

The Retreat from Truth

Philosophers and other clever people cannot agree about what is meant by the word 'truth'. This shouldn't bother us too much though, because we all know perfectly well that it means not telling lies. We've known this since we were five years old, if not younger.

So why do we keep lying to ourselves?

The answer is simple.

We cannot allow ourselves to believe what we can't bear to believe.

The primary purpose of the whole of nature is to perpetuate itself. We are no different. The next generation is the focus of our attention. If anybody told us that our own children were under threat we would do one of two things:-

1. Protest vehemently.
2. Deny it.

Since we don't really know what to do in order to protest, we end up opting for no. 2.

Here's the truth: the world is on the brink of the biggest cataclysm since an asteroid crashed into Mexico, long before the idea of naming anything had been invented, wiping out all the dinosaurs.

Ever since 1962, when the pesticide scandal came to light, I've been worried. Rachel Carson's book 'Silent Spring' alerted us to a shocking reality. Human interference was causing mayhem in the food chain. Insects were dying, birds were falling from the sky. Next on the list would be us. And our children.

This was a wake-up call, You'd think that anyone who'd found out that they'd inadvertently poisoned their food supply would want to do something about it; and we did - sort of. A voluntary ban on those horrible chemicals (aldrin, dieldrin and

heptachlor - not to mention DDT) was agreed. And eventually they were proscribed in most of the 'developed' world; though not elsewhere.

You'd think we'd have learnt something from this canary-in-the-mine episode, but no, not really. Look around. Only an idiot like Donald Trump or Boris Johnson could fail to see what we've done. Sensible people everywhere are talking about it. Talking, and trying to do something about it.

The planet is gasping for breath. This is not just a crisis. It's a disaster. Consumerism, the profit imperative, the corruption; the forests, the seas, the sky: everywhere you look it's the same dreadful truth. But we deny it.

We'll plant more trees, we'll put a load of windmills in the sea, we'll have some regular beach cleaning and do a bit more recycling. It'll soon be sorted.

Bullshit. We're buggered.

Come on, get real. The population of the world has more than doubled in my lifetime. It's reaching breaking point.

This is the elephantine elephant in the room.

What the hell is wrong with us?

Why can't we own up to what is staring us in the face?

While Rome burns we're content to fiddle. As the Titanic heads for oblivion we rearrange the deck chairs. We're so compulsively obsessed with the trivia of the here and now that we refuse to own up to the reality of the unimaginably terrifying future to which our folly assuredly leads.

We need more money For the health service, for schools, for social services, etc. etc. Yes, yes of course. We need to be in or out of Europe (though nobody has any idea of just how 'in' or 'out' we're ever likely to get), we need a better prime minister, a better government, more jobs, better education, better this, more of that, etc etc.....

Yes of course. But first of all we have to work out how not to destroy forever the very ground upon which we stand. We can only do this by minimising our impact. And that requires something that we haven't got and which, given our belligerent ways, we are never likely to get, namely world government, or at the very least a United Nations with real teeth.

We also need to get rid of the nuclear threat. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament of the 1960s held out the promise of some hope that this would eventually come. Alas it never did. The truth is we LOVE war. We LOVE heroes. We LOVE to turn out and cheer whenever there's an opportunity to watch soldiers marching past. We love to PRETEND that war is a terrible thing but the truth (remember that?) is that the demon in our bellies is what really motivates us. It's basic. It's primeval. We're hard-wired.

Though good people everywhere are doing their best to make a positive difference, the truth could hardly be clearer. Nothing of importance is happening to alter the direction in which we're heading.

One way or another, most people have family. It is in the nature of things that we dote upon our kids. And their kids (even more so!).

We cannot face the prospect of our kids having a terrible time so we just stick our heads in the clouds, or down in the sand and pretend to ourselves that it's all gonna work out fine.

No I don't think so....

BUT THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

In a relatively short space of time the human race has begun to come to its senses. More and more people are realising that we have a big problem. There is increasing awareness of the need for radical change. Perhaps it is, after all far too little far too late. But perhaps not.....

It seems to me that the only thing that can save us is a snowballing of the appropriate mindset. You cannot fix a problem if you deny it exists. Now that so many of us are beginning to realise there IS a big problem, maybe Hope is not dead.

The way forward? Talk about it. Write about it. Never stop thinking about it. Bore everyone to death about it. Start right now, today and every day. We can't save the world if we're not all of one accord. Forget about Brexit. It's a pitifully unimportant storm in a teacup. So don't waste your time listening to those bickering politicians. Write to them all and tell them you'll only vote for them if they do what is right.....

A shopping list for the saving of planet Earth

1. Recognise the truth of our perilous predicament.
2. Create powerful tax incentives to discourage reproduction.
3. Banish economic growth in favour of a stable and sustainable system.
4. Re-wire our brains to eliminate the tribal mentality*.
5. Outlaw all weapons of war.
6. Question the need for 24/7 energy consumption.
7. Respect and restore the natural world.

This is just a start. But how are we to achieve it? Alas, given the human passion for exalting psychopaths to positions of high office I really have no idea.

Do you?

* There is plenty of recent evidence as regards appropriate chemicals. Check out the benefits of psilocybin.

Ray Hume
(musician and pessimist)

Cleethorpes, England

July 2019

PS I'm not alone. Check out Mayer Hillman and Paul Kingsnorth, to name but two voices of truth in this frightening wilderness.