

A Kind of Illustrated Journal

For reasons I don't fully understand, this website has been archived in perpetuity by the Australian National Library's Pandora Electronic Archive. That means it is likely to be accessible for quite a long time into the future. In the course of trying to find something to do that isn't entirely a waste of time, it has occurred to me that I could do worse than try to set down, for some (probably mythical) interested reader of the future, what it feels like for a not-yet-hopelessly-senile eighty year old to live a thoughtful life in 2017. (Spoiler alert: it's not particularly optimistic. More disillusioned and sardonic. As the saying goes: no matter how cynical you get, it's never enough).

If any of my forbears had left something similar which dealt in some detail with what they thought about things as they approached the end of their lives, I'm sure I would find it to be an interesting read. With a bit of luck, someone in the future may feel the same way about the stuff I am about to write about. Only time will tell, but you never know.

What follows is largely disorganised. There is no structure to it. When I think of something I think should be included, I simply sit down and start writing about the topic. So the narrative jumps all over the place. The illustrations that accompany the text have been selected from many many others that can be found elsewhere on this website. Should you be interested to explore them further you can go to http://www.billbottomley.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/pictorial_poster_book.pdf , or look for them towards the bottom of Drawer Two on the website.

Many years ago, when I was teaching sociology at UNSW, a student said: “Ah, Bill, maturity is just another name for lowering your sights”. The uncomfortable truth of this statement still occupies me fifty years later. I was quite unprepared for just how much you have to lower your sights as you get older. You have to, because the older you get the more skills and capabilities you lose. Your body just won’t do lots of stuff any more. From being pleased to identify myself as a generalist, I now have to accept that pretty well all I can physically take on these days is whatever can be done in front of a computer monitor. As a result, I too often find myself bored. There are just so many of the things I used to do that I can do no longer. All my fine motor skills have decamped, so that manual occupations like playing music or pottering in the workshop making things are off the agenda these days. But I can still peck at the keyboard, so if I’m to find something to keep me occupied, it looks like it’ll have to be to do with writing something. But I don’t have a magnum opus inside me waiting to get out. So, what to write about?

Tom Stoppard once remarked that age is a high price for maturity. I think I’d have to agree with him. (Mind you, at eighty, although I can be sure I’m old, I’m not sure if I’ve attained much in the way of maturity). I certainly seem to approach life differently to what would appear to be the norm for most people. Bert Russell’s phrase about the “facile enthusiasms” of others often seems to spring to mind. The vapid escapist fare that seems to be so popular on The Box leaves me cold. Contestants on game shows want to go to Disneyland or Las Vegas so often that I’m left gaping. I have no idea how to go about understanding such a desire. I’d be hard put to think of anything worse. (Mind you, again, I’m the one watching the game show, and I can imagine many people would find that pretty vapid and escapist. Well, it is, I suppose, but that’s how bored I get).

Anyway, one way and another, I don’t feel that I fit in very well with post-industrial society and its aims and enthusiasms. Along with a numerous minority of other people, I think we’re headed in the wrong direction. (Naomi Klein, in her latest book *This Changes Everything* had a big impact on me). So I think I’ll begin this boredom-killing writing exercise by trying to explain why I feel so alienated from the social world in which I live. It will be easy to look on this as a whinge, and it is – I could whinge for Australia, there’s so much to whinge about, but increasing curmudgeonliness seems to go with having had lots of birthdays. Trying to be constructively critical is going to involve a certain amount of whingeing however much I might try to camouflage it. So I won’t.

In the 1970s, when I was in my thirties, the counterculture was in full swing. Songs like Dylan’s *Blowing in the Wind*, and *The Times They Are a-Changing* were on every young person’s lips and on their turntables. The old ways were being seriously challenged, and there was a generally optimistic feeling in the air. How misplaced was that optimism! Look at what we have become: We’re making war not love, and the wars we get ourselves into are the sort of wars where we have no exit strategy. Indeed, we have no criteria to decide even if and when we have won.

The counterculture seriously questioned consumerism, yet these days many people can think of nothing better than going shopping for its own sake, not because they *need* something. If you’re feeling a bit down, the best treatment is to go for a spell of Retail Therapy. And most of the stuff bought is crap that the planet would be better off without. I mean, who really needs a dozen handbags and thirty pairs of shoes?

Look, I know these things have been oft remarked upon. But they are still here – and flourishing. I think the problem goes deep – very deep. The unquestioned assumptions that undergird our social activity are where the problem lies. Our legal system is adversarial, as is our political system. And both are hideously and unnecessarily expensive. Can you imagine the political parties getting together and working out the things they can agree upon (like fighting climate change, or trying to stamp out social inequality, or the re-establishment of The Fair Go) and then actually co-operating together to try to achieve these ends? No way. Whatever one political enemy might come up with in the way of altruistic attempts at social amelioration (rare, I agree), it has to be vigorously opposed, not on its merits, but simply because it was proposed by an opposition party. Ineluctably adversarial. Not a shred of co-operation to be seen. Every new government that gets in mouths bullshit platitudes about how they're going to govern for all Australians, then proceeds to govern for the sectional interests that they are most closely associated with.

[Bear with me here. A lot of this might sound a bit naïve and wet behind the ears, but I know there are many Australians who feel similarly (some of them often appear on TV on *The Drum*, or Q&A), but their views are not well-represented in the ranks of most of our politicians – with the possible exception of The Greens, who, inexplicably, are looked on as a bit of a joke by many people, (which in itself shows how far we have yet to go to get anything like a genuinely human face to our politics). But I find that sometimes you have to take the trouble to write down what you think about some things in order to find out what you actually do think about them. And, most importantly to me at the moment, doing so gives me something to do and helps me avoid sliding into the Slough of Despond].

Our current (Turnbull) government is an embarrassment. They are brazenly waging a class war of breathtaking obviousness, yet many of those being duded can still find reasons to vote for the coalition and seem to be unaware of their exploitation. I was in Specsavers recently, when the temperature outside was 43 degrees and the woman serving me asked me how I was going in the extreme heat. I agreed it was hot, and alluded to the fact that our government was still addicted to coal and nineteenth century energy technologies, which isn't helping matters. She looked at me oddly, as though I were some kind of nutjob. "Doesn't that worry you?" I asked her. "I never think about it" she replied. What can you say? (I'll deal with the government's attitude to climate change in more detail later on in this rant).

And how could any government with even a shred of political nous announce that it was reducing weekend penalty rates out of one side of its mouth, then on the same day, proudly announce that it is planning to *give* the controversial Adani mining interests a billion dollars of government's (your) money out of the other? But they seem to have got away with it, such is the degree of political apathy in the community.

In much earlier times, when life was "nasty, brutish and short" (thank you, Mr Hobbes) the people who ran the show used to think up creative ways to punish offenders, like shoving red hot pokers up their fundament, or hanging, drawing and quartering them. It was common to burn black cats alive, too. All this and worse. Well, in times like that, I can understand the ruling classes behaving like predatory carnivores. But I can't understand why they *still* seem to be in the thrall of humanity's baser impulses. In the land of the Fair Go things are anything but fair, and they are purposely manipulated to be that way because it is in the ultimate interests of those in power, who will do anything to stay there. And, crowning all this is the fact that so many of these predatory polities are lip-service Christians – hypocrites par excellence.

I suppose we need to remind ourselves that we all come from a long line of pretty savage

hominids from the African savannah, who have distinguished themselves amongst the rest of creation by learning over the millennia to use our grey matter with increasing sophistication. Now we've reached the point that we can congratulate ourselves on being the smartest life form on the planet. Our skills in this area have resulted in some truly astonishing human achievements, but some of the things we still do suggest that many of the more savage aspects of our heritage are still very much in play. Why this should be I don't know. You'd think that having become so adept at using our intelligence, the fine-tuning we've done along the way would obliterate the nastier practices. But a moment's consideration of some of the outrageously bestial and animalistic things we still do shows that much undesirable stuff is still smouldering away inside us, just waiting an opportunity to be brandished brutally. (Rape springs to mind, among many other sub-human goings-on that fill the news every day. But less dramatic, but nonetheless reprehensible, is the cold-blooded way the government can close women's refuges and cut the benefits to unmarried mothers, while still refusing to clean up the flagrant tax avoiding of the corporate world).



