

There may be other justifications for forcing one person to give what he has created to someone who has not earned it, but please let's not pretend it's compassion. If we really care about our fellow man, we ought at the very least take a hard, critical look at the damage our faux compassion is causing. What have we bought with that \$1 trillion? Not the end of poverty, certainly. But we've got more envy, resentment, and unwarranted pride than we could ever need.

4 Thoughts

EPISTEMOLOGY-SLINGING AT THE OK CORRAL

Posted on October 16, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

GREG HAS CHOSEN EPISTEMOLOGY AT 20 PACES. SO BE IT. NOW, Greg has steady nerves and keen aim, so this doesn't bode well for me. But my Irish heritage has given me a genetic inability to duck a challenge. All I'm hazarding, however, is public embarrassment, so here goes.

In Greg's view of things, the cultural elite (no less than the gentleman watching Family Guy with a six-pack standing by) are insensibly marching in circles with too little thought given to where they have been and where they are going. That is to say, they haven't given enough attention to the effects of what they do, and so are not intellectually responsible for what follows.

This isn't a cheap shot at those with whom we may disagree – he finds the same torpor on our side of the debate. In fact, to his credit, Greg is actually offering ignorance as a defense against my charge that the cultural elite know their favored policies are causing harm:

Both Christian teaching and conservative beliefs about human behavior explain why we shouldn't expect to find that our opponents are conscious of the destructiveness of their policies.

Greg says we need to, and can, break the cycle of unconscious destructiveness. To this he adds an important caveat:

But we can't do that if we live in a false reality where we imagine that our opponents are knowingly accepting the destruction of America as the price they pay for fidelity to their values. That picture strikes me as ludicrous.

That statement is why we are here at the OK Corral. If it's true, we have one type of conversation with our opponents (*a la* Kwai Chang Kaine and Grasshopper). If it's not, we have another (*mano a mano* over the relative importance of competing values). Before the shootin' starts, let's take a look around at the lay of the land.

As we do our survey, we notice two important features of the landscape. The first is that people are not epistemologically monolithic. What they know is largely determined by who they are, their level of intelligence, and their motivation to know whatever it is we're talking about.

Thus, it's important to identify who's doing the knowing, and what they are supposed to know. For example, I wouldn't expect a typical newsreader to know that the Federal Reserve's quantitative easing policy increases the money supply without reference to increased economic production, thereby causing the value of savings to erode as inflation increases. But I would certainly expect Ben Bernanke to know this.

The second feature our survey reveals is that we cannot always accurately predict all the consequences of our policies or ideas. In some Rube Goldbergian sense, when I buy a bottle of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir, I am engaging interconnected economic levers that reach across the country without even knowing what they are. If my preference for that wine over one from Napa Valley causes the other winery to go out of business, this says nothing about whether I *intended* the other winery to fail. My preference for Santa Barbara wines is not the proximate cause of the failure. But it *is* the proximate cause for one bottle of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir sitting in my kitchen instead of on a store shelf.

So when we charge someone with understanding the destructiveness of a policy or idea, it is important we first do the epistemological match. The first step is to look for people who are responsible for an idea or policy (or who advocate for it). This gives us the assurance we are considering only those with a high motivation to know the nature of the idea or policy. The second step is looking for a short proximal fuse between the policy they advocate and the consequence. This gives us a rational basis for tagging the people under consideration with knowledge of their policies' consequences.

That's what the OK Corral looks like. Greg's hand is inching towards his epistemology, and his finger's starting to twitch. So it's time to mix it up.

Greg said we could win over the cultural elite on topics like marriage by (for example) appealing to their concern for the poor, women, and children. We would be doing a bit of jiu-jitsu – using their solicitude for these groups to demonstrate a need to change their policies. This strategy only works, however, if the elite would not knowingly favor policies inimical to those groups.

Unfortunately, they do. Let's do some epistemological matching. The media have made themselves the institutional defenders of the poor, women, children, and minorities. Should they report on the end of the world, so the witticism goes, the headline would trumpet that women and children were hit the hardest. So they wouldn't give aid and comfort to something that would harm those groups, would they?

The rise of radical Islam shows that they would. One of the central characteristics of this extreme theology is its misogyny. The media, however, has been strangely silent on how destructive this is to women. They've even gone beyond silence – they actually run interference for radical Islam, pleading for our tolerance and understanding of differing cultures. The rights of women take back seat to a higher value (in their minds) – promoting and defending the multi-culturalism imperative.

We have an epistemological match! The media is in a position to know about radical Islam, is motivated to know what it does, and there is a nearly instantaneous proximal fuse between the thing they advocate and the destructive effects for women. Yes, we can safely conclude they know the destructive effects of their advocacy, and they pursue it anyway. Why? Because multi-culturalism is more important than its effects on women.

Shall we try another? It's an emotional one, but it is especially instructive. Here we will match the Democratic Party, a major women's organization, and a single-purpose special interest group to a policy deadly to children. The subject, as you might guess, is abortion. The Democratic Party favors it, the National Organization of Women is adamantly supportive, and the National Abortion Rights Action League has the single-minded purpose of keeping it legal.

Each of these culturally-elite organizations has invested heavily, both in dollars and intellectual effort, in normalizing the practice of abortion, making it culturally acceptable. An abortion, of course, involves taking the life of a human being. And everyone involved in the subject knows it. Not only is the proximal fuse short between the policy and the destructive consequence, it is simultaneous. So we may safely charge them with knowingly favoring a policy that has as its primary purpose harming children. Why? To preserve sexual libertinism. Another epistemological match!

We could do this all day long, but I think it makes the point, yes? Culturally elite institutions, ones with a vested interest in knowing the effects of their preferred policies, will work to the disadvantage of women, children, and the poor when it will advance a more important objective.

They don't need us to teach them that their policies cause collateral damage. They already know. If we are to make a difference, therefore, we have to convince them that the damage is a price too high to pay. And that project is significantly different from Greg's mission to simply put the collateral damage on display.

Let's not step into the OK Corral thinking the cultural elite don't know what they're doing. We'll get epistemology-whipped. And there ain't nothin' more

embarrassing than that.

4 Thoughts

THE LIMITS OF STATE ACTION: WHY YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

Posted on October 9, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

I LOVE THESE CONVERSATIONS. SOMETIMES, IN THE MIDDLE WATCH OF THE night, I'm still sifting through them, arranging fragments of thoughts and arguments to see if they are building towards a whole, and then arranging them again. It's deeply satisfying, but when the building blocks come from several different people, it is difficult. Each thought and argument has attached to it content that today we would call "metadata." That metadata, if we could see it, would tell us something about where in the grand scheme of things the person proposing the idea believes it belongs.

Trouble is, though, that the metadata is largely invisible – most often we have to intuit it from the substance of the discussion. And that leads to unnecessary misunderstandings. When we talk about rights, and morals, and law, and culture, we each have some understanding of how those are all supposed to fit together. But that doesn't necessarily come through when we talk about specific issues.