

3/1/19

Climate change: LED lights could dent UK energy demand

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46741346>

Hooray for LEDs! But there is a downside: increased light pollution.

5/1/19

CES 2019: Tech preview of the expo's hottest new gadgets

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46715334>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-46791486/ces-2019-could-lovot-the-pet-robot-make-you-fall-in-love>

"Mr Hayashi has said the purpose of Lovot is not to be helpful or entertaining, but rather to engender joy, love and other positive emotions that might help owners reach their true potential." For me this closes the question about whether robots can have emotions: of course they do, because they evoke emotions in us! (Naysayers will call this the 'pathetic fallacy', see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathetic_fallacy. But I contend that this misses my point, which is: (i) Emotions don't exist except as percepts in our minds, where they are defined and acquire meaning simply through their association with other percepts, see HMM p.178; (ii) Since we can only ever access our own 'minds' (i.e. our acquired networks of associated percepts), the ascription of emotions to others is always an untestable article of faith; (iii) Since we routinely assume that other people experience emotions similar to our own, logically-speaking it's equally valid to suppose that these same emotions can be experienced by pets, or robots, or even inanimate objects, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x-iZGnsLOU>.)

7/1/19

Tech Tent: Tim Cook's bombshell

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46762041>

"It is a company that is always tight-lipped about its finances between its quarterly results, so Wednesday's letter from Tim Cook warning Apple investors that the outlook had suddenly darkened was a bombshell which rocked the market. ... In the view of Shanghai-based Shaun Rein, Tim Cook is right to blame China. The founder of the China Market Research Group tells us he is very worried about the state of the Chinese economy: "It's the absolute worst I've seen in the 20 years I've been in China. Everything has really stalled in the last quarter." And he says that fall in consumer confidence, coupled with the growing trade war with the United States, has made people more nationalistic about the phones they buy. "There's a lot of pride in buying Chinese products made by Chinese for Chinese. After the United States got Canada to arrest the CFO of Huawei that caused a lot of Chinese to be angry. And so a lot of Chinese consumers in a show of patriotism are saying let's not buy Apple let's buy Huawei and show support for the Chinese state." Even if those trade tensions ease, it is hard to see Chinese phone buyers turning back to Apple in large numbers now the spell has been broken. Last summer Huawei overtook Apple to claim second place behind Samsung in global smartphone sales."

The phrase "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" comes to mind. Trump is such a fool.

7/1/19

Tech trends 2019: 'The end of truth as we know it?'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46745742>

"'Deepfakes' - manipulated digital videos that overlay another person's face onto a body or change what people actually said - pose a growing threat, argues Katja Bego, data scientist at innovation foundation, Nesta. "2019 will be the year that a malicious 'deepfake' video sparks a geopolitical incident," she predicts."

Fortunately Donald Trump has already broadcast every conceivable malicious lie, so we're immune to this particular threat.

7/1/19

India scientists dismiss Einstein theories

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-46778879>

"The head of a southern Indian university cited an old Hindu text as proof that stem cell research was discovered in India thousands of years ago. G Nageshwar Rao, vice chancellor of Andhra University, also said a demon king from the Hindu religious epic, Ramayana, had 24 types of aircraft and a network of landing strips in modern-day Sri Lanka. Another scientist from an university in the southern state of Tamil Nadu who was speaking at the conference said that Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein were both wrong and that gravitational waves should be renamed as "Narendra Modi Waves". Dr KJ Krishnan reportedly said Newton failed to "understand gravitational repulsive forces" and Einstein's theories were "misleading"."

Would it be scientist for me to hum

Hare-Krishna Hare-Ram

Krishna-Krishna Ram-Ram-Ram?

8/1/19

Hyundai shows off 'walking car' at CES

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46794087>

It's really happening, Reg!

11/1/19

Signals from space: Five theories on what they are

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46825450>

1. A rapidly spinning neutron star
2. Two stars merging
3. Blitzar
4. Black hole
5. Alien life form

If it takes a vast radio telescope to detect even the faint signals from 1-4 - enormous events which, if they happened to our sun, would easily obliterate the earth - then what would be required to detect anything from 5?!

21/1/19

In pictures: 'Super blood wolf moon'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46943592>

I saw this, and it was utterly spectacular! By chance I was up before 6am and chanced to look out, and there it was, also Venus and Jupiter. So I went out and followed my mother's practice of bowing three times* ... and all was well.

*See <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/TheThinkingMachine.pdf>

21/1/19

Brexit: May boxed into comfort zone as options disappear

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-46951202>

"The prime minister is embarking on yet another push to see if she can win over Brexiteer Tories and the DUP to support an amended version of her Brexit deal. A senior Tory tells me that May is acting on the advice of her chief whip, Julian Smith. "The chief whip told the prime minister that if she relies on Labour votes to get her deal through she will split the party," the former frontbencher tells me. "So she has to do it with Conservative and DUP votes. God knows how she does that."" Party before country. Despicable.

23/1/19

What can Plato teach us about Donald Trump?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnzo9qXLFUo>

Thanks Gee for this discovery, which is worth playing again and again.

Recently I reworked Plato's analysis as follows:

1. Civil society + Panactivism -> Democracy (Empiricist);
2. Democracy + Populism -> Autocracy (Idealist);
3. Autocracy + Pragmatism -> Tyranny (Activist);
4. Tyranny + Paternalism -> Oligarchy (Conformist);
5. Oligarchy + Professionalism -> Bureaucracy (Theorist);
6. All of the above (but none too much) -> Pentocracy (IDEAL man).

Notes:

* The progression 1-5 (which is in the same sequence as Shakespeare's ages of man) is my alternative to the brilliant evolutionary schemes of Plato and Aristotle (e.g., "does not tyranny spring from democracy in the same manner as democracy from oligarchy");

* With 'Autocracy' in place of 'Aristocracy' or 'Royalty', and 'Bureaucracy' in place of 'Timocracy' or 'Polity', these are the same sets of '-cracies' as for Plato or Aristotle respectively;

* Like Plato and Aristotle I see 'Democracy' as another word for 'mob rule'; To understand the kind of circumstances that led them to this conclusion read Robert Harris' Cicero trilogy and/or go to the RSC play of the same;

* By 'Panactivism' I mean any or all of 'Egalitarianism', 'Libertarianism', 'Radicalism', 'Antiestablishmentism', 'Disruptionism', and 'Anarchism';

* And I see 'Pentocracy' as another word for 'Civil society' (albeit at a higher level), with 6 closing the loop back to 1 in an iterative cycle.

7/2/19

Robot teaches itself to ice-skate

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-46988569>

"A robot made from 3D-printed modular parts has taught itself how to ice-skate. "The only thing we tell it is how one ice skate behaves on ice," says ETH Zurich's Prof Stelian Coros, explaining that after this stage the robot figures out how to move across the ice by itself."

It's really happening, Reg!

8/2/19

Indian man to sue parents for giving birth to him

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-47154287>

"There's no point to humanity. So many people are suffering. If humanity is extinct, Earth and animals would be happier. They'll certainly be better off. Also no human will then suffer. Human existence is totally pointless."

So where's the flaw in this argument?

10/2/19

'There's a danger of losing our tenure on this planet'

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/theres-a-danger-of-losing-our-tenure-on-this-plane/p06yyqvc>

"James Lovelock is one of the most influential environmental thinkers of our time. Now aged 99, he reflects on the climate change challenge."

In this clip Lovelock recommends that we "not worry too much about schooling, the three R's yes, they're very important, but all the other stuff, I think, could be ditched in favour of a better understanding of the world."

James Lovelock has been the nearest thing to a guru for me ever since I bought 'The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management' on first publication 35 years ago.

12/2/19

Environment in multiple crises - report

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47203344>

A manifesto to save Planet Earth (and ourselves)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44389413>

Really important.

