

November 6, 2013

Take some time to carefully read this blog post titled [Government is Magic](#). The post is from a blog called Sultan Knish and in it you'll be reminded of what a cargo cult is. Then you'll understand that our country has become one big cargo cult.

Our technocracy is detached from competence. It's not the technocracy of engineers, but of "thinkers" who read Malcolm Gladwell and Thomas Friedman and watch TED talks and savor the flavor of competence, without ever imbibing its substance.

These are the people who love Freakonomics, who enjoy all sorts of mental puzzles, who like to see an idea turned on its head, but who couldn't fix a toaster.

The ObamaCare website is the natural spawn of that technocracy who love the idea of using modernity to make things faster and easier, but have no idea what anything costs or how it works.

It's hard to have a functioning technocracy without engineers. A technocracy made in Silicon Valley with its complete disregard for anything outside its own ego zone would be bad enough. But this is a Bloombergian technocracy of billionaires and activists, of people who think that "progress" makes things work, rather than things working leading to progress.

Healthcare.gov showed us that behind all the smoother and shinier designs was the same old clunky government where everything gets done because the right companies hire the right lobbyists and everything costs ten times what it should.

If the government can't build a health care website, how is it going to actually run health care for an entire country is the obvious question that so many are asking. And the obvious answer is that it will run it the way it ran the website. It will throw wads of money and people at the problem and then look for programs it doesn't like to squeeze for extra cash.

The Navy had to be cut to the bone and the Benghazi mission had to make do without security so that a Canadian company which began employing a classmate of Michelle Obama's could score over half a billion to build a broken website. Obama mocked Mitt Romney's criticism of his Navy cuts by telling him that we don't fight with bayonets and horses anymore. Bayonets and horses are outdated. In our glorious modernity, we spend fortunes to build websites that don't work instead. ...

... The United States government is the ultimate giant unworkable mess. It is a living cargo cult where everyone marches around following routines that are supposed to yield great prosperity, but never do. The processes themselves are broken and make no sense, but the cargo culturers of the government cannot and will not hear that. They know that the government will magically make everything work.

Because government is progress. Government is modernity. Government is magic.

The cargo culters on the islands, who once witnessed the might and power of the American military during WW2 make American flags and uniforms, they build airstrips and wooden control towers, and wait for the planes to land and make them rich. They

don't understand why these things should work, but they do them anyway because that is how they remember it happening.

Our own cargo culters invoke FDR and JFK, they talk about the New Deal and the Great Society, they make grand promises and roll out big programs, and then they wait for it all to work. They don't understand themselves how or why it would work. But government is magic and the appearance of a thing is just as good as a real deal.

Build a website and it will work. Pass a law and they will come. Get a degree and you're competent.

There is no need to know how to do a thing. You don't need engineers or competent men. All you need to do is remember the great dreams of the past, listen to a few inspirational JFK speeches and then carve a computer out of wood and wait for free health care to arrive.

In cargo cult America, the food is free, the cell phones are free and the money can be printed forever because government is magic.

All of this reminded Pickerhead of Reynolds' Law as given to us by [Philo of Alexandria](#).

I haven't been blogging much lately, because I haven't had many thoughts that haven't been better expressed elsewhere. But I have to draw attention to a remark of [Glenn Reynolds](#), which seems to me to express an important and little-noticed point:

"The government decides to try to increase the middle class by subsidizing things that middle class people have: If middle-class people go to college and own homes, then surely if more people go to college and own homes, we'll have more middle-class people. But homeownership and college aren't causes of middle-class status, they're markers for possessing the kinds of traits — self-discipline, the ability to defer gratification, etc. — that let you enter, and stay, in the middle class. Subsidizing the markers doesn't produce the traits; if anything, it undermines them."

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In his blog [Pejman Yousefzadeh](#), posts on a recent NY Times editorial that tries to come to grips with the failures of the healthcare rollout. Here's a paragraph from the Times' piece that provides a perfect example of the cargo cult among the bien pensants - We want something good to happen. So we pass a law and the wonderful

things will naturally flow from out pure intentions. Here's the editors of the Times with the reasoning that allows them to overlook disaster;

... This overblown controversy has also obscured the crux of what health care reform is trying to do, which is to guarantee that everyone can buy insurance without being turned away or charged exorbitant rates for pre-existing conditions and that everyone can receive benefits that really protect them against financial or medical disaster, not illusory benefits that prove inadequate when a crisis strikes. ...

