

Cause and Affect Service

Ours is a bicameral mind. As a result we too often think in binary, dualistic terms, giving us a deductive template of cause and effect. While pondering the ideas and events that led to this service, it occurred to me that cause and effect works to understand unthinking matter, but for humans, the animal that can write it's own scripts, cause and affect is more likely. Things happen, we pretend to respond rationally, but really we are responding emotionally. Some people use this phenomena for their self interests, using the magician's tool of misdirection. With a magician you know you are being tricked, the entertainment is in trying to figure out the trick. With others the trick is to make you think the illusion is real. Their expertise is in leveraging affect, your emotional response to their trickery. I think this observation is worthy of reflection.

Reading: John Calvin

"For this we must believe: that the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life.

Mingled vanity and pride appear in this, that when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves as they ought to do, they measure him by their own carnal stupidity. All whom the Lord has chosen and received into the society of his saints ought to prepare themselves for a life that is hard, difficult, laborious and full of countless griefs.

God preordained, for his own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation.

For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity."

Voltaire: "Religion began when the first charlatan met the first fool."

from bloomberg business:

The marketing profession has long relied on data. But as the terabytes grow, progressive marketers are turning to science. They're using systematic observation, testing and measurement to study broad behavioral patterns, drill down from the aggregate to the individual and produce new insights that improve business outcomes. Most marketing managers rely on data that capture past behavior. They overlook valuable information that can be mined from social media sources to provide a wealth of insight into consumer preferences. If I find out what someone's preference is today, I can predict his or her actions tomorrow—and try to influence the future behavior

Spoken Meditation: William Wordsworth

"I grew up," said Wordsworth, "fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

Cause and Affect

I had insomnia recently and turned on the tv in the hopes of dulling my senses enough to sleep. A commercial was playing and this is the claim it made for the product: "Makes everything matter more." Even after decades of listening to product pitches that insulted my intelligence, this one jolted me. "Make everything matter more", by buying something. What an slur on the wonder of life. I was reminded of an old Coast soap commercial: "It actually brings you back to life". And the old campaign that said that: "Coke adds life." The lesson of these successful attempts at marketing? That words have no longer have meaning.

Thus a reverie on marketing began.

Marketing is the business of inculcating beliefs that mold your behavior. It aspires to making you believe something and not examine the source of that belief so you will pursue something the marketer has a financial interest in.

This morning I'd like to consider examples of marketing that illustrate the power of marketing in our lives.

When I got married I had a problem. The whole diamond engagement ring thing seemed suspect to me. It felt manipulative. I told this to my betrothed and suggested something useful instead. We camped a lot. We exchanged North Face sleeping bags in lieu of rings. She seemed delighted. I was very proud of that gesture. 27 years later, when the marriage ended, one of the last statements of reproach was that she knew I was a cad when I didn't buy a diamond ring. Sigh.

30 years too late I ran across an article about how diamond rings came to be associated with romance. The DeBeers diamond company of South Africa, started by Cecil Rhodes and financed by the Rothschild family, had a problem in the early 1900s. They had diamond mines that produced so many diamonds they were almost worthless. They did what people with worthless products often do today but rarely did in 1938. They hired a public relations firm. The firm was N.W. Ayer and Co. from Philadelphia, and they were charged with coming up with an angle to would increase sales of the hard, shiny, essentially worthless object called a diamond. The angle, as you might imagine, was that a ring with a diamond must be purchased to honor an engagement. This was the golden age of women's magazines and they bombarded these magazines with ads that cleverly created the meme that a ring must be purchased or great shame will befall the bride to be. As we've learned from the great religion of Abraham, shame is a powerfully effective tool for controlling behavior - even more so when that shame is designed to bludgeon the male ego. Most households had several magazines subscription for the

