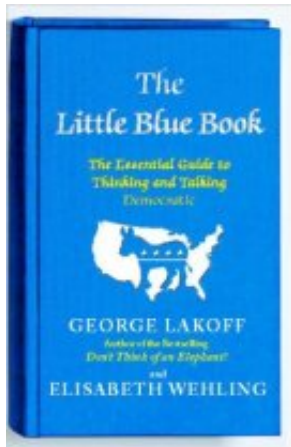


The Little Blue Book by George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Thursday, December 31, 2015

<https://curmudgeon-alley.com/the-little-blue-book-by-george-lakoff-and-elisabeth-wehling/>



The main point of this book is that words matter. And the words that we debate with have been chosen by the conservatives to the detriment of progressive causes.

Someone recently posted on Facebook a quote by Robert A. Heinlein that sums up our current political situation nicely:

“You can sway a thousand men by appealing to their prejudices quicker than you can convince one man by logic.”

The authors phrased it thusly:

“All politics is moral...”

One of the problems we see for liberal democracy is that conservatives use language more effectively than liberals in communicating their deepest values. Liberals assume their own values are universal values, and then further assume that all they need to do is present the facts and offer policies that support these universal values.”

The authors' base premise is that conservatives and progressives are inherently different. This is nothing new. I have seen multiple news stories quoting studies that the two brains are not wired the same. In an effort to explain this difference they use the family model. The progressive model is of a nurturing family where empathetic parents share power equally. There must be self-responsibility as well as responsibility for other family members. Respect of parents is not from fear, but is earned. For the family to succeed everyone must work together. In the conservative model family is centered on a strict father. He is the provider and protector in a hostile world. The children must be taught right from wrong, by punishing if necessary. Love is the tough love model. The mother's role is that of a nurturer and helpmate to the father.

The two models then project these different moral jumping off points onto larger institutions, government

and business. For the conservatives it is all about individual liberties and self-reliance. It is Social Darwinism at its finest (worst?). Progressives are about working together for the common good, about taking care of each other. There is a cartoon floating around that depicts this perfectly. A lifeboat is tilted up at an acute angle, obviously leaking from the lower portion. There are two individuals bailing furiously in this section. In the upper section are two other individuals. One of them says to the other, “No need to worry we are high and dry.” Progressives are about community. Conservatives are about the individual. The authors do go on to say that most of us are morally or politically complex. That is we take a little from column A and a little from column B, and frequently we are easily switched.

What the authors seek to do with a multitude of examples is replace the conservative language everyone is using to language more emotionally in favor of progressives. They argue that by using the language put forth by the conservatives we are reinforcing the conservative message. Good examples of this are found around taxes. Taxes are a necessary part of living in society. Without taxes we do not have roads, schools, firehouses, etc, etc, etc. Somehow taxes have become a very bad thing. This is done with language like “tax relief”, “tax burden”, “tax haven” and “tax loopholes”. All those have the implication that taxes are bad and something to be avoided. Progressives need to be using words like “revenue”. Without revenue our government does not run. When conservatives resist any tax for any reason, progressives should use language such as “deficit creation” or “revenue depletion”. Besides taxes the authors suggest language for health care, women issues, social security, all the areas where the war between the two sides is being fought.

The authors have a very succinct discussion of the Keystone XL pipeline and why it is wrong that is the best I have read. They also give the same treatment to the Farm Bill. I was seeing red before I completed the chapter. Conservatives are so worried about freeloaders on SNAP and somehow so accepting of billions going to subsidize food crops like cotton.

For their ending they dealt briefly with income disparity. It can best be summed up with this quote from the book:

“...that 93 percent of the additional income that entered the economy in 2010 went to the top 1 percent. The market is now the 1 percent market.

That is the real point. There will always be a richest 1 percent. The issue is the degree of disparity in wealth and power. A market that disproportionately robs the 99 percent and rewards 1 percent should be called a 1 percent market. Not a free market. Not a laissez-faire market. A 1 percent market.”

Language matters and if progressives wish to prevail in what is essentially a struggle for the soul of this country they do not need to let the conservatives set the language of the debate. They need to realize that the battle is about different perceptions of basic morality, and not logic.