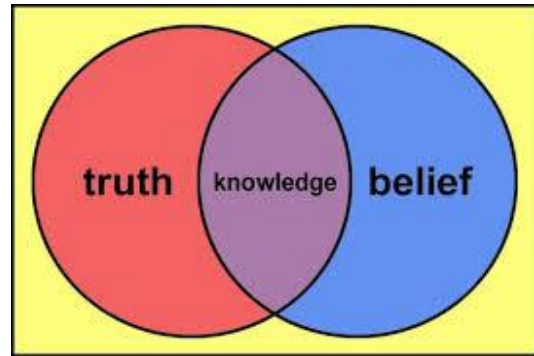




Journeys Without End



Will the Centre Hold?

Existential questions without any final answers.

2022, November 9: Will the Centre Hold? p.1

Recordkeeping and culture. The Voice, Identity, and *Dark Emu* discussed.



Knowing What We Know

Finding out about the World and how to verify it.

2023, June 28: Knowing What We Know p.32

Search for information & understanding ... and attempts to suppress it.



2025, May 3: Fed: [Arcan-I] ACA Support of US ... Cultural Institutions p.77

If you heap burning coals on your own head, you'll find them hot - cf. [Proverbs 25:22](#).



2022 November 9: Will the Centre Hold?

I was speaking some years ago with a North American archival educator who asked rhetorically *What can you do with college graduates who haven't heard of the French Revolution?*

A [Conversation](#) article asks whether social media is (are?) killing democracy and they reach the predictable conclusion that to safeguard democracy social media must be regulated by "voters and elected policymakers, not a small clique of super-rich individuals". But suppose it's the ignorance of those using social media (the voters themselves) that's also at fault, that social media simply provides a means whereby people can actually say what they really think and do what they really want (as democracy always promised they could). Suppose social media isn't causing the ugliness but simply releasing the dark underbelly of human nature that was always there but hitherto revealed only in times of turmoil and revolution?

What is the connection between knowledge and reason, between ignorance and ugliness? Can archivists who've never heard of the French Revolution uphold civilisation (assuming that is any part of our role)? Is it evidence or ideology that prevails? Bit of both, I suppose. In his latest book ([The War on the West](#)) Douglas Murray writes (pp.79-81)

... the assault on the West's history succeeds because it speaks into a vacuum of vast historical and contemporary ignorance ... A poll of young British people carried out by [Survation](#) in 2016 found that 50 percent had never heard of Lenin, while 70 percent had no idea who Mao was. Among sixteen- to twenty-four-year-olds, who had all grown up after the fall of the



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Berlin Wall, 41 percent had positive feelings about socialism, while just 28 percent felt the same sentiments towards capitalism. One possible reason for this is that 68 percent said they had never learned anything in school about the Russian Revolution ... A poll carried out in 2020 found that almost two-thirds of Americans between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine had no idea that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust ...

Can't speak to the accuracy of these figures and, of course, well-educated toffs are just as capable of ignorance as the downtrodden (witness Sky-After-Dark). It's reminiscent of the argey-bargy over gun control. Do guns kill people or do people kill people? Does social media kill democracy or do people kill democracy? Can archives help if those using archives aren't bound by the evidence they provide?

2022, November 25:

Further to this –

In the [*Maltese Falcon*](#), Sam Spade, Brigid O'Shaughnessy (aka Ruth Wonderly) and Joel Cairo are spinning tales to mislead each other and the police. The police challenge Cairo (played by [the inimitable Peter Lorre](#)) to respond to Spade's yarn. "*Well, I don't know what to say.*" Try telling us the facts, the police reply. Cairo looks up, puzzled and disbelieving, "*Facts?!*" Next morning, after a night in the lock-up, Cairo says he wishes Spade could have come up with a more plausible story. "*If I'd told a sensible story, we'd have all ended up in jail.*"

Three uncontroversial points sum to a paradox: 1) Almost every democratic theorist or democratic political actor sees an informed electorate as essential to good democratic practice. Citizens need to know who or what they are choosing and why – hence urgent calls for expansive and publicly funded education, and rights to free speech, assembly, press, and movement. 2) In most if not all democratic polities, the proportion of the population granted the suffrage has consistently expanded, and seldom contracted, over the past two centuries. Most observers, and I, agree that expanding enfranchisement makes a state more democratic. 3) Most expansions of the suffrage bring in, on average, people who are less politically informed or less broadly educated than those already eligible to vote. Putting these three uncontroversial points together leads to the conclusion that as democracies become more democratic, their decision-making processes become of lower quality in terms of cognitive processing of issues and candidate choice. The paradox is both historical – why *have* democracies expanded the franchise to include relatively ignorant voters? – and normative – why *should* democracies expand the franchise to include relatively ignorant voters?

The article addresses both questions ...

"In a random telephone survey of more than 2,000 adults, conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory at Northern Illinois University, 21 percent of the respondents said they believed that the sun revolved around the earth; an additional 7 percent said they did not know which revolved around which" (Halpern 1997). A long list of studies shows that Americans in the 1950s thought the Bill of Rights was written recently by Communists, that 40 percent do not know the name of the vice president, that few can name their own Representative in Congress, that many believe that more of the federal budget goes to foreign aid than to social security, and so on. Jennifer L. Hochschild [*If democracies need informed voters, how can they thrive while expanding enfranchisement*](#) (read on)

Hochschild illustrates one of her propositions by stating, inter alia, that "In the absence of adequate information neither passion nor reason is likely to lead to decisions that reflect the real interests of the public." This should warm the hearts of information professionals like us. My problem is persuading myself that adequate information would be all that effective in leading reason to triumph over passion. Most of the evidence seems to point the other way. Climate Change, Frontier Wars, Vaccination, Presidential Elections - adequate information is not lacking but it is either ignored or disputed. Factoids from the Internet are used willy nilly to uphold every conceivable position and inflame almost every political and

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ideological argument. The information we curate is not like a truth-pill. The ability to honestly analyse and evaluate the information is beyond our power to confer.



Another possibility would be to deny the ignorant a vote (or any capacity to do harm, other than invading Congress and shooting up pizza joints). Another way of suggesting that harm comes from the (mis)use made of knowledge – not from its (in)accuracy.

- Roughly a third of American voters think that the Marxist slogan “From each according to his ability to each according to his need” appears in the Constitution. About as many are incapable of naming even one of the three branches of the United States government. Fewer than a quarter know who their senators are, and only half are aware that their state has two of them ...
- It would be much safer, Plato thought, to entrust power to carefully educated guardians. To keep their minds pure of distractions—such as family, money, and the inherent pleasures of naughtiness—he proposed housing them in a eugenically supervised free-love compound where they could be taught to fear the touch of gold and prevented from reading any literature in which the characters have speaking parts, which might lead them to forget themselves. The scheme was so byzantine and cockamamie that many suspect Plato couldn’t have been serious ...
- A more practical suggestion came from J. S. Mill, in the nineteenth century: give extra votes to citizens with university degrees or intellectually demanding jobs [CH: God forbid!] ...
- In 1855, Connecticut introduced the first literacy test for American voters. Although a New York Democrat protested, in 1868, that “if a man is ignorant, he needs the ballot for his protection all the more,” in the next half century the tests spread to almost all parts of the country. They helped racists in the South circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment and disenfranchise blacks, and even in immigrant-rich New York a 1921 law required new voters to take a test if they couldn’t prove that they had an eighth-grade education. About fifteen per cent flunked. Voter literacy tests weren’t permanently outlawed by Congress until 1975, years after the civil-rights movement had discredited them ...
- David Estlund, a political philosopher at Brown ... tried to construct a philosophical justification for democracy, a feat that he thought could be achieved only by balancing two propositions: democratic procedures tend to make correct policy decisions, and democratic procedures are fair in the eyes of reasonable observers...Estlund coined the word “epistocracy,” meaning “government by the knowledgeable.” ... As a purely philosophical matter, however, he saw only three valid objections. First, one could deny that truth was a suitable standard for measuring political judgment ... in debates over contentious issues, such as when human life begins or whether human activity is warming the planet, appeals to the truth tend to be incendiary. Truth “peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate,” Hannah Arendt pointed out ... The second argument against epistocracy would be to deny that some citizens know more about good government than others ... The third and final option: deny that knowing more imparts political authority. As Estlund put it, “You might be right, but who made you boss?” ... By the end of Estlund’s analysis, there were only two practical arguments against epistocracy left standing. The first was the possibility that an epistocracy’s method of screening voters might be biased in a way that couldn’t readily be identified and therefore couldn’t be corrected for. The second was that universal suffrage is so established in our minds as a default that giving the knowledgeable power over the ignorant will always feel more unjust ...



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- Jason Brennan, a political philosopher at Georgetown, has turned Estlund's hedging inside out to create an uninhibited argument *for* epistocracy. Against Estlund's claim that universal suffrage is the default, Brennan argues that it's entirely justifiable to limit the political power that the irrational, the ignorant, and the incompetent have over others ... Brennan suggests that since voters in an epistocracy would be more enlightened about crime and policing, "excluding the bottom 80 percent of white voters from voting might be just what poor blacks need."
Caleb Crain [The case against democracy](#)

<<**Andrew Waugh: Australia has had four expansions of the suffrage:**

- **Lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18**
- **Enfranchising indigenous Australians**
- **Granting women the vote**
- **Eliminating the property qualification**

I'll let you argue that extending the franchise to any of these groups damaged Australian democracy.>>

Not my argument. Jennifer Hochschild is making a link between expanding the franchise and a resulting "*lower quality in terms of cognitive processing of issues and candidate choice*". Take it up with her. All of the quotes address the wider issue of voter ignorance as a threat to democracy. It is only Hochschild who links that ignorance to expansion of the franchise. Whether voters are more ignorant than before and if so what causes that and what are the results is the common thread. I would say that passionate ignorance is today to be found, in the English-speaking world at least, amongst all strata of society including (some would say mostly) amongst the educated elites.

I would be prepared to argue that damage is occurring as a result of ignorance but also as a result of much else besides and (harking back to the *Conversation* piece) that is wrong to see the rise of unreasoning passion as the result solely of the instruments by which it is expressed (viz. social media). I think ignorant people are to blame not just the tools they use. I don't think education is the answer if, as some ideologues argue, it simply means indoctrination with approved or preferred "knowledge". As I've indicated elsewhere, my idea of education involves development of critical thinking to assist people in reaching their own conclusions. People reaching their own conclusions is a fair description of social media craziness but I don't think they can be "educated" out of false conclusions or bullied out of them either for that matter (e.g. pronoun wars, identity wars, history wars, and so on).

This is ultimately a social issue so, like my old friends Charles Dickens and George Orwell, I think the answer is a moral one, not a structural one. I think the baby boomer generation (to which I belong) has seen a loosening of custom which formerly lay alongside democratic government, some of it good some of it corrosive. But perhaps this is just an old man's fear of change.

The connections between passion, knowledge, and truth are complex and can't really be dealt with in a list posting (hence my attempt to cross-reference the writings of others). Our issues, which I take to include evidence, fact, and memory can't be separated from the question these writers raise concerning the state of democracy. As I said in Winnipeg many years ago, the ethos of recordkeeping and the role of the recordkeeper are not inherent, they derive from the context in which we operate.

2022 November 26:

<<I would be prepared to argue that damage is occurring as a result of ignorance but also as a result of much else beside>>

- **Democratic backsliding**, also called **autocratization**, is the decline in the democratic characteristics of a political system and is the opposite of democratization. [Wikipedia](#).
- Turning and turning in the widening [gyre](#) / The falcon cannot hear the [falconer](#);
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere [anarchy](#) is loosed upon the world,



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The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.

- *All happy families are alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way* (Tolstoy)

It may be that every functioning democracy is like every other and that every failing democracy fails in its own way. Leaving aside collapse engineered by external forces or resulting from internal divisions, how are we to judge failure (or impending failure)? It is probably necessary to distinguish the failure to meet the definitional requirements of a liberal democracy (e.g. autocratization in [Russia](#) supported, apparently, by a majority) from majority rule that fails to satisfy minority aspirations (e.g. UK's persistent [Scottish problems](#) and the question of [Palestinian Independence](#)). If I am correct that recordkeeping takes on the colour of its context, then it's important to know if our context is failing.

One way to know that (not necessarily the best or one which I would endorse) is how the governed perceive the case to be,

- Anger at political elites, economic dissatisfaction and anxiety about rapid social changes have fueled political upheaval in regions around the world in recent years. Anti-establishment leaders, parties and movements have emerged on both the right and left of the political spectrum, in some cases challenging fundamental norms and institutions of liberal democracy... ideas at the core of liberal democracy remain popular among global publics, but commitment to democracy can nonetheless be weak ... Across 27 countries polled, a median of 51% are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in their country; just 45% are satisfied ...
- The results highlight some key areas of public frustration: Most believe elections bring little change, that politicians are corrupt and out of touch and that courts do not treat people fairly. On the other hand, people are more positive about how well their countries protect free expression, provide economic opportunity and ensure public safety ... among the factors studied, dissatisfaction with democracy is related to economic frustration, the status of individual rights, as well as perceptions that political elites are corrupt and do not care about average citizens. Additionally, in Europe the results suggest that dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working is tied to views about the EU, opinions about whether immigrants are adopting national customs and attitudes toward populist parties ...
- Overall, populist party sympathizers tend to be unhappy with the way their democracies are working ... Nearly six-in-ten Swedes with a favorable opinion of the Sweden Democrats are dissatisfied with the current state of democracy, compared with only 17% of those who see the right-wing party negatively. Similarly, 69% of Germans with a positive view of the right-wing AfD are dissatisfied, while just 37% hold that view among Germans who rate AfD negatively. The same pattern is found among those who sympathize with left-wing populist parties in some nations. For instance, six-in-ten who have a favorable view of La France Insoumise are dissatisfied with how democracy is working, compared with 47% of French people who see the party negatively. Interestingly, those with favorable opinions of two European populist parties are more satisfied with how democracy is working: the UK's right-wing, pro-Brexit UKIP and Greece's left-wing Syriza.
Pew Research Center [Many across the globe are dissatisfied with how democracy is working](#)

Another way is by evaluation against defined criteria -

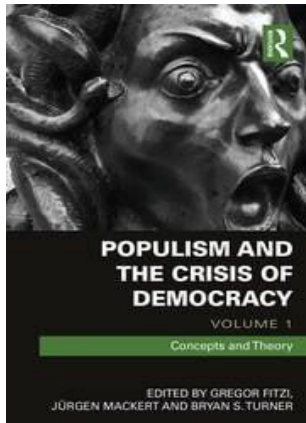
Democracy is in crisis. The values it embodies—particularly the right to choose leaders in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—are under assault and in retreat globally ... For the 12th consecutive year, according to *Freedom in the World*, countries that suffered democratic setbacks outnumbered those that registered gains. States that a decade ago seemed like promising success stories—Turkey and Hungary, for example—are sliding into authoritarian rule. The military in Myanmar, which began a limited democratic opening in 2010, executed a shocking campaign of ethnic cleansing in 2017 and rebuffed international criticism of its actions. Meanwhile, the world's most powerful democracies are mired in seemingly intractable problems at home, including



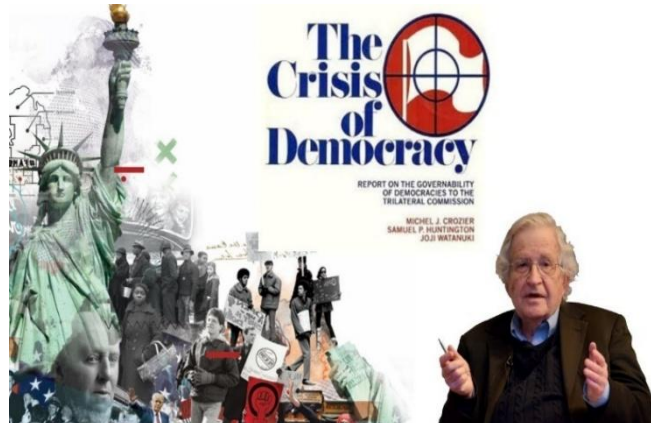
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social and economic disparities, partisan fragmentation, terrorist attacks, and an influx of refugees that has strained alliances and increased fears of the “other.”

Freedom House *Democracy in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*



Gregor Fitzl et al



Noam Chomsky

<<Andrew Wilson: Using data from the US as a guide to anything anywhere else in the world is problematic, to say the least.>>

- Australia [is] the sixth most accurate country on the Ipsos “Index of Ignorance”. Ipsos’ latest “Perils of Perception” survey highlights how wrong the public across 40 countries is about key global issues and features of the population in their country ... India receives the dubious honour of being the most inaccurate in its perceptions on these issues, with China and the US also high up the list. The Netherlands is the most accurate, followed by Great Britain, with South Korea in third. *Perils of Perception ...*
- „, the standing of democracy amongst Australians — presumably including that of Australian democracy — is not overwhelmingly positive. In the latest authoritative Lowy Institute Poll of Australian attitudes towards democracy, it is troubling that 30% of 18-29 year-old citizens surveyed believed a non-democratic system is preferable to a democratic one under some circumstances, while 55% believed democracy is preferable regardless of circumstance. This is a contrast to those 60 years and over surveyed, only 15% of whom believed a non-democratic system might be preferable, while 72% believed democracy was always preferable. The overall numbers for all surveyed was 22% and 65%, respectively. The lower regard for democracy amongst younger Australians is reflected in previous polling going back to 2012 ...
Most Australians are famously disinterested in politics and contrast their general disinterest in politics favorably with the passionate and intense American debates about the state of U.S. democracy ... This more flippant attitude to politics means that Australian democracy is far less partisan and divisive than in a country such as the United States. However, there are downsides. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a widespread Australian ignorance about the structure and workings of its democracy ...
The risks to Australia’s democracy
- This thesis is focused on Australian citizens who were not interested in politics during the period 1987- 2016 using data primarily from the Australian Election Study (AES) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) ... The findings of this thesis suggest that there are at least twenty percent of Australians who are politically uninterested who lack the motivation to garner rudimentary political knowledge. They do not understand how our system of government works and cannot take information shortcuts to vote according to ideology or atomised issues. Lower socio-demographic individuals are generally the most uninterested, yet they are also the section of society that require more from government in relation to benefits and programs ... They are also more likely to swing from one party to another at different elections and more likely to simply not care who governs. The broader polity is therefore affected by major political parties rationally focusing on uninterested swinging voters in order to attract their attention. The result is that ephemeral or fringe issues hijack political debate. Greg Kramer *The Apathetic Country*



2022, November 30:

<<Suppose social media isn't causing the ugliness but simply releasing the dark underbelly of human nature that was always there ... Does social media kill democracy or do people kill democracy?>>

... Merriam-Webster, America's oldest dictionary publisher, has just chosen "[gaslighting](#)" as its word of the year ... Gaslighting is the act or practice of grossly misleading someone, especially for one's own advantage. "In this age of misinformation - of 'fake news', conspiracy theories, Twitter trolls, and deep fakes - gaslighting has emerged as a word for our time," Merriam-Webster said in a statement on Monday ... as Merriam-Webster notes, while the term referred primarily to psychological manipulation in the 20th Century, its modern use is driven by "the vast increase in channels and technologies used to mislead" people, especially in personal and political contexts ...

2022, December 1:

<<to safeguard democracy social media must be regulated by "voters and elected policymakers, not a small clique of super-rich individuals">>

<< he was not a hole-and-corner soul-saver, the kind of well-meaning idiot who thinks that the world will be perfect if you amend a few bylaws and abolish a few anomalies>>

Would regulation by voters and elected policymakers in place of a small clique of super-rich individuals actually improve matters? The Internet was once touted as a way of escaping from regulation and government control. What happened? Is oppression by a majority less baleful than the caprice of a clique? Can truth be established by ballot?

Are the motives of voters and elected policymakers less suspect, less tyrannous, less dangerous to democracy? Are their intentions, biases, and beliefs less harmful? Would their regulation (whatever that involves) make things better or worse or would it make no difference at all? What can I expect from regulation by voters and elected policymakers? I am absolute for free speech but I know this is a minority opinion not shared by a majority of voters or by elected policymakers. Very much so if you exclude the sophists who weasel out of difficulty with the formula: *I support free speech but ...* People who oppose discrimination (as I do) are expected by many voters and elected policymakers to oppose vilification also (as I do not). Some voters and elected policymakers don't see a difference between vilification and discrimination and advocate "control" to eliminate both. But how does this safeguard democracy (freedom, fairness, toleration, etc.)?



If I say that God hates you and you're going to Hell, that's vilification (a form of free speech); if I refuse to bake a cake to your specification, that's discrimination. It's easy to see the difference unless you've got scrambled eggs for brains. But would voters and elected policymakers see it? I don't vilify people (at least not in my own estimation) because that's how I was brought up, but others don't do so under statutory compulsion. Which is more



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righteous? As the price of living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other, I know I must accept (unwillingly) socially sanctioned abridgements to free speech such as libel, vilification, sedition, blasphemy, copyright even. I oppose the *Religious Discrimination Bill* (which allows the religious to both vilify and discriminate) but not necessarily for the same reasons as most voters and elected policymakers. I oppose it because I think everyone should be free to vilify and no one should be free to discriminate. But I and others who oppose that Bill for different reasons might have to consider that accepting it (unwillingly) is the price of living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other.

Online it won't be arguments about vilification vs discrimination that have to be dealt with but rather about the harmful (e.g. [misleading](#) or [inflammatory](#) information) vs the vile (e.g. incorrect, hateful, or disputed opinions). Not even the small clique of super-rich individuals has been able to avoid [dealing with that](#). If voters and elected policymakers take over this role, they will have to develop norms for what is misleading that are acceptable to the majority and they will be tempted to extend their control over dissenting opinion simply because it is distasteful to the majority. If the editors of Merriam-Webster are right and social media tools amplify the problem of misleading information, then controlling the tools may have to be accepted (unwillingly) as the price we pay for living in a civilized society etc etc. But don't suppose that you can tame human nature by taming Twitter. That's all I'm saying. And beware: accepting compromises as the price of living in a civilized society etc etc because that is also the excuse needed by every totalitarian regime that's trampling on democracy and human rights.

The [gun control](#) analogy may disturb, but I hold to it. The American Second Amendment is based on a quaint 18th century idea that "a well regulated Militia [is] necessary to the security of a Free State". Whatever merit there may have been (or is) in such a notion, I doubt the Founders intended to ease the way for solo psychopaths to purchase battlefield weapons over the counter and use them to massacre school kids. If it's people who kill people (not guns) then gun control is very much about compromising a principle so people can live in a civilized society etc etc. Comparisons are sometimes made between murder rates and gun control in [Canada](#) and the US. Gun ownership and control are different in those two places, but I expect (as Andrew Wilson suggests) another difference is that Canadians live on one side of the border and Americans on the other.

From our perspective, misleading information is like a record: it may be purposefully or accidentally misleading. It may originate with reliable-sources, deliberate-deceivers, or self-deceivers but these distinctions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and they may be distinctions without a difference since they do not conclusively establish either truth or falsity. Whatever the intention of the originator (the record-maker) it is the job of someone else (the record-keeper) to understand it.

Another thing we know is that a false record (allowing for context and meaning as well as content) can be as illuminating as a true one. The [Donation of Constantine](#) tells us nothing about true title but a lot about the Papacy's territorial ambitions and world view. Trump's twitterings say as much about the character of the man as his rantings from the podium and yet despite this documentary evidence nearly half of the American electorate voted for him in 2020 – depressing, but good to know all the same. Morrison's I-know-better-than-you defence does nothing to augment the record but tells us a lot about him.

The hard part is knowing how to tell fact from fiction but it involves judgement as well as regulation. Relying on a majority to do this indulges the fiction that the majority is a single, homogenous, unchanging entity/identity to whose wishes dissenters (perceived as a different single, homogenous, unchanging entity/identity) must always defer. But it is not so. Apart from those enslaved to dogma and ideology, if you're in the majority on one issue



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you're sure to be in the minority on another. Deferring to the majority on principle and without qualification or exception is just another form of tyranny against which democratic freedom must (somehow) be protected. Perhaps that's what those 18-29 year-olds who didn't believe in democracy in all circumstances had in mind (but I doubt it).

But, they ask, isn't vilification harmful. Indeed? It's difficult to find an argument for this proposition that does not almost at once slide into conflating mere vilification with incitement to do harm. Putting up with offence is another price we pay for living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other. "Woke" has been weaponized, but depending on your view-point, it is weaponized by:

- those opposed to social change to deride and demean the enlightened, or
- the enlightened as a tool to bully and suppress those they disagree with.

Those without perspective will unavoidably give (and take) offence. Avoidable hurt felt by the weak, the downtrodden, and the inarticulate is bad and should be avoided but (so far as I can see) many of the a-woke are neither weak nor downtrodden nor inarticulate and use wokeness as a political cudgel to silence their opponents and pursue political agendas. Unfortunately, the unintended consequence of culture wars can be disengagement: "never again use his voice 'in an official capacity' to comment about a political issue" so the ultimate resolution around a peace table is that everybody loses.

Unless someone gives me some push-back on this soon, I'm going to get away with it.

Speaking of which

Foreign individuals, companies and governments are expected to be banned from donating or campaigning for either side during the Indigenous voice to parliament campaign ... The proposed reforms to the Referendum Machinery Act will also include donation disclosure rules, and public funding for campaigns to mitigate misinformation around the voice and referendum process ... Current referendum laws require the government to produce and mail information pamphlets to voters, containing 2,000-word essays from those in favour and those opposed to the referendum change. That provision would be scrapped ... "The government believes campaigns in the voice referendum should be organised and funded by the Australian community," ... During a speech at the National Press Club in October, [Attorney-General] Dreyfus called Australia's referendum processes "very antiquated", and said foreign funding of the referendum was "a concern". "I can't think of a reason why there should be overseas funding permitted for campaigning in this referendum," he said ... In an interview with the ABC's 7.30 program on Tuesday, [Indigenous Australians Minister] Burney said the government's decision to not fund either side of the campaign was "prudent". "We will be using public funds to fund a civics campaign, so people know about what referendums are... We will not be using public funds to fund a yes or a no campaign," she said. "We believe those campaigns can raise their own money, through private means." Burney said there was "enormous support" for the voice referendum in the corporate sector, among unions and in the community.

So, this is what government regulation of debate looks like:

- Ethnically biased (foreign voices forbidden because there is "no reason" to let them speak - too bad for Nigel Farage);
- Issue-free (generic civics lessons in place of an issues debate until challenged);
- One-sided (private funding from corporates and unions for "yes" vs funding for "no" from ?????). I'm assuming that the ban on "foreign ... companies" does not extend to Australian corporates and unions, said to be enormously supportive of "yes";
- Thought-controlled (campaigns to mitigate misinformation - as defined by government);
- Partisan (how can you publicly fund a campaign to mitigate misinformation without taking sides?).



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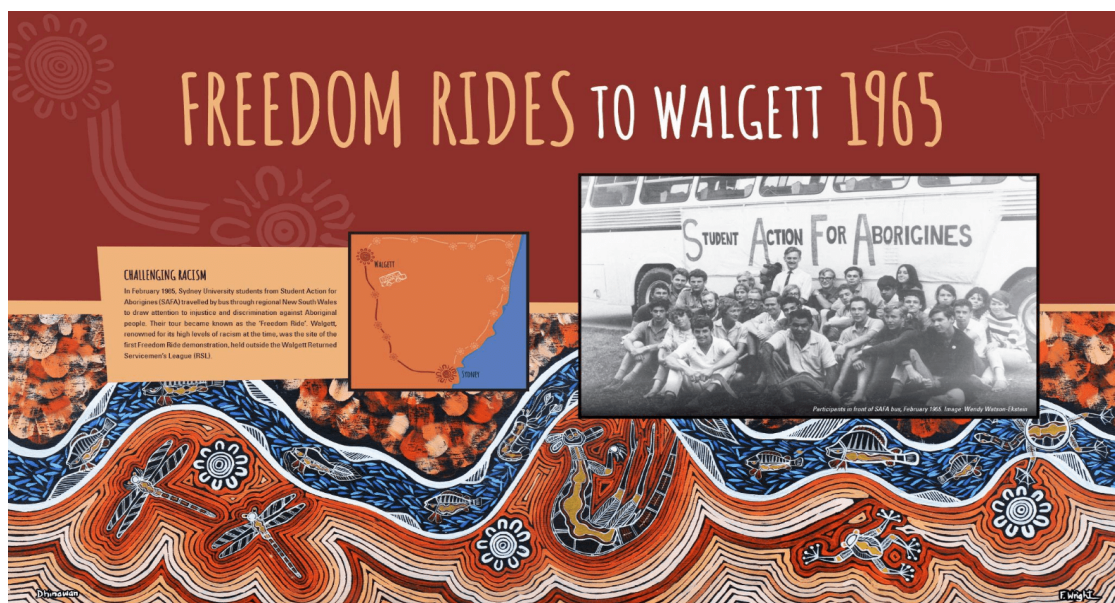
One advantage of the current law is that corporates, for example, would not have to support the “no” case publicly; would they (or individuals for that matter) dare to knowing their financial support would be publicly disclosed in an atmosphere of “enormous support” for the other side? But we are probably losing little since I don't see this government being capable of overseeing the preparation of a fair “no” case anyway.

2022, December 4:

On my recent visit to Sydney, a friend told me that my contributions to this thread indicate my view on the substantive issues and not just (as I had intended) on the process for dealing with them - most recently re The Voice. Unless the referendum machinery changes are going to abolish the secret ballot, I have every right to tell you to mind your own business. But, disappointed rather than surprised, I don't mind saying that, supposing I'm still alive, I will be voting “no”. And I don't have to await the detail (the proponents certainly aren't doing so). The proposition is racist in its essence and no amount of detail is going to change that. In 1967, Australians [voted to become one nation](#). It was one of the first times I had a chance to cast my ballot. Now, scarcely 50 years later, we are being asked to vote to become two again. It's very sad.

I'm told I don't understand. I do understand but I disagree. Similarly, I am told that our approach to archiving must redress our inherent social and racial bias and I am all for correcting error where it can be found. I am told that error can be calibrated in terms of our social, racial, and gender identity and that I reject absolutely. I'm told I can't know what Aborigines want, so I guess I have to be the one to make the point that what Aborigines want (assuming that all Aborigines want the same thing) isn't all that matters. I am told that I can't imagine what Aborigines have to endure and that is true. I am told that nothing has changed since 1967 and that I can say is untrue.

