

Spooner, Captain Phillips, Further Fallacies



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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.

This is the last of a full year’s worth of bi-weekly columns (one fortnight skipped). And it has been wonderful. I learned years ago that if you truly wished to understand a thing, you should teach it. And now I have also learned that you should write about it. I have truly loved writing, reading, learning and teaching here at EVC.

I will finish the year by doing all of these things with another set of topics. In the last month, I have come to the realization that I place no one above Lysander Spooner when it comes to preaching freedom, individualism, voluntaryism, and self-governance — and hence forth I plan to discuss him with you in much greater depth.

About a week ago, Ms. Vol and I were thrilled by the very exciting and dramatic movie, “Captain Phillips”, but I found the next day that I still had many questions on the story, questions from a voluntaryist’s eye view.

And lastly, I will cover another in my continuing series of discussions on logic fallacies, their importance, and the management of them in keeping a level voluntaryist head.

Let Us Now Praise Lysander Spooner

We voluntaryists, we individualists, are nevertheless quite the name droppers. Or at least I am. I owe many of my most deeply held convictions to those who have gone before me. The list is rather lengthy, and it grows by the day. But I have moved Lysander Spooner among the stars, among the lofty company of Mark Twain, Thomas Jefferson, H. L. Mencken, Murray Rothbard, Frederic Bastiat, and Robert Higgs. Why? Because to me, he speaks more plainly, and cuts more cleanly to the critical path. He is so eloquent that, for the life of me, I cannot understand why he is not universally known and lauded. But then on second thought I know why — he gored way too many oxen among the ruling class.

In a quick demonstration of his power, I will quote two passages that I believe establish his credentials for our continued study. Then in future columns, I will try to make his philosophy a new career for voluntaryists who may revere him as I do.

“But whether the Constitution really be one thing, or another, this much is certain — that it has either authorized such a government as we have had, or has been powerless to prevent it. In either case it is unfit to exist.” – from the work, No Treason.

“This science of justice, or natural law, is the only science that tells us what are, and what are not, each man’s natural, inherent, inalienable, individual rights, as against any and all other men. And to say that any, or all, other men may rightfully compel him to obey any or all such other laws as they may see fit to make, is to say that he has no rights of his own, but is their subject, their property, and their slave.” – from the work, Natural Law; or The Science of Justice.

Voluntaryist Questions About the Motion Picture, “Captain Phillips”

Being very interested in the issues of free trade, anarchy, Somalia, pirates, etc., we watched the motion picture, “Captain Phillips”, last week. It was tremendously suspenseful and compelling. But as I think of it, I still have several questions. Many of the questions are self-explanatory, but others may deserve a bit of explanation:

- *Why was the crew of 21 on the ship, Maersk Alabama, unarmed?* I have read other accounts that mentioned that there were small arms on the ship. Did Hollywood apply poetic license here?
- *Why did Captain Phillips take an isolated route rather than sticking with the main merchant marine traffic?* There were extremely frequent piracy attacks around the horn of Africa at this time.
- *Why did Maersk shipping send this cargo into an area where pirate activity was dense and frequent?* See the link above.
- *Why did anyone think the fire hose tactic would be effective?* The activation of all the fire hoses at once eliminated any chance of precision. A single high-pressure stream would certainly have swamped the pirate’s skiff if there had been protective armor for a crew member manning the hose.
- *Why was there no answer to the first call for help?*

- *How much money was spent on this rescue mission?* We know that it may have cost the owner of the ship quite a sum to prepare it better for tactical defense, but who ended up bearing the cost of this event?
- *What are the odds of sniper fire killing three pirates simultaneously through small windows on a violently tossing covered lifeboat?* The critical moment of the rescue, as depicted in the movie, was straight out of Die Hard. Is there any documentation that this is really how it went down? Or were the heroics a propaganda price exacted by the military for their cooperation in the making of the movie?
- *What were the responsibilities of the Maersk company, the Captain, and the crew?*

Another recent movie I have watched was “Ender’s Game”. I will have to think a good deal more about this one because it was based on a great classic book. I want to be less critical because of my esteem for the original, and because of my mixed emotions regarding the author, Orson Scott Card. I need more distance.

Begging the Question

Some of the time, debaters will bury an important piece of the content of an argument under the cover of a foregone conclusion. A question is taken for granted as already answered. This happens both deliberately or innocently. An egregious example is the query, “When did you stop beating your spouse?” This, of course, begs the question, “Has anyone in this debate ever engaged in spousal abuse, and if so, is it relevant in any way to the discussion?”

An innocent example could be when one of my students addresses me as “Doctor So-and-So,” without first establishing my highest degree (a Master’s degree). But it would be a mistake to presume also that the Master’s degree was my only claim of credentials.

We often encounter the technique if the presenter is trying to minimize a question. A police department spokesman may say, “The officers involved followed all procedures.” But this says nothing on whether the officers did right or wrong in light of the outcome. They may have committed a dawn home entry without a warrant at the wrong address and shot the family dog. A computer given the wrong data will process it perfectly (and fast!), but always resulting in the wrong output. If you start with the conclusion that the data are correct, you will never diagnose the problem.

The best advice is to avoid begging the question whenever possible. It poisons rational and objective discussion. It will come out sooner or later, and it will cancel all transactions when it does. Honest conversants have every obligation to establish all critical information before the query is established.

Two weeks from now, if all goes well, I will be back to start a new year of columns. In the meantime or in due time, I hope you will continue to delve into the works of Lysander Spooner. And while you're at it, the critical examination of the information in your life is indispensable. You are surrounded by information, and you can make highly constructive use of it by addressing both your objective observations and your emotions. Sometimes this requires searching for and revealing the hidden part of information.

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