PERtinence

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EDUCATION! EDUCATION! EDUCATION!

Yes, Tony Blair was on the right lines when he launched this famously dashing election mantra in 1997. There was only one snag... he didn't know what modern 'education' needed-to-be, *if it were to generate the extra-talented leaders needed wisely to steer the kind of hyper-developed world which had been emerging since WW2.* [1]
He evidently had no awareness whatever of the retrogression which had taken place in schools, after the progressivist illusion of the 1960s caved-in. A hyper-developed world needs (urgently needs) hyper-effective education. The bungled "managerialism" which took over around 1980 ---as a reaction against progressivism--- had monstrously reverted to a crude "instructionalism" which was a new version of rote learning.

Let's begin by looking at the 'big picture'... as it is now, nearly 30 years after that mantra was aired.

First, the principle than we need hyper-effective education applies to all children in school. We can't afford to write genuine education "off" for the least talented youngsters. They need genuine education just as much as their more talented contemporaries. Otherwise they will be virtually enslaved by a combination of IT and AI. [2]

The huge challenge facing the human race at the present time is to find the composure actively to *hold IT & AI* at a distance, rather than let these dark electronic arts enslave the human race. This means *not treating them as an unquestioned authority*. The deep-aim of Silicon Valley —which is to cash-in on diminishing the human brain's exposure to difficult, painful challenges.[3]— has to be confronted. Human brains of all levels of ability MUST be helped in every possible way to face, understand and overcome, these challenges. Silicon Valley is dedicated to fobbing-off the ordinary person with "easy alternatives". These "easy alternatives", though, inevitably tempt mental laziness, and hence debilitate the powers of the human brain. Addictively dramatic social media like Tick-Tok also have the same debilitating effect. Taking the easy way out inevitably diminishes the average person's capability (appetite) to cope unaided. Overall we need fully to digest today's "new big picture", which is that the universe can now be modelled —-and hence foreseen—- in a new human-friendly way. But it isn't going to happen easily.

Second, Moral Codes have lost their former prime authority. The functional necessity for Moral Codes is dreadfully, disastrously, overlooked and ignored by today's school status quo[4]. These Codes were originally introduced during the first urbanisation., about 5000 years ago. This brought thousands of

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[1]This hyper-developed world urgently needed a huge cohort of young people, graduating from schools each year, who understood it. This meant that education had to raise its game far above the levels previously deemed satisfactory. Blair seemed to assume that the changes made ---after 1960s-style Progressivisn had finally failed around 1980--- were OK. He had been blindsided by the Crude Managerial Behaviourists, who were peddling a sophisticated kind of structured rote learning in schools.

[2]If not, they will be told "what to do" by the computer or smartphone. They vitally need the cognitive confidence to assess this advice and think-through whether it is really what they want to do, or not. Without this level of confidence, they are effectively being enslaved by the internet.

[3]This is what they are selling ---content which reduces the need for difficult thinking, a cognitive equivalent to pain-killers.. They admit that they are "in it for the money" … and the money comes about by visibly minimising experienced difficulties. But this isn't the best way to deal with the problem. Today's children urgently need to *grow* their problem-solving capabilities. And if children are to energise their minds, they need to face the music and build-up their capacity to overcome life's difficulties.

[4]The Treasury spends about £115 billions each year on education, but they are not insisting on schools even instilling the most urgent <<Non-Contentious attitudes>> in the cohorts they are generating. This is wasting billions of pounds of taxpayer's money at a time when society is disintegrating and money is very scarce.

previously slightly anarchic nomadic people together. They suddenly found themselves living in close proximity to each other… with all the opportunities for ego-clashes that this brings along. In these circumstances a strict Moral Code was absolutely essential ---to prevent outbreaks of conflict[5].

Alongside these Strict Moral Codes, a body of speculative thinking, centred-on how the world came about, emerged and formed. It was a no-brainer (at that time) that the immense inter-connected nature of the universe must have been created by an infinite supermind (i.e. a 'God'). This speculative thinking was brought-in side-by-side with Strict Moral Code, but functionally it was the Strict Moral Code ---which had to be firmly and fully instilled in the children. This was the priority, the practical heart of the matter. It was absolutely essential, for the maintenance of a civilised (free, creative, inter-active, civilised) way of life. The associated religious speculation of antiquity was really just a supportive artefact which successfully captured the synoptic thinking of the most far-sighted seers… creating a very plausible backstory as the "authority behind the Code". (For example, the Golden Rule <<Behave in relation to others as you would want them to behave towards you!>> .) In addition, the immensely stimulative effect of fluent arithmetic on trading, meant that a move towards simplifying operational thinking gradually gathered weight. This eventually led to an out-break of monotheism, and hence the three famous Abrahamic religions.

Third, we have now entered a post-Judeo-Christian phase where the old religions have lost much of their former authority, confidence, mythical sensibility and lustre. So we need an alternative approach to Strict Moral Code in schools. This can be, and already is, conceptualised by a wide consensus of reflective, conscientious people as <<The necessity for personal accountability>>. Children need to be led to see that they need to de-centre and work-out what other people are thinking ---and feeling. They also need to be able, retrospectively, to account for their actions in common terms. If a child falls short… sooner or later, they will have to give a full account of their lapses. Without this early training they will become insufferable egoists… selfish people who are apt to trample on the feet of everyone they encounter. The Christian religion, reduced to essentials, postulates a world in which every person invests quite a lot of energy and attention into other people's needs, preferences and perceptions. This has not been diminished or demolished in any way by advanced modern thinking: it remains simultaneously a challenging "Code for Living" and a Truism. The alternative, a dog-eat-dog egotistic world, is not a happy place to live-in. An egoistic person who shows no interest in the well-being of others, is very unlikely to become admired, cared-for, or befriended by anybody. So if we wish to live in a world where lots of admiration and caring are in circulation ---and, hopefully, dominate--- we need to take this universal accountability very seriously. This attitude is not a re-jigged old Moral Code driven by a punitive God-figure waiting to punish us, but a simple, mature fact of life: a clear example of down-to-earth logic. This is not a partisan or controversial point of view. It should be treated in schools as part of the <<Most Important Non-Contentious Facts of Life>> and every child should be led to fully appreciate what it means. There is the old saying <<*He who pays the piper calls the tune!*>> but we have the DfE under both Tories and Labour not calling the tune … even though they are paying the piper (the school system) more than £100 billion each year. This is both inexcusable sloppiness and gross irresponsibility.. Society needs the schools to implant the essential values which hold society together. Not to be bothered to do this, is a serious dereliction of duty. It leaves a vacuum where the roots of society should be.

Fourth, the world has been passing through a worrying, pesky phase of almost total loss of confidence in our public problem-solving capabilities. It has mostly been an unspoken loss of cognitive confidence, but it has now been demoralising reflective people for more than a hundred years. It was the former elites of maths and physics which first fell into deep despair. They should have redoubled their problem-solving efforts, but in the dismal, demoralised 1920s they decided to try to fake their way out of the difficulties, by introducing fudged "solutions". The result has been ---predictably--- that the only people who will ever be able to lead us all out of the corridor of despair (the ex-elites) have damned themselves, and

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[5]To hold these new conurbations together all the citizens needed to take a positive attitude to the social whole, i.e. to be proud of it and proud of their membership of it. This is essential, because if the Status Quo is dubious, a lot of individuals will start adopting dubious values. Homo Sapiens is a copying species. This is still true today. Unfortunately this principle has been recently seriously breached by a sudden upsurge of bitter recriminations about the slave trade. What needs to be said loud and clear is that every society has had periods when the leadership and the prevailing culture has fallen into a reprehensible state. The UK had various periods when its true, long-term image was traduced, e.g. before 1666, after Waterloo, 1873-86… What needs to be emphasised is subsequent governance which re-affirms the society's good reputation. This happened when the UK abolished the slave trade, a unbelievably landmark moment which boldly rejected untold thousands of years of enslavement toleration.

hence brought their formerly proud, much admired bodies into disrepute[6]. The elites are in the doghouse, and –to change the metaphor--- the rest of us are like passengers on an ocean liner whose crew has gone AWOL…leaving the ship wandering around in circles… with dwindling resources and a mood of hopelessness.

Fortunately the P E R Group came along in the 1990s and we have been able to sketch-out genuine solutions to the disastrously fudged original dilemmas which caused the crisis. This is the good news. The bad news is that millions of people have now been thoroughly socialised into a world of lost hope, and the one thing they are **quite sure about**… is that the future is darkening and the enlightenment which comes from confidence and resolved basic problems is a **lost cause**.

Can anything be done? Yes. All that needs to be said is that Russell's contradiction disappears the moment we notice that contradiction can happen in two forms, the classical logical kind, and a dynamic kind which becomes possible when a statement can switch its own meaning into the opposite direction. The oppressive effect of deterministic spacetime similarly disappears when we recognise that maths is not the only way to use 100% abstract models. Here too, a more active, diversified mode is possible, because Anti-Maths modelling based on long strings of jumping-random tallies is automatically relativistic from the beginning, As a wonderful bonus it also leads to closure, because the imperfect human brain ---which must be a product of some form of highly sophisticated anti-maths structure--- can serve to impose the necessary reifications onto the basic jumping strings... to create itself! So it can reify its own existence!

It follows that the dark cloud of deep angst under which we have all been living. is beginning to break-up. The prospect for future generations is already much better than it used to be.

Fifth, among the things which fall under the heading of <<Non-Contentious Facts of Life>> and which the DfE should be insisting *are delivered to all the pupils in every school* namely the **Fact of Life** that every fit body in a society **must** make a genuine contribution to the huge, arduous, task of keeping the show on the road. At this point bitter, anti-capitalist political grandstanding is offering refuseniks a way out of their obligations. They imagine that to work in today's economy is to prop up an "unjust capitalist" system. Well, actually, the free market economics which operate in democratic societies don't add-up to any kind of "imposed system". It is the totalitarian top-down command economies which represent imposed "systems". Capitalism is, roughly, the opposite of these oppressive "systems". There are millions of deals being struck every day… deals which determine the price of things and the rate everyone contributing to the delivering of that thing will get. These deals are not imposed by the authorities ---the market is "free", which means that both buyer and seller must in the end agree to a deal, which is an acceptable compromise for both buyer and seller. Every job has its present payment rate, but the job needs to be done, and quibbling about the rate-of-pay is at best a red herring. In an ideal world the sheer effort and commitment involved in every job might be assessed objectively using a single universal yardstick, and the renumeration given would then be visibly, 100% fair. We might get there in 50 years' time. What is absolutely intolerable is the case of able-minded defiant people unwilling to make their work-contribution to the common good. There is no justification whatever for such a person to live on the efforts of other citizens who are making their contributions. The man who drives the bus we use every day is contributing to the common good ---even if you think that the directors of that bus company are over-paid. The same logic applies to supermarkets. Here, too, all those working in the business are "contributing to the common good", because we all need to have access to their items.

To sum this reasoning up, the sad, latterly stark, decline of religious sensibility in society since WW2 has exposed the extent to which previous social cohesion was based on ---was actually extremely dependent on--- the presence of residual religion and high ethical ideals. A society cannot last for long if it is effectively morally bankrupt, i.e. permissive on knife crime, shoplifting, substance abuse, lying, and lack of social cohesion. We need to stand back and rethink the essentials of this potentially dangerous situation. Immensely complicated, extended societies of the kind we have today, need extremely cogent, deeply and widely accepted social discipline… if they are going to survive ---a 101 versions of egotistic grass-roots rebellion. By the high standards of the post-WW2 leadership community, today's socio-political leadership is pathetic.

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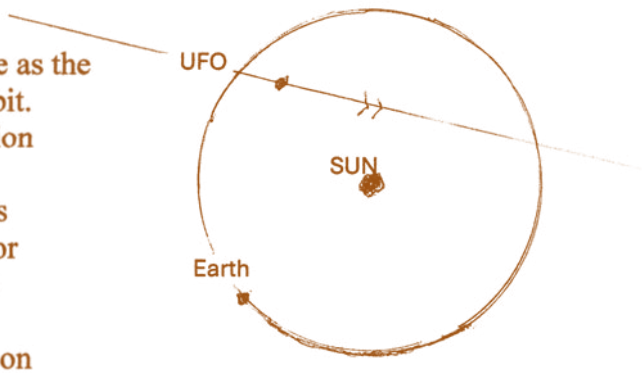
[6]The nearly total loss of authority which the elites have suffered in recent decades isn't a crude, ignorant, unjustified attack. It is rather a belated awareness on the part of the public that the elites have stooped to fudges.

NARRATIVE MATHS 15

A large unidentified object (UFO) has been picked up by a telescope: the UFO moving very fast in the same plane as the Earth's orbit and indeed already inside the Earth's solar orbit. But the closest it is likely ever to be to the Sun is 46.5 million miles. It is moving at five times the speed of the Earth. If it continues in approximately a straight line, and the Earth's orbit is approximately a circle of radius 93 million miles, for how many days will it have been closer to the Sun than the Earth?

[Assume that the Earth's and the Sun's gravitational effect on the UFO are effectively negligible. Also that there is no risk of a collision between the UFO and the Earth.]



NEWS ITEMs

September Debate we are planning a P E R Debate in September on the question whether AI will be an asset to education or destructive of it. Details to follow later.

The Times (17th May) had an article describing a scheme to set up a special Mathematical School, which will be built in the grounds of Mill Hill School in North London. This was noted in the last issue of *PERtinence*. It is to be hoped that this splendid initiative will take the trouble to understand and adopt the new enlightened modelling-to-illuminate-the-future vision of maths. It would be retrogressive if it perpetuated treating maths as an artificial artform and end-in-itself. Maths as an art-in-itself has lost its lustre. The Peircean Interpretation of Maths offers us an immense kit of precise concepts which can be used excitingly to model, and hence illuminate, the future.

The new P E R Newsletter This BULLETIN, which is devoted to explaining the basics of Anti-Maths, can now be read on-line at http://pertinence.co.uk/pertinence-news-1/ What it offers is a blow-by-blow account of the reasoning behind Anti-Maths. This first issue of the BULLETIN addresses the two questions (1) What is the true meaning of maths? (2) What are the tiniest bits of physical reality lying perhaps 2 or 3 levels below the quarks? It is obvious that these "tiniest bits" of physicality cannot be mathematic objects, because mathematic objects are passive, timeless and spaceless. So whatever could fill this extraordinary conceptual gap?

FERMAT PRIZE UNCLAIMED The Author's bare hands (=roughly A-level standard) proof of Fermat's Conjecture has now been online for five years. No one has been able to find a mistake in the reasoning, even though a £5000 prize was offered to anyone who could find one.

NEW ENGLISH REVIEW The Editor has had a long 22nd essay published by the on-line *New English Review*, 1st July 2025 (from Nashville, Tennessee). It begins by pointing out that so-called "Modern Maths" began around 1830 with the introduction of doubly-pure mathematics, twice removed from any contact with the real world, i.e. a form of absolutely artificial gaming. Eventually it led to Bertrand Russell's notion that all sets are mathematical objects.

This is actually a howler of the most *howling* kind. Sets are things like a stack of beakers, a pack of cards (or dogs), a collection of pictures… They can't be "mathematical objects" because they are defined by words with ordinary sensory associations. A set of cows is usually described as a 'herd', but it can't be a mathematical object because it doesn't make sense to say that <<a mathematical object can be milked!>> A flock of birds can soar around in the sky, dipping into low cloud and out again. It doesn't make sense to say that <<a mathematical object can soar around in the sky!>> The set of trams in Croydon can take passengers to Elmer's End, but it doesn't make any kind of sense to say that <<You can take this trip using an element of a mathematical object!>>. This is really a mind-blowing expose of the nonsense implicit in Russell's lynchpin concept: the one on which Russell relied with his *Principia* and his entire supposedly canonical notion of the nature of maths and mathematical logic. However could the critical corporate professional mindset of his peers in the 1900s have fallen so low? However could Russell get away with such a massive howler?

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