

Logic versus Emotion in Society (9285 words)

by Elaine Walker

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"The problem isn't that Johnny can't read. The problem isn't even that Johnny can't think. The problem is that Johnny doesn't know what thinking is; he confuses it with feeling." – Thomas Sowell

Things are not always as they seem and outcomes of events are not always easy to predict. Sometimes one very simple event can cause widespread changes that ripple out, in turn causing other changes which play out over time and are unforeseen, undesirable or even life threatening.

A large asteroid hitting the Earth is a very simple event in a sense; one rock, one planet. But if a ten mile wide asteroid were to hit the Earth, a long chain of devastating events would occur. First would come an ear shattering sonic boom, intense blinding light, a crushing heat pulse, severe radiation burns, tsunamis around the world, lethal balls of hot glass, devastatingly fast winds and flash fires. The dust, debris and gases thrust into the stratosphere would block sunlight for months, lowering global temperatures and killing the plants. Then the herbivores would perish, then the carnivores and on up the food chain. Most life on Earth would be gone in just a matter of days.

That was a drastic example of a simple cause with complicated and devastating consequences. That example was also inevitable. No one at the time could have done anything about it. No dinosaur could have deflected an asteroid. But there are endless examples of things we humans do, in all of our brilliance, that have unforeseen and unwanted consequences which *could* be avoided. Some consequences are never traced back to their initial cause due to the subtlety and complexity of society, letting many lessons go unlearned.

One example that was easy enough to trace after the fact happened in Israel with a simple campaign to eradicate fruit bats. Unforeseen was that 80% of the insectivorous bats also died, and as a result, caused the local moths to breed uncontrolled. In turn, their caterpillars became major agricultural pests, which led to extensive insecticides being used thereafter to control the moth population, which of course pollutes the environment. Call it the butterfly effect or call it unforeseen consequences, but it is just the way things work in the world. Everything is connected and affected by everything else in causal chains of events, whether directly or indirectly.

Consequences of a government program are often so unintuitive and hard to predict that it takes a shrewd logical mind to even attempt to do so. In many cases it isn't even possible. Some unintended consequences are subtle and too easily blamed on other things. As "advanced" as we are, I wonder why we can't track the cause-and-effect of our actions better than we do. It's a shame because it causes ripples of tension and disagreement in our

society that is all too widespread. I would largely blame it on the issue of logic versus emotion in our society.

There are logical decisions and there are “emotional” decisions. By logical decisions I don’t necessarily mean those of a completely emotionally barren Vulcan. Most decisions involve both logic and emotion, but certainly we tend to lean one way or another, depending on the person, and the topic, and the circumstances.

In our society, programs are often initiated with very little logical foresight but more so with what I call "emotional thinking". In other words, it might "feel good" to initiate a program to "help" a sector of society in need. But emotional thinking does very little to predict what the consequences of a program might be. Emotional thinkers are also usually pretty bad at drawing connections after the fact between any unintended consequences and their original cause, only seeing the intended consequences and thus declaring their program a success, when for all intents and purposes it may have caused more harm than good. It may have actually harmed the very people it was meant to help.

Not all of us are emotional thinkers by default, but we are *all* abstract thinkers, and that is really what sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. Our abstract minds allow us to make sense of the world around us by categorizing, prioritizing, and using broad, sweeping high level thought. Our abstract brand of thinking has made us powerful to the point where we have risen above the animal kingdom, and we can be thankful for that. However, the problem is that it can really mess us up when it comes to problem solving in society, especially if a situation has an emotional context.

With our abstract minds we tend to see problems connected directly to "solutions" as if the situation exists in a vacuum. This works well in our personal lives where any consequences or "tradeoffs" tend to only affect ourselves or at most our immediate family or community. However, in larger groups, one sweeping "solution" will almost always affect more people than it was intended for, and often have an ill affect. In large groups we are a complex system of intermingling individuals and on the whole behave more like a living, breathing, self-evolving entity. We often misleadingly view society as a collection of static, separate, unchanging categories of people and forget that we are all connected causally one way or another. Categories of people overlap and we inevitably change over time, often moving from one category to another.

In our normal daily lives we're used to simple causal relationships and that is fine since most day to day events in our personal lives don't enter the realm of complexity. But the collective dynamic of society is vastly more complex than anything we normally encounter day to day. It makes more sense to treat our collective society as a part of nature – like unpredictable weather – and stop convincing ourselves that we can actually control and change society on command without the possibility of dire consequences.

In order to grasp the complexities of society, or of nature for that matter, it's necessary to almost fight our normal tendency for abstract thinking as well as any tendency for emotional thinking (if we are emotional thinkers) and expend the extra effort of using logic

and deduction to at least try to imagine all possible consequences before we make any sweeping policy decisions.

