More GingoLingo - The Master O The Distinction Without A Difference And Last Night's GOP Debate On The "Obamacare" Individual Mandate

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Well, how about that. Here's a moment of truth from Michelle Bachmann. During last night's GOP debate, she asserted:

"But you have to take a look. You-- when you look at Newt Gingrich, for 20 years, he's been advocating for the individual mandate in healthcare. That's-- that's longer than Barack Obama."

Newt was, of course, a bit miffed by that:

"Well, Michele, you know, a lot of what you say just isn't true, period. I have never-- I have-- I oppose cap and trade, I testified against it, the same day that Al Gore testified for it. I helped defeat it in the Senate through American solutions. It is simply untrue. I fought against ObamaCare at every step of the way. I did it with-- the Center for Health Transformation was actively opposed, we actively campaigned against it. . . You know, I think it's important for you, and the-- this is a fair game, and everybody gets to-- to-- to pick fights. It's important that you be accurate when you say these things. Those are not true."

Undaunted, Mrs. Bachmann continued:

"Well you'd have to go back to 1993 when Newt first advocated for the individual mandate in healthcare, and as recently as May of this year, he was still advocating for the individual mandate in healthcare."

Then, after Mitt Romney and Rick Perry had their say, Gingo returned to Bachmann's contentions:

"Yeah, I-- I just wanna make one point that's historical. (CLEARS THROAT) In 1993, in fighting HillaryCare, virtually every conservative saw the mandate as a less-dangerous future than what Hillary was trying to do. The Heritage Foundation was a major advocate of it. After HillaryCare disappeared it became more and more obvious that mandates have all sorts of problems built into them. People gradually tried to find other techniques. I frankly was floundering, trying to find a way to make sure that people who could afford it were paying their hospital bills while still leaving an out so libertarians to not buy insurance. And that's what we're wrestling with. It's now clear that the mandate, I think, is clearly unconstitutional. But, it started as a conservative effort to stop HillaryCare in the 1990s."

The Persistence Of (transcript) Memory

Mrs. B is correct in her underlying assertion: Gingo *did* support an individual mandate in 2003. Here the relevant portion of his May 11, 2011 interview on *Meet the Press:*

MR. GREGORY: All right, let me ask you about another hot-button issue in the Republican primary, of course, and that's health care. Mitt Romney having to defend his proponent–that he was a proponent of universal health care in Massachusetts, and specifically around this idea of the individual mandate where you make Americans buy insurance if they don't have it. Now, I know you've got big difference with what you call Obamacare. But back in 1993 on this program this is what you said about the individual mandate. Watch.

> (Videotape, October 3, 1993)
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> REP. GINGRICH: I am for people, individuals–exactly like automobile insurance–individuals having health insurance and being required to have health insurance. And I am prepared to vote for a voucher system which will give individuals, on a sliding scale, a government subsidy so we insure that everyone as individuals have health insurance.
>
> (End videotape)

MR. GREGORY: What you advocate there is precisely what President Obama did with his healthcare legislation, is it not?

REP. GINGRICH: No, it's not precisely what he did. In, in the first place, Obama basically is

trying to replace the entire insurance system, creating state exchanges, building a Washington-based model, creating a federal system. I believe all of us–and this is going to be a big debate–I believe all of us have a responsibility to help pay for health care. I think the idea that…

MR. GREGORY: You agree with Mitt Romney on this point.

REP. GINGRICH: Well, I agree that all of us have a responsibility to pay–help pay for health care. And, and I think that there are ways to do it that make most libertarians relatively happy. I've said consistently we ought to have some requirement that you either have health insurance or you post a bond…

MR. GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

REP. GINGRICH: …or in some way you indicate you're going to be held accountable.

MR. GREGORY: But that is the individual mandate, is it not?

REP. GINGRICH: It's a variation on it.

MR. GREGORY: OK.

REP. GINGRICH: But it's a system…

MR. GREGORY: And so you won't use that issue against Mitt Romney.

REP. GINGRICH: No. But it’s a system which allows people to have a range of choices which are designed by the economy. But I think setting the precedent–you know, there are an amazing number of people who think that they ought to be given health care. And, and so a large number of the uninsured earn $75,000 or more a year, don’t buy any health insurance because they want to buy a second house or a better car or go on vacation. And then you and I and everybody else ends up picking up for them. I don’t think having a free rider system in health is any more appropriate than having a free rider system in any other part of our society.

GingoLingo: The Distinction Without A Difference

A distinction without a difference is a "logical fallacy and rhetorical ploy that involves drawing a drawing a conclusion on the assumption that different terms identify significantly different concepts when they do not." That's both an excellent definition and a portrait of Newt Gingrich, who is among its exemplars.

Here's another definition, especially applicable to Gingo.

> "This fallacy consists in attempting to defend an action or point of view as different from some other one with which it is allegedly confused, *by means of a very careful distinction of language*, when in reality the action or position defended is not different in substance from the one from which it is linguistically distinguished." [Italics indicate Gingo's strength].

There's nothing new about the technique that characterizes Gingrich's extreme form of mendacity. It's called "a distinction without a difference." It's often seen among politicians, yet gingo has exceeded the best of them, and with him, this technique is part of a mendacious personality; most other politicos knowingly ues it as a ploy, they do not always believe in the truth of it. Gingo does.

Also, one often sees this among academics, persons trained in the art of drawing distinctions in

their very narrow areas of study. These distinctions have meaning to their peers who also work in similar narrow areas. These cases are distinctions *with* a difference and are not dishonest ploys as they are among politicians, especially Newt Gingrich. As what he claims to be, a trained academic, Gingo may have sharpened his skills during this kind of training where distinctions *with* a difference are the flour and butter used in cooking up a new concept among one's peers. Doctoral committees reinforce this as well. But Gingo arrived in this life with a gene for mendacity. The honing of that skill in his dubious academic career onl mildly improved the skill that existed *in utero*.

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Attacking the Fallacy Because many people are unaware that their attempted distinctions are not true differences, the first step that you might take is to try to point out to them the futility of their efforts. If your verbal opponent takes issue with your assessment, which is likely, you might ask for an explanation of just how the alleged distinction differs in meaning. If you are unconvinced by this explanation, you may be inclined to settle for the absurd example method? Consider the following example: "I wasn't copying; I was just looking at her paper to jog my memory." Such an example should clearly illustrate how very different words can function in very similar ways.

I think that history's judgment will tend towards Gingo as a savant, of sorts. If one can be a savant of mendacity, Gingo's precisely that. He is, at best, slightly above aversge for Lake Wobegon. Yet, he's not "responsible" - none of us are - for innate intelligence. As a savant of mendacity, though, he doess make the absolute most of what he has, and is of Olympian stature when compared with all others. Nixon may now sleep soundly and, finally, peacefully.

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