ladies of the house and those magazines communicated with great gusto that women must insist that their fiancée buy a ring or else they would be humiliated. People they knew would snicker in their presence, wondering how she could marry a man so deficient in the protocols of love. Almost overnight diamond engagement rings went from non-existent to a requirement, to the dismay of men everywhere. There was rejoicing in the halls of the N.W. Ayer company and in the mansions of the DeBeers executives. But financial returns revealed a potentially crippling problem for DeBeers. People weren't buying expensive enough diamonds to morph profits from merely great to overwhelmingly spectacular. The DeBeers executives had lifestyles with a lot of overhead. N.W. Ayer and company started a new campaign noting a rule of thumb that they suggested had existed since the beginning of time, but actually was created at an adman's desk in 1938. The meme was this: The accepted rule of thumb is that an engagement ring should cost the equivalent of 2 months salary. Women around the U.S. suddenly had another measure of shame. God forbid if the ring didn't cost her fiancée 2 months salary. Having too small of a diamond on their ring finger was more shameful than no ring at all. This meme was repeated and repeated and repeated until it is never questioned. It just is. You might as well question why the sun comes up each day. Like the diamond ring itself, 2 months salary for a ring just is. So a long since dead Philadelphia adman is responsible for the breakup of my marriage.

We believe that, through rational thought, we analyze the world around us and come to informed decisions based on our experiences and our understanding of the natural laws of the universe. Sure. Sure we do.

As a person of European, Protestant heritage, I have a default belief system that one must be modest, thrifty, and serious in purpose. If I experience a moment of spontaneous joy, my immediate thought is that I must moderate that joy. People will talk. So joy is intimately associated with guilt. This is directly tied to the ramblings of John Calvin, whose thoughts I shared in the reading. As a result of all of this, I fear that The Abrahamic God I'm confident does not exist exists will disapprove and punish me. So you see, I base my life on reason.

Consider this. I have an electric bike. I made a little extra money and the thought occurred to me that I could buy a second electric bike to allow my biking partners to ride at the same speed and comfort as me.

Immediately the thought occurred to me that buying a second bike was wasteful. Joy turned to self loathing. I put it off. Then a boyhood friend died. Something about this loss made me briefly shut off the voice in my head that said to feel guilty about joy.

The bike shop was in Madison Wisconsin. The day I drove to make the purchase it rained all of the way to the shop. It was too wet and cold to test drive the bike. I considered that the Abrahamic God I don't believe in was making me aware of his displeasure with my extravagance.

As I drove home with the suspect bike, a woman in a BMW convertible, a vivid indicator that life was exceedingly good for her, took exception that I was going to pass her before lanes merged for construction. She swerved in front of me, I adjusted, she swerved again. And again. This was proactive meanness by a person who had won life's lottery. Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord.

I stopped at a gas station along the rural interstate, I went to pay for a cup of coffee and noticed there at the register, a display of stickers to put on your car. the first one I laid eyes on said "ObamaCare, Bend Over America". I was incredulous and told the clerk as much. The clerk, an overweight woman with disconcerting gum disease, presumably working for minimum wage, immediately went into an anti Obama diatribe, spewing out the phrase "I ain't gonna pay Obama's illegal tax on working people" like it was a curse. Having revealed herself as not having health insurance, and considering that she had been manipulated into voting against her own self interest by powerful people, I began to ask her if she had considered that by not having health insurance, tax payers would be paying for any trip to the emergency room that she might make - but she seemed to be the sort that might have been a fan of concealed weapons as well. I left, dizzy at the way it all went so dissonantly wrong in a heartbeat. As I left I saw another sticker: "Zombies eat brains, so liberals are safe." Have a nice day.

Seek and ye shall find.

I drove back into the rainstorm. Soon I was passed by a pickup truck with two muddy old tires in the truck bed. I was going 65. It passed me like I was standing still. As it passed me it hit a small bump, the tires bounced, a clod of mud and rocks broke off of a tire and like something out of a slow motion scene from a movie, it made a perfect parabola out of the truck, through the air, and into my windshield. There was a loud noise and just like that my windshield was shattered. I have \$250 deductible insurance. Goodbye \$250. Thus spake Yahwe.