Unintended consequences in society

All societies inevitably have conflicts of all sorts and therefore develop systems and policies for regulating them. But no policy or program will ever benefit all of society equally. In fact, no one can convincingly predict the downstream effects that a policy might have, or even what will happen if the policy is not implemented at all. Societies are complicated, and just like the rest of the Universe everything affects everything.

Sometimes a policy will affect groups that were thought to be unrelated. And all too often it will hurt the very people it was supposed to help. There are endless examples of policies with unintended consequences, which have become fallacies in themselves. Here are some of the most common ones, starting with their respective slogans.

"Welfare helps the poor" doesn't take into account that welfare *helps the poor remain poor* because it removes incentives and doesn't allow a savings plan. And I think that is precisely what the Obama administration wants. The more that people are reliant on the government, the more power the government has over the people. Welfare also discourages marriage in poor communities because combined income might disqualify them.

"Zoning land for parks protects against greedy developers" doesn't take into account that nearby rents will be driven up due to there being less available land, and this not only affects the poorest but raises the income of urban landlords. Many of these zoning laws are in the name of environmentalism, and environmentalists seem to be the last people to understand the consequences.

"Government job creation" never takes into account that private sector jobs are inevitably lost or never created as a consequence. The government can create as many jobs as they want on a whim simply by hiring people, but the money to do so comes from tax dollars – from people in the private sector. That means less jobs can be created in the private sector. But those numbers are never estimated into statistics. Government created "green jobs" typically cost far more than it would to create a job in the private sector. They are often temporary positions, and sometimes jobs that last only *one day*, yet still get counted into jobs statistics no differently than new permanent jobs.

"Jobs saved" by the government inevitably result in other jobs being lost as well. U.S. sugar jobs were "saved" by restricting sugar imports, but that drove up the cost of domestic sugar thereby costing *confection industry* jobs, prompting them to relocate to Mexico and Canada in addition to more pre-made confection products being imported to make up for restricted sugar imports. According to a 2006 study by the U.S. International Trade Administration, three times as many jobs were lost in the confection industry as were "saved" in the sugar industry. The key is to look at "net" jobs created, which also takes into account how many were lost as a consequence of the policy.

"Unions help the workers" never takes into account that if they are a private union they hurt the business that employs the workers often causing them to go bankrupt, and if they are a public union that they have no pressure to mitigate their demands because they work for state monopolies. (It confuses me that progressives claim to hate monopolies yet support them all the time.) Part of the workers' dues goes to gigantic campaign contributions giving them enormous influence over who gets elected to bargain with them. These public "managers" have every incentive to give in to the workers' wishes for the sake of their own survival. The normal relationship between excellence and reward is broken because workplace decisions are made on the basis of seniority instead of workplace excellence. This leads to resentment among non-union taxpayers who don't have that luxury. Unions also hurt higher education. Many professors belong to a union or have tenure, or both. With job security like that the most incompetent, lazy or radical professors won't get fired.

Those promoting "universal healthcare" seem blind to the fact that former policies are the reason medical insurance is so expensive to begin with. The whole idea of insurance is that it covers things that probably won't happen, but are a valid risk. When coverage for routine things is mandated it will undoubtedly drive up costs. Then legislators proceed to insult insurance companies for raising costs. In 2012 I tried to sign up in advance for maternity care and five different companies informed me that they "are no longer able to afford maternity care since Obamacare was implemented". Women who already have it can continue their maternity care, but it is no longer available for new accounts. That was surely not the original intent of Obamacare, yet it was inevitable.

Policies in the name of "safety" usually don't result in more safety. One of the most graphic examples, which thankfully didn't come to fruition, is one that my absolute favorite economist of our times, Thomas Sowell, chronicles in his book "The Vision of the Anointed". In 2005 the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced that it would not mandate a proposed policy to force parents to purchase an extra airline seat for any children under two. A study by economists drew the connection that lower income families who could not afford the extra seat would opt for ground transportation. Statistically far more babies die in cars than planes. This would have been yet another policy to hurt the poor and even kill babies!

There is no free lunch, as they say. To gain something we want or need means ultimately giving up something we already have, so we can think of unintended consequences as tradeoffs. On a collective level, benefiting from any government "program" inevitably means forcing others to give up something for our benefit, or at the very least to give up an opportunity to have gained something different instead. And again, it's hard to predict ahead of time what the tradeoffs will ultimately be. A program could ultimately kill babies when the original goal was safety!

But it's hard for emotional thinkers to see beyond simple relationships such as (a) if child safety seats are required in automobiles then (b) surely airplanes speeding through midair must also require them, or (a) if the government creates jobs then (b) there are more jobs in the world as a result. But both of those turn out to be incorrect statements. The key is to

recognize that most things have a much more complex relationship with multiple interwoven variables that all affect each other. We should give up on the idea of simple causal relationships when it comes to the collective whole.

