Journal Post for class on January 28, 2019

1. Five bullet points summarizing your “takeaways” from the Fog of War

Robert S. McNamara spent a significant portion of his professional career as a policymaker on war activities. War is the most extreme example of conflict over ideas. Whether or not to go to war and how to wage a war are perhaps among the most important policy decisions that a government makes. McNamara was a principal actor in forming policy on the Vietnam War, which many consider one of the biggest policy mistakes ever made. As such, McNamara’s life serves as a useful case study from which we can draw important insights about the policy process. Five of these insights include the following:

* It’s important to empathize with your opposition because it enables you to understand the motivations of their actions (i.e., their world view), which provides you with the ability to negotiate policy that will incur the least opposition and achieve your primary objectives.
* Relying exclusively on rational decision making approaches focused exclusively on self-interested objectives can produce decisions that impede the achievement of goals and objectives.
* The decisions of policymakers are not entirely driven by self-interest. They are also driven by a sense of responsibility to society.
* Policymakers are human and humans often see what they want to believe.
* Because successful policymaking depends so much on alliances, you should take any lack of support from traditional allies as a signal to re-examine the reasoning that led you to a particular policy stance.

1. A paragraph comparing the view of science presented in Smith and Larimer as articulated by Harold Lasswell and the view presented in the video on the Pursuit of Ignorance.

There are significant differences between Harold Lasswell’s view of science (as explained by Smith & Larimer, 2016) and Stuart Firestein’s view of science presented in the “Pursuit of Ignorance” TEDTalk. Lasswell viewed science as a well-organized, well-structured search for answers to specific problems more akin to putting together a jigsaw puzzle in which success is marked by a clear endpoint where the full picture is completed. Firestein views science as a search for better questions that is more like trying to find a black cat in a room without any light and the possibility that there is no cat in the room at all.

1. One strategy you think would be helpful in overcoming our Political Preference Narrative by achieving a state of “being consciously ignorant,” i.e. activating System 2 thinking

One strategy for activating System 2 thinking to overcome our Political Preference Narrative is to employ the Devil’s Advocate technique whenever we’re faced with a significant decision or when the correct decision seems “obvious”. This would entail actively trying to develop the strongest counter-argument to our preferred position on a topic. Doing so would force us to at least try to interpret the facts of a situation from a different world view.

Another strategy is to try to create an alternative metaphor or analogy for a situation. Because System 1 thinking works through metaphor and analogy, consciously searching for an alternative metaphor or analogy may force you to re-interpret the facts of a situation from a different worldview, which can only be done by activating System 2 thinking.