

12.Pretense of Knowledge

(Pretense is a monstrous lie, perhaps the worst of the worst)

As we live our lives, we often encounter people in positions of authority dispensing bogus information. A typical example is a teacher stating “the best results of education occur when students explore and learn on their own.” If this were true, the teacher would not be necessary. Why did ancient Greeks flock to the side of Socrates? To learn on their own? Another example is a newspaper editor stating that green sources of electricity just need to be given a chance and they will replace fossil fuels and nuclear in short order. This implies that green sources are exploitable regardless of economic results.

Instead of saying, “I don’t know,” or “It is my unsubstantiated opinion that ...” these people unabashedly put forth false statements with facile, innocent assertiveness. This sort of thing we may expect chatting with someone in line at the supermarket, but what I am writing about here are people in positions of authority, using fully the color and authority of their position.

A column in the Pasadena Star-News by Thomas Sowell describes pretense of knowledge and shows how it leads to error and horror. I will summarize briefly, then give Sowell's account.

My summary: A child less than one-year of age is brutally killed by his parents. The social services organizations of the San Mateo County Children and Family Services agency knew that this family had harmed other children in this same family, and knew that the child who eventually was killed had been severely injured in a suspicious fashion on other occasions. This happened because the authorities performed their work using bad reasoning. They applied a string of unproved social theories without using common sense. Had they been doctors, engineers, or paving contractors they would have been sued. Although the individuals may have been punished, their actions will continue carried out by others in the county agency. Their bogus science gets a free pass and will continue to wreak havoc.

Here is Tomas Sowell’s article:

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(Pasadena Star-News 27 Jan 2003)

“Angelo Marinda was a cute little baby, but he never lived to see his first birthday because he was another victim of a

widespread pretense of knowledge that has produced many tragedies.

Twelve days after he was born last April, little Angelo was in a hospital being treated for broken ankles and ribs. Although no one admitted abusing him, ankles and ribs don't break themselves, so he was removed from the home where his unmarried parents lived with relatives.

Then came the pretense of knowledge. There is something called "family reunification services" which are supposed to change abusive parents so that, their children can be safely returned to their home. But does anyone really know how to change someone who is capable of breaking the bones of a helpless newborn baby?

Although the severity of little Angelo's injuries would have provided a basis for simply putting him up for adoption, a social worker told the court that the San Mateo County Children and Family Services agency "will be recommending reunification services, as the parents are receptive to receiving services."

Hope springs eternal -- especially when it is at someone else's risk.

The fact that the little boy's sister had also been removed from the home and was "developmentally delayed" after suspected neglect might have tempered this optimism -- but it didn't. The fact that Angelo came back bruised from a November visit with his parents might have been a clue. The fact that the baby "had a look of fear in his eyes" on a Dec. 7 visit might have been a clue.

Never the less, the little tyke was turned over to his parents yet again for an unsupervised two-day visit at Christmastime. He died on Christmas literally shaken to death, according to police.

Facts like these can remain buried in bureaucratic files and the same irresponsible mistakes made again and again, with tragic consequences that remain unknown to anyone outside the narrow circle of those privy to the sealed information.

This time, however, San Mateo County Superior Court Judge Marta Diaz ordered the information made public. Thank heaven!

Now the voters have no excuse for letting this deadly pretense of being able to rehabilitate child abusers continue. Tragically, it is just one of innumerable pretenses to knowledge that no one has -- and not just in San Mateo County.

All across the country, there are "services" being made available at taxpayers' expense in the name of "anger management," "rehabilitation" of criminals, and other miracles on demand. How many little Angelos are we prepared to sacrifice on the altar to these pretenses?

It is no great secret to those who follow these things that the "services" of social workers and shrinks have no track record that would inspire such confidence.

But these services are a great way for officials to cop out by going through the motions of "doing something" about tragic situations.

Having prescribed these magic services, courts and social agencies can always claim good intentions when the coroners' reports come out. But it has been known for centuries that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. It would, of course, be wonderful to have some way to get criminals, drug addicts, abusive parents and others to change their ways and become better people. It would be great to be able to prevent crimes or drug addiction before they start.

But setting up programs with such goals in their titles is dangerous make-believe and self-indulgence when there is no evidence that these things can be relied on to do what they say they do.

The law, especially, should not be based on pretenses to knowledge. If little Angelo Marinda had simply been removed from his home permanently and put up for adoption, he would probably be alive today. That should

carry a lot more weight than fashionable phrases about "family reunification."