In order to grasp the reality of interconnectedness and tradeoffs one cannot think of a government policy as a simple "solution". Rather, a policy is merely starting point that will initiate a series of causal events, which spread out and propagate over time. The very initial outcome might be the one that we were aiming for and thus cause us to congratulate ourselves for our brilliant "plan", but it's hard to predict what other outcomes will unfold, or whom they will affect. The resulting consequences might not be easy to trace back to our initial plan and may actually get blamed on other things that weren't the cause at all.

Ultimately, it's not actually necessary to predict what the ultimate consequences of any a government policy will be, nor is it possible to an exact science. It's only necessary to realize that there *will* be unforeseen consequences and that in most cases it is more natural, less risky and more compassionate to actually just leave well enough alone. The wisest decision is often to steer clear of any action on a sweeping collective level and to trust nature's own corrective measures – meaning, trust in our natural group behavior instead of forcing government's hand on the problem. In most cases the invisible hand of the free market will find solutions, and even many solutions at once, whether it be pricing adjustments, private charity, innovation or any number of other things, all interacting in lock-step.

Misleading statistics

We are constantly inundated with misleading statistics from legislators, interest groups and the mainstream media. They are misleading because statistics are almost always presented as static and unchanging, but almost everything changes over time. Nothing about society is static. They are also misleading for other reasons. Sometimes statistics are cherry picked from larger lists of data. For instance, it has been a widely used statistic that blacks and Hispanics are turned down for home loans more than whites. But never is it included that whites are turned down for home loans more than Asians, which is also true.

In another example, think about one possible lifetime of a college student. Perhaps he was fully taken care of all the way through college. While in college, even though lavishly taken care of by his parents, he could still neatly fit in the "poor" category of a statistical report since he doesn't make any income of his own. Meanwhile, his parents might have a combined income of \$250k but are putting two of their children through college at the same time, paying a mortgage, car payments and health insurance for the family, all while trying to start a new business. They might be barely staying afloat month to month, yet will most likely be put in the "rich" category.

Let's say that upon graduation their son was on his own. It's easy to imagine at that point that he could be considered "poor" since he's just getting on his feet with a new job. But as he grows and matures so does his employment. Several promotions later he will be in a

higher income bracket. He might actually become "rich" by his 40's or 50's. Rarely is any person in the same "class" throughout their entire lives. Many people who are born into poverty find ways of breaking out and eventually making decent incomes. There are those who are permanently rich or poor from birth to death but they are a small percentage of society. When we are categorized as "rich" or "poor" it is almost always misleadingly presented as a permanent "class" that we will always belong to, as if we are living in medieval times.

Since individuals on average move up from one "class" to another as they age, income disparity is largely an *age* issue rather than a "class" issue. Older people normally make far more income than younger people! There is nothing offensive about that simple and obvious fact. Yet it is precisely what is used to show how bad off we are, framed in the context of static, unchanging "classes" rather than "age groups" and completely disregarding the more realistic dynamics of individuals and our changing lifestyles.

If someone breaks their leg and is unable to walk for some temporary period of time we don't label them forevermore as "disabled". Yet, we are put into "rich" and "poor" and "middle class" categories even though our monetary situations are continually changing. Statistics about these "classes" are often used in negative ways, pitting groups against each other, often with inexplicable racial or gender related undertones.

"Household income" statistics as used by legislators are also incredibly misleading, which is of course the objective – to mislead people. Household income refers to the combined income of anyone living in any particular household, so large families with several wage earners will easily have a higher household income than a household containing only one person. There is nothing unusual about that. It's silly – even if every individual on planet Earth made identical incomes, "household income" statistics could still be used to show "rich" and "poor" discrepancies!

Since the average size of families has been declining over the decades, so has "household income" even though individuals on average are making quite a bit more. What the statistics actually show is that since individuals on average are making more income they are now able to live in smaller groups or even alone. Yet declining "household income" has been used time and time again to show a gradual stagnation of society over the decades, even though it's the opposite!

One problem is that most income statistics in general don't follow actual individuals. Instead they follow "classes" such as "the top one percent", as if they continue to consist of the same individuals over a period of time, but different individuals move in and out of income brackets all the time, and the top one percent probably has the highest turnover rate of any group. People in the top one percent are often only in that "class" for one year at a time, and only because of an anomalous spike in their income.

Misleading statistics are often used by legislators and the media to mislead the public in order to further their agenda, and then the public naively repeats them with good

intentions. It's certainly a lot easier to simply repeat a statistic that we've seen or heard than it is to think through the dynamics of a complex situation and come to our own conclusions.

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"Much of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has involved replacing what worked with what sounded good." –Thomas Sowell

There are many things in politics that are repeatedly preached in an emotional context that are complete fallacies. It's not always clear if the person stating the fallacy realizes the misleading quality of their statements, or if they are just cleverly using rhetoric and feeling-messages to convince the masses that their ideas are for the best. Are the intentions diabolical or just naive and well intentioned? It depends on who is saying them of course.

