

3/1/18

AI early diagnosis could save heart and cancer patients

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-42357257>

"The government's healthcare tsar, Sir John Bell, has told BBC News that AI could "save the NHS"."

3/1/18

10 explosive revelations from new Trump book

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42559436>

1. Bannon thought Don Jr meeting 'treasonous'
2. Trump 'befuddled' by his victory
3. Trump 'angry' at inauguration
4. Trump found White House 'scary'
5. Ivanka hopes to be president
6. Ivanka mocks dad's 'comb-over'
7. White House unsure of priorities
8. Trump's admiration for Murdoch
9. Murdoch calls Trump 'idiot'
10. Flynn knew Russia ties 'a problem'

"Like the protagonists in the film The Producers ... their success was their undoing."

4/1/18

Trump scraps his own voter fraud commission

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42561699>

"US President Donald Trump has scrapped the voter fraud commission he set up in May to investigate his own allegations of illegal voting."

Well we all knew that he was being deceived by his own 'fake news' (= what we used to call propaganda), so it's no surprise that he can't find any evidence to back up these false claims.

4/1/18

Robot warning over living wage rise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42559226>

"The rapid increase in the living wage could mean that more jobs are replaced by robots, the Institute of Fiscal Studies has warned. The think tank said with the hourly rate set to top £8.50 per hour by 2020, more jobs may be at risk of automation. Firms are more likely to invest in robots and computerised systems if the alternative is more expensive labour."

5/1/18

UK car sales see first drop for six years

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42571828>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-41773715>

"Diesels have been a key target for air quality campaigners, particularly since the Volkswagen emissions scandal erupted in late 2015. In July, after weeks of speculation, the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced that sales of all new diesel and petrol cars would be banned by 2040. Although the proposed ban doesn't include hybrids and won't come into effect for more than two decades, it does appear to have had an impact on sales. In September, for example, registrations of diesels were down more than 20% compared with last year - continuing a trend seen over several months. Sales of electric cars and hybrids have risen sharply, but not enough to make up for the decline elsewhere."

NB Diesel engines in cars and small-scale electricity generators are the primary source of fine particulates, i.e. PM2.5. Contrary to popular opinion, you cannot get FINE particulates from construction, open fires, fireworks, crop burning, or dust blown in from the Middle East.

5/1/18

Short showers for India's cricket team in South Africa

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-42578484>

"Despite the hardships facing South Africans, the Indian Express managed to salvage some good news from the situation. "There is one silver lining for the Indian cricketers," it said. "Sinking underground water level means less moisture and a dry track [pitch], conditions Indians are used to." On the first morning of the Test, conditions appeared to favour them, with South Africa's batsmen reduced to 12-3 within the first five overs, before a fourth wicket stand rescued the hosts." So that's all right then. Maybe other cricketing nations should lower their water tables likewise.

6/1/18

Is this the year 'weaponised' AI bots do battle?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42559967>

"Whether helping to identify diseases and develop new drugs, or powering driverless cars and air traffic management systems, the consensus is that AI will start to deliver in 2018, justifying last year's sometimes hysterical hype."

7/1/18

Northern Forest: Plan to plant 'ribbon of woodland' across England

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42591494>

"The description of the project from the Woodland Trust suggests that the forest will be less of a green ribbon and more of a sparsely-threaded doily."

Now there's a word we don't see very often. I remember it being used in one of the Paddington Bear stories, along the lines of:

Mr Curry (angrily): "Bear! What are you doing, turning my five pound note into a doily!"

Paddington (sadly): "Oh dear. I seem to have skipped a page in my book of magic tricks. Two of them are stuck together with marmalade."

Mr Brown (with a sigh): "Don't worry Paddington, I'll pay."

Mrs Bird (darkly): "There's more to that bear than meets the eye."

12/1/18

Trump 'in Oval Office outburst about migrants'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42656433>

"US President Donald Trump has reportedly lashed out at immigrants in a foul-mouthed Oval Office outburst. "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" Mr Trump asked lawmakers on Thursday, in remarks widely reported by US media."

Well he has a point. The native americans probably said much the same many times after 1492.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGKU8awk7Vg>

18/1/18

Moustached monkey is separate species

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42720556>

Moustached men are a separate species, too!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtTDUXHAU5Y>

20/1/18

France: Emmanuel Macron's marvellous manoeuvres this week

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-42749953>

"The man is a cross between Metternich and Michelangelo! And Machiavelli too."

And Mini-Me, maybe. Awesome alliteration or annoying affectation?

20/1/18

Tech Tent: China's AI ambitions

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-42745218>

"So far, the trade war between the US and China that many feared when Donald Trump was elected has failed to materialise, But maybe the battle over AI could provide the spark."

As ever, it's not the technology, it's what people want to do with it, that matters.

20/1/18

Hope for threatened 'little tiger cat'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42738079>

Cf.

<http://prints.bl.uk/art/477854/alice-and-the-cheshire-cat>

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/Cheshire_Cat_Tenniel.png

21/1/18

Dark is divine: What colour are Indian gods and goddesses?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-42637998>

Fair and lovely? Pink and piggy, more like.

21/1/18

Air pollution: Are diesel cars always the biggest health hazard?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42666596>

"modern diesels actually emit very few particulates - because they are equipped with special filters."

But it's very unlikely that these "special filters" are maintained properly in countries like India (as evidenced by the incredibly high PM2.5 concentrations measured in Lucknow).

Also, the higher NO_x concentrations from diesels are a real problem in hot climates, where the greater UV tips the balance of the reversible photochemical smog reaction (NO + O₃ <-> NO₂ + O₂) towards the production of ozone O₃. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ozone>: "There is a great deal of evidence to show that ground-level ozone can harm lung function and irritate the respiratory system. Exposure to ozone (and the pollutants that produce it) is linked to premature death, asthma, bronchitis, heart attack, and other cardiopulmonary problems."

21/1/18

President Macron on Trump, Brexit and Frexit

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-42768466/president-macron-on-trump-brexit-and-frexit>

He casts doubt on the wisdom of holding a referendum to decide on EU membership. (Which was my objection, too, on the eve of the Brexit vote.)

22/1/18

'World's richest 1% get 82% of the wealth', says Oxfam

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42745853>

"Oxfam's report is based on data from Forbes and the annual Credit Suisse Global Wealth datebook, which gives the distribution of global wealth going back to 2000. The survey uses the value of an individual's assets, mainly property and land, minus debts, to determine what he or she "owns". The data excludes wages or income. The methodology has been criticised as it means that a student with high debts, but with high future earning potential, for example, would be considered poor under the criteria used. But Oxfam said even if the wealth of the poorest half of the world was recalculated to exclude people in net debt their combined wealth was still equal to that of just 128 billionaires."

Well they have a point. It's wrong to undermine the obvious message that there are vast inequalities by quibbling about the maths.

