



I love Trump, I hate Trump

### Description



**November 13, 2016.**

Today, I'm talking about Donald Trump. I'm sorry.

And who am I to add to the torrent of commentary that we've already endured on this subject? Especially when the bulk of that commentary, from pundits and pollsters who should have known better, was spectacularly wrong?

Perhaps they were missing something, and in the contemplation of that possibility, I am haunted by an adage:

“There is no cause so right that one cannot find a fool following it.”  
– Larry Niven.

A week ago, I expressed the view as a Conservative that it might be better if Trump lost the election. I saw... danger. That Trump did not reflect any Conservatism I could support. This has crystallised an emerging sense I've had about what motivates me in politics, and what I stand for. I want to counter those who are desperate to dictate what Trump's election to President does and does not mean for the future of Conservative politics.

Let's start with a useful definition I've leaned on over the years as a first approximation of a Conservative philosophy.

### **“Competence trumps Ideology”.**

Apart from the (coincidental) play on words, what I mean is that no amount of high-minded intent is worth a hill of beans without the ability to *execute*. That Conservatism is interested in what has proven the test of time. That Conservatism is wary of grand theories and radical change.

As a teacher, I offered this truism to my students as a starter for a classroom debate when musing on the question why democracies tend to devolve into binary blocs – two parties of the so-called Left and Right.

The Left, ever thinking with their heart (“Ice cream for everyone, and damn the expense!”), but rarely delivering. Prey to all the traditional follies of socialism, but now adding the corrosive influence of woke culture and its competitive virtue signalling. Poor with money and public administration.

Meanwhile the Right, who regard parsimony as a virtue. Who invariably have to clean up the mess the other mob leave behind when the political pendulum swings back, but rarely do the “vision” thing well. And now, further split between free-marketeers and social (and often religious) conservatives. And whose claim to the mantle of good economic management is only thought safe when resisting the urge to abandon fiscal prudence and keep to small government ideals.

Is this the best we can do?

This point was driven home recently when I [read a recent speech](#) by my friend and State MP Dominic Perrottet. He was speaking to the [Menzie's Research Centre](#) where he called for Conservatives to better articulate their values.

Perrottet said:

“There is a loss of faith in public institutions, the political class and its programme. People feel displaced by rapid changes in the global economy. Establishment parties overseas are perceived as being on a unity ticket – of big government globalism, crony capitalism and minority fundamentalism. The frustrated centre is rejecting this elitist agenda and looking elsewhere for solutions – ending up in the arms of reactionary parties.”

Now there is a man with his finger on the pulse, considering that he spoke before the result in America was known.

So, is the choice increasingly reduced to alternating between parties that make high-sounding promises but engender disillusionment when they never deliver, and parties that run a trim ship but are perceived as being heartless econocrats while battling their own religious fringe? Surely we can do better.

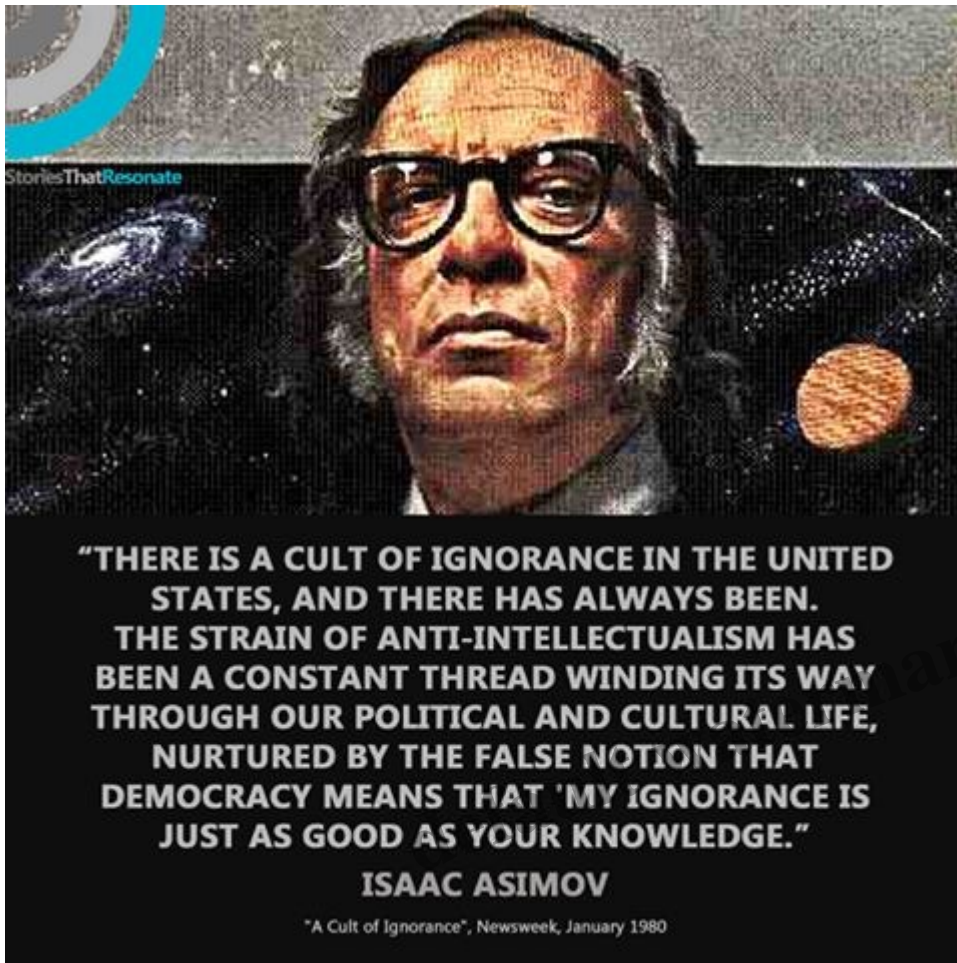


I think we *can* do better. And yet, here is the danger: I believe Trump represents the worst, *the absolute worst* of both worlds. Because Trump doesn't promise the “both” we're all looking for. He offers *neither*.

Donald Trump, and the dysfunctional party that backs him is an infuriating mix. Where Trump is right, on Islamic terrorism for example, or immigration, he will have little ability to execute (despite a majority in both houses), and will apply the wrong remedy anyway. He's dead right about the dislocation and disempowerment the working class feel as the result of Globalisation, but betrays his party's philosophical roots by becoming an economic protectionist, ignorant of the [benefits of comparative advantage](#). Trump is like a doctor that diagnoses medical problems well, but whose prescription is obsolete, like leeches and Mercury. His solutions are dead wrong, even when his diagnosis is spot-on. And where he *is* wrong – such as on renewable energy, or universal health coverage, or nuclear proliferation, his powers will be limited to undoing the work of others rather than proposing any better fix. I predict an ongoing split *within* the Republicans and an attempt at impeachment within this Presidential term. It's a dreadful situation.



Rounding out the danger is Trump's sneering anti-intellectualism, which I find contemptible.



[Only Trump could suggest](#) a young earth creationist as Secretary for Education. Or a climate-change skeptic and oil magnate to be in charge of the environment. This proud know-nothingism lays at the core of the paradox that makes America simultaneously the smartest nation on earth and the dumbest *at the same time*.

I oppose Trump, even as a capital "C" Conservative because I can't throw my weight behind a person who barely respects rationality, let alone Science; Who sees conspiracy theories in every corner; Who shows no sign of thinking deeply on almost any subject; Who thinks, like [Creon in Sophocles' Antigone](#), that his definition of loyalty to the state can be defined by his personal prejudices – and that to be outside that is treason.

And lastly, and no less important: because Trump acts as a poor role model because of his gross disrespect for women.

By any objective measure, Trump is a lightweight, vulgar con artist.

On the other hand, I feel conflicted because Trump has exploited a legitimate resentment, which I share, that has built over recent decades towards modern fads. Competitive virtue-signalling, political correctness, victim-fetishism, identity politics, polyculturalism masquerading as multiculturalism – these have all poisoned the well of our polity. The pushback has come from people who are sick of the

moral superiority asserted by regressive leftists through their lecturing about “microaggressions”, “deplatforming”, “safe spaces”, or their refusal to mount a muscular defence of Western civilisation in favour of appeasement towards Islamic fundamentalism. Look no further than the abuses of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act for proof that this problem extends to Australia.

Analogous, well held concerns about the downside of globalisation and the need for sovereign autonomy among nation states contributed to the UK voting for Brexit in June. (Parenthetically, Australia can only benefit from a renewed and independent Britain as a member of the club of [English-speaking peoples of the Commonwealth](#).)

So on some of these broader questions, *Trump is right*. Yet still, I think he is absolutely the wrong standard-bearer for Western Civilisation. It’s an invidious situation, and the world will become a more dangerous place while he remains President.

How did we get here? How did Americans, in an era where fact-checks are available on everyone’s smartphones, elect a man who could deny in one breath what he had said in the previous one, and then stick his chin out when he was called a liar? Specifically, how do *religiously* conservative voters reconcile the cognitive dissonance of supporting a man with so few scruples? I recall the advice of my favourite author, Robert Heinlein:

“The America of my time line is a laboratory example of what can happen to democracies; and what has eventually happened to all perfect democracies throughout all histories. A perfect democracy, a ‘warm body’ democracy in which every adult may vote and all votes count equally, has no internal feedback for self-correction. It depends solely on the wisdom and self-restraint of citizens... which is opposed by the folly and lack of self-restraint of other citizens. What is supposed to happen in a democracy is that each sovereign citizen will always vote in the public interest for the safety and welfare of all. But what does happen is that he votes his own self-interest as he sees it... which for the majority translates as ‘Bread and Circuses.’

‘Bread and Circuses’ is the cancer of democracy, the fatal disease for which there is no cure. Democracy often works beautifully at first. But once a state extends the franchise to every warm body, be he producer or parasite, that day marks the beginning of the end of the state. For when the plebs discover that they can vote themselves bread and circuses without limit and that the productive members of the body politic cannot stop them, they will do so, until the state bleeds to death, or in its weakened condition the state succumbs to an invader—the barbarians enter Rome.”

I also recall my Spinoza:

“Faith requires not so much true dogmas as pious dogmas, that is, such as move the heart to obedience; and this is so even if many of those beliefs contain not a shadow of proof.”

I lament that this election heralds an era where factual correctness, moral rectitude, or depth of insight are explicitly rejected as necessary for high office.

## So what's the alternative?

What would a conservative leader who actually knew their history look like? Who was as likely to quote Scruton or A.C Grayling as Hayek or Von Mises in supporting their worldview? Who, if they had to seek a sense of the numinous, looked to the revelations of the Large Hadron Collider, the Hubble Telescope or a gene sequencer before they looked to a holy book? Carl Sagan said *“Science, properly practiced, is a kind of informed worship”*. Why can't that be enough? Why can't we have a Conservative leader whose hero is Carl Sagan or Neil DeGrasse Tyson? Why should they “belong” to the Left? Science is cool!

What would a conservative leader look like who spoke unapologetically about Western Civilisation being objectively, measurably better than its alternatives? Who was able to demolish the intellectual impostures of cultural relativism and postmodernism, and who built and articulated an intelligent and publicly compelling case for the subsequent and necessary decisions on immigration, foreign policy and defence, instead of calling names and threatening political opponents with gaol?

A leader who, as John Howard says *“Can win arguments, not just elections.”*

What would a conservative leader look like who understood that we live in a society, not just an economy, and who admits that although free-markets consistently deliver greater wealth, some regulation and accountability are necessary to ensure that this wealth is not distributed unfairly? Who can admit that universal health-care is not socialism, but rather something that many countries have supported with bilateral zeal for half a century? That such boons are the patrimony of prosperous and humane societies?