Taxation and "the rich"

Some of the most often quoted fallacies lately have to do with taxation or "the rich". No one else can manage to include more fallacies about Republicans and taxes and rich people in one sentence than our current president, Barack Obama. And no one can dissect it better than Thomas Sowell. I found this gem in one of Dr. Sowell's columns:

On July 9, 2012, President Obama pronounced, *"Many members of the other party [the Republicans] believe that prosperity comes from the top down, so that if we spend trillions more on tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, that that will somehow unleash jobs and economic growth."*

I found a transcription of the speech on the official White House website, and not only did he reiterate this sentiment in so many words in the same speech, but gave similar speeches such as a "weekly address" shortly thereafter, so there is no chance he misspoke. So let's dissect his words.

His use of the word spend is a complete fallacy. Cutting taxes does not equate at all to government "spending". *Cutting taxes* is not the same as *spending*. Why? Because cutting taxes does not correlate directly to less tax revenues coming into the government, which would be needed in order to even remotely call it "spending". There are various cause and effect relationships in society that happen *in between* these two steps.

For instance, when taxes are lowered, a causal chain of events propagates in society. Individuals can do more with their personal funds boosting the economy any number of ways. When someone suddenly has more funds to hold a conference at a hotel, for example, it benefits the hotel workers on all different levels, from the manager, wait staff, cleaning service, A/V personnel, bartenders, bussers, concierge, bell hops, not to mention

the local taxi services, restaurants and their entire staffs, etc.

If someone buys anything from a loaf of bread to a yacht it benefits the suppliers of the parts or products to make it, the workers who made it, the store that sold it, the media that advertised it. In the case of a yacht there might even be people hired to maintain it who will benefit thereafter. When taxes are lowered for businesses or individuals who run them, they can then hire more employees, raise wages, and improve their business in general. In other words, the poor and middle class fare better when people are allowed to keep their money since it is used to invest in business, create jobs or buy goods and services. In turn, the population is likely to pay *more total tax dollars* even if tax rates are lower simply because their income is higher and/or there are more people employed.

To put all of this in simpler terms, *cutting* taxes can sometimes actually *raise* revenue – not overnight – but after the effects of cutting taxes propagate throughout society. Society is not a static block, but a complex web of interactions. Yet so many assume that tax rates and revenue are directly tied and that therefore it makes sense to call collecting less tax dollars "government spending". But it is sheer fallacy.

It follows then that if taxes are *raised* on businesses or on the individuals that run them, it also doesn't correlate directly to the amount of revenues coming into the government. The reason is because companies are then forced to make a tradeoff. You can't be forced to pay more taxes and then somehow magically still have the same amount of money leftover to do everything else you were already doing. The new tax burden will inevitably get passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices, or job layoffs or pay cuts.

Moving on to more fallacies, when Obama refers to the "wealthiest Americans" he's not actually talking about the wealthiest Americans, since taxes are on income and income does not equate to "wealth". Wealth is what has been accumulated, such as assets, and wealth is not taxed. Older people tend to have more wealth but lower incomes than people in their thirties and forties. So when he refers to the "wealthiest Americans" you can be assured he is really talking about people in their thirties and forties; not necessarily older, uptight, super-rich Conservatives as the stereotype goes. Just because a family makes over \$250,000/year does not mean they are millionaires or billionaires. And millionaires and billionaires can make less than \$250,000 a year if they have accumulated wealth.

Most importantly, it is sheer fallacy to claim that Republicans believe "prosperity comes from the top down" or "trickle down" economics, as they say. To the contrary, Republicans support free-market economics, where individuals at the *lowest levels* interact voluntarily in the marketplace (microeconomics) – not a top-down scheme (macroeconomics). He is literally stating the exact opposite of what Republicans believe! In fact, a top-down view is a more Liberal stance, where the government is at the top and we are all on some lower level, and that the government's generosity might trickle down to us, if we're lucky.

Again, in a free market economy, patterns bubble up from the masses, companies are formed, products and services are rendered, and so on and so forth. Only when this bottom-up froth is bubbling do businesses, small and large, "unleash jobs and economic growth". The market only becomes a top-down scheme where the heavy-hand of the government gets involved!

He repeats this fallacy in the same speech: *"So we don't need more top-down economics. We've tried that theory. We've seen what happens. We can't afford to go back to it. We need policies that grow and strengthen the middle class – policies that help create jobs, that make education and training more affordable, that encourage businesses to start up and create jobs right here in the United States."* Obama is a master at convincing people of the opposite of reality, and the mainstream media repeats his words without question, no matter how ridiculous the statements.

It is his mastery of rhetoric that somehow makes these fallacies believable to so many. Rhetoric is very flexible. When he extends the Bush tax cuts he calls it "cutting taxes". When he talks about letting the Bush tax cuts expire for the wealthy he doesn't call it raising taxes but rather, "going back to the Clinton tax rates." When he accuses Republicans of possibly letting the tax cuts expire, due to gridlock in Congress, he calls it "raising taxes". The rhetoric is effective because the whole conversation is enough to make anyone's heads spin and it's much easier to grab onto these sound bites than it is to actually think it all through.

"Taxing the wealthy" seems to be all about "spreading the wealth", preventing the "rich" from "hoarding the wealth" and generally equalizing the incomes of society. Fallacies abound. Wealth redistribution is a very unfortunate fallacy because, like so many policies, it harms the very people whom left-wing Democrats intend to help. And the rhetoric can be extreme. Somehow wanting to keep your hard earned money is "greedy" yet it is "idealistic" to want to take what someone else has earned.

Again, it really all comes down to the fact that our legislators, the mainstream media and even our education system have become increasingly emotion based in their messages, rather than logic based, and in doing so present data as simple snapshots in time, as if adjusting tax rates only has one effect (less revenue), instead of explaining the more realistic multiple causes and effects that take time to propagate. The result is that a large sector of the public has increasingly built up negative emotions towards "the rich" which has set off class warfare in our society that is largely misguided and unfortunate.

"Racism"

Another unfortunate and misguided emotional issue in society is racism and it's such a shame because it really doesn't need to be. Unlike the days where it was a very real and desperate situation, it is now largely based on false accusations and heated emotion and far

less in logic. It's as if those who loudly proclaim to want to help racial "minorities" either simply don't want racism to stop because it helps their agendas somehow, or else they truly believe it's real after hearing the fallacy repeated so often. There are those who still genuinely feel discriminated against, depending on their particular personal situation, and I really don't mean to downplay their situation. But in a general overall evaluation of our society, it really does seem that we are mostly dealing with accusations of racism rather than real racism.

It's amazing to look at the amount of accusations of racism that have occurred since the election of our first mixed race president, Barack Obama. At one point one of his opponents, Herman Cain, who is black, was leading on the Republican side. If I thought anything of it at all it was that racism was clearly no longer an issue! Hurrah! How absolutely opposite everything turned out. Cain got called Uncle Tom and anyone who still dared not root for Obama was deemed racist. Conservatives apparently aren't supposed to be female, gay or black in this country yet. I did meet a few people who took Obama's skin color into consideration, versus the white John McCain who was ultimately the Republican opponent, but in a form of reverse racism they admittedly voted *for* Obama *because* of his skin color. I have never actually met anyone besides that who cared about the skin color any of the candidates, or anyone else for that matter. The so-called "racism" in the presidential campaign was 100% accusation.

It amazes me how we get called racists here in Arizona, against – of all the crazy things – Hispanics, whose very culture we revolve around and has shaped much of our architecture, dress, music and cuisine. Not including the many mixed race individuals, Phoenix is over 40% Hispanic. It's often cited that Hispanics get pulled over in traffic stops more than anyone else. I was shown first hand how impossible it is for a police officer to see who is in a car while pulling them over. In our state where the sun dominates the sky and temperatures get up 120 Fahrenheit, almost everyone has darkly tinted windows. Never mind that Arizona has the largest percentage of Hispanic police officers in the nation, making up at least 40% of the force! It's like accusing Texas of being prejudiced against cowboys or California of being prejudiced against surfers.

But accusations of Arizonan racism are so rampant and repeated in the media in an emotionally charged context that it's no wonder people have come to believe it.

Of course we Arizonans welcome *legal* immigrants and are not even hell bent on spending energy fighting against illegal workers! The accusation of Arizonians being racist against "Hispanics", whether they are legal immigrants, multi-generational Americans or even illegal workers is ridiculously unfounded and insulting. These false stories of racism have been so emotionally charged and often-repeated in the media that the real issues, which really should be emotional issues, get overlooked or worse – buried on purpose.

Real emotional issues

We Arizonans can't help but wonder why others don't seem to care at all about the Mexican citizens and Americans alike that are increasingly in danger of the drug cartel, illegal arms trading and the kidnapping/ransom schemes that revolve around the Arizona border. For instance, Mexicans pay good money to other Mexicans to drive them over the border, then are kidnapped by the very people who drove them over and held for ransom, among other horrific things.

But all I can guess is that those particular stories, for whatever reason, have not been framed in an emotional context in the media. In fact, they haven't been in the media much at all. If too many people become aware of these serious problems it might lead to more pressure to protect the border, and that would go against the status quo. I wonder if that fear causes the media to simply avoid reporting these issues in the first place.

Furthermore we Arizonans feel compassion for *legal* immigrants who have endured or are currently enduring the long and tricky process of legal immigration. That fact is flat out twisted in the media who often simply use the word "immigrants", not differentiating between legal or illegal, and thus blurring the whole issue.

Ironically, our former Democratic governor, Janet Napolitano, announced a state of emergency during the Bush Administration in response to illegal immigrants crossing our very long and porous border. "We've heard too much talk about border security and not enough action. All of America is waiting and time is running out," she said in a speech at the National Press Club. She estimated that the federal government owed Arizona \$350 million for the cost of holding illegal immigrants in jail. She argued that that kind of money "could pay for all day kindergarten for every 5 year old in the state."