24/1/18

Grumpy Cat wins \$710,000 payout in copyright lawsuit

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42808521>

As popularised by President Obama:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E55rVThsJPK>

24/1/18

UK PM seeks 'safe and ethical' artificial intelligence

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-42810678>

"Is the UK really on track to lead the world in Artificial Intelligence? Well the United States and China might have a thing or two to say about that. Both are engaged in an AI arms race and are investing the kind of sums that would make Chancellor Philip Hammond's - or even Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's - eyes water. Still, it is true that in London and Cambridge some of the world's leading AI scientists are at work. It was here that the Alexa digital voice assistant was developed and where a computer was trained to defeat champion players of the Chinese game of Go. ... The concern is that while the UK agonises over the implications of this technology, the Chinese will just be getting on with it."

Note the reference to London and Cambridge: good news for owners of flats near to Cambridge Station!

25/1/18

Padmaavat: India tightens security as controversial film opens

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-42815702>

"Many theatres across India have said that they will not screen the film, fearing further violence. But viewers in Delhi said there was nothing controversial in the movie. "All the ruckus that is going on is uncalled for," one viewer told the BBC soon after watching the film."

I do love the Indian use of English.

25/1/18

Modern humans left Africa much earlier

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42817323>

"New dating of fossils from Israel indicates that our species (Homo sapiens) lived outside Africa around 185,000 years ago, some 80,000 years earlier than the previous evidence."

It would be interesting to review Stephen Oppenheimer's 'Out of Eden' in the light of this discovery.

26/1/18

Nutella 'riots' spread across French supermarkets

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-42826028>

"A discount on Nutella has led to violent scenes in a chain of French supermarkets, as shoppers jostled to grab a bargain on the sweet spread. Intermarché supermarkets offered a 70% discount on Nutella, bringing the price down from €4.50 (£3.90) to €1.40. But police were called when people began fighting and pushing one another. "They are like animals. A woman had her hair pulled, an elderly lady took a box on her head, another had a bloody hand," one customer told French media."

26/1/18

Museum offers gold toilet to Trump instead of Van Gogh's work - report

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42827291>

"New York's Guggenheim museum has turned down a request from President Donald Trump to borrow Van Gogh's work for the White House - instead offering him a gold toilet, media reports say."

28/01/18

Bureaucats: The felines with official positions

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-42098216>

Plenty of paw puns here ...

30/1/18

Mastermind 'bans' Harry Potter and Fawcett Towers

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42871651>

This makes me think that a great specialist topic for Mastermind would be 'Alan Rickman one-liners', e.g.

(Harry Potter) "I'll get you, Harry Potter"

(Robin Hood Prince of Thieves) "I'll get you, Robin Hood"

(Die Hard) "I'll get you, John McClane"

(Sense and Sensibility) "I'll get you, Willoughby"

(Love Actually) "I'll get you, gift-wrapping twerp"

etc.

1/2/18

India unveils 'world's largest' public healthcare scheme

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-42899402>

For a country that defines itself (in its constitution) as socialist, isn't this 70 years too late?

2/2/18

How to control a machine using your mind

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42894312>

"Imagine being able to make a machine do your bidding with your thoughts alone, no button pressing, typing, screen tapping or fumbling with remote controls, just brain power. Well, this sci-fi scenario could be closer to reality than you think. Bill Kochevar's life was changed, seemingly irrevocably, when he was paralysed from the shoulders down following a cycling accident nearly a decade ago. His future looked bleak. But last year he was fitted with a brain-computer interface, or BCI, that enabled him to move his arm and hand for the first time in eight years."

It's really happening, Reg!

2/2/18

Syria war: Why Turkey's battle for northern Syria matters

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-42818353>

"This is an uncomfortable position for Washington: its Nato ally Turkey engaged in fierce combat with its main ally in Syria, the Kurds. And it could get worse. If the Turkish assault moves eastwards towards the town of Manbij, there is a very real risk of the fighting extending into areas where US trainers and special forces may be based."

I recall that in his 2007 book 'Black Mass' John Gray predicted a new 'Thirty Years War' in the Middle East. This has turned out to be the case, both figuratively (the original 30YW was also fuelled by religion and undertaken by many competing groups) and literally (9/11 was 16 years ago, and there is no end in sight). The greater involvement of Turkey in Syria further supports this comparison.

5/2/18

Dow Jones hit by worst fall since 2008

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42942921>

... less than a week after Donald Trump was crowing about the strength of the US economy in his State of The Union Public Information Diatribe ...

6/2/18

Asia markets join global stock plunge

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42956234>

"The sell-off began last week after a solid US jobs report fuelled expectations that the economy's strength was such the Federal Reserve would need to raise interest rates faster than expected.

"Economic news from the US has been stronger than anticipated," said David Kuo, chief executive of financial services advisory Motley Fool. "So, perversely, the market correction has been caused by positive economic news." Markets in Asia typically follow the lead from the US."

European shares tumble in new sell off

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42957834>

"European markets followed Asian markets lower on Tuesday as investors continued to dump shares. London, Frankfurt and Paris all fell sharply at the open with losses of up to 3%, before recovering some ground. In the US overnight the Dow lost 4.6%. Japan's Nikkei 225 closed down 4.7%. The sell-off began last week after data in the US showed stronger wage growth, which raised expectations that US interest rates might start to rise more quickly to tackle inflation. London's FTSE 100 was down 150 points or 2% at 7,184.74 in mid morning trade. Frankfurt's Dax and Paris's CAC were down 2.2% and 2% respectively. On Monday the FTSE 100 closed at its lowest level since April of last year. The falls follow some good years for investors. In 2017 the Dow in the US was up 25% and London's FTSE 100 rose 7.6%."

What's perverse is that the US stock markets did so well last year despite Donald Trump's ravings. For what it's worth, I think this is because the dollar is the de facto global reserve currency, so when there is any increase in uncertainty (as triggered by Donald Trump's ravings, for instance) then people buy dollars and US bonds. That is, bad news is good for the US stock markets, and so I guess it follows that good news is bad for the US stock markets. That's what happens when you put a lunatic in charge of the asylum!

7/2/18

Trump tells Pentagon to plan military parade in Washington

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-42969566>

"Democratic politicians have criticised the plan as expensive and said such ideas carry worrying symbolism. "What an absurd waste of money!" tweeted Representative Jim McGovern. "Trump acts more like dictator than president. Americans deserve better." Representative Jackie Speier, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, told CNN: "I was stunned by it, to be quite honest... we have a Napoleon in the making here." "It's really a waste of money, and I think everyone should be offended by his need to always be showy... it's not our style, it's not the way we do business." | How unusual is this? | Such parades are rare in the United States and most Western countries, and are more commonly associated with nations such as North Korea."

