

We Still Haven't Learned Voltaire's Lesson

It's fascinating how easily people accept something they would otherwise know is wrong when someone they view as an authority figure tells them it's right.

Voltaire observed, in 1765, "Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities." This truth has led to many of the worst horrors in history.

People still haven't learned the lesson.

There are hordes of people working full-time — at your expense — to trick you into believing absurdities. My hope is that you're smarter than they expect.

Unfortunately, many of our fellow humans do fall for the trick. They lack awareness of when their behavior violates others. This lack of awareness enables atrocities, too. No one can be expected to quit doing what they aren't aware is wrong.

Some of these believe the world owes them an easy life because they are so special and irreplaceable. After all, some authority figure has preached this absurdity to them, and it sounds good.

The sense of entitlement this creates is breathtaking. If you threaten to withhold what they've been told they are owed, they're ready to commit atrocities until you relent. They refuse to accept the reality: no one owes you anything beyond not violating you.

These people expect their rights to be respected, but they refuse to respect the rights of anyone else. They even imagine "rights" that would enslave others. They aren't aware of how absurd this would be.

The good news is no one needs to stay trapped in the absurdities they once believed. Growth requires rejecting those absurdities so you don't commit atrocities.

The awareness of the rights of others, and how to respect them, is libertarianism.

I first discovered I was a libertarian about 20 years ago. Before then I hadn't given it any thought, but at that time I began to examine my values and beliefs. I was willing to discard anything that didn't stand up to scrutiny.

When I was young and accepting of absurdities, I tried to make excuses as to why it was OK to violate some people's rights under certain conditions. I eventually came to understand you only deserve as much liberty as you respect in others.

I'm glad the realization came before I participated in any atrocities.

Believing absurd justifications of why it's OK to do things to other people when you know it wouldn't be right for them to do the same to you is a dangerous trap. Avoid it.