12/2/19

Why so many people believe conspiracy theories

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-47144738>

"To understand why we are so drawn to the notion of shadowy forces controlling political events, we need to think about the psychology behind conspiracy theories. "We are very good at recognising patterns and regularities. But sometimes we overplay that - we think we see meaning and significance when it isn't really there," Prof French says. "We also assume that when something happens, it happens because someone or something made it happen for a reason.""

Pattern recognition + single perspective => System 1, see HMM ch.3.

14/2/19

Trump to sign border security bill and declare emergency over wall

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-47247726>

What next? Martial law? Concentration camps?

14/2/19

Brexit: Theresa May suffers fresh Commons defeat

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47245992>

Another executive at odds with its legislature. A house divided against itself cannot stand ...

19/2/19

Viewpoint: Should Britain apologise for Amritsar massacre?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-47070534>

Yeah well, maybe the Sikhs should also apologise to the rest of India for joining with the British in 1857 to put down the Mutiny/Rebellion (for which they were richly rewarded, which is why there are so many of them in Delhi to this day: having massacred many of the inhabitants they took over their properties). OK two wrongs don't make a right, but equally it's best to know which side your bread is buttered and not to bite the hand that feeds you when the wind of change is blowing the unmoosy rolling stone along the corridor of power and through the window of opportunity to the sunlit uplands of a new world order.

20/2/19

Will we worship artificial intelligence in the future?

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/will-we-worship-artificial-intelligence-in-the-fut/p07100kv>

"Although the robots might help us, they cannot, ultimately, save us."

That's not the point. The point is that they might well destroy us. See HMM ch.10.

20/2/19

AI fake face website launched

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47296481>

False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

24/2/19

'Fairytale ending' for fat cat Mitzi returned four times

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-47333694>

They should've read 'The Pizza' by Ogden Nash:

Look at itsy-bitsy Mitzi!

She her figure slim and ritzy!

She eatsa

Pizza!

Greedy Mitzi!

She no longer itsy-bitsy!

4/3/19

Crossing Divides: Keeping the peace in Northern Ireland

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-47373925>

"Why, 21 years after the Good Friday Agreement, does religion still divide the people of Northern Ireland?"

Because that's what religion does: it nurtures and sustains a strong group of like-minded people; just like politics, nationalism, business, science, sport, and neighbourhood watch; and, as Raymond Aron wrote, "Everything that unites individuals also divides groups against one another. Men have fought as often in the name of universal religions as they have in the cause of nations."

4/3/19

Crossing Divides: Has the UK changed its mind on immigration?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47428515>

"Almost half the people in the UK believe immigration has been positive for the country, a poll for the BBC's Crossing Divides season suggests."

For many people (including the PM, it seems), immigration is the central issue governing Brexit.

Should the UK remain part of the EU, with little or no control over immigration? OK it's good for the economy, but at what social cost? Apart from Netherlands, Belgium, and other tiddlers, the UK (including all of near-empty Scotland) is the most densely populated country in the EU, see

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Area_and_population_of_European_countries. 100 years ago London didn't exist beyond the North Circular Road; now it's up to the M25, with people commuting in from Oxford and Cambridge. Is there to be no limit to growth? But what's the difference between this line of thinking and voting for someone like Donald Trump (or, let's face it, Adolf Hitler,

whereby "Lebensraum became an ideological principle of Nazism",

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensraum>). Discuss.

12/3/19

Tim Berners-Lee: 'Stop web's downward plunge to dysfunctional future'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47524474>

"In his letter, Sir Tim outlined three specific areas of "dysfunction" that he said were harming the web today:

- * malicious activity such as hacking and harassment
- * problematic system design such as business models that reward clickbait
- * unintended consequences, such as aggressive or polarised discussions"

He's not so clever that he didn't foresee any downsides of his great invention. cf. HMM p.196,

"No innovation is innately good or bad, but every innovation may be used in good or bad ways."

16/3/19

How swarming drones will change warfare

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47555588>

It's really happening, Reg ... and not in a good way.

16/3/19

Capitalism is destroying the Earth. We need a new human right for future generations

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/capitalism-destroying-earth-human-right-climate-strike-children>

On first reading, this stirring polemic struck me as quite revolutionary, maybe even as the basis of an environmentalist manifesto. In particular, when discussing the first article of the UDHR Monbiot concludes that “no renewable resource should be used beyond its rate of replenishment,” and “No non-renewable resource should be used that cannot be fully recycled and reused.” To me these are very sensible and quite specific principles. And I agree that it would be better if Article 17 read, “Everyone has the right to use property without infringing the rights of others to use property.” Indeed this is entirely consistent with my interpretation of Article 29(1) in <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/MyPhilosophy03.pdf>. But how is this to be enforced? Few if any of the UDHR signatories have implemented all of its principles; e.g. by signing they had promised to teach it in their schools, but only the Scandinavian countries do this, I believe. And Article 17, amended or otherwise, is sufficiently abstract that it’s difficult to see how it can be implemented in practice. And while Monbiot lumps all the blame for the world’s environmental problems on ‘capitalism’ (in fact, land ownership), this is grossly simplistic. I’d agree that these problems are largely a consequence of our obscene social inequalities; but it’s not ‘inequality’ that’s the problem, it’s ‘extremity of inequality’; see <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/some-answered-questions.pdf>, ch.78, ‘Strikes’; and ‘extremity of inequality’ isn’t a necessary feature of ‘capitalism’ or of land ownership, but rather it’s a consequence of how we’ve chosen to implement them. Specifically, because pay rises and returns on investments are conventionally given as fixed percentages rather than fixed amounts, the rich will always get richer faster than the poor, resulting in a lognormal wealth distribution, just as I argue in <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/LognormalWealth.pdf>. But it doesn’t have to be this way: both Christianity and Islam banned usury at different times (defined as ‘the action or practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest’); and clearly if rewards for acquiring wealth or excelling at work were given as fixed amounts rather than fixed percentages then this would go a long way to eliminating the extremes of wealth and poverty. We don’t need to go ‘full Marx’, as Monbiot appears to suggest.

17/3/19

Can you murder a robot?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47090174>

"Back in 2015, a hitchhiker was murdered on the streets of Philadelphia. It was no ordinary crime. The hitchhiker in question was a little robot called Hitchbot. The "death" raised an interesting question about human-robot relationship - not so much whether we can trust robots but whether the robots can trust us. The answer, it seems, was no."

21/3/19

When I woke this morning I recalled a recent front-page photo of Theresa May and Michel Barnier, which in my mind quickly morphed into another photo of Adolf Hitler being appointed Chancellor of Germany by President Hindenburg. In fact these photos are quite different (see attached), and if anything it's the photo of Hitler with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (formerly Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, see attached) which is the better comparison. (I should make clear that although I am familiar with these archive photos, each of them has particular features which I had effectively forgotten or misremembered, until I saw them again.) In any case, isn't it interesting that the mind can create a suggestive collage of images and ideas in this way? In like manner we can imagine sphinxes, dragons, mermaids, etc., through what is usually understood to be the operation of our sense of invention/intuition. In my view this 'creative collaging' is the result of the fundamental mental process of pattern recognition undertaken with an unusually low threshold of acceptability.

Whilst this 'low threshold' is a simple consequence of the unfocused operation of a semi-conscious mind, if the resulting associations are taken too seriously (e.g. by people who lack the necessary System 2 skills to know any better) then they can become dangerous and divisive 'alternative facts'. For example, what do we feel if we conclude from this comparison that Theresa May is behaving like Adolf Hitler? Or what do we feel if we conclude that Theresa May is behaving like the Duchess of Windsor? Frightening, isn't it!



21/3/19

Nowruz: How 300m people celebrate Persian New Year

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-47643267>

Nawruz haiku time!

Eating cake inside your mouth*

Yay Happy Nawruz!

* ref. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzPoz2safPI>

24/3/19

Mongolia: A toxic warning to the world

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47673327>

PM2.5 > 999 micrograms/m³ in the city, associated with coal burning (like London smogs).