The Churchill bust banished by the president is now in the Capitol Building. [Andrew Malcolm](#) with the story.

You may recall one of the first things the brand-new 44th president did 1,749 days ago was have the honored bust of Winston Churchill, Britain's legendary war leader, prime minister and author, removed from the Oval Office.

Many people suspect Barack Obama harbors ill-disguised ill feelings toward Great Britain stemming from its long colonial rule of Kenya, homeland of Obama's father.

Besides exiling the Churchill bust, Obama has been involved in notoriously cheesy gift exchanges with Britons, including Queen Elizabeth, who once received an i-Pod chock-full of Obama's own speeches. Obama has also been photographed numerous times with his feet on the historic presidential desk, another gift from Britain made from pieces of a British man-o-war.

Such suspicions of a Chicago politician from the South Side are, of course, silly and ridiculous. A man of Obama's effete education, pettiness and arrogance would never stoop to such juvenile behavior, or if you're reading this in Britain or Canada, behaviour.

So, it was with some emotion and perhaps a little political nose-thumbing this past week that Republican House Speaker John Boehner presided over the installation of a new, larger-than-life Churchill bust in a place of honor in the U.S. Capitol. Ex-Sen. John Kerry even attended. ...

Sultan Knish

[Government is Magic](#)

by Daniel Greenfield

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Modernity has to be built. It has to be constructed brick by bit by rivet by cable by people who know what they are doing. Modernity without competence is as worthless as the ObamaCare website which looked pretty enough to give the illusion of technocratic modernity, but didn't actually work.

Competence is the real modernity and it has very little to do with the empty trappings of design

that surround it. In some ways the America of a few generations ago was a far more modern place because it was a more competent place. For all our nice toys, we look like primitive savages compared to men who could build skyscrapers and fleets within a year... and build them well.

Those aren't things we can do anymore. Not because the knowledge and skills don't exist, but because the culture no longer allows it. We can't do them for the same reason that Third World countries can't do what we do. It's not that the knowledge is inaccessible, but that the culture gets in the way.

It's our very hollow modernity that gets in the way of our truly being modern. We can no longer build big things because the ability to implement vision on a large scale no longer exists. We can still do impressive things as individuals, but that's also true of Kenya or Thailand. And in China, they can carry out grandiose projects, but those projects have no vision or competence.

We used to be able to combine the two by competently implementing grandiose visions, but our "modern" culture is the roadblock that prevents us from working together to make the great things that we can still envision individually.

Our modernity is style rather than substance. It's Obama grinning. It's the right font. It's the right joke. It's that sense that X knows what he's doing because he presents it the right way. There's nothing particularly modern about that. In most cultures, the illusion of competence trumps the real thing. It's why so many countries are so badly broken because they go by appearances, rather than by results.

The idea that we should go by results, rather than by processes, by outcomes rather than by appearances, was revolutionary. For most of human history, we were trapped in a cargo cult mode. We did the "right things" not because they led to the right results, but because we had decided that they were the right things. There were many competent people, but they were hamstrung by rigid institutions that made it impossible to go from Point A to Point B in the shortest possible time.

And we're right back there today. The entire process of ObamaCare was the opposite of going from Point A to Point B. It was the least competent and efficient solution every step of the way. There was no reason to think that its website would be any better. The process that led to it being dumped on the American people was completely devoid of any notion of testing or outcomes. It was the right thing to do because... it was the right thing to do. It was cargo cult logic all the same. So was its website.

Healthcare.gov, like ObamaCare, was going to work because it was "good". Its goodness was by some measure other than result. It was morally good. It was progressive. And so the deity of liberal causes, perhaps Karl Marx or Progressia, the Goddess of Soup and Economic Dysfunction, would see to it that it would work. Karma would kick in and everything would work out because it had to.

This brand of magical thinking was once commonplace. It still is. And it's why things so rarely work out in some of the more messed up parts of the world. But the sort of attitude that would once have made anthropologists shake their heads is now commonplace here. Savages in suits, barbarians with iPads are certain that things will work because they have appeased the gods of modernity with their fonts, they have made a website that looks like a functioning

website. And like the cargo culters who built fake control towers expecting planes to land, they thought that their website would work.

Competence is built on the unhappy understanding that things won't work because you want them to, they won't work if you go through the motions, they will only work if you understand how a thing works and then make it work by building it, by testing it and by expecting failure every step of the way and wrestling with the problem until you get it right.