When I was a lad living in the bush north of Walgett, I saw some of what Aborigines had to endure up close and personal. To take just one example: on rare visits into town we went to the cinema (the flicks) in an old fashioned theatre with stalls and a balcony. Aborigines sat below and Whites sat above. No questions, no mixing whatsoever, and no protests that I knew about. There were two pubs: Abos went to the rough one and it was Whities only in the posh one. This was in the mid-1950s for goodness sake. I learnt a lot more sitting with Aboriginal shearers on our property around the camp fire at night. I was back in Sydney when things actually began to change after Charlie Perkins and the [Freedom Rides](#).



Not saying things became perfect after that (nor are they now, far from it) but dealing with it is a social and a political issue not a constitutional one.



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All this may seem a long way from recordkeeping but our professional ethics and behaviours are social constructs, not just a bloodless intellectual exercise, and the tension between attempted objectivity and social mores abides. From my own experience, was it right in the 1980s to regard the word “patriarchal” in a finding aid as a loaded term? Was its use an accurate description of historical events (illuminating for those we were trying to assist) or an unhelpful expression of contemporary prejudice (obscuring the truth we were trying to convey)? The least convincing argument made in favour of that term was, at the time, that most of those working on our finding aids were women. In the Woke Wars, the tensions are equally apparent:

- The unenlightened vilify the unrighteous
- The a-woken hound the unenlightened
- The bullied unenlightened cry “vilification”

The hard-line unenlightened want freedom to speak in opposition and protection from bullying, the uncompromising a-woken want to denounce wrong and to suppress it with impunity by any means. Many of the unenlightened and many of the a-woken are much nicer than that, of course. I’d prefer it if everyone was nicer to each other (and Tiny Tim got to live) – but they aren’t. “God bless us, every one” doesn’t cut it but it’s madness not to dream. At the raw edge of extremism. each side claims the freedom to do right, damns the other, and claims protection from abuse. A clash of absolutes like this can’t be resolved (except when drunk or in a Dickens novel).

Of course, there’s always the totalitarian answer – suppression and submission.

The other answer, outside of intoxication or fiction, clearly lies somewhere in between – unsatisfactory, faltering, uncertain, qualified, ambiguous, mealy-mouthed, troubled answers, but ones we can live with without murdering each other. And the poor old archivist who tries to live out that grey answer (left of the black and right of the white) may end up being vilified by both sides.

2022, December 7:

<< our approach to archiving must redress our inherent social and racial bias and I am all for correcting error where it can be found.>>

... so long as it does not involve substituting one error for another. I flatter myself that parallel provenance is one way we archivists can (partly) overcome perception bias - cf. Cartographers for Social Equality. I think Word Wars are sometimes a projection of bias, though often intended to overcome it by being “respectful”. You may not have noticed, but I am not a respectful person. I’m with Dorothy Parker:

“They say of me, and so they should, / It’s doubtful if I come to good.

.....
*But I, despite expert advice, / Keep doing things I think are nice,
 And though to good I never come / Inseparable my nose and thumb.”*

Not deferential either. I accept that words can be inflammatory but being precious about them can also be an obstacle to understanding. I don’t much care about terminology, so I say Aborigines rather than First Nations (because of when I was born, I suppose) but if I were doing it, I’d say: “Old Australians”, “Introduced Anglo-Celts”, and “New Australians” and I could live with “Anglo-Celtic Invaders” if anyone thinks it matters. But even the terms “Old” and “New” are loaded from an Invader’s view-point.

It doesn’t do to confound difference and separation. Acceptance of difference (good) can be healing. The end game of separation (bad) is malice, conflict, war, and oppression.

Examples along the continuum of conflict (territorial, racist, religious, etc.) range from discontent to slaughter: UK (English, Irish, Scots, Welsh), Ireland (Catholic vs Protestant),



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Belgium (Flanders & Wallonia), Spain (Basques & Catalans), [Macedonism](#), Ukraine ([Russophones](#) & [LGBT](#)), Russia ([almost everyone](#) they don't like), Cyprus (Turks vs Greeks), Israel (Palestinians), Middle East ([Christians](#)), Rwanda ('nuf said and very nearly the [whole of Africa](#)), China (Tibetans, Uyghurs, [et al](#)), Canada (Quebecois), [Myanmar](#), India/Pakistan (Kashmir), Indonesia (Aceh & West Papua), the Kurds, Ceylon (Tamils), South Yemen, US (Blacks & Latinos), [the poor bloody Armenians](#), and so on and on and on It's a fragile world.

Australia and New Zealand, both of which have had to deal with the Old, the Introduced, and the New, have done not so bad as some (bad historically, not perfect now, could do better, a lot better, but OK in comparison). Accepting difference is part of doing better. Separatism can't be. But Western Australia remains a worry.

2022, December 19:

From the [Guardian](#)-

- Eric Gill was one of the most celebrated British artists of the 20th century ... But after his death, details emerged of his grotesque sexual conduct ... and there has been increasing clamour since for his work not to be shown ... Now ... Gill's home-town gallery [Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft in East Sussex] has apparently begun a campaign to distance itself from the artist ... none of his substantial body of work in its collection has been on display for most of 2022, and he is now described as one artist "among many others" the museum features when previously he was "central"... As recently as February last year, the museum was still asserting its intention to continue to be associated with Gill – "we absolutely condemn Gill's abuse of his daughters with no attempt to hide, excuse, normalise or minimise, yet we also have a duty to protect, display and interpret the artwork we hold in our collections". However, since then ... without making any public announcement, it has for most of 2022 removed all trace of Gill, his work remaining in storage ... The museum told *The Observer* that it is trying to find new ways to "give visitors a clearer picture of the core Ditching narrative ...".
- Journalist and author Alex Larman said: "The news that the Ditchling museum is removing Gill is both depressing and predictable ... it would be a shortsighted act of folly for the museum to attempt to airbrush the village's most famous inhabitant from its cultural history ... Nobody should defend Gill's personal actions ... But many great artists throughout history – from Caravaggio to Gauguin – behaved despicably, and it seems to me to be barking up the wrong tree to attempt to make an example of Gill" ... But Margaret Kennedy, who founded the Minister and Clergy Sexual Assault Survivors (Macsas), and has campaigned to have Gill sculptures removed from Westminster Cathedral since 1998, approved of the move ...



George Orwell argued that Charles Dickens' appalling treatment of his wife Catherine was no more relevant to an understanding of *David Copperfield* than the second-best bed was to an understanding of *Hamlet*. So, does that imply that no behaviour on the part of the artist is so awful that it should affect our appreciation of his work? I think it does but that is

very different from letting an appreciation of the work soften our judgement of the artist. It's harder for collectors and museums (who tend to be effusive and celebratory) than for archivists who coldly curate in a more dispassionate manner (or so I believe they should) to keep toxic evidence without regard to the moral status of the records or of their creator.

But, of course, we can't be neutral about the evil that the stuff we hold embodies.

1. What do we do about records of torture that may be useful in medical research ?
2. How do we present records that may be deeply offensive and hurtful to people whose lives are/were affected (to say nothing of the effect they may have on us)?
3. How do we avoid becoming embroiled in controversy (not being celebratory would be a start) even assuming we want to avoid it?
4. Should we be calculating and adopt a curatorial stance that best helps our brand (and budgets) or one that assumes a cloak of impartiality as honest brokers to all parties (in hope that will fend off attack and not enrage our masters)?
5. Should we be prompted by what is right or by what we can get away with or by what we are told to do?
6. Do we agree with Larman (that if Adolf Hitler had been a great artist and not a drab one his [paintings](#) should be admired) or with Kennedy (questioning [Rembrandt's artistry](#) according to his attitude towards slavery)?

2022, December 29:

Think again

<<Acceptance of difference (good) can be healing. The end game of separation (bad) is malice, conflict, war, and oppression ... Examples along the continuum of conflict (territorial, racist, religious, etc.) range from discontent to slaughter>>

A war is raging that has cost more than an estimated [600,000 lives](#) ... It has lasted two years and is happening today, yet the chances are you don't even know where it is. Though it is far deadlier than the war in Ukraine, the western media have mostly ignored it ... The question remains, how did the international community ignore hundreds of thousands of people dying? ... When all is said and done, our global consciences must reckon with the fact that, while this human bloodbath happened, we chose not to watch.

And just to prove the author's point, I overlooked this one in my catalogue of woe on 7 Dec.

B B C

Ethiopia/Eritrea

Home News Sport Business Innovation Culture Arts Travel Earth Audio Video Live



The war has led to millions of people in Ethiopia needing aid



2023, February 13:

Insightful article by [John Silvester](#) in *SMH* at the weekend re Alice Springs (which for my money is not unique, just more obvious because of the high concentration of Aboriginal fringe-dwellers to be found there). Can't find it online. Here are some grabs:

"It has been on the slide for 12 to 18 months, particularly since Stronger Futures finished" --- Several human rights, legal collectives and Aboriginal support groups submitted ... that the laws were discriminatory. (They were, as they were aimed at one group). In July, Stronger Futures lapsed, with NT Chief Minister Natasha Fyles saying it was a race-based policy that her government would not support.

Perhaps, like The Voice (another race-based policy), Stronger Futures should have been embedded in the Constitution where brain-dead governments couldn't touch it.

- *"There are rivers of grog. In 20 years I've never seen anything like it" --- "The majority of the kids are on the street to get away from the alcohol and violence" – kids are taken home and returned to abusive conditions while reports to Territory Families ... result in little action --- young offenders have often lost connection with traditional culture ... "They are trying to outdo each other ... to stream online" ---*
- *"Many of the kids have foetal alcohol syndrome and hearing loss ... through constant infections. Their speech and learning abilities are stuffed from an early age" --- "Young white males are watching racist influencers and Aboriginal kids are doing weird shit to get likes" --- there are 11 Aboriginal liaison officers at the Alice Springs Hospital " ... They are the glue that holds the place together, yet they are the lowest paid" --- "There is anger and hatred to white people ... They know they are going to jail and they don't care because they have no future" ... Well-meaning, paternalistic policies have been disastrous ... [adding] bedrooms to houses to allow for larger family groups [to] the verandah, the one area people liked ... people had to walk through a bedroom to get to the next one, adding to assaults ... "When women said men followed them ... and locked the door to assault them [the policy makers] removed the doors. Now the kids won't shower or go to the toilet indoors" ---*
- *Many from the right want the kids ... locked up and taken from dysfunctional families. Many from the left rail against laws that treat Indigenous people differently ... everyone agrees that what is in place now is not working ...*

And the kicker comes at the end:

- *But they all have one thing in common. They are the decision makers, and they are all White.*

So far as I can tell, decision-makers in our houses of memory are making genuine efforts to involve Indigenous voices. I am too far out of it all now to know whether this is effective or mere tokenism or to judge whether they are listening to the right mix of voices. But even if they are, the dilemmas don't end there.

<<Is a transcendent reach beyond identity and towards independence of mind an abnegation of faith or is it rather a commitment to universality and truth that refuses to be shackled by "social context" (past or present)? 3 April 2021>>

What is the link between abnegation of faith, universality and truth, and respect for social context? And thus to the abiding question -

<<Should [archivists] try to stand aloof and be "objective", acknowledge the tension and try to be "balanced" or even corrective, enter the fray and take sides, or offer parallel views as best we can and cop it from everyone? 9 Jan., 2023 >>

All forms of identity thinking are different because what each of them is **about** is different and if we approve of what this one or that one is about we are beguiled into abandoning observation and judgement. But they are also all alike because there is no difference in what they **are** - every single one of them (right or left and everything in between) incites division in preference to respect for difference. I'm with [Kilrain](#):



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... Any man who judges by the group is a pea-wit. You take men one at a time ... Equality? What I'm fighting for is to prove I'm a better man than many of them. Where have you seen this "divine spark" in operation, Colonel? Where have you noted this magnificent equality? No two things on Earth are equal or have an equal chance. Not a leaf, not a tree. There's many a man worse than me, and some better... But I don't think race or country matters a damn. What matters, Colonel ... Is justice. Which is why I'm here. I'll be treated as I deserve, not as my father deserved. I'm Kilrain ... And I damn all gentlemen. There is only one aristocracy ... And that is right here." He tapped his white skull with a thick finger ...

The only group we should aspire to is the society in which we live (with all its pleasures and all its pains; with the obligations and the freedoms it confers) - but on what terms? Kilrain's? [Jim Chalmers](#)? [Plato](#)? [Foucault](#)? How many archivists these days, I wonder, think that question is settled? If we subscribe to universality and truth, the only fight we should take sides in is for difference and against division. If we give our allegiance to anything, the only thing in which we should trust is understanding not belief but it is an allegiance that is not worth having absent perspective and judgement.



Michael Pascoe has [written](#) about this:

- *The privilege of journalism is its licence and duty to question and observe in order to interpret and report. Over time that should mean you learn a bit about people, systems and the world – the better to filter fact from fake, the better to inform ... Keeping perspective means seeing both the good and the bad, not being carried away with fad and fashion, keeping an eye on the bigger picture, on the possible ... Kev O'Donohue was [my] deputy chief of staff and cadet counsellor, experienced, charitable and wise ... Michael, he said, don't be cynical. Be sceptical, you have a duty to be sceptical, but don't be cynical. If you're cynical, you can't recognise good when you do see it.*
- *... people are overwhelmingly good. Margaret Thatcher was totally wrong – there is 'Society' and it is magical in what it achieves and can achieve. It is Society, all of us, that makes everything possible, including the mega-rich who seem to think it's all their own work. In reply to a tweet about the abandonment of COVID transmission suppression, [Professor Brendan Crabb](#) wrote: "I often face libertarians who I suspect are not sufficiently aware of how reliant they are on co-operative society for all of what they have and do." To which someone added the adage that libertarians are like house cats: Absolutely convinced of their fierce independence while utterly dependent on a system they don't appreciate or understand ...*
- *... Healthy, optimistic scepticism helps dismiss the chancers and charlatans who strut our stage, the substance-free windbags forever grabbing headlines. Keeping perspective on that big picture reduces the noise, whether it's from warmongers talking their own book, idealogues pushing narrow barrows, or the hacks only focused on political advantage. (Did someone mention #RoboDebt?)*



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- You might notice there seem to be a few veteran journalists concentrating more on that big picture, offering perspective ... The venerable [Ross Gittins](#) who has been at this a bit longer than me hones in on it ... Colleague [Alan Kohler](#) is in those very trenches ... concerned with the heritage we provide our children, our children who are our legacy ... So that's the core lesson I've learned over half a century in journalism. But, being honest, there's been something else as well: If it's the job you're meant to do and you're a little lucky and work at it, it's the only thing worth doing ...

What I find odd in all this is that (like so many ideas that were about when I was young) "[libertarian](#)", which used to be about the call to freedom espoused by cranks on soap-boxes in the Domain on Sunday afternoons, is now about cranks preaching social disunity on TV.

You live long enough and you see everything.

2023, February 15:

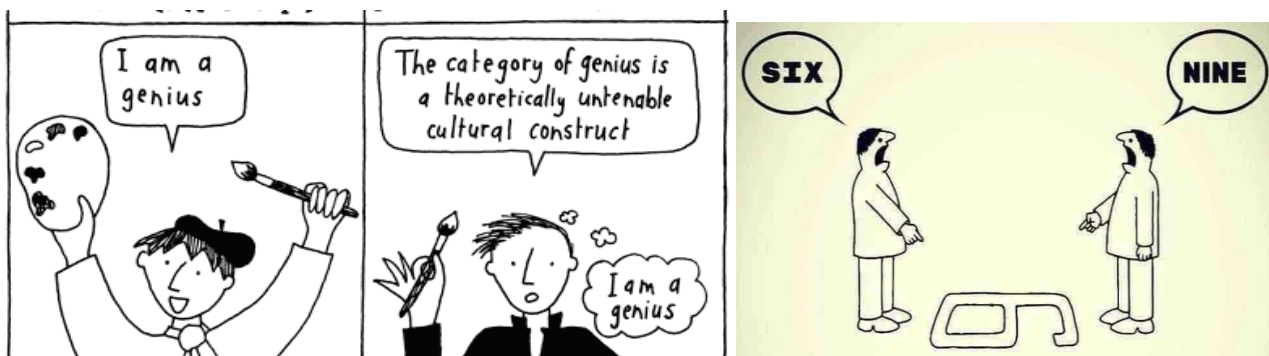
I'm not against race-based programmes *per se*, I'm just opposed to putting race back into the Constitution. [Closing the Gap](#) is a race-based programme into which we are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars and I'm in favour of that - even though it is being trashed (sadly) every time a Voice proponent tells us nothing else has worked.

What I like about it, firstly, is that that they are evidence based. They measure everything and use metrics to chart progress and failure and, when there isn't enough data to do the metrics, they say so. Secondly, it's not a project. They don't just try and then say "job done" and move on. It's about progress, it's hard, they fall short, but they keep trying. It's a process. I like that.

PS

<< I am too far out of it all now to know whether this is effective or mere tokenism or to judge whether they are listening to the right mix of voices >>

Perhaps our archives could get together (unhappily they have no collective voice any more since they killed off the Australian Council of Archives) and organize a closing-the-gap-for-archives: set targets, measure results, and report back collectively. Might be a bit more convincing than back-slapping themselves in annual reports and at conferences.



2023, April 10:

First there was this

... many of the characteristic doctrines of postmodernism [constitute](#) or imply some form of [metaphysical](#), [epistemological](#), or [ethical relativism](#) ... Postmodernists deny that there are aspects of reality that are objective; that there are statements about reality that are objectively true or false; that it is possible to have knowledge of such statements (objective knowledge); that it is possible for human beings to know some things with certainty; and that there are objective, or absolute, [moral](#) values. Reality, knowledge, and value are constructed by discourses; hence they can vary with them. This means that the discourse of modern [science](#), when considered apart from the evidential standards internal to it, has no greater purchase on the [truth](#) than do [alternative](#) perspectives, including (for example) [astrology](#) and [witchcraft](#). Postmodernists sometimes characterize the evidential standards of science, including the use of reason and [logic](#),



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as “Enlightenment rationality.” ... Thus postmodernists regard their theoretical position as uniquely inclusive and democratic, because it allows them to recognize the unjust hegemony of Enlightenment discourses over the equally valid perspectives of nonelite groups. In the 1980s and '90s, academic advocates on behalf of various ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious groups embraced postmodern critiques of contemporary Western society, and postmodernism became the unofficial philosophy of the new movement of “identity politics.”

And then there was this

The United States is a grim warning of what happens when a society dispenses with the idea of truth. Fragmentation, paranoia, division and myth rule – democracy wilts ... the culture of truth denial is no accident; it was a key stratagem of the US right as it fought to build a counter-establishment in the 1970s, 80s and 90s that would challenge and even supplant what it considered an over-dominant liberal establishment. Unalloyed facts, truthful evidence and balanced reporting on everything from guns to climate change tended to support liberals and their worldview. But if all facts could be framed as the contingent result of opinions, the right could fight on level terms ...

What is interesting is that this commentator, like many other like-minded lefties, cannot seem to realise that the evil of right-wing relativism is just as bad as (and derives from) the evil of left-wing relativism. Postmodern insights into the fragility of human-constructed realities are like arsenic - useful in subtoxic doses. But once the ideological left began using postmodernism in a non-philosophical sense as a basis for crusades undermining the idea of Objectivity in order to attack what they disapproved of, the right thought they could play that game too. We should not confuse Truth and Fairness because, unfortunately, in a postmodern world, everyone is allowed to believe that his opinions are True: *I am fair-minded, you are biased, he is a raving looney.*

For years, the right had a target in its sights, rather as the British right today has the BBC – the 1949 Fairness Doctrine. This required American broadcasters to ensure that contentious issues were presented fairly; that both sides to any argument had access to the airwaves and presented their case factually ... Finally, in 1987 the doctrine was ruled unnecessary because it obstructed free speech. Within months, *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, the ultra-rightwing talkshow platform, was being nationally syndicated as the scourge of the liberal elite ...

I doubt that fair-minded Truth has prevailed without challenge or set-back throughout the last 200 post-enlightenment years, but these days it seems to have to deal with an irrationality that infects both right and left and which (in my view) risks endangering our work when, as some seem to argue, it should be applied to what we do - when purposes “ranging from decolonization to postcolonialism, feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, and deconstructionism” displace the postulates of our profession.

2023, April 11:

Objective adj.: antonyms and near antonyms – partial, biased, partisan, unjust, inequitable, deceptive, arbitrary, dishonest, unreasonable, deceitful, prejudiced, one-sided, ex parte, parti pris, unconscionable, distorted, unsympathetic, colored, unfriendly, jaundiced, warped.

Postulate: something taken as being true or factual and used as a starting point for a course of action or reasoning.

<<What, then, are the postulates of our profession?>>

Laura A Millar *Archives: Principles and Practices* 2nd edition

... the central principle of accountable and trustworthy archival service must be to make certain that archives are captured and protected with their evidential value intact, and then to ensure that those archives are made available as fully as possible, so that they may benefit the widest possible constituency ... The archivist will protect the integrity of the archives in her care, doing everything possible to maintain their value as documentary evidence ...



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striving to protect the content, context and structure of archives during any work to arrange, describe, preserve or provide access to holdings ... The archivist will maintain impartiality and transparency in all her duties ... While one can acknowledge the postmodern argument that all actions taken by anyone in society are inherently subjective, on an individual level the archivist needs to act on the basis of institutional need and priorities, not personal inclinations ... (pp 93-95)



[Laura A Millar](#)



[Cartographers for Social Equality](#)

These postulates must be observed in contested space -

... The philosophy of postmodernism was seen as a reaction to the certainty and authority associated with modernist perspectives, which themselves were a shift away from the belief in reason and rationalism that were hallmarks of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism emphasized differences instead of similarities, conflict instead of consensus and doubt instead of truth ... Drawing on the writings of Derrida and others, postmodern archival thinkers questioned the idea that archives could be innocent by-products of life and work, as had been assumed by Jenkinson, Schellenberg and others. They also argued that archival materials did not tell only one 'story' but could be interpreted in different ways depending on the audience ... Postmodernism encouraged archivists to shed their role as guardians or gate keepers, instead placing the archivist in the position of steward, a person whose job was to manage a fluid documentary resource on behalf of everyone in society and not impede the path for those seeking documentary truth(s) in archival holdings. Many embraced this more direct role, seeing archival management as a mechanism for supporting social justice, by helping to protect the archives not just of the agents of power but also of the marginalized in society ... The drawback to postmodernism ... was the danger that archivists would feel either paralyzed – unable to make a decision because there were too many variables – or excessively empowered – moving beyond 'objectively' managing the records that society created to actively helping to create records in the first place ... The argument for decolonization is that traditional approaches to archives and history (even postmodern approaches) have been patriarchal and imperial, driven by the elite in society and not representative of the concerns of minorities or the marginalized. Those who advocate decolonization believe that archivists have to redress this wrong ... (pp.43-44)

But don't postmodernists claim that, by telling not just **one 'story'** they come nearer the Truth? Indeed they do, and they won't get an argument about that from the father of [parallel provenance](#). But parallel provenance is about seeing the same Facts from different views (cf. [Cartographers for Social Equality](#)) not about twisting the Facts themselves. It's how Facts are treated that's the problem.

[Bafflegab](#) is a word you wish got used more often.



2023, April 16:

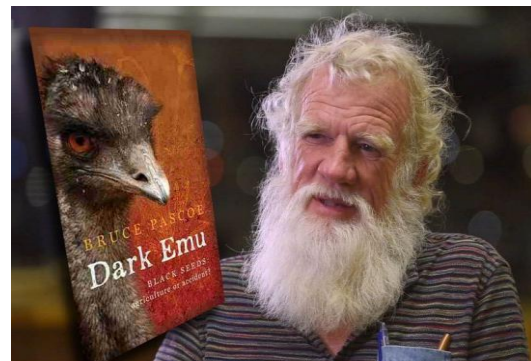
I have been asked (challenged really) for examples of left-wing post-truth bafflegab to lay alongside right-wing [postfactisch](#). I have before referred to the *Dark Emu* saga and will do so again, now. The most shameful specimens may be found in the idea that focussing on “the history of the present” justifies distortion of the past, in the Australian Museum’s assertion that “distorted history” doesn’t matter if it leads to “new knowledge”, in the idea that virtue trumps truth (no pun intended), that facts can’t be distinguished from opinion, and the despairing lament that facts aren’t important unless they work (in a democracy now crippled by technology and populism).

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

Dark Emu exposed

... [Readers] were captivated by his story ... that the Australian Aborigines were not “just” a hunter-gatherer society when the British settled Australia in 1788, but they were in fact, as the Judges of the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards claimed “..liv[ing] sophisticated lives...[in an] Aboriginal democracy [that] created ‘the ‘Great Australian Peace’ on a continent which was extensively farmed, skilfully managed and deeply loved.” ... let the reader decide as to whether Mr Pascoe :

“...puts forward a compelling argument for a reconsideration of the hunter gatherer label for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians...[where] the evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing - behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag.” - from Dark Emu dust jacket blurb;



On the Dark Emu Debate

or whether his arguments fail to overcome the accepted, Australian belief of :

*“They [the Australian Aborigines] are, of course, **nomads** — hunters and foragers who **grow nothing, build nothing, and stay nowhere long**. They make almost no physical mark on the environment...They move about, carrying their scant possessions, in small bands of anything from ten to sixty persons...Their tools and crafts, meagre — pitifully meagre — though they are, have nonetheless been good enough to let them win the battle for survival, and to win it comfortably at that. With no pottery, no knowledge of metals, no wheel, **no domestication of animals, no agriculture**, they have still been able to people the entire continent...” - W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming & Other Essays*, Black Inc Agenda, 2010, p 64,65 & 70 – (**our emphasis**) ...*

Debunking Dark Emu

- ... First published in 2014, *Dark Emu* has won some of the nation’s richest and most prestigious literary awards ... Indigenous academic [Marcia Langton](#) called it “a profound



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challenge to conventional thinking about Aboriginal life on this continent” and “the most important book on Australia” ... Last year, Labor senator Penny Wong declared that Pascoe had helped free Australians from an “underlying supremacism”. A children’s version has been published and a documentary film is being made. At the same time, Pascoe ... has been targeted by conservative commentators and media who have questioned both his version of history and his Aboriginality ...

- ... It is into this fraught arena that Sutton and his co-author, archaeologist Keryn Walshe, now step with *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The Dark Emu Debate* ... In page after page, Sutton and Walshe accuse Pascoe of a “lack of true scholarship”, ignoring Aboriginal voices, dragging respect for traditional Aboriginal culture back into the Eurocentric world of the colonial era, and “trimming” colonial observations to fit his argument. They write that while *Dark Emu* “purports to be factual” it is “littered with unsourced material, is poorly researched, distorts and exaggerates many points, selectively emphasises evidence to suit those opinions, and ignores large bodies of information that do not support the author’s opinions” ... Australian National University anthropologist [Ian Keen](#) has said that Pascoe’s evidence for Aboriginal farming is “deeply problematic”, although he also believes that some of the criticism has been used to support a racist agenda. Christophe Darmangeat, a lecturer in social anthropology at the Sorbonne in France, wrote that in *Dark Emu* Pascoe mixes “perfectly proven elements, others possible but more doubtful, others very improbable, and finally frank fabrications, firing on all cylinders by handling concepts and facts with a disarming casualness”...
- Sutton and Walshe acknowledge *Dark Emu* has made some positive contribution. But the world of 1788 that Pascoe created in *Dark Emu*, Sutton says, was “a reimagination, not a discovery” and “agriculture” was not the way of the Old People – who had their own complex philosophy and practice – but “the badge of their conquerors” ... Admirers of *Dark Emu* invariably refer to Pascoe’s persuasive use of the journals of explorers such as Thomas Mitchell and Charles Sturt. Sutton is less enamoured of them, questioning both the reliability of journals written by Europeans who encountered Aboriginal people only transiently and who were “the forward scouts for the army of land-hungry farmers who would come in their wake”, and Pascoe’s sharp editing of them ... Pascoe records Mitchell’s astonishment on coming upon a large, deserted village during his Australia Felix expedition, which he estimated housed “over 1000” people. This, says Sutton, is “pure fiction”. “All Mitchell says is that his party ‘noticed some of their huts’; there is no mention of anyone counting anything.”
- ... And if Aboriginal people were farmers as Pascoe contends, Sutton asks, where is the evidence for it in Aboriginal languages, as there is evidence in Torres Strait languages? ... Aboriginal people knew about farmers, Sutton and Walshe write, from their trading interactions with Torres Strait gardeners and Macassans and Baijini from the Indies, but chose not to emulate them, for reasons that were cultural as well as practical. Economics without religion was “inconceivable” to the Old People, they write. “Gathering and hunting and fishing were not just economics: they were the Law.”
- ... The decision to not adopt horticulture and agriculture was not a failure of the imagination, Sutton writes, “but an active championing and protection of their own way of life and, when in contact with outsiders, a resistance to an alien economic pattern”. ... **Pondering why** *Dark Emu* was so well received, Sutton and Walshe write that its success appears to indicate a profound lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people and history, “or an unconcern with facts and truth themselves, or a combination of these things” ... “As far as we can tell, no journalist or book reviewer covering the *Dark Emu* story has interviewed senior Aboriginal people from remote communities where knowledge of the old economy is retained at least by some, and practised in an adapted way by many,” they write. “Nor do members of the media appear to have spoken to any of the anthropological specialists who have learned from Aboriginal authorities and from the vast literature on their traditional ways of life ... This journalistic abandonment of the academy, if that is what it is, seems to be symptomatic of a break from the past – a past in which professional knowledge and lay knowledge were more distinct, and the distinction more respected. The authority of the academy has slipped. Much worse than that, the authority of Aboriginal knowledge-holders has been ignored yet again.”...



Not limiting the “representation” of Aboriginal people

... Sutton and Walshe want to strip the debate of any contemporary meaning, and return our thoughts to the facts of what went on before their own ancestors arrived on the scene to record, in English using foreign concepts, the truth about what they want to call hunter-gatherer societies or now, the “Old People” ... Sutton and Walshe state their intention to “avoid identity politics and racial polemics”, instead claiming to offer their critique in the spirit of debate. However, they are clearly on the side of academic anthropology and archaeology — and the past — while Pascoe’s work is focused on the history of the present ... Through his writing and speaking appearances, Pascoe has made the deep ancient past and the present intelligible and imaginable for a wide audience ...