The relatively brief tyranny of Tony Abbott (and Peta Credlin) provided us with an unpleasant foretaste of what was to happen in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave under the lunatic captaincy of Trump. Abbott could really push my buttons, and I was hard put to imagine how any PM could be worse than he was. He stood for everything I hated about politics. To let off steam I used to prepare posterish posts and give them to Lorraine to put up on her Facebook page. As I said earlier, a number of them have been sprinkled through these pages. They didn't achieve anything, of course, but, just like this diatribe/rant, they somehow made me feel a tiny bit better.

But then, of course, Mr Harbourside Mansions succeeded Tony and we had to stand by and watch him do fuck-all about running the country. A lot of us thought he would return common decency to the political process, which of course he didn't, compromised as he was (and still is) by the hard right of his party.



The dominant polties
are all dressed in suits
Because they know
no other way,
They've got no support
from the people's grassroots.
It's time to call it a day.



So we want to be rid
of this arrogant mob
But what in the hell
can we do?
If we get rid of them,
then who do we get?
The lackluster Mr Me Too.



The Greens have the answer
I think, on reflection.
But they won't get up
at the coming election
'Cos most people don't
seem to see them as serious
And don't know their policies,
which I find mysterious.



How shall we rid us
of this turbulent priest
In this the winter of
our discontent?



Captain Tone gives me the shits
And so do all his cronies
They're such a bunch of hypocrites
And self-important phonies.

They only want to run the show
To make it suit them more
They'd never think to strike a blow
To try and help the poor.

"We'll govern Oz for all" they said
After they got elected.
But now the poor are filled with dread
To see their needs neglected.

But Captain Tone and all his team
Just couldn't give a toss
As long as they fulfill their dream
To be forever boss.

The trouble with Tony was that he couldn't get used to the idea that he could actually get kicked out of office. Although it was patently obvious to everybody, surely, that you could never believe a bloody word of what he said he has continued to take every opportunity to snipe at Malcolm and try to destabilise his government, despite having promised not to do so, in his farewell speech. He has no idea of loyalty to anyone but himself, and would throw any number of spanners in the national works if he thought it would advance his interests in any way.

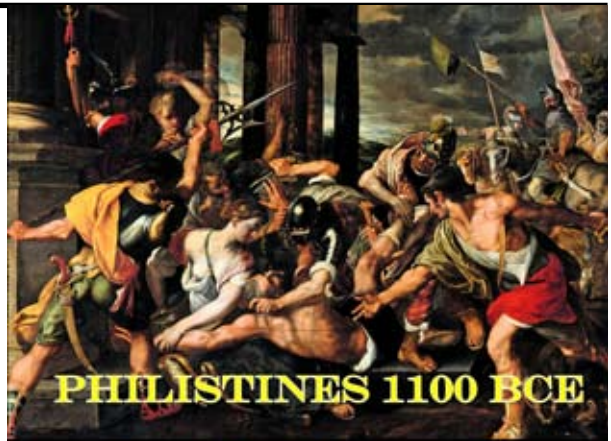


I used to watch aghast as Little Johnnie Howard cut education budgets and generally had his short-sighted way with the country, but Tony's antics were to me almost unbelievable, and used to fill me with despair. Now that he's gone, of course, and we have ineffectual Malcolm at the helm, I'm still pretty much filled with despair. Maybe it's hard-wired in me by now.

