

Hermiston Herald

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Critical thinking

I am bringing to my readers today a sad and sorry confession. Several weeks ago, I planted the seeds of mental illness in the minds of some unsuspecting and otherwise innocent young people, naive and trusting students in my Blue Mountain Community College public speaking class.

In mitigation, I will plead that the planting was a requirement of the course, but that does not absolve me of the crime. You see, one of the course requirements is to introduce and nurture students into an attitude of “critical thinking.” This is an easy area for me to teach, as I have been the little (or not so little) dog pulling back the curtain for as long as I remember. Parent-teacher conferences were tough for my mother, as teacher after teacher joined the refrain: He won’t take anything for granted and demands explanations of everything.

But I digress. Back to my poor students. I explained that critical thinking begins with a very simple question, “Why?” Everything has a reason, and every actor (as in “someone who acts,” not as in “movie star”) should be able to clearly describe the “why” of his action. If his description is muddled or nonexistent, then the “why” is likely a reason he won’t admit to, one based on emotion, or that he’s acting under the direction of another. “Why?” develops a long list of addenda: “Why did you do that? Why do you want that? Why did you say that?” and so on, all of which should — if the actor is honest — have answers.

How is that inflicting mental illness? Well it seems the manual used by psychiatrists to diagnose mental illness lists something called “Oppositional Defiance Disorder.” ODD symptoms include “questioning authority, negativity, defiance, argumentativeness and being easily annoyed.” Sounds more like a typical 2-year-old — or a trial attorney — to me.

In short, by telling my students to ask “why?” without saying “but not of anyone in a position of authority,” I have placed my students at risk for a long stay in a special room with very soft walls. Bad instructor. No cookie.



THOMAS CREASING
OFF THE BENCH
Herald columnist

Yet, shouldn’t a free and thoughtful human being question authority? Serfs and slaves have so-called owners who don’t want them asking questions. Why should asking “why can you tell me what to do?” be grounds for mental health treatment? Dissidents in the Soviet Union were sent to “psychiatric hospitals,” which sounds like what’s being proposed here, in a quiet and understated form. Or, if not a hospital, mandatory medication for the defiant person’s “own good.”

