

on this score. If it is the latter, however, we can declare the job done. Our welfare state is about as advanced as you can get without actually sliding into socialism.

1 Thought

RE: DO THEY KNOW? HOW DO WE KNOW THEY KNOW?

Posted on October 27, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

OKAY, I'M STARTING TO THINK GREG IS PULLING MY LEG WITH THIS whole "people are stumbling around not knowing what they do" thing. He even goes so far as to label as "poppycok" and Pelagianist the idea that people act rationally (when they have a vested interest in it and have the intellectual horsepower to do so).

To his mind we are incapable of understanding the consequences of our actions, unable to connect the dots between cause and effect. It's all the fault of that dratted original sin, he says – it has confounded everything. Not only did it leave us with an appetite for immorality, it even robbed us of the ability to think rationally. Well, I'll see your "poppycok" and raise you a "pish posh."

Greg has made for himself an untenable model of human behavior and responsibility. In a nutshell, it is this:

Human beings are fallen and sinful creatures, and our sin affects our consciousness. We are “darkened” by sin. This does not excuse us from responsibility for our actions. But it does mean that the sin we are committing when we act wrongly is often a negligent failure to know what we ought to know – to know what we would have known if only we were good people – rather than a conscious decision to do the act even though we know that act to be wrong.

I’ll grant you that God has created a system in which the sins of the first couple (no, not the Obamas) condemned to guilt every subsequent generation before they could have even a single thought in their minds. I don’t understand that, and I’m quite certain none of you do either. Poetically, yes, that makes us “darkened” by sin.

What I *won’t* grant, however, is that the darkening took our rationality. What a silly, farcical world that would leave us. It would be a cartoon world, just like the one that fronts Greg’s post. It’s a world in which people are not accountable for their actions (*pace* Greg’s statement above). The ability to know the effects of what one causes is the irreducible cornerstone of responsibility. Without that, holding someone to account is unjust, pointless, and cruel.

A world in which sin robs us of rationality is certainly not one in which we can fly men to the moon, drive boats underwater, invisibly heal bodies from cancer, or put a world of information into the palm of my hand. None of this is possible without rigorous – and, one might even say, flawless – rationality.

Ah, but these are *technological* accomplishments, you might tell me. They have nothing to do with whether the cultural elite know the consequences of their

actions. Not so. Our inquiry is into the human mind's ability to accurately grasp the effects of one's choices – not whether it comprehends whether one effect is morally superior to another, just whether the effect will follow from the impetus.

So, is the human mind up to this task? Yes, yes it is. And from the moment you open your eyes in the morning till you close them at night, you see the proof of it. The darkening is that our desires are disordered, not that we don't know what it is that we do. That is to say, when confronted with competing values, we often choose wrongly – even when we know the consequences of our actions. *That* is the legacy of the Fall.

Greg mistakes this for Pelagianism. It is not. The error in that doctrine was the idea that we can choose to follow God without sin. In other words, Pelagius said we can always identify the correct moral choice and, having identified it, we have the ability to act on it. That's wrong, and I don't ascribe that ability to the cultural elite. I'm saying they know the consequences of their actions, irrespective of morality. Those are two totally separate things.

Let's return to the abortion example. Greg intimates that Planned Parenthood and NARAL would accept our message of life if someone just explained to them that abortions destroy human beings. Which necessarily means that no one at Planned Parenthood or NARAL has ever seen a sonogram of a late-term unborn child. Or that they believe the baby fairy swoops down at the moment of birth and transforms an undifferentiated mass of cells into a human infant. *There's* your poppycock. They know abortion takes the life of an unborn child, and if they said otherwise they know they would be laughed out of the room. It is not knowledge or rationality they lack, but a correct ordering of values.

And the media, what of them? How about a very specific example of knowingly fronting for a system that destroys lives? The New York Times won a Pulitzer prize for Walter Duranty's deceptive reports on Stalin's Soviet Union. Duranty fawned over the communist system, justifying every evil and destructive decision and policy as necessary to achieve the greater good. He famously responded to the Stalin-imposed Ukrainian famine by dismissively noting that "you have to break a few eggs to make an omelet."

Just so we're clear – Duranty wasn't talking about eggs. He was talking about millions of deaths. He knew it and the New York Times knew it, and they've never returned the Pulitzer. The communist project was more important than the eggs. The Fall led to their disordered values. It didn't make them insensible.

So where does that leave us? If Greg's right, then what we're doing here on this blog is so much meaningless blather. If the cultural elite really are so lacking in reason that they cannot connect the dots between what they do and what happens afterwards, they certainly aren't capable of engaging in rational conversation.

And if the Fall really had such a catastrophic effect on our ability to reason, then who's to say *they* aren't right?

P.S. The alternative explanation Greg offered for the media's defense of radical Islam is not plausible. Radical Islam is not on the decline, nor is it losing ground. It is on the rise and is taking more territory (Egypt being the most recent example, likely to be followed by others in the terribly-misnamed "Arab Spring"). Those are objectively verifiable facts. So the press is not ignoring it

because it is confident it will go away. They know it's on the opposite trajectory.

Update: Upon review, I can see where my post might leave some with the impression I do not consider the problem of sin (original or otherwise) to be as grave as it is. So let me say this. I understand sin is rebellion against God, that it is horrible beyond, probably, our comprehension, and it is so serious it required the death of his son to repair the rift it caused between him and his creation. And in a sinful state it is difficult to make moral choices. But that does not change my analysis above, which addresses a person's ability to know the effects of his choices, not whether the choice is morally correct.

4 Thoughts

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