Destruction of grazing habitat on the steppes, associated with climate change. Conclusion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EH1G4EwljM>

24/3/19

How Pope Francis could shape the future of robotics

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47668476>

"For the opening of the meeting, Pope Francis presented a letter to the Human Community, where he outlines the paradox of "progress" and cautions against developing technologies without first thinking of the possible costs to society."

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190106_lettera-accademia-vita.html

Reading this, I am reminded of messages from the Universal House of Justice, and of this song, <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/times-they-are-changin/>; which comparison makes me wonder whether the Pope has any idea what he's talking about; but I do concede that he's got more right to pontificate than the rest of us!

24/3/19

Trump-Russia inquiry: President 'did not conspire with Russia'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-47688187>

Mueller report: The best day of Trump's presidency

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-47688348>

Trump's conclusion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjmKMv4yL9s>

27/3/19

India election 2019: Modi says India now a 'space power'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-47114401>

Renewed space rivalry between nations ignores a tradition of cooperation

<http://theconversation.com/renewed-space-rivalry-between-nations-ignores-a-tradition-of-cooperation-108810>

For their next trick the BJP will catapult a cow over the moooooon.

27/3/19

Cycling heaven: The African capital with 'no traffic'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-47709673>

"A combination of various factors ranging from conflict to diplomatic isolation have unintentionally turned the Eritrean capital into a cycling paradise."

These people need 'progress' and 'development' like a hole in the head.

27/3/19

British-Canadian AI expert Geoffrey Hinton wins Turing Award

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47721129>

"British-born artificial intelligence (AI) expert Geoffrey Hinton has won the Turing Award, sometimes referred to as "the Nobel Prize of computing". Mr Hinton, who now lives in Canada, shares the award with Yoshua Bengio and Yann LeCun - two other proponents of deep learning, a popular form of AI. ... Deep learning is also seen as a promising, though not flawless, tool for the development of self-driving cars and other futuristic technologies."

In MyPhilosophy03.pdf I identify 'deep learning' as an implementation of System 1 pattern recognition, which is necessary but not sufficient for human-like cognition.

30/3/19

How Authentic Are You?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4241Jvj91zzfNCTnbJJhykB>

I got a score of 25/30 and the verdict, "Fantastic! You have a strong grasp on your inner self and seem to be entirely authentic, possibly to the point of great annoyance to others. We recommend you immediately pen a self-help book and share your secrets with everyone." Annoyingly my 'self-help book' exists already, it's <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/MyPhilosophy03.pdf>.

1/4/19

Don't rely on Mueller and Russia: there is no magic wand to rid us of Trump – or Brexit

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/31/mueller-russia-magic-wand-trump-brexit>

"Brexit and Trump were not perversions brought about by corrupt campaigners, they were natural culminations of decades of failing politics. It is time to face this reality and lose the psychological comfort blankets. To paraphrase Maya Angelou, when nations show you who they are, believe them the first time."

As Ayatollah Khamenei said over two years ago, Donald Trump shows the real face of the US.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/ayatollah-khamenei-donald-trump-170207114954347.html>

5/4/19

Fossil of ancient four-legged whale found in Peru

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-47822228>

A 'missing link' long predicted by science on account of whales being mammals. (Whereas Biblical scholars and just-so storytellers are still looking for evidence of Jonah,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_VdS7OHwqU.)

6/4/19

Masquerade: How a real-life treasure hunt obsessed a nation

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-47671776>

An instructive parable of our times: (1) Originality; (2) Reward; (3) Controversy; (4) Disillusion; (5) Acceptance. Just like the five acts of a classical play, the five stages of grief, etc. That's life!

7/4/19

India eco-school: Is this the greenest campus on Earth?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47480210>

Hey CMS, what are you doing for the environment? For the 12 Station Road redevelopment you've just cut down all the trees at the back, whereas at 3 Zoar Cottages I am planting as many trees as my land will bear. And consider these fine contributions to the environment:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/10976303/Felix-Dennis-and-his-forest-of-good-fortune.html>; <https://www.ft.com/content/27d5eed0-a1b9-11e6-aa83-bcb58d1d2193>;

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

8/4/19

Air pollution: How does London's new emissions zone compare?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-47816360>

This is why I feel Hazratganj should be closed to cars, now there is a nice metro running its full length and plenty of rickshaw-wallahs looking for work.

10/4/19

How catastrophes can change the path of humanity

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20190408-how-catastrophes-can-change-the-path-of-humanity>

"A global disaster such as a nuclear war, a pandemic or runaway AI could have much graver consequences for humanity's future than we realise, says catastrophic risk expert Seth Baum."

It's inevitable that sooner-or-later AI becomes the dominant 'species'. Why resist it?

10/4/19

John Bercow's Brexit stardom

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-47866793>

Orrrrrdurrrrr!!!!

13/4/19

Brexit: Boris Johnson 'wrong on no-deal polling claim'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-47913555>

"In its ruling, Ipso said that while columnists were free to use "hyperbole, melodrama and humour", they must take care "over the accuracy of any claims of fact"."

Googling "Ipso facto BoJo boo-boo" indicates that the Sun missed a trick by not running with this headline.

22/4/19

Boston Dynamics latest videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iV_hB08Uns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHBcVlqpvZ8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnWolLQSZic>

It's really happening, Reg!

22/4/19

Will we ever have robot carers?

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20190418-will-we-ever-have-robot-carers>

"The more it looks like a human, the more that person receiving the care is going to resist the care provided by the robot"

What if it looks like a lamb? They also care who sit and sleep:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-scotland-47992909>

(With thanks to Marika for this link)

26/4/19

Tracking the toxic air that's killing millions

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48037412>

The bar chart supports my view that it's diesel engines which are the primary source of photochemical smog. They emit nitrogen oxide which with oxygen produces nitrogen dioxide ($2\text{NO} + \text{O}_2 \rightarrow 2\text{NO}_2$), which in the presence of strong UV (e.g. in India) also reacts with oxygen to produce ozone ($\text{NO}_2 + \text{O}_2 \xrightarrow{\text{UV}} \text{NO} + \text{O}_3$). Ozone is needed in the stratosphere (20km up) to keep out the UV, but at ground level it's not welcome, as it is carcinogenic (and also highly-reactive, so it combines with whatever else is in the air, e.g. hydrocarbons, to generate other toxins). Also nitrogen dioxide and ozone are obscurants, i.e. they makes the sky look murky and grey, so the rays of the sun can't get through to the ground, and instead they heat the top of the boundary layer (= the first ~1km of the atmosphere), causing a temperature inversion (hotter above than below), which cuts off convection, which kills the breeze and makes the air static, which means that all the pollutants just build up more and more (including PM2.5 particulates, also primarily from diesels), until it rains and we get some relief, whereupon it starts all over again. In Lucknow over the last few weeks we've had lovely clear skies and fresh breezes, but now the temperatures have begun to rise above 40 deg C and the sky is getting markedly greyer, so I fear that the smog may be returning.

27/4/19

All the references in Taylor Swift's Me! video

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-48063952>

The video is rather fun.

1/5/19

Why is a 2,500-year-old epic dominating polls in modern India?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47944411>

"This year, like in previous elections, the conversation among many hardline Hindus has returned to the epic Ramayana and its protagonist, Ram. A longstanding demand to construct a temple in the northern city of Ayodhya - a key point of tension between Hindus and Muslims - which Hindus believe is Ram's birthplace, has become louder in recent months."

Ram Ram Sita Ram

Two steps forward three steps back

All go backwards now.

6/5/19

Nature crisis: 'Shocking' report details threat to species

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-48169783>

"On land, in the seas, in the sky, the devastating impact of humans on nature is laid bare in a compelling UN report. One million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. Nature everywhere is declining at a speed never previously seen and our need for ever more food and energy are the main drivers."

Even Hans Rosling would've been hard pressed to put a positive spin on these numbers.