That's modernity. It isn't glamorous. You can see it in black and white photos of men working on old planes. You can see it in the eyes of the astronauts who first went to the moon. You can read it in the workings of the men who built the longest suspension bridges, laid undersea cables and watched their world change. They were moderns and their time is done. They have left behind savages with cell phones who make decent tinkerers, but whose ability to collaborate falls apart in large groups.

The difference between savages and civilized men isn't that savages are dumb and civilized people are smart. Savages can individually be quite clever within their parameters and civilized folk can be quite stupid. It's the ability to extend that intelligence in groups that makes for a civilization.

Savages cannot work together. They can fantasize, but they can't build anything bigger than a small group can manage. Savages are warriors, but not soldiers, they are tinkerers, not engineers, they are inventors, not scientists, they cannot work together on a large scale and thereby push past their own limitations as a culture and grow. They may have individual geniuses, but they cannot pass on what they learn.

We have not yet been reduced to savagery, but our incompetence increases in large groups to such a staggering extent that it often seems not to be worth the trouble. Individual geniuses can occasionally carry large groups on their shoulders, micromanaging them, terrorizing them and motivating them, the way that tribal chieftains do, but without that singular personality the whole thing collapses.

The United States government is the ultimate giant unworkable mess. It is a living cargo cult where everyone marches around following routines that are supposed to yield great prosperity, but never do. The processes themselves are broken and make no sense, but the cargo culturers of the government cannot and will not hear that. They know that the government will magically make everything work.

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Philo of Alexandria **Reynolds' Law**

I haven't been blogging much lately, because I haven't had many thoughts that haven't been better expressed elsewhere. But I have to draw attention to a remark of [Glenn Reynolds](#), which seems to me to express an important and little-noticed point:

The government decides to try to increase the middle class by subsidizing things that middle class people have: If middle-class people go to college and own homes, then surely if more people go to college and own homes, we'll have more middle-class people. But homeownership and college aren't causes of middle-class status, they're markers for possessing the kinds of traits — self-discipline, the ability to defer gratification, etc. — that let you enter, and stay, in the middle class. Subsidizing the markers doesn't produce the traits; if anything, it undermines them.

I dub this **Reynolds' Law**: "Subsidizing the markers of status doesn't produce the character traits that result in that status; it undermines them." It's easy to see why. If people don't need to defer gratification, work hard, etc., in order to achieve the status they desire, they'll be less inclined to do those things. The greater the government subsidy, the greater the effect, and the more net harm produced.

This law is thus a relative to Murray's third law in *Losing Ground*, the Law of Net Harm: "The less likely it is that the unwanted behavior will change voluntarily, the more likely it is that a program to induce change will cause net harm." But Reynolds' Law rests on a different and more secure foundation. It focuses on character as fundamental.

Since the time of Woodrow Wilson, Democrats—but not only Democrats—have fretted that the middle class is shrinking due to the power of large corporations, and that only government action to "level the playing field" can save the middle class. The "middle class is being more and more squeezed out by the processes which we have been taught to call processes of prosperity." Obama? Hillary? No, that's Woodrow Wilson in 1913 (*The New Freedom*). It's striking to realize that progressives have been playing the same tune for a century, no matter what's actually taking place in the economy—indeed, in the midst of the greatest expansion of affluence in the history of the world—with the same set of proffered solutions: greater government power, regulations, higher taxes, and *subsidies for the markers of affluence*.

Reynolds' Law thus strikes at the heart of progressivism as a political ideology. Progressivism can't deliver on its central promise. In fact, it's guaranteed to make things worse in exactly that

respect. It's not that it sacrifices some degree of one good (liberty or prosperity, say) to achieve a greater degree of another (equality). That suggests that the choice between conservatism and progressivism is a matter of tradeoffs, balances, and maybe even taste. Reynolds' Law implies that progressivism sacrifices some (actually considerable) degrees of liberty and prosperity to move us away from equality by undermining the characters and thus behavior patterns of those they promise to help.

Not coincidentally, progressives accumulate power for themselves, not only by seizing it as a necessary means to their goals but by aggravating the very social problems they promise to address, thus creating an ever more powerful argument that something has to be done.

Pejman Yousefzadeh

[How Bad Is the Obamacare Rollout?](#)

So bad that the *New York Times* has to issue [one of its patented awful editorial board op-eds](#) in order to try to defend the law—and the administration that has botched its implementation. The whole thing is a laugh riot from soup to nuts.