More than facts are at stake

... Pascoe doesn’t regale his audience so much as woo them with parables ... As the session came to an end, the audience rose to its feet in rapturous applause ... At face value, this is a dispute about historical “facts” and the source, use and interpretation of evidence. But of course, given the popularity of both Pascoe and *Dark Emu*, and the widespread historical illiteracy regarding Australia’s First Nations people, much more is at stake ...

New Knowledge

... While the *Dark Emu* presents a passionate polemic with distorted history, it also projects into the future. This new knowledge, that Pascoe outlines in his book, will enrich us all. It will compel us to respect indigenous cultures as our own ...

The official view

... Bruce Pascoe’s award winning non-fiction book *Dark Emu*, published in 2014, is a monumental work of scholarship that disproved the long-held myth that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were nomadic hunter gatherers before European colonisation ...

And predictably

Author Bruce Pascoe says it’s not a bad thing that academics are engaging with and debating his wildly successful but controversial book *Dark Emu*, following damning accusations his work was “littered with unsourced material” ... Professor Pascoe was forewarned about the story’s publication and was sent it, but said on Saturday he had not yet read it. The criticism could be put down to “differences of opinion” about the facts, he said, and that was OK. “I think what is happening, and I’m saying this without having read the [whole] book or the [Good Weekend] article, is that we’re having a difference of opinion about history,” he said. “We’re looking at the same facts and we’re having a difference of opinion about the facts. That’s not a bad thing. I think Aboriginal people have been wanting to have this discussion for 250 years, so I think it can only be positive.”

Distinguishing between fact and opinion

A fact is based on observation and research. It is something that can be proven true or false. An opinion is based on one’s feelings and thinking. It is something that cannot be proved true or false.

- *Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.* **John Adams**
- *There are no facts, only interpretations.* **Friedrich Nietzsche**
- *What is called "objectivity," scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation) imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, firmly established, or rooted in a network of conventions ... and yet which still remains a context.* **Jacques Derrida**
- *Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please.* **Mark Twain**
- *In our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence. A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence.* **David Hume**



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- *Truth is simply a compliment paid to sentences seen to be paying their way.* [Richard Rorty](#)
- *Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this.* [Thomas Huxley](#)
- *Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts.* [E. B. White](#)
- *Facts are to the mind what food is to the body. On the due digestion of the former depend the strength and wisdom of the one, just as vigor and health depend on the other. The wisest in council, the ablest in debate, and the most agreeable companion in the commerce of human life, is that man who has assimilated to his understanding the greatest number of facts.* [Edmund Burke](#)
- *If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.* [C. S. Lewis](#)
- *Facts don't care about your feelings.* [Ben Shapiro](#)
- *A truth that's told with bad intent beats all the lies you can invent.* [William Blake](#)

2023, April 18:

The book and Pascoe himself are not important. They are yesterday's trash. What gives them "significance" (over-used word) is the reactions of the book's defenders – academicians, some of them, deriding and trying to dethrone what they see as the stuffy old-fashioned academy ("academic anthropology and archaeology") with ideas about discourses, dethronement of "Enlightenment rationality", and the idea that truth "is a matter of interpretation". And some of our core institutions are singing from the same song-book – the [Australia Council of the Arts](#), the [Australian Museum](#).... What I would call activist postmodernism (as distinct from the philosophical kind) and what Acton would have called dogma is replete with irony: they deride others for arguing for what is true but regard their own "theoretical position as uniquely [inclusive](#) and democratic".

What is the difference between reducing truth to an interpretation and simply denying it? What is the point of knowing the facts if they get in the way of belief? [Douglas Murray](#) asserts that *the assault on the West's history succeeds because it speaks into a vacuum of vast historical and contemporary ignorance*. But what kind of defence would better information be for the downtrodden if the elites simply insist that truth is just a matter of interpretation? What kind of "success" or pushback is possible in that intellectual wasteland? *There are some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual could believe them* [George Orwell](#).

I became aware, working at Monash for a year, of the truth of the aphorism that academic debate is ferocious because there is so little at stake. But there is something at stake here for **us** because our core values honour (or should do) facts, truth, honesty, and evidence and also, for that matter, a hatred of ignorance and the tyranny of elites who can simply deny facts when they are confronted by them (and that includes government and corporate malfeasance as well as elite arrogance). Standing up for those things may put us on the wrong side of current intellectual trends, and it may take courage and the risk being cancelled, but I believe we have no choice. I once told Verne Harris that what he and McKemmish and Upward were bickering about was not (thank God) any concern of mine. He was outraged and I was wrong. He was outraged because I was indifferent to what he regarded as an important intellectual development of our time and I was in fact indifferent because I didn't think it mattered.

But it does matter. Whether publicly or silently muttering dissent as we get on with our business, we have to choose – and I fear that some of us have chosen wrong.



Journeys Without End

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

John Keane is a professor at my old alma mater (U. of Sydney). I feel ashamed.



[John Keane](#)



However well equipped our language, it can never be forearmed against all possible cases that may arise and call for description: fact is richer than diction.

— J. L. Austin —

AZ QUOTES

[J L Austin](#)

What is the difference between the “truth” of what we observe and the truth in our description of it (the relationship, that is, between language and reality)? Here is what the English philosopher [J L Austin](#) has to say:

The truth or falsity of statements is affected by what they leave out or put in and by their being misleading, and so on. Thus, for example, descriptions, which are said to be true or false or, if you like, are “statements”, are surely liable to these criticisms, since they are selective and uttered for a purpose. It is essential to realize that “true” and “false”, like “free” and “unfree”, do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right and proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions.

Have you heard of “valorizing terminology”?

Valorize, valorized, valorizing *transitive verb*

1: to enhance or try to enhance the price, value, or status of by organized and usually governmental action *using subsidies to valorize coffee*

2: to assign value or merit to: VALIDATE

It is all part, according to National Archives (US), of what is known in “the larger archives profession” as [reparative description](#). This includes: **transparency** (e.g. distinguishing between language original to the record and that supplied by archivists), **language** (e.g. harmful terminology, valorizing terminology, under-description), **institutional change** (becoming deliberative and thoughtful), **collaboration** (with the marginalized and acknowledging past wrongs), **iterative/reflective** (an ongoing process, not a one-time project), **leadership** (learning from marginalized communities who have led the way).

I couldn’t work out if valorized terminology is meant to be a good thing (something to be injected to improve descriptions) or a bad thing (something outdated to be rooted out), but I’m guessing both. No doubt the uncertainty on my part is because of senile confusion and because I am so far out of things now that I can’t keep up with the new developments in “the larger archives profession”. Or possibly because I am just not equal to the intellectual pressure of the critical archiving debate. Is there a debate or is it now orthodoxy that accuracy is enhanced by inclusion and respect?

“making it more accurate also brings confusion”- I just love [that thought](#).



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[Language] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.

Accurate adjective

1: free from error especially as the result of care

5: tending to hit the intended target.

PS. Ironically, what Harris, McKemmish, and Upward were bickering about (it seemed to me at the time) was not the merits of postmodernism but who understood it better.

PPS. Of course, as Shock-and-Orr demonstrated in the Banking Royal Commission, records can be an antidote against truth-denial (“*may I show you a document?*”). It was a famous victory but what good has come of it all? “*Why that I cannot tell,*” said he, “*But ‘twas a famous victory.*”

2023, April 19:

A now for something related but different: **accuracy** - of records no less. The *Weekend Oz* has a story (I’ve only seen it there) about a spat over temperature data gathered by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM). The Bureau has (reluctantly) released data that shows differences between temperatures being gathered by a relatively new method (“probes”) and those recorded by older mercury thermometers – giving higher readings and possibly feeding climate change agendas. Manna from heaven for climate deniers I imagine. Newness (the last thirty years) is a relative concept in scientific circles. A lot of scientific thought is based on “smoothing” data to achieve clarity by ignoring insignificant differences and sharpening classificatory boundaries that are, in fact, blurred. The argument here is that the differences, though minor, are significant.

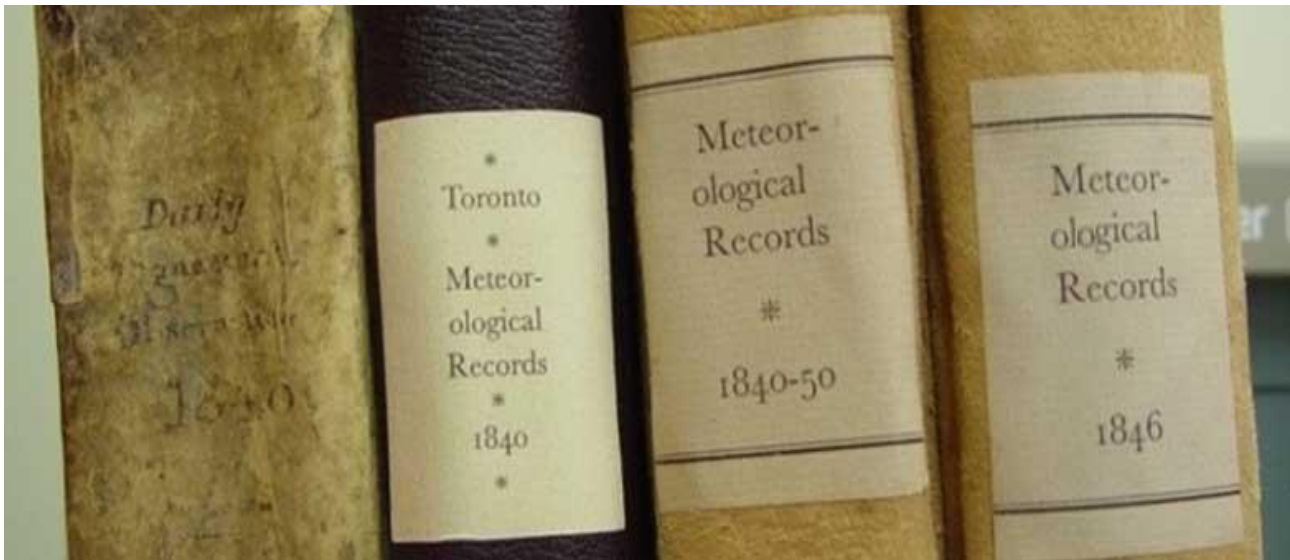
- A dispute over how the Bureau of Meteorology records daily temperatures is hotting up, with the release of more than 1000 pages of data that show new probes can record different temperatures to mercury thermometers in the same location at the same time ... Given that even small variations in temperature recordings can have an impact on the long-term record, accuracy is vital. The main issue is how well temperatures recorded by new technologies can be compared to earlier methods to establish a continuous record ... In response to questions from The Weekend Australian, the bureau said it “verifies temperature probes to ensure that they are within specification” ... [scientist Jennifer Marohasy] said analysis of the Brisbane airport data proved the BOM claim that the new probes had been specially developed to measure exactly the same temperatures as the mercury thermometers was wrong ... Dr Marohasy said the difference in readings between probes and mercury thermometers was significant ... “This has implications for the artificial generation of new record hot temperatures”, she said.
- The other key issue was that Brisbane Airport parallel data showed a dramatic change in the difference between the mercury and probe temperature readings after December 2019. “It is important to know whether this average difference of 0.35C had been caused by a recalibration of the probe that is the official recording instrument at Brisbane Airport”, she said. Dr [John] Abbot [who gained access to the data under FOI] said ... “The public is constantly being told of impending global catastrophe should temperatures rise by more than 1.5C. Discrepancies of more than 0.5C because of instrumentation differences are therefore very significant ... Given the importance of reliable continuous records, it is important to know whether these instruments are recording the same temperatures, or not. The parallel data so far made available constitutes only a small portion of what the BOM holds. It is important to extend the analyses to longer periods and for other geographical locations.”...
- Dr Marohasy said the data represented just three of the 14.5 years (January 2008 to July 2022) of parallel data that the bureau held for Brisbane Airport. “It is also just a fraction of the 760 years of parallel data the bureau holds for 38 different locations spread across the landmass of Australia,” she said. Probes in automatic weather stations began replacing mercury thermometers across Australia and the world 30 years ago ... Most meteorological offices tried to achieve equivalence between the probes and mercury by averaging



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instantaneous recordings from probes over 1-5 minutes ... The bureau has claimed in correspondence with Dr Marohasy that it never averaged measurements from probes ... Dr Marohasy said the lack of numerical averaging despite the use of probes made the BOM measurements unique in the world. She said equivalence was important for the construction of reliable historical temperature datasets, for understanding temperature trends and for knowing whether a record hot day as measured automatically by a probe really was hotter than what might have been read manually from a mercury thermometer.

Coda: I think the word *significant* is over-used. The latest *Peninsula News* has a [story](#) about a tree in Woy Woy that Council has officially declared a “significant tree”. What on earth would the criteria be? It’s quite a young tree, having been planted only last year. One hopes that, when it grows up, it will have morphed from significance to magnificence. It bothers me that much-loved trees near me may be treated with indifference for want of significance.



2023 April 21:

<<The Bureau has (reluctantly) released data that shows differences between temperatures being gathered by a relatively new method (“probes”) and those recorded by older mercury thermometers – giving higher readings and possibly feeding climate change agendas.

Manna from heaven for climate deniers I imagine

... The argument here is that the differences, though minor, are significant>>

More on what the records say and how they are used:

- ... Those records say Australia has warmed by 1.4C since 1910 ... As a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science of human-caused global heating, the bureau’s temperature record might be seen as ground zero ... Despite multiple reviews, reports, advisory panels and peer-reviewed studies rejecting claims that its temperature record was biased or flawed, [Dr Ailie Gallant, of Monash University] says the “harassment” of the bureau has continued ... [An] independent expert panel reported for three years from 2015 and ... backed the bureau’s methods, despite “unsolicited submissions” which they said “do not provide evidence or offer a justification for contesting the overall need for homogenisation and the scientific integrity of the bureau’s climate records.”
- ... Former bureau boss Rob Vertessy, who left the agency in 2016, has said ... “The answers [from the reviews] should have been very clear,” ... “There was always a close to zero chance that the bureau had deliberately introduced a warming trend.” ... Dr Greg Ayers, a former director of the bureau and leading CSIRO atmospheric scientist, has written four peer-reviewed papers testing claims made by sceptics. “There’s a lot of assertion [from sceptics]



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but I haven't seen much science," said Ayers. "If you are going to make claims then we need to do peer-reviewed science, not just assertion." ...

- One longstanding bureau critic is Dr Jennifer Marohasy of the rightwing Institute of Public Affairs ... has claimed the bureau's practice of taking automatic measurements from the final second of each minute breached guidelines from the UN's World Meteorological Organization, which recommends temperatures should be averaged over a minute [and that] the bureau's methods contradict guidance from the WMO, despite previous studies arguing the contrary ... Dr Anthony Rea, a director at the WMO, says ... "No measurement is perfect, the bureau's temperature measurements included, but we all know there are multiple lines of evidence proving that global temperatures are rising, from satellites to ocean buoys to deep sea profilers. All evidence points in the same direction." ...

2023, May 9:

<<... a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science ... >>

In the 21st-century media, the intensity with which an opinion is held has come to serve as a proxy for its value in a debate. The more ardent the feeling the more deserving it is of attention ... A handful of online fulminators will suffice for the threshold of newsworthy outrage to be met ... There is no harm in having steadfast beliefs. The danger comes when opinions are held with such intensity that criticism is construed as treason and reasonable challenge denounced as heresy. Rafael Behr [Politics: A Survivor's Guide: How to Stay Engaged without Getting Enraged](#)

<< ... we all know there are multiple lines of evidence proving that global temperatures are rising, from satellites to ocean buoys to deep sea profilers. All evidence points in the same direction ...>>

This would seem to be an argument for the veracity of the temperature records based on the [coherence theory of truth](#)

... truth [is] a property of whole systems of propositions that can be ascribed to individual propositions only derivatively according to their coherence with the whole ...

It remains epistemologically an appeal to veracity over opinion. If Behr is correct, however, maybe we should move away from the consensus that [Richard Firth Green](#) identified (not with unqualified approval) as having processed from reliance in truths residing in people (and culminating in a reliance on documents) –

In the late fourteenth century the complex Middle English word "trouthe," which had earlier meant something like "integrity" or "dependability," began to take on its modern sense of "conformity to fact." At the same time, the meaning of its antonym, "tresoun," began to move from "personal betrayal" to "a crime against the state." In *A Crisis of Truth*, Richard Firth Green contends that these alterations in meaning were closely linked to a growing emphasis on the written over the spoken and to the simultaneous reshaping of legal thought and practice. According to Green, the rapid spread of vernacular literacy in the England of Richard II was driven in large part by the bureaucratic and legal demands of an increasingly authoritarian central government. The change brought with it a fundamental shift toward the attitudes we still hold about the nature of evidence and proof—a move from a truth that resides almost exclusively in people to one that relies heavily on documents ...

and now to be going back to a situation where “dependable” opinion and belief matter more than “conformity to fact”. When un-reason prevails, moderate dealings with one's fellows, a personal rather than a civic virtue (as Behr seems to be suggesting, albeit one with social benefits), and not an appeal to evidence or coherence becomes a more desirable path to follow in the discernment of truth (or, at least, a more profitable one). And truth then becomes a social commodity (?) and the postmodernists win the debate. I can't help feeling that moderation (much as I admire that virtue) is a fragile weapon in the battle against un-truth.



2023, May 11:

<<... **reliance in truths residing in people [where] “dependable” opinion and belief matter more than “conformity to fact”>>**

Perhaps this leads on to a kind of paradox: the most dependable opinions, even those we disagree with, are held by those with a high regard for conformity to fact. Chesterton might approve of that – “a paradox is two facts that stand on opposite hilltops and across the intervening valley call each other liars” (Carl Sandburg).

The Language Police by Diane Ravitch

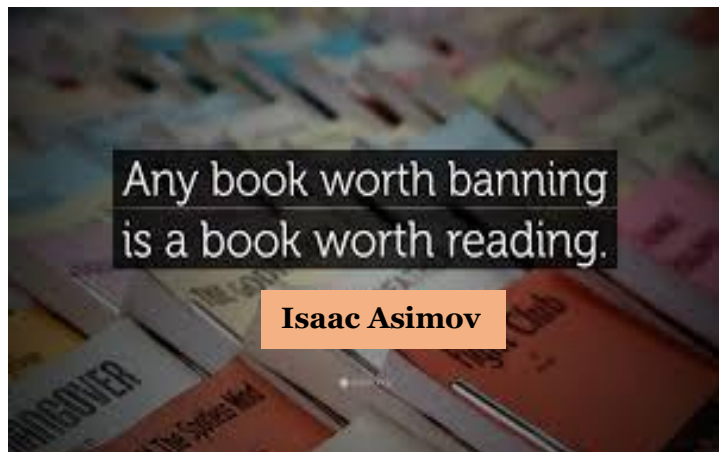
... Ravitch maintains that “censors on the right aim to restore an idealized vision of the past, an Arcadia of happy family life” [and] censors on the left believe in an idealized vision of the future, in which there is no dominant group, father, race, or gender.

Left-wing censorship

For many years, **the left identified censorship as a conservative concept...** Many believed that the slogans of the leftist revolt in Paris in May 1968 (the famous “Il est interdit d’interdire”, it is forbidden to forbid) represented the true nature of the left...However, the true nature of the left had been clearly exposed a century earlier, when Karl Marx formulated his idea of a “dictatorship of the proletariat” that would subjugate all of society to tight control by the state...the first thing that the Lenin dictatorship did in Russia was to pass a press censorship law...In Spain, after the arrival of the Second Republic in 1931, one of the first things the left did was pass a “Law for the Defense of the Republic” which established prior censorship...the attempt to limit freedom of expression on social networks by the left is not something new or something that contradicts the ideological tradition of the left...The only novelty is the excuse used to justify this censorship. In the past they called you an “enemy of the people”, now they accuse you of “hate”... **the justification for censorship is to identify anything that disagrees with the left as “hate speech”...** in an intellectual attitude charged with arrogance and at the same time weighed down by ignorance...



The Empty Library Memorial in Berlin Marks the Site Where Nazi Students Burned 20,000 “Objectionable” Books in One Night in 1933



“It is hateful and mean”

“A lot of these books are being banned in order to rewrite history, to make claims about who should be allowed to exist publicly in our society and whose stories should be whitewashed. It’s about not having to face that history.” ... According to data compiled by the American Library Association, book bans are currently at record levels in the US. The organization documented 1,269 “demands to censor library books and resources” in 2022, by far the highest in the 20 years the ALA has monitored book banning ... 90% of these demands were efforts to ban multiple books, an enormous escalation over 2021. This comes on top of efforts by Republican politicians such as Ron DeSantis, who has stripped Florida public schools of books with themes involving LGBTQ+ individuals or subjects like racism ... “It’s a naked



attempt to build a political coalition around ideas that feel uncomfortable; they tried with critical race theory, any now they're trying with LGBT stories." ...

Yes, the Left Should be Worried about Censorship

... Many conservatives feel that their opinions are being stifled on the internet due to left-leaning bias within social media companies ... However, while these private companies are acting well within their rights, their platforms are critical areas for public discourse ... By deciding who can and cannot speak, social media can effectively control the public narrative on many discussions ... it is a massive overreaction to call this extreme censorship ... what would the alternative option even be? Would we rather have social media sites with no terms of service? Or have the government play a role in these forms of media? ... These are complicated questions to which we are still developing the answer. Ultimately, the more pressing issue is the growing aversion to open discussion. Across social media, advocating for an unpopular standpoint or even just asking a question can garner massive amounts of hate, even if there was no malice intended. Such reactions ostracize opposing viewpoints and push people to congregate within echo chambers that magnify hate and mute dissent ... blocking out entire belief systems forces people to speak only amongst themselves, and thereby become more entrenched in what they believe ... There will always be those who don't listen, but we must strive to curb the trend of polarization ...

Self-censorship in universities

Critics claim that universities have become political monocultures, hostile to those who challenge the merits of contemporary "progressive" thought. They warn of an academic culture where viewpoint discrimination is rampant and academic freedom is threatened. Others have been skeptical, arguing that fears over cancel culture and political homogeneity are overblown and are merely right-wing talking points ... Canadian universities are, like universities in the U.S. and the U.K., politically homogenous institutions whose lack of viewpoint diversity contributes to serious problems on campus including a weakening of support for academic freedom, a hostile climate for those who disagree with left-leaning values, and significant levels of self-censorship ... [Our] survey shows that fully 88 per cent of professors identify as "left-leaning" and voted for left-leaning parties in the 2021 federal election ... This political homogeneity is a significant problem ... Studies show that homogenous decision-making bodies make poor decisions because they operate on incomplete information, silencing (often unintentionally) those with diverse viewpoints ... Fully 57 per cent of right-leaning professors report that they self-censor to avoid professional harm. Even amongst left-leaning faculty, 37 per cent self-censor ... although most professors value academic freedom, a substantial minority — roughly one-third of professors — admit that they would support cancelling a colleague if that colleagues' research conflicted with certain contemporary social justice values ... At a time when political polarization and social media algorithms diminish trust in institutions, Canadian universities need to be part of the solution — modelling intellectual humility and genuine acceptance of all forms of diversity, especially viewpoint diversity. *National Post*

2023, May 12:

And while we're on the subject, should our interpretation of the record, from whichever hilltop we choose, [confront or conform?](#)

When [Barry Humphries died last month](#), the ABC kicked off the 7pm news with his obituary ... I braced myself for the part where it would be made clear that ... a couple of things he said late in his life did not meet the exacting moral standards of the national broadcaster. The reprimand was duly delivered courtesy of a young comedian who gravely told the camera that it was a pity that Humphries, in his declining years, "lost his ability to read the room" ... notice that we're talking about *the* room. The definite article seems important ... The injunction to read *the* room ... implies that the whole world is one big room now ... the people who instruct us to read the room don't see it as a problem ... to them, there's only ever one opinion in this giant global room that's acceptable — which happens to be the opinion they hold themselves ...



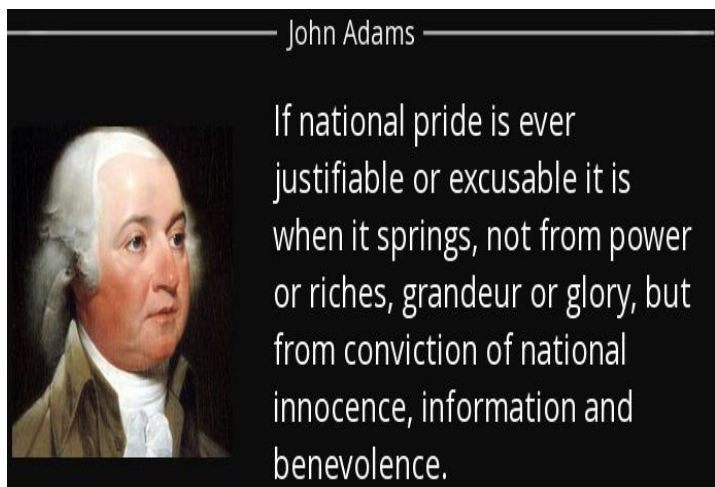
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In truth, Humphries did not at any point “lose his ability” to echo orthodox opinion. He never wasted a minute of his adult life trying to do that. His whole career was based on being a minority of one ... [he] spent his career bridling against Australian groupthink and complacency ... In the 1970s he created a dodgy union official named Lance Boyle. “While performing him,” Humphries recalled, “it was amusing to scan the stalls” for scandalised left-wingers. “Their poor little pinched faces always fell most entertainingly when they realised that the odious operator on the boards was one of their own.” ... Read the room? Read a book ...

A few days after Humphries died, [Jerry Springer fell off the twig too](#). Now there’s a man you could never accuse of failing to read the room. Springer gave the American public what it wanted; and America became a much worse place as a result. Humphries was a kamikaze contrarian ... to honour his dissident spirit, I think Australia should be the first English-speaking nation to stop saying “read the room.” It’s a dictum for moral hacks – a philistine import from the same country that gave the world Springer. It’s a recipe for dud art, a mantra for people who are afraid to think for themselves, and want the rest of us to stop thinking too ...



Those amongst us who read the room entertain fantasies of belonging to and being empowered to speak for oppressed minorities. However satisfying confrontation might be to the “kamikaze contrarian” in all of us (or, I hope, in most of us) in order to prick that bubble of self-delusion, the entertainment value derived from dismaying their “little pinched faces” would be a parallel temptation to misinterpret the record, and so must be avoided.



And, paradoxically, doesn’t increased funding now seem to depend, amongst other things, on [upholding “national pride”](#) (however defined) – hardly a role for those who believe they align with and speak for minorities, still less for anyone hoping to uphold truth. A contrarian



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might say that the role of our archives is to buttress [national understanding and self-awareness](#), but I guess that might not be reading the room too well. The consolation is that our interpretations of the record and our efforts to assist the interpretations of others probably have much less influence than we suppose.

National Pride

the pride or sense of esteem that a person has for one's nation and the pride or self-esteem that a person derives from one's national identity. National pride is related to feelings of patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is love of one's country or dedicated allegiance to same, while nationalism is a strong national devotion that places one's own country above all others.

2023, May 13:

Friday essay: cancellation or conflicted joy - grappling with the work of our 'art monsters'

... From the outset, the question of "do we separate the art from the artist?" opens up other, more interesting questions – like, who is this "we" that proposes such a separation is possible, or desirable? ...

We (whoever we are) are not just an audience sitting in contested space and developing an ethical response involving appreciation or denunciation; we are not critics or philosophers debating social issues; we are (in some complicated way) involved in their preservation and presentation, and a role that involves some kind of responsibility for their continued existence (a form of "creation").

And "we've" been here before.

Much ado about toxic assets.

So, what is the problem? ... What we do with them? Who it is who does something with them? How we describe and present them? The political fall-out of dealing with toxic materials? The kind of materials involved (stamps yes, uniforms no)?

Old, damaged, or untruthful.

Critical theory is the idea that everything is built on power structures to sustain the hegemony of the "privileged" over the "rest" who are oppressed ... According to critical theory, there is then no "neutral" position and any claim to neutrality is simply a smokescreen to conceal your privileged position. The problem with "critical theory" is that it can identify genuine problems, but is incapable of providing any solutions, since changing the way things are done means power and control, especially control of the new ideas, which then produces a new set of the "oppressed" who rise up against the change.

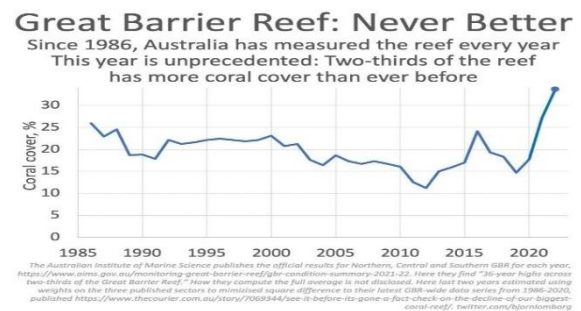
2023, May 21:

<<... Those records say Australia has warmed by 1.4C since 1910 ... As a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science of human-caused global heating, the bureau's temperature record might be seen as ground zero ... >>

Another focus for unnecessary disputation about the science (and illustrative of the poisonous admixture of fact and opinion) is our own Great Barrier Reef. Do the records in fact show whether it is "healthy" or "dying" and do they disguise how those facts are being interpreted and understood. Are they even being compiled correctly? A recent report from the [Australian Institute of Marine Science](#) with the headline *Highest coral cover in central, northern Reef in 36 years* has prompted a frenzy of climate denial.

What the records say: The northern and central Great Barrier Reef have recorded their highest amount of coral cover since the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) began monitoring 36 years ago. Published today, AIMS' [Annual Summary Report on Coral Reef Condition for 2021/22](#) shows another year of increased coral cover across much of the Reef ... However, average coral cover in the southern region (from Proserpine to Gladstone) decreased from 38% in 2021 to 34%.

What the records mean I: [AIMS CEO Dr Paul Hardisty](#) said the results in the north and central regions were a sign the Reef could still recover, but the loss of coral cover in the southern region showed how dynamic the Reef was ... Dr Hardisty said the increased frequency of mass coral bleaching events was “uncharted territory” for the Reef, with this year’s bleaching event the fourth in seven years and the first to occur during a La Niña ... “Every summer the Reef is at risk of temperature stress, bleaching and potentially understanding of how the ecosystem responds to that is still developing. “The 2020 and 2022 bleaching events, while extensive, didn’t reach the intensity of the 2016 and 2017 events and, as a result, we have seen less mortality. These latest results demonstrate the Reef can still recover in periods free of intense disturbances.” ... The 36-year-long dataset of [AIMS’ Long-Term Monitoring Program \(LTMP\)](#) is the largest, longest, and most comprehensive information source on the health of the Great Barrier Reef. It helps determine long-term trends in the condition of coral communities across the Reef ...



What the records mean II: The release of the Australian Institute of Marine Science’s [Annual Summary Report on Coral Reef Condition for 2021/22](#) has exposed a major scandal in Australian environmental management – not only has the reef recovered from damage 10 years ago, but it is at record levels ... the recovery ... underway since around 2012, has not been celebrated by AIMS ... [There is] a graph of Great Barrier Reef coral cover, teased from the AIMS data by Dr Peter Ridd. It shows a steady decline in coral cover from around 25 per cent to 10 per cent in 2012 and then a relatively steady increase to around 35 per cent over the next 10 years ... What this graph shows is that from around 2016 coral cover was at levels not unusual for the recorded history of the reef, and that from 2017 they were mostly well-above it ... The really stunning thing about this graph is that the reef saved itself before any of the loony god-complex schemes hatched by environmentalists have had any chance to be implemented ... [Spectator Australia](#)

The critique offered in *Spectator* goes beyond an examination of the recorded data to alleged flaws in the methodology, neglected ways of measuring the Reef’s health, and even the motivations behind compilation and use of data derived from the allegedly flawed methodology. How can non-experts deal with all this? Perhaps -

<<When un-reason prevails, moderate dealings with one’s fellows, a personal rather than a civic virtue (as Behr seems to be suggesting, albeit one with social benefits), and not an appeal to evidence or coherence becomes a more desirable path to follow in the discernment of truth (or, at least, a more profitable one). And truth then becomes a social commodity (?)



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and the postmodernists win the debate. I can't help feeling that moderation (much as I admire that virtue) is a fragile weapon in the battle against un-truth.>>

“We” are experts in records and recordkeeping, not adjudicators as to their veracity. It is not (in my view) our job to battle against un-truth or arbitrate correctness, except in the most egregious circumstances, but we cannot avoid interpretation of some kind or another – it is inherent in everything we do (contextualise, contextualise, contextualise). That is not at issue. The issue is: how are we to do it? And, of course, we will disagree amongst ourselves about which circumstances are so egregious that we must speak but it may be easier for us to discern authenticity if we develop our ability to sniff out the tendentious.

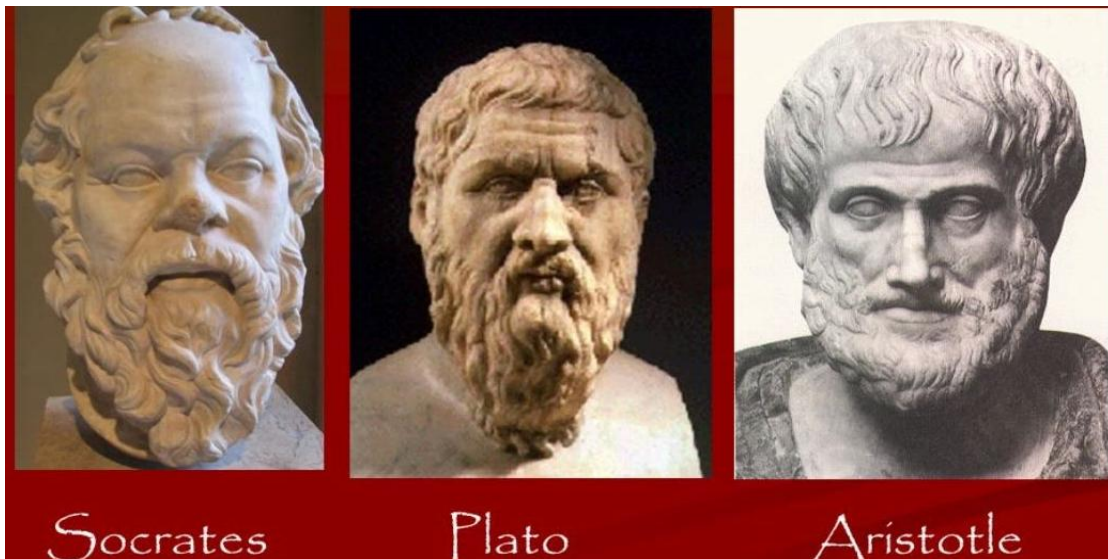


2023, June 28: Knowing What We Know

New book by Simon Winchester (*The Map That Changed the World, The Professor and the Madman*, etc. etc.) is sub-titled *The Transmission of Knowledge: From Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic*. I purchased this expecting to read a lot about libraries and possibly even about archives & records. Alas, the index has nothing about archives and only one reference to records:

In four quite separated places around the planet, and over an extended period of over two thousand years that began around 3400 BC, the craft of writing was invented. Until recording equipment came along, speech vanished into the air, lingering only in the fugitive vaults of memory and in the oral traditions of some indigenous peoples, but writing enabled the retention of records ...

This reflects what we now regard as a somewhat old-fashioned view, consistent with his use of “BC” instead of the modish “BCE”. There is rather more about libraries and museums. He gives space to fake news and censorship, but fails (in my view) to confront the emerging toxic issue of “misinformation” which is getting a good run in The Voice debate, in which it is seemingly being confused (in the addled mind of Linda Burney and Mark Dreyfus) with disinformation. It’s terrifying that these muddle-headed clowns are now proposing a Bill to control it without (seemingly) understanding the difference.



But I digress. Until the last chapter of Winchester's book, I didn't feel I'd had my money's worth. Then, in the last few paragraphs, he redeems himself (for me):

[Aristotle] believed that Plato took too otherworldly an approach to knowledge, that he laid down his dictates as a priori propositions, basing them not on evidence or experience, but on supposition, analysis, and deep thought. Plato was a superb thinker, detaching himself



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from the harsh realities of the outside world ... When he travelled ... he appears to have met only with other philosophers and engaged himself in high-minded discussions without once ever getting his hands dirty, as it were.

Aristotle did otherwise. He travelled widely and wildly, learning as he went ... about biology, physics, logic, astronomy, weather forecasting, geology, and countless other disciplines, each to be on his return home the subject of anything from a monograph to a pamphlet to a major work, each organized and categorized with a meticulous care and a librarian's mind. Nothing was too small or too great to rouse his curiosity. Sir David Ross, the Scotsman who devoted his entire academic life at Oxford to the study and translation of Aristotle, pointed to two abiding characteristics – his love of order and tidiness, and “a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction – in the theory of knowledge he is neither a rationalist nor an empiricist, recognizing the parts played by both the senses and the intellect.” He is, in short, as well-rounded, multidimensional, clever, knowledgeable, curious, and inspired a person as ever lived.

We know more now but Aristotle's stature rests not on what he knew but upon his way of knowing. As one who has long held that archivists who are true to their calling must be Aristotelians and not Platonists, these words left me with warm inner glow.

2023, June 30:

<<It's terrifying that these muddle-headed clowns are now proposing a Bill to control it without (seemingly) understanding the difference>>

I once [remarked](#) that totalitarians are notoriously good recordkeepers, the point being that r/keeping is a tool that can be used for good or evil. Recordkeeping, it seems, will lie at the heart of the proposed regime. I wonder what my old friend Aristotle would make of it.

... Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland said: “Mis and disinformation sows divisions within the community, undermines trust and can threaten public health and safety” ... Under the [proposed legislation](#), ACMA would be granted the power to compel digital platforms to maintain records related to misinformation and disinformation. Moreover, these records would have to be handed over upon request. ACMA would have the authority to request a “code of practice” for the industry, outlining strategies to combat misinformation. Companies failing to adhere to this code could be subject to penalties of up to \$2.75 million or two per cent of their global turnover, whichever is higher. Finally, ACMA would be able to establish and enforce its own industry standard. Violations of this standard could lead to companies being fined up to \$6.8 million or five per cent of their global turnover. ACMA's powers would extend to various online platforms, including social media, news-aggregators, and podcasts ... it would not have the authority to remove individual pieces of content, and the new powers would not apply to professional news content

“Mis and disinformation sows divisions”. It seems then that the government thinks that contrasting misinformation and disinformation is a distinction without a difference since both are intended (apparently) to be covered by the same regulatory regime. This will be a regime that does not monitor individual instances of forbidden content but intimidates those who purvey it into caution and self-censorship using the power to enforce “standards”. It seems that the enforcement will come when a breach of standards is identified and persistence in purveying State-disapproved speech is punished.

The distinction between mis- and dis- information is intent and that is not unrelated to the distinction between opinion and fact. I may be mistaken in my opinions or deceitful in misrepresenting the facts. The grey area is where I mistakenly give out false facts (insofar as that can be determined in a postmodern world) without intending to deceive. But honest opinions can also “sow divisions ... undermine trust and ... threaten public health and safety”. So what? If there is any slender justification for a State apparatus to suppress the expression of ideas (I don't think there is), it cannot simply be to protect us from division, uncertainty, and hurt (associated with hyper-ventilation about “harm” “unsafe” and

“offence”) but only to protect us from falsification (deliberate or otherwise) that is deemed detrimental in some substantial, specified way. Political suppression of any kind begins with censorship and ends in repression. Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries of tyrants ever since Robespierre. This lot doesn’t even have the imagination to change the language. I would not wish to suppress any kind of information, but the case is otherwise when those who **are** willing to set up such an apparatus can’t see the distinction.

The mark of a mature, psychologically healthy mind is indeed the ability to live with [uncertainty and ambiguity](#), but only as much as there really is. Uncertainty is no virtue when the facts are clear, and ambiguity is mere obfuscation when more precise terms are applicable. [Julian Baggini](#)

[Obfuscation](#) is the obscuring of intended meaning in communication, making a message confusing, willfully ambiguous, or harder to understand.

The danger comes, then, when governments think they can regulate obfuscation. In The Voice debate, Anthony Albanese has refused to admit that a reasoned opposition is OK and he vilifies those of us he disagrees with as dishonest, fearmongers, chicken littles, and heartless racists. And he seems to think that putting “some” before such a [vile torrent of abuse](#) makes it OK. Geez, it’s not even witty. Not my Prime Minister. Such a man is quite capable of setting up a State apparatus to suppress contrary opinion, one that will not distinguish between dissent and deceit, one that will not distinguish between falsehoods and obfuscation, one that will end up controlling thought. The worry is that a majority of our elected representatives may agree with him.



If you think the State should interdict opinion and you won’t even admit to a distinction between misinformation and disinformation, then you also are of that number, above all if you trust the likes of Albanese, Burney, and Dreyfus to decide where to draw the line.

“It is simply not good enough for Linda Burney to say in the parliament the Voice will not make representations on Australia Day and she ruled out other matters that we questioned her on as well,” [Deputy Liberal Leader Sussan] Ley [told reporters](#) on Wednesday morning. “She’s now being contradicted by experts, including those on the ‘yes’ campaign and her own Referendum Working Group. They’ve taken a completely different position. They’re right, Linda Burney is wrong. “She needs to come into the parliament, and she needs to correct the record.”

In response to the question would The Voice [be able to advise on Australia Day](#), Burney (instead of answering the question) said it would not be “required” to do so. Is that misinformation or disinformation? What do you think? However harmless Michelle Rowland seeks to make it sound, the system is coercive (someone will have to interpret the codes, determine breaches, and impose multi-million fines) and, without censoring content in particular cases, that power will prompt self-censorship through intimidation. Under that methodology, whose idea of mis/dis-information will prevail? Will it be reportage of Linda Burney’s error of fact (elaborated in the *Conversation* article)? Will it be our Prime Minister



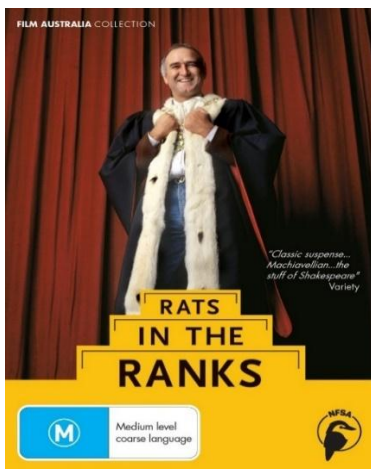
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sowing division by abusing the nearly 50% of us who now say we are voting No? I don't think so.

Anyway, however this turns out there could be jobs for recordkeepers in it.

2023, July 1:

You may think I'm too hard on Albo. If I am, it goes back to *Rats in the Ranks* (1996), a gem of a documentary in which he has a walk-on role. Leichhardt Council is electing a mayor. The unaligned incumbent, Larry Hand, best described as *flash as a rat with a gold tooth*, is manipulating and conniving to get himself re-elected. All the other councillors are nondescript beyond belief and seeing them squabbling over nothing is hilarious. Labor councillors, all four of them, have (god-save-us-all) broken up into factions (two each). Unable to decide on a candidate, they roll the dice but the losing faction rats. An apparatchik from Head Office is called to a meeting at a Leichhardt Café to sort it out. That's Albo. When he sees the cameras, he refuses to join them and they retire to the shadows so all we see are silhouettes muttering in the dark.



That's the impression I've retained of him as he has risen to prominence – a grubby little fixer lurking in the shadows of a back street in Leichhardt.

<<“**Mis and disinformation sows divisions within the community, undermines trust and can threaten public health and safety” Michelle Rowland**>>

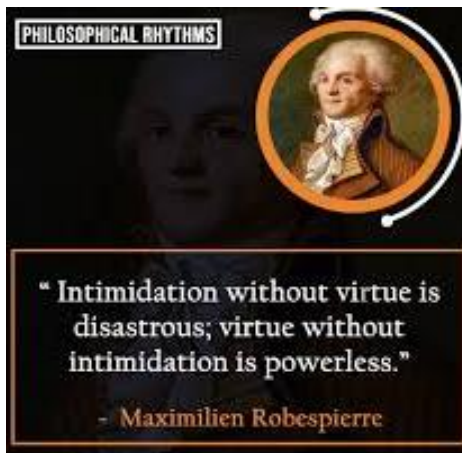
<<**Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries of tyrants ever since Robespierre.**>>

Virtue : *What is the goal for which we strive? ... We wish an order of things where all low and cruel passions are enchained by the laws, all beneficent and generous feelings aroused; where ambition is the desire to merit glory and to serve one's fatherland; where distinctions are born only of equality itself... In our country we wish to substitute morality for egotism, probity for honour, principles for conventions, duties for etiquette, the empire of reason for the tyranny of customs, contempt for vice for contempt for misfortune, pride for insolence, the love of honour for the love of money... that is to say, all the virtues and miracles of the Republic, for all the vices and snobbishness of the monarchy ... What is the fundamental principle of democratic or popular government – that is to say, the essential mainspring upon which it depends and which makes it function? It is virtue ... the first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror... The basis of popular government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror. Terror without virtue is murderous, virtue without terror is powerless. Terror is nothing else than swift, severe, indomitable justice – it flows, then, from virtue.”* Maximilian Robespierre

Public Safety: With Robespierre at the helm, the Committee of Public Safety ... responded with terror against the Revolution's enemies, making certain crimes capital offenses, and

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giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest “those who by their conduct, relations or language spoken or written, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty.” By this decree, more than two hundred thousand citizens were arrested ... An estimated ten thousand died in jail. The tribunals found seventeen thousand guilty, mostly for charges of armed rebellion. A guilty finding typically resulted in being sent to the guillotine. In addition to the mass imprisonments and executions, the committee explored other ways to sow fear and control counterrevolutionaries. The committee authorized local authorities throughout France to create small military forces to patrol the countryside ... In addition, the committee put aside a new democratic constitution that the convention had recently drafted, which had incorporated popular demands for equality and various rights. Without these rights in effect, the convention continued to rule with an absolute sovereignty more strict and rigid than that of the old monarchies. The Reign of Terror was an assault on the people of France, The committee enforced a terrorist mentality on the France’s citizens. The Law of Suspects, which had the intent of defending the nation through legal recourse, ironically tried to make terror lawful.



Maximilian Robespierre



Michelle Rowland

<<Adrian Cunningham: 'Rats in the Ranks' is indeed a great documentary ... it shows up just how craven and unbecoming is the conduct of local politics ... But to be fair to Albo, somehow he was given the thankless task of trying to sort out the 'storm in a teacup' issue involving ALP factions in Leichhardt ... The role he played in that grubby little affair does not make me think any less of him ... Time will tell what kind of PM he will be - though compared to most recent occupants of that office, he does not have to be very good to be considered one of the best.>>

As one currently being vilified by this man as dishonest, a fearmonger, a chicken little, and a heartless racist, I may be forgiven for taking a less kindly view of “the kind of PM” he has become. At the risk of stirring up another storm in a teacup, I would point out that Albo was rather more involved. His participation in this “grubby little affair” resulted from his being the ALP’s assistant general secretary at the time and he is described in the 2006 *SMH* [article](#) as Larry Hand’s “old mate”. Early on, before the shadowy meeting on the streets of Leichhardt, the documentary shows mayor Hand (who seems to have been a member of the Labor Party at one time and was still in contact) speaking with Albo on the ‘phone as he (Hand) attempts to manipulate the Labor vote in his (Hand’s) favour and then “leaking” the substance of that discussion as an unattributable quote to a reporter. Still, no indication that Albo was assisting Hand to Labor’s detriment (or anyone else’s) so fairly innocuous by comparison with some of what goes on in Canberra, I agree. I think Aristotle (who had a sense of proportion) would concur.

Meanwhile, as an illustration of just how [treacherous](#) this mis/dis information issue can become, Cambodia’s “strong man ruler” Hun Sen, accused by Facebook of “inciting violence against political opponents on his profile page”, has had to explain (and then withdraw) an apparent threat to close the platform down. He has closed his own account and moved to

other platforms, his supporters “urging” other Cambodians to shun Facebook and follow their leader:

Amid Hun Sen’s public shunning of the platform, his political loyalists also called for a ban with supporters of the prime minister sharing on social media an image of the Facebook logo overlaid with a prohibited sign – a red circle with a diagonal red line inside. Cambodia’s Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications also on Friday told online gateway operators in the country to share Hun Sen’s new Telegram and TikTok accounts. The ministry, in a separate announcement on Friday evening, called for an end to public and private partnerships with Facebook, citing “political interference” ... A Phnom Penh University student who declined to be named for fear of retaliation said their student association called a meeting on Friday and told students to “spread the word” about following Hun Sen’s new social media accounts. Student association members were also told to monitor other students’ social media activity. “If students weren’t following the accounts”, the student said, association members were told to “follow up and ask them why”.

2023, July 2:

It’s paranoia day! I agree with Adrian thus far: I do not see Albo as insignificant, cuddly, bland, or harmless. I think he’s dangerous. I don’t regard Oliver Cromwell as an admirable man either (“a brave bad man” [Clarendon](#) called him) but I am beguiled by one of his most famous [quotations](#):

I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.

This is not something I would think it worth my while saying to our Prime Minister (nor to Cromwell for that matter once he thought God had told him what to do).

**<<Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries
of tyrants ever since Robespierre.>>**

While I am still able to without constraint, I take the essential ingredient in both the quotations I have used, throwing light upon the mentality of the likes of Robespierre and of Michelle Rowland et al, to be the linkage of **righteousness** with the **damnation of dissent**.

Virtue: ... *the first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror...*

Public Safety: ... giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest “those who by their conduct, relations or language spoken or written, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty.”

... the Parliament [could not base legislation upon its own declaration that a fact exists](#). This fact must be determined to exist by a court. As one Judge said, just because Parliament says something is a lighthouse does not make it a lighthouse. It is up to the Court to decide this. Parliament had, in essence, simply declared the Communist Party to be guilty of subversion in the Act’s preamble. This was unconstitutional.



Albo’s pernicious draft legislation delegates to [ACMA](#) (Nerida O’Loughlin, Creina Chapman, James Cameron, Anita Jacoby, Anna Brakey, Catriona Lowe and their minions) the power to declare something to be a fact – what is mis/dis information, who are the “enemies of the

people”, what is dangerous “language spoken or written”, what postings to this listserv might run foul of standards promulgated by these thought police.

Identifying enemies of the people is not unlike the attempt of the Menzies Government to give itself the power to simply declare who is a Communist. I’m no lawyer and it may be drawing a long bow, but I like to think that such an unfettered power conferred upon mere bureaucrats to simply declare what is so, potentially subjecting their targets to financial penalties and (what may be worse) to silence, will run foul of the precedent upholding the rule of law and “the rights and liberties of those facing the law” when such a power was abrogated to itself by the government and was declared unconstitutional in 1951.

There were [two questions asked](#) of the High Court: Did the validity of the *Communist Party Dissolution Act 1950* (Cth) depend only on the truth, or otherwise, of the ‘facts’ asserted by the nine recitals that formed the preamble of the Act? If that was not the proper test for the Act’s validity, was the Act invalid under some other test?

... the parties argued whether the validity of the Act depended only on the truth of the ‘facts’ asserted in the preamble, and whether evidence could be adduced by both parties to prove or disprove these ‘facts.’ This might seem a strange issue to be debating, but it is actually very important. This is because it is really a debate about the relative power of Parliament and the judiciary. If the validity of the Act depended only on the truth of the preamble, then Parliament would be free to determine the limits of its own power, and the High Court would be reduced to being a minor branch of the federal government, unable to function as an effective check on the power of the legislature or the executive. If the Parliament said that the Australian Communist Party was a threat to the security of Australia, that would be that, and the High Court would not be able to challenge the validity of the Act

...

Of the seven judges who heard the case, a majority of five answered the first question above ‘no,’ but answered the second question ‘yes,’ saying that the validity of the *Communist Party Dissolution Act* was not simply a matter of determining whether the asserted facts were correct; whether or not those facts were correct, the Act still had to fall within one of the enumerated powers of the Commonwealth. Since it didn’t, it was invalid ...

Despite the atmosphere of distrust concerning communism, and the clear democratic mandate granted to the incoming Menzies government to take strong action against suspected Communists, the High Court refused to withdraw from its role as protector of the constitutional order, and, perhaps more importantly, the rights and liberties of those facing the law.

Albo’s legislation, if passed, will operate through penalties and intimidation (aka “voluntary compliance”). Penalties, I suppose, will go through a court process but intimidation is more insidious and probably can’t be litigated (perhaps by design). ACMA is already well versed in [the art of intimidation](#) and has an established track record – through investigations, negotiations, findings, infringement notices, remedial directions, enforceable undertakings, etc.

A [significant amount of our work](#) is aimed at encouraging voluntary compliance ... Where appropriate, we encourage and assist self and co-regulatory compliance initiatives by industry sectors. These initiatives range from industry-initiated self-regulatory codes of practice to co-regulatory codes developed and registered under legislation ... The appropriate enforcement response may involve us commencing civil litigation or referring a matter to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution of an offence. For certain contraventions, we have the power to commence civil proceedings to obtain, among others, civil penalty orders, injunctive relief and orders to enforce an enforceable undertaking. The laws we administer also create several offences. The office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions prosecutes these offences. The decision to refer a matter to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution of an offence will be made by the ACMA considering the facts and the Prosecution Policy of the Commonwealth.

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The court may deal with prosecutions of offences, but beyond non-compliance the essential ingredient of such an offence can only be at bottom a determination by bureaucracy under a delegated power from the Parliament deciding what is in fact mis/dis information. How would a court deal with that? But who will have the will, the stamina, and the resources to fight such decisions?

- First they convince you that freedom is impractical. *"It's nice in theory, but not realistic."*
- Then they convince you that freedom is insensitive. *"I love liberty too, but I also love people."*
- Then they convince you that freedom is immoral. *"You're being selfish by putting your individual rights before this person's pain."*
- Then they convince you to sacrifice your freedom on the altar of the greater good. *"Give us the power to legislate your behavior and dictate your decisions. We promise to use that power in a way that benefits everyone. You can trust us. We know what's best."*
- Then they destroy the world and pin the blame on you. *"This would've never happened had you given up your freedoms earlier. It's your fault for being so selfish."*

And the cycle is repeated from age to age with each new generation being duped into believing that authoritarianism was the sort of thing that could only go wrong during more primitive times.

2023, July 3:

Thought control is not unrelated to limitations on protest ...

The 57-country-strong Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said international law and other collective measures are needed to prevent future incidents involving the desecration of the Quran ... after the holy book was burned and defiled in Sweden ... Last week, Salwan Momika, a 37-year-old Iraqi who fled to Sweden several years ago, tore up and lit pages of the Islamic holy book on fire. The desecration occurred on the first day of the Eid al-Adha holidays ... Swedish police granted permission for a protest to take place, saying freedom of expression is guaranteed under the country's constitution. But after the burning, police charged Momika with agitation against an ethnic or national group ... In approving the permit for the protest by the Iraqi refugee, Swedish police said that while it "may have foreign policy consequences", the security risks did not mean the application should be rejected. The United States also condemned the burning but added that issuing the permit for the demonstration supported freedom of expression ...



... or revision of memory ...

Dutch King Willem-Alexander has formally apologised for the Netherlands' involvement in slavery, saying he felt "personally and intensely" affected ... The slave trade brought vast riches to his ancestors ... In December, Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised on behalf of the Dutch state. The monarch acknowledged the apology saying "a start has been made" but also there was "still a long way to go" ... Since the Black Lives Matter movement emerged in the United States, the Netherlands has embarked on an often difficult debate about its



colonial and slave-trading past that turned it into one of the world's richest countries ... While some European leaders have apologised for their country's colonial past, others have refused to take that step.

In January, French President Emmanuel Macron stated he will not “ask forgiveness” from Algeria for French colonisation, but hoped to continue working towards reconciliation. “It’s not up to me to ask forgiveness, that’s not what this is about, that word would break all of our ties,” he said in an interview. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also rejected calls to apologise and offer reparatory justice for victims of the British slave trade and imperialism, saying the attempt to “unpick our history” was not something the government would “focus its energy on”.

In this country, our houses of memory use, inter alia, RAPs ([reconciliation action plans](#)). These are usually positive and forward-looking (celebratory and constructive) rather than apologetic and atoning. But the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) Protocols (first released in 1995) cut closer to the bone (and to thought control or reconstructing the “narrative” if you prefer) when it comes to the handling of materials in our care:

historical exclusion from libraries; the offensive nature of much of the material about Indigenous people in library collections and archives; subject headings that described Indigenous peoples and cultures in ways that had little to do with how Indigenous peoples described themselves, and which demeaned Indigenous peoples and cultures; access issues for Indigenous peoples and materials; and general Indigenous service issues. [Reconciliation in Australia: the role of the academic Library in empowering the Indigenous community](#) (p.6)

The ATSILIRN [Protocols](#) make for interesting reading, especially if you try to place them into contending libertarian and progressive frameworks:

2. Content and perspectives: ... *Major institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their collections are comprehensive, inclusive and reflective of all perspectives ...* [This seems to be about enhancing and correcting existing “colonial” bias rather than suppressing what is “offensive” and simply imposing approved viewpoints. But who knows? See 7 below.]

3. Intellectual property: ... *Develop professional recognition of cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and consult with appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples on their application ...* [Part of the [re-imagining of provenance](#). But yet to see anything like this in our archives laws].

5. Description and classification: ... *the use of outdated, inaccurate or value laden terms ... obstructs access ... Use national Indigenous thesauri ... retrospectively re-cataloguing items recorded with unsuitable subject headings ... [introduce] classificatory systems which describe items by their geographic, language and cultural identifiers ... opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe and annotate material that relates to themselves and their communities.* [It would be interesting to know what progress our archives are making. In addition to their RAPs, are any of them including progress reports in their annual reports on specifics like this?]

7. Offensive: ... *Libraries, archives and information services need to recognise that their collections may contain materials that are offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such materials may be racist, sexist, derogatory, abusive or offensively wrong. Many examples are of a historical nature but some are contemporary. Libraries, archives and information services have a responsibility to preserve and make accessible the documentary record but must also respond appropriately to the existence of offensive materials ...* [ditto].

11. Copying and repatriation of records: ... *Archives and libraries often hold original records which were created by, about or with the input of particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A community may place tremendous importance on particular records and request copies for use and retention within the community. Some records may have been taken from the control of the community or created by theft or deception ... Agree to the repatriation of original records or the provision of copies to Aboriginal and Islander communities as may be determined through consultation. Seek permission to hold copies of*

repatriated records but refrain from copying such records should permission be denied. [Much of this going on?]

Some of these sensitivities are on display in [section 2.1](#) of the *Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee (Vic) Report*, March 2022. Section 2.1, dealing with “The archived history ...”, is severely (and, in my view, admirably) objective; “balanced” because it does not engage our judgements or sympathies (not saying this is always a good thing). Elsewhere, sympathy and understanding of the Indigenous experience is well displayed. This *Report* is about wrongs being righted but it is not “reflective of all perspectives”. It doesn’t, for example, reflect the perspective of well-meaning foster-carers or consideration of the political justifications for removal. Perhaps in an instrument of reparative justice it doesn’t need to but the basis in [child welfare](#) for a policy of removal remains an issue for us to this day. We do it more sensitively now, but it is [still done](#) and some would argue [not well enough](#).

2023, July 5:

<<Albo’s legislation, if passed, will operate through penalties and intimidation (aka “voluntary compliance”)>>

If you approve of interference in our ways of knowing by conferring on a tribunal representing the righteous power to damn dissent, be careful what you wish for ...

The virtue of that power depends on your ideas about what is righteous. The onslaught of right-wing partisanship on SCOTUS is the culmination of over 30 years of [politicisation](#) beginning with “borking” by Kennedy and Biden in 1987. SCOTUS has been political virtually from the days of [Marshall](#) but never [so bad](#) as now (Roosevelt’s attempted stack came close). It is said that after 1987 [McConnell](#) made it his life’s mission to visit revenge on the Democrats by swinging the Court his way.