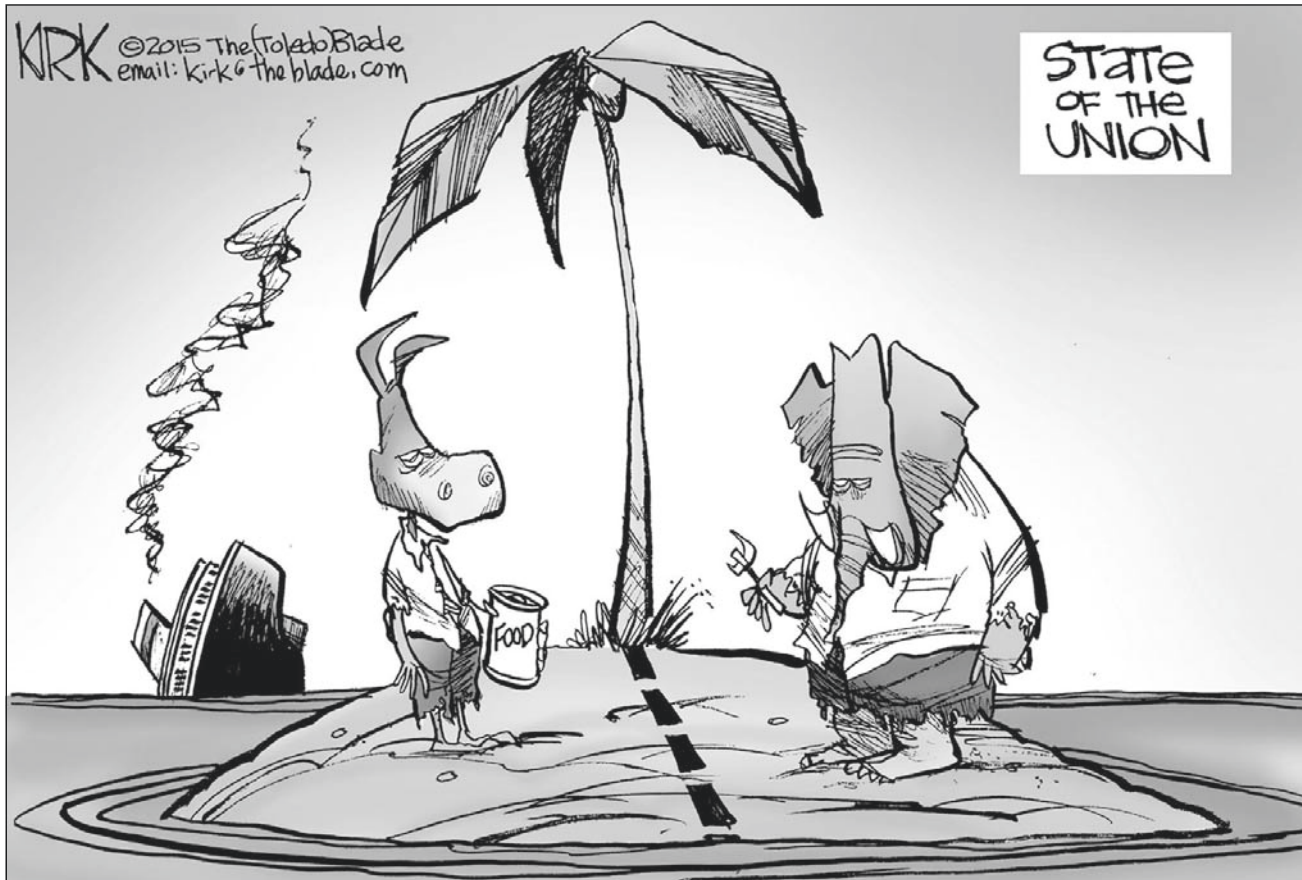
This is not to say that authority never has valid reasons to exist, but it should not fear “why” as much as it does these days. For instance, the answer to “why can the city fine me for driving past a yellow light?” is simple: You drove your car on a public road and did not stop for a yellow light. Or put up a yellow light on your own Hundred Acre Wood, and you can drive past it to your heart’s content.

I remember a conversation early on with other judges, discussing verdicts. They were amazed that I took time to explain my decision to the losing party, whether defendant or officer. A number of them disagreed but had no good answer when I asked how (another good critical-thinking question starter) someone could be expected to change his behavior if he wasn’t informed why it was incorrect.

Free people shouldn’t fear critical thinking. Oligarchs, on the other hand, should. Given that one aspect of critical thinking is now described as mental illness, a critical thinker would see that as a serious clue as to whether he’s seen as a person — or slave.

That’s just the critical opinion of a critically thinking guy. You can get critical by sharing your opinions in response with letters to the editor or by email to hermistonherald@thebench@gmail.com. Names of the terminally shy will be withheld on request.

— Thomas Creasing is the Hermiston Municipal Court judge and columnist for the Hermiston Herald



Hermiston lucky to have animal shelter

The Humane Society of Eastern Oregon Pet Rescue has come under attack recently as concerned residents have brought a series of complaints to the City Council who want city officials to look into the matter. This in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. The city, after all, does contract with the shelter to take in animals that are found loose or seized within Hermiston.

What is unfortunate is the tone this issue has taken, with genuine concerns getting lost in the anger or amid general discontent with the shelter based on poor past experiences.

Another thing that is getting lost in the negativity is the fact that Hermiston is fortunate to have a facility like Pet Rescue, regardless of whether or not it practices euthanasia, which appears to be at the center of most of the complaints.

Pet Rescue takes in stray animals, primarily dogs, or pets that owners can no longer care for or keep and gives them a temporary home.

Essentially, Pet Rescue takes in animals off the streets, where they are in danger of getting hit by cars or causing trouble, and provides people with an alternative to abandoning animals they, for whatever reason, cannot maintain as pets.