8/5/19

Microsoft Word AI 'to improve writing'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48185607>

It's striking how popular the phrase 'AI' has become in the last 3 or 4 years. Here it's applied to the new MS Word spellchecker. But 10 years ago Imperial College Department of Computing research staff all proudly proclaimed "I don't do AI," see HMM p.49. Even 4 years ago when HMM was published it wasn't a popular phrase. Everything changed with the success of AlphaGo in March 2016, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlphaGo>, which uses pattern recognition but calls it 'deep learning'. It's a pity I didn't get backing for my 1990 research proposal, 'The Metastrategy Approach for Artificial Intelligence', which was all about playing Go using precisely this technique.

11/5/19

US sends missile system and ship to Middle East as Iran tensions escalate

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-48235940>

"On Friday, the Pentagon said that the US did not seek conflict with Iran, but that Washington was "ready to defend US forces and interests in the region"."

All together now: "We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do | We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too". Clearly the Americans are behaving like the British in their imperial heyday.

16/5/19

DJI Osmo Action camera poses threat to GoPro

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48279408>

"The Osmo Action uses image-stabilisation software to smooth out its video, rather than using the electronic motors found in the Osmo Pocket and other handheld gimbals. This mirrors the approach of GoPro's Hero 7 Black. But DJI's model has the advantage of a colour front-screen."

Modern technology is quite staggering sometimes.

16/5/19

Bertrand Russell interview 1959

http://www.openculture.com/2012/08/face_to_face_with_bertrand_russell_love_is_wise_hatred_is_foolish.html, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p04qgxlw/face-to-face-bertrand-russell>

Some compelling anecdotes from a real genius. His closing words are famous:

"I should like to say two things, one intellectual and one moral:

The intellectual thing I should want to say to them is this: When you are studying any matter or considering any philosophy, ask yourself only what are the facts and what is the truth that the facts bear out. Never let yourself be diverted either by what you wish to believe or by what you think would have beneficent social effects if it were believed, but look only and solely at what are the facts. That is the intellectual thing that I should wish to say.

The moral thing I should wish to say to them is very simple. I should say: Love is wise, hatred is foolish. In this world, which is getting more and more closely interconnected, we have to learn to tolerate each other. We have to learn to put up with the fact that some people say things that we don't like. We can only live together in that way, and if we are to live together and not die together we must learn a kind of charity and a kind of tolerance which is absolutely vital to the continuation of human life on this planet."

20/5/19

Duchess of Cambridge shows off garden to her children

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48329425>

Royals being normals at last.

21/5/19

Microchips, massive blow: Huawei's vulnerability explained

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48345509>

"Last year, Huawei released a list of its core suppliers and it included 33 US companies. As well as Google having to pull back on supplying its version of Android, major US technology suppliers including Xilinx, Qualcomm, Broadcom and Intel have all warned they will need to stop selling their technology to Huawei in order to comply with the ban."

I don't see how any good can come of this, for anybody.

22/5/19

The 'personality politics' of Narendra Modi and Donald Trump

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48332141>

"for both sets of supporters, there's a broad acceptance that it doesn't matter if the lines of political civility are crossed - as long as the job is done."

This naked pragmatism completes my* little formulae:

Democracy + Populism -> Autocracy; Autocracy + Pragmatism -> Tyranny

(*with acknowledgments to Plato)

29/5/19

Are rare earth minerals China's trump card in its trade war with US?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48366074>

Yup.

29/5/19

Memorial held for ex-Lib Dem leader Lord Paddy Ashdown

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-48382850>

My Dad attended this memorial, under the impression that Ashdown had died recently. When I said that he'd died before Christmas Dad replied, "No wonder I was the only one there, apparently, who was wearing a black tie." In 1985 or 1986 Geeta and I joined Dad and the other Yeovil SDP members on their tour of Parliament, and Paddy Ashdown showed us around both chambers and the adjoining Westminster Hall. He was full of life and great fun, indeed an "all round good guy".

6/6/19

Trump is provoking a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. What could go wrong?

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/06/trump-nuclear-arms-race-middle-east-president>

"Belated confirmation came this week that the US department of energy has issued seven separate permits to allow transfers of nuclear technology to Riyadh. Belated, because the information was purposefully withheld until Democrats insisted on seeing it. Belated also because Trump, his family and associates are doubtless aware of suspicions that they could benefit financially from these or future sales."

What could go wrong? Well, Osama bin Laden was a Saudi who received CIA 'aid' when he was in the Mujahideen; "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

7/6/19

Why 1984 still matters

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/entertainment-arts-48492465>

The best review I've seen of Orwell's book.

11/6/19

Human staff will always be needed, Amazon insists

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48590628>

"Amazon's warehouses will always need human staff, the firm's chief robotics technologist has told the BBC. The company said it had deployed more than 200,000 warehouse robots working in around 50 of its locations."

It's really happening, Reg!

19/6/19

Viewpoint: How the British reshaped India's caste system

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48619734>

"it is doubtful that caste had much significance or virulence in society before the British made it India's defining social feature."

A radical reinterpretation ... but is it true?

19/6/19

Chennai water crisis: City's reservoirs run dry

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48672330>

"The southern Indian city of Chennai (formerly Madras) is in crisis after its four main water reservoirs ran completely dry. The acute water shortage has forced the city to scramble for urgent solutions, including drilling new boreholes. Residents have had to stand in line for hours to get water from government tanks, and restaurants have closed due to the lack of water. "Only rain can save Chennai from this situation," an official told BBC Tamil."

When a city is critically dependent upon the unsustainable availability of monsoon rain and deep borehole water then you know it's time to get out.

20/6/19

Spy satellites reveal extent of Himalayan glacier loss

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-48696023>

"The Columbia University team looked at 650 glaciers in the Himalayas spanning 2,000km. The group found that between 1975 and 2000, an average of 4bn tonnes of ice was being lost each year. But between 2000 and 2016, the glaciers melted approximately twice as fast - losing about 8bn tonnes of ice each year on average."

Mother India is dying.

4/7/19

James Lovelock on the future of AI and climate change

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/science-environment-48858692>

"Once described as "the most important and original scientific thinker in the world", James Lovelock is still a hugely influential environmental thinker - and he's about to celebrate his 100th birthday. In the 1960s he was a campaigning eco-pioneer and now he's a firm advocate of nuclear power. The BBC Today programme's Mishal Husain went to meet him at his home, as his new book Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence was published."

The full radio interview (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qj9z/episodes/player>, 4/7/19, 7.35am) is inspirational.

6/7/19

The Guardian view on the climate emergency: forests can help to save us

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/05/the-guardian-view-on-the-climate-emergency-forests-can-help-to-save-us>

If there is hope, it lies in the trees.

8/7/19

AI pilot 'sees' runway and lands automatically

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48908346>

It's really happening, Reg!

11/7/19

Cricket World Cup semi-final, England v Australia

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/live/cricket/47484055>

Cricket causes huge NHS backlog:

14:15 Do you think the patients notice when I check "the computer" more than usual during the consultation? - Tom

14:33 Turns out they do notice! (If you're using the screen to show patient info sheets and you've accidentally left the live text page up. Patient was v understanding - it is Eng v Aus after all). - James, GP, Somerset

14:33 Went to the hospital a couple of weeks ago, the consultant went very quiet while looking at my notes. I asked is there a problem? Yes. After another few seconds he added, Pakistan have just lost another wicket. I hadn't noticed his smartphone was on silent and he was watching the cricket. - Anonymous

14:46 My patients didn't notice.... mind you they were two cats and a dog and anaesthetised for their ops today! Happy to report all went well as are England! - Simon - vet in Weybridge!

11/7/19

Google's DeepMind goes undercover to battle gamers

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-48950103>

"Gamers in Europe are being invited to take on a bot developed by some of the world's leading artificial intelligence researchers. But there's a twist: players will not be told when they have been pitted against it. The tests are being carried out by DeepMind, the London-based AI company that previously created a program that defeated the world's top Go players. In this case, the challenge involves the sci-fi video game Starcraft II."

