

The Alternative Line

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for Publication in CNY-PCA Redline Report

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Dear friends; A recent article in Autoweek and an infomercial on TV yesterday got me thinking about what constitutes liberty. You will never find me so radical as to suggest that there be NO regulation of things we each hold dear. But history has taught us a few lessons about the abuse of power in the hands of those with an agenda which is not in keeping with the general populace.

Strangely, this all came home to me as I read of the intolerance of live performances of Wagner's music in Isreal, because Wagner had been anti-semitic, but more because of its abuse by the Nazis in propaganda. Yet it is simply MUSIC. Helter Skelter was music written by John Lennon, but HE could not be said to have caused the murders by Charles Manson and his gang.

The infomercial suggested that law-abiding gun owners were increasingly put at risk BOTH by prosecution for such ownership, and from those whose lawlessness was little constrained by already existing laws against the mis-use of those guns. The Autoweek article essentially suggested that there had been some significant loss of personal choices as automobile ownership became incrementally more controlled by government. Both these issues can be seen to stem from some individuals' need to control what others are allowed to do. In the same way, it could easily be seen that CAFÉ, a strange and empirically unverifiable calculation of the average fuel economy of a producer's fleet, is somehow the subject of regulation, rather than designing energy policy so the result will be the improvement of fuel economy. Think about it; if the real objective is to stimulate fuel economy or alternatives to gasoline, then driving the cost of gas up via taxes will result in precisely what you see in Europe; more exciting performance from significantly more fuel-efficient vehicles.

But by leaving the pump price at low cost, there is no incentive to avoid the Stupid Urban Vehemoth in favor of the streamlined screamer. Now, few Americans are really so stupid as to not have figured this out. But they ALSO understand the concept of mass vs. efficiency, and in a head-on collision, mass always wins. Or does it? Much has been published about the IIHS warning of dire consequences of smaller cars in the USA. Yet noone seems to have realized that they make more money insuring BIG ones because they tend to CRUSH more in any accident. So it follows that if one extrapolates that back, the little car MUST be more nimble, and therefore more likely to AVOID the crash in the first place. Duh! Ever hear the IIHS suggest that a Skip Barber or PCA driver school could reduce your insurance rates? Neither have I. But I have ALL KINDS of empirical evidence of its correlation, in SPITE of much evidence (ahem) of an increased velocity tendency from same.

Folks, let me explain the difference between Passive Safety and Active Safety. Passive is when you are suspended inside a pillow, but cannot see or affect an impending collision in any way. The marshmallows around you keep your body from decelerating so rapidly as to cause you harm (nobody was ever hurt jumping from a 79 story building – just from the sudden stop at ground level), but you are not ALLOWED any input to that system. Think about how an airbag system works. Active safety, on the other hand, DEPENDS on you doing the right thing at the right time. And if you screw up, you are likely to die. Next.

I simply wonder if, in trying to make systems which protect us from ourselves TOO much, we do not do some major damage to the contract we all implicitly accept when we decide to be participants in democracy. It is, after all, dependent on we the people making choices, and bearing the **consequences** of those choices. Totalitarians limit those choices, but also limit the liberties those choices imply. Wagner anyone?