Now that she is Secretary of Homeland Security under the most Liberal regime in our history she has been most unhelpful with our predicament. Perhaps Napolitano's opinion on immigration depends solely who her constituents are.

The hypocrisy doesn't stop there.

Just eight days before his inauguration President-elect Barack Obama met with Mexican President Calderon over lunch at the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington, D.C. and pledged he would take action to stop the flow of guns into Mexico from the United States. But once elected, his regime took part in a scheme called Fast and Furious that purposefully *initiated* a flow of guns into Mexico. The program forced Arizona gun shops to sell to the Mexican cartel in hopes of following the guns, yet didn't track the guns! This resulted not only in the death of one of our own border agents, but *hundreds of deaths in Mexico*.

Ironically, this *should* have been an emotional issue since it involved hundreds of deaths but instead was barely in the news at all.

It's hard to even imagine any legitimate reason for *Fast and Furious* other than to create more gun violence as the mayhem spills into the United States for the purpose of justifying stricter gun control laws.

Gun control

Let me briefly point out one more fallacy as a result of oversimplified emotional thinking, and that is "stricter gun control leads to lower murder rates". This is only true if one cherry picks the data. Countries like Mexico, Brazil and Russia have stricter gun control laws than the United States and much higher murder rates. Israel and Switzerland have very low murder rates and a higher percentage of gun ownership. But the only country ever cited as "evidence" is Britain. It's true that Britain has stronger gun control laws and lower murder rates, but again, there are numerous cause and effect relationships at work in any given country. There is *no* direct causal relationship between general gun ownership and violence.

Gun control laws are primarily emotion driven rather than being driven by critically examining potential consequences such as the fact that the bad guys as well as government officials will have guns no matter what the laws are. It is usually the very people who seek more power and control over our lives that are the strongest gun control advocates. A good portion of the population is emotionally driven to believe that the government's overreaching gun policies actually exist to help us as if we are helpless otherwise. We are not children of the government. We are adults who have hired – and continually pay – the government to protect us.

And let's never forget the reason for our gun rights in the first place. In the case of a government who has completely overstepped its bounds and evolved into a tyrannical one, unfortunately the only way to regain our freedom is for the might of the people to overwhelm the might of the state. A government treads much more carefully when its citizens are armed. In every dictatorship the first thing that happens is that gun ownership is outlawed so that the general populace can no longer defend itself. For instance, before the Nazis began exterminating their Jewish population they needed to disarm them first.

An armed populace is the last and most important check on government abuse of individual rights. So in the course of continuing dialog about this most important right, we should never find ourselves drawn into arbitrary talk about which guns are suitable for sport shooting or hunting, even if it's in defense of gun ownership, because those issues are unrelated to our constitutional right to keep and bear arms and just detract from the real reason for the second amendment.

Learning to understand each other

As the reader might have gathered by now, I am implying that emotional thinkers tend to lean Liberal and logical thinkers tend to lean Conservative, at least as far as economic policies go. I can't help but wonder if we are born with our brains wired to lean one way or the other politically – to be primarily logical or emotional. After all, we are born either gay, or not, or to some varying degree. We are born with personality tendencies. We are born with all sorts of pre-wiring, different from the baby in the next crib. I wonder if the personality tendencies that our parents notice before even having influence on us – whether we are natural loners or team players, leaders or followers, independent or dependent, focused or flighty, emotional or logical – cause us to gravitate left or right, or up or down, politically.

If this were shown to be the case, then we might at least understand what we are dealing with when we disagree on politics. It just may not be possible to convince certain people of certain things right on the spot. We are our brains, and rewiring ourselves politically or religiously is usually a slow and painful process. Although our brain structures may indeed cause us to have certain political leanings, as we gather new evidence over the course of time it may in turn change our brain structures. Many people do change their political views over the course of their lifetime. As the saying goes, "If you're young and Conservative you have no heart. If you're old and Liberal you have no brain."

It is almost a lost cause for me to preach the idea of freedom to someone who is pre-wired as a natural follower or an emotional thinker or has an aversion to the type of risk that having more freedom requires (although, in my mind, a world controlled by Liberals is much riskier). They may not be able to physically change their minds no matter how thoroughly and logically I explain it. And besides the fact that our brains may be wired one way or the other, logic rarely convinces an emotional thinker anyway.

Indeed, a widely publicized study by the University College London in 2011 demonstrated that differences in political orientation are tied to differences in specific structures of our brains. People who identify as Liberals tend to have a larger anterior cingulate cortex, which processes reward anticipation, empathy and emotion, and is linked with tolerance to uncertainty and conflicting information. Conservatism was associated with increased right amygdala size, which process violations to personal space, greater emotional intelligence, societal integration and cooperation with others and a greater ability to recognize a threat.

