we

might do well to consider our own free choice. And we are led away from the present — the time when we can really do something — through half-baked promises about the future.

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