

Funding the Future

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Regular blog commentator PSR posted this comment on the blog yesterday, responding to my [lament on falling standards in public life](#). I think it worth sharing more broadly as the idea referred to - of [agnotology](#) - makes a lot of sense in the world that we now live in where it is a part of the new culture of corruption that the right wing are creating:

I've been reading (wrestling) with Philip Mirowski's book 'Never Let A Serious Crisis Go To Waste' (2013) about how Neo-liberalism avoided its comeuppance after 2008.

This book is occasionally like walking in a heavily wooded forest, and then entering a clearing or beautifully illuminated glade where you come across something you have never seen before in all its glory (remember that I might not be as well read as people like John S Warren so take that last statement with a pinch of salt!). So here is what Mirowski (especially from Chapter 5, p.239 has revealed to me (wait for it — drum roll!!):

Agnotology: the study (and practice moreover) of how ignorance and doubt is spread in society.

Mirowski gives examples of how agnotology has been practiced in science, PR and advertising and highlights the methods cigarette manufacturers (but also think how climate change denial has been working) also worked along agnotological lines to suppress the knowledge about tobacco's link to cancer.

Cigarette manufacturers even funded beneficial medical studies (avoiding lung cancer of course) in order to be associated with such positive activities to further create a picture of being 'benign' organisations in the minds of the public. The idea was to create a form of 'cognitive dissonance' in society which leads to uncertainty: on one hand these people are selling death to the public; but on the other they are funding valuable research into diseases and giving grants to poorer countries etc., etc. Are they good or bad people? 'Well, I don't really know.....??".

Now.....think about how Putin runs Russia. It is well known that his Government funds

some of the opposition parties and that they may also have stirred up tensions in the former Soviet region, created artificial crises so that are seen riding to the rescue. People fall for it every time. It's hard for them to know who is saying what?

Think about modern 'Think Tanks' — as we know here, how many of them have got questionable funding, decanting their rubbish into society, causing more doubt and confusion; The Great Barrington Declaration for example. What was that about really?

Mirowski accuses orthodox economists (Neo-liberal of course) of the doing the same in his book — noting how economists since 2008 created obfuscation about the causes of the credit crunch — economists are accused of deliberately not agreeing on the causes of the crash, or creating useless specious dissent in order to put people off the scent.

Think about how Trump ran his Government and his adherence to 'alternative facts'? Think about the messages being bled into society about UK Government debt and who from? Think about the European Research Group (ERG) sounding like a serious, pious research body but in fact nothing but a group 'swivel eyed loons'.

Mirowski points to the consequences — with so much doubt, there can only be stasis and indecision because no one is really sure — especially at the ballot box. And so what you get is TINA, and then Timothy Snyder's construct of 'Inevitability Politics' comes more sharply into focus.

And all of this agnotological practice is turbo charged by the internet and the untaxed/corrupt wealth that funds it.

So maybe this is it — we are living in the 'Age of Agnotology' — an age of mass mis-information. In order to keep us where we are, and to prevent a more courageous age.

Remember that word folks 'AGNOTOLOGY'. In your neighbourhood since 2010.

SOTD — even Peter Osborne in his book 'The Assault on Truth' (2021) p.17 points out that Johnson lied about Corbyn. How much of this went out on the internet and sullied him, God only knows.

Even the BBC has come across agnotology: