



Arts Beat

The Culture at Large



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More From the Frontlines of the Epistemic Closure Debate

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After Wednesday's article [on the Great Epistemic Closure Debate that has engaged conservatives](#), a number of philosophers wrote in to complain: Don't drag philosophy into it! The obscure term "epistemic closure" is being used in a vigorous online discussion to refer to a tendency on the right to operate in a closed information bubble, where news from outside the bubble is immediately ignored or discounted. Julian Sanchez, a libertarian at the Cato Institute, was the first to use the phrase in this context, and he noted, as did The Times article, that it had an unrelated meaning in philosophy, where it refers to a problem of logical deduction. Here are two links for the ambitious from [Stanford](#) and the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).

Colin McGinn, a prominent British philosopher at the University of Miami, said he suspected that a term he coined, "cognitive closure," which means "the inability to arrive at knowledge of some given subject matter," might have become confused with "epistemic closure." In another blog post, John Quiggin, an economist at the University of Queensland in Australia, suggested "agnotology" — a word coined by the historian Robert Proctor "to describe study of the manufacture of ignorance." According to [Mr. Quiggin](#), Mr. Proctor was referring "to the efforts of the tobacco lobby to cast doubt on research demonstrating the link between smoking and cancer."

Another philosopher suggested psychology was really where discussants should look for the proper terminology. Social psychologists like John T. Jost and Arie Kruglanski, for instance, have argued that research shows liberals and conservatives consistently match one of two personality types. Those who enjoy bending rules and embracing new experiences tend to turn left; those who value tradition and are more cautious about change tend [to end up on the right](#). Many of these studies, however, have been criticized as being biased against conservatives. After all, one man's principled stand can be another man's blind dogma.

Do you have your own phrase to capture what's going on in conservative circles? Offer an alternative, and see if the leading participants in the debate are open to outside suggestions.

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