



# LIBERTY TREE

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In the June *Liberty Tree*,<sup>1</sup> I observed that truth is often elusive, and that the more expansive the truth — that is, as you approach the idea of the *whole* truth — the harder it gets to know it for certain. This difficulty is natural enough; obviously, the more there is to know, the less likely it is that we can know it all. And this limitation gets back to the subject of that article — trusted sources of information.

Over time, experience will teach us which sources of information can be trusted, and which ones cannot. But it's important to understand that the distinction between the two cannot, or at least *should* not, be whether or not the information we obtain from them is itself *true*. This may seem counterintuitive at first, but upon further reflection, you will hopefully see that the distinction should properly be the *intent* of the source. A trusted source of information should be the one who *believes* it to be true, and is passing it on to educate others in good faith, while an untrustworthy source knows the information he presents is *false*, but passes it along to deliberately mislead those who receive it. Indeed, to my mind, this is the most important characteristic for a trusted source — the *intent* to present true information (whether it is *actually* true or not).

The reason that intent is so important is that being *honestly* wrong about something is often simply a function of ignorance. Any of us can be wrong, and in fact, every one of us is wrong at some time or another.

Should we consider ourselves untrustworthy then? Of course not! We may be wrong because we lacked the necessary information, or because we made an honest

mistake in our evaluations, calculations, observations or conclusions. But this is part of the natural progression of knowledge. As we

accumulate more and better information and skills, we are able to come to more correct conclusions and better decisions.

In “Believing Liars” I discussed the untrustworthiness of the government as a source of truthful information, since it has an agenda that is often, if not always, at odds with the will of the people, especially as that will is expressed in the Constitu-



John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), British philosopher, economist, and political theorist, published *On Liberty* in 1859.

tion. However, there is a greater evil that the government inflicts on the people, and that is the censorship of dissenting opinions. We need look no further than the federal injunction against the Fellowship for an ex-

(Continued on page 2)

## THE WHOLE TRUTH

By Dick Greb

## Taking Every Last Dime

Despite the Privacy Act, the Social Security Administration charges nearly 30 federal reserve notes to produce a copy of an application for an SSN. How do they do it?

If you don't have a copy of the application you made to the Social Security Administration (SSA) for an SSN (or the request your parents made for an SSN), it would seem a

simple matter to request a copy from the SSA. After all, Congress passed the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 USC § 552a) to ensure that each citizen or permanent resident of the United States has access to the records about him- or herself that have been collected and maintained by federal agencies.

When a person requests personal records kept by an agency under the Privacy Act, the agency is allowed to charge for the cost of *making copies* of the records, but not for any costs of searching or reviewing the records

(Continued on page 3)

1. See “Believing Liars”: [libertyworksradionetwork.com/jml/images/pdfs/libtree\\_jun\\_2013.pdf](http://libertyworksradionetwork.com/jml/images/pdfs/libtree_jun_2013.pdf).



in question.<sup>1</sup>

But visit the SSA's website, and you will find that the SSA is charging quite a fee for providing copies — 27 FRNs for a copy of the Form SS-5 application if an SSN is provided, 29 FRNs if not.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the SSA calls requests for these forms FOIA<sup>3</sup> requests rather than Privacy Act requests.

As is so often the case with agencies exceeding (and obfuscating) the limits of their power, a check into the regulations shows that the SSA has devised a tangled web of their own rules to hide their obligation under the Privacy Act to supply copies at the mere cost of printing.

In the regulations at 20 C.F.R. § 402.170 (b), the SSA insists that: “we generally **will not charge** you for information needed to assure the accuracy of our records on which your present or future Social Security benefits depend. In addition, we generally **will not charge** for furnishing information under section 205 (c)(2)(A) of the [Social Security] Act. However, if we do charge for a program related request (for example, if more detailed information or special services are requested) we will use the ... fee schedule in 20 CFR 401.95 if access to the information is being granted **under the Privacy Act**” (emphases added). The fee for a Privacy Act request under § 401.95 for “Copying of records susceptible to photocopying” is “\$.10 per page,” and copying records not susceptible to photocopying is at actual cost to be determined on a case-by-case basis, but in any event, the SSA “will not charge if the total amount of copying does not exceed \$25.” All of this is in keeping with the Privacy Act, as cited above.

How, then, does the SSA get away with charging 27 FRNs for a mere copy of a record already kept on microfilm?<sup>4</sup> It appears that by using §1106(c) of the Social Security Act, the SSA skirts both the FOIA and the Privacy Act requirements. § 1106(c) states:

Notwithstanding sections 552 and 552a of title 5, [] or any other provision of law, whenever the Commissioner of Social Security or the Secretary determines that a request for information is made in order to assist a party in interest (as defined in section 3 of the [ERISA] of 1974 (29 U.S.C. 1002)) with respect to the administration of an employee benefit plan ... **or is made for any other purpose not directly related to the administration of the program or programs under this Act** to which such information relates, such

1. See 5 U.S.C. § 552a (f)(5).
2. [www.socialsecurity.gov/foia/request.html#a0=1](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/foia/request.html#a0=1).
3. Freedom of Information Act.
4. At least on microfilm, but it's likely that to produce such a copy these days requires nothing more than a few seconds of computer searching and typing a print command.
5. 42 U.S.C. § 1306 (c).