What would a conservative leader look like who was prepared to address existential threats to civilisation such as overpopulation, climate change or resource depletion, but did so *honestly*? Who understood that our fundamental duty is to the generation *after* our own, more even than *to* our own? Who prioritises science funding, and space exploration? Who acknowledges our Judeo-Christian heritage *at the same time* as respecting the necessity of separation between church and state? Who was welcome to be a practicing Christian, but refused to wear it on their sleeve or ram it down your throat?

Whose attention span was longer than a tweet?

Maybe I'm asking too much. Maybe I'm asking for a conservative Jeb Bartlett. Maybe I'm fantasising that the nightmare will end when the Trump suit is unzipped, and a smiling Alan Alda steps out, miming finger guns to an appreciative crowd.

The left beat the pants off us in this regard. Again, returning to Perrottet's speech:

“[The left's] original aim of social justice, through helping the working class, has been left far behind. **Today they cloak their politics in the sweet rhetoric of fairness, equality and tolerance – but their agenda is far from benign.** They are motivated now by a burning hostility to our culture and heritage. It's no coincidence they want to redesign our flag, rewrite our anthem, remove ANZAC Day, replace our constitution, repudiate our Judeo-

Christian heritage, and rename our national day.”

I agree that the militant left have precisely this agenda, and my gut feeling is that there is a hidden majority in the sensible centre of the Australian electorate who are as repelled by this agenda as I am. The electoral dividend residing in that distaste for social engineering is the Liberal Party's for the taking.

But I cannot see Trump as anyone's solution to these problems (and let me emphasise, this is no endorsement of Hillary Clinton).

Conservatism for me has nothing to do with “preserving marriage as sacred between a man and a woman”. For pities sake... Let people live their lives. Aren't right of centre parties the parties of individual liberty? Of mitigating the State's influence in your personal lives? Grow up and stop pruriently caring about what happens in other people's bedrooms. It's none of your business. And don't say “think of the children”. Kids with gay parents turn out just fine.

But Conservatism has everything to do with acknowledging the wisdom that our future comes from our past, and that there is value in a sense of continuity and connection with our heritage. That we respect the intent and work of our forebears, even while we innovate and update our sense of “what can be” for Western Civilisation. The Crown, the Constitution, and our inheritance from the Enlightenment are worth defending, because they have given us health, wealth and (relative) peace for over a century. That's something Australians should be more proud of than they are.

Conservatism should have little to do with blindly following free-market economics, but should seek to temper economic rationalism with a humane core. We should recognise the inherent value in some less tangible things and practices that provide enduring value – anchors to the way we *want* to live. Preserving the semi-rural lands in our city, and the viability of agriculture within the greater circle of the Sydney metropolitan area would be a good local example.

Conservatism should be about an absolute commitment to balancing our budgets and living within our means as the surest way of preserving intergenerational equity, but it shouldn't be about driving efficiency at *any* cost, because the electorate will spit you out. Witness the huge electoral damage of pushing unpopular Council amalgamations in NSW as proof. A huge, and easily avoided mistake.

Conservatism should be about preserving an absolute right to free speech, and being confident enough in the force of our arguments to never seek to censor. If your inclination is to say “I'm offended” when you are contradicted rather than offer a rebuttal, maybe you're just wrong and won't admit it. Censorship robs us all of our right to see bad ideas fail in a fair fight in the public square.

Lastly, Conservatism should be about governing for everybody, because when the pie is bigger, everyone gets a bigger slice. As Perrottet noted, a famous Australian politician once said:

“This country has great obligations to the weak, the sick, the unfortunate. It must give them all the sustenance and support it can.... to every good citizen the state owes not only a chance in life but a self respecting life”

Perrottet then noted: “*That wasn't a socialist politician. That was Sir Robert Menzies.*”

My belief is that Conservatism is better for us all.

But Trump? He's just an idiot.

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1. Trump

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