The very title of the piece—"Insurance Policies Not Worth Keeping"—signals to the reader that the *Times* is fully prepared to cover up, paper over, and outright ignore the fact that President Obama and his political allies repeatedly and deliberately misled the nation by promising Americans that if they liked their health care plans, they could keep them. We are told that the president "clearly misspoke" when he told Americans that they could keep their plans in all instances; for the *Times*, "clearly misspoke" is a euphemism for "repeatedly consistently and deliberately told the exact opposite of the truth," given that the prevaricators in this instance were political actors the *Times* approves of when it comes time to hand out endorsements (and when it comes time for *Times* employees to go to the polls and vote). This talk about "clearly [misspeaking]" is about as blatant a signal that the *Times* is ready to engage in journalistic fraud and malpractice as is the opening paragraph, which tells us that the reason news reports are focusing on the cancellation of insurance policies—and the revelation that the Obama administration and its political allies lied to the American people—is that congressional Republicans "have stoked fear and confusion." As though the stories of cancellations and sticker shock themselves—told straight and without any congressional Republican lobbying for the stories to be told—were not enough to make Americans fearful, and as though the unbelievably malfunctions that have been suffered by the website are not enough in order to make Americans confused and outraged.

We are told that insurers "are scrambling to retain as many of their customers as possible with new policies that are almost certain to be more comprehensive than their old ones," a sentence that hardly inspires confidence, especially when one considers the context of the Obamacare rollout. We are also told that "in all the furor, people forget how terrible many of the soon-to-be-abandoned policies were. Some had deductibles as high as \$10,000 or \$25,000 and required large co-pays after that, and some didn't cover hospital care." Never mind that we have seen cancellations of insurance policies with deductibles much lower, and customers forced to purchase replacement policies with *higher* deductibles, and with premium increases of 100%, if not higher.

We also get this:

This overblown controversy has also obscured the crux of what health care reform is trying to do, which is to guarantee that everyone can buy insurance without being turned away or charged exorbitant rates for pre-existing conditions and that everyone can receive benefits that really protect them against financial or medical disaster, not illusory benefits that prove inadequate when a crisis strikes.

The cancellation of millions of insurance plans—a phenomenon the president and his allies *assured* us would *never* occur—is an “overblown controversy” now. And what good is health care “reform” when it increases deductibles and premiums in many, many cases, causing financial “crises” for individuals and families all across the country?

More:

Starting next year, all plans sold in this country will be required to provide 10 essential benefits, including some, like mental health and substance abuse treatment and maternity and newborn care, that are not now part of many policies. And premiums may well rise, in part because insurance companies must accept all applicants, not just the healthy.

Why do people who are not expecting to have children—single males, elderly couples, infertile couples—obliged to get health insurance plans that cover maternity and newborn care? Why can't people opt out of mental health coverage if there is not a reasonable chance that they will need that coverage? Why can't they get mental health coverage when it is needed? After all, pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied, so in the event that mental health coverage is needed down the line, it can be obtained and the insurance companies cannot deny people who already have pre-existing mental health conditions. The *Times* assures us that over-coverage—and the high premiums that come with it—is “one price of moving toward universal coverage with comprehensive benefits.” They don't explain why having unnecessary coverage is a step towards social justice, but as we saw from the beginning of this intelligence-insulting, repulsively dishonest op-ed, the *New York Times* is less about explaining, and more about covering up a disastrous rollout with disastrous policy consequences for the country. The *Times* editorial should be ashamed of its partisan shilling, and of the the fact that it cannot competently shill worth a damn.

I am sure that *Times* editorials in the future will refrain from pointing out [the security risks of using the HealthCare.gov website](#). I am also sure that *Times* editorials in the future will refrain from excoriating the Obama administration for [awful management and rollout procedures for the HealthCare.gov website](#). The *Washington Post* story claims that a lot of the truly terrible decisions made by the Obama administration were made because of the fear that *competent* management decisions would somehow invite Republican political opposition. Apparently, the White House believed that it would be politically safe by making *incompetent* management decisions, a determination that historians will struggle to comprehend and explain so long as intelligent life continues to exist in the universe and so long as that intelligent life has access to the chronology of the Obamacare rollout story.

The *Times* editorial board won't talk about [this](#) either:

Senate Democrats voted unanimously three years ago to support the Obamacare rule that is largely responsible for some of the health insurance cancellation letters that are going out.

