

Personal attacks are hardly illuminating

This is Part II/V of the Go Forth and Ceriberize Citizens Survival Guide to Sound Reasoning: a primer on how to use your minds better than most politicians. Last time we looked at how a conga line of candidates, using banana-brain reasoning, will “Carmen Miranda” cajole votes. We stressed recognizing counterfeit thinking by its flaws.

Today, we discuss “ad hominem attacks,” the first of three broad categories of stinking thinking that might drive voters to drinking but not the polls. “Mental Magicians Using Slight of Mind” and “Give Em the Ole Razzle-Dazzle” follow. Our goal is that by election time, loaded up with plenty of political poo repellent, you will know “cortical caca” when any sense, especially common, suspects it.

Not every politician is a nincompoop nor do all politicians abuse our brain with tortured rhetoric and thin excuses for reasoning. It takes chutzpah, courage and thick skin to make it through a campaign and get down to the job. One also hopes it takes civic and national pride and a keen sense of service before self. Those who compete to lead and serve must avoid stinking thinking like Bill Clinton avoids blue dresses.

In the days of “double-dog dares” and other schoolyard etiquette, there was soil that even a budding Don Rickles wannabe never trod: a revered, sacred barrier beyond which only the unclean and



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motherless ventured. It was as powerful and laser focused an admonition as the chalk-throwing arm of a sixth grade nun. Playground politics were clear: “No Mothers, Man.” Broadly, that meant keep the arguing on point and not on the arguer. It is the dissection of the tissues of the issues and

not the man that is the point.

Power and privilege can be launching pads for attacks against the person rather than their argument. In the classroom this is known as “poisoning the well” wherein the person (the well) arguing a position (offering water to a burning issue) is attacked and the argument (the water) itself is ignored.

Painful as it seems, an assertion’s truth doesn’t depend on the virtues of the person asserting it. Imagine if some ad hominem prone hominids in our little burgh were to say, “Of course, the council says passing Measure Q (the intentionally branded “illegal water tax”) is the right thing to do, they’re all incompetent and to blame for us drowning in debt.”

There are more ways to attack the person and not the argument such as body slams from the protection of the dais including appeals to fear or dark comments such as “We all know you,” “moron” and “gadfly.” How about the poison in statements such as, “I’d like to respond to that, but you would not under-

stand.” Cheap shots and irritants such as, “And what did your ex-wife used to say?” may accurately address arguers personal past, but they do not address the argument per se.

Beware politicians prescribing the “I feel your pain” Dr. Phil Pill or the infamous “Rope-an-Oprah” such as, “I know who you really are and a person like you would never . . .” If you hear such “I know you better than you know yourself” coming from politicians, get off the psych couch and switch the channel.

Look out for the “I’m so smart, you’re an idiot” gambit such as “studies have shown.” Call their bluff because remember 38.75 percent of all statistics are made up on the spot . . . or was that 28.25 percent?

Finally, politicians who still have not defeated (shamed) unworthy opponents or doubting minds can simply scowl, growl something ominous and “bitch-slap” their dais microphone into submission.

Attacking the person and not their argument is an attack against reason, an impediment to progress and a deterrent to team-derived solutions and besides, it is usually used by folks who weren’t breastfed as a child.

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