An interesting variant of the Turing Test. It's be interesting to see if people can tell whether they're up against an AI bot. I suspect it will be quite easy to work out: the AI bot will always be more fast, more agile, more powerful, more clever, and more interesting than the human avatars.

21/7/19

What actually happens inside us when we read?

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/what-actually-happens-inside-us-when-we-read/p07h9t70>

Our mirror neurons (mainly in the parietal cortex) make simple recognition-based associations such that we easily identify with fictional characters, with the result that "stories can increase empathy, reduce prejudice and loneliness, and be very persuasive".

23/7/19

What would Plato make of referendums?

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/what-would-plato-make-of-referendums/p074jgpb>

In my view:

(1) It is a long-established expectation that in a 'free society' citizens may pass on a measure of their accumulated wealth and power to their children (in the form of titles, positions, capital, property, and exclusive access to a privileged education). Over generations this 'freedom' creates a separate class of people who are 'born to rule'. In countries like the UK and the USA they have most of the top jobs in government, business, and the services.

(2) And yet, as I say in <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/LognormalWealth.pdf>, "If one were to measure the distribution of wealth across a population in a free market economy, one would find that the poor always outnumber the rich." This is the direct consequence of the operation of a

market in which the prices of goods, services and capital are adjusted by proportions rather than absolutes. e.g. when you get a pay rise it is by a fixed percentage rather a fixed amount.

(3) For as long as general elections are contested just between members of the 'ruling class', the 'poor majority' will rightly feel that no-one represents them, so many of them don't bother to vote. They are effectively disenfranchised by 'the system'.

(4) The genius of populist demagogues such as Trump and Farage is to get the 'poor majority' to come out to vote. Maybe this is no bad thing, as by any measure it must be 'more democratic' for a higher proportion of the eligible population to participate in collective choice. And it doesn't yet amount to mob rule: for that, one would need to get the same mass response to a whole series of votes (e.g. re-electing Trump as US President, or the Brexiteers winning a second EU referendum). But the 'poor majority' are notoriously fickle, and 'perpetual revolution' is a contradiction-in-terms, so in practice the only way to uphold and enforce the fluctuating 'will of the people' is through the emergence of a pragmatic tyrant (who claims to be the people's champion, but rarely tests it in a meaningful election). Hence my little formulae: Democracy + Populism -> Autocracy; Autocracy + Pragmatism -> Tyranny.

(5) Therefore Plato was right.

24/7/19

India turns to electric vehicles to beat pollution

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48961525>

At last, a sensible decision; but will India continue to generate electricity by burning coal?

24/7/19

Climate change: Current warming 'unparalleled' in 2,000 years

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-49086783>

"The speed and extent of current global warming exceeds any similar event in the past 2,000 years, researchers say. They show that famous historic events like the "Little Ice Age" don't compare with the scale of warming seen over the last century. The research suggests that the current warming rate is higher than any observed previously. The scientists say it shows many of the arguments used by climate sceptics are no longer valid."

The timeline graph is striking.

25/7/19

Boris Johnson replaces Theresa May as the UK's new prime minister

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-49098630>

Boris Johnson can't be found out: we all know he's bluffing

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/25/boris-johnson-bluffing-stage-managed>

This inspires me to compose a haiku:

Damn Conservatives

Picking BoJo as PM

Clutching a straw man.

25/7/19

Why is India sending humanoid robots into space?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48918280>

The video of Atlas doing backflips is particularly entertaining. It's really happening, Reg!

28/7/19

The downsides of positive thinking by Derren Brown

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/the-downsides-of-positive-thinking/p07c6sb6>

"Optimism doesn't work when things go wrong."

A succinct summary of Brown's book 'Happy'.

29/7/19

Nasa's Valkyrie robot could help build Mars base

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-49072492>

Indeed it's highly unlikely that a Mars base will be built - or populated - by anything other than robots. (Plus: It's really happening, Reg!)

30/7/19

Climate change: Tree planting rise 'needs to happen quickly'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-47541491>

Punjab: India state launches 'gun for plants' scheme

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49149431>

Ethiopia 'breaks' tree-planting record to tackle climate change

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49151523>

Let's all plant trees!

1/8/19

Kidney condition detected in minutes by app

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-49178891>

Facebook funds AI mind-reading experiment

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-49165713>

AI system 'should be recognised as inventor'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-49191645>

It's really happening, Reg!

3/8/19

Painted lady butterflies emerge in once-a-decade phenomenon

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-49210010>

As seen on my buddleia.

6/8/19

India water crisis flagged up in global report

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49232374>

"According to this database compiled by the World Resources Institute, a US-based think tank advocating sustainability, India ranks 13 among the 17 worst affected countries - a list that includes countries where large swathes are deserts such as Saudi Arabia. The report also ranks nine Indian states and union territories as having "extremely high" water stress. Haryana is among the worst hit. Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir are the others. They all scored between four and five on scale of zero to five, with five being the worst."

This is shocking: Haryana and Punjab are meant to be India's 'bread basket', their primary agricultural states; UP dominates the Ganga/Yamuna plain, where Indian civilisation developed and thrived, because the soil was good and there was plenty of water in navigable rivers; and J&K is supposed to be perfect for fruit trees. This is the real threat to India, not Pakistan or China!

6/8/19

If one drone isn't enough, try a drone swarm

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-49177704>

The video of the ball-dodging drone is particularly impressive. The article talks about drone swarms being used by farmers, but their use by soldiers and the police is just as likely. It's really happening, Reg!

8/8/19

NHS to set up national artificial intelligence lab

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-49270325>

"The NHS in England is setting up a national artificial intelligence laboratory to enhance care of patients and research."

In due course it would be interesting to ask whether it's more rewarding to converse with a computer than with your fellow medics. Also, IRHR.

8/8/19

Abbey Road: Beatles fans gather to recreate cover shot

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49279293>

"Thousands of fans made a pilgrimage to London's Abbey Road 50 years after the Beatles walked over its zebra crossing for the cover of the last album the band recorded."

Amazing!

12/8/19

Why we see faces in clouds

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/why-we-see-faces-in-clouds/p07jsv05?playlist=made-in-partnership-with-the-open-university>

Simple pattern recognition made mysterious.

14/8/19

AI reads books out loud in authors' voices

<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-49329650>

"Chinese search engine Sogou is creating artificial-intelligence lookalikes to read popular novels in authors' voices."

IRHR.

14/8/19

'Human-sized penguin' lived in New Zealand

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49340715>

"The remains of a giant penguin the size of a human have been discovered in New Zealand."

<http://www.montypython.net/scripts/penguins.php>

"If we increase the size of the penguin until it is the same height as the man and then compare the relative brain sizes, we now find that the penguin's brain is still smaller."

17/8/19

How reliable is AI at telling us about ourselves?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/technology-49322214>

"Typically in computer vision systems there's six emotions - fear, happiness, sadness, disgust, anger."

The sixth emotion would be the embarrassment that a person feels when they've just demonstrated publicly their utter ignorance of popular science and their moronic inability to count.

26/8/19

At Rosh's suggestion I've been reading 'Mother Tongue' by Bill Bryson. On p.224 I found the following insight: "The Romans also liked anagrams – scrambling the letters of a word or phrase to form new words or phrases – and turned 'Quid est veritas?' ('What is truth?') into 'Est vir qui adest' ('It is this man here')." I wonder whether the author of John 18:38 was aware of this anagram and its implicit double meaning when he had Pilate ask Jesus the same rhetorical question, and not wait for a reply: "Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went

out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all." (For a wider discussion of this arcane theological question see <http://www.sirbacon.org/truth.htm>.)

Incidentally, the whole story of Jesus being crucified and Barabbas being freed is precisely the ancient Jewish tradition of sacrificing to God an innocent young goat and sending to the Devil a miserable old goat (= the scapegoat), see Principia Intellegentia pp.225-6 (below) and <http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/HowPeopleThinkSlides.pdf> slide 14.