Also this great video:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-42982095/what-makes-a-military-parade>

1. Marching (Iran, Russia, North Korea, Zimbabwe)
2. Weapons (North Korea, China, Russia, Iran)
3. Flypasts (Russia, Sri Lanka, France, China)
4. Rousing music (Russia)
5. Elaborate choreography (Iran)
6. Standing in moving vehicles (France, Russia, Sri Lanka, China)
7. And animals (UK)

8/2/18

Economic collapse: The real message of the fall of Troy

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42864071>

"The fall and sack of the city of Troy at the hands of an avenging Greek army is one that has been told for some 3,000 years, but contained within it are clues to a much wider global collapse - with lessons for our own 21st Century."

When done well, I find this kind of comparative historical analysis absolutely fascinating.

9/2/18

Why do the British drive on the left?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-42981735/why-do-the-british-drive-on-the-left>

Because that gives a (typically right-handed) medieval horse rider greater reach for his lance or sword - everyone knows that. But this video also asks, "Why in so many countries do they drive on the right?" It offers two answers: (i) They copied the French, whose pre-revolutionary aristos liked to have their carriages driven firstly down the middle of the road and then (to be as distinctive and awkward as possible) on the right; (ii) Large carriages such as used in America needed to be pulled by teams of four or more horses, harnessed two-by-two, with the single driver sitting on the back left horse (not by 'tradition', as the video says, but because that made it easier for a right-handed driver to hold the reins and control the horses), and then they would drive on the right so that the drivers could best judge the clearance with oncoming traffic.

11/2/18

How should we tackle the loneliness epidemic?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42887932>

"There are risks in muddling loneliness and being alone. Some people do like their own company and revel in the qualities of solitude. The American essayist Alice Koller determined to become a hermit, and from that experience wrote a series of essays called The Stations of Solitude. 'Being solitary is being alone well,' she concluded. 'Being alone, luxuriously immersed in doings of your own choice, aware of the fullness of your own presence rather than of the absence of others. Because solitude is an achievement.' I tend to be more persuaded by the thoughts of the philosopher Francis Bacon on the subject: 'Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god.'" I think Bacon's quote is a perfect summary of the herd-quitter's dilemma, see <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/HowPeopleThinkSlides.pdf> slide 14; and of course one person's wild beast is another person's god; it's all a matter of perspective.

13/2/18

Boston Dynamics' latest SpotMini robot opens doors

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-43048666/boston-dynamics-latest-spotmini-robot-opens-doors>; Alternatively <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUyU31Kzoio>

It's really happening, Reg!

20/2/18

Damian Green dismisses Brexit 'conspiracy theories'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-43117500>

"There's a great problem of politicians who won't accept evidence. We can all argue about economic forecasts and none of them are 100% accurate but you have to rely on them and if you reject evidence you don't like then you are likely to end up producing faith based policies."

22/2/18

Ancient Britons 'replaced' by newcomers

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43115485>

'Neolithic Brexit' ... clearly the Tory party is a lot older than we thought ...

24/2/18

Seven things the NRA blames after Florida

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-43163710/nra-and-florida-seven-things-wayne-lapierre-blames-after-shooting>

1. Insecure schools (full of violence => Bashful)
2. Family structure (destroyed by permissive hedonists => Happy)
3. Mental health system (unhealthy => Sneazy)
4. The FBI (complacent => Sleepy)
5. Mainstream media (fake news peddlars => Dopey)
6. Democrats (negative cynics => Grumpy)
7. European socialists (communist ideologues => Doc)

Conclusive proof that Wayne LaPierre gets his views from watching old Disney films. (Not like us, then. I mean, who does that dopey duke think he is?)

27/02/18

Boris Johnson's Irish border remarks lampooned

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43208893>

Wot a twit.

2/3/18

Mahatma Gandhi letter on Jesus up for sale in US

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43252705>

"I have not been able to move beyond the belief that Jesus was one of the great teachers of mankind. Do you not think that religious unity is to be had not by a mechanical subscription to a common creed but by all respecting the creed of each?"

This is why I am a Gandhian!

6/3/18

Is India's Bangalore doomed to be the next Cape Town?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43252435>

"Bangalore is not likely to run out of water but we will have to manage it well"

i.e. "Wur doomed!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EH1G4EwljM>

6/3/18

'Super Monster Wolf' a success in Japan farming trials

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-43303781>

"A robot wolf designed to protect farms has proved to be such a success in trials that it is going into mass production next month."

6/3/18

What is populism, and what does the term actually mean?

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-43301423

An interesting introduction. And here's another: <https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/a-brief-history-of-populism/p05t8hqq?playlist=the-a-z-of-isms>.

7/3/18

Red squirrel numbers boosted by predator

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43308588>

It seems counterintuitive that the return of a predator can increase the population of its prey; but this article explains how.

7/3/18

Sanchez Watt: Former Arsenal player sent off after referee mistakes his name for dissent
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/43314870>

"A player has been sent off after a referee mistook his name for dissent. Referee Dean Hulme asked Sanchez Watt, who was playing for Hemel Hempstead Town, for his name as he was about to be booked in a National League South game against East Thurrock United. The 27-year-old repeatedly replied: "Watt" but Hulme believed he was saying "what?" and sent him off for dissent."

This is straight out of the Fawlty Towers playbook:

Mrs. Richards: Are you the manager?

Basil Fawlty: I am the owner, madam.

Mrs. Richards: What?

Basil Fawlty: I am the owner.

Mrs. Richards: I want to speak to the manager.

Basil Fawlty: I am the manager, too.

Mrs. Richards: What?

Basil Fawlty: I am the manager as well.

Manuel: Manajer, he manajer.

[Basil smacks him]

Mrs. Richards: Oh, you're Watt!

Basil Fawlty: I'm the manager!

Mrs. Richards: What?

Basil Fawlty: I'm the manager!

Mrs. Richards: Yes, I know, you've just told me. What's the matter with you?

7/3/18

Amazon promises fix for creepy Alexa laugh
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-43325230>

"Amazon's Alexa has been letting out an unprompted, creepy cackle - startling users of the best-selling voice assistant."

It's really happening, Reg!

11/3/18

What happens when AI meets robotics?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43215863>

Not a lot, as it turns out. Reason: "The researcher leading the project is a linguist, Dr Jesse Thomason. He has restricted the number of questions the partly built Daleks can ask to just five. Why so few? He tells me that the robots can become "infuriating" with their questions. They would ask them forever like a small child." There are two problems with this: (a) putting a linguist in charge of what ought to be autodidactic learning; (b) not allowing the robots to behave as if they are small children. See HMM ch.4.

12/3/18

Life in Vladimir Putin's Russia explained in 10 charts
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43210257>

This is fascinating.