The "Hope and Change" slogan of the Obama campaign seemed ridiculous and simplistic from the perspective of the Right, but grabbed the attention and support of the Left because of its emotional value. The fact that the slogan was vague and uncertain didn't matter, and the fact that the Obama administration's consequent actions sharply conflicted with his initial campaign message seems widely tolerated by the Left as well. Hardwired emotional thinking may even explain the tolerance to all of the conflicting hypocrisies and fallacies outlined in this essay.

As a Libertarian with one foot to the left and an arm to the right, I wonder how my brain structures would measure up. I grasp at freedom in both directions, which means social values to the left and economic values of the right. I would guess that I have more brain-structural traits of a Conservative since I'm a logical thinker, test high on emotional intelligence tests and wish to naturally cooperate with others as opposed to being forced to "cooperate", and I identify threats quite often, mostly from the current government! Whereas I could care less about rewards for my actions other than a basic paycheck, and have very little tolerance for conflicting information. I have been told I'm empathetic however, and that might be the social-Libertarian in me. It is all very interesting to ponder, but probably too easy to over-think, so I will enthusiastically await further studies in this area before I get too carried away analyzing myself.

But whether or not our brains cause our political leanings, or our political leanings cause our brains to change – and I suspect it goes both ways – it highlights the fact that it does take time and a lot of effort for most people to ever change their political views. It may be that most people simply can't help the way they lean politically and that instead of battling heads we must recognize that any change in our views will take patience along with lots and lots of convincing information one way or the other.

People do often shift from more Liberal views as youngsters to more Conservative ones as they age but it is usually a very slow process. When we are young we tend to see things as black and white and to want to help everyone by giving them what they "deserve". But over time as we observe the world and gain experience we come to understand a more complex dynamic permeating society, that everything eventually must be accounted for or paid for one way or the other and that it isn't healthy or realistic to be forced to either give or receive money that was taken by force. Unfortunately about half of our fully-grown legislators never went through this maturing phase and still prefer to govern through "feelings".

The bombardment of emotional propaganda in the media coupled with our natural tendency for overly simplistic abstract thinking and planning is continually pulling us away from freedom and decentralization, towards lifestyles that are restricted and controlled. Some of us have an ideological preference for a purely free market society and unhindered personal freedom, but now that we are currently so far off the mark, it's hard to know what corrective maneuvers to take as citizens. We need to constantly and relentlessly pull for decentralization in all areas of our lives and to continually shake off each new chain that binds us, since the nature of legislators will always be to control the masses, whether it is their intention or not.

Ideally we would welcome the peaceful experimentation and evolution of different models of social organization and learn to respect each other, understanding that we may have simply been born with different brain wiring, into different families and different social situations.

Why is society so complex?

Everything in the physical world on every level is competing with other things in one way or another, or cooperating – however you prefer to think about it. Wind causes ocean waves to rise while gravity pulls them down. Snowflakes are formed through different environmental conditions as they fall; some that cause them to melt and others that cause them to grow. Patterns of galaxies are formed in the midst of the competing factors of gravity (mostly dark matter) and some form of anti-gravity (dark energy). Contradiction creates the Universe as we know it. It's the engine that keeps it churning. Call it Chaos Theory, or dynamical systems, or complexity theory, or any number of names. It's just the way things work. The beauty we see all around us in nature is the result of all this.

This reality isn't just reserved for what we think of as nature, but is at work in society as well. Competing terms give rise to patterns and order no matter the medium or size of the system. Smatterings of war and peace have defined humanity since time immemorial. Greed and generosity are competing terms that together give rise to great innovation and organizations. The engine of any free market system is the combination of self-interest and cooperation among the people. Like nature, a free society evolves spontaneously and organically. This organic order is disrupted when a top down force tries to regulate it, prune it, manipulate it or control it in any number of ways.

Society may be complicated, but like nature, a free society has many corrective measures built in. It's not easy for most people to trust that these corrective measures are sufficient or even that they exist at all because of how complex society is. But many confusing and conflicting opinions about society are just a matter of perspective. We might think we're a "greedy" society or "environmentally destructive" or "high tech" or "war mongering", or all of the above. Yet the person next door might be convinced of the opposite – that we are the most proactively helpful nation to other nations in need, the most generous society to our own citizens, and environmentally aware. The world has grown so incredibly complex that actually all of the above is true on some level.

The United States does end up in bloody wars that go on far too long, but at the same time our private citizens and government together are the highest net donor of international aid in absolute dollar amounts, providing more than twice the amount of the next highest donor, the United Kingdom.

The "harmony" of nature can be downright cruel at times. There are continual extinctions and continual newcomers, yet the average person sees nature as the most balanced and "fair" entity of all. A free market economy makes more sense as seen through the lens of nature. For instance, after some period of time, monopolies inevitably won't survive the new innovation of competitors and will have to downsize in order to survive, or an up and coming business might get eaten alive by a larger, more successful business. An elephant can stomp on a termite, but termites can also make or break an entire ecosystem. In nature

there are no restrictions on innovation but there are also no bailouts.

