

What If, Vicarious Connectivity, More About Information



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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 past week, members of my family and friends and I took part in one of the greatest voluntary activities of all. Three generations did Holiday World in Santa Claus, Indiana, and we had reiterated one of the great lessons of voluntaryism – there is no difference among children, adults, and grand-adults in an overwhelming number of ways. I also, and in particular, learned never to say never.

You will hear more from me, in future columns, on vacationing, because that is the way it works. Experiences illuminate thoughts, which illuminate philosophy, which fortify reason, which underlies action. You and I may never recognize a future idea as arising from a theme park, but it may happen nonetheless. Every moment of one's life is structural. I could go on an extended rant on the propaganda about religion and patriotism and cultural elitism that abounds in an amusement park, but I would have to live in a cave to duck all of that from any recreational respite. The truth is that I did not feel coerced or unfree for a single moment except when I was embroiled in the statist highway system – midnight traffic jams on the Interstate in downtown Louisville do not lighten my animus toward our all-enveloping government.

But, now refreshed, and just plain tuckered out, I return to my word processor to consider more challenges for the voluntaryist. This column we will explore the trap of crystal ball gazing, we will examine our cultural obsession with minutiae such as the recent addition to the royal family of England, and lastly we will chase again the illusive and elusive nature of information.

Playing the "What If" Game

If we are truly set up to understand tomorrow, then we are living on the wrong day. If we are truly designed to understand the past, then we are always at the wrong vantage point.

Why are we obsessed with the preformulation of time and dizzied with the endless re-evaluation of the past?

A few days ago, a friend asked, "What if government goes away; what community objectives would you support with your tax savings?" And I was stopped cold by that question. I know she meant that question in a very positive way, seeking to know what voluntaryists valued as things in their social lives. The easy answers, I suppose, would have been things like getting people to markets, aiding the sick and the disabled, peace, food, breaking down barriers to freedom, etc.

But all I could do was ask: how can you compare a statist world to a voluntary world? The state is so pervasive, so viciously intent on perpetuating itself, how can we know what is true or false? Every "charity" of the state is intended to enslave its recipients. Every action of the state is to serve some secret purpose to enslave its beneficiaries. Every idea, philosophy, and initiative of the state is to entrap the minds of the persuaded.

Another side of the problem for me is that, while I hate taxation with every fiber of my being, I carefully cultivate a day-to-day ignorance of its effect on my life. I spend every resource on voluntary pursuits. I do not consider "before tax" and "after tax" money as meaningful, except that the former should by right be of negligible difference and the latter should be sufficient. If the state and its taxes went away, then my individual resources would be sufficient to be dedicated to the voluntary life – I cannot give more to the life than that.

And the "programs" of the old gone-away state could serve as no guide to what is desirable for the future. If I look at any state endeavor, all I can say is that surely there must be a better way. I know that roads are as old as the era of the first moving creatures on Earth. I know that there have always been infants and ancients who may need care – but I have never known an infant, child, man or woman who needed to have his individuality and freedom taken away in return for care. I know there is poverty, but poverty is something that people cast themselves or others into – the state has never rescued a single soul from poverty, anywhere, in all of time. I know there is comparative advantage and disadvantage, but I also know that the state can know nothing of the quality of life of any individual. I know there are crimes and there are criminals, but the state can do nothing but constantly expand the definitions of each until we are all in their dungeons or charnel houses. I know there is a need for learning, but there is less learning that goes on because of the state's need to indoctrinate.

So you may ask, rightfully, if you cannot project what needs to be done, then what can you hope to achieve? I already have it figured out, I believe. I live my life without benefit of government. The things that government calls a "benefit" are not true benefits. I cannot become dependent on a false benefit. The roads are crumbling, and the schools are

minimum security detention facilities. Welfare programs are nothing but TV game shows about the arbitrary picking of temporary losers and winners. Defense? I will not dignify that ruse with even a cynical description. I could care less whether these war-on-drug hypocrites get their continuing jollies by buzzing my farm with their helicopters daily.

It is my view that whenever the sleepwalkers lose their government lullabyers, they will awake and, bereft of the “Uncle Sam knows best” fairy tale, they will have to ask what is the right thing to do. It is my hope that some of them, enough of them, will realize that the answer must come from the new reality and from within.

Monarchy? Really?

If you have found yourself drooling over the prospect of King George VII of England, or pleased beyond reason at the maternity of Kate Middleton Windsor, ask yourself what you are thinking. Didn't most of the world fight various wars over the last 2000 years to free humankind from the zealots who supposed themselves kings and queens?

We have built a fictionalized fairy world around the horrors of the monarchist period of human history. It has no connection to real life. The amount of adoration that an individual shows for these accidents of chance is directly proportional to the amount of self-loathing he feels for himself.

In my personal opinion, Kate Middleton is a perfectly lovely lady, but neither she nor her son have any dominion over me. Nor should they have dominion over anyone else.

Buying into the authority model of the world is just subsuming the self. If you subsume yourself, there are only two major explanations: that you are afraid to take on life as a functioning independent unit, or that you have been crushed by indoctrination.

I discovered Sheldon Richman's idea of equality in authority, this week at the website of the Future of Freedom Foundation. Most of us have a rudimentary understanding of the idea that all humans are created as equals, but we each put little twists on that. Sheldon's view clarifies it for me. Equal in authority means that each of us has the same natural authority over any other of us – in effect, none. There is no natural condition that anyone can point to which institutes one's authority over another. Size and strength? That will work just fine as long as we are just a lowly form of animal life.

I make no grandiose claims for humanity, maybe just a failed evolutionary middle passage, but the species does bear a natural distinction which lends them a natural advantage (not an authority). Humans have two or three tools which are entirely missing from other species – reason, symbolism, and complex communication. Again, I make no boast about how well we have done with these tools.

And we have been sorting ourselves out regarding discredited ideas of racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, geographic, or quantitative calculation of authority for tens of thousands of years. There is no natural human accident of birth or nurture that conveys superiority on any one human. All one needs to do is look at the past performance of authorities to see that there is no efficacious happenstance for determining “Who’s in charge here?”

So, why don’t we just quit getting all doe-eyed about the royals? They are dinosaurs. And why don’t we get offended with imperialists like the little kings we make of presidents, generals, and prime ministers? They really should be beneath our notice because of how badly deluded they are about the world they occupy.

Information, More or Less

If we have so badly botched the information we hold about the past, the present, and the future and about the relationship of one person to another or to a bunch of others, then how have we done with information itself?

Let’s try yet again to get a better handle on what information is. There is a strong argument that information and information systems may be tyranny over ideas, philosophy, and thought. But facts are stubborn things. Information is a construct with which we can all reach harmony by examining its architecture.

Information is a concrete thing, part of the concrete cycle of input → process → output. And it should be noted that the input comes as the combined output of preceding processes, while the output becomes part of the inputs for succeeding processes. While there are an infinite number of processes and connections among processes, there are no occurrences of process arising without input and no occurrences of process terminating without output. Furthermore, there is no incident of something from nothing nor of nothing from something. And, finally the process itself adds or subtracts nothing beyond that which is intrinsic to the input, and the process is only a transformation of the input.

Data are the input. Transformation of the input is the process. Information is the output. If the data are facts and the transformations are true, then the information will be true. The problem arises because there are those who prefer that the data be cherry-picked, that the process be corrupted, or that the information be predetermined. If the data are not appropriate, and the process is manipulated to compensate for the bad data, then the result will not be the desired information, but may masquerade as such. Every information process, however, produces information – about the data, AND about the process. The information on the process is the key to your understanding of the data. You, as the user of the information, are a concrete part of the cycle as well. All three segments must accommodate to your intended use – the data must be factual in your reality, the transformation must be possible in your world, and the information must be usable in your

life. If these things are not the case, then the information in question is disjunctive from your point of view.

You are part of the input – your particulars, including your goals in using the information, have to be part of the format of the input. For instance, is the data in your language, does the raw data use the same number system (base-10), and does the financial component exist in your currency? You must understand and accept the physical facts about the data. You have a choice. You can observe the data being collected, or you can have faith in the collectors. You must judge the relative risks of these two paths. The same rules apply to the transformation segment and the information segment – you are part of each segment.

In the end, you know two sets of information: the information for which the process is built, and your own information regarding how credibly the process performs. You can test every piece of the process for how well it conforms to all the information you have ever ingested.

In future columns, we will explore one of the finest tool sets for testing information, training yourself to look for logical fallacies. An example would be when the powers that be (illegitimate powers, incidentally, if we buy the equality of authority concept) assure us that if we have done nothing wrong then we have nothing to fear. This fallacy is known as the appeal to emotion fallacy, the words “fear” and “wrong” are loaded with emotion. These words short circuit the rational facilities. These words short circuit your evaluation of information. They mask withholding of data. They mask faked transformation or omitted transformation.

Living in the present is easy; just do the right thing. But that brings a great difficulty in knowing what is the right thing. Our view of the past may be centered on what were the right or wrong things in response to the problems we have previously encountered. We may align the present problems with the past problems to make sure they are similar enough to expect a good outcome by avoiding past mistakes or repeating good solutions. But all of the “what ifs” in the world cannot amount to a hill of beans for the future. We can expect nothing from the future except to learn when we get there whether our guesses about responses were effective and efficient.

Living in the past, or far worse, living in a romanticized false version of the past with fairy kings and queens, will get us nowhere. It only perpetuates a world in which we have been constantly told that someone else has more authority over our own selves than each of us have. It may not be comforting to lose the semblance of being able to throw yourself at a king’s feet, but that ability does nothing for *you* – it is all for the king. Get over it. You will be as likely to be fine as will be that king. Remember, as Shakespeare observed: “Golden lads and girls all must, as chimney-sweepers, come to dust.”

My strongest advice is to spend your every day processing information in the truest fashion

that you might. You own the process as it pertains to you. You can see the input and you can ask, “who, what, when, where, how, and why” about it. You are on the critical path of the transformational process. The data must go through your intellectual filters. You have two types of information, that which makes sense to you, and your view of what happened to that information on its way to you. In science we talk about threats to validity, conditions and elements that may destroy all or part of the truth in the data. You do not do the data, or your sense of reality, a favor when you dismiss these threats, but you do create an easy path for those whose interest lies in your misunderstanding of the information.