DEEP IN YOUR GUTS



YOU KNOW HE'S NUTS



PHILISTINES 1100 BCE

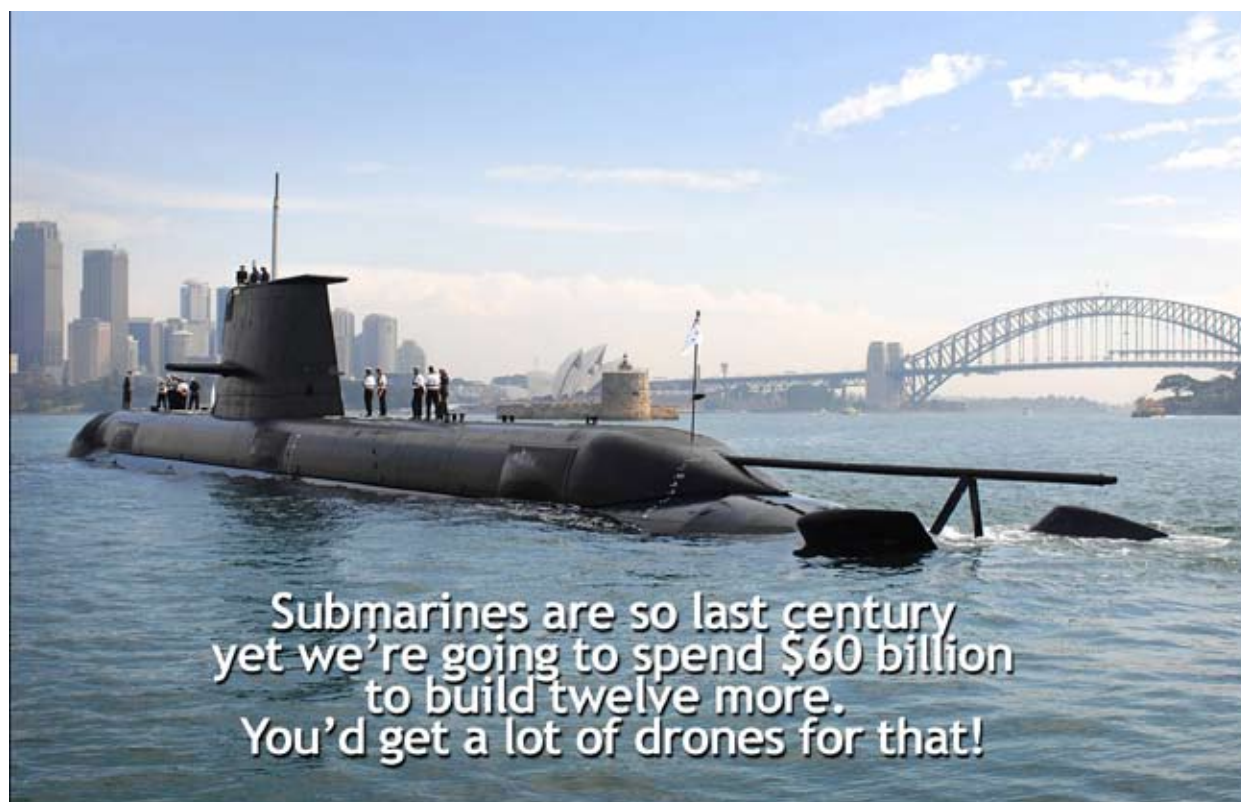


PHILISTINES 2014



**There is nothing to
fear more than the
current government**

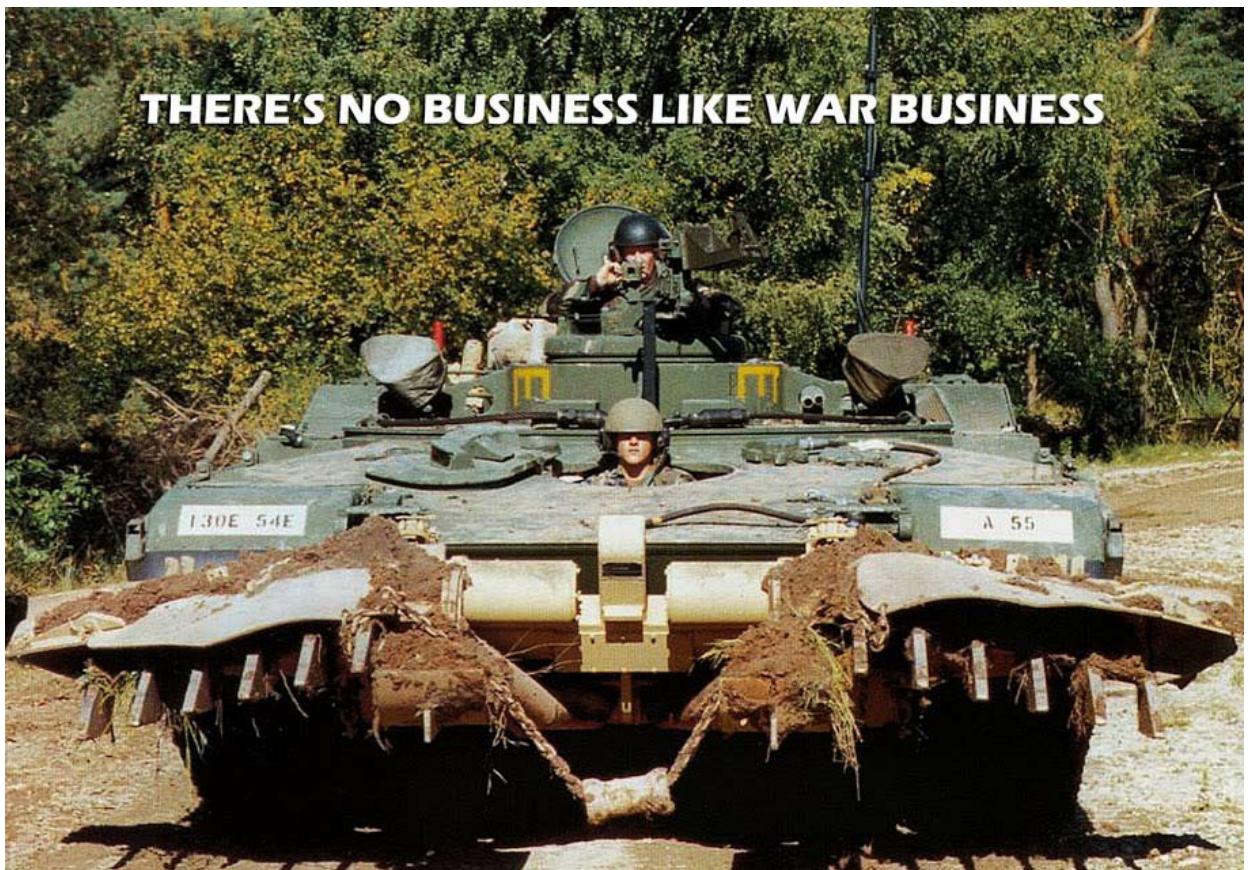
I don't know how such a mob of brainless dolts came to head up our armed forces under both Abbott and Turnbull, but they give me no reason to think that our national safety is in the very best of hands. They still seem wed to ways to be belligerent that had their origin in the early parts of last century. Take the much-touted submarines that we are going to have built for us, and which are going to cost more than the NBN network. Why do we need twelve of them? How about ten? Or even one? The dozen will cost around A\$60 billion, but when you add the cost of maintaining them the total bill will be more in the vicinity of A\$150 billion. Submarines were a very effective weapon last century when they could submerge themselves and be difficult to find, but these days technological advances mean that there is nowhere to hide, and their one-time invisibility is no more.



Not to mention the deals we've done for state-of-the-art aircraft and non-state-of-the-art tanks. "National security" is such a sacred cow that war machines, no matter how unsuitable, will always have a place at the head of the queue. Most modern governments use fear to maintain a tractable polis, and buying expensive stuff in the name of defence is always an attractive proposition to them, no matter its incompatibility with sensible and socially-responsible government. National defence is a testosterone-laden thing. I sometimes wonder if we would be so automatically bellicose if most governments were headed by women, but then I remember Maggie Thatcher and the Falklands adventure, and even Myanmar under Aung San Suu Kyi doesn't seem to have done much to better the plight of the Rohingya despite her making statements such as *"It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."*



The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed -- and hence clamorous to be led to safety -- by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary. -H.L. Mencken



Unrelated to what I have just been talking about, I know, but I'll drop it in here while I think of it. It has occurred to me that feminism won't have finished its job until women wake up to the fact that it is really weird that so many of them think that they have to paint their face, and wear really silly and orthopedically unadvised shoes, in the mistaken belief that kitting themselves out like this will make them look more "feminine".



I watched Richard Di Naltale's address to the National Press Club last night (this is mid-March 2017). It was so refreshing to hear a polly saying things with which I agree vehemently. From my perspective, the Greens are the only one of all the political parties who actually get it. Their ideas are progressive, and show that they understand the issues of the 21st century, unlike the other, more traditional parties, who appear like dinosaurs by comparison. Di Natale urged us to think seriously about our assumptions about work, and suggested we would do well to consider a four day working week or a six hour working day. This could help make more jobs for those who want to work and can't get a job, as well as easing the burden and changing the work/life balance of those who feel they are spending too much time at work.

He also floated the idea of a people's bank which would use its profits to fund social projects rather than just swell the dividends to shareholders. Sounds like an eminently reasonable suggestion to me. He also talked about a minimum living wage which would be everyone's right. But of course his ideas are too progressive for most. The media made a joke of his suggestions the next day, they way they always seem to do with the Greens. I find it quite depressing how hard it seems to be for people to look critically at their assumptions and accept that that's what they are - merely assumptions, and may be transcended because there is nothing God-given about them (unless they're religious assumptions, of course.)

In a different context, when I was doing research among the coalminers of the south coast years ago, they were offered a nine-day fortnight as a sop to some of their demands. The miners themselves rejected this because they were convinced having every second Friday off was not a goer because Friday was pay day! It surely wouldn't be too hard to get around that problem. People do get stuck in their ways. I think one of the big questions we need to try to unravel is why some people seem able to go beyond the social context they were born into and happily consider radical ideas (I have to admit I count myself among such people) while others seem incapable of stepping outside the comforting warmth of the ideas they were inculcated with, no matter how antediluvian those ideas might be..

Speaking of dividends to shareholders: I can see no reason why maximising returns to shareholders in business enterprises should be such a hallowed first principle of corporate operations. Why is this fundamental assumption such a sacred cow, never to be questioned. Would the corporate world collapse if it were only permitted to make a maximum of, say, 15% profit, after which the extra would be put towards socially beneficial programmes? There was precedent for such action when Ben Chifley pegged both profits and wages to help finance the war effort. But the wartime footing of the political context was quite different then, and of course, achieving such a change these days has about as much chance of happening as enrolling football teams in temperance projects. It seems to be beyond the cognitive capability of most businessmen and conservatives to even contemplate.

It's a bit like privatisation. I can't think of any example of a privatised enterprise that hasn't been a golden opportunity for profit-gouging for the benefit of the new owners, and to the detriment of the users. When I was a kid, the post office and the public transport systems, among others, were run by the government, and their brief wasn't to maximise profits, but rather to provide a service. Providing the service was the thing to be striven for, above all else, and it wasn't uncommon for these public instrumentalities to run at a deficit. And I've yet to find anyone, of whatever political stripe, who can explain to me why those on the conservative side of the political spectrum have such a fetish for privatising everything they can get their hands on. Other than sheer greed, of course.

And then there's sport. I think Australia is a tad OTT about sport. They take it so seriously. You get more spectators at an important AFL game than people who did the Harbour Bridge Walk for Reconciliation. Have a look at the photos that accompany sports reports in the media. I'll bet you'll never see a smile within cooee. I find it more than somewhat unsettling to be forever looking down the throats of contorted faces that look uncomfortably like demented gibbons. This is especially so with the blokes. (The women are a different story, which I will come to a little later.) Men playing competitive sport never seem to look as though they are enjoying it. It's obviously not just a game to them. They have to win at all costs. It is a crucial test of their manhood. It's testosterone running amok.

**Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play.
It is bound up with hatred, jealousy,
boastfulness, disregard of all rules
and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence.
In other words, it is war minus the shooting.**

- George Orwell



The rugby codes, and to a (slightly) lesser extent AFL, are too often just a legitimised way for bellicose thugs to go the biff. They pay lip service to fair play, but nobody is surprised when a player is caught cheating. I wonder how different rugby would be if only one player was allowed to tackle at a time, rather than the three and more that gang up on the man with the ball, pick him up holus bolus, and plunge him headfirst into the ground in a "spear tackle", inviting concussion or spinal injury. I would have thought three onto one was not very "sporting"

Spare me from images of exultant sportsmen! They look so ugly! If that's what a "peak experience" does to you, then I'd rather go without. They are so aggro about it. When they score, they are totally pumped, and they carry on as though they have suddenly reverted to some animalistic, sub-human savage. They appear to totally lose all control of themselves and migrate momentarily to another (lower)

plane. Soccer isn't as brutal as the rugby codes, but when men play it, it still has its lip-curling moments. Men, supposedly the tougher sex, writhe on the ground in agony after almost every tackle, only to be up and prancing around two minutes later, and are forever appealing for fouls. The mens' soccer coaches, such as Graham Arnold and Tony Popovic, for example (dressed in suits, collars and ties) stride up and down the sidelines, haranguing the players. I suspect they won't make old bones, since they spend so much of their lives eaten up by negative emotions that must erode their guts seriously. This uber-macho behaviour by the men is in strong contrast to women playing soccer. The women play fairer, smile more, show concern for their opponents, and generally play it like it should be played -- it's a game, not a gladiatorial contest. As I write they've begun to introduce women's rugby and AFL teams. It will be interesting to see if the same sorts of gender contrasts apply once they start to really get into it.

In the late seventies and eighties, when the world was becoming aware of climate change and global warming, I was naively optimistic. I thought that we were confronted by a threat that was going to affect everyone -- rich and poor, young and old, caring or uncaring, in equal measure. In the face of this huge global phenomenon, our old rivalries and enmities would pale into insignificance and the human race would have no choice but to forget the usual things that divided us and co-operate to defeat this shared threat.

Boy! How wrong I was!



In the light of what has come to pass, my expectations now appear to be almost ludicrously naive. Governments, not only here but in many other parts of the world, have clung grimly to the energy status quo in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence that if we don't fundamentally change our ways of energy procurement we're almost certainly going to slowly make the very planet we live on more and more unliveable.

In the case of Australia, we have so much coal still in the ground, that whatever the dangers of continuing to mine it, the conservative side of politics can't bear to see all that potential profit left unexploited. They have to get it out, at any cost -- even if the cost is a dire threat to the continued existence of our species. You can't get stakes much bigger than that, and yet our political Right is blithely playing Russian roulette with everyone's future. It's as though they are totally addicted to coal, no matter what risks are run by continuing to burn it to get our energy supplies.

Coal is black smack, and the conservative forces in Oz are totally hooked on it.

And it's not as though there aren't alternative sources for our energy. The renewable energy industry is alive, well, and growing apace, even though it has had to struggle against government disincentives since its beginnings. (During Little Johnny Howard's reign, his energy policy, and the role of renewables within it, was worked out in a meeting between his good self and the peak representatives of the fossil fuel industry! The renewable energy interests were not represented at all). Imagine how much further we'd be down the transition road to renewables if the various governments of the day had encouraged, rather than discouraged its growth at every opportunity.

I also find it hard to believe that the many hard-headed, but nonetheless intelligent, captains of industry can't see the writing on the wall -- can't see where things are obviously going, and where the big profits are going to come from in the future. Even as Skipper Turnbull is offering billion dollar inducements to Adani (after all, who gives a fuck about bugging up the Barrier Reef?) the media is talking about "the transition to renewables", because it is happening anyway, despite the best efforts of the neocons to stifle it. You've only got to look at how enthusiastically the general public has taken to installing solar panels on their roofs, despite vacillation and sabotage by the government on the pricing of rebates domestic suppliers will get for feeding extra energy generation into the grid.

Further, the current government doesn't seem to be the slightest bit embarrassed or guilty for



what they are doing, (what Kevin O'Leary called "the greatest moral, economic and social challenge of our time" -- just before he reneged on doing anything serious about it). But the provocativeness is pretty hard to swallow when the government brings a lump of coal into the House, and passes it around, giggling like schoolboys. Their infantile lack of any sense of responsibility for what they are doing is scarcely comprehensible. They'll do anything, however despicable, if they think it will help them stay in power. Just look at how far Malcolm has been prepared to suborn his earlier sincere beliefs in order to placate the ultraconservative ninnyes in his party. They say that power is the ultimate aphrodisiac, and if this is true, then most of the polities must be walking around with perpetual hard-ons.



The disinformation campaigns waged against renewables by mega-rich fossil fuel interests are almost unbelievable. And the government is just as bad -- witness Malcolm's attempt to blame a recent power outage in SA on their advanced espousal of renewables when it wasn't that at all. Outright, blatant lies are the main currency of the fossil fuel lobby and the government. Talk about fake news!

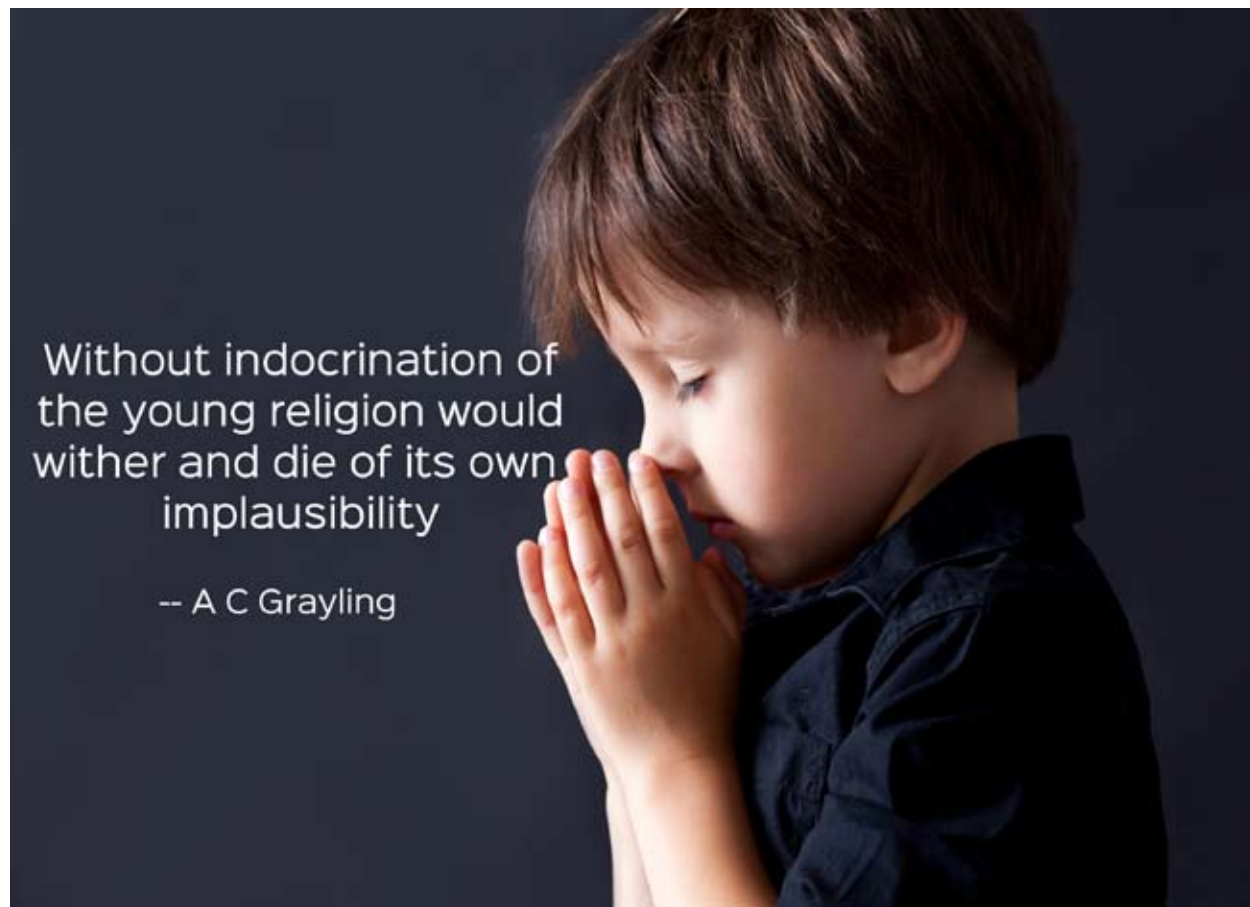
Left to itself, the government would talk only about same sex marriage, or revisions to the 18C, because such things are handy distractions from the fact that the Liberal Party is in a mess as big as Labour was during the Rudd/Gillard years, not to mention that they are doing their level best to ignore the threat of global warming and will inevitably hasten the ruination of the planet! Selfishness, greed and the lust for power are well and truly in the driving seat of government policy, and I find it a pretty unedifying spectacle. It makes me ashamed to be an Australian. It really does.



Somehow, we've got to the stage in Oz where, if you stand up for fairness, equality and social justice, you're considered some sort of crazed socialist. If you're going to be "on the team", as Abbott used to say, you have to be an enthusiastic supporter of the ghastly, inhumane treatment of asylum seekers who arrive by boat, of a rapacious and dog-eat-dog economic system where the rich and powerful are rewarded, and the powerless and vulnerable are made even more powerless and vulnerable by legislation that continues to drain them of what few resources, social and financial, that they already have to squeak by on. An unbridled fear of the unknown, the brunt of which is borne mainly by those from other cultures, means that, as a country that used to boast of its multicultural success, we now seem to be every bit as racist as when the White Australia Policy was in full swing.

It's as though the good things about being Australian have been pushed to the back of the bus. Our reputation for being easygoing, informal, friendly and helpful, no-bullshit and generous has simply evaporated. Now we are suspicious, frightened, abusive and absolutely drowning in bullshit. We trust no one. Give no one the benefit of the doubt. We seem to expect everyone to be just like us, and if your skin's the wrong colour you are subject to our distaste in spades. How did we get this way? In the past, all population influxes were met with discrimination (Balts, Wogs, Eyties, Dagos), but by the second or third generation they were accepted, and their diverse contributions to our culture were recognised and celebrated. But now it's as though we never lived through that process, and diversity is opposed rather than accepted gladly.

Speaking of bullshit, there's no way I could indulge myself with a rant of this magnitude without having something to say about religion, and faith-based explanations for life's conundrums and how we should conduct ourselves..



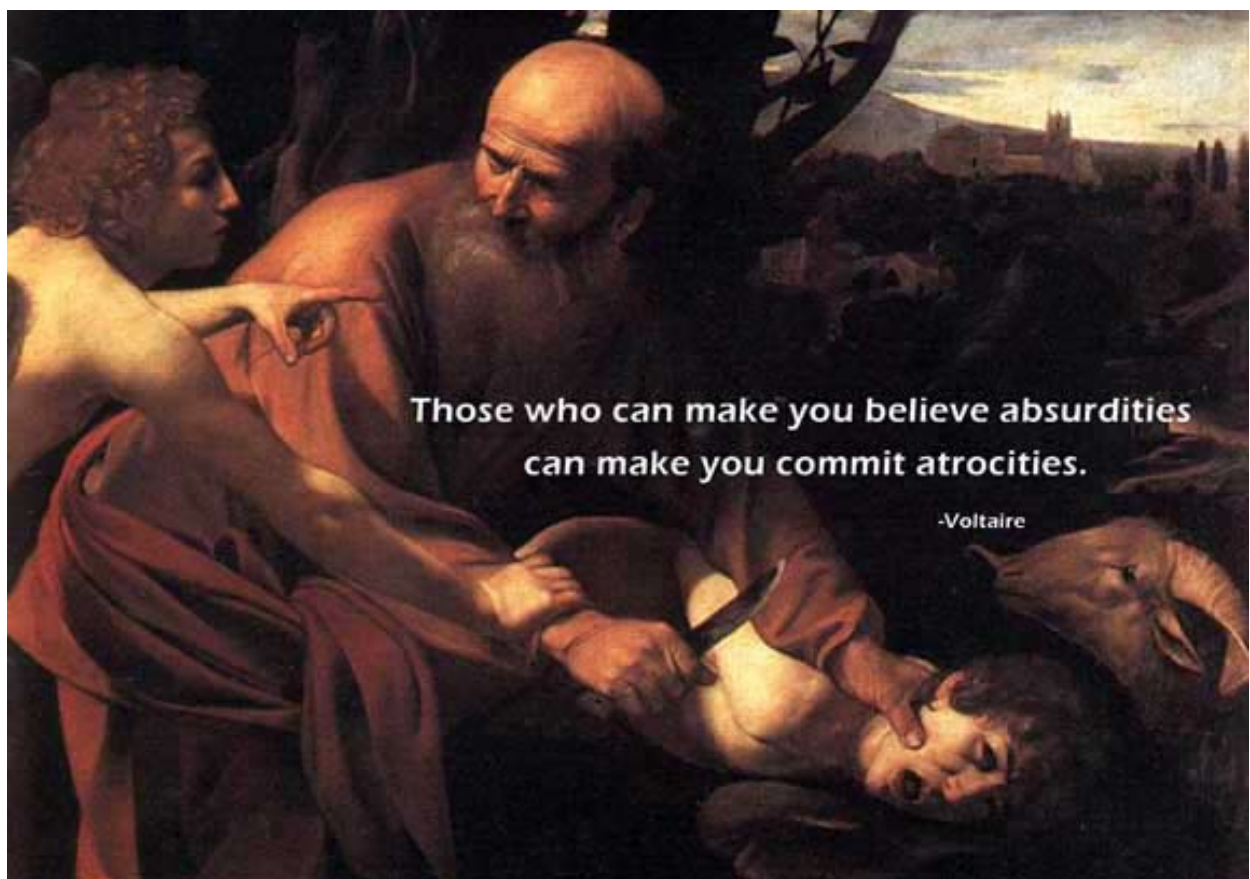
I find it astonishing that the Catholic Church is still staggering on pretty much unchanged despite the stuff that has recently been aired about their shameful treatment of the children in their care. It has become abundantly clear that the Roman Catholic church is little more than a monument to overweening hypocrisy. Yet people's faith remains unchallenged, and the church doesn't appear to be seriously reconsidering its attitude to celibacy despite the recent damaging revelations. Surely it is obvious that they can't continue on as they have in the past. The jig is up now.

In these post-Internet days where reliable information is so ubiquitously dispersed and easily available people still believe the most amazing things, as though they are determined not to have their antiquated ideas renovated, no matter what.

But it's not just the Catholic church that is the problem. It's *all* faith-based belief systems. It beats me why people choose to believe something -- fervently -- when there is absolutely no evidence for the truth of what they believe. Lots of people believe all sorts of weird stuff for which there is not a shred of evidence, despite us, as a species, having arrived at perfectly satisfactory explanations that are backed by empirical evidence and sound scientific reasoning to explain the same phenomenon. To me, authoritarian systems of belief handed down by half-crazed prophets in the medieval wilderness, (many of whom would be seen as candidates for psychotherapeutic treatment these days) are huge and unhelpful impediments to the realisation of a sane and scientific set of beliefs by which to lead our lives. Religious recipes for living do not deserve the respect they are accorded as hallowed tenets because they are actually holding us back from furthering a rational and non-metaphysical set of beliefs about how human life should be conducted. Many of the world's most intractable problems will only be



solved when we can loosen the stranglehold that religious ideas of all stripes have over ideas of morality. As my mate Telf Conlon opined once: "The church has no more of a monopoly over morality than General Motors has over the wheel."
Just as puzzling to me is how otherwise intelligent people still believe that every word of the





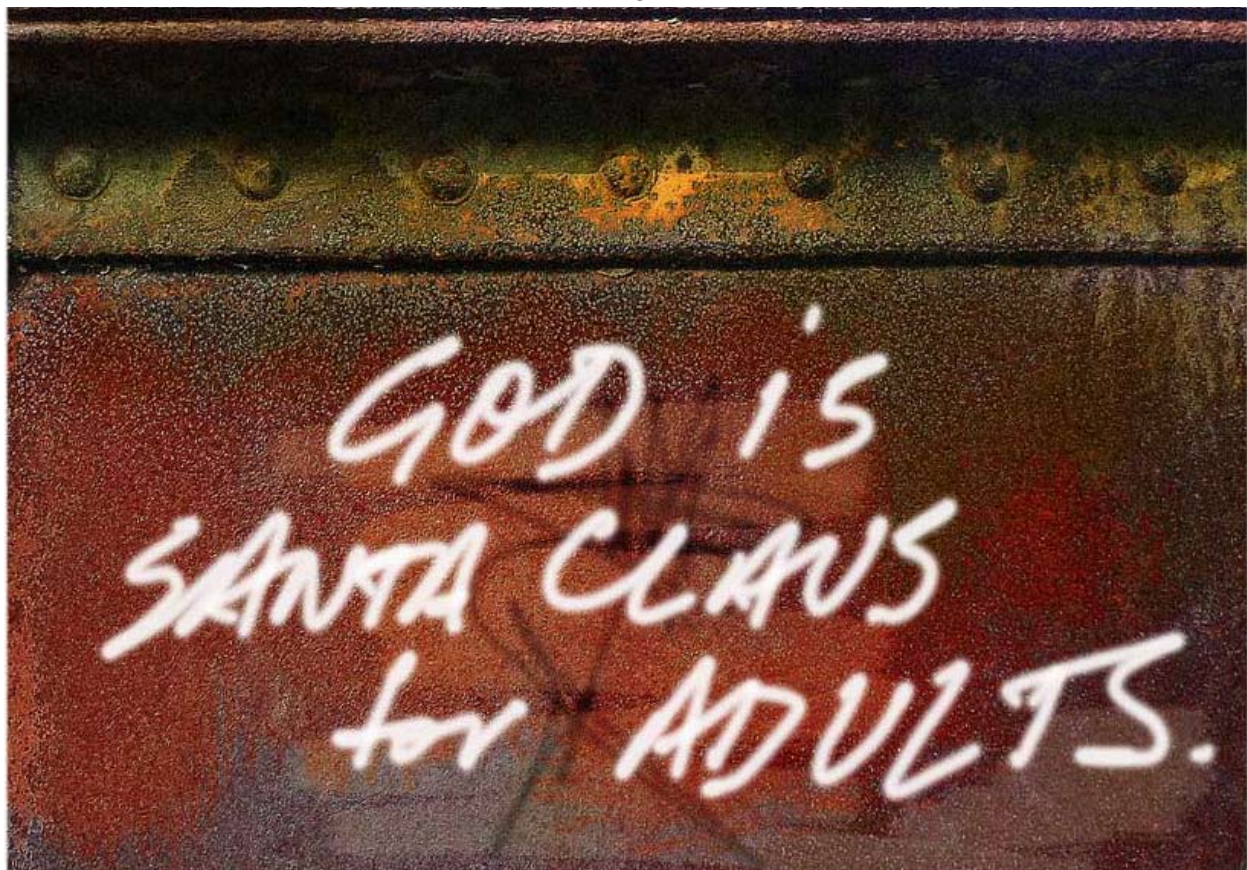
Science has proof without certainty



Creationists have certainty without proof.

- Ashley Montague

bible is literally true. These people tend to be the most fervent of believers, but they appear not to have read too much of the bible, as they are apparently unaware of the many contradictions contained therein, as well as apparently being ignorant of the way the bible was put together in the first place, and how much it has been massaged so as to meet the political interests of its



architects.

We managed to make the transition from the strictures of a feudal economy all those years ago, so it shouldn't be impossible to get everyone out from under the thrall of superstitious and magical thinking, but it sure doesn't look as though it's likely to happen for quite some time yet. To me it's an absolute no-brainer.



As long as people believe that these tomes contain the Word of God, literally, then we, as a species, are pretty well bugged. These books urgently need to be toppled from their position of absolute authority, because, in the final analysis, they are based on bullshit. But to come straight out with the truth like that these days is heavily disapproved, lest someone might be offended. Well fuck them! They're the ones whose ideas are like a thick plastic condom on the penis of progress for the future human race. It's *their* ideas that are holding us back, which is something much more offensive than simply telling it how it is in actuality.

Why on earth are there so many on the conservative side of politics that still want to smooth the way for the Adani mine to despoil the Barrier Reef? How can it be in Turnbull's interest to keep prosecuting this line? The mining venture is almost universally thought to be not a goer, given the changing global approach to energy and the rapidly changing situation in India. Any financial investment the government might make in it (like stumping up billions to build their railway line) will almost certainly never be repaid when Adani eventually goes down the gurgler. A large majority of Australians are keen to transition from coal to renewables, Turnbull is not currently in a position of any electoral strength, and although we all know he will sell out on any of his own social convictions at the drop of a hat, surely placating the rabid right rump of his party in this way can only complicate his political survival in the near future?

The differences between Labor and the Libs is becoming increasingly nuanced and harder to discern. I don't think that the Labor Party knows what it stands for any more. When Rudd first won the Prime Ministership I was completely take in by him. He'd come pretty much out of the blue, and I didn't know all that much about him, and his first moves once in office, and his overall manner, gave me a (brief) resurgence of optimism. But then the rot set in and Rudd revealed his true colours, repudiated his commitment to doing something useful about climate change, and then set about scuttling the party's chances of making any useful contribution as he ran berserk trying to maximise his own situation with absolutely no thought for the wider consequences. As a result, poor ole Julia copped heaps of flak, didn't last long in power, and now few people remember just how much legislation she got through despite having to deal with a hostile Senate.

What happened to the polities with some vision and a bit of guts, like Don Dunstan, Ted Mack or, for that matter, Gough? At present the Labour Party doesn't do anything the slightest bit radical or reforming, for fear of upsetting interest groups. They forever fall back on adversarial sniping, and even Shorten's zingers lack any zing. And the similarities between the Coalition and Labor draws even closer. Malcolm's attempts to mollify the demands of the dinosaur right in his party make little sense as political strategy, and the Coalition looks likely to go the same way as Labor did under Rudd/Gillard. So little of their antics makes any sense to me.

Rudd's disavowal of his stance on climate change not long after he was first elected shocked me. Up until then I'd believed what he'd been saying. God I can be naive at times! Then as Labour made it clear that they were happy to "process" (read "lock up forever and throw away the key") asylum seekers coming here in desperation... to process them offshore and were basically in agreement with the Coalition on this, well, I gave up on them completely and have remained a Greens voter ever since. Like so many other voters, I am completely fed up with the major political parties. As I said before, adversarialism is so deeply encoded in their genes, there is absolutely no way the major parties could get together and do something about climate change, which seems the most obvious course for any party to pursue for this and many other social issues which really do not need to be aligned with either left or right political perspectives.