## What's holding up Paper Ballots in Maryland?

In 2007, the Maryland Legislature voted to require paper ballots for the state's voting system by 2010. Why hasn't this been implemented, and what can we do about it? **Please join SAPF & LWRN on**

**Saturday, September 7, 2013**

**5 S. Center Street, Westminster, MD 21157**

(Entrance on the alley side, at white double doors.  
Please call 410-857-4441 if you need directions.)

**for an important meeting on how we can  
bring Paper Ballots back to Maryland!**



A sample copy of the Form SS-5 copied from microfilm.

Commissioner or Secretary may require the requester to pay the full cost, as determined by the such Commissioner or Secretary, of providing such information.<sup>5</sup>

By simply determining (*i.e.* assuming) in advance that *the intent* of all requests made for the Form SS-5 is not “directly related” to the administration of its programs, the SSA can set whatever costs it determines for such requests. The average requester does not understand that the Form SS-5 is maintained by the SSA specifically for administering its programs. Nor is the average requester aware that the SSA has also made a pre-determination that his or her request for a copy of the record is *not* directly related to the SSA's administration of its programs. And only one in a million is likely to research the matter or challenge the SSA. After all, it doesn't cost the requestor more than a parking ticket, right?

The entire SSA program is built on deception. What's a little more? Especially if it serves to strip people of even more of their hard-earned money. Had enough yet?



with that, he is either led by authority, or adopts, like the generality of the world, the side to which he feels most inclination.<sup>5</sup>

This condition is one that seems as common in the freedom movement as in the general population. Patriots study the positions of one “guru” or another and become so intellectually invested (and often financially invested as well) in them that they stop trying to refute those positions (if they even start), and accept them as true without ever fully testing them. This is not to say that they don’t spend a whole lot of time, energy and money studying those positions, because many certainly do, but mostly just to support them. Few ever study their own positions with an eye towards refuting them, and even fewer study the positions of their opponents in order to effectively do the same. Thus, they can never really understand the issue, and are reduced to merely repeating, like a mantra, the arguments that have been fed to them by others. “Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.”<sup>6</sup>

Censorship of opposing views always leads to the suppression of truth. As Thomas Jefferson said, “It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.”<sup>7</sup> So, the main purpose of the suppression of opposing views is ultimately to hide the weakness of one’s own views. After all, if your position can’t stand up to serious scrutiny, then you wouldn’t want to allow anyone to raise questions in people’s minds which would set them on the path to such scrutiny. This, of course, is the whole purpose behind the demonization of “conspiracy theories.” The government can’t afford to have people hearing explanations of events that make more sense than the tales it’s telling to the public. And with the far-fetched stories it tells, even fairly crazy theories can give them a run for the money in the sense department. So, government takes the craziest ones it can find (or just as likely, makes them up itself), and uses them to justify tarring and feathering all alternative explanations, to keep the public from getting “confused” by them.<sup>8</sup>

Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.

As Mills said in the first quote above, suppression of alternative views might rob one of the opportunity of trading an erroneous view for a true one, or of solidifying one’s understanding of the true view they already hold. However, a much more likely scenario than either of these is that the view one holds is itself only partly true and partly false, and that opposing views likewise contain only a portion of truth in them. If that be so, then the suppression of opposing views will ultimately prevent *everybody* from ever knowing the whole truth. All those fragments of truth hidden away in the views we’re kept from seeing will never get to replace the errors in our own understanding, and we will all be the worse for it. And this is the case whether we don’t see those contrasting views because of external forces, such as government censorship, or simply because of self-imposed practices.

In the end, it behooves all of us to engage in serious evaluations of the positions we hold, if we have a desire to know the whole truth of a matter. That means being able to refute those who espouse conflicting views and being able to defend your views against the refutation of others. And if there’s nobody providing any refutation of the positions you hold, then you should diligently try to formulate such refutations yourself. Mill’s view is that rather than disparaging those who would refute our positions, we should thank them:

That, therefore, which when absent, it is so indispensable, but so difficult, to create, how worse than absurd it is to forego, when spontaneously offering itself! If there are any persons who contest a received opinion, or who will do so if law or opinion will let them, let us thank them for it, open our minds to listen to them, and rejoice that there is some one to do for us what we otherwise ought, if we have any regard for either the certainty or the vitality of our convictions, to do with much greater labor for ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

The fact is, we may still never know the whole truth, but unless we develop our ability to justify our positions against opposing ones, it is *certain* that we will never know it. Only by the constant testing of our positions can we expect to come to true understanding. In this we should try to apply the same principle as that which Luke praises in the people of Berea: “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”<sup>10</sup>



5. *Ibid.*, lines 793–802.

6. *Ibid.*, lines 682–685.

7. *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Ellery Bergh, ed. (1905), vol. 2, pg. 222, “Notes on Virginia.”

8. Courts use the same excuse to keep those being tried for tax “crimes” from explaining their positions to juries, and for the same reason. It wouldn’t do to have jurors hearing reasonable explanations for why a defendant believes the way he does. It might *confuse* them into believing he couldn’t have acted “willfully.”

9. *Ibid.* 4, lines 1145–1154.

10. Acts 17:11.