Ancient myth and modern fiction

Some ancient myths are based on actual events, others are not. However, all myths attempt to describe or explain something about the human world, and all have been reinterpreted many times. On both counts we might expect that these myths say more about human psychology and the learning styles of their narrators than about the original events that they claim to report. To lend weight to this expectation we start with something heavy.

Investigation. *The Golden Bough*. James George Frazer's *opus magnum* is a magnificent, unreadable tome. Magnificent because of its scope, unreadable because of its pedantry. Having merely skimmed through an abridged version³⁶, I am not qualified to pass judgement. Therefore the following comments constitute 'first impressions' only.

Frazer's all-encompassing study of myth, ritual and belief is framed by his description of the rites of Nemi. These rites involve: (i) The 'King of the Wood', who dies or is sacrificed, only to be reborn; (ii) A challenger, who aims to take the place of the king; (iii) The goddess Diana Nemorensis, bearer of the golden bough, the totem of the rite. Frazer focusses almost exclusively on the first of these roles, in its many manifestations across all cultures. However, it suits my purpose to retain all three of the Nemi roles, and to add a further two, the 'shaman' and the 'trickster', that appear intermittently throughout *The Golden Bough* and other myth studies. These five roles may be mapped to IDEAL learning styles as follows:

IDEAL learning style	Role
Empiricist	Trickster
Idealist	Dying and rising king
Theorist	Shaman
Activist	Challenger
Conformist	Totem bearer

In emphasising the role of the 'dying and rising king', Frazer gives great credence to the concept of the 'scapegoat'. However, he appears not to have known that this is a relatively recent concept, for the word makes its first appearance in William Tyndale's 1526 translation of the Bible. Tyndale's usage survives in the King James Bible:

And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast

³⁶ James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915; Oxford 1994).

lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.³⁷

This is based on a misreading of 'Azazel' ('Goat-god') as 'ezazel' ('the goat that departs', hence Tyndale's '(e)scape-goat') present in the fifth-century Vulgate Bible. It is corrected in the Revised Standard Version:

Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat upon which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.³⁸

Christian theology conflates these two goats as two aspects of Christ: (i) The innocent sacrifice; (ii) The bearer of our sins. Thus "Christ died so that our sins may be forgiven". Frazer, following common usage, similarly conflates the two concepts in the single word 'scapegoat'. However, the original meaning was quite different, and much simpler: one goat was sacrificed to God, the other was sent to the Devil together with our accumulated sins. If theologians had maintained this interpretation then the two 'goats' would have been Christ and Barabbas respectively, and we would be saying "Christ died and Barabbas lived so that our sins may be forgiven". This change of emphasis suggests that Frazer should have drawn a greater distinction between the 'dying and rising king' and the 'scapegoat', as indeed there is a distinction between "the sacred king who dies at midsummer" and "the son who avenges him"³⁹—Agamemnon and Orestes, for instance.

Five reasons why Frazer should have been influenced by John Millar:

1. Millar has many interesting things to say about the relationship between cultural practices and societal roles, much of it of considerable relevance to Frazer.
2. Millar's liberal Scottish Enlightenment outlook would have appealed to Frazer.
3. Like Frazer, Millar was a scion of Glasgow.

³⁷ *Leviticus* 16:7-10 (KJV).

³⁸ *Leviticus* 16:7-10 (RSV).

³⁹ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Penguin 1955).

27/8/19

The robo racing cars accelerating driverless tech

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-49420570>

'Dangerous' AI offers to write fake news

<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-49446729>

IRHR.

29/8/19

'All bets now off' on which ape was humanity's ancestor

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49486980>

"Prof Haile-Selassie says the specimen is the best example yet of the ape-like human ancestor called *Australopithecus anamensis* - the oldest known australopithecine whose kind may have existed as far back as 4.2 million years ago."

It turns out that we are all Rastas. Altogether now:

"Woy yoy yoy, woy yoy-yoy yoy

Woy yoy yoy yoy, yoy yoy-yoy yoy!

Woy yoy yoy, woy yoy-yoy yoy

Woy yoy yoy yoy, yoy yoy-yoy yoy!"

<https://genius.com/Bob-marley-and-the-wailers-buffalo-soldier-lyrics>

2/9/19

Understanding the mechanics of hatred

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/understanding-the-mechanics-of-hatred/p07m1tgk>

Essential watching for peacemakers.

2/9/19

Tiffany Francis-Baker: How forests shaped our literary heritage and inspired a nation

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49496757>

"The woods are ever changing, society's ever changing - what the woods mean, and what forests mean in society is ever changing. We're facing numerous challenges today - climate change, pests and diseases, our forests are under threat - and they're more important for human welfare and well being, inspiration and creativity than perhaps, you might say, ever before."

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42891/stopping-by-woods-on-a-snowy-evening>

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep": my idea of paradise.

2/9/19

We, the peoples of the Amazon, are full of fear. Soon you will be too

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/02/amazon-destruction-earth-brazilian-kayapo-people>

"We all breathe this one air, we all drink the same water. We live on this one planet. We need to protect the Earth. If we don't, the big winds will come and destroy the forest."

Naah. Once Brexit happens we can sit tight in our green and pleasant land, knowing that we won't be swamped by fast-breeding tree-burning dirty rotten foreigners, even while the rest of the world dies of fire and thirst. Just like in *The Handmaid's Tale* and similar dystopias.

5/9/19

How Britain's opium trade impoverished Indians

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49404024>

"Historian William Dalrymple, author of *The Anarchy*, a new book on the East India Company, says it "ferried opium to China, fighting the opium wars in order to seize an offshore base at Hong Kong and safeguard its profitable monopoly in narcotics"."

Arjun and I heard the same thing at the RSAA (Royal Society for Asian Affairs) several years ago. (William Dalrymple was also there, and giving a talk, but not on this topic.) It's one of the most shameful acts of the British Empire.

5/9/19

Left-handed DNA found - and it changes brain structure

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-49579810>

"The best guess is handedness is 25% genetic and 75% down to the environment (anything that's not in the genes). Yet this study has found only the first 1% of that genetic component and only in a British population. So, much more work is needed ..."

Or they could just accept my simple-and-convincing explanation in

<http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/RightHanded.pdf> ... but then they'd be out of work ...

14/9/19

Gold toilet stolen in Blenheim Palace burglary

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-49700620>

"An 18-carat solid gold toilet has been stolen in a burglary overnight at Blenheim Palace. ... It was part of an exhibition by Italian conceptual artist Maurizio Cattelan that opened on Thursday. ...

Speaking last month, Edward Spencer-Churchill - half-brother of the current Duke of Marlborough - said he was relaxed about security for the artwork. "It's not going to be the easiest thing to nick," he said." Stupid aristos.

18/9/19

The 'brown girls' out to conquer Instagram

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-49530394>

"Brown girls are pro-us; not anti-you. We should be allowed to celebrate - especially as women of colour are the least represented in the media. Black and brown women are often pushed to the side. Now we are being seen and on our terms."

I agree. Jai brown girls!

20/9/19

How to Save the World: Is individual action pointless in the face of climate change?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-49756280>

"Let's not beat around the bush: the simple answer has to be yes; individual action is pointless. ... It is a dispiriting conclusion and begs an obvious question, and one that I am sure has already occurred to you: why bother? That's exactly what I asked the 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg when I met her last month. ... she doesn't think it is her job to tell other people how to live their lives. Rather, her convictions must guide her own behaviour."

I agree.

22/9/19

Delhi pollution: Is air quality in the Indian capital now improving?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49729291>

One regular African swallow doesn't make a summer, and one regular Indian summer doesn't cure asthma.

25/9/19

Rewilding will make Britain a rainforest nation again

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/25/rewilding-britains-rainforest-planting-trees>

"The forests still burn, but the world now looks away. In both the Amazon basin and the rainforests of Indonesia, the world-scorching inferno rages on, already forgotten by most of the media. Intricate living systems, species that took millions of years to evolve, are being incinerated in moments, then replaced with monocultures. Giant plumes of carbon tip us further into climate breakdown. And we're not even talking about it."

