

What “Everyone Knows” About D-Day

By [Prof Susan Babbitt](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Global Research, June 10, 2019

Four days of coverage of D-Day on CBC radio and no one explains “free world”. After seventy-five years, everyone knows what it is.

Evolutionary biologist **Steven Jay Gould** said nothing is as dangerous as what “everyone knows” but no one remembers the arguments for. **Che Guevara** called out the US president, at an economics conference, for what “everyone knows” democracy is.[i] Guevara said the conference was political, not about economics. JFK made no arguments.

But there *were* arguments and Che Guevara knew them. He refuted them, as Gould refuted scientific arguments for white supremacy. Today the arguments for “free world” are forgotten, even by some who study such things. Nothing is as dangerous as ideology not recognized as ideology.

Gould knocks out one peg of that ideology: an idea of reason. Evolution has no final purpose, Gould argued. It aims for no ideal. Yet if you wind back the tape of evolution to any point, the next steps are constrained by myriad causal factors.[ii] Gould used the word “contingency”. It means dependence.

Marx had this view of reason, radically contingent upon circumstances and conditions. He got part of his view from Hegel, who saw reality structured organically and developmentally.[iii] Marx accepted Hegel’s vision but found Hegel’s explanation “mystical.” For Marx, it was just a fact that the world is structured dialectically, and so the best way to know it is in terms of organic tendencies and systems.

Einstein agreed. He criticized US schools for emphasizing end results: success. Students should feel their relationship to their work, knowing through their own bodies how engagement with the world creates *them*. When we focus on end results, we focus on what is expected, not what is. We miss out. [iv]

In theory, the view is appealing. Connectedness is trendy. Walter Isaacson’s new biography of Leonardo da Vinci upholds such a view and then denies it, in practise. Isaacson doesn’t know that he does this.[v]

He doesn’t bother with philosophy. It is not a luxury, although it seems so, the way it is done, in rarified language, accessible to few. Gramsci said everyone is a philosopher. It is because we all, at some moments of reflection, rely on ideas like “freedom” or “human”. If you don’t think critically about such ideas, you’re a slave of convention, for instance, of the “free world”.

Isaacson tells us the *Mona Lisa* is “a distillation of accumulated wisdom about the outward manifestations of our inner lives and about the connections between ourselves and the

outer world.” It is, we learn, “Leonardo’s profound meditation on what it means to be human.” For him, it means contingency. It is what Leonardo lived: the intersection of mind and body. It is how he saw himself.

It is how Leonardo thought. It is not how Isaacson thinks. He insists, irritatingly, that we should be like Leonardo by asking questions, as if questioning is an act of will, something *decided*. In fact, we ask questions when surprised by what is unexpected, and expectations are part of who we are. Asking questions, when it matters most, is a way of letting go of expectations.

It is a kind of renunciation. We must care. Leonardo asked questions not because it is *good* to ask questions but because he cared about what those questions explained: what it means to be human. Caring is an orientation. It is not something you do because your life coach tells you to.

And this is how the book ends: talking points for a life-coach. We get a list, for an entire chapter: We are to “retain a childlike sense of wonder”, “go down a rabbit hole”, “start with details”, “get distracted”, “procrastinate”, “make lists”, and on and on. A formula.

If we learn anything from Leonardo’s life, it is that the intersections his art expressed are not formulaic. No formula. But why look for one? It is for control. We can’t trust relations.

Sensitivity to relations is insecure. No straight lines in nature, Leonardo noted. He knew we are part of the unfolding of the universe, complex and mysterious, but beautiful for being so. We are not discreet beings, the lie of the “free world”. We live well, and better, without complete control: because of contingency. Marx knew this too. So did Lenin and others not part of the “free world”.

Feminism, since the 80s, is the area of scholarship in North American universities most attentive to relations, most expressive of Marx’s dialectical vision (although he doesn’t get much credit). The ends-dependent view of reason is refuted by insistence on interdependence.

But the vision is elusive. *The Apology*, by radical feminist **Eve Ensler**, is an imagined letter from her father, dead 31 years, apologizing for abuse. Why it is liberating for the abused to tell this story, so long after the fact, as if it is the father’s story, when in fact it is not? Why invent a story about oneself, conforming to one’s own expectations, as a “way to be free”?

We don’t get an answer. Perhaps “everyone knows”, and the arguments are forgotten. Interestingly, in 7,200 pages of notes, covering a remarkable range of scientific passions, Leonardo says little about himself. Or so says Isaacson. In fact, it is all about himself. Leonardo knew human beings by intensely studying nature. He knew himself that way.

We know ourselves, as human, through dependence, through solidarity. This is part of the argument against the forgotten arguments for the “free world”. It is a more interesting vision, acknowledging the myriad causal relations constituting human community and through which we know that community, and ourselves.

As Patrick Mondiano describes in *Sleep of Memory*, such encounters might “drag you in their wake when they disappear”. But they’re real.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Susan Babbitt is author of *Humanism and Embodiment* (Bloomsbury 2014). She is a frequent contributor to *Global Research*.

Notes

[i] Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1961

[ii] *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (Norton 1989)

[iii] A. Wood *Karl Marx* (Routledge 2004) 197ff

[iv] *Ideas and opinions* (Wings 1958)

[v] This book is reviewed at <https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/> along with the two referenced below.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Prof Susan Babbitt](#), Global Research, 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Prof Susan Babbitt](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca