

“The Most Important Task for Liberals Today”

Oliver Kamm, a liberal in the original sense of being in favour of human freedom and institutions that promote it, rightly **remarks**:

It is no exaggeration that the most important task for liberals in the world order today is to give unreserved support to British and American troops in [their aim of militarily defeating the terrorists in Iraq].

It is odd that both he and Andrew Sullivan (whom he quotes) seem to think that there is a serious possibility that the enemy in Iraq will prevent the emergence of a stable and successful Iraqi democracy. Well, better safe than sorry, but in fact such an outcome could only happen if the US disengages – which would be a betrayal on a scale that would rival that of Munich, 1938. It isn't going to happen.

This article is also worth reading for its excellent summary of the historic failure, and moral emptiness, of French foreign policy.

Tue, 10/28/2003 - 21:52 | [permalink](#)

Re:It isn't going to happen.

So you've gone from Popperian fallibilism to predicting the future?

by a reader on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 04:59 | [reply](#)

Fallibilism and Prediction

A reader asks:

So you've gone from Popperian fallibilism to predicting the future?

If Popperian fallibilism were incompatible with making predictions, it would be in a fine old mess. The whole of science would be ruled out, for a start.

Fallibilism is not the denial of the possibility of knowledge.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 05:31 | [reply](#)

Prediction

So are you claiming to "know" that the U.S. will not disengage?

Do you also "know" what my IBM stock will do this year?

by a reader on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 14:34 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I don't understand this criticism.

I think that saying things like "It isn't going to happen." is a perfectly reasonable usage and in no way contradicts fallibilism. It doesn't mean "The probability of this happening is 0." It means that the speaker thinks he has very strong reasons to believe that it isn't going to happen. New events or information could change this belief, but it currently doesn't seem likely enough to consider significant, and he suggests that we proceed under the assumption that it won't happen.

Would you object to: "The sun will rise tomorrow."?

I really don't want everybody to qualify everything they say. We know what they mean, we know they aren't omniscient, they know they aren't omniscient. What would lots of qualifications add to the discussion other than bits and distractions?

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

Prediction

How is the prediction "it isn't going to happen" any different from Marx's claim that socialism is inevitable ?

Actually I suspect that the intent of the editor wasn't to put forward a prediction so much as to have a rallying cry for the faithful. "It isn't going to happen." really means "We won't let it happen!"

by a reader on Thu, 10/30/2003 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I don't think "We" (meaning the readers of this blog) are in a position to determine whether it happens or not. I think the editor *was* making a prediction.

If you don't share the editor's confidence that it won't happen, why not just ask what the reasons for that confidence are, rather than criticizing predictions in general?

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 10/30/2003 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I am not criticizing predictions in general. I am criticizing a prediction as it is being applied to social phenomena. It is impossible, in practice, to predict the behavior of one individual let alone the behavior of all parties in such a conflict. See Hayek's lecture "The Pretense of Knowledge" While he is discussing economics, the arguments are valid in this instance as well.

by a reader on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 03:22 | [reply](#)

Prediction

Yes, *certain* knowledge about how people will behave is impossible.

But, that doesn't mean we have *no* knowledge at all in this area, or have no reason to be confident about anything that anybody might (or might not) do.

Again, is your point that you disagree with this particular prediction, or do you have a problem with fallibilists making any claim about human behavior without qualifying it with "I think" or "might"?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 17:42 | [reply](#)

Prediction

Britain will never

- Launch a nuclear attack on South Korea in support of a North Korean invasion.
- Introduce Shari'a law.
- Outlaw hats.
- Elect a government of trained snails.

We predict these things – or at least, we think we predict them. But we could be wrong, perhaps we only think we think we predict them. Or perhaps we *couldn't* be wrong – we only think we could. Or do we?

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 21:52 | [reply](#)

trained snails

LOL

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 00:08 | [reply](#)

If It isn't going to happen.....

then surely the editor is going to buy in real estate in Iraq. What an incredible investment opportunity! and you would also be helping the Iraqi people! When the stable and successful Iraqi democracy emerges the money will come rolling in!

by a reader on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

Real estate

Current (i.e. inherited Baath socialist) Iraqi law prohibits foreign ownership of real estate; if you have a pointer to a futures market, please post it.

by [Kevin](#) on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

How is it different?

Marxism is an attempt to predict the entire course of human history. Predicting the Americans will stay in Iraq till they're done with establishing a vaguely civilised government is not a prediction about the whole of human history, nor does it resemble such a prediction in any important way.

Try looking at [The Poverty of Historicism](#) chapter 15.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 11/02/2003 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

Prediction

As long as George W. Bush is in control of the strategy, the prediction **seems** pretty good:

"The enemy in Iraq believes America will run," Bush said.
"That's why they're willing to kill innocent civilians, relief workers, coalition troops. **America will never run.**"

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 11/03/2003 - 22:35 | [reply](#)

Which is it going to be?

The editor predicts: "a stable and successful Iraqi democracy"

Alan Forrester predicts "a vaguely civilised government"

by a reader on Tue, 11/04/2003 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

At the cost of draft?

Dear Editor,

The Pentagon is now making a concerted effort to fill all the draft board and appeals board positions throughout the USA. It appears that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are going to require military conscription, a highly coercive institution which seems thoroughly in contrast to **setting the world to rights**.

As long as the military units in Iraq remain all volunteers, it is not for me to tell them what to do with their time. They did volunteer to be in the military, being shot at whilst on garrison duty comes with that job description, and there is some possibility

that some good may come of it. I'm frankly not enthusiastic about the expense to the taxpayers, but as those are also allegedly volunteers, what is it to me?

However, when this goal of a stable and successful Iraqi democracy is used to justify conscription, enslavement, and other forms of coercion I'll give it a pass. Since conscription appears to be predicated on the assumption that Bush is again able to pretend to be elected, perhaps it is a moot point.

Regards,

Jim

davidson@net1.net

<http://www.ezez.com/free/freejim.html>

by [planetaryjim](#) on Fri, 11/07/2003 - 03:43 | [reply](#)