

## Are some things unknowable?

### Object 1:



The man in the middle is Ali Amrozi bin Haji Nurhasyim, the “Smiling Assassin.” He was executed for the bombing and murder of over 200 people in Indonesia. This photo created outrage because his smile makes him appear to be unremorseful for the murders.

This made me wonder if knowledge of Amrozi’s feelings are unknowable.

When I moved to Asia, I learned that it is common here to smile when feeling embarrassed or conflicted. I see this often when parents of screaming children smile in the mall. I also saw an Indonesian coworker smile even though her team was being admonished by their superior.

Malcolm Gladwell says, “if you’re looking at me in a manner that I perceive as bored, I would get very upset. But maybe the way that interest registers on your face is just different from other people’s” (Somos). Is Amrozi happy in this photo? Or am I misunderstanding his face because he shows *my* way of demonstrating happiness? Applying the prompt to personal knowledge, the emotions of people from different cultures may be unknowable because of the personal knowledge that I have about my own emotions.

Darwin theorized that facial expressions evolved to contribute to civilization. If true, my ways of demonstrating emotion are deeply rooted. When I see this photo, I consciously tell myself that Amrozi is remorseful, not happy. I do this because I have been told by Indonesians that this is the case. But do I know that this is true? I really don’t. Instead, I am repeating a knowledge claim told to me. I don’t really know that this man is embarrassed or conflicted. Every experience that I have with happy people looks like Amrozi here. How can he not be happy? Even now, as I write this, I imagine him feeling a bit of happiness.

When it comes to the truth behind facial expressions, and especially emotions that contradict those of other cultures, we may never be able to know the truth. The veracity of such emotions are unknowable.

## Object 2



In the 2010s Texas used its state authority to alter what is discussed in textbooks. In this photo, a teacher is showing History books filled with information that she disagrees with.

The history book in this photo discusses the New Deal, one of the largest acts by the US federal government. Many Americans believe that the New Deal, via vast government spending, ended the Great Depression. But the Texas state legislature decided that lessons about the New Deal should minimize this perspective. Instead, books should mention the effect that World War II had on ending the Great Depression.

These textbooks exemplify not just the culture wars, but also a question about the veracity of a historic event: Is history knowable?

Keynesian economists believe that sustained levels of government spending ends depressions. Conservative economists believe that this is harmful: the New Deal only *seemed* to work because it came just before the US' involvement in war and the serendipitous economic expansion that it created.

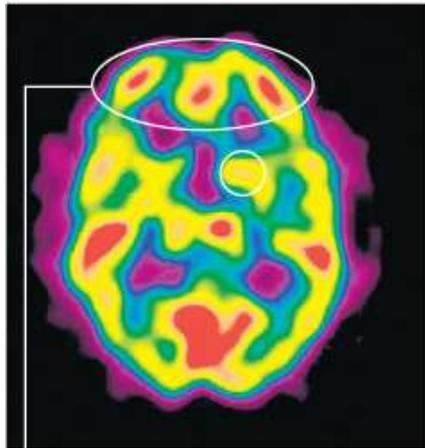
Though economists on both sides have well supported theories, the cause of the end of the Great Depression is unknowable. So is much of history. If a president was to create a *new* New Deal in the absence of war, would it end a depression? If a country in depression chose to involve itself in a war, would it help the country similarly?

These textbooks can only present theories because the complex web of events that occurred in the 1940's, both planned and random, will never occur again. If these textbooks make either claim about the New Deal, they make a claim about the unknowable.

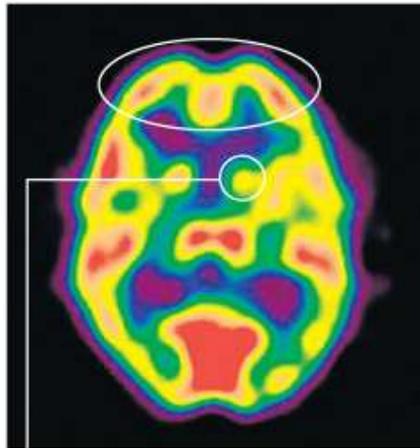
Thus, the cause of the end of the Great Depression is unknowable and unteachable.

### Object 3:

SINGING GOSPEL SONG



SPEAKING IN TONGUES



This brain chart shows the unique occurrence that happens when someone practices Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Scientists used technology to measure the change in activity of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. This scan shows that patients lose a sense of control when both singing gospel songs and speaking in tongues.

Some Christians believe that practicing Glossolalia is a sign of salvation. Others believe that it is an unforgivable sin—it is a false demonstration about God. This brain scan uses technology associated with the natural sciences as a way of trying to know the unknowable: does Glossolalia come from God or man? These questions made me ask: is a religious/metaphysical knowledge claim unknowable? And were the doctors using the right tools in the first place?

If a doctor said that the brain scan demonstrates that Glossolalia wasn't from God, a Christian could say that God wanted it to appear this way. But if the doctor says, as this scan seems to show, that something unique and potentially supernatural *is* happening, does that mean that we *know* that Glossolalia is from God? The only thing that this scan shows is brain activity. Not God. Therefore, it shows us an understanding of knowledge that exists in the Natural Sciences, not knowledge that is a part of RKS.

Many claims are unknowable if the tools used to know, tools such as technology and empiricism, can be transcended by religious belief and faith. As the natural sciences use technology to explain the perceivable natural world, faith is a way of knowing the metaphysical. There would be unknowable things about the brain if you used faith to gather knowledge, and there are unknowable things about the supernatural world when using science-based WOK to gather knowledge.

While much in religion is unknowable, using a non-religious WOK only creates more that is unknowable.

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