Here is the lesson I took from this drive. I bought a frivolous toy in spite of God's many hints that to do so would disappoint Him and thus the God I don't believe in was punishing me. John Calvin was the cause, my guilt over joy was the affect. Thus behavior and attitudes are born.

The following quote is from a book review I just read:

A fairy-tale logic is at work here, familiar from any Victorian morality tale: you are responsible for your own injuries, every misfortune is comeuppance, and your fate is a logical extension of your vices.

Exactly.

I don't really believe this. Unfortunately, I feel this.

What happened to me was not cause and effect, I was bad and so was punished, but rather cause and affect - I was joyous and had to feel shameful emotions.

Over the past two thousand years, groups of control freak men who fancied themselves as God's proxies have convinced much of the Western World that they call they shots and that even as this clergy often revels in the pleasures of the flesh, they tell us that God has told them that the joy of pleasures of the flesh are sinful for the laity - all the better to control us. It especially took hold in northern Europe, where my people come from, and generations later, people still have this meme in their heads, even people like me, who long ago rejected the certainties of Abrahamic religion. The Church is the best marketer of ideas in the world and one of their favorites is that pleasures of the flesh and joy are contrary to God's will.

Here is a quote from Edwin Land, one of the creators of the Polaroid camera:
"Marketing is what you do when your product is no good."

So John Calvin was an early marketing expert.

Modern marketers generally can't threaten you with hell if you don't follow the party line, but they don't let that stop them from planting behavioral memes like demented Johnny Appleseeds. Or from engaging proxies to mold your behavior by threatening you with hell if you don't embrace desired outcomes.

We've seen how a manipulative sales pitch regarding religious belief has corrupted the world view of even a skeptic like me.

But the stakes are bigger than my neurotic little life. Entire nations have been massaged and manipulated for even greater and more insidious purposes.

A huge example. Why is god and country so intertwined these days in a country where the founding fathers explicitly insisted on separation of church and state? They made a wall between church and state a centerpiece of our national genesis, yet flag waving yahoos breach that wall with a lunatic's certainty.

Recently I ran across an article by Kevin Kruse called: How big business invented the theology of 'Christian Libertarianism' and the Gospel of free markets. I will quote from that article in what follows.

First a summary.

In the aftermath of the financial fiasco in 1929 that destroyed America's economy, putting much of the nation out of work, Americans lost faith in the Free Marketplace that had come to reward some citizens extravagantly, others not at all.

People who were out of work began to be tantalized by other economic systems like socialism and communism. This, along with the regulations and rules imposed by the New Deal, scared the wits out of corporate leaders in America. If Americans began embracing socialism and regulations on financial conduct, their gravy train was in jeopardy. The big bank accounts, multiple houses, huge domestic staffs and a financially risk free life style would go the way of monocles. In 1934 the National Association for Manufacturers did what any group threatened by new ideas would do.

No, they didn't reflect on the reckless practices and brutal anti worker policies that created the mess they were in - they hired a marketing firm. What they marketed was the miraculous, almost supernatural nature of unfettered free enterprise, you know, the kind that created the Great Depression, and they did this through advertisements, direct mail, films, radio programs, a speakers' bureau, and a press service that provided prefabricated editorials and news stories for 7500 newspapers. (Ted Cruz)

To their dismay, people all over the country who were suffering because of the implosion of the market place the industrialists created, saw through the self promotion of the National Association for Manufacturers. The campaign was a bust.

A new organization, funded by General Motors and DuPont, The American Liberty League, tried a similar approach, with similar results. People just weren't buying the pitch the corporations were selling.

