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Evaluating Arnold Kling's Three Languages of Politics

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Kling's 3-Axis Model Motivation

- Political Polarization (U.S. and abroad)
 - Tribal affiliation; goal not of working w/others but to defeat them
- Language used to identify tribe rather than seek broad-based solutions
 - Each language is intended to resonate w/own tribe and not others
- Each Axis has a view of moral superiority over the others

Kling's Three Axis Model

- Progressive: Oppressor Vs Oppressed
- Libertarian: Coercion Vs Liberty
- Conservative: Civilization Vs. Barbarism
- “For praise and condemnation, each tribe prefers a different language. For a progressive, the highest virtue is to be on the side of the oppressed, and the worst sin is to be aligned with the oppressor. For a conservative, the highest virtue is to be on the side of civilizing institutions, and the worst sin is to be aligned with those who would tear down those institutions and thereby promote barbarism. For a libertarian, the highest virtue is to be on the side of individual choice, and the worst sin is to be aligned with expanding the scope of government.” pp 85-86.

Application of 3-Axis Model: Black Lives Matter

- Progressive: Blacks historically oppressed, and often by police
 - Racism the method of (white) oppression, with police and society
- Conservative: Protestors and suspected criminals are barbarians threatening the civilized order
 - Rioters did significant damage, often to their very own minority communities
- Libertarian: People should be free from state harassment—freedom from coercion if not violating the rights of others
 - Many interactions with police and African-Americans are about recreational drug use

Good case can be made for all three of these perspectives in individual situations

Slow Down (Kahneman)!

“The first to plead his case *seems* right, *Until* another comes and examines him.” Prov 18:17

Application of 3-Axis Model: Donald Trump

- Progressive View: Trump racist and hostile to other victim classes
- Libertarian: Trump an authoritarian and populism a threat to liberty
- Conservatives: Split decision
 - Never-Trumpers: Trump a descent from civilization to barbarism w/rejection of boundaryies
 - Hold-your-nosers: Clinton a greater threat to civilization
- Kling suggests there could be a new axis: populist vs elite, or outsider vs insider

Kling's Assessment of 3-axis Model

1. Useful in descriptive sense—not how people arrive at their decisions but how they are likely to frame their position
2. 3-axis model not capturing the richness of any of the ideological positions
3. Politically aware Americans use these frames to assert moral superiority; part of their identity and basis to oppose others
 - Need to understand each other's language

How does the 3 axis model compare to Biblical Worldview?

- Christian Anthropology captures three dominant themes:
 - Creature vs Creator distinction, therefore dependent being
 - Created *Imago Dei*
 - *Fallen*
- Christian model could be:
 - Imago Dei Vs Fallen (Gen 1-3),
 - Flesh Vs Spirit (In Christ) (Romans 8)
 - Old man Vs. New Man (Ephesians 4)
 - Slave to Sin Vs Slave to Righteousness (Romans 6)

3-Axis model encompassed in Christian Worldview

- Progressive: Oppressor Vs. Oppressed
 - Egypt and the Israelites (Exodus 1:12b-14)
 - the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.
 - Isaiah 1 “hands full of blood”, “evil deeds” “take up the casuse of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow” “your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves, they all love bribes and chase after gifts.”
 - Amos 2, “sell the innocent for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals” “deny justice to the oppressed.”
 - James 2: “Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?”

3-Axis model encompassed in Christian Worldview

- Conservative: Barbarism Vs Civilization

- Romans 1 “although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”
- Judges
- Genesis 19: Sodom and Gomorrah “But they said “Stand aside.” Furthermore, they said, “This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.”
- Proverbs 29:18 “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.”
- Genesis 1:26-28, Dominion or Cultural Mandate

3-Axis model encompassed in Christian Worldview

- Libertarian: Freedom Vs. Coercion
 - God's purposes magnified in freedom—the Bible is full of choice from cover to cover
 - Genesis 2, “from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.”
 - Joshua 24, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve”
 - Deut 28-30, Blessings and Curses
 - Matthew 7, “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction.”
 - God's calling is coupled with man's agency: we are not puppets on a string.
 - Jesus call is to follow Him, but we are free to reject Him
 - Coercion the legitimate function of the state as the bearer of the sword, and avenger of evil (Romans 13).

Assessing Kling's 3-axis model WRT Biblical Worldview

- Kling wants our language to change—opportunity to seek common ground rather than revert to our tribes
- Biblical worldview says yes!
 - There is a righteous concern for the poor and vulnerable from oppression
 - There is a cultural mandate to create civilization lest barbarism prevail
 - There is a need and general proposition supporting freedom that might enable people to “choose this day” to follow Jesus.
 - Jesus (Matthew 5:22) and James (3:9) admonish us against disrespecting our fellow image bearers

Limitations of Kling's approach

- Kling hopes for more rational discourse
 - Kling doesn't suggest all approaches right, but look for the good in them
 - "In fact, I do not think one's goal should be to win everyone over to the same ideology. I think one's goal for others should be that they have open minds. And if that is my goal for others, then it should also be the goal that set for myself (p.39)
 - But Biblically, there are limits where no discourse possible: "Crucify Him!"
 - Loving thy neighbor means wanting for them what God would want for them.
- Wants us to be an "impartial judge" rather than "aggressive lawyer."
 - But under what moral basis could we judge? Fundamentally there is a difference in values and systems of morality.
 - Kling denies this as we are to acknowledge that our views are not absolute truth (p.43)
- Attributing bad motives to other tribes is part of the drive to closure
 - Yet there is a logic that one's worldview leads to—Sowell's COV

Other Klingisms of note

- “The only person you are qualified to pronounce as unreasonable is yourself.”
 - Really? Are we not qualified to say that Putin is unreasonable?
- “I believe that it is not a coincidence that as religious sentiment has weakened, political sentiment has strengthened.” p. 43
 - If you don’t like the religious right, wait till you see the irreligious right!
- “people need to affiliate with groups...we evolved a need to belong to groups that embody a higher moral purpose.”
 - “he has set eternity in their heart.” Ecclesiastes 3:11b
- “I believe that most difficult political issues are sufficiently complex that they cannot be understood fully using just one heuristic” p. 87