Politicised institutions are a threat to us all. In an imperfect world, this danger is ever with us but it is most dangerous when they control thought by [forcing](#) “platforms into line where self-regulatory codes and practices have failed” and it is unclear on what basis it is concluded that it “would appear to be focused on misinformation shared socially, rather than professionally – for example, conspiracy theories – rather than information that is accidentally incorrect despite a publisher’s best intentions.” The breadth of the definitions (to say nothing of the confusion over dis- and mis- information) gives no such assurance.

ACMA is no innocent, non-partisan instrument of good. It is at war with the platform providers and eager to extend its control. It has been calling “for more powers to regulate misinformation and disinformation [since] its June 2021 assessment report [[pdf](#)] on the opt-in voluntary codes managed by the platforms’ association the Digital Industry Group Inc (DIGI).” They are not umpires, they are players.

... Communications Minister Michelle Rowland's proposed framework strikes a balance [?] between DIGI’s [Digital Industry Group Inc.] demands and ACMA’s demands



Journeys Without End

... DIGI's codes could remain if ACMA does not overturn them [and] rejecting ACMA's calls to apply the regulations to traditional news providers and to expand ACMA's information-gathering powers to the contents of private messages ...

One of ACMA's demands granted by the bill is overturning DIGI's opt-in model for the codes; this means that the ACMA's powers would extend beyond the eight signatories of the voluntary codes - Adobe, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Redbubble, TikTok and Twitter ... DIGI has campaigned against the government registering mandatory codes by trying to demonstrate that its voluntary codes have successfully incentivised the eight signatories to build robust systems and measures for combatting misinformation and disinformation ...

The bill suggests giving ACMA the power to create "codes" for specific companies that repeatedly fail to deal with misinformation and disinformation, and register industry-wide "standards" when codes are found ineffective ... A [statement explaining the bill \[pdf\]](#) declares that making these powers available to ACMA would "incentivise and strengthen the voluntary framework." ... A freedom of speech safeguard outlined in the summary of the draft bill aims to ensure ACMA "would have no role in determining truthfulness, nor will it have a role in taking down or requesting action regarding individual pieces of content."

That alleged "safeguard" will need to be examined very carefully.

... Another safeguard that the draft bill included to prevent ACMA's powers from impinging on freedom of speech was rejecting the ACMA's call to apply regulations to news providers ... This was despite ACMA arguing that the media exemption creates "potential loopholes for bad actors and less reputable news sources." ... "We do not agree that the existence of other industry codes absolve platforms of any responsibility to address seriously harmful news content posted on their services... This position is consistent with the view taken by the European Commission."

Similarly, as a safeguard to protect privacy, the draft bill said that ACMA's information-gathering powers would not extend to private messages ... This was also a rejection of a power ACMA asked for in its [submission \[pdf\]](#) to DIGI's review of its codes. ACMA argued against exempting messaging services because they "continue to be a source of news for many of their Australian users... Telegram, for example, allows for 'supergroups' of up to 200,000 users."

They are active self-promoters (they saturate the first few pages of a google search) and their preferred methods are [velvet-gloved intimidation](#). Like members of SCOTUS, they are appointed by the government of the day and their agenda obviously includes getting even more extensive powers into their hands. Their existing powers over broadcasting have been pretty consistently exercised [politically](#) (not in ways that most of us would disapprove of, except for the precedent that it sets in giving such power to such people). If you suppose that can't change with a simple change to the composition of the tribunal, look at SCOTUS.

ACMA and the Human Rights Commission (re 18C) are careful not to court public outrage by punitive measures. Their goal is submission not punishment – and who can bear the cost of fighting them? Our ultimate protection is to deny the power of thought control to a tribunal.

PS. Sorry, I seem to have omitted to make the link to Jeremy Nadel in [IT News](#) (28 June, 2023).

2023, July 9:

<<**[Andrew Waugh](#): The terms disinformation and misinformation are an excellent example of using spurious dichotomies to control the narrative. In my view the government is quite correct to ignore the distinction ... As you quite rightly point out, the difference between misinformation and disinformation is intent ... The magician's trick here is that it is difficult to prove intent ... The practical effect of making a distinction between misinformation and disinformation is to make the knowingly spreading of false information invisible ...>>**

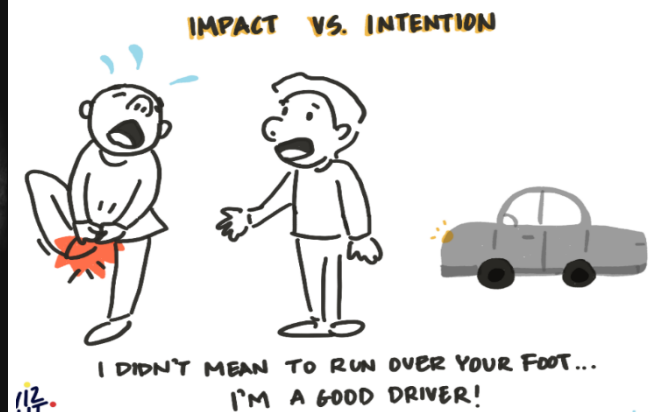
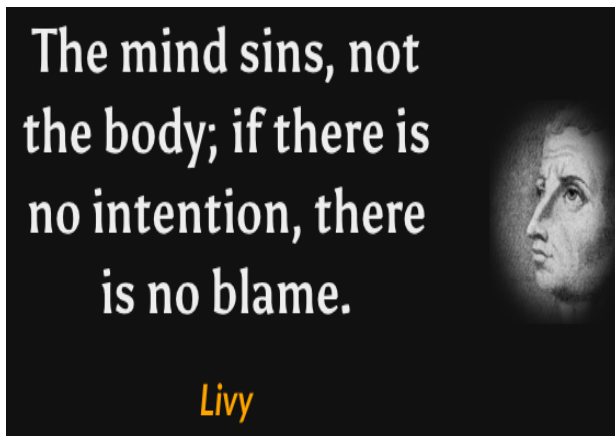


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It is absolutely necessary for the government's purpose that ACMA should not be required to do so.

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

Unless you believe that, there is a difference to be made between facts and opinion. Facts (however defined) may be intentionally or mistakenly erroneous. Fact-checking is a defensible exercise but it is constrained by some reference to objective reality (supposing you believe in some such notion). Suppressing mistaken facts may be argued to have a worthy purpose, but on any conceptual, legal, or moral plane, the distinction between evil and innocent intent is worth making – if only in mitigation.



Opinions, on the other hand, aren't mistaken - they are simply arguable. Arguing with an opinion, while it may be constrained by the rules of logical discourse, cannot be referenced to objective reality. Identifying opinions you disagree with as erroneous in order to suppress them annihilates, as you argue it should, the notion of intent. You can't fact-check an opinion, you can only disagree with it (and suppress it if you have the power to do so). Suppressed opinions are, in the eyes of the [suppressor](#), necessarily mistaken intentionally. There can be no mitigation because righteousness demands demonization of wrong-doers for their evil opinions. Theologically, you can't do wrong without the intent to do so. You can't have an innocently mistaken opinion in the eyes of the virtuous.

“giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest “those who by their conduct, relations or language spoken or written, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty.”

In the context of The Terror, “federalism” was a belief in devolution or local democracy which would have resulted in loss of power by the centralized committees in Paris. You could lose your head for it (or even being suspected of it) and many did. If you are going to have the government suppressing online content, I would have thought the distinction between the power to suppress erroneous fact and the power to suppress (supposedly) erroneous opinion was worth making. But, hey, that's just me.

2023, July 10:

Uncomfortable Truths and Unintended Consequences

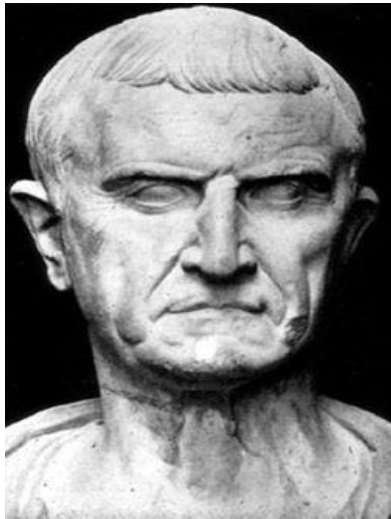
We should have lost memory as well as voice, had it been as easy to forget as it is to keep quiet. [Tacitus](#)

Tacitus is one of my favourite historians:

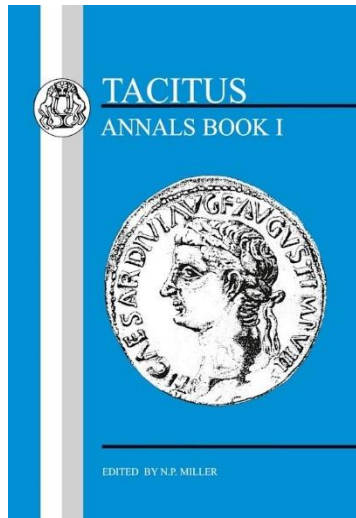
- ♦ *They create a desert and call it peace;*
- ♦ *when the state is most corrupt, then laws are most multiplied;*

- ♦ *everyone would have gone on saying what a great Emperor he'd make ...
... if only he'd never become one.*

That last always reminds me of Malcolm Turnbull.



Emperor Galba



Tacitus



Malcolm Turnbull

Social media, here and overseas, and mainstream media for that matter, are already “[self-censoring](#)” even w/o the kind of statutory powers Albo wants to confer on ACMA (and that ACMA desperately wants to have). This and similar regimes deliberately create uncertainty in the publishers and platform providers who then self-censor detrimentally (in a climate of fear beloved by all authoritarians). Recent examples of self-censorship (or, in the alternative, bias) include:

[Facebook](#) will [allow](#) users to praise the Azov Battalion ... in contradiction to the social network's policy banning support for "dangerous individuals and organizations." ... to "allow Facebook users to obtain information about the forces' military activity" and "ensure that news coverage of the conflict can continue to be shared on the platform," ... Facebook also made an exception to its hate speech policy to [allow](#) statements like "death to the Russian invaders" and calling for violence against Russian president Vladimir Putin and his ally, Belarussian president Aleksandr Lukashenko. The change only applies in several countries in the Caucasus and Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia, where Facebook is currently banned ... these actions by Facebook, along with decisions to ban propaganda from only [one side in the war](#), demonstrate that decisions that *should* be made on some kind of objective principle are instead being made on the basis of team sport ...

[Facebook](#) expanded an unprecedented campaign to police falsehoods early last year by banning what it called “debunked claims” about the virus. Among them: The claim that covid was “man-made” and had leaked from a lab in Wuhan, China ... a view that was partly vindicated when China’s lack of transparency prompted prominent scientists to declare the lab-leak theory “viable” and demand further investigation. In May 2021, barely three months after it imposed the ban, Facebook backtracked: “In light of ongoing investigations into the origin of Covid-19 and in consultation with public health experts,” the company said, “we will no longer remove the claim that Covid-19 is man-made from our apps.” ...

Questions about adverse effects of COVID vaccines raised by [researchers](#) and [victims](#) alike have been suppressed on public health grounds (not in front of the children). But [orthodox opinion](#) rejecting these claims as misleading are plentiful. Even then, the platforms [get hit for allowing](#) anti-vaxxers to speak. Questioning the COVID vaccines, which were necessarily rushed through development and testing, is not the same as opposing all vaccination, though it is often misrepresented that way.

And it doesn’t take long for it to leech into “traditional” news reporting:

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Starting in the early 1990s, when journalism went online, [censorship followed](#). Filtering, blocking and hacking replaced scissors and black ink. Some governments barred access to Web pages they didn't like, redirected users to sites that looked independent but which in fact they controlled, and influenced the conversation in chat rooms and discussion groups via the participation of trained functionaries ... The Edward Snowden leaks made clear that the internet is a tool for peering into the lives of citizens, including journalists, for every government with the means to do so ... the Obama administration's authorization of secret wiretaps of journalists and aggressive leak prosecutions has had a well-documented chilling effect on national-security reporting ... Journalists legitimately fear being swept up in this electronic dragnet. But frequently they are its specific targets. China has hacked foreign journalists' email accounts, presumably to vacuum up their sources, and broke into the servers of leading US newspapers. The NSA hacked into Al Jazeera ... It is little wonder why governments would pursue a strategy of weakening print and broadcast companies if it meant journalists moved to a platform the state can control and monitor ...

The double standards of the powerful are not suppressed:

... [US President Joe Biden](#) recently called out Russia for its arrest and detention on espionage charges of the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is stationed in Moscow. On April 29th, Biden attended the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner, where he denounced Russia's actions and stated that "journalism is not a crime." US Senate leaders echoed this sentiment in rare bipartisan fashion. Yet, Biden's own administration, like Donald Trump's before him, continues to doggedly pursue the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange under the Espionage Act. Assange has languished in a British prison the past four years—all for publishing factual documentation of US war crimes and misconduct that span nearly two decades ...



The most serious consequence of suppressing some content is that we lose faith in the rest. We can no longer know if we are getting the whole story, based on a reasonable judgement that the news sources we rely on are trying their best to get it for us. This is the position I've now reached with the ABC (I never thought I'd say that). It's not just that they are unbalanced (in my judgement) but they just don't seem to run news anymore that is unhelpful to their ideological slant. For hard news now (and I never thought I'd say this either), I go to Sky (Australia) and to Sky (UK) – despite their names they are different beasts – and to Al Jazeera. There are many reasons why the public is losing faith in “news” but the specter of censorship is [one of them](#):

... This survey finds that the public is fairly split on whether social media companies should engage in this kind of fact-checking, but there is little public confidence that these platforms could determine which content should be flagged ... Overall, a majority of Americans (66%) say they have not too much or no confidence at all in social media companies being able to determine which posts on their platforms should be labeled as inaccurate or misleading, with 31% saying they have a great deal or some confidence ... Americans by and large believe social media companies are censoring political viewpoints they find objectionable. Roughly three-quarters of Americans (73%) think it is very or somewhat likely that social media sites



intentionally censor political viewpoints they find objectionable, including 37% who say this is very likely ...

<<Theologically, you can't do wrong without the intent to do so.>>

Someone has told me they find this comment puzzling. I'll try to make it simple:

- Opinion can't be fact-checked,
- It can only be suppressed because it is sinful,
- Intent (awareness) is an essential ingredient of sin.

2023, August 29:

<< AW: Spreading of false information has lots of dimensions, and most of them are a continuum. You can divide this space in many ways and at many points. For example, is the material demonstrably false? Does the person or organisation benefit (e.g. profit) from the spreading of the false information? There are lots of other dividing points. >>

<<CH: ... there is a difference to be made between facts and opinion. Fact-checking is a defensible exercise but it is constrained by some reference to objective reality (supposing you believe in some such notion) ... Opinions, on the other hand, aren't mistaken - they are simply arguable. Arguing with an opinion, while it may be constrained by the rules of logical discourse, cannot be referenced to objective reality>>

... but by some reference to apprehended bias it seems -

Facebook has suspended an Australian fact checking operation ... The powerful RMIT Factlab operation ... will be banned from judging what is true or false on social media while Meta and the International Fact Checking Network [IFCN] probe its operation. Sky News Australia's investigation, dubbed The Fact Check Files, revealed the university's fact checking director Russell Skelton was campaigning for the Voice and re-sharing slogans and images created by Labor's Indigenous Affairs Minister Linda Burney. Skelton's team was responsible for several misleading fact checks against Sky News Australia which led to a censorship of journalism related to the Voice referendum ...

... Another RMIT fact checker, Renee Davidson, also put the University in jeopardy of breaching impartiality clauses in the IFCN's Code of Principles by labelling Opposition Leader Peter Dutton a fear-mongering racist on her personal social media account ... An audit of RMIT Voice fact checks showed the 17 Voice checks between May 3 and June 23 this year were all targeting anti-Voice opinions or views ... Meta CEO and Founder Mark Zuckerberg had made promises to governments globally that the fact checking industry was both independent and overseen by the IFCN. However, The Fact Check Files investigation revealed Meta had a direct commercial relationship with RMIT which allowed it to pocket up to \$740,000 a year in payments.

Sky News host Peta Credlin was targeted by RMIT Factlab for her coverage of a Uluru Statement to the Heart document which was released under a public Freedom of Information Request. Skelton's fact checking team ruled it was false to declare that the Uluru statement was longer than one page, and used quotes from one of its authors Professor Megan Davis as evidence. However, those quotes from Professor Davis were inconsistent with her earlier comments which stated the document was much longer than one page ... Debate around the length of the Uluru document became political with Labor arguing it was just one page while the Coalition disagreed. As a result of RMIT Factlab's false fact check, Australians on Facebook were stopped from hearing the debate. The fact check also had the chilling impact of limiting the reach of all of Sky News Australia's journalism. This meant important news, debate and even live press conferences streamed to the platform were blocked to the world.

Another misleading fact check related to former Liberal MP Nicolle Flint, who weighed into a controversial United Nations Declaration On the Rights of Indigenous People. In a live interview on Sky News Australia Ms Flint argued implementing the declaration legislatively could lead to Indigenous Australians having their own independent political system. Her opinion on a speculative future event, of which no legislation existed,



was deemed false by fact checkers. This was a breach of the IFCN rules which state a fact checker cannot deem opinions to be false

We shall see if ACMA is empowered to deem opinions to be false under Albo's mis/dis-information law. There is no little irony in RMIT's response: "... it stood by its staff and claimed they had freedom of speech on social media."

2023, September 14:

How much can we rely on what we read in books? All the kerfuffle over The Voice referendum has called to mind a bit of mis/dis-information to be found in Bill Bryson's entertaining book about Australia entitled *Down Under* (2000); it has also appeared under [other titles](#). In Ch.15, dealing with N.T., he writes-

All Australians are required by law to vote in federal elections, including residents of the Northern Territory. However, since the Northern Territory is not a state it has no seats in Parliament. So the Territorians elect representatives who go to Canberra and attend sessions of Parliament (at least that's what they say in their letters home) but don't actually vote or take part or have any consequence at all. Even more interestingly, during national referendums the citizens of the Northern Territory are also required to vote, but the votes don't actually count towards anything. Seems a little odd to me ...

Bryson's book is highly amusing but more than once I found his "facts" to be wrong and he too often succumbs to the temptations of oddity and whimsy. Now, I wouldn't have the temerity of RMIT or ACMA to set myself up as a fact-checker but here is what the [Australian Electoral Commission](#) (AEC) has to say about referenda -

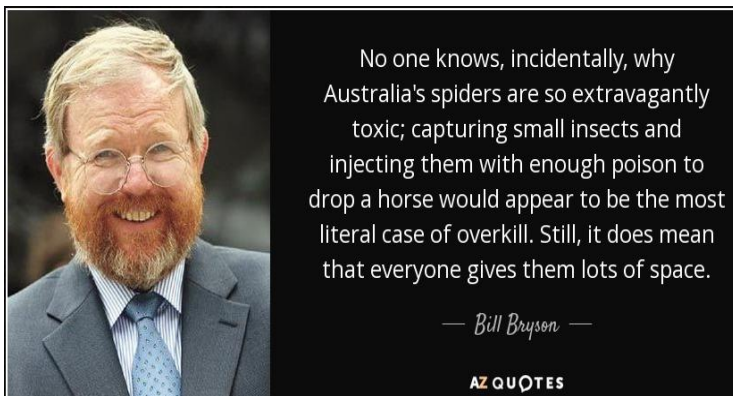
Votes cast outside of the six states, such as from the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory, are counted towards the National Majority but not towards any of the state counts.

Up to a point, Bryson is correct about the oddity of [representation of the Territories](#) in federal parliament -

Currently, the two Northern Territory Senators represent the residents of the Northern Territory as well as the Australian external territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The two Australian Capital Territory Senators represent the Australian Capital Territory, the Jervis Bay Territory and since 1 July 2016, Norfolk Island ... [In the Lower House] Parliament granted a seat to the Northern Territory in 1922, and to the Australian Capital Territory in 1948; these territorial representatives, however, had only limited voting rights until 1968 ...

But regarding the impotence of the Territory representatives in the Lower House, Bryson is [dead wrong](#) -

Although voting restrictions were initially imposed on these representatives, these restrictions were gradually removed.



PS. On the subject of oddity and whimsy, consider [Mt Athos](#), the Greek peninsula dedicated to the monastic life. Women are banned. Even female animals are banned; but not female



cats (it's a question of mice apparently). Here's the thing: Mt Athos is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Go figure.

2023, October 6:

Did you know that this is [Banned Books Week](#)? The ALA (US) is promoting it. Tomorrow (7 October) has been declared [Let Freedom Read Day](#). They suggest taking one action from a list that includes

- Check out a banned book from a library
- Buy a banned book

Love it. This all about resisting a [US phenomenon](#), viz. religious/right-wing attacks on books they don't like -

... the skyrocketing number of legislative proposals targeting LGBTQ people and especially, transgender and nonbinary youth. Like bills targeting health care, drag performance, pronouns and public spaces, book bans ... aimed at limiting the rising visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ youth, and removing parents' rights to make private health care decisions for their families, or determine what their own children can read. According to the [American Library Association](#), 2022 saw 1,269 documented demands to pull titles from library shelves, nearly doubling the 729 challenges in 2021, an astounding 713% increase from the previous year. The vast majority of these bans target books by and about LGBTQ people and all people of color.

Ideas they don't like really. The American intelligentsia (unsurprisingly) seem less concerned about suppression of one kind or another coming from the other direction (identity, decolonisation, etc. etc.) Here in Australia we get it from [both directions](#)

I'm not really a big fan of "days of". You know, international day of the turnip, that sort of thing. Yet I was interested to see that this week we celebrated "hug a librarian day" ... Books are under attack from populists and dilettantes on both the Left and the Right. In recent weeks we've had the kerfuffle over [Roald Dahl](#), with censorious publishers in a lather at the prospect of little ones reading the word "fat". Quelle horreur! Old Roald may have been a nasty antisemite and an appalling husband, but he was a wonderful writer. Leave his books alone, I say. At the same time Northcote High School was [culling Australian history books](#) from its library that were, wait for it, "old". The real reason was that they minimised the horrors of colonisation for Indigenous people ... ([Matthew Bach](#), former Vic Shadow Minister for Education).

Actually, I'd be surprised if they don't have it from both directions in the US also – witness the [cancellation](#) of J K Rowling by Chris Moore at the Seattle Museum of Pop Culture.

All censorship is bad, so let's see what happens now with [Albo's Misinformation Bill](#).

2023, November 3:

... Of course, governments don't lie, they produce propaganda. And policies and laws have been imposed to combat what's commonly termed fake news, which have reined in digital platforms, mainstream and nonmainstream media players and individual social media users. Indeed, since February 2021, the [Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation](#) (the DIGI Code), a voluntary set of standards developed on request of our government, has been in place and major digital platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been complying with it. So, this begs the question as to whom the government is targeting with a new set of laws it proposes to empower the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) – the statutory body that monitors communications and media – with, especially as they won't apply to professional news ... Well, whilst the ultimate determiner of truth isn't being legislated, the entities these new laws will apply to are digital platform services, which include content aggregation services, connective media services, media sharing services or, somewhat liberally, "a digital service specified by the minister" ... could it simply be that the government of what the [New York Times described](#) as "the world's



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most secretive democracy”, is seeking to empower itself with a means to lean on digital platforms that are running defensible dissenting political information that only harms the validity of its own lies? [Sydney Criminal Lawyers](#)

“And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down, and you're just the man to do it, do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake!” **Robert Bolt, A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts**

What intrigues me most is how obtuse support for this Bill is. Misinformation, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. [Nerida O'Loughlin and her cronies](#) can be relied on to behold it in ways pleasing to one side. But a tool that empowers them to exercise their biases can just as easily be used, if they are replaced by those with a different set of biases, to please the other. So, be careful what you wish for.

Politically motivated numeracy and other forms of biased evaluation show that people reason their way into or out of a conclusion even when it offers them no personal advantage. It's enough that the conclusion enhances the correctness or nobility of their political, religious, ethnic, or cultural tribe, It's called, obviously enough, the myside bias, and it commandeers every kind of reasoning, even logic. Recall that the validity of a syllogism depends on its form, not its content, but that people ... judge an argument valid if it ends in a conclusion they know is true or want to be true ... Keith Stanovich finds it in every race, gender, cognitive style, education level, and IQ quantile, even among people who are too clever to fall for other cognitive biases ... The myside bias is not an across-the-board personality trait, but presses on whichever trigger or hot button is connected to the reasoner's identity. Stanovich relates it to our political moment. We are not, he suggests, living in a “post-truth” society. The problem is that we are living in a myside society. The sides are the left and the right, and both sides believe in the truth but have incommensurable ideas of what the truth is. **Steven Pinker Rationality: What it Is; Why it seems Scarce; Why it Matters** (Allen Lane, 2021).

Times change. Yes, they surely will.

2023, November 5:

**<<We are not, he suggests, living in a “post-truth” society.
The problem is that we are living in a myside society. >>**

If archival description, lying at the heart of the work itself, is at the mercy of belief (the myside bias) and cannot rely on rationality, what are the implications? As a young archivist, I suppose I assumed (without thinking much about it) that I wrote objectively for scholars to help them reach objective conclusions - eschewing interpretation of my own. Interpretation was their job. On mature reflection, I saw that interpretation, without having to abandon the goal of objectivity, was a necessary part of description. “Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold,” as [Lytton Strachey](#) has it. But such a belief still assumes a rational response from those for whom one writes.

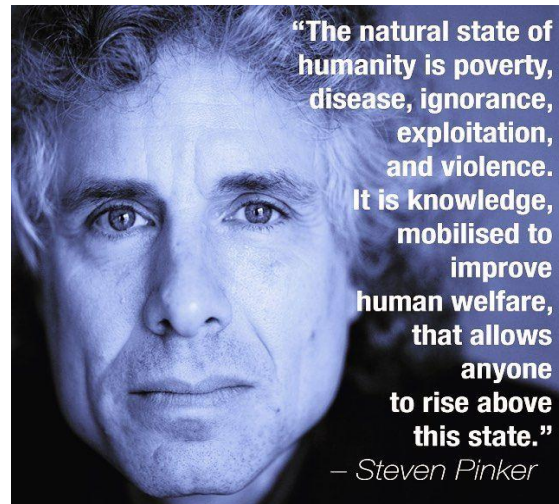
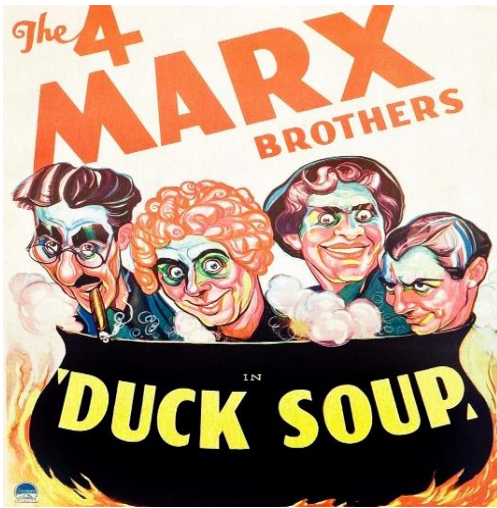
Pinker provides examples of myside bias that are essentially along a political axis-

In *Duck Soup*, Chico Marx famously asked, “Who ya gonna believe, me or your own eyes?” When people are in the throes of the myside bias, the answer may not be their own eyes. In an update of a classic study showing that football fans always see more infractions by the opposing team, Kahan and collaborators showed a video of a protest in front of a building. When the title labeled it a protest against abortion at a health clinic, conservatives saw a peaceful demonstration, while liberals saw the protesters block the entrance and intimidate the enterers. When it was labeled a protest against the exclusion of gay people at a military recruiting center, it was the conservatives who saw pitchforks and torches and the liberals who saw Mahatma Gandhi.



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... opinions that go against the scientific consensus, like creationism and the denial of human-made climate change, may not be symptoms of innumeracy or scientific illiteracy. Kahan has found that most believers and deniers are equally clueless about the scientific facts (many believers in climate change, for example, think that it has something to do with toxic waste dumps and the ozone hole). What predicts their belief is their politics: the farther right, the more denial.



What then should guide description if we think our audience is irrational? Would it not be madness to appeal to reason where it doesn't exist? Must description be shaped by the response we expect - the myside beliefs of those we are writing for – rather than a rational exposition of the truth we aspire to convey? If Pinker is correct and myside is today essentially a political division, unless the archivist is submerged in the politics of one side or another, he must consciously choose which bias to appeal to. On what grounds? Should our descriptions challenge the prejudices of our chosen audience or cater to them?

The answer must surely be that it remains our job to interpret and present the record objectively and truthfully, with a mature understanding of complexity and the inter-connectedness of things, as if our audience is rational (even if we begin to entertain suspicions that they aren't). Pinker points to a ground where the forces of reason and irrationality do battle. Perhaps archivists have always taken sides in such a battle. Perhaps that is what Terry Eastwood meant when he said that we are knowledge-workers concerned with more than “content to be exploited or context to be elucidated” (*Archivaria* 37, Spring 1994). Of course, a belief that one is taking the side of reason against bias and simply not bothering with the left/right divide at all might be seen as too smug by half.

PS. I wonder if Strachey had in mind Proverbs 2:4 (*search for wisdom as if it were money and hunt for it as if it were hidden treasure*) or Tolstoy (*Truth, like gold, is to be obtained not by its growth, but by washing away from it all that is not gold*).

2023, November 10:

<<The sides are the left and the right, and both sides believe in the truth but have incommensurable ideas of what the truth is.>>

Because I donated to the recent “No” campaign, I now receive emails from [Advance Australia](#). Their latest illustrates the myside thesis perfectly:

We didn't ask for this, but they're the ones who tried to divide us down the middle. And there's no escaping the reality of what they've turned our country into. **Australia is now about them versus us.** On one side, the political, media and corporate elites. Labor, the Greens, the Teals, the 'Liberals for Yes'. The ASX-listed companies, the universities, the mainstream media, the woke bureaucrats. On

the other side: the ordinary hard working Aussies like you who are just trying to do their best to make a living.

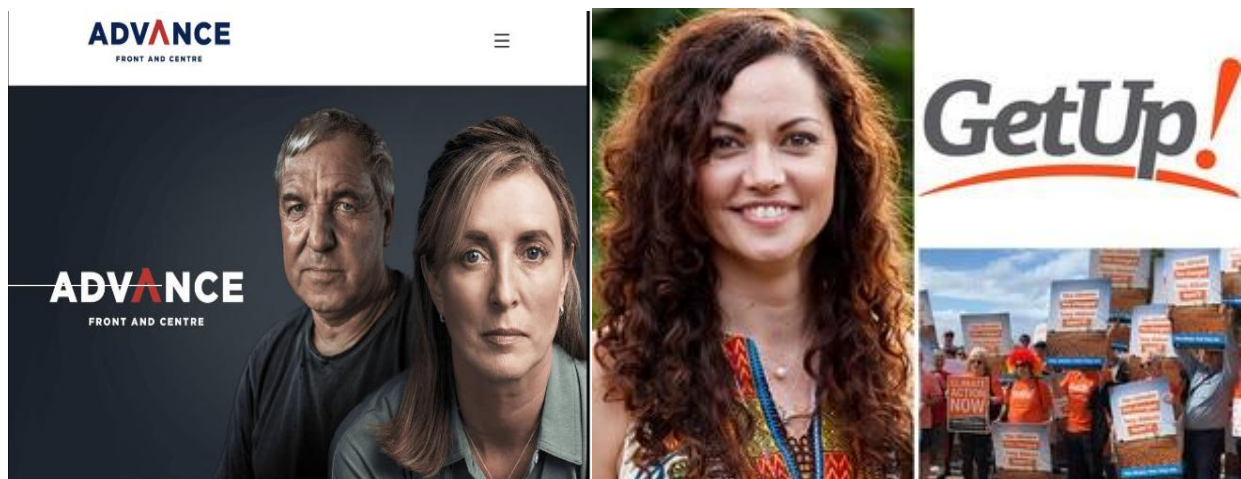
This approach will fail (I hope) because it is so obviously polemical (just like the “Yes” campaign itself). Because I think the referendum was unwisely divisive, I obviously don’t believe we should be reacting now to that error by choosing sides in the wake of its defeat. But I don’t get a sense of thoughtful reflection about what it all means from either side. Maybe that doesn’t matter. The operation of social constructionism is more subtle, measured, imperceptible - less hectoring.

Predictably, history is one of the battle-fields in the Advance campaign(s).

... [dumbing] down maths, science, reading, civics and [throwing] out the best of western culture, Australia’s Judeo-Christian heritage and ... mainstream values – and [indoctrinating] children to become political activists ...

I think that the emphasis on social virtue rather than knowledge has taken education off the rails (e.g. decolonisation) but I hear the same, shrill god-is-on-my-side certainty in this back-to-basics nonsense.

The referendum forced unthinking, benign, well-meaning mainstream Australia to take sides on indigenous affairs (unwillingly, I thought). How strange will it be (albeit unlikely) if the push to regulate misinformation likewise thrusts epistemology into the mainstream? The good news is that, if it does, mainstream has a very short memory.



2023, November 11:

<< It’s enough that the conclusion enhances the correctness or nobility of their political, religious, ethnic, or cultural tribe, >>

The other side. For reasons known only to God and the activists, I also get emails from GETUP. Here’s something of theirs from a recent missive:

... **despite the result, our movement gave it our all.** We organised and worked alongside communities to tell stories of leadership and knowledge – stories the 'no' campaign tried so hard to bury with their lies and fear-mongering ... Our movement turned out in greater force than the 2022 Federal Election – a testament to who we are and the values we strongly hold ... There's much work ahead of us. Some of the forces behind the 'no' campaign will only be emboldened by their success – especially Opposition leader Peter Dutton who has become increasingly brazen in his racist rhetoric. Amplified by the Murdoch Press and the disinformation on social media, Dutton has polluted our politics and created an environment where lies, misrepresentation – and yes, racism – go unchecked ... But the GetUp community has shown time and time again the changes we can achieve when we come together and stand up for our values. So that's what we will do, chris.

PS. ... But this is long-term work that requires stable, ongoing funding. **chris, can you consider chipping in today to power GetUp's crucial work?**

So much for reconciliation. GETUP and ADVANCE will probably never reconcile but the rest of us can. Even if we don't agree with each other we can ignore both of them and take a stand in the sensible middle. Or, is that the sensible muddle?

I wish I was as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything ([Lord Melbourne](#))

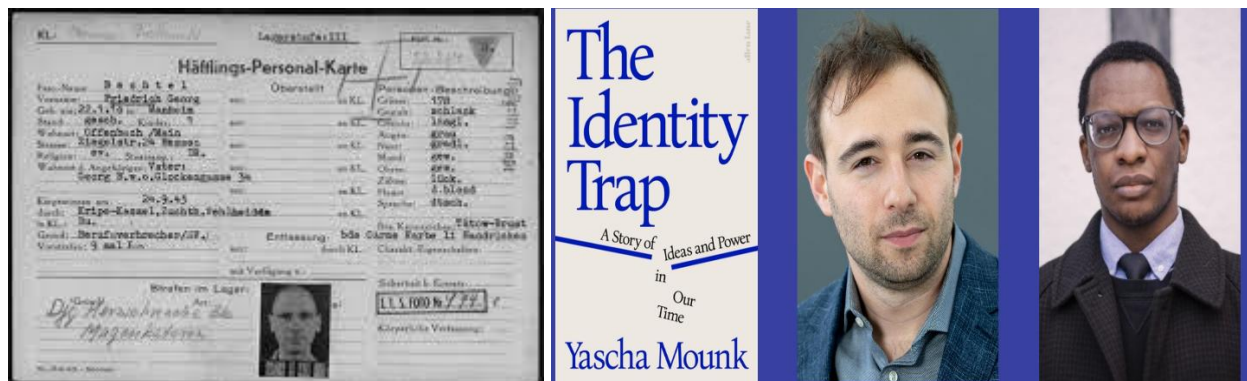
It's not what these people believe that's their problem - it's the way they believe it. Aristotle would understand: *his love of order and tidiness, and "a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction"*. What we know is an emanation of how we know it. Temperance can also be virtuous.

2023, November 19:

The Archivist's career is one of service. His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence. His Task, the Conservation of Evidence attaching to the documents committed to his charge. His Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge. [Hilary Jenkinson](#).

It is useful to reflect from time to time on the kind of dangers posed by prejudice and afterthought to the recordkeeper's Task. In *The Conversation*, Hugh Breakey [reviews](#) Yasha Mounk's new book, [The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time](#). According to Breakey, the book

... argues that the new identity-focused ideology is not simply an extension of prior social justice philosophies and civil rights movements; on the contrary, it rejects both ... To critique this perspective, Mounk must first name it. He settles on "identity synthesis", in an attempt to avoid the more common but contentious term "identity politics". His term refers to its synthesis of a range of intellectual traditions, including [postmodernism](#), [postcolonialism](#) and [critical race theory](#). These theories focus on ascriptive categories such as race, gender and sexual orientation ...



The way I know both ADVANCE and GETUP are cranks is their demand, couched in generalities, that I join them in **everything** they believe in. Because, they say, I belong with them. They can't possibly know if I will agree with them about any particular issue, but it doesn't matter. They have, both of them, substituted "values" for thought. The record (whether contemporary or historical) will tell its own story and its truth (not our values or those of anyone else) is what the recordkeeper tries to seek out. Our values, such as they are, drive us to that - not to find evidence upholding "values" but to get at the evidence. Unpredictably, the record may turn out to uphold one "side" or the other. More likely, the record will uphold neither, telling a tale that does not align exactly with what either side wants to believe. And contested interpretation(s) should be about what the record says not about what value proposition it upholds (in the opinion of the beholder).

According to Breakey, Mounk distils the identity synthesis into seven core themes.



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1. ***Scepticism about objective truth***: a postmodern wariness about “grand narratives” that extends to scepticism about scientific claims and universal values.
2. ***Discourse analysis for political ends***: a critique of speech and language to overcome oppressive structures.
3. ***Doubling down on identity***: a strategy of embracing rather than dismantling identities.
4. ***Proud pessimism***: the view that no genuine civil rights progress has been made, and that oppressive structures will always exist.
5. ***Identity-sensitive legislation***: the failure of “equal treatment” requires policies that explicitly favour marginalised groups.
6. ***The imperative of intersectionality***: effectively acting against one form of oppression requires responding to all its forms.
7. ***Standpoint theory***: marginalised groups have access to truths that cannot be communicated to outsiders.

A recordkeeper (in my view) could do a lot worse than make these seven themes a template of how **not** to go about our work. According to [Wikipedia](#), ADVANCE

... promotes family values, free markets, [meritocracy](#), business, a [Judeo-Christian](#) heritage, a strong defence force and national borders. The group believes that anthropogenic climate change is a "hoax", with current national director Liz Storer describing the teaching of the [predominant scientific view](#) as "the other side of the story being shoved down their throats. It's already happening. The left have infiltrated our education systems..."

But this familiar agenda of grubby particularities wants interpretation such as Mounk provides for identity synthesis of the underlying “values” of (for the want of a better term) [populism](#). It cannot serve the recordkeeper as a corresponding template for warning signs of intellectual landmines to be avoided. No matter, archivists in western democracies are more likely to become beguiled by the other. It would be interesting, however, to review what prevailing value-orthodoxies (if any) pose threats to recordkeeping in non-western countries. They must exist if you follow Pinker and put all this down to politics. But if, in the alternative view, value systems are culturally and socially grounded (or, heaven forbid, based in religion) the story may be otherwise.

2023, November 19:

<<[Andrew Waugh](#): I don't understand archival theory talking about 'truth' at all; certainly not as something that recordkeepers (or archivists) seek out. The characteristics of good records are authenticity, reliability, and integrity, and even then it's more hope than certainty. Truth is something that the users of our records seek ... We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions. And which questions can be asked, or answered, has implications for people today ... It is consequently worth questioning why archivists and recordkeepers make particular decisions about the retention (and its shadow, disposal/destruction) of particular classes of records.>>

These distinctions are too fine for me, I'm afraid.



- [truthfulness](#): the quality of being honest and not containing or telling any lies
- [authenticity](#): the quality of being real or true
- [reliability](#): the quality of being able to be trusted or believed because of working or behaving well
- [integrity](#): the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change



Any words can, of course, be invested with professional meanings and thus converted into terms of art to prove any conclusion you choose. If archivists choose to reason their way out of truthfulness by adopting specialised definitions of authenticity, reliability, and integrity to mean something else, a simple syllogism will do the job. But archivists may, in the alternative, assign a professional meaning to "truth" and say that the record is true when its authenticity, reliability, and integrity are established and defended. This is not to say that its contents are therefore true (that is, truly, for others to determine) but only that it can be trusted in the context of the meaning that the archivist strives to discern and describe. What worth will that meaning have if it is not true (even if it is only understood to be true more in hope than certainty)?

We are not alone in wrestling with these questions:

... documentary evidence has been recognised by most legal systems and scientific researchers as a highly reliable conduit to the truth, because, placed in its contexts (be they administrative/judicial, provenancial, procedural, documentary or technological), it shows the relationship between a fact to be proven and the fact that proves it. Lately, though, the public appears to disregard this fact infrastructure in favour not only of information coming from more easily accessible sources, like social media, but also of its own feelings and opinions ...

... Records and archives professionals have in the past provided a reasonable guarantee of the accuracy, reliability and authenticity of the documentary evidence for which they are responsible. However, the phenomena described above have been so highly politicized that reliance on records and archives as primary sources of evidence seems hopelessly mired in partisanship, while it becomes increasingly unclear who is responsible for the truthfulness of information circulated through the news or social media, which we know to be filtered in order to reinforce members' beliefs and those of their friends. Contributing to this situation, the creation and maintenance of records is falling victim to politicians and administrators who fear being held accountable for their actions ...

... Most of the literature emphasizes the important role of critical thinking and media/information literacy in fighting misinformation, and argues that librarians and other information professionals have the key responsibility of serving as impartial mediators, educating the public on how to think critically about information presented to them and understand the inherent and explicit biases of those who create and disseminate information, and promoting the importance to democracy of facts and evidence ... The literature acknowledges that any collection is "filtered," but argues that the ethics and professional skills of information professionals mitigate the risk of extreme bias.

... what can records and archives professionals do? The obvious answer is: re-establish the lost trust in the fact infrastructure provided by archives. What does trust involve? ... InterPARES Trust (ITrust), an international multidisciplinary research project focused on the trustworthiness of records in the cloud environment, defines trust as "confidence of one party in another, based on an alignment of value systems with respect to specific actions or benefits, and involving a relationship of voluntary vulnerability, dependence, and reliance, based on risk assessment." Substantially, trust involves acting without the knowledge needed to act, by substituting the information that one does not have with other information, e.g. the testimony of witnesses, oral tradition, records, or archival institutions

... To counteract misinformation and disinformation and make again of records and archives the centerpiece of what the public will regard as the best evidence of facts and actions and the most effective instrument of accountability, records and archives professionals must do much more. They need to develop tools to "nudge" people towards their infrastructure for documentary truth (recordkeeping and preservation systems), even if it means slicing and dicing the related information for targeted audiences, just like Facebook does. They have to create different blueprints for characterizing their infrastructure to potential users, just like Google does. Finally, they need to design and implement capabilities enabling people to easily trace, access, and assess records in context click after click, fast and easily, just like Wikipedia



Journeys Without End

does. Most importantly, they need to do all the above ethically, on the basis of a true understanding of the facts and of a willingness to let them speak for themselves ... What is relevant to professionals in the digital online environment is rather “responsibility,” which can be enforced through legislation and regulations. A “duty to document” one’s action, ensconced in legislation, might be able to do just that, to require administrators of all kinds, including records managers and archivists, to record all their actions and decisions, especially when it comes to providing access to the information they hold in trust. Only then will the public rediscover that records and archives are the necessary instruments for unveiling and denouncing misinformation and disinformation and get to the truth.

Luciana Duranti [Of Truth, Evidence, and Trust: Records and Archives in the Era of Misinformation and Disinformation -- pre-print \(2020\)](#)

PS The *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic) was the first archival legislation in Australia to impose on government officials a duty to “cause to be made and kept full and accurate records” (s.13)

2023, November 20:

<<Any words can, of course, be invested with professional meanings and thus converted into terms of art to prove any conclusion you choose ... archivists may ... assign a professional meaning to "truth" and say that the record is true when its authenticity, reliability, and integrity are established and defended ...>>

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’ [Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass](#)

<<... They need to develop tools to “nudge” people towards their infrastructure for documentary truth (recordkeeping and preservation systems), even if it means slicing and dicing the related information for targeted audiences, just like Facebook does. They have to create different blueprints for characterizing their infrastructure to potential users, just like Google does. Finally, they need to design and implement capabilities enabling people to easily trace, access, and assess records in context click after click, fast and easily, just like Wikipedia does ... >>

In the US, they have an online tool (at a price) called [TruthFinder](#)

...You can search for nearly anyone in the United States by name, phone number, address, or email address. In minutes, TruthFinder crawls through billions of public records from all over the United States and compiles this information in one easy-to-read report. You can access contact information, criminal and arrest records, assets, bankruptcy information and liens, licenses, social media profiles, location information and history, and other public records through TruthFinder ... When you activate a search, TruthFinder pays a fee to access these databases and then pulls all of the data about your search subject out of the database and into one digestible report ... TruthFinder is legit. We have thousands of positive reviews and an A+ rating from the BBB ... TruthFinder aggregates public records from federal, state, county, and city databases ... To access this prior to websites like TruthFinder, you would have to travel to a courthouse, request a file, and wait for an administrator to find it. And that’s just one record! ... TruthFinder provides detailed information in our people reports and [Dark Web Monitoring](#) to our members. Dark Web Monitoring scans the Dark Web in search of your personal information (i.e. emails, passwords, Social Security numbers, etc). If you find your information online, it’s possible you were targeted in a data breach — and you can take steps to protect your data before it’s auctioned off to an identity thief online. So you’re a lot safer using TruthFinder than you are without it! ...

<< We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions. >>

Not sure it would be all that easy to “nudge” people to the truth about climate change.



2023, November 21:

Users of TruthFinder are invited to trust aggregated results on the basis of two assurances:

- The information is sourced from reliable origins (public records)
- The gatekeeper can be trusted to relay it honestly (“Truthfinder is legit”)

This effectively eliminates interpretation on the part of convinced users. It works because the data and the results are both formatted (“structured” I believe the IT folk say) so the record, i.e. the information derived from the record, speaks for itself (or as near as all get out). The content requires no context on the part of an optimistic consumer.

But as a rule unstructured records don’t speak for themselves. They have to be interpreted. It is the users’ job to interpret the content (as best they may) and to evaluate the reliability of sources in which it is found but it is our job to discern and defend (i.e. interpret) the “truth” of those sources whose content they are interrogating. Trustworthiness and contextual meaning are our business. Earning the users’ trust in that role (as truth-tellers ourselves) and by extension their trust in the sources we sustain is much more intricate than crawling the net or just aiding or hindering in some passive and minimalist way.



PS Bearman used to argue that his idea for an MEO (metadata-encapsulated-object) provided for a kind of record that could speak for itself – i.e. one that carried its own “description” along with it. I disputed this with him, arguing that no record stands alone, that no record can be wholly self-referential as to its relationships with events, circumstances, and other records or with contextuality. Hence the abiding need for recordkeepers. However much is inscribed there always remains some ambient symbiosis. Taxonomists live in the vain hope that some universal codification of meaning (and some standardised ordering of relationship-types) can eliminate further interpretation. I hold to the other view although I concede that technology (or even advances in non-technological methods) may and do change the way in which we satisfy this abiding need – but without eliminating it altogether.

2023, November 22:

<<We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions>>

<<Earning the users’ trust in that role (as truth-tellers ourselves) and by extension their trust in the sources we sustain is much more intricate than crawling the net or just aiding or hindering in some passive and minimalist way>>

Lest anyone suppose that fake news is a recent phenomenon, consider the rise of the political newsletter in 17th century England. They have continued (more or less, in one form or another) ever since – partial, partisan, and opinionated. And the political newsletter continued an even earlier polemical tradition from the field of religion. There is a direct line to Sky-After-Dark and weapons-of-mass-destruction.

One example is *Mercurius Civicus: London’s Intelligencer, or, Truth impartially related from thence to the whole Kingdome to prevent miſ-information*. The genre reached a frenzy

at the turn of the century, engaging the talents of luminaries such as Swift, Defoe, Addison, and Steele.

... Pamphlets such as the Royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* and the Parliament-supporting *Mercurius Britannicus* brought the conflict into print by aiming to score propaganda victories ... *Mercurius Civicus* was a London newsbook published between 1643 and 1646 ... its author is uncertain, although he is widely believed to have been Richard Collings ... whilst Collings spent much of his time attacking the Royalist paper *Mercurius Aulicus*, there was no love lost between him and his fellow Parliamentarian authors. Usually he merely accused them of inaccuracy, but he went as far as charging Humphrey Blundon and his *Speciall Passages* with Royalist sympathies ... Neither was Collings averse to including his own editorial on a variety of subject matter. In particular he was prone to outbursts of religious diatribe against Catholics and non-conformists ... However he declared that 'I delight not to rake in the Dunghill of their errors. I shall therefore leave them to be corrected and suppressed by lawfull Authority' ...



Newspapers are generally classed as 'ephemera': their existence is fleeting and the survival of a particular edition is not guaranteed. We owe the survival of a large swathe of 1640s news output to [George Thomason](#) (d.1666), who began collecting printed items as England, Scotland and Ireland fell into a state of war in the late 1630s and early 1640s, and continued collecting throughout that decade and into the Interregnum ... his collection was at risk of destruction by the authorities on numerous occasions ... After his death the pamphlets made their way through the hands of various caretakers and collectors ... Eventually in the eighteenth century it was purchased on behalf of [George III](#), who donated it to the [British Museum](#), where it stayed until [transferred to the British Library](#) in the 1970s.

... the newsbooks have never been easily available outside academia ... only being available in libraries or repositories where membership/prior booking/readers ticket is required ... poor print quality often makes them difficult to decipher with the human eye, and the age and inconsistency of the fonts makes them impossible to reliably OCR ... there are no indices ... spellings are so variable that the task of indexing could not be done by machine ... In recent years the problem of newsbook access has been somewhat alleviated by microfilm copies being made and distributed to major world libraries in the 1970s, and more recently, [PDF](#) copies of the filmed documents being made electronically ... However, as only visitors to a major national library ... or individuals with a university or research library membership, can access these electronic copies, gaining access for research purposes is still a major hurdle for the majority of non-academic researchers ... Complete transcription from the originals was the only practical route to republication, but this offered the opportunity to add explanatory footnotes and, for the first time, an index ...



Journeys Without End

Knowing the source and knowing about the source are subtle and interconnected matters. Can “historical questions” be neatly parcelled up into distinctions between the role of the curator and the role of the historian? If we could all agree about the answer to that question, or even agree about the question itself, probably. Otherwise

2024, January 2:

<<Earning the users’ trust in that role (as truth-tellers ourselves) and by extension their trust in the sources we sustain is much more intricate than crawling the net or just aiding or hindering in some passive and minimalist way>>

Belief has its attraction (what Yeats called its *terrible beauty*) and it has many guises but always without understanding or pity until it is constrained by Truth. We need to find the source of that Truth not only in the Record but also in Ourselves.

What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches. Karl A Menninger

But, for some teachers, Values trump Knowledge:

At a session I attended, the teacher-presenter, feeling she was among like-minded people, declared: ‘I’m a raging leftie. I make no secret of it’. She also confessed that: ‘I lose sleep over the political landscape.’ ... This teacher-presenter, who later told us she is part of an organised group of feminist educators, suggested that she wanted to have an influence on her students’ perspectives: ‘So, when my students do vote, it’s a good vote’. To her, this would be so ‘Australia will be saved!’ Part of her solution involved instructing her students to watch news and current affairs programmes on the ABC.

In a seminar that was supposed to be about instructing teachers on how to teach students how to analyse an argument, what this teacher-presenter was passionate about instead was influencing the ideology of her students rather than focusing on helping them to analyse with precision, reason soundly, and express themselves effectively in sentences that correctly employ a capital letter and a full stop. Listening to this lecture, I paused in my note-taking and looked around. There was not a murmur of criticism from the teachers present. If there was dissent (and I wished there was) it was undetectable. All the interactions at that seminar between this teacher-presenter and the teachers present were agreeable ...

The intolerance of the politically correct Left towards ideas other than their own has limited the subject matter that can be taught, learned or explored in high school. This intolerance has also inhibited the ways topics relevant to political correctness can be discussed or analysed. This ideological bias has also impacted significantly on assessment by influencing what is rewarded or not rewarded. What is routinely praised and rewarded in high school is student work that expresses opinions that reflect the ideological bias of the vast majority of teachers. Biased assessment that favours what is politically correct and left-wing is one of the defining features of this education system.

Mark Lopez (cf. School Sucks)

So it goes

For me, this phrase does not, as many believe, endorse resigned indifference; it expresses impotent rage. But then, in my heart and in my mind, I am an Alien living on the planet Tralfamadore. And, so I am repeatedly told, a contrarian.

My critics seem surprised when I react to being called a contrarian as if it were an appreciative criticism rather than a pejorative one. Just being contrary, I guess.

<<the abiding human instinct for severe dominion over others and the suppression of difference>>

I would **like to believe** that celebrating differences need not “spring from a common, concordant source.” But then there’s this:



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On a day early in the school year, initiate a discussion about being caring and open-minded. Set up some ground rules to create a safe environment where children can take risks. These rules can include:

- All ideas are acceptable — there are no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone may respond differently because we're all different, with different experiences and thoughts.
- No judgments (either agreeing or disagreeing) are allowed.

Ughhh!

“By the end of the day your class will have gained three important things: a greater insight into their classmates, a better understanding of diversity, and a terrific bulletin board,” says Boles.

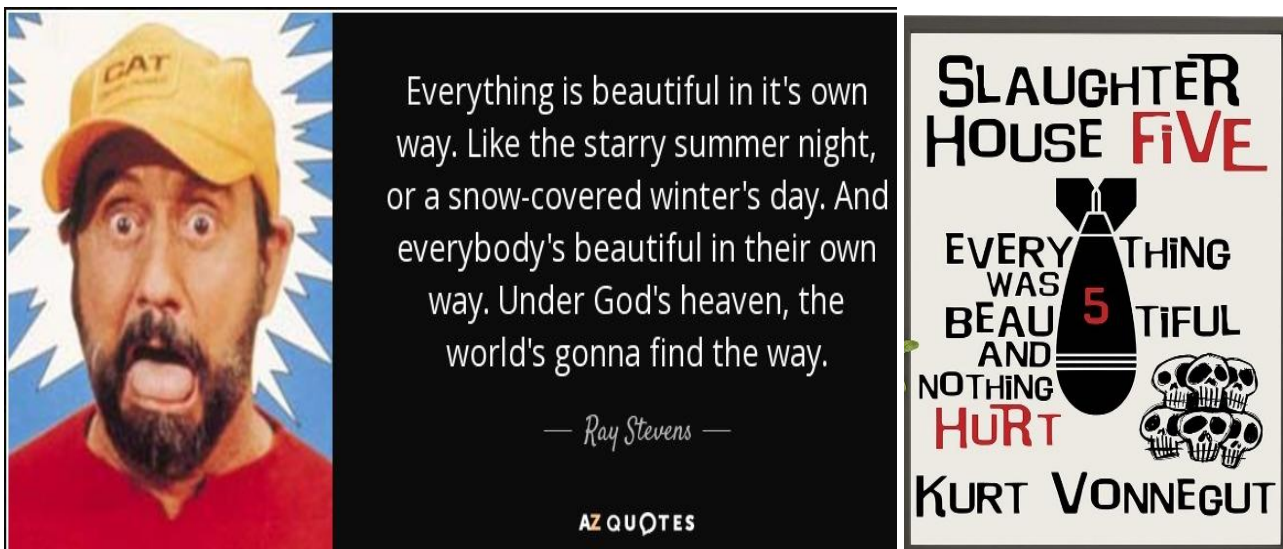
Celebration of difference is soon hijacked (in a muddle-headed way) by idealogues who can't wait to [celebrate diversity](#):

We have different backgrounds and life experiences, but we all believe in our shared values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity ... We've come a long way as a nation but there is still much more work to do. We've grown and we're increasingly not afraid of having difficult conversations about our past, present and future, of questioning our ways and acknowledging our mistakes, and finding new ways to live better, in harmony. We're working together to ensure diversity and equity are part of our everyday reality ...

It's hilarious watching politicians trip over themselves trying to square the circle of cant by respecting diversity while simultaneously celebrating “shared values”. [Harmony](#) is about both diversity and inclusiveness, it seems:

Harmony Week is an opportunity to reflect upon and celebrate our diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives ... Harmony Week is about inclusiveness, respect, and creating a sense of belonging for everyone. It is about bringing people together

From far, far in the past, I hear the strains of one of the most nauseating pop songs ever:



Everything is beautiful (in its own way)

Not the same as “[everything was beautiful and nothing hurt](#)”. Not by a long shot.

In "Slaughterhouse-Five," Kurt Vonnegut's use of the phrase "Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt" reflects the protagonist's attempt to find solace in the face of the atrocities of war and the trauma he experiences. It's a recurring refrain throughout the novel, serving as a coping mechanism for the character to find beauty and peace in a world filled with pain and suffering. Vonnegut's writing often explores the absurdity of human existence, and this line encapsulates the struggle to find meaning and beauty in a seemingly senseless and brutal world.



2024, January 12:

<< All ideas are acceptable — there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone may respond differently because we're all different, with different experiences and thoughts. No judgments (either agreeing or disagreeing) are allowed. Ughhh!>>

People who teach kids like that should be held criminally liable.

In Sydney yesterday, picked up [*The Canceling of the American Mind*](#) by Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott. Quite a good analysis of cancelation as a phenomenon practised by both Left and Right. Identifies it as a new phenomenon and blames social media as a significant cause rather than simply an instrument. I don't really agree with either of those conclusions but the argument is worth following (if only for the examples cited). I couldn't help wondering if the title was a take-off of Allan Bloom's [*Closing of the American Mind*](#) (1987).

Though you might not think it, as a child I was generally docile and biddable. I was, after all, living on the planet Tralfamadore and the affairs of earthlings were of small moment. When I was about six, my (very much) older brother brought home his first girlfriend (at any rate, the first we were allowed to see). For days, I was nagged mercilessly about how I had to be on my best behaviour, which is pretty much what I was planning to do anyway. But the nagging stirred up the Irish in me and when that happened I could be very, very naughty. Had they known me better they would have realised what a perilous road they had chosen. When the day came, I went outside as instructed, turned on the garden hose, and sprayed them through the window as they sat at tea and cakes.

In Yasha Mounk's [*The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*](#) (cf. Nov. 19) seven core themes of what he calls the identity synthesis were identified

1. **Scepticism about objective truth:** a postmodern wariness about “grand narratives” that extends to scepticism about scientific claims and universal values.
2. **Discourse analysis for political ends:** a critique of speech and language to overcome oppressive structures.
3. **Doubling down on identity:** a strategy of embracing rather than dismantling identities.
4. **Proud pessimism:** the view that no genuine civil rights progress has been made, and that oppressive structures will always exist.
5. **Identity-sensitive legislation:** the failure of “equal treatment” requires policies that explicitly favour marginalised groups.
6. **The imperative of intersectionality:** effectively acting against one form of oppression requires responding to all its forms.
7. **Standpoint theory:** marginalised groups have access to truths that cannot be communicated to outsiders.

I commented that “A recordkeeper (in my view) could do a lot worse than make these seven themes a template of how not to go about our work.” Although many disagree, I believe that these contemporary cultural challenges face us too and cannot be dealt with by the archivist's usual amiable evasion. In that spirit, Jonathan Haidt (in the foreword to *The Canceling of the American Mind* offers three Great Untruths from an earlier book ([*The Coddling of the American Mind*](#)) on which he collaborated with Lukianoff:

1. **The Untruth of Fragility:** *What doesn't kill you makes you weaker* ... If you shield your child from all dirt, germs, and viruses, you block the development of the immune system and condemn your child to a lifetime of auto-immune diseases. And if you shield your child from all risk, teasing, and exclusion you block the development of

normal social and emotional skills and condemn your child to a lifetime of ... social incompetence.