In a 1939 speech to the US Chamber of Commerce, H.W. Prentis of the Armstrong Cork Company suggested a solution to to the corporate world's concern that Americans were losing faith in American big business. "Economic facts are important, but they will never check the virus of collectivism," he warned (collectivism, of course is a more delicate way to say socialism); "the only antidote is a revival of American patriotism and religious faith."

Soon after this Prentice became the president of the National Association of Manufacturers. In 1940 he gave a speech promoted by the Wall Street Journal and broadcast live on ABC and CBS radio promising that capitalism's salvation lay in "a strengthening of the spiritual concept that underlies our American way of life."

Corporate leaders began to try to convince Americans that the New Deal threatened not only the economic freedoms of business leaders, but the religious and political freedoms of ordinary citizens. They began to advance a new ideology that some called "Christian libertarianism."

Here is a quote from one of the people charged with spreading this message "Recent polls indicate that America's clergymen are a powerful influence in determining the thinking and acting of the people in the economic realm," said the organizer, and so business leaders should "enlist large numbers of clergymen" to "act as minutemen, carrying the message upon all proper occasions throughout their several communities."

Soon corporate leaders began to create and fund new organizations of ministers to spread the gospel of Christian Libertarianism.

Reverend James W. Fifield's Spiritual Mobilization took in millions from General Motors, Chrysler, US Steel, Republic Steel, International Harvester, Firestone Tire and Rubber, Sun Oil, Gulf Oil, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Colgate-Palmolive-Peet and many more. The Christian Freedom Foundation, created by Reverend Norman Vincent Peale was sustained by Sun Oil President J. Howard Pew, who gave over \$300,000 a year for twenty-five years to use Peale as a mouthpiece to manipulate his listeners.

Awash with corporate money, ministers in these organizations spread the arguments of Christian libertarianism. "I hold," Reverend Fifield asserted, "that the blessings of capitalism come from God. A system that provides so much for the common good and happiness must flourish under the favor of the Almighty." Their speeches taught that

Christianity and capitalism were indistinguishable on this issue: both systems rested on the fundamental belief that an individual would rise or fall on his or her own merit alone. Just as the saintly ascended to Heaven and sinners fell to Hell, the worthy rose to riches while the wretched were resigned to the poorhouse.

This is from the well funded Christian Freedom Foundations founding statement: "We emphasize the interdependence of freedom and Christianity. When the First Commandment 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me' is violated and the state is exalted to take the place of God as the highest authority over the actions of man, freedom is suppressed.

The welfare state, a CFF member argued, violated the eighth and tenth commandments by encouraging the poor to covet what the wealthy had and "forcibly taking the wealth of the more enterprising citizens for distribution to others." And because it spread scurrilous rumors about the rich and made extravagant promises to the poor that it could never deliver, the New Deal violated the ninth commandment's injunction against bearing false witness, too.

In publications like Faith and Freedom and Christian Economics, they introduced tens of thousands of clergymen to the work of prominent libertarian thinkers including Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Percy Greaves, George Koether, Garet Garrett, Henry Hazlitt, Frank Chodorov and Clarence Manion, presenting their originally secular arguments in a new sanctified light. Spiritual Mobilization went further, proselytizing the general public over the radio. Corporate sponsors, such as Republic Steel, secured airtime for its weekly program "The Freedom Story" and spread its warnings about "creeping socialism" over more than 800 radio stations nationwide.

In 1951, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty held a nationwide initiative. Organized and funded by wealthy patrons like Harvey Firestone, Conrad Hilton, E.F. Hutton, James L. Kraft, Henry Luce, Fred Maytag, J.C. Penney, and J. Howard Pew, and corporations like General Motors, Chrysler, US Steel, Republic Steel, Hughes Aircraft, Eastern Airlines, United Airlines, Gulf Oil, Marshall Field. Leaders of the initiative advanced a series of coast-to-coast celebrations on the new Christian libertarian slogan of "freedom under God." 17,000 ministers belonged to the group and were encouraged to compete for prizes by making sermons on the theme of Christian Libertarianism. A nationwide tv broadcast, produced by Cecil B DeMille and featuring Jimmy Stewart, Bing Crosby and Gloria Swanson extolled the virtues of Christian Libertarianism in speech, song and dance.