16/3/18

How likely is it Russia poisoned ex-spy?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-43422184/how-likely-is-it-russia-poisoned-ex-spy>

Hypothesis (What): Russia poisoned Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia

Means (How): Novichok; only Russia is known to have developed this nerve agent; possibly planted in Yulia's suitcase, see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/15/suitcase-spy-poisoning-plot-nerve-agent-planted-luggage-sergei/>

Motive (Why): Revenge on a traitor

Track record (Where/When): e.g. Litvinenko poisoning with radioactive polonium

Plausible alternative hypotheses (Who else could have done it): None

To me this is proof 'beyond reasonable doubt', because it covers all five 'ways to truth' (see HMM ch.9) while allowing for alternative perspectives/hypotheses (see OOTK).

16/3/18

Fantastic Beasts 2 'plot holes could just be for publicity'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-43415547>

I stopped looking for plot holes when the 3rd book introduced time travel. Once you have that then you can have anything. Even twins. ("It is never twins," said Mrs Bird darkly.)

16/3/18

Water feature

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p061ccym>

Laddish humour at its best, I hope you can see it in India.

Here are some more in a similar vein:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p060n36c>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05z50dc>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05xnngx>

17/3/18

Facebook suspends controversial data firm Cambridge Analytica

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-43440043>

"The data firm credited with helping Donald Trump win the 2016 US election has been suspended from Facebook. At the centre of the row is University of Cambridge professor Aleksandr Kogan who, according to Facebook, made a "personality app" that gathered data he then sold to third parties. ... The company also played a role in the Brexit referendum campaign."

This personality app uses the Big Five / OCEAN psychometric test (which maps 1:1 to the five IDEAL learning styles), see https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mg9vvn/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win. It's really happening, Reg!

21/3/18

What does the future hold for humanoid robots?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-43402896/what-does-the-future-hold-for-humanoid-robots>

"Humanoid robots will be used as entertainers and in commercial spaces but will not undertake major tasks, according to the director of a company that makes robotic performers. Most artificial intelligence (AI) does not need a body to work, explains Engineered Arts director Will Jackson, adding that the human body is very hard to replicate and there is much more work to be done."

Will Jackson said precisely the same thing to me 4 years ago when I visited him and his robots down in Cornwall. It's curious why this article has come out at the same time as the furore over Cambridge Analytica, which effectively ascribes omniscience to AI. Is it happening or not, Reg?

22/3/18

UK passports 'to be made in France after Brexit'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43489462>

Another delicious irony.

27/3/18

Aadhaar: Is India's biometric ID scheme hurting the poor?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43207964>

"For the last three years, they have been deprived of subsidised food from India's vast public distribution system, a lifeline for the poor. That is not because supplies have dried up at the neighbourhood shop, but because their ration cards have not been linked to their biometric-based 12-digit personal identification numbers. ... Three months ago Muniya Devi travelled some 35km to the nearest town to submit the forms and papers necessary to get her family's ration cards linked to Aadhaar. People at the office demanded a bribe to get the job done, so she paid them 400 rupees, nearly four days of family earnings."

Read to the end - it's heartbreaking. & Geeta dear - how can you be sure that a school voucher scheme won't be a similar licence for corruption?

27/3/18

'Smoking' elephant in India baffles experts

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43551715>

"The elephant "appears to ingest charcoal" left by a controlled fire on the ground and "blow out the ashes", according to the statement. ... "Charcoal has well recognised toxin-binding properties, and although it may not have much nutritional content, wild animals may be attracted to it for this medicinal value," he said. "Charcoal can also serve as a laxative, thereby doubling its utility for animals that consume it after forest fires, lightning strikes, or controlled burns.""

Why not burn down the entire forest? That would provide all the charcoal ever needed to solve the biggest elephant constipation problem.

29/3/18

Brexit: The top five clichés

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-43573752>

5. The 'Brexit ball' (as in, "The ball is now in your court")

4. Cherry picking (or "Ein rosinenpicken")

3. A 'cliff edge' Brexit

2. Leaving the EU ... but NOT Europe

1. Cake (i.e. having it and eating it; "Thanks Boris")

2/4/18

The strange phenomenon of 'twin films'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-43371881>

The Mercy & Crowhurst

Hercules & The Legend of Hercules

Darkest Hour & Dunkirk

Cop Out & The Other Guys

Olympus Has Fallen & White House Down

No Strings Attached & Friends With Benefits

Antz & A Bug's Life

Marguerite & Florence Foster Jenkins

Deep Impact & Armageddon

Capote & Infamous

Dante's Peak & Volcano

I suspect that in most of these cases the studios conspired to compete, knowing that this would give the (otherwise bored witless) press something to write about, with the resulting publicity (like this article) benefiting all. This marketing tactic worked well in rock & pop, where completely artificial 'battles' between the Beatles & Rolling Stones, Slade & T Rex, Blur & Oasis, etc., boosted all sales. In the '70s it was the exciting highlight of the year to discover which single was going to be Top of

the Pops at Christmas. And at Christmas 2008 we all wondered which version of 'Hallelujah' was going to make #1.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_UK_Singles_Chart_Christmas_number_ones

Maybe democracy works this way too? e.g. it's very entertaining having Donald Trump in the White House, but it's what goes on behind the scenes that really matters, and that doesn't change. e.g., regardless of Trump's unpredictable posturing over North Korea, there is still the prospect of disarmament talks, brokered with great patience by South Korea; and, regardless of Trump's admiration for Putin, the US is still expelling 60 Russians in order to show solidarity with the UK over the Skripal poisoning. And the people who do all this behind-the-scenes fixing are permanent civil servants, who are not democratically elected. If you have a professional civil service steeped in "honesty, integrity, impartiality" (like in most Western countries?) then this system works generally to the benefit of society. If you don't (like in India?) then it doesn't. But in all cases "democracy" is the gaudy decoration on the cake which takes all the attention while hiding what's underneath.

3/4/18

Reaping the wind with the biggest turbines ever made

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43576226>

Some of these stats are quite amazing.

4/4/18

The myth of the Indian vegetarian nation

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43581122>

More surprising stats.

4/4/18

Russia's bitter taste of capitalism

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-43630898>

Conclusion: capitalism may be chaotic and unfair but at least it gives people the opportunity to fend for themselves (which is a more natural instinct than keeping hold of a ration book while waiting in a queue).

4/4/18

Making deliveries in a badly mapped world

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-43544007>

I consider this to be a good example of 'true' AI: getting a computer to navigate in much the same way as a human, by combining a variety of different observations / data streams.

5/4/18

N Korea missile 'could reach UK shores within months'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43648259>

Now that's scary - a missile that can go faster than a supertanker! Somehow it doesn't sound as bad as the 2002 claim that Saddam Hussein could launch a WMD attack against Britons (if they happened to be in Cyprus) within 45 minutes ... also 'fake news', but within 6 months it led to the invasion of Iraq and the deaths of lakhs of people including Saddam Hussein and David Kelly. (Why does the UK have its own nuclear missiles, if not to deter such a threat?)

9/4/18

Facebook data: How it was used by Cambridge Analytica

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-43674480>

"The 'Big Five' personality test has been used by psychologists for years. It scores you on five core traits. [Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism] Blended together,

these broad traits sort people into personality types. [e.g. Adventurer, Protector, Executive] And the algorithm? It's been proved impressively accurate. With just 10 'likes', it's better at guessing what kind of person you are than your colleagues. 150 'likes', it's more accurate than your parents. And just 300 'likes', it's better at predicting your personality score than your partner. ... Political parties around the world will be considering the lessons of Cambridge Analytica. The Big Five genie is out of the bottle."

Big Five = IDEAL learning styles. It's really happening, Reg!

11/4/18

'I'm not having children because I want to save the planet'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-43699464>

"What's the best thing you can do to help save the environment? For Anna, a cycling instructor and writer living in Bath, it's to have fewer children. She has chosen not to have any at all."

That's very noble, but a bit extreme. I agree that too many people are spoiling the planet, and the primary response has to be radical birth control (see

<http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/MyPhilosophy03.pdf>). But not having any children at all?

Well, each to their own. I guess it'll average out.

17/4/18

Artificial intelligence must be 'for common good'

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43778578>

Their Lordships have been watching 'Hot Fuzz':

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

18/4/18

Minister ridiculed for saying ancient India invented internet

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43806078>

"A minister who has claimed that the internet was invented hundreds of thousands of years ago by ancient Indians is being met with ridicule."

With a link to:

Cows to planes: Indian ministers who rewrote scientific history

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-41344136>

"India's junior education minister, Satyapal Singh, raised a few eyebrows on Wednesday when he said that engineering students needed to be taught about ancient Indian scientific discoveries, including the fact that the plane was first mentioned in the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana."

"In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a gathering of doctors and medical staff at a Mumbai hospital that the story of the Hindu god Ganesha showed cosmetic surgery existed in ancient India."

"the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat, Vijay Rupani, made a speech at the Institute of Infrastructure Technology Research and Management where he praised the "engineering skills" of Lord Ram, one of Hinduism's most popular deities and the protagonist of the epic Ramayana."

"The education minister for the western state of Rajasthan said in January that it was important to "understand the scientific significance" of the cow, as it was the only animal in the world to both inhale and exhale oxygen."

I never fail to be unimpressed with Indian politicians.

28/4/18

Abba announce first new music since 1982

<http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-43924609>

SOS! Will Abba's new music live up to their legacy?

<http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-43925749>

Worth reading just for the torrent of bad puns.

2/5/18

Taj Mahal colour change worries India Supreme Court

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43967685>

"India's Supreme Court has instructed the government to seek foreign help to fix what it described as a worrying change in colour at the Taj Mahal. "Even if you have the expertise, you are not utilising it. Or perhaps you don't care," court justices said. The court said the famous tomb, built in the 17th Century from white marble and other materials, had turned yellow and was now turning brown and green. Pollution, construction and insect dung are said to be among the causes." Being a type of limestone (calcium carbonate), marble is susceptible to erosion from acid rain etc. The Lotus Temple (Bahai House of Worship) in Delhi is also becoming discoloured, after only 30 years. Maybe this is why most of India's surviving monuments are built in red sandstone.

2/5/18

India cities dominate world air pollution list

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43972155>

"Fourteen Indian cities are among the world's 20 most polluted, according to World Health Organization (WHO) data. BBC analysis of the study shows the northern city of Kanpur tops the list of world cities with the highest PM2.5 levels in 2016."

Lucknow is #7, see attached table.

UK's most polluted towns and cities revealed

<http://www.bbc.com/news/health-43964341>

In the UK the peak concentrations are a 10th of those in Northern India, and still people go on about it.

Fourteen out of the world's most-polluted 20 cities are in India

City	*PM2.5	City	*PM2.5
Kanpur	173	Gurgaon	113
Faridabad	172	Jaipur	105
Varanasi	151	Patiala	101
Gaya	149	Jodhpur	98
Patna	144	Baoding	93
Delhi	143	Ulaanbaatar	92
Lucknow	138	Hengshui	87
Agra	131	Xingtai	87
Muzaffarpur	120	Anyang	86
Srinagar	113	Liaocheng	86

*(Annual mean, ug/m3)

Source: World Health Organization

BBC

12/5/18

Atlas the robot shows off running skills

<http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-44089636>

Also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcoTflB_OG8

It's really happening, Reg!

15/5/18

Are intelligent robots better at our jobs?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-44068927>

If you can watch the video, do so!

26/5/18

I wish mum's phone was never invented

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-44224319>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/31/smartphone-addiction-children-research-technoference-child-behaviour>

I foresee an imminent society in which the masses relate more to their handheld AIs than to fellow humans. What then for the tedious chore of parenting?

This is the way the race ends

Not with a bang but a ringtone.

27/5/18

First colleges to teach new vocational T-levels to be named

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44267933>

"New T-level qualifications will help the UK "complete globally," Prime Minister Theresa May has said. The first 52 colleges to teach the courses, intended as vocational alternatives to traditional A-levels, will be announced on Sunday. From 2020, they will teach courses in construction, digital, and education and childcare. A further 22 courses will be rolled out in stages from 2021."

This is what we used to have in the UK in the '60s and '70s. Then they were called technical colleges. They worked well, but the government decided that they didn't sound sufficiently academic or fair, so they were rebranded and ended up setting written exams for kids who were only ever going to work in a trade or service; which is one of the reasons why most of the British are in meaningless office jobs and they get their builders and carers from Eastern Europe (see attachment). And of course in India with the caste system you have an even greater denigration of vocational skills and an absurd over-emphasis on the importance of getting through written exams. If you really want better-educated children, wouldn't it be a good idea to also teach childcare?!

How can CMS say that its mission "is to create a better future for all children" when it just ignores the fact that most Indian children will end up in a trade or service or family role for which they have had zero formal training?



29/5/18

The surprisingly sexist history of artificial intelligence

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05ydzh6>

"Siri, Alexa, Echo, Cortana... We may be living through an AI revolution, but male digital assistants have always been few and far between. Sarah Dillon meets one of the very first language-processing computer programmes, Eliza - named after George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle." An insightful and persuasive viewpoint.

3/6/18

Exams 2018: The 'myth' of the visual learner

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44304056>

"the best way of learning something depends on the subject and on the level of the learner. For example, in some subjects - especially maths - studies have suggested lower-ability students learn more in highly structured environments with lots of input from teachers, while higher-ability students learn best in less structured environments, where they are left to complete exercises on their own. But this pattern is reversed in other subjects. We also learn differently depending on whether we are new to a subject or more experienced. When we know more about a subject, any new information we receive about it forms part of a wider pattern in our brains, making it easier for us to remember because we can mentally store it as one "unit"."