**Human kindness
has never weakened the stamina
or softened the fiber of a free people.
A nation does not have
to be cruel to be tough.**

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

The way we treat asylum seekers who risk their lives in leaky boats to get here (often fleeing from brutal regimes whose existence is partly the fault of Australia's foreign policy) is nothing short of despicable. I can't get my head around the fact that socially respectable adults (some of whom we address as The Honourable, or even the Right Honourable in some cases) who have been elected to public office can be quite so cold-blooded about their role in totally ruining the lives of despairing people in desperate straits. Further, most of them quite happily call themselves Christians. What fucking out and out hypocrisy it all is! It is totally beyond my comprehension that very well-off, comfortable, and powerful human beings can apparently be without a compassionate cell in their bodies.

And I suspect that at the root of this unconcern and gratuitous cruelty is because most of the refugees have the wrong skin colour. Compare our treatment of swarthy-skinned refugees with the way we handled refugees from Kosovo some years ago. No offshore incarceration for them. Was this because they were white-skinned? If the White Australia Policy were still in place it would at least have the virtue of honesty.

Our treatment of asylum seekers is the single thing that upsets me most about the current political scene in Oz. However you look at it, it is unconscionable and inexcusable.

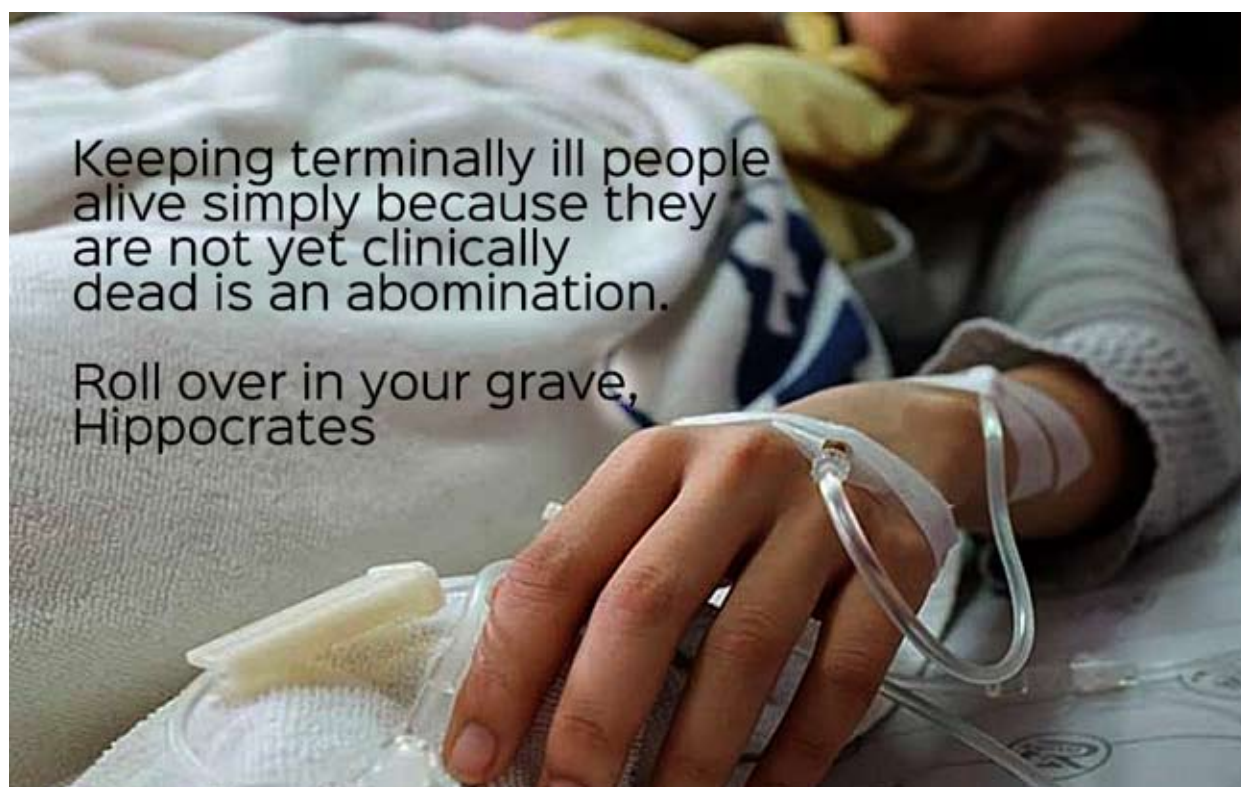


TV shows about homebuilding (Grand Designs, Restoration Man et al) have become all the go in recent times. Being a from-scratch homebuilder myself, I watch quite a few of them, and the experience has made me think a bit about the role of the architectural profession in our society. Every now and then these programmes might feature a straw bale house, or attempts at building sustainable dwellings from recycled materials, but they are rare. Most of the grand designs ooze opulence. Everything costs a motza. Huge machinery is usually needed to prepare the site and to lift into place massive structural elements, and the projects almost always come in late and well over budget. Perfectly good buildings are smashed to pieces to make way for some rich prick's architectural wet dream. It's all about opulence and "look at what I can afford to build and live in".



Where is the architecture for the poor? Well, the poor can't afford architects. Architects are for the rich – by definition, since no-one else could afford their services. I'd really like to see more examples of creative, original and *cheap* dwellings. But the common thread running through the designs of these Gloria Soames is pretentiousness and grandiloquence. It is conspicuous consumption concretised. Once you employ an architect you lock yourself into a set of assumptions that house designs are expensive, and are more about social status than they are about human habitation. There is a preference for high-tech modern materials like brushed stainless steel and acres of triple glazing, and to my taste the results are often too bare, self-consciously tidy, and "design-ey". Where is the cosiness, the human messiness and the feeling of somewhere to inhabit, bring up kids, and feel a living part of? Something to get homesick for?

I know I go on about the negative aspects of religion a lot, but there's yet another aspect I want to mention, and that's the role played by religion in throttling the debate about euthanasia. (This is an awkward noun, and we have yet to make up our mind whether the verb to make from it is "euthanase" or "euthanise". For the nonce, let's call it "Let me go when I decide I want to".) In some other countries, where their social policies are considerably more compassionate and advanced than ours are in this regard (and about which we seem to hear very little), it has been repeatedly shown that, of those dying people who are given a small bottle of "peaceful pills" (Nembutal) to have handy by their bedside, many die without resorting to the pills for one reason or another. You can't legally get hold of Nembutal in Oz at the moment, but having the pills at the ready apparently eases the anxiety associated with a terminal illness because the patient knows that if things get too tough, the pills are there to resort to. I don't know whether my exit will be mercifully quick, or attenuated, painful or undignified, but I know that if I could get hold of some Nembutal to have, just in case, then I



would live out what's left of my life in a much more unworried and serene state than I am doing at the moment.

As one study said, *pain is not the main motivation for PAS (physician-assisted suicide)...* The dominant motives are loss of autonomy and dignity and being less able to enjoy life's activities. When you can no longer feed yourself, wash and dress yourself or wipe your arse --- how can you call that living?

Talking to people about this, I often have it pointed out to me that if we made "let me go when I decide I want to" legal, then hordes of economically rapacious relatives would be lining up to have Mum or Dad knocked off so they could get their mitts on the family home or whatever money and other assets the oldies might have amassed. Well, I suppose there are some people like that, but they're not people I'd want to know. Careful drafting of the legislation, with appropriate safeguards against predatory behaviour by relatives has been achieved successfully in other more enlightened countries. Why can't we do the same?

What I strenuously object to is the way people who are personally *not* in favour of letting people go when they want to, have influenced our legislators so that, as things stand at the moment, it is unlawful *not* to do it their way. I don't mind if someone opts to die the hard way out of religious conviction, but I sure as hell object to them telling me that I must do it their way too, no matter what I might think to the contrary. Again, bugger 'em! It's my life and it's my death..

