


4-15-2019

Fatal Attractions, Elective Affinities, and Deadly Epistemologies

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2019) "Fatal Attractions, Elective Affinities, and Deadly Epistemologies," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 4 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss4/2>

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Title: Fatal Attractions, Elective Affinities, and Deadly Epistemologies

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Cultural products including drama, poetry, and narrative from the sublime of great literature to the quotidian psychopathology of everyday life frequently focus on knowledge—where it comes from, what it is, whether we control it or it us.

In the film *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, director), a married man and a female colleague start with a hypersexual affair leading to *sturm und drang*, pathos, overwrought narcissism, a boiled-to-death rabbit, and the wife shooting dead the knife-wielding colleague. A knife-wielding colleague who had been thought drowned in a tub full of water by the man and who suddenly and startlingly arises with knife-from-tub as water-drenched *maenad* resurrected *daemon ex machina*. All the players are in the throes of known knowns, known unknowns, unknown knowns, and unknown unknowns, as if former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was the script doctor.

In the novel *Elective Affinities* (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, author), a married couple initiate a desired idyllic interlude with the husband's best friend and the wife's niece. Are the various affinities among the four elective, predetermined, in control or controlled by others, or yet something else? The Scylla and Charybdis of who should end up with whom strews casualties across the battlefield of love—a baby dropped into a pond to death, the niece starving herself to death, the niece's maid throwing herself off a roof to death and resurrection through the niece's touch, the death of the husband. The wife buries husband and niece side-by-side awaiting some endnote via eternity. What's love got to do, got to do with it? Love is love and not fade away? Who knows?

Accessing the news of today (Denise Grady, reporter, *The New York Times*), one finds death at the hands of knowing and not knowing who has been infected with ebola hemorrhagic fever in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Also, how they should medically managed—analogously to knowers and not-knowers about the pros and cons of vaccinations and the casualties of knowledge conflict. The key is the use and misuse of 3 kinds of basic logic.

First, *inductive* logic. If some Ebola victims have fevers, do all fever-ridden individuals? No, malaria is but one alternative candidate. Yet the use of inductive logic can lead observers to attribute differential treatment among all those with fevers not to differential diagnosis but to corruption, malign intent, and/or incompetence.

Next, *deductive* logic. The same differential treatment among those with fevers contrasts *sound* and *valid* arguments. It might be a *sound* argument to ascribe the Ebola diagnosis to all fever-ridden individuals—if only all Ebola victims have fevers, and this group of individuals all have fevers, then they all should be correctly diagnosed with Ebola. But this is not a *valid* argument, because individuals without Ebola can have fevers as well.

Finally, abductive logic. This is constituted by finding the simplest and most likely explanation to explain something. However, actual explanations may be believed, justified, and true that are neither simplest nor most likely. Occam's razor privileging parsimony not only can cut to the truth, but cuts truth up.

A key to more effective, humanitarian support for the current Ebola crisis in the DRC is parsing the logics used by those at risk and serving up explanations resonating with those logics along with appropriate triage and other health techniques. The truth of a post-truth world is that *not* addressing the elective affinities of different logics due to a fatal attraction for only one privileged logos is a prescription for living in the book and house of the dead.

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Keywords: Affinities. Attraction. Death. Ebola. Epistemology. Knowledge.

Abstract/Description: This article cites film, the novel, and news report to underline the deadly seriousness of the quest for knowledge.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations, Epistemology

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