Spot the important word - 'pattern' - yes, it's all to do with pattern recognition - just as I told CMS students in <http://www.idealectic.com/idealectic/HowPeopleThinkSlides.pdf>.

7/6/18

Pollution hits fungi that nourish trees - study

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44382889>

I was completely unaware of this aspect of ecology.

8/6/18

Boris Johnson calls for 'guts' in Brexit talks

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-44407771>

"He also said he was "increasingly admiring of Donald Trump", who is preparing for an historic summit with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un. Mr Johnson was reported to have said: "I have become more and more convinced that there is method in his madness." "Imagine Trump doing Brexit," he added. "He'd go in bloody hard... There'd be all sorts of breakdowns, all sorts of chaos. Everyone would think he'd gone mad. But actually you might get somewhere. "It's a very, very good thought.""

Boris Johnson is insane.

11/6/18

Two more die as India WhatsApp 'child kidnap' rumours spread

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-44435127>

Fake news takes its toll in India. Like in 1857.

12/6/18

Trump Kim summit: US and North Korean leaders hold historic talks

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44435035>

Paraphrasing Kipling:

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment seat;

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two morons stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

4/7/18

Sperm quality improved by adding nuts to diet, study says
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-44695602>

For some reason this item has inspired the following haiku sequence:

Health advisory:

A teenager's nuts go nuts
Just by adding nuts

Ponder, if you will
The salutary tale of
The prince of Denmark

Hamlet a sweet prince?
Self-propelled sperm gun more like
And I blame the nuts

It wasn't the drink
It was the nuts wot did it
Pumped up his sex drive

Lock up your daughters!
Learn from fair Ophelia!
Don't end up like her!

Her father led her
Like a lamb to the slaughter
(Offstage: knaves' laughter)

Righter he oughter
Taught her: "Coconut water
Good for your daughter"

But nuts for your sons?
They'll be like that pig Hamlet
Who eats, roots, and leaves

So here's my advice:
Boys, go easy on the nuts;
Girls, don't trust the boys.

4/7/18

Star Wars: Jar Jar Binks actor Ahmed Best considered suicide
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-44708983>

"The actor who played Jar Jar Binks in the Star Wars franchise has revealed how the vicious backlash against the character left him close to suicide."

It's difficult to know whether to laugh or cry. In any case I hope he was well paid for the role that wrecked his name.

8/7/18

Choosing to have an only child: 'People were offended'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-44737573>

It turns out that Swedish society is not very tolerant to families with single children. What a burden of expectation!

8/7/18

Exoskeleton that allows humans to work and play for longer

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-44628872>

11/7/18

How to build a real time machine

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44771942>

"Ron Mallett has a dream: He wants to travel in time. This isn't mere fantasy - Mallett is a respected professor of physics."

Yeah well in my experience most professors of physics ('respected' or otherwise) are incapable of seeing beyond the very narrow limits of their particular specialisations (what's Ron Mallett's, I wonder?). (It's in the training. At Imperial 1980-83 there was no effort to teach or even discuss fundamental questions of physics and philosophy such as the possibility of time travel. We were fully occupied cramming the maths. And I doubt whether anything has changed since then.) What is needed is for someone to point out that (a) what happens at quantum scales simply doesn't happen on human or cosmic scales, and (b) there is no established physical theory (not even relativity) in which time passes in anything other than one direction. But this isn't stated anywhere in this article or the associated Horizon programme. (Which I've just sat through in order to make sure that what I've just said is true. It is. And my head still hurts.) All of which goes to show that physicists can be just as naive, narrow-minded, and deluded as religious or political extremists.

17/7/18

Trump-Putin summit: US president under fire over poll meddling comments

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44854786>

Trump-Putin summit: After Helsinki, the fallout at home

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44830012>

"After a week abroad, Mr Trump on Monday delivered the coup de grace for what has been a highly disruptive week in US foreign affairs. European allies are uneasy. US-Russia relations are uncertain. And the US political world - and even the White House's own communications team - is unsettled."

Trump-Putin summit: US president reverses remark on Russia meddling

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44864739>

The video clip is staggering. To me it looks as if Donald Trump is experiencing the onset of senile dementia. In any case he makes the US President in Dr Strangelove look like a genius.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T2uBeiNXAo>

23/7/18

The (not so brief) history of fake news

<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/the-not-so-brief-history-of-fake-news/p06dn741>

An essential video.

27/7/18

US economic growth hits fastest rate since 2014

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44979607>

Explain that!

29/7/18

Tsundoku: The art of buying books and never reading them

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-44981013>

"Do you have a habit of picking up books that you never quite get around to reading? If this sounds like you, you might be unwittingly engaging in tsundoku - a Japanese term used to describe a person who owns a lot of unread literature."

I particularly liked the application of the 'distracted boyfriend meme'.

1/8/18

The robot controlled by your thoughts

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-44959462>

They ought to call it "The Husband" and program it to say "Yes dear".

9/8/18

Organic solar cells set 'remarkable' energy record

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45132427>

"Chinese researchers have taken what they say is a major step forward for the development of a new generation of solar cells. Manufacturers have long used silicon to make solar panels because the material was the most efficient at converting sunlight into electricity. But organic photovoltaics, made from carbon and plastic, promise a cheaper way of generating electricity. This new study shows that organics can now be just as efficient as silicon."

This could be important.

13/8/18

Artificial intelligence 'did not miss a single urgent case'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-44924948>

DeepMind pattern recognition strikes again. Eye scans this time.

17/8/18

Motorola phone 'brazen copy' of iPhone X

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45208546>

"Lenovo plans to sell the Motorola P30 in China, but has not announced its availability in other countries. The device is expected to cost about \$350 (£275) - less than half the price of Apple's flagship device."

And this is how China will beat the USA in a trade war.

17/8/18

Earliest galaxies found 'on our cosmic doorstep'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45198764>

Well this really buggers the idea of an expanding universe in which everything gets more distant following a Big Bang. (I never did believe in that, anyway. It's clearly based more on theology than astronomy, cooked-up by Catholic priest and mathematician Georges Lemaître.)

17/8/18

Tent Tech: Is AI more than just a buzzword?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45219902>

"Perhaps Mr Chishti, who has been immersed in this subject since his student days, is just too close to it, like a fan of an indie band who loses interest when it goes mainstream. But his scepticism reflects divisions in the AI world about the very definition of its discipline and mission. And some of what he says will strike a chord for any journalist in the technology field - hardly a day goes by

without a press release from some company that thinks the label AI will guarantee coverage. Does anyone really want an AI toothbrush?"
Any takers? Gee?