Almost everyone appreciates the perfect balance of untouched nature even though she can be harsh and unforgiving. Why? I think it is because deep down we really crave pure unadulterated freedom. It's been a long and continuous battle to win whatever freedom we have now. Those of us who truly crave freedom already know that we must accept nature's unforgiving ways to some degree. Freedom doesn't come with any guarantees. For instance, we must accept that dinosaurs were unforgivingly wiped off the planet, and if they weren't we probably wouldn't be here. And even after that it was only through cleverness and cunning that we eventually made our way to the top of the food chain.

Conclusion

As we grow as a species and become more intelligent and numerous it is imperative that we gain a much deeper awareness of the complexity of things, including the nature of society, and not just assume that our immediate mental (emotional) perception of how we are is the only level of reality. There are many levels of "reality" and many ways to interpret each one of them. People categorize differently than one another, remember the past differently, make wildly different predictions about the future and completely different assumptions about things.

We tend to view quick snapshots in time, and to categorize groups of people in a way that vastly oversimplifies things – as if a race is a race (though most of us are not of one pure race), a religion is a religion (though interpretations can be wildly different) as if a gender is a gender (though lines are often blurred), as if the rich were forever rich (though many were once poor) and as if the poor are forever poor (though many find opportunities to change their situation). Categorizing does not necessarily help us think of the world more rationally, realistically, or even more compassionately.

The average person is extremely limited in their grasp of the underlying forces of society because of a general lack of understanding of complex dynamical systems to begin with. As advanced as our abstract thinking is, it can trick us into shortsighted notions about the world. Legislators are usually average people with the same limited grasp of complexity. We can't expect legislators to be superhuman. However, those responsible for making sweeping decisions for society should at least be aware that the complexities of civilization, and therefore outcomes of their legislation, are well beyond their linear intuition.

Not only are we not wired to think through all of the cascading complexity beyond a few causal steps (nor is any super computer!) but also, our linear thinking has been reinforced by the notion of a "clockwork universe" which has been naively taught over the ages. If we see the world as simple, static and well defined, it is all too easy to proceed to implement sweeping programs that feel good emotionally but make us worse off in the long run. With

a higher grasp of reality, those very same programs may actually seem morally reprehensible.

Some legislators *are* aware of the complex dynamics of society and purposefully take advantage of the general populace's lack of understanding of complexity in order to pass their agendas, using a vastly simplified emotional message. Unfortunately, the fastest way to achieve political power is to say what the people want to hear. To compound the problem, emotional slogans about government "programs", "subsidies", "stimulus plans", "racism", "greed", and "the rich" are repeated in our nationalized news to the point where it becomes extremely convincing, at least to the emotionally gullible. Only a rare legislator or news broadcaster will have the moral fortitude to stand by the truth if they can even recognize it in the first place.

Over the millennia, periods of widespread emotion permeating society and periods of restrained logic have teetered and tottered, alternating throughout history. Ancient Greece was logical, the Medieval Era was largely emotional, the Renaissance was logical, the Baroque Era was emotional, the Classical period was logical, the Romantic period was emotional, and from there it has evolved into a complex mix as populations have grown and worldwide communications have exposed us to innumerable ways of thinking.

The fact that we are made up of these opposing types of people – logical types and emotion-based thinkers – is one of the biggest reasons for so many seemingly ironic contradictions in the world. But currently in the United States and even scattered across the planet it really does appear that we are deeply planting ourselves into another period of unrestrained emotional "thinking" where logic is largely rendered meaningless – especially the brand of logical dynamical thinking that it takes to comprehend the cascading consequences of our actions in our complicated world.

The same forces that cause weather patterns and mountain ranges affect our civilization. Each person, like individual molecules, may appear to be acting randomly on some level, but as a whole we form recognizable patterns and sometimes will even trend in a unified direction. Seven billion of us interact with our neighbors, affecting them while they in turn affect us. Trying to control all of us individuals from the top down is a waste of time for the same intuitive reason that it is a bad idea to try to control the weather. Controlling the masses might help some of us in the short term but inevitably hurt others. The controls of sweeping legislation might work on a limited basis for a period of time, but eventually we will break the chains that bind us and pull for decentralization in all areas of our lives, in both economic and social issues.

If there is one means of control that will actually keep us civilized in the long run it is the control that we must implement on ourselves, and ourselves alone, that reflects an understandable and organic set of principles. We should not forcibly interfere with the right of others to live in whatever manner they choose, and in return we also have the right to exercise sole dominion over our own lives. This means we would not impose any type of force against others, would not suppress the freedom of speech of others and should respect others' property as we expect all of the same in return. When we cease to control

the masses from the top down and instead expend our energy controlling our own actions in a way that fits our own lifestyles, as long as we aren't harming others, then the natural order of society can take root and evolve organically. In the long run it is the most compassionate and natural way to exist together.

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