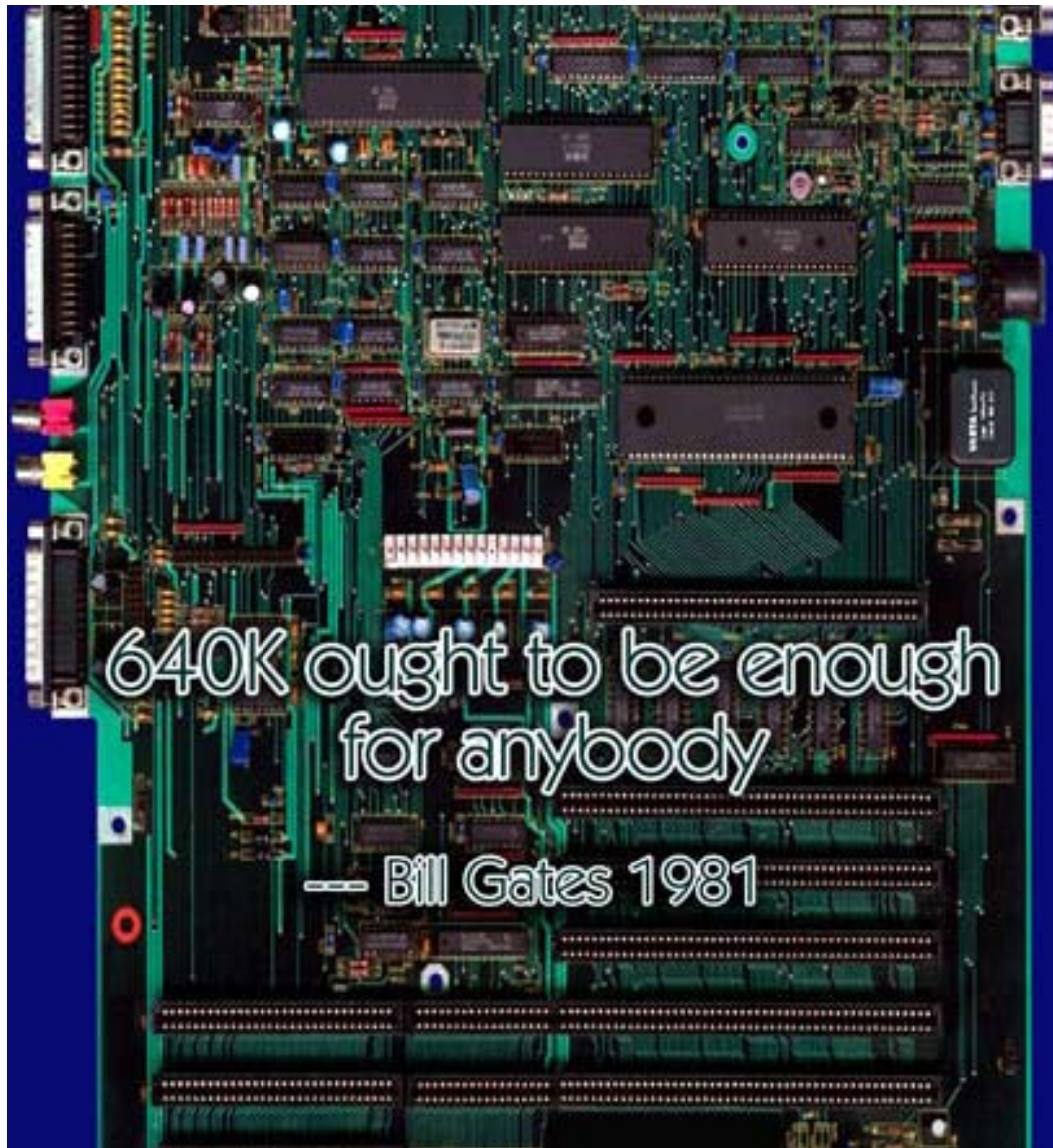
Ever since Trump was elected and he ushered in the "post-truth era" (can you imagine?) we have been deafened by a gnashing of teeth about Fake News. But what's the big deal with fake news? Fake news has been around for a long while. When I was very much younger and being politicised it was known as "disinformation". It's a form of political practice that is older than Cicero. In simpler, less jargon-ridden times, we knew it by a perfectly adequate four letter word: LIES.

Same sex marriage has been lurking around the political water cooler conversations for quite some time now. I have to admit it's not one of my political priorities, mainly because I can see no reason for anyone to get married these days. What is it about marriage that is so attractive to people? People spend a fortune on big weddings at a time in most couples' lives when they need whatever moolah they've got to pay back their HECS debts and try to find some way to put a roof over their heads.

I agree that there should be no impediment for same sex attracted people to get married if they want to, like everyone else, but let's not forget that marriage is an institution tainted by its historical association with ecclesiastical ideas, and let's face it, was introduced originally as a form of control over property inheritance by blokes. These days you could argue that it's an unadmitted lack of trust in your partner that makes it advisable to get married. If you didn't mistrust your partner in some way, why would you bother with all the hoo-hah of getting married? (Unless you were going to marry a brainless ninny who just can't wait for The Big Day dressed in hypocritical white.) You could do a prenup agreement without having anything to do with the church if you were that insistent on covering your back. I can't see the need for marriage as an institution any more. Instead of lobbying for the right of LGBTIQ people to follow the herd and have a marriage ceremony, I'd rather see everyone legalizing their relationship in a way that's non-liturgical, and getting on with their lives.

Now, lest you think that I can only write in Complain Mode, I'd like to say how pleased and impressed I am by the Digital Revolution. It has led us into areas that nobody could have even dreamt about a couple of decades ago. Who could have foreseen the advent of Facebook, Twitter and their like, and the inordinately influential role they have come to play in modern communications? (Not that I'm on Twitter or Facebook myself, but their deep-rootedness in modern culture for many many people is hard to deny).





When I was doing my Arts degree at night at Sydney Uni a long time ago, I used to spend many a weekend afternoon at the State Library in Macquarie Street, reading for essays I had been set, or studying for exams. This involved driving into the city, finding somewhere to park (not always easy, even then), putting in a chit at the Stacks desk for books you wanted to look at, waiting for it to be retrieved for you – sometimes up to an hour – and then often, after all that time, you'd find the book wasn't as helpful as you'd hoped. It wasn't hard to waste an entire afternoon in this way.

Fast forward to today, with Wikipedia at your fingertips. Just about any piece of information you can think of takes a mere matter of minutes to find. Every time I look something up I marvel at the democratisation of information that has come about. This makes the Web a heaven for autodidacts. And this is just as well, as I can't see our conventional educational institutions being able to handle the challenges of our rapidly changing world where most of the jobs we will be doing in the future haven't even been thought of yet. Doing PPE at Oxbridge for a rounded education looks like an increasingly inadequate way to go given the explosion of knowledge that is happening, and the speed at which it is all coming about.

Occasionally I hear people sneer that Wikipedia is an artifact of the Web and is not reliable. Well, all I can say is, compare it with an encyclopedia, where many entries were written by one

“expert”. One person’s take on an entry was all you got, whereas with Wikipedia every entry is the result of the efforts of many people, and any dodgy bits are identified. For the life of me I can’t see how anyone could think it to be an inferior information source to what we used to have. I’m not saying Wikipedia is watertight, but it’s so much better than what we had to make do with, there’s almost no comparison.

I’m aware that I’ve been talking about only a tiny part of the digital revolution. Just whether the Ascendency of the Binary as a whole will turn out to be A Good Thing of course no one knows. The potential for cyberwars, and what might happen to humans in the long run in their romance with the smartphone is anybody’s guess. But for the parts of cyberspace that I now use regularly, I have nothing but enthusiastic praise.

Well, I think that might be enough for now. I might some more at a later date, but then again, I might not. But. as you shuffle around this mortal coil. always remember that...