After these animals are



JESSICA KELLER
HERMISTON HERALD
Editor

brought to the facility, they are cared for — provided shelter that keeps them out of the elements and receive food and water, no guarantee if left to their own devices on the streets. The ones that are eligible are placed up for adoption. Numerous animals have received a new lease on life after being adopted and finding a forever home because of Pet Rescue through the years.

Yes, some animals, including the ones that are sick or aggressive, are euthanized. This, however, is not unique and is a standard operating procedure at many animal shelters in large cities and small. Unfortunately, Pet Rescue is a small operation — with limited shelter space. It also doesn’t have the money or resources available to provide medical care or rehabilitation some of the animals may need. Just as it would be cruel to let animals that are sick continue to suffer, it would be irresponsible to place dogs that are aggressive toward humans in homes.

Overall, Pet Rescue provides a very valuable service to this part of Umatilla County.

Without it, where would

Hermiston and the surrounding areas, and, more importantly, these animals be?

That said, Pet Rescue should not get a free pass because it is providing a service to the community. If the animals were mistreated or neglected, obviously, that should be reported to law enforcement authorities. Thus far, however, the complaints about Pet Rescue have not been about criminal activity, which is important to note.

At the same time, valid concerns about the facility should not be disregarded by the pet shelter, especially when they are accompanied by reasonable solutions that can be implemented. Surely productive suggestions would be welcome.

Unfortunately, valid concerns and solutions are getting lost amid those complaints by people who dislike Pet Rescue or its directors on principle. Regardless of how well meaning a cause is, if the chorus of general discontent is so loud and negative in nature, any positive or productive suggestions or measures generated may be drowned out in the process.

Presumably, all parties involved in this conversation are acting out of concern for the animals’ well being at

the pet shelter. In that case, perhaps the most productive course of action at this juncture would be for past animosity and ill will to be set aside and for the various parties involved to sit down together, maybe with a neutral third party, so legitimate concerns and complaints can be addressed, questions answered and, hopefully, solutions amenable to everybody can be found.

So far, one positive change has come from this largely negative issue: Beginning in February, Pet Rescue will be working with the Oregon Humane Society for a van to regularly come and take some of the dogs at the shelter and place them elsewhere so they can be adopted. This should ease some of Pet Rescue’s burden, especially in caring for larger dogs, and also free up space for animals needing temporary shelter.

This is a positive step. Another positive step would be for all concerned parties to work together in a cooperative, rather than antagonistic, manner to make Pet Rescue an even greater service in the community.

— Jessica Keller is the editor of the Hermiston Herald. She can be reached at jkeller@hermistonherald.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Tour of Knowledge supports Pet Rescue

Last year, the Tour of Knowledge was able to take a tour of the Pet Rescue facility. All of those who took the tour were impressed with the amount of work that is accomplished on a daily basis at the facility. The facility was clean, and the animals were responsive to the people visiting. The staff and volunteers at Pet Rescue operate an open-door facility and do not on a daily basis know if they will be dealing with owner surrenders, officials dropping off strays, sick

or injured animals or an emergency rescue. They do so much with what they have, even opening their doors to pets that need a warm place on the evenings that the Warming Station opens. The adoption fees are set to help cover the feeding, housing and any medical costs for all animals. Humane euthanasia is offered for a fee to pet owners who cannot afford the cost of a veterinarian and is only considered for the residents of the shelter if that animal is extremely ill or aggressive. Sometimes, as supplies are available, Pet Rescue can help with emergency food for pets and vaccina-

tions that do not require a veterinarian. Since the time of the Tour of Knowledge’s visit, Pet Rescue has undergone some renovations and held an open house. Many of the core members of Tour of Knowledge have had happy and successful adoptions through Pet Rescue. For all those reasons, the Tour of Knowledge stands solidly in support of this organization that grew out of one community member trying to meet a need that she saw.

NANCY DUNCAN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR AND SPOKESPERSON

TOUR OF KNOWLEDGE

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Letters Policy

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