I'm planting trees. What are you doing?

24-26/9/19

Trump Ukraine call: What's this story all about?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-49800181>

The Trump-Ukraine scandal is a taste of how dirty the US elections will get

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/23/the-trump-ukraine-scandal-is-a-taste-of-how-dirty-will-the-us-elections-get>

"Like Vladimir Putin, Al Capone knew that you don't have to be smart to get away with murder. You just have to confuse everyone about what guilt looks like."

By fair mean or foul, Donald Trump will get his second term in the White House.

Trump impeachment: Lawmakers see 'troubling' whistleblower complaint

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-49834661>

"I didn't do it. I didn't threaten anybody ... No push, no pressure, no nothing. It's all a hoax, folks, it's all a big hoax."

This is straight out of The Untouchables: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjmKMv4yL9s>

26/9/19

Boston Dynamics robot dog Spot goes on sale

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-49823945>

The video of Atlas doing gymnastics is amazing. IRHR!

3/10/19

Boris Johnson or Donald Trump: Who is in more trouble?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-49884838>

This is hilarious (if you're not a Tory or a Republican).

9/10/19

Trumplomacy: Are we seeing the end of a close Israel-US relationship?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49973217>

"after nearly three years of walking in lock-step with the Trump administration, Israel is facing the reality of an unpredictable and transactional president who has deep reservations about using US military might, is afraid of getting involved in another Middle East conflict, and who, like Mr Netanyahu, is immersed in his own domestic political battles for survival."

I'll say this for Donald Trump, despite all his ignorant rhetoric, and every encouragement from the Israelis and Saudis, he hasn't started another war ... yet ...

13/10/19

Mercedes' 'permanent scepticism' gains them 'greatest' label

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/formula1/50032379>

"It is about marginal gains. It's about putting everything together and not leaving one stone unturned. It's about having a no-blame culture, empowering even when it's difficult sometimes when you'd rather control things."

See Matthew Syed, 'Black Box Thinking' and/or

<http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/HowPeopleThinkSlides.pdf>.

17/10/19

Robot hand solves Rubik's cube, but not the grand challenge

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50064225>

The world's first artificial womb for humans

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/health-50056405>

Unmanned ship to go on 400-year-old journey across the Atlantic

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50047449>

IRHR.

20/10/19

Have you heard of the catastrophic men theory of history? Step forward Boris Johnson...

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/20/catastrophic-men-theory-history-step-forward-boris-johnson>

I liked this flip-side of Carlyle's 'Great Man' theory.

1/11/19

All you need is mud: Japan's new spin on rugby

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-50252393>

"It's charming everyone from shrieking schoolkids to professional rugby players, but Japan's newest all-weather sport is anything but good clean fun. This is tambo rugby - where teams splash and squelch their way over a flooded rice field (or tambo, in Japanese), and swimming goggles are the new skullcaps. It's a non-contact game, meaning there are no tackles, and players of all ages and

genders face each other on this waterlogged mud wallow. A try will get you two points, and the joy of flinging yourself into an enormous puddle."

Now that looks like real fun.

2/11/19

Trump says Beto O'Rourke 'quit like a dog'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-50272171>

ISIS leader al-Baghdadi 'died like a dog' says Trump

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6c5D8AlKrg>

Trump tweets fake photo of Isis raid dog, and appears to declassify its name

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/30/trump-latest-news-tweet-dog-isis>

"I suppose you'll have to skip the country now. A fugitive, eh. You'll be hunted down like... well, a dog."

https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Wallace_and_Gromit

Spot the connection.

3-7/11/19

India air pollution at 'unbearable levels', Delhi minister says

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-50280390>

"Air pollution in the north of India has "reached unbearable levels," the capital Delhi's Chief Minister Arvid Kejriwal says. ... Levels of dangerous particles in the air - known as PM2.5 - are far higher than recommended and about seven times higher than in the Chinese capital Beijing."

Delhi air quality: Severe pollution drives car rationing

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-50285343>

"Health officials have asked people to stay indoors and refrain from doing any physical activity. Schools are closed until Tuesday and the shutdown is likely to be extended until Friday as the city continues to choke under a thick blanket of smog."

Delhi air pollution 'killing our children'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-india-50321498>

Why is India's pollution much worse than China's?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50298972>

Don't get me started ...

7/11/19

Boston Dynamics boss learned by unbalancing toddler

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50316951>

IRHR.

9/11/19

In 1989, capitalism won. Today its greatest ideological challenge is the planet

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/09/1989-capitalism-planet-iron-curtain-market-environmental>

"The cold war was won because western capitalism proved better than communism at delivering goods for consumers. The events of 30 years ago created an ideological vacuum that is being filled not by Chinese-style capitalism but by environmentalism, a creed that does not accept the basic "more is better" tenet of capitalism. On the contrary, it says that adherence to this belief is killing the planet."

I agree. Down with capitalism!

12/11/19

Video of 'mini cheetah' robots playing football scares many, amuses some

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/it-s-viral/video-of-mini-cheetah-robots-playing-soccer-scares-many-amuses-some/story-2z4iqqgdvdEx3lcc2PFNYO.html>

The video is amazing. IRHR.

19/11/19

'Why economists get things wrong'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-50310815>

That's economists other than them (Duflo, Banerjee and Kremer), obviously. I wonder how they came to their conclusions; was it using the same randomised control trial technique that won them their Nobel Prize? (And did no-one on the awarding committee watch this video,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB1A62u9fBE>? They should've: Angus Deaton also won the prize, in 2015.)

23/11/19

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20191121-why-you-might-be-counting-in-the-wrong-language>

"Nearly all cultures today use the same decimal, or base-10, number system, which arranges the digits 0-9 into units, such as tens, hundreds and so on. The most logical counting systems use words that reflect the structure of this system and have regular, straightforward rules – but many languages use complicated and messy conventions instead. ... in English, words like “twelve” or “eleven” don’t give many clues as to the structure of the number itself (these names actually come from the Old Saxon words *ellevan* and *twelif*, meaning “one left” and “two left”, after 10 has been subtracted). Contrast this with Mandarin Chinese, where the relationship between the tens and the units is very clear. Here, 92 is written *jiǔ shí èr*, which translates as “nine ten two”. Japanese and Korean also use similar conventions, where larger numbers are created by compounding the names for smaller ones. Psychologists call systems like these “transparent”, where there is an obvious and consistent link between numbers and their names."

I don't think this is a serious issue. My own early schooling followed Montessori methods, and so I learned the decimal number system from tactile 'units' (of identical small wooden cubes), 'rods' (of 10 units), 'squares' (of 100 units), and 'blocks' (of 1000 units); and I suspect that once that's learned it really doesn't matter what words are used to signify individual numbers such as 11 or 12. The trick is "to undertake 'symbolic referencing', that is, to give names to things, and then to refer to the things by their given names rather than as things-in-themselves" (HMM p.124). Technically, what is being learned is not this or that word but 'abstraction', i.e. the use of words as mere labels for 'things' (in this case, numbers) which have a range of properties unrelated to the words themselves. And it might actually help this abstraction process to throw in the odd word with an arcane Old Saxon meaning that no-one understands or thinks about!

28/11/19

Go master quits because AI 'cannot be defeated'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50573071>

"A master player of the Chinese strategy game Go has decided to retire, due to the rise of artificial intelligence that "cannot be defeated". ... Lee Se-dol is considered to be one of the greatest Go players of the modern era. The 36-year-old former world champion started playing at the age of five, and turned pro just seven years later. His defeat by the AlphaGo software was seen as a landmark moment for artificial intelligence."

Lee Se-dol is the first human casualty in what will be known as the AI Revolution.