20/8/18

Bank of England chief economist warns on AI jobs threat

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45240758>

"Mr Haldane said that jobs that focused on skills of human interaction, face-to-face conversation and negotiation would be likely to flourish."

So where is the formal training, and where are the exams, that develop the skills of human interaction?

20/8/18

On the frontline of India's WhatsApp fake news war

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-45140158>

"Mobs have lynched at least 25 people across India after reading false rumours spread on WhatsApp. Now the authorities in one Indian state are fighting back - by teaching children about fake news."

Technology-enhanced mob rule is coming to India. Don't say you weren't warned.

29/8/18

The robot that watches as you cross the road

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45330451>

"British carmaker Jaguar Land Rover is testing a robot that catches your eye as you cross the road. The self-driving pods, which feature large "virtual eyes", are being trialled in Coventry to try to increase humans' trust in autonomous cars."

Eye contact: now that is clever.

11/9/18

'Climate change moving faster than we are,' says UN Secretary General

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45471410>

"UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said that if the world doesn't change course by 2020, we run the risk of runaway climate change. Mr Guterres said he was alarmed by the paralysis of world leaders on what he called the "defining issue" of our time. He wants heads of government to come to New York for a special climate conference next September."

Humanity fiddles while the whole world burns.

13/9/18

Smarty pants: Robot trousers could keep the elderly mobile

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45501069>

They're techno-trousers, ex-NASA, fantastic for walkies!

14/9/18

Lehman anniversary: The five most surprising consequences

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45478670>

1. We have fewer children, if we have them at all
2. We've accumulated a lot less wealth than prior generations
3. We hate the stock market
4. We don't buy homes
5. We trust no one

17/9/18

'Lewis Hamilton has a hold on the title - thanks to Ferrari'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/formula1/45542607>

"Hamilton's qualifying lap was one for the ages. ... Hamilton described it as "a lap out of nowhere - just flowing, beautiful. It was like a dance. It was awesome. It was the best feeling I've ever had.""

Driving fast is like dancing well, just as I say in

<http://www.idealistic.com/idealistic/HowPeopleThinkSlides.pdf> slide 7, when extolling the virtues of System 1 reactive thinking.

18/9/18

US imposes new tariffs on \$200bn of Chinese goods

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45555749>

Well it must be the US mid-term elections coming up. At election time Mugabe murders, Putin poisons, and Trump tariffs.

18/9/18

Google bans birds on bikes from algorithm contest

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45547805>

It's a bird on a bike. If I can recognise that, why can't a computer? They need to read 'How to Make a Mind'.

22/9/18

Viewpoint: What India's first newspaper says about democracy

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-45546585>

"India's first newspaper, founded in 1780, held up a mirror to British rule in India. It can also teach us about how tyrants work and how an independent press can stop them, writes journalist and historian Andrew Otis. ... Like in the case of India's first newspaper, authoritarian leaders today seek to suppress the press. The source of their power is to convince enough of the public to believe them, and not what they read in the press. Politicians who want to be dictators are not new. But why are they so dangerous now? They have new tools to sow divisions between citizens. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and other forms of social media have created "filter bubbles" in which people consume and share content they already agree with. The result is that people across the world are increasingly divided into tribes as social media allows politicians to communicate directly with their citizens."

Investigative journalism in the 1780s! But it didn't actually stop the tyranny ...

23/9/18

Hayabusa-2: Japan's rovers send pictures from asteroid

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45598156>

A giant leap for robotkind.

25/9/18

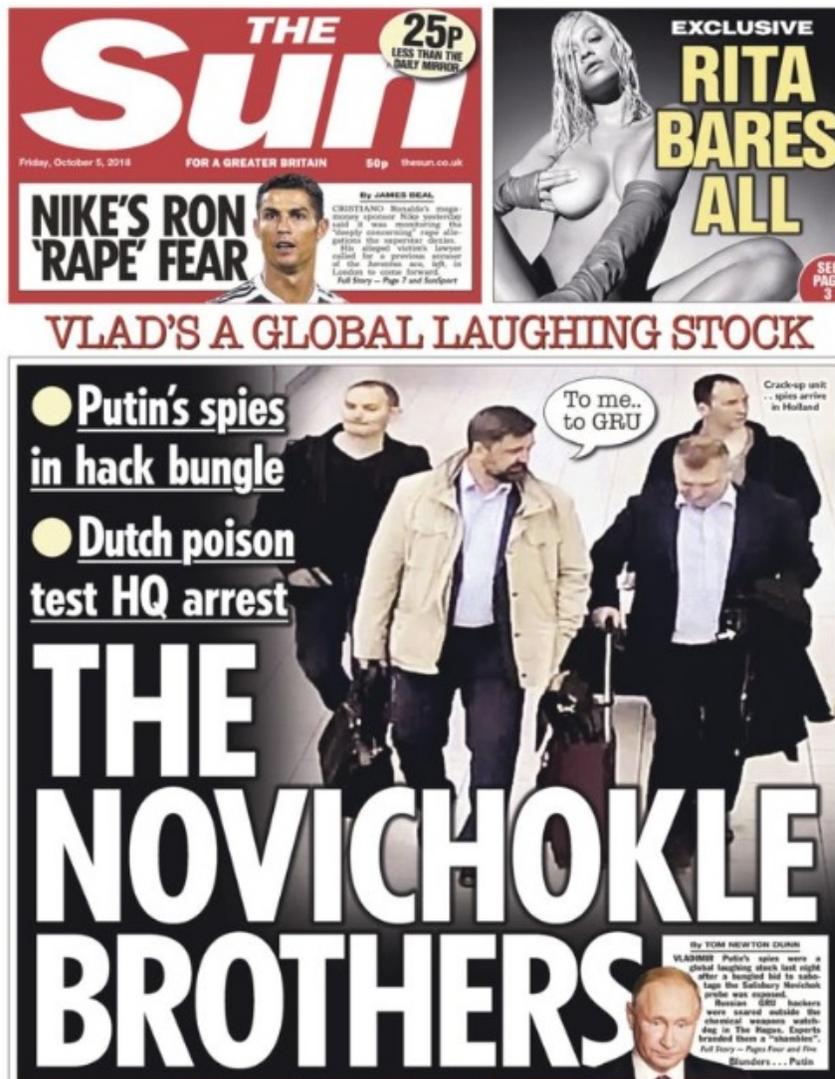
Quiz: Test your knowledge of evolution

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45564594>

I got 6 out of 7 in the quiz. The one I got wrong was question 7, "Evolution and religion are incompatible. True or false?". I put "True", but the given answer is "FALSE: Evolution is not about the origins of life, but how animals and plants change over time. People of many different faiths and levels of scientific training see no contradiction between science and religion." It strikes me that there are at least two fallacies in this answer.

5/10/18

This morning's newspapers are having fun with latest spy scandal, see attached.