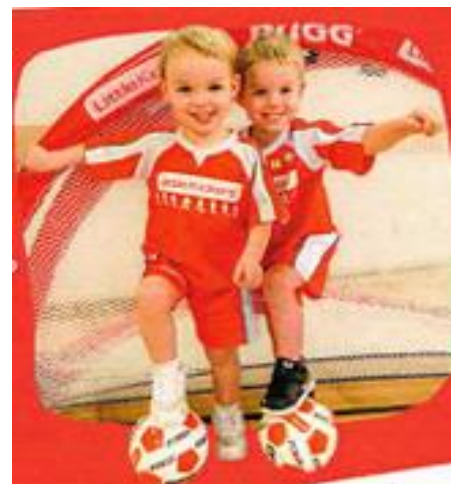
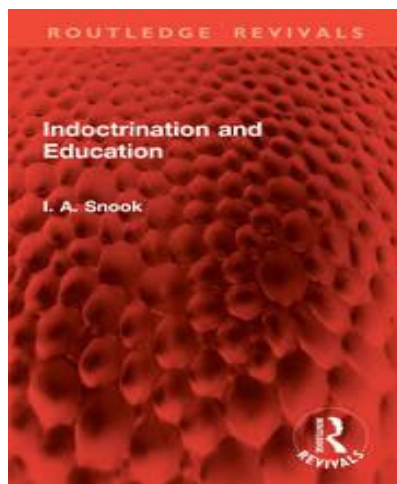
2. **The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning:** *Always trust your feelings ...* [this] is the opposite of the fundamental insight of Stoicism, Buddhism, and many other ancient traditions ... To take your own feeling of anger as evidence that somebody harmed you is one of the major cognitive distortions ...
3. **The Untruth of Us Versus Them:** *Life is a battle between good people and evil people ...* It is part of humanity's evolved tendency toward tribalism ... The last thing we need, in a complex multiethnic liberal democracy, is for educators to teach young people to divide everyone up into groups and then teach them that some groups are good, others are bad.

No.3 is very similar to Pinker's myside bias. So there we have it: the danger that [Celebrating Differences](#) (*all ideas are acceptable ... no judgements*) will morph into [Unintended Consequences](#) (*a game of mutual provocation and reciprocal outrage*). It's the paradox of the human condition: if we don't watch out we end up hating those we disagree with, even if it is a disagreement over tolerance and acceptance.

2024, January 14:

<<People who teach kids like that should be held criminally liable>>

... because it substitutes exhortation for persuasion, belief for understanding. Because there are right and wrong answers. Because judgements derive from thought as well as experience. Because, instead of nurturing developing intelligence, those people try to beguile the young with good feelings. Because it is the intellectual equivalent of “just say no to drugs” (or “just say no to pre-marital sex” for that matter). Pedagogically, it would be harmful, if it was not so futile. Based in lessons learned from actual experience of intolerance and division, the moral heft of tolerance and acceptance derives from hard-won insight, from an understanding of the **essence** of their goodness, not from the worship of totems, set up in opposition to facile **concepts** and to those you demonise for personifying them. The lie at the heart of the proposition that “all ideas are acceptable” is the acknowledged fact that some of them aren't.



Nearly every day, I visit the Leisure Centre at Woy Woy. On weekends, they have [Futsal](#): little kids, no higher than your knee, running about after balls that are almost as big as they, dressed in red-and-white uniforms with New Age names lettered on their backs: Hayley, Leo, Riley, Rocky, that sort of thing. They run about with the kind of sideways waddle you have to be very young or very old to perfect. Every now-and-then, one will take an almighty swing at a ball, miss it completely, spin like a top, and fall face-down flat to the floor. It's hilarious to watch and (in an Age of Coddling) gratifying that they have permission to make

that kind of contact with a hard wooden surface. At that age, they are almost unbreakable, it seems.



We all have to experience intolerance and division and we all have to learn how to comprehend and deal with them. Even kids. Especially kids – there few more savage arenas than the school-yard. I have never subscribed to the view that parents have the primary responsibility for social learning. Parents are often part of the problem. Mostly, kids will learn from their peers. Teachers can only open up possibilities, often possibilities that parents don't approve of (a difficult and dangerous task). Those possibilities can (unfortunately) include an escape into a world of fantasy or (more responsibly) into one of understanding – what it means and how to deal with it on a realistic level.

All my adult life, people have been telling me that cognition doesn't work with non-academic kids. As if thought and understanding were limited to the intellectually gifted. Well, I've stood in front of class-rooms in which many of the un-gifted sat. And I can tell you this: exhortation to virtue and denying them the power of judgement doesn't work either.

2024, April 2:

<<The terms disinformation and misinformation are an excellent example of using spurious dichotomies to control the narrative. In my view the government is quite correct to ignore the distinction. AW 9 July 2023>>

Be that as it may. I have a good example of the distinction at a local level. Somehow, I am on a mailing list entitled “*Your Narara Neighbours*”. Mostly, the posts are local news and gossip, inanities, and the occasional rant. This morning one of my neighbours posted this:

Just found out Woolworth refusing to stock Anzac biscuits on Anzac Day. Very unaustralian. They have nostalgic memories.

I suspect he may have found it out on one of the more lunatic social media sites but no citation is given. Don't know about Anzac Day itself, but the Woollies site has several adverts for the patriotic bikkies:

- [Family 24 Pack \\$6.50](#)
- [Bakers Finest RSL Anzac Biscuits \\$3.40](#)
- [Greens Traditional Anzac Biscuits \\$3.50](#)

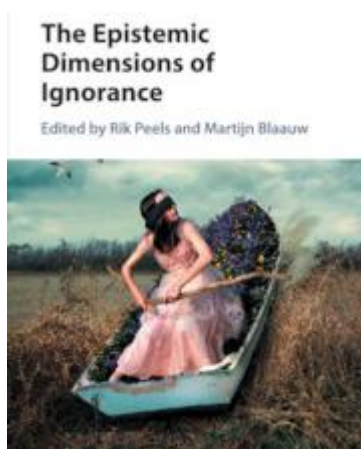
My neighbour may be one of the unenlightened who hate Woollies for being too “woke”, but I suspect that this posting is more likely an example of misinformation (stupidly giving out false facts w/o an intention to deceive) rather than disinformation (intentionally lying for some ulterior purpose). It is indeed a spurious distinction if your intent is to suppress both. So far as I am aware the revised [Misinformation Bill](#) which our reckless Government is pursuing despite strong opposition (surprising to me because Australians don't really care about free speech, but vested interests are involved) still fails to make the distinction and the evil [ACMA](#) sits salivating on the sidelines waiting to be given its expanded powers.



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When I say I hate Israel for its persecution of the Palestinians over many decades, I am accused of being antisemitic. Some who say that genuinely believe it to be true even though there is no logical or semantic connection between hatred of Israel (for what it does) and hatred of Jews (for who they are) – and no basis for confusing two entirely different kinds of entity: Israel (a state) and Jews (an identity). The charge of antisemitism is an opinion expressed as a fact. I would not, of course, wish to deny anyone the right to hold and express such an opinion.

An argument over whose facts are better founded would likely lead to fresh insights on both sides and possibly reinterpretation and modification of the opinions based thereon, provided such an argument were conducted openly and with sincere intent. Misinformation honestly (if mistakenly) held and given out by persons willing and able to change their minds can be a healthy and righteous part of discourse. But when malign intent is in play this cannot be so. **Intent** lies at the heart of any hope we may hold that disputed facts can lead to enlightenment and progress (and **Belief** is death to Truth).



Ignorance



Anzac Biscuits

Even though I am against trying to suppress any opinion (regardless of intent) I hold that the distinction is anything but spurious. I believe the descriptive archivist needs to be skilled in understanding and expressing disputed facts and courageous in exposing and decrying falsification. Telling the difference may not be easy but regarding the distinction as spurious is not a good place to start.

**<<... no basis for confusing two entirely different kinds of entity:
Israel (a state) and Jews (an identity) ...>>**

Entity-types are too little studied and understood by archivists. The “State” as we understand it now (an understanding that informs, often uncritically, our descriptions of “creators”) is an entity-type that is largely of European origin and relatively recent.

***5a** a politically organized body of people usually occupying a definite territory especially : one that is sovereign.*

The term peoples instances a broader entity-type into which the State can be enfolded.

***5** a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, that typically have common language, institutions, and beliefs, and that often constitute a politically organized group*

Non-human “agency” is a whole other issue that archivists need to think more deeply about in relation to provenance (I love the idea that ignorance can be a non-human agency) - to say nothing of how other aspects of provenance may be conferred apart from “creation”.

The Roman Empire was arguably a State (though some historians might dispute this). The successor “states” are sometimes misleadingly called “tribes” or “peoples” to get away from



Journeys Without End

confusion caused by modern terminology. After the fall, only the surviving Eastern Empire and in the Muslim world could political entities be so described. Endless discussion could be had about the state of affairs at various times in Africa, Asia, and the Sub-Continent (what price Shaka, Kublai Khan, and Tamerlane?)

Thus, Martyn Rady [*The Middle Kingdoms: A New History of Central Europe*](#) (2023):

In the aftermath of the Avars' defeat, new Slavonic rulers carved out semi-independent principalities. We know of at least four of these ... Some of these early formations were of Avar origin, set up to facilitate tribute payment, but others were Frankish marcher lordships, under Slavonic leadership. Historians seek to plot their location on maps, but they are better thought of more as dukedoms than as duchies – as groups of people who acknowledged an overlord or duke, and not as defined spaces with fixed borders. (p.42)

2024, April 3:

<<I love the idea that ignorance can be a non-human agency>>

Maybe the notion that Ignorance can be an agency of creation is a bit of a stretch. But a bulletin board that tells you that Woolworths is planning to cancel Anzac biscuits keeps the idea in play. Perhaps as an ambient entity? And we may have to develop our context control entity-models further to include other non-human agencies of creation. Artificial Intelligence anyone?

2024, April 5

<<a bulletin board that tells you that Woolworths is planning to cancel Anzac biscuits keeps the idea in play>>

It's all about the tins, apparently ...

Woolworths has responded to outrage over the supermarket giant's decision to not stock RSL Australia's trademark limited-edition Anzac Day biscuit tins this year ... The supermarket usually sells the biscuit tins, which feature unique designs commemorating different wars and have become a collector item, but have controversially opted not to sell the iconic tins this year ... In response to the criticism, Woolworths said it had opted to simply support RSL Australia in other ways and that they were still selling the same biscuits, however, without the tin ... An RSL Victoria spokesperson backed Woolworths, reaffirming their continued support for the RSL over the last decade ...

My Narara neighbour must have been having a [Miss Groby](#) moment.



Here Lies Miss Groby



Records Tower, Dublin Castle

Reminds me a little of the [State Paper Office](#) (Ireland) once located in a tower at Dublin Castle. As I have posted previously, I visited there when I was studying in London in the 1970s – before it was merged with the Irish National Archives and [the records](#) were relocated. When I saw them, they were on shelves around circular walls. There is still a part of the Castle known as the [Records Tower](#) and I suppose that may have been what I saw.



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Anyway, I carried away the impression that the records were being preserved in the very place at which they were created and I thought that was enchanting because the repository was part of the record - a kind of archival metonymy achieved by maintaining both the container and the thing contained.

2024, June 28:

<<Nov., 2023: It's not what these people believe that's their problem - it's the way they believe it. Aristotle would understand: his love of order and tidiness, and "a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction". What we know is an emanation of how we know it ... It is useful to reflect from time to time on the kind of dangers posed by prejudice and afterthought to the recordkeeper's Task ... The way I know both ADVANCE and GETUP are cranks is their demand, couched in generalities, that I join them in everything they believe in ... They have, both of them, substituted "values" for thought. The record (whether contemporary or historical) will tell its own story and its truth (not our values or those of anyone else) is what the recordkeeper tries to seek out ... And contested interpretation(s) should be about what the record says not about what value proposition it upholds (in the opinion of the beholder)>>

On 8 August 1776 the political economist Adam Smith visited his great friend David Hume at his home in Edinburgh ... For much of his life, Hume had held that the great achievement of eighteenth-century Britain was that its religious institutions ... had been replaced by more tolerant and calmer instances of Christian commitment ... but ordinary Europeans still faced sustained periods during which fanatics justified actions and laws condoning and encouraging civil and international bloodshed. These movements often justified themselves and generated zealous followers by defining their mission along explicitly war-like terms against those with an alternative faith. The results were often the collapse of pacific modes of behaviour and crisis among communities suddenly overrun by men and women with extreme and uncompromising beliefs ...

Identifying threats that might transform superstition into fanaticism was, Hume argued, a central duty of the philosopher ... And as he approached death ... he had concluded that new forms of superstition had formed new fanaticisms of unparalleled power. Hume believed that this superstition stemmed not from the religious realm, but from that of secular belief ...

According to its advocates, the Enlightenment ended. Strategies for enlightenment had largely vanquished religious fanaticism ... But in the final decades of the eighteenth century, they believed that they ultimately failed in the maintenance of toleration and peace ... For many, including Hume, Smith, Gibbon and Burke, the most significant failure was in suppressing ideological zealots whose forebears were deemed to have been responsible for the religious wars ... The French Revolution was, in fact, more of a response to the anticipations of imminent crisis; it was their effect rather than their cause ...

Once again we live in a world that has suffered an end of enlightenment, as the strategies formulated after 1945 to prevent civil and international violence, fanaticism and chaos from breaking out again have gradually failed or been abandoned ... there is little purpose in emphasizing alone the path of progress. It is much more important to foresee crisis ... Equally, there is little to be gained from turning against history, censoring and condemning national histories for being responsible for the ills of the present. History alone supplies answers, rejecting the past for its flaws is to go blindly into the future.

One of the remarkable facts about the post-1945 period was a renaissance of research concerned with the eighteenth century ... Rather than turning against European history [scholars] sought lessons for the present in the history of fanaticism and the strategies of enlightenment that were formulated to prevent it. We need to follow them and battle for enlightenment anew.

Richard Whatmore, [*The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis*](#) (2023)



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Different take on this in [The Guardian](#), perhaps illustrating some of the dangers in transposing the past into the present. As [Chesterton reminds us](#), it is only human nature and moral standards that abide. Everything else is contingent.

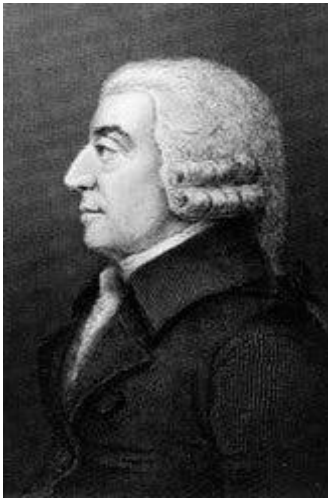
2024, June 29

PS I imagine Hume's apprehension of impending dissolution was not mitigated when he gave refuge to John Jacques Rousseau – [the house guest from hell](#).

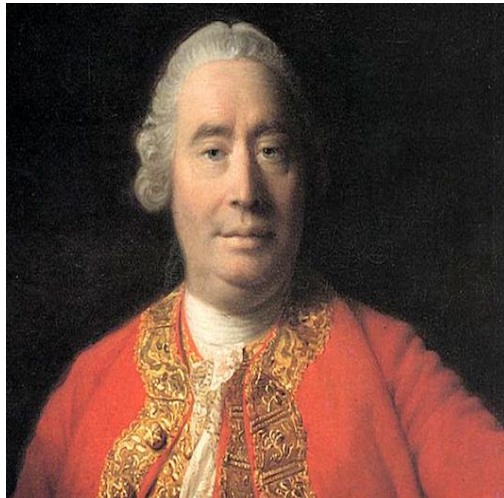
I love philosophy, it's philosophers I can't stand.

Enlightened enemies:

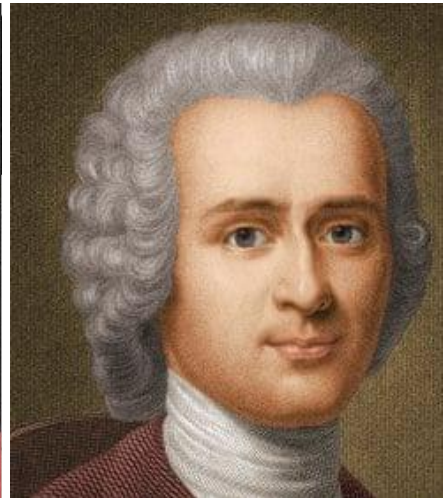
“Hume was a combination of reason, doubt and scepticism. Rousseau was a creature of feeling, alienation, imagination and certainty.”



[Adam Smith](#)



[David Hume](#)



[Jean Jacques Rousseau](#)

2024, September 11

<<14 Jan., 2024: We all have to experience intolerance and division and we all have to learn how to comprehend and deal with them.

Even kids. Especially kids – there few more savage arenas than the school-yard. I have never subscribed to the view that parents have the primary responsibility for social learning. Parents are often part of the problem. Mostly, kids will learn from their peers. Teachers can only open up possibilities ...>>

Now they're planning to [ban kids from social media](#). Terrible idea. How else can they learn about life's terrors? It's some of the adults that need to be banned ... Nah! I'm not in favour of that either. How depressing that this terrible (and popular) idea is being supported by both sides of politics.

<<10 July, 2023: Social media, here and overseas, and mainstream media for that matter, are already “[self-censoring](#)” even w/o the kind of statutory powers Albo wants to confer on ACMA (and that ACMA desperately wants to have). This and similar regimes deliberately create uncertainty in the publishers and platform providers who then self-censor detrimentally (in a climate of fear beloved by all authoritarians) ... The most serious consequence of suppressing some content is that we lose faith in the rest>>

The evils of uncertainty: in the sources (about what is allowed) and in us (about what to believe). This is so regardless of whether the uncertainty is created deliberately or unthinkingly.



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What kind of possibilities can you credibly open up for kids when they know they're being shut out from the same information you can see? Kids (some of them) always get access to forbidden fruit (smokes, booze, drugs, knives, porn ...). A ban on social media just adds to the list. You know they've gone too far when information is added to the catalogue of what is impermissible. Forbidding it will make it more attractive and the temptation will be almost irresistible. Kids who don't will be up against those of their peers who do and will learn to distrust the teachers who are complicit in the expurgation. And what a recipe for conflict, confusion, and dysfunction that will be.

PS. I think Donald Trump has done one good thing. His lies have generated a debate amongst the Virtuous about the nature of Truth and Fact (core concepts in the r/keeping mission in my view). I can't imagine that happening otherwise in the confusions attendant upon post-modern relativism. The fact that he is still acceptable to large numbers of people (the "Deplorables" as Hillary Clinton would have it) is enough to put the fear of God into anyone. But I don't think the fear has yet established standards that are being even-handedly applied by the Virtuous to voices they find more congenial.

PPS. To anticipate: As I've explained before, I'm not against post-modernism, just the dumbed down version of it popularly used to discredit the idea of Truth.

2024, September 12:

<<Nov., 2023: It's not what these people believe that's their problem - it's the way they believe it. Aristotle would understand: his love of order and tidiness, and "a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction". What we know is an emanation of how we know it ... It is useful to reflect from time to time on the kind of dangers posed by prejudice and afterthought to the recordkeeper's Task ... The way I know both ADVANCE and GETUP are cranks is their demand, couched in generalities, that I join them in everything they believe in ... They have, both of them, substituted "values" for thought. The record (whether contemporary or historical) will tell its own story and its truth (not our values or those of anyone else) is what the recordkeeper tries to seek out ... And contested interpretation(s) should be about what the record says not about what value proposition it upholds (in the opinion of the beholder)>>

<<2 Jan., 2024: Though you might not think it, as a child I was generally docile and biddable. I was, after all, living on the planet Tralfamadore and the affairs of earthlings were of small moment ...>>

Aliens, living on the planet Tralfamadore, have (I believe) an edge when it comes to r/keeping. We can more easily assume a mantle of professional impartiality. Information is not abeyant, it is red hot. Those who handle it have special responsibilities and vulnerabilities. We are on a par with teachers in that respect. When we return from the barricades, turbulent and bloody, knowledge workers must then assume, along with a grey dustcoat, a disdain for faction - for the sentiments of the Virtuous and the Deplorables (cf. Acton) – and an indifference to the approval or disapproval of the State. That disdain, that indifference, gives knowledge workers the Teflon gloves needed to handle the information when we step beyond the protective glass and into the furnace of deliberation. Teachers too.

13 November, 2019

'Overcrowded', 'overloaded', 'cluttered', 'pressure to cover large numbers of dot-points', and 'promoting a tick-box approach to teaching' – these are just some of the responses to the [NSW Curriculum] Review from teachers, leaders and professional associations when asked for feedback on the current NSW syllabuses ... Exactly how to create a less crowded curriculum (and, in turn, free up time for both teachers and students) is a topic for further consultation, and the Review includes eight questions for exploration in this area. However, it suggests the starting point should be to identify what's at the heart of each



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discipline – the core knowledge, concepts and principles. ‘These include disciplinary ways of thinking and working and the “big ideas” around which less central detail can be organised and understood. There may be relatively few of these,’ it says.

24 July, 2024

An overhauled NSW primary school curriculum will tackle some of the thorniest issues parents face: screen time v physical playtime and consent ... the updated syllabus is the biggest shake-up in three decades and provides more clarity for teachers and ensures children learn concepts and skills in the right order before applying them. Students will learn about graphs in mathematics, for example, before then using those graphs in geography ...

... a major change in the curriculum is the focus on knowledge, or "explicit teaching," as opposed to a "skill-based" curriculum ... The separate subjects of history and geography will be replaced by one: human society and its environment. This new course will also include compulsory civics and citizenship content that spans democratic roles and the history of voting in a democracy ...

For the first time, students will learn about a healthy use of digital services and the importance of balancing screen time with outdoor physical activity ... The creative arts syllabus will see its first update in 24 years, according to the government ... There will be more hands-on experiences outdoors with animals, habitats and ecosystem, while indoors, students will be learning about solar systems, climate, energy, food chains and electricity.

30 July, 2024

There were two major education developments last week that deserve credit. First, the long-awaited launch of the revised NSW state curriculum makes what teachers are expected to teach clearer, and is more supportive of effective teaching practice. Add to this NSW Education Minister Prue Car's call to better identify children who might struggle with maths early in school ...

Curriculum reform is regularly on policymakers' wish lists, but it can be messy, requires compromise with the sector, and takes a long time to make an impact. The previous federal government's national curriculum review became encumbered by predictable history and culture war debates ...

Despite the challenges, policy commitment on curriculum is worth the effort, because it can meaningfully improve the work of teachers. The work of the NSW Education Standards Authority in redirecting and improving the curriculum review is commendable. Previous policy favoured a flexible approach to the curriculum where teachers are left to interpret and adapt content. But there's now greater emphasis toward explicit and consistent definitions and guidance for what students should know and how teachers can best ensure they're succeeding. This 'knowledge-rich' approach is consistent with the world's best and follows the recent path from English school system reformers ...

It's no secret that Australia's education outcomes have generally disappointed in recent years. On some measures, such as the OECD-run Program for International Student Assessment, Australian students have suffered among the steepest and most consistent declines in achievement. On others, such as our NAPLAN tests, students' results have largely been flat ... Australia's education ministers have generally scored a mixed report card, but the nation would benefit greatly from leadership on policy that can lift outcomes. Will other Australian education ministers rise to this challenge?

The Guardian 11 Sep., 2024

The new [proposed crime of doxing](#) would be punishable by up to seven years in jail for targeting someone for their race, religion or sexuality but Labor has backed down on its proposal to outlaw hate speech and vilification against minority groups. Malicious release of personal data would be criminalised under a bill to be introduced by the attorney general, [Mark Dreyfus](#), on Thursday along with a separate bill implementing the first tranche of privacy reforms ... But despite [promising a bill to criminalise](#) vilification and hate speech more generally – such as inciting hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule – the government has dropped the commitment. Instead the government will criminalise



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incitement to serious acts of violence or threats of violence, likely aligning sexuality and gender with existing protections for race ...

The Albanese government [announced its intention to crack down on doxing in February](#) in response to the publication of the log of a WhatsApp group chat of more than 600 Jewish Australians. The proposal immediately sparked controversy, with the anti-fascist research group the [White Rose Society warning](#) it could be weaponised against journalists and their sources. Others including the writer and commentator Clementine Ford noted republication of the initial WhatsApp leak had contributed to discourse about “coordinated efforts ... to silence Palestinian activists and their allies” ...

As Labor broadens its crackdown on big tech, including a proposal to ban children from social media apps, the communications minister, Michelle Rowland, will introduce [its bill on misinformation and disinformation](#) which has been debated in exposure draft form for more than a year. That bill allows the Australian Communications and Media Authority to create an enforceable industry code if industry self-regulation fails to address the threat posed by misinformation and disinformation. The law would apply to material that is “reasonably verifiable as false, misleading or deceptive and reasonably likely to cause or contribute to serious harm” ... The government has ... amended the bill so that electoral and government content is no longer exempt, while the religious exemption has been clarified. The bill does not apply to satire, parody, news content, academic, artistic, scientific or religious material ...

ABC News

... When the draft bill was released early last year, it was met with criticism from both sides, including from the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, who took issue with how key terms were defined, the “low” threshold for “harm” and placing the power to determine what is censored content with one body.

The opposition also opposed the draft bill, raising concerns about government overreach. Ms Rowland this week denied that the laws would hinder freedom of speech ... The shadow minister for communications, David Coleman, on Thursday said the opposition was yet to see the updated bill but that the previously released draft legislation was “grotesque”. “It was one of the most appalling pieces of legislation ever put forward by an Australian government,” he told ABC’s Afternoon Briefing ...

2024, September 13:

**<<Aliens, living on the planet Tralfamadore, have (I believe)
an edge when it comes to r/keeping. We can more easily
assume a mantle of professional impartiality.>>**

One of the more distressing results of getting old is watching how ideas morph and deviate from what they once were.

It's happened with *free speech* which was a left-wing issue when I was a lad and is now a right-wing mantra.

And I can still remember when [libertarians](#) were harmless cranks standing on soap boxes in the Sydney Domain on Sunday afternoons.

I used to go there when I should have been surfing.





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A useful antidote, though, to the theology (pre-Vatican II) I was being taught at [Marist Bros High School, Darlinghurst](#).



[MBHSD](#)



[1963: LC \(me, front row centre\)](#)

Br Sebastian's case

About the middle of last November His Eminence wrote a letter to the Br Provincial stating that some of the Brothers in Sydney were guilty of Modernism; he especially named Br Sebastian and requested the Provincial to remove him to some other sphere of labour, threatening that if his request should not be complied with he would put all St Joseph's College under an interdict. His Eminence gave no specific instance of what he considered to be Modernism.

At the time Br Sebastian resided at the Brother's residence within the Cathedral grounds and had done very efficient teaching at the Brother's High School. Though no attempt was made to prove the charge of Modernism Br Provincial was desirous of conforming to His Eminence's wishes. But not clearly understanding what His Eminence meant by another sphere of labour he deputed Br Victor and Br Denis to interview His Eminence for the purpose of getting an explanation.



His Eminence on hearing the nature of their visit to him simply repeated the threat of interdictum and abruptly left the room.

At very great inconvenience the Br Provincial then removed Br Sebastian to Mittagong a place 78 miles distant from Sydney and where Br Sebastian could render the Institute no service as a teacher.

Note: If you don't know, [Modernism](#) (of which poor Br Sebastian was accused in 1911 - a bit before my time) was the name given by the Church to ideas they didn't approve of during the [reign of terror](#) conducted under Pius X (subsequently canonised), a campaign against [relativism](#) seeking to take the Church "[out of history](#)". What that Pope and his collaborator, Merry del Val, would have made of post-modernism doesn't bear thinking about.

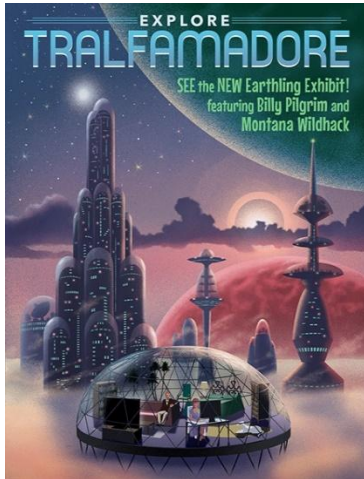
[The Mises Institute](#) describes itself as [libertarian](#) ... In 2003, [Chip Berlet](#) of the SPLC described it as "a major center promoting libertarian political theory and the Austrian School of free market economics", while also assessing that it favors a "Darwinian view of society in which elites are seen as natural and any intervention by the government on behalf of social justice is destructive". The Mises Institute favors the methodology of [Misesian praxeology](#) ("the logic of human action"),^[30] which holds that economic science is [deductive](#) rather than [empirical](#) ... it opposes the [mathematical modeling](#) and [hypothesis-testing](#) used to justify knowledge in [neoclassical economics](#). Misesian economics is a form



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of [heterodox economics](#).^{[7][8][9]} It is distinct from that of other [Austrian economists](#), including Hayek and those associated with [George Mason University](#)

John Foster "Chip" Berlet is an American [investigative journalist](#), research analyst, [photojournalist](#), scholar, and activist specializing in the study of [extreme right-wing movements in the United States](#). He also studies the spread of [conspiracy theories](#) ... Berlet has regularly appeared in the media to discuss extremist news stories. He was a senior analyst at [Political Research Associates](#) (PRA), a non-profit group that tracks right-wing networks.



Tralfamadore



Ludwig von Mises

The Stewards of History Desperately Need Mises Jonathan Lawler 10 Sep., 2024

... archivists surprisingly accept and promote dangerous and intolerant collectivist ideology ... [They] should turn from this path and embrace Mises's insights into peaceful social cooperation and tolerance ... Over the past few years, the national professional organization for archivists in the United States, the *Society of American Archivists* (SAA), has uncritically embraced a conception of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) that is hostile to dissenting voices ...

... SAA ... encouraged member conformity through DEI events and electing ideologically cookie-cutter candidates to leadership positions. From January 2021, candidates proved their DEI bona fides through required 400–1,000 word [diversity statements](#). Candidates' confessed their sin ("Are you aware of your own implicit biases?"), professed fealty to DEI ideology in the workplace ("How do you reflect DEI in your work?"), and proselytize DEI in all areas of society ("What are your specific plans and strategies for using the position you are applying for to advance DEI within your SAA unit, SAA as a whole, and beyond the organization?"). In November 2023, by referendum, a new coercive tool was added to ensure DEI adherence. A [section](#) of SAA's constitution and bylaws was added that SAA council members may involuntarily terminate a society member who violates the "[SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)" or the "[Code of Conduct](#)." However, 2024 brought the clearest evidence of the SAA's ideological capture.