This occurred at the same time in history that the word "God" was introduced to the pledge of allegiance and that Joe McCarthy announced he had a secret list of communists who had infiltrated government. He began destroying lives. Communists, at that time of course, were all considered to be atheists.

Lest you think that this is a strategy of the distant past, a few weeks ago the campaign of Texas Senator Ted Cruz has distributed a sermon to thousands of preachers to use

from the pulpit urging the defunding of Planned Parenthood. The ministers were urged to read it during Sunday's services despite the fact that it is against the law for churches to engage in political speech.

Cruz wrote, "When an individual or a nation stiff arms the character of God and embraces an abomination as the law of the land, it ends in disaster. When rebellious people disregard the compass of the most powerful, it is a very short step to dismembering the bodies of the most vulnerable. Like other nations, America has taken that step. It is time for a turnaround."

Like the rest of the GOP field, Cruz wants to end government grants to the health clinics but he is the first to take his case directly inside the churches while promoting his candidacy at the same time which is illegal.

I could go on but it is unnecessary. You begin to see how the separation of church and state, a bedrock of our nation's founding, has long been subverted by systematic, well funded corporate initiatives. The Christian Right, whose ideals are contrary to our Founding Fathers ideals, didn't arise organically, it was created by corporate America and their proxies, men of the cloth with who chose mansions over the spirit. Now we have the spectacle of people running for president and being greeted with rapturous applause when they promise to undermine the separation of church and state.

I knew I had to watch out for corporations, and I knew to be wary of religious institutions, but it didn't occur to me that they would work together to rig the system. William James, the father of modern psychology, noted that "there is nothing so absurd that if you repeat it often enough, people will believe it. Who knew the advocates of corporate personhood were William James fans?"

The psychology of manipulation has become the script of the nation. This is now a country of the Corporations, by the Corporations, and for the Corporations. It has been for some time. The motto they market is this: In consumerism we trust.

Well. Somehow I have combined a sad tale of John Calvin ruining my Madison Wisconsin road trip, how some racist South Africans and a guy behind a desk in Philadelphia brainwashed brides into wanting a diamond, and how rich people paid influential ministers to spew patriotic jingoism in order to subvert the separation of church and state. Strange and dangerous bedfellows.

I spun this tale to make a simple but important point. We must be informed consumers in the marketplace of ideas. We must examine why we believe what we believe. Is it choice, or are smiling fascists planting memes in our heads? We are constantly being manipulated by self serving, well funded individuals and institutions to get us to fill their wallets. Some go so far as to provide cover for their treachery by hiding behind

the hem of Jesus' robes. Religion is one of mankind's most precious gifts, a concept that honors that miracle and sanctity of life by encouraging us to be our better selves. Perverting that gift for profit while undermining our Founder's democratic ideals is beneath contempt.

But we are in a sanctuary and this is a sermon. We should have a positive lesson here, should we not? You recall I started this sermon quoting from an ad that said that a product "Make everything matter more.," and another said that it's product would "actually bring you back to life", another that the product "adds life". Let's subvert those attempts to manipulate us to buy stuff we don't need and might actually harm us, and use the same phrases on something meaningful, something nurturing, something we should be promoting.

Research shows that hugging has profound emotional and physical benefits. How about we making the lesson of today about the wonderful qualities of hugging? Hugging actually brings you back to life. Hugging adds life. Hugging "Makes everything matter more." Finally a marketing campaign that makes the world a better place.

Go forth and hug.

Closing Words: Marshall McLuhan

Madison Avenue is a very powerful aggression against private consciousness. A demand that you yield your private consciousness to public manipulation.