5/10/18

What does the UK's nuclear future look like?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-uk-leaves-the-eu-45707290>

"Dame Sue Ion, who chairs Euratom's Science and Technology Committee, says the UK has a lot of world-class expertise and creating new post-Brexit arrangements has meant a huge extra burden of unnecessary work."

Nominative determinism strikes again.

5/10/18

Selfie deaths: 259 people reported dead seeking the perfect picture

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-45745982>

Dead famous Darwin Award nominees.

5/10/18

Why a US national park is holding a 'Fat Bear Week' contest

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-45749891>

Awww.

5/10/18

Trump boards plane with paper stuck to his shoe

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-45758636>

"Donald Trump was spotted with what appeared be toilet paper stuck to the sole of his shoe as he boarded an Air Force One plane."

Sooner or later, the shit begins to stick.

8/10/18

The UK firm hoping to take on Google's driverless cars

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45706509>

"This week we speak to Stan Boland, founder and chief executive of UK driverless car company Five AI."

NB Five AI. Not four or six or any other number. Five.

11/10/18

Paul McCartney - My Valentine - Music Video (Featuring Natalie Portman & Johnny Depp)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6jTIIPr-yI>

Something quite extraordinary that I just discovered.

12/10/18

Humanoid 'rescue robot' learns parkour

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-45841771>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LikxFZZO2sk>

The latest scary movie from Boston Dynamics. It's really happening, Reg!

20/10/18

Will Gompertz on Peter Jackson's WWI film They Shall Not Grow Old ★★★★★☆

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-45910189>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57322/for-the-fallen>

Released to commemorate the centenary of the end of the Great War on 11/11. My grandfather William Napier Kingdon was a gun captain on board the battleship HMS Temeraire at the battle of Jutland (1916, when he was 24 years old, the same age as Roshan now). The noise of the guns left him quite deaf for the rest of his life. His brothers John (Royal Navy) and Theo (British Army) were injured at Gallipoli and the Somme respectively. Their sister Peggy nursed the wounded. On my mother's side, her great-uncle Martyn Henry Langford, a medical doctor serving in the Royal Navy, survived the war but died in the subsequent global flu epidemic (in Aden or thereabouts, en route back to the UK from the East). He was unmarried and had just one sibling (my mother's grandmother), and his father Henry Johnston Langford died a few months later 'of a broken heart', it is said. In my family the war generation never talked about their experiences, probably because it brought back awful memories. But "We will remember them."

1/11/18

Brazil: Bolsonaro plans threaten Amazon, say experts

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46039996>

WWF report: Mass wildlife loss caused by human consumption

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46028862>

Climate change: Oceans 'soaking up more heat than estimated'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46046067>

Goodbye dear world.

8/11/18

Oldest cave painting of an animal discovered in Borneo

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/science-environment-46131792>

"One painting found by the group is believed to depict a banteng, a South Asian wild cow, and is at least 40,000 years old."

I imagine this supports Stephen Oppenheimer's theory that the culture in S E Asia is a lot older than previously thought.

9/11/18

Delhi pollution: Are Diwali fireworks to blame?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46138064>

Delhi air: Eating berries and wearing masks to beat pollution

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46135764>

Good that the media are engaging with this topic which I've been going on about for years now. Less good that still nobody's doing anything about vehicle emissions, which are the main source of PM2.5.

9/11/18

'Remarkable' decline in fertility rates

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-46118103>

Oh good. Perhaps humanity isn't so insane after all.

To me this article appears to have a strong bias favouring 'experts' who are fixated on the dangers of declining fertility rates. Japan is cited but there's no discussion of what they are doing about their unusual demography. They should've interviewed me, I'd have said hooray for the single child!

9/11/18

England v New Zealand: Five ways England can beat the All Blacks

<https://www.bbc.com/sport/rugby-union/45955061>

1. Prayer.
2. Fantasy.
3. Magic.
4. Poison.
5. Lightning strike.

11/11/18

The above five miracles were identified before the match. As it turned out, the outcome of the match depended upon a sixth type of miracle (which regrettably didn't come about):

6. Biased referee.

Good match, though.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iR54j5QNPc>

11/11/18

The forgotten English poet buried in India

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46069119>

A fascinating story, well told.

12/11/18

The digital epidemic killing Indians

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-46152427>

WhatsApp fake news leading to summary executions by mobs.

13/11/18

Project Ommi

<http://www.for-films.com/project/ommi/>

<http://www.ommimovie.com/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qSeWIwBWIk&t=21s

"PROJECT OMMI is a sci-fi thriller set in the not-too-distant future in the ship graveyards of Dhaka, Bangladesh. This intense, cyber-punk sci-fi is inspired by its raw and elemental setting." This forthcoming film gets its ideas about AI from my book, 'How to Make a Mind', and from my input as scientific adviser.

18/11/18

Delhi's rickshaw pullers: Toxic air is killing us but we can't quit

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46191589>

"I guess hunger is a bigger problem than pollution for us."

Notice the persistent tendency to blame stubble burning and fireworks; anything other than the vehicles carrying the journalists and other white collar workers to and from their offices! But this recent news article is a lot more enlightened:

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/lessons-for-delhi-how-beijing-shifted-tide-in-its-battle-against-pollution/story-QsahbFTCJFqIfne4g9fWK.html>

"The second such survey on air pollution in Beijing revealed that in 2017, around 45% of PM2.5 came from vehicles. Diesel trucks were the worst offenders, it said. The government is specifically targeting diesel vehicles. Since last year, the government has restricted the movement of diesel trucks within the city"

Note here the comparison with Beijing, the focus on PM2.5, and the associations with diesel vehicles. All three points (which I have been making for years now) are a first for an Indian newspaper, AFAIK.

17/12/18

Climate change: The massive CO2 emitter you may not know about

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46455844>

"concrete is ... the reason some of the world's most impressive buildings exist. Sydney Opera House, the Lotus Temple in Delhi, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai as well as the magnificent Pantheon in Rome - boasting the largest unsupported concrete dome in the world - all owe their form to the material."

That's recognition, of sorts. (It's a pity you don't get a clear view of the Lotus Temple any more, because of the air pollution!)

This article explains that the calcification process by which cement is made also gives off vast quantities of carbon dioxide. Specifically, by heating ground-up limestone (calcium carbonate) you get calcium oxide (the basic ingredient of cement) plus carbon dioxide: $\text{CaCO}_3 \rightarrow \text{CaO} + \text{CO}_2$.

17/12/18

Kiwibot delivery robot catches fire after 'human error'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46593190>

More likely the robot contemplated its futile existence and decided to end it forthwith.

25/12/18

Abbas Edalat: British professor returns to UK after detention in Iran

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46679054>

Ten years ago I worked with him to produce this:

http://www.ideallectic.com/ideallectic/iso1_report.pdf