In September 2010, Senate Republicans brought a resolution to the floor to block implementation of the grandfather rule, warning that it would result in canceled policies and violate President Barack Obama's promise that people could keep their insurance if they liked it.

"The District of Columbia is an island surrounded by reality. Only in the District of Columbia could you get away with telling the people if you like what you have you can keep it, and then pass regulations six months later that do just the opposite and figure that people are going to ignore it. But common sense is eventually going to prevail in this town and common sense is going to have to prevail on this piece of legislation as well," Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley said at the time.

"The administration's own regulations prove this is not the case. Under the grandfathering regulation, according to the White House's own economic impact analysis, as many as 69 percent of businesses will lose their grandfathered status by 2013 and be forced to buy government-approved plans," the Iowa Republican said.

On a party line vote, Democrats killed the resolution, which could come back to haunt vulnerable Democrats up for re-election this year.

Ya think?

And finally, I'm sure that the *New York Times* editorial board simply won't tell Americans the truth the way that, say, Jon Stewart will. [But then](#), Jon Stewart [isn't a hack](#).

IBD

[Expelled from Obama's office, a Winston Churchill bust gets honored Capitol spot](#)

by Andrew Malcolm



You may recall one of the first things the brand-new 44th president did 1,749 days ago was have the honored bust of Winston Churchill, Britain's legendary war leader, prime minister and author, removed from the Oval Office.

Many people suspect Barack Obama harbors ill-disguised ill feelings toward Great Britain stemming from its long colonial rule of Kenya, homeland of Obama's father.

Besides exiling the Churchill bust, Obama has been involved in notoriously cheesy gift exchanges with Britons, including Queen Elizabeth, who once received an i-Pod chock-full of Obama's own speeches. Obama has also been photographed numerous times with his feet on the historic presidential desk, another gift from Britain made from pieces of a British man-o-war.

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So, it was with some emotion and perhaps a little political nose-thumbing this past week that Republican House Speaker John Boehner presided over the installation of a new, larger-than-life Churchill bust in a place of honor in the U.S. Capitol. Ex-Sen. John Kerry even attended.

Boehner hailed Churchill as "the best friend the United States ever had." (Scroll to bottom for full Boehner text.)

The son of an American mother, Churchill was a self-assigned student of many things, including Americana. He was an expert on the U.S. Civil War and deeply revered Abraham Lincoln, whose statue resides by the British Parliament.

Churchill, the Conservative Party leader, Boehner recalled, "had his complaints (about America). Like the time he declared our toilet paper to be too thin and our newspapers too fat. But it was this man's curiosity about the land of his mother's birth that formed the makings of a beautiful — and, of course, special — relationship."

Churchill, of course, was famed as a great orator in stirring radio speeches to his war-torn island people, to Missourians after the war when he coined the iconic phrase "Iron Curtain," and to the U.S. Congress less than a month after Pearl Harbor. (Scroll down for a selection of Churchill quotes that are our favorites, or favourites.)

"Now we get to bring it all full circle," the Speaker added. "For today — with peace, justice, and a touch of majesty — Winston Churchill returns to the United States Capitol."



Select Winston Spencer Churchill Quotations

"You can always count on Americans to do the right thing—after they've tried everything else."

Nancy Astor: "Sir, if you were my husband, I would give you poison." Churchill: "If I were your husband I would take it."

"Politics is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year. And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen."

"A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject."

"History will be kind to me for I intend to write it."

"There is no such thing as a good tax."

"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."

"If you have 10,000 regulations, you destroy all respect for the law."

"Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy."

"We contend that for a nation to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

You know, re-reading those Churchillian words now, perhaps we have discovered the *real* reason Obama was so uncomfortable in the Oval Office beneath the Briton's steady gaze. ----

Source: [Top 25 Winston Churchill Quotes](#)

The bust will reside in a corner of the U.S. Capitol renamed Freedom Foyer in his honor.



PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGY

Book of Second Cargo Cult:

Progressives don't need to actually understand *how* things work. It's only important to believe that when a Prog gov't program *looks* like a duck, or is even *entitled* "duck," then it's a duck; and anyone pointing out the lack of bill, feathers, waddle or quack is a heretic





"WHOA! – IS THAT SUPPLY-SIDE ECONOMICS OR DEMAND-SIDE ECONOMICS?"

"I'D SAY CARGO-CULT ECONOMICS."



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If I wave this magic paper and card, they will give me stuff!

