

The Argument from Patriotism



Send him mail.

"Food for Thought" is an original column appearing every other Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Norman Imberman. Norman is a retired podiatrist who loves playing piano, writing music, lawn bowling, bridge, reading, classical music, going to movies, plays, concerts and traveling. He is not a member of any social network, nor does he plan on becoming one. Dr. Imberman has written a fantastic Christmas song which he had professionally recorded as a demonstration record. He is looking for a publisher, or A & R man, or record producer to listen to his song. It deserves to be a permanent member of the lexicon of familiar and favorite Christmas songs. Archived columns can be found here. FFT-only RSS feed available here.

There is a worn out slogan usually associated with the Conservative right which reads, "America, Love It or Leave It." This slogan is quite distasteful to the Liberal left. It is often seen as a bumper sticker with an American flag on it. There is also a very popular and often quoted slogan penned by John F. Kennedy, which reads, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." The Liberal left loves this slogan as if it were quoted directly from the *Communist Manifesto*.

Often, whenever I become involved in discussions with both sides of the political spectrum, whereby I take the position of advocating a voluntary society and express disappointment with our present system of government compulsion, both Liberals and Conservatives join forces and ultimately resort to the following argument against my position of freedom. They both say, "The price we must pay for living in America is to abide by its laws, pay taxes and vote to support it." In other words, "America, Love it or Leave it." Suddenly, the Liberals are in agreement with the very slogan that has been abhorrent to them in the past. This is a prime example of the saying, "politics makes strange bedfellows." I call both of their slogans, "The Argument from Patriotism."

This demonstrates that both parties are very similar in their fundamental method of achieving their goals. They agree upon the use of governmental compulsion and duress in order to solve society's most urgent problems. They never stop to consider that perhaps their *fundamental method* may be the very antithesis of what is required. They differ only as to the issues they favor and disfavor. They both hide under the guise of patriotism.

This country was founded upon the doctrines antithetical to the Argument from Patriotism. The immigrants came here from other lands where they were constantly expected to perform for the benefit of their king, monarch, rulers, party or country. Thus, a Statist society is one in which the individual is subservient to the State. These immigrants escaped all manifestations of religious, social and economic persecutions in order to come to a land where there existed the promise that they would be left alone to shift for themselves for the benefit of serving themselves - not for the benefit of the State. They came to the Promised Land not asking what they can do for their country, as in the quote from Kennedy, but to be left alone.

America flourished because of the establishment of the principles of non-compulsion or voluntarism. The Declaration of Independence was the embodiment of those principles. For the first time the individual discovered that he had certain inalienable rights; the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. The right to the Pursuit of Happiness does not mean the right to a guarantee of happiness. It only guarantees the right to seek happiness and to fail in that endeavor. But, more importantly, for the first time, the individual was king and the State became subservient to the individual. The practice of these principles is what enabled America to become the wealthiest, most respected country in the world, having the highest standard of living for more people than in all previously recorded history.

Now we have come full circle and once again, we have degenerated to a Statist society. Most citizens look towards government to solve most problems and want their fellow citizens to foot the bill for the cost of these solutions. The means of support are never considered and the problems continue to multiply. In the meanwhile, the individual gets trampled upon and hardly anybody cares.

The liberals want more welfare, more entitlement programs, more social security benefits, universal medical care and increasing foreign aid to starving nations. The conservatives want more interference with our private lives by passing anti-abortion laws, anti-drug laws, anti-pornography laws and generally, laws to control the morality of the people. Both of these factions care little about the individual. The liberals have a reputation of giving support to the minority, forgetting that the individual is the smallest minority. The conservatives pay lip service to individual rights.

Frederic Bastiat, in his book, *The Law*, stated a simple truth when he wrote, "If you want to see if a law is just, see if it gives the government the power to commit an act, which if committed by an individual would be considered to be a crime. If such a law exists, abolish it immediately or else it will grow and fester until it becomes institutionalized and contaminates the entire system and society."

Both slogans from the left and right (The Argument from Patriotism) tell us to submit and

respect, honor and support our system of government simply because it is our government. Look at the result! One would have to be blind not to see the contamination that is quickly enveloping us as predicted by Bastiat over 150 years ago. The Argument from Patriotism is actually no argument at all. It is just an excuse for compulsion; clichés taught in government schools and fostered by members of the media and politicians who also were taught in government schools in order to propagate the system of compulsion.

In order for an argument to have any validity its structure must be derived from basic principles, which are then used to build a consistent and logical hierarchy of concepts, resulting in conclusions based upon those principles and concepts. In fact, that is the only method in history that has been effective in solving any problems. To simply say that we must obey the law is to advise us is to submit to authority like the people who live under totalitarian regimes do all over the world. It makes no difference if the authority was democratically voted into power. It was the requirement to submit to authority under penalty of physical harm or even death, from which the early settlers had escaped. They had had enough. Some day the citizens of the United States will have had enough but there will be no place to run.

At this point statist recite the next Argument from Patriotism. It is used as if, once stated, it becomes indisputable. It is stated as follows: “what are you complaining about? America is still the best country in the world and you should feel lucky to live here.” Although the statement is true, it has nothing to do with the issue of living free versus living under the yoke of an increasingly abusive government. Such an argument is a *non sequitur* used by people who cannot ideologically develop a sound reason for their own philosophy of “good abusive government.”

Falling back upon the Argument from Patriotism also adds another element of negativity to the situation. We usually label aggressive and abusive acts in pejorative terms and condemn them, especially when they are perpetrated between individuals. For example, we condemn theft, kidnapping, extortion and fraud. However, when our own government behaves in a similar manner the Argument from Patriotism takes hold, either from the left or the right, so that the citizens do not even recognize those acts as abusive and so nobody condemns them. The cloak of the Argument from Patriotism hides the following facts:

1. The right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are the only real rights an individual possesses. There are no others.
2. An infringement of those three rights is abusive, unjust, antisocial, and anti-progressive no matter who commits it or who sanctions it and can only lead to further abuses until no rights remain. In order to proclaim other pseudo-rights, (like the right to an education or medical care or housing) one of the three real rights must be infringed upon.
3. Even when a government infringes upon an individual's rights, it is always another

individual who is acting. The IRS agent is an example. Hiding under the cloak of a righteous government and protected by the government's guns, the IRS agent has the power to confiscate your property without a legal court order and throw you in prison if you resist. This is true of the agents of most of the other government agencies, especially Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency. Yet who is the victim and who is the aggressor? Try to answer that question without invoking the Argument from Patriotism. What ideological weapon can you use to favor such abuse? "I was only following orders," will not hack it. That's the excuse proclaimed by the Nazis during the Nuremberg trials.

In the future, when you are in the mood to ponder over your own convictions, think about where they come from and why you adhere to them. Were they developed according to a logical pattern of thinking or were they just accepted by whim or some self-defeating sense of compassion? Think about our country's problems and instead of pointing your finger outward, look in the mirror. You may be the problem and if so, only you can be part of the solution.

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