In July 2024, SAA published an ideologically puritanical [essay](#) in the profession's flagship journal—*The American Archivist*. This essay ... presents a self-admittedly radical perspective on archivists' moral duty to fight "oppression," ... [a] prioritization of collectivist radicalism over professionalism ...

Shades of Merry del Val. Just because Mises are libertarians, it doesn't mean they're not on to something.

<<**A [section](#) of SAA's constitution and bylaws was added that SAA council members may involuntarily terminate a society member who violates the "[SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)" or the "[Code of Conduct](#)."**>>

I am told it's OK for a professional body to impose shared values on its members. Gimme a break! I know a loyalty oath when I see one.



Journeys Without End

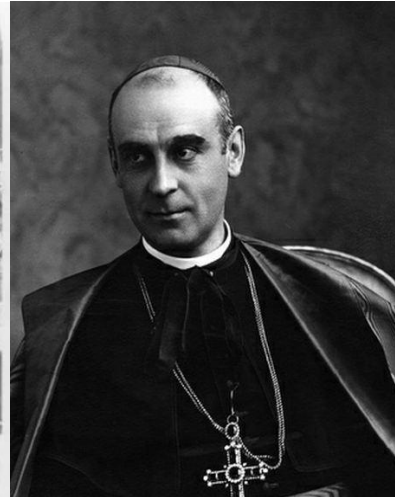
Loyalty oath: a usually mandatory oath affirming the loyalty of its taker (as to a sovereign, government, or party principles).

**<<It's not what these people believe that's their problem
- it's the way they believe it.>>**

A reign of terror is a reign of terror. Regardless of whether its instigator is named Domitian, Robespierre, Sarto, Rowland, or the SAA. Mind you, when was the last time you heard of the archival profession expelling someone for violating the Ethical Code? Even for something as trivial as professional malpractice? Maybe virtuous attitudes really are more important than skillful application. Non-believers may not have much to worry about after all. Possibly it's more honourable, in some circumstances, just to be shunned.



American Archivists (1937)



Rafael Merry del Val

Maybe it's all just **virtue signalling** anyway. Maybe the posturing is only to disguise the fear that we are no more than the "meek librarian[s] surrounded by dusty shelves, old boxes, and brittle paper" of popular imagination. Maybe the "stewards of history" aren't as important as Mr Lawler supposes.

"Involuntarily terminate"? Geeze, Orwell lives.

2024, September 14:

The Anti-Modernist Oath

... with due reverence, I submit and adhere with my whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical Pascendi and in the decree Lamentabili ... I also reject the error of those who say that the faith held by the Church can contradict history ... I also condemn and reject the opinion of those who say that a well-educated Christian assumes a dual personality--that of a believer and at the same time of a historian, as if it were permissible for a historian to hold things that contradict the faith of the believer, or to establish premises which, provided there be no direct denial of dogmas, would lead to the conclusion that dogmas are either false or doubtful ... *I* promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or in writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God.

SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

SAA affirms that simply pledging nondiscrimination is insufficient, and that we must make positive efforts to center diversity among our membership, our members' holdings, and our members' user communities in order to enrich the historical record and achieve professional excellence ... Diversity is one of the eleven Core Values of Archivists (adopted in 2011), and several SAA committees, task forces, component groups, and initiatives have focused on issues relating to diversity and inclusion. In 2010, the Council developed the "SAA

Statement on Diversity.” ... The [SAA Code of Conduct](#) provides guidance on expectations for member conduct that are based on the core principles of this Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as the Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy.

SAA Guidelines for Preparing a Diversity Statement

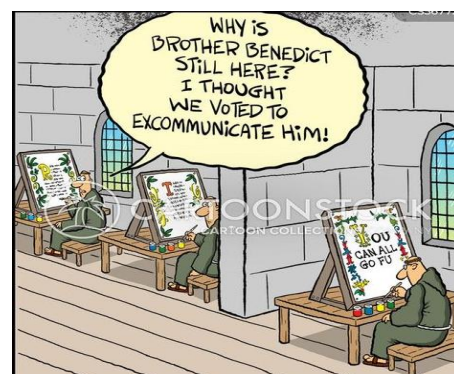
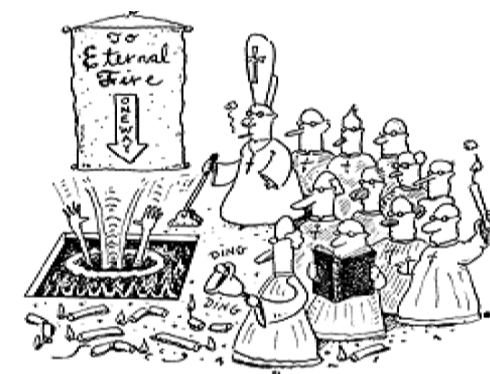
The SAA Council requires a diversity statement as part of the application process for elected positions and certain appointed positions (Executive Director, *American Archivist* Editor, and Publications Editor) as this helps SAA, its leaders, and its members to elect or appoint candidates who are best positioned to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in SAA, the profession, and beyond. It also encourages candidates and applicants to articulate the diversity they bring to their respective positions ...

A diversity statement: reflects on how one’s identity and experience contribute to diversity; demonstrates awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues and how to frame and approach them; and identifies specific DEI strategies relevant to the position they seek. It is highly recommended that the Diversity Statement incorporates answers, but are not limited, to the following questions:

- What is your own definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- How have your own personal, academic, and professional experiences and expertise prepared you to advocate for inclusive, equitable practices?
- Are you aware of your own implicit biases? How have you come to this realization and how do you continue to grow as an advocate for DEI?
- How do you reflect DEI in your work? How will you model a trauma-informed and inclusive practice, and mentor others who will work with you?
- What are your specific plans and strategies for using the position you are applying for to advance DEI within your SAA unit, SAA as a whole, and beyond the organization?

Those **individuals who are elected** by the membership to serve, such as President, Vice President/President-Elect, Council members, and Nominating Committee members, are required to include a 400-word (maximum) Diversity Statement as part of the Candidate Statement. The Diversity Statement must be distinct and separate from the candidate’s Biographical Statement and Response to Question Posed by the Nominating Committee. The Diversity Statement should be made available to all voting members of the Society.

Those applying for **Council-appointed positions** (such as Executive Director, *American Archivist* Editor, and Publications Editor) are required to submit an 800- to 1,000-word Diversity Statement as part of their application materials. The Diversity Statements of the candidates for these positions are available to those involved in the hiring or appointment decisions, subject to confidentiality and privacy considerations. The Executive Director may require diversity statements for applicants to other staff positions, as appropriate.



SAA Constitution & By-Laws

IIIC Termination of Membership

2. Involuntary Termination:

A final decision by the Council that a member has violated the SAA Code of Ethics; the Code of Conduct; the Equal Opportunity/Non-discrimination Policy; and the SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



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- a. Any member whose membership has been involuntarily terminated shall be prohibited, from the date of termination, from: attending, presenting, or exhibiting at the SAA Annual Meeting; attending or teaching an SAA education course; authoring for SAA publications; receiving an SAA award or recognition; or participating on Section discussion lists or events.

Excommunication

Excommunication is an institutional act of religious [censure](#) used to deprive, suspend, or limit membership in a religious community or to restrict certain rights within it ...

2025, February 18:

Australian students record worst ever civics result

Australian students' proficiency levels in civics and citizenship have fallen to their lowest level in two decades, according to 2024 exam results released today by ACARA ... Experts have warned this means students have failed to grasp basic concepts about Australian democracy and institutions, leaving them vulnerable to foreign interference when they become voters ... Civics is currently included in the national curriculum but states, and even individual schools, have a large degree of autonomy in the importance given to civics ... Federal Education Minister Jason Clare said the country needed more young people to understand how democracy worked. "This is why I've boosted funding for school students to get out of the classroom and visit Parliament House and the War Memorial. To understand what generations of Australians have fought and died for," he said.

If all this is true, how come Donald Trump got himself elected somewhere else? If ever there was an issue that should be bipartisan, surely this is it. But ...

Shadow Education Minister Sarah Henderson said the government's response was not good enough. "This latest report is another example of how our education system is failing young Australians under the Albanese government," Senator Sarah Henderson said ... but the government put the blame back on the coalition. "The previous Liberal government developed and signed off on the current curriculum, which includes civics and citizenship," Mr Clare said.

To say nothing of trivialisation (visiting "the War Memorial, Parliament House and Old Parliament House in Canberra"). Seriously? Looks like it may be our fault.

<< **March 4, 2023 ([Indexing](#)): ... perhaps trying to assist ourselves to develop better "[nerd immunity](#)" would help ... On the other hand, perhaps naivete lies in trusting that people want to be un-deceived about what they [believe](#) (or, more accurately, what they want to believe) – not to be confused with [self-deception](#) which is entirely different or with [hoaxes](#) (e.g. drop bears).>>**

I have trouble accepting that civics, in any case, could be any more than a part of any solution (even if it went further than visiting a few GLaM-orous institutions in Canberra).

NERD IMMUNITY

[In Finland] multi-platform information literacy and strong critical thinking have become a core, cross-subject component of a national curriculum that was introduced in 2016. In maths lessons ... pupils learn how easy it is to lie with statistics. In art, they see how an image's meaning can be manipulated. In history, they analyse notable propaganda campaigns, while Finnish language teachers work with them on the many ways in which words can be used to confuse, mislead and deceive ... The curriculum is part of a unique, broad strategy devised by the Finnish government after 2014, when the country was first targeted with fake news stories by its Russian neighbour, and the government realised it had moved into the post-fact age.



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In my more light-headed moments, I have thought about what we r/keepers could add to such a curriculum. A simple, basic understanding of sources

the core question we take for granted:

- the difference between information and the provenance of the information –

ought to be right up our alley. And it's a thing I have found (over and over again) to be an insight that many haven't thought about (or been taught about). How's that for an idea for an outreach programme. Something we could take into the schools along with a bit of GLaM-our perhaps.

2025, February 19:

<< I have trouble accepting that civics, in any case, could be any more than a part of any solution>>

Opinion vs Fact

... In calling something an opinion, one presumably wants to contrast it with something that is *not* an opinion, and the obvious candidate for the contrast class is "fact" ... But this way of drawing the contrast merely pushes the problem back further ... For among the beliefs that people have about the world, there are some that people tend to put in the "fact" column and some that they tend to put in the "opinion" column ...

I began having trouble with IQ Tests early on (do they still have those?) because I couldn't resist asking questions about the questions:

Which is the odd one out: shirt, skirt, trousers?

The "right" answer may be shirt (because it is worn above the waist) or skirt (because it doesn't enclose limbs) or trousers (because it is the only unproblematic answer). I did excel, however, at Comprehension Tests (do they still have those?). Like IQ, comprehension is cognitive but it is more nuanced than IQ. It is a mistake to overlook Emotional Intelligence but it is an even bigger mistake not to understand the difference.

Could you pass a Year 10 Civics Test?

5. Why did Australia move from a policy of assimilation to one of multiculturalism?
 - Australia did not have an identifiable culture of its own.
 - The government found it too difficult to force people to assimilate.
 - The diversity of immigrants coming to live in Australia needed to be recognised.
 - The government wanted equal numbers of immigrants from a variety of countries.

I think I could develop a case for any one of those dot points (though I might be stretched doing so for the last one). The problem doesn't lie with the questions; it lies with the person setting the questions. Criticism of such tests include:

1. intelligence isn't binary,
2. standardised testing ignores individual differences, and
3. the questions are culturally biased.

When I was briefly teaching at Monash, I gave a few undergraduate lectures. It was Frank Upward's job to wrangle the exam questions. "*Sure, Frank,*" I said carelessly, "*just give me a few minutes.*" When I handed them in, he shook his head forbearingly. Turns out, there are all sorts of rules around what questions you can (and cannot) ask in an exam based on lectures given (to prevent appeals against the results, etc.) and Frank proceeded to give me a master class on how to set them. So,

4. The question doesn't deal with the material covered.

When teaching for Q.5 (and for some of the others) I would start with a bit of critical thinking: by questioning the question.

- Is the premiss of the question correct?



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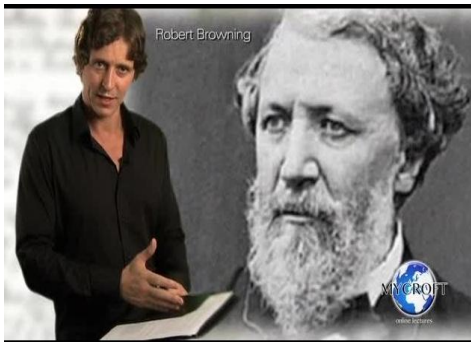
- Is the desired answer a “fact” or an “opinion”.
- Are the choices unambiguous?
- What is the evidence and how do I find it?

One of the reasons I got out of teaching was the realisation that this pedagogical approach was not universally admired within the NSW Dept. of Education.

<<**I did excel, however, at Comprehension Tests (do they still have those?)>>**

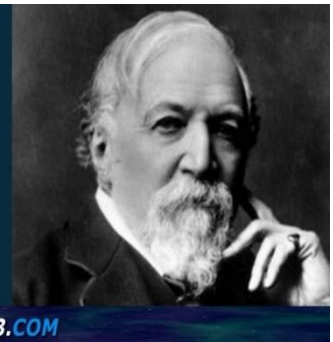
There are examples of [Comprehension Tests online](#), so apparently they are still in use. Some of them stress grammar and syntax too much for my liking. The ones I used to enjoy most tested understanding (meaning). A superb instance is one of Browning's poems:

My Last Duchess



*“Ah, but a man's reach should
exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven
for?”*

- Robert Browning



FAMOUSQUOTES123.COM

A teacher once told me of the experience he'd had teaching this poem to a class of teenage boys. After reading it a few times, understanding strikes one lad. Others won't accept the reading. There are arguments. Then a buzz of excitement spreads as the penny drops for them all. The room actually throbs with comprehension. Teachers live for moments like that.

When Browning was courting Elizabeth Barrett, the story goes that she asked him the meaning of an obscure passage in [Sordello](#). He looked it over and is [supposed](#) to have said “*Well. When I wrote that only God and I knew what it meant. Now, only God knows.*”

PS. *Sordello* is a massive poem. I love Tennyson's quip: “*There were only two lines in it that I understood, and they were both lies; they were the opening and closing lines, 'Who will may hear Sordello's story told,' and 'Who would has heard Sordello's story told!'*”

2025, March 5:

<<**Australian students' proficiency levels in civics and citizenship have fallen to their lowest level in two decades ... Federal Education Minister Jason Clare said the country needed more young people to understand how democracy worked>>**

[The Conversation](#) agrees and is putting out [a book](#) (cost: \$34.99) comprising “analysis from people with valuable experience and expertise to better understand who we are, how we got here and where we might go next”. Book's not out yet but it will be interesting (for a start) to see how they define WE and whether there is, in fact, a WE at all. But I'm not sure that a well-meaning book is much of an advance on visits to “the War Memorial, Parliament House and Old Parliament House in Canberra”. Might be helpful in schools where some of the real work has to be done.

But “students' proficiency” is only one measure of the problem. Ignorance, disengagement, and polarisation is [also to be found](#) amongst adults, the downtrodden, the ill-educated, the marginalised, the un-involved, the cynical, the distressed, and the ratbags. There are lots of people attempting to overcome this, e.g.:

- [Parliament of Australia](#)
- [Governance Institute of Australia](#)
- [Australian Public Service Academy](#)



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- [Australian Indigenous Governance Institute](#)
- [Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House](#)
- [Department of Home Affairs](#)
- [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)
- [Flinders University](#)
- [Australian Democracy Network](#)
- [The Australia Institute](#)
- [Australian Communities Foundation](#)

It's already a crowded field. A basic differential amongst these people is those who focus on **governance** (*the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements of governance*)

those who focus on the political system

democracy (*rule by the people ... a system of government where people have the power to participate in decision-making ... In some, people help make decisions directly by voting on laws and policy proposals. This is called direct democracy. In others, like Australia, citizens choose representatives to make decisions on their behalf. This is known as representative democracy*)

and those who deal with it more rhetorically

freedom, either **passive** (*being able or allowed to do, say, think, etc. whatever you want to, without being controlled or limited*), **political** (*civil rights and liberties*), **aspirational** (*allowing individuals to flourish in all aspects of their lives*), or **collectivist** (*the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions*).

Almost none of this highfalutin stuff bears on how ordinary people experience and understand democracy or (I suspect) on how they vote – a basic difference between structure and meaning. Too little of it is focussed on different levels of governance and how they interact with people (and how people interact with them). The collectivists seem to but they are all too often, as Burke remarked, *the loudest complainers for the public but not the most anxious for its welfare*. And ignorance is not the only problem that has to be addressed; it is also misinformation (inaccuracy), disinformation (malice), populism (anti-politics), and elitism (dogma). How ironic and how pertinent that we have recently witnessed the elites trying to deal with mis/dis-information by [regulation and suppression](#).

A basic part of the problem is distrust (arising from whatever reasons) between the governed and the governors. Assuming there is some substance to distrust of institutionalised power, how can “leaders” find the insight to deal with it? The [governance arrangements](#) for the Museum of Australian Democracy illustrate the issue – they're mostly journos, bureaucrats of one kind or another, and politicians, many of them “ex”. A comfortable retirement perhaps for those who already have a stake in the system, but are they the best people to help enlighten those who haven't?

2025, May 3: Fwd: [Arcan-I] ACA Support of U.S. ... Cultural Institutions

<<**Joanna Sassoon: And where is the Australian Society of Archivists in support of our US colleagues?**>>

2025, May 4:

- “The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) stands with our colleagues working in archives, libraries, museums, and cultural institutions across the United States of America who are experiencing attacks on their professions by the current administration. We echo the concerns raised by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums (ATALM), the American Library Association (ALA) and other related organizations ...”



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- “SAA affirms that simply pledging nondiscrimination is insufficient, and that we must make positive efforts to center diversity among our membership, our members’ holdings, and our members’ user communities in order to enrich the historical record and achieve professional excellence ... The [SAA Code of Conduct](#) provides guidance on expectations for member conduct that are based on the core principles of this Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as the Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy.” [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)
- ” Those applying for **Council-appointed positions** ... are required to submit an 800- to 1,000-word Diversity Statement as part of their application materials. The Diversity Statements of the candidates for these positions are available to those involved in the hiring or appointment decisions, subject to confidentiality and privacy considerations.” [SAA Guidelines for Preparing a Diversity Statement](#)
- “... myside bias is displayed in a variety of experimental situations: people evaluate the same virtuous act more favourably if committed by a member of their own group and evaluate a negative act less unfavourably if committed by a member of their own group; they evaluate an identical experiment more favourably if the results support their prior beliefs than if the results contradict their prior beliefs; and when searching for information, people select information sources that are likely to support their own position. Even the interpretation of a purely numerical display of outcome data is tipped in the direction of the subject’s prior belief.” Keith E Stanovich [The Bias that Divides Us](#)
- “Over the span of just seven months, countries in eastern [Europe](#), central Asia and South America were awash with ... laws, all with the same basic premise – organisations and individuals receiving foreign funding must make themselves known to the government ... Foreign interference is a very real threat for many countries ... But the devil is in the detail. And – as is so often the case with these laws – there very deliberately isn’t any. Their power lies in vague, broad wording. Wording that can, and has been, easily weaponised to inflict legal penalties and crippling stigma to such an extent that it renders the work of anyone implicated effectively impossible. Especially journalists ... It would be naive to think this is a problem solely reserved for autocratic states, however. As disinformation campaigns and electoral interference become more prevalent, many democracies are also considering this type of legislation – Italy and the UK, to name two.” [Antonio Zappulla](#)
- “... archivists surprisingly accept and promote dangerous and intolerant collectivist ideology ... Over the past few years, the national professional organization for archivists in the United States, the *Society of American Archivists* (SAA), has uncritically embraced a conception of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) that is hostile to dissenting voices ...” [Jonathan Lawler](#)

It isn’t just what we believe that matters, so much as how we believe it. When we take sides in “culture wars” we ought not to be surprised when we are attacked by those whose “side” we have rejected. But it is not possible to live and be human without taking sides. We ought not to be simply and routinely [impartial](#) (treating or affecting all equally) but we should be responsibly and intelligently [objective](#) (dealing with facts or conditions ... without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations). Objectivity, after all, a respect for evidence (for “facts”) regardless of where they lead, is a hallowed professional value. Or was once.

The conflict between “progressive” ideologues and “conservative” ideologues (for want of better terms to describe them) takes place in the streets, not in the groves of academe. Our professional values cannot simply be detached from grubby battles over dogma. They are unavoidably contaminated if we simply become pawns in that conflict but we still have choices over whether to surrender to it or to transcend it. Or to try, at least. Authoritarian assaults on houses of memory, seats of learning, and the press are in many respects simply a visceral reaction to the tyranny of authoritarian woke (as well as to demons that are real enough). Our defence of civilised virtues is crippled when it becomes partisan in the throes of that conflict, but



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“... however dedicated, [the historian] remains primarily a citizen. To turn from political responsibility to dedication therefore is to open the door to tyranny and measureless barbarism.” A J P Taylor, *Englishmen and Others*

There is no simple answer to the quandary - how do we close the door to tyranny and barbarism without betraying the dedication? I don't know the answer to that, but I know we have to keep trying. And, for what it's worth (and that's probably not much), I believe that [critical archiving](#) (offering “an alternative to the waning but still tenacious notion of [archival neutrality](#)”) is not the simple answer to that quandary because it makes a virtue of partiality and fails to make the essential distinction between neutrality and objectivity.

PS. The [euphoria](#) expressed last night over Labor's “landslide” win is as fanciful as similar claims made last year in the UK. Both results rest on the preferred votes of about one-third of the electorate (meaning two-thirds of us don't agree). Preliminary results give Labor [34.7% of the primary vote](#). Any political leader taking comfort from that or believing that it affords the basis on which “the Australian people can come together” under his or her leadership is as delusional as Margaret Thatcher when, on coming into office, she likened herself to Francis of Assisi. The [flight from the majors](#) is now an established trend here and elsewhere. Diversity of opinion is no bad thing but it carries the seeds of conflict that can be fatal as we see in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, etc. Albo's self-serving paeon to Australia's basic decency is stomach-churning and painful to watch not just because it is affected but because it reveals the depth of his ignorance and insensitivity to the realities of our situation. I hold ignorance and insensitivity to be as dangerous as myside (even if it is sincere, perhaps more so if it's sincere). And, if you don't agree, reflect that Trump-ism is apparently the preference of considerably more than one-third of the US electorate and has its supporters here amongst the two-thirds of us who “don't agree”.

PPS. What does make Labor's victory stunning (for me) is that this time I voted for them, preferentially of course not absolutely, and I am usually on the losing side.

2025, May 10:

Oh! What a fractured world we live in.

The new Pope is described as a “gentle” man but he seems to have the courage of his convictions (which are still being speculated about). His namesake (Leo I) stood up to Attila the Hun and maybe he will (gently) stand up against some of the new Attilas abroad in our troubled world. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Prevost had this in mind when he chose his papal name? The media speculation about it invites thoughts about how best to stand up **against** bullies and **for** the things we believe in.



On the [ABC news site](#), one commentator has cottoned on to how the fracturing of the vote makes talk of landslide shifts fanciful:

Labor took the glory in last weekend's election, but beneath the surface an ongoing trend in how Australia votes has quietly carried on. The major parties' primary vote has, once

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again, fallen. In fact, there is a strong chance that the combined independent and minor party vote will beat one of the major parties for the first time in seven decades ... because [in] this election, for the first time since the creation of the Liberal Party in 1944, the combined independent and minor party vote looks likely to beat a major party ... Minor parties and independents received 33.1 per cent ... The “other” vote is a couple of percentage points higher than it was last time, in 2022 ... more than double what it was in the 2007 election ... and nearly eight times what it was 50 years ago, in 1975.

Back then, nearly everyone voted for a major party ... It was only much more recently you’d see seats starting to reliably appear in the grey zone ... compared to the Coalition side, [Labor] is still looking a bit sturdier ... But going into the future, it has a fair few seats that look vulnerable ...

If I were a Liberal politician (God forbid) I would now be asking if more-of-the-same is the right way forward. Their view of [their own history](#) is that unity is strength:

In 1944, the Liberal Party of Australia was founded after a three-day meeting held in a small hall not far from Parliament House in Canberra. The meeting was called by the then Leader of the Opposition (United Australia Party) Robert Menzies [who] believed that the non-Labor parties should unite to present a strong alternative government to the Australian people.

They don’t mention the fact that in almost every election that they have won they came in on the preferences and/or in coalition with the Country Party (hardly mentioned on the online history page) – and with a bit of help from the DLP for a while (not mentioned at all). The Country Party (now called Nationals) has always been a sectional party (appealing to the bush and regional centres) and their growing strength is indicative of the deepening divide between metropolitan centres and the vast, sparsely populated areas outside the major cities which have a grievance, a feeling that the rest of us ignore them.

That is just one of many deepening divides in our society (age, class, ethnicity, gender, wealth, climate-consciousness, etc, etc.) to say nothing of cultural divides and passions raised by oppression and conflict elsewhere that resonate with “tribes” created internally by our immigration policies. We are not predominantly White, Anglo-Celtic colonists any more (as we were in 1944). The diversity that we now enjoy, so obvious that even [Andrew Bolt](#) understands, with its accompanying grievances, we have, so far, thankfully navigated without majorly destructive consequences - but it calls into question (I believe) any strategic approach based on the Menzies’ idea that “unity is strength”.



[We are One, but we are Many](#)



If I were planning a Liberal revival, therefore, I’d be asking whether the time has come to pursue the opposite strategy, a preferences-based approach, on the grounds that diversity (not unity) is strength and that grievance and self-interest may trump conviction. Don’t keep putting the Greens last, because they are Labor’s Achilles heel. Break the coalition with the Nats until you’re ready to form a coalition government with them after success at the polls. Divide the Liberal Party along factional lines - into Whigs and Tories perhaps - and hope the Whigs can win back some Teal votes. Plan to win future elections, as Labor did this time, on



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preference flows. It'll never happen, of course, because politicians (and commentators urging a return-to-the-base) always look backwards, but it suggests a line of thinking.

The implications of living in a fractured world go beyond politics. A belief that unity-is-strength aligns with the myside bias – getting everyone onto your side, talking into a homogenous, rather than a multi-cultural, audience. That belief plays into the idea that we are (to paraphrase Pauline) one nation in a way we haven't been for some time or (to paraphrase Clive) patriots whatever that may mean nowadays. The options are to treat your audience as a diverse, “gentle”, centrist-seeking, persuadable grey zone to be wooed or a zealous, militant, committed, intractable tribe to be won and held fast by unyielding devotion to shared convictions (cf. Advance and GetUp). At a personal level, I endorse strong belief and advocacy for what you believe in but is that the best way to win friends and influence people? As a life-long supporter of minority opinions, I claim the right to wonder about that and about what kind of subtlety wooing a fractured audience might require.

Which brings us back to the ACA's call to stand “with our colleagues working in archives, libraries, museums, and cultural institutions across the United States of America”. Of course, we must do that. The question is how to do so effectively. Not just by retreating into a posture of professional dedication I grant you because that would “open the door to tyranny and measureless barbarism” but by figuring out how to make what we are professionally dedicated to appealing to others. To stand up against barbarism is the easy part. It's harder to decide what we are for and to explain it to a diverse audience that may not all believe as we do in a way that will invite them to join us.

Like the Liberals, we don't just have to think about whether we are Whigs or Tories - we also have to think about how to win other people over to our side,

PS. The UK doesn't have a preferential system but Labour won there because the non-Labour vote (pace the Lib-Dems and Scottish Nationals) was split between Conservative and Reform (which when combined out-pollled them). The same underlying phenomenon (fracturing of the vote) was at play.

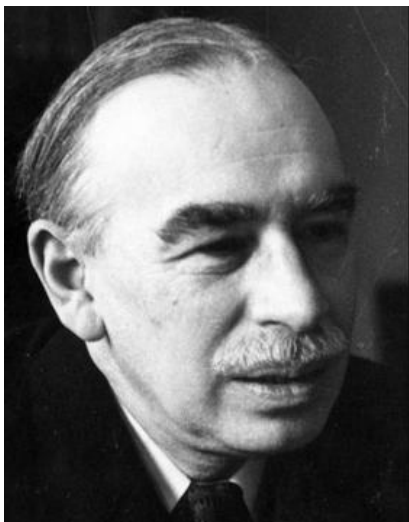


Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves.

– [William Pitt the Younger](#)

Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so.

– [Timothy Snyder](#)



If, however, a government refrains from regulations and allows matters to take their course, essential commodities soon attain a level of price out of the reach of all but the rich, the worthlessness of the money becomes apparent, and the fraud upon the public can be concealed no longer.

— *John Maynard Keynes* —

AZ QUOTES



Government and state can never be perfect because they owe their raison d'être to the imperfection of man and can attain their end, the elimination of man's innate impulse to violence, only by recourse to violence, the very thing they are called upon to prevent.

— *Ludwig von Mises* —

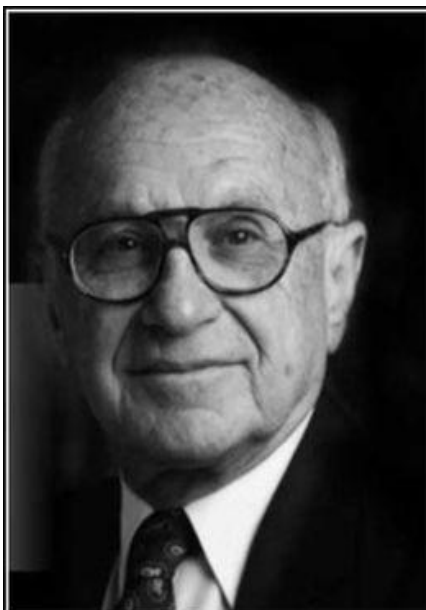
AZ QUOTES



“ We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. ”

~ *Friedrich Hayek*

QuotesCosmos



A society that puts equality — in the sense of equality of outcome — ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom. The use of force to achieve equality will destroy freedom, and the force, introduced for good purposes, will end up in the hands of people who use it to promote their own interests.

— *Milton Friedman* —

AZ QUOTES