29/11/19

Reactions to the global environmental crisis: the complacent neither see nor hear; the frightened cover their eyes and ears; the hyperactive generate yet more sound and fury; the self-righteous wallow in the misery they foresaw; as for me, I shall return home and tend my garden. William Wordsworth: "The world is too much with us; late and soon, | Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;— | Little we see in Nature that is ours; | We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" T S Eliot, Burnt Norton: "Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind | Cannot bear very much reality." W B Yeats, The Second Coming: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst | Are full of passionate intensity." Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden: "The silent sullen peoples | Shall weigh your Gods and you." George Eliot, Middlemarch: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity." For over twenty years I have lived with "that roar which lies on the other side of silence": it is tinnitus, and it has worn me to a ravelling.

30/11/19

Rediscovering the forgotten Indian artists of British India

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50542353>

"The English East India Company, founded in 1600, was established for trading. But as the powerful multinational corporation expanded its control over India in the late 18th Century, it commissioned many remarkable artworks from Indian painters who had previously worked for the Mughals. Writer and historian William Dalrymple writes about these hybrid paintings which explore life and nature."

Fascinating as ever from Dalrymple.

3/12/19

Bad Air Day: UP Govt to cut nearly 64,000 trees in Lucknow for Defence Expo

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/bad-air-day-govt-cut-nearly-64000-trees-lucknow-defence-expo>

64,000 Trees to Be Displaced for Defence Expo in Lucknow Next Year

<https://www.news18.com/news/india/64000-trees-to-be-displaced-for-defence-expo-in-lucknow-next-year-2405287.html>

Apparently the tree-clearing is required to enable people to take joyrides in tanks along the waterfront: and isn't that a fitting symbol of modern India! In a sane world Nanaji would ask his pals CM Yogi Adityanath and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to intervene. Unfortunately, however, India operates under the same insane logic as 'Apocalypse Now': "It's a way we had over here for living with ourselves. We cut 'em in half with a machine gun and give 'em a Band-Aid. It was a lie. And the more I saw them, the more I hated lies."

5/12/19

Nato summit: Trump calls Trudeau 'two-faced' over video

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50653597>

"US President Donald Trump has called Justin Trudeau "two-faced" over a video in which the Canadian leader appears to mock him at a meeting of Nato leaders."

So much for the greater respect Donald Trump claims he's earning for the USA around the world.

Five 'hot mic' moments that got leaders in trouble

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-50662928>

1. Ronald Reagan: 'We begin bombing in five minutes' (1984)
2. Jacques Chirac doesn't like British or Finnish food (2005)
3. 'Yo Blair!' (2006)
4. Gordon Brown's 'bigoted woman' (2010)
5. 'I can't stand him any more' (2011)

11/12/19

Climate change: Major emitters accused of blocking progress at UN talks

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-50736617>

"Delegates from developing countries have reacted angrily to what they see as attempts to block progress at the COP25 meeting in Madrid. One negotiator told the BBC that the talks had failed to find agreement on a range of issues because of the blocking actions of some large emitters. Carlos Fuller from Belize said that Brazil, Saudi Arabia, India and China were "part of the problem". Other observers said there was a serious risk of failure at the talks."

What are they talking about, anyway? In previous conferences they came up with the idea of 'carbon credits', but what's the point of that now that the Amazon rainforest is going up in smoke? (Life imitating art: In The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy the people chose the leaf as the unit of currency, but that led to hyperinflation, so they burnt down the forests.) My reaction is to stay at home and tend my garden. What's yours?

13/12/19

Minecraft diamond challenge leaves AI creators stumped

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50720823>

"Researchers have found that using reinforcement learning alone can sometimes deliver superior results. For instance, DeepMind's AlphaGo Zero program trumped one of the research hub's earlier efforts, which used both reinforcement learning and the study of labelled data from human play to learn the board game Go. But this "pure" approach typically requires much more computing power, making it too expensive for researchers other than large organisations or governments."

I don't think this is correct. As Demis Hassabis said when interviewed on Desert Island Discs, AlphaGo succeeded because it used deep learning plus meta-learning (which I interpret as Systems 1 and 2, see <http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/MyPhilosophy03.pdf>), which doesn't necessarily require a huge amount of computing power.

14/12/19

Myanmar Rohingya: Aung San Suu Kyi cuts a haunted figure in court

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-50770961>

"The spectacle of Aung San Suu Kyi, a once-persecuted Nobel peace laureate now defending her country against allegations of genocide over its treatment of the Rohingya minority, has been one of bewildering irony. ... After two years of blistering international criticism for failing to use her moral authority to stand up for the Rohingya, she is now the permanent face of the legal defence of some of the worst abuses imaginable. The generals, safe for now and far from the winter chill of The Hague, have watched a Nobel Peace Prize winner trying, in many people's eyes, to defend the indefensible. They wouldn't have it any other way."

Premise 1: Genocide is a great evil.

Premise 2: There are too many people in the world.

Conclusion: Any government that tries to address the problem of overpopulation - e.g. Burma with its teeming Rohingya (who the Burmese claim originate from Bangladesh), or for that matter Burma's backer China with its stringent one-child policy - risks being accused of perpetrating a great evil.

See also <http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/MyPhilosophy03.pdf>, 'Perspectives', and ask yourself, "What would I do?"

15/12/19

Unions colluded in the fiction that Corbyn's plan was going to win power

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/15/unions-colluded-in-fiction-corbyns-plan-never-win-power>

"Johnson might be a narcissist, a twister, a liar and a toff – but in his witty one-liners and breezy optimism they recognised him, however rogue and untrustworthy, as a member of the English

officer class, on the battlefield, at least. Corbyn, in contrast, would have been at home as a conscientious objector. You can respect that position. But a majority of the British will never elect such a man their prime minister."

I think this hits the nail on the head.

22/12/19

Space Force: Trump officially launches new US military service

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-50876429>

"President Donald Trump has officially funded a Pentagon force focused on warfare in space - the US Space Force. The new military service, the first in more than 70 years, falls under the US Air Force."

They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

26/12/19

Paris Agreement: Will India lose millions of carbon credits?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-50774901>

"One of India's main goals at the recent UN climate talks or COP25 was to win the right to sell the carbon credits it has earned over the years. But the talks ended in Madrid on 15 December without agreeing on rules for future carbon trading, leaving the fate of billions of carbon credits on the line. This is a bad sign for India. ... India had earned hundreds of millions of carbon credits or emission reduction certificates (CERs) by investing in low-carbon intensive technologies, switching to renewable energy and protecting forests. But since this happened under an earlier climate agreement - the Kyoto Protocol - the meeting in Madrid was expected to finalise rules for a new global carbon market as part of the Paris Agreement. India is the world's third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and it earned a lot of money by selling its carbon credits in the international market. But it still has hundreds of millions of CERs left over that it wants to sell."

This is a sick joke. India is planning to import coal from Siberia to burn in its power stations, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-50507539>. Meanwhile the electricity supply grid can't cope with demand, so houses and businesses must have their own diesel generators or face frequent power cuts. Diesels emit CO₂ (very inefficiently, compared with power stations) and are the primary source of PM_{2.5}, which directly affects ground-level air quality and health. And India wants to sell carbon credits so that it can do what? Burn more coal?! If only we had a world government to stop this wickedness.

Also, if carbon credits can become valueless overnight in this way, then the same thing can happen to school vouchers/DBTs. Geeta please note.

27/12/19

Mecca 1979: The mosque siege that changed the course of Saudi history

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-50852379>

This is fascinating; and, for me, rather worrying, as I have absolutely no recollection of it happening!

30/12/19

Hydrogen-powered drones could point way to future travel

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/business-50839917>

"Maybe in the next 20 or 30 years we can even like start thinking about how to put this in commercial flights and decarbonise air travel."

Thirty years seems to be a universal constant for the rollout of any kind of new technology; e.g. for over 60 years it's been cited in relation to using nuclear fusion as an energy source. I suspect it's another way of the speaker saying, "After my retirement."