Intellectuals and academics are part of this problem too. Years ago I encountered" the Stanford professor who was pushing this "family reunification" fad and told him, more or less politely, what a crock I thought it was. But I doubt if he has lost a moment's sleep over little Angelo."

Sowell, as usual, has hit the nail squarely on the head.

A common error with regard to elected representatives is that the election transforms them into supermen. Imagine a newly elected official on his (or her) first day in office: Does the fact of winning an election make them more competent than they were prior to the election? If prior to entering office, the subject held a lesser political post, and ultimately he obtained degrees in history and law, why does his election make him an expert in global warming?

One of the things that infuriates me most is to see people in government regulatory agencies who haven't a clue as to what they are regulating; Christie Todd Whitman as head of the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), for example; or Bill Richardson as head of the DOE (Dept. of Energy), as another example. Does Whitman know the concept of equilibrium constant? Does Richardson know *Carnot's Law*? I venture to say the answer is NO. They are both *politicos*. Of course modern theory of management (another untested, dubious theory; another pretense of knowledge) holds that the head of an organization need not know the business he directs. He need only be versed in *management*, whatever *that* is.

Oh, really. Has anyone ever heard of Henry Ford, or ... Bill Gates. How many management courses did they take? Also: How about generals in the military? Do you understand how Lincoln went through four or five fine "managers" before he pulled Ulysses S. Grant out of obscurity, and that Grant pulled Sherman out of alcoholic oblivion. Grant and Sherman both knew how to fight, and (it turns out) they knew how to manage too.

One of the more dangerous pretenses of knowledge is the supposition that a government agency can issue regulations on production operations, yet this is done on a daily basis. A regulator can arrive on the facility of a drug manufacturer and issue an edict. The manufacturer can oblige, obfuscate (lie), or shut down (i.e., move to China). These

edicts even reach other branches of government. I was once on a facility operated by the Department of Defense (DOD) that produced explosive materials. They could not function because they were not permitted to burn their waste material.

Although the edict prohibiting waste burning sounds reasonable on the surface, when examined in depth, it fails.

To understand disposal of explosive materials, you have to understand explosives, but you also have to have experience. This, the regulators lack. DuPont, the prime producer of explosives in the USA over a span of more than 150 years, is responsible for most of the safety regulations. They began their quest for safety in their mills on the Brandywine (near Wilmington, Delaware) after several mills and several members of the Dupont family were blown up in accidents.

The company set out to study the causes of these losses. They established a system of reporting “incidents.” They weren’t being altruistic. They were being studious: How do we keep from blowing up our people (and our capital investment)?

Over many years, the DuPont company learned painful lessons. These lessons were reported, discussed, analyzed, and written down as a Safety Procedure. By being thorough and rational, DuPont saved its employees and its shareholders a lot of grief.

From first-hand experience, I can relate to you a fragment of what the requirements were for disposing of nitroglycerin dynamite.

I learned these things when I worked at Dinamita, Durango, Mex. as a helper, in the chemical laboratory during my summer job of 1960. I learned many things that summer. How to titrate a chemical solution to a very exacting norm was one thing, . . . but I digress. Safety. Safety. Safety. Safety was another thing I learned. I learned to wear eye-protection, to stay only in the lab area, or the office area, unless under the escort of authorized employees. I learned that these rules were the product of more than 100 years of observation by very serious people. The rules were written down. The rules were analyzed and refined in a process of continuous improvement. Infractions were punished by dismissal. The rules were studied, memorized and observed. Much of the company literature extolled safety -- even in the Annual Reports. The reasons given for attention to safety were: save life and limb, save company property. Detailed accident reports were circulated and discussed on a regular basis.

As an intern, I was put under the tutelage of the plant chemist, a fellow not older than 26 years of age. The procedure we adhered to for removing, testing, and disposing of dynamite was, roughly:

1. All tests had to be done as teams, a single individual could not run a test.
2. Sign your name to a preprinted form requesting a quantity of such and such explosive, identified by product number, plus production numbers. (The form had about 3 spaces to pencil in, and took about 5 seconds to complete.)
3. Obtain the material from the shipping dock. (The shipping dock was located on the boundary of a perimeter fence. One side of the fence was inside the plant. The other side was in the outside world. This was the portal from the company to the world.)
4. Proceed from the shipping dock to the test area. (The distance was about 4 kilometers.) Keep blasting caps separate from the test material.
5. Boom, boom, boom.
 - 5.5 In case of misfire:
 - 5.5.1 With fuse: wait for 15 minutes.
 - 5.5.2 With dynamo (aka, electric): test and retry three times.
6. Examine the test site. Collect unexploded material. Collect surplus material.
7. Go to burning ground. (The burning ground was an open field, surrounded by a fence.)
8. Place unexploded and surplus material in a designated zone, in a pile, add sawdust to the mass. Soak liberally with kerosene¹. Insert a 30-second black-powder fuse terminating in a small mound of sawdust near the surface of the mass. Light the fuse, and retreat to a clearly marked observation point. (When the fuse reaches the kerosene it will set the kerosene on fire.)

¹ Kerosene ruins nitroglycerine.

9. Watch while the mass burns. These masses do not detonate. They burn in a rather boring fashion. Satisfy yourself that no real explosive material remains. Approach within 30 feet of the smoldering residue. If any material remains undestroyed, do not mess with it; report it.

10. Fill out a form describing what was burned. Sign it. Turn the form in to the clerk at the shipping dock where the materials were removed from the site.

These things were done without any supervision from the any government agency. We were in the middle of the desert in Durango, Mexico. We supervised ourselves. There were no people in the Universe who could control our activities better than ourselves. And no one who had our interests more in mind.

Can you imagine these procedures being put into place by a bureaucrat in Dubuque or Washington? Why should the EPA set rules for these activities?

One of the reasons our Nation is imperiled is the idea that people in government, whether elected or appointed, must be *untainted by* filth associated with economic, commercial enterprise. The people on the left howl because Bush and Cheney both had ties to the oil industry. The left would have you believe hands-on experience makes them unsuited for public office. Gray Davis is pure because he has been a government flak his whole life. Bill Simon is sinister because he was in several businesses.

Here is a small table. Some parts are worthy of committing to memory:²

	<u>1929</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>
consumption	75.0	75.5	64.4	63.8	64.8
investment	15.7	7.6	15.2	14.8	17.3
inventory	na	na	0.6	0.2	-0.4
exports	1.1	1.5	0.5	0.1	-0.5
federal(%)	1.3	6.4	10.7	9.9	7.7
state + local(%)	7.0	9.0	8.6	11.1	11.0

² Source: *Information Please Almanac*.

The numbers are percent of gross domestic product (GDP). For example in 1929 the percent of GDP under the Federal government was 1.3 percent. The top four rows represent private control. The percent values for Federal and State are really higher and the Private numbers are lower, because many of those counted as private are really working on government contracts. Thus Boeing might be 40% government. Olin might be 80% government. Microsoft might be 10% government. (These later numbers, for Boeing etc., are guesses on my part.)

Looked at from another perspective, the Federal income taxes on a median family have gone from about 3% in 1920 to about 33% today. My guess is that more than half of this money is spent on *pretenses of knowledge* of one kind or another. The same is true of state and county revenues. Remember Angelo Marinda and the San Mateo County Children and Family Services agency?

From the table above, I judge that Federal government is 5 to 10 times as large as it needs to be, and local government is 40% greater than it needs to be.

When the money being spent is not yours and cannot affect you one way or another, then it doesn't matter if its use is effective (i.e., *economic*³) or not. This is your money in the hands of others.

How did the Federal government's business get done when it was lean and trim -- back when it was 3% of the GDP? First of all they stuck to their responsibilities under the Constitution: national defense, international relations, adjudicating conflicts between states, and such. Next, they relied on retired (or wealthy) citizens (or organizations, think Halliburton) who had proven skills to handle key jobs on behalf of the Federal government. Often these citizens and organizations performed their work pro bono. These citizens were experts in their fields -- just the opposite of today's politico, nurtured on a leftist campus, with a degree in political "science."

³ See Chapter 10, *Economics vs Politics*

At the head of this parade is Ben Franklin. He served, very effectively, and at great personal sacrifice, as the US representative to the French Court for more than ten years. He was a wealthy man and in retirement. He paid all his own bills.

The DuPont Company was engaged often, and on terms where costs were paid, but little money went into the company coffers. DuPont engineered, erected, and managed the Savannah River Facility for the Federal government for more than 30 years. Their fee for doing this monumental task was \$1.00 per year.

During WWI one of the lions of Wall Street was named to the War Industries Board. This was Bernard Baruch. He was later named Chairman of that board. I don't know if he worked without a salary, but if it was for pay, it was for Civil Service wages. He gave up some exceedingly lucrative dealings to come to the aid of his country.

The idea that *untainted inexperience* must be preferred over *biased experience* is a highly destructive one; it is the root of *Pretense of Knowledge*.

In your everyday life, how do you distinguish *knowledge* from its imitation?

First of all, you must know what constitutes knowledge – this requires an understanding of *truth*. (See Chapters xxy.)