

CIVILIZATION FOR



MORONS

(a PERSONAL JOURNEY)



CIVILIZATION FOR MORONS (A PERSONAL JOURNEY)



WE ARE SO SCREWED. OR ARE WE?
ON THE MINUS SIDE, WE HAVE CLIMATE
CHANGE, A DEBT CRISIS, AND VARIOUS
SOCIOPATHS TRYING TO DESTROY
DEMOCRACY.

BUT ON THE PLUS SIDE, WE HAVE A FEW
MILLION YEARS OF HOMINID EVOLUTION,
THE MAGNA CARTA, AND NEIGHBOURS
WHO STILL SMILE AND WAVE.

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT THOSE THINGS, AS
WELL AS THE TWO MAIN CONCEPTS
WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TIP THE
BALANCE FROM MINUS TO PLUS (THOUGH
TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE, YOU'LL AT
LEAST HAVE TO CRACK THE SPINE ON
THIS THING AND CHECK OUT THE
INTRODUCTION).

ADMITTEDLY, THE AUTHOR IS SOMEWHAT
OF AN ASSHOLE (MORE ON THAT LATER).
BUT HE'S AN ASSHOLE WHO NONETHELESS
MANAGED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THOSE
TWO CONCEPTS ARE. HE DID IT WITH THE
HELP OF 0.0001 GRAMS OF LSD, A PUBLIC
LIBRARY CARD, AND TEN YEARS OF
UNIVERSITY.

STILL CONFUSED? THEN YOU'LL HAVE TO
READ THE INTRODUCTION. BUT IT'S ONLY
TWO PAGES LONG. SO GO FOR IT. THEN
MAYBE YOU CAN HELP TO TIP THAT
BALANCE FROM MINUS TO PLUS.

CIVILIZATION FOR MORONS



(A PERSONAL JOURNEY)

16TH DRAFT

2021

BY EVAN BEDFORD

PUBLISHED BY

_____ ?

This book is
dedicated to my younger
self, in the hope that he
might learn something.

All authorial proceeds
from the sale of this book
will go to the
New Democracy Foundation.
www.newdemocracy.com.au

(I would love to direct this \$
to a similar Canadian organization,
but the closest equivalent seems to be
MASS LBP, which is a private
consultancy, rather than a
non-profit organization.
I am, however, open
to suggestions.)

Three Themes in Four Quotes

The smartest person in the world
is that person who knows
where the shoe pinches
on his/her own foot.

Paraphrase of an Irish proverb

If the pus from a dead dog's boil
gives enlightenment,
then it should be prized
as the finest elixir.

Paraphrase of a Tibetan proverb

Sooner murder an infant in its cradle
than nurse unacted desires.

William Blake (18th/19th century poet)

Everyone is entitled to his own opinion,
but not his own facts.

U.S. Senator (1977-2001) Daniel Patrick Moynihan

The Dog's Breakfast

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Introduction...Preface...Warning...

Are you sometimes unable to sleep at night, thinking about an uncertain global future? Like that associated with runaway climate change?...or a new covid variant?...or one of the Trump kids in the White House in 2024?

No? Then you may as well put this book back on the shelf.

For those of you remaining, let me introduce myself. My name is Evan, and like you, I'm *also* unable to sleep at night. That's because I spent many years at university, studying "societal sustainability" and I'm not very optimistic.

I *did*, however, find the two main concepts which can fix our rapidly disintegrating civilization. One of them is called "communitarianism" and the other is called "deliberative democracy".

Communitarianism is simply defined as a society which has a better balance between personal freedoms and collective responsibilities (if you gladly wore a mask and got vaccinated in 2020/21, you likely already know about the latter).

Deliberative democracy, however, is a bit harder to explain. So I'll first describe what it is *not*. It is not what we have now, where a polling firm asks a random selection of people what they think about a very serious issue (let's say climate change), and even though many of the respondents might not know the difference between a methane molecule and a giraffe, they'll still give answers about which policies they prefer. Then these answers are fed back to politicians, who allocate dollars and make laws based on them. That's somewhat more advanced than Medieval Europe, but not much.

Contrast that with deliberative democracy, which involves – you guessed it – deliberation. And a couple of good examples were the Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform held in BC and Ontario in 2004 and 2007 (though the subsequent referenda were prime examples of what are often toxic, *non*-deliberative processes).

Before we go any further, I want to assure you that I'm not a nut-case. Deliberative democracy and communitarianism have other backers with far more letters behind their names than I'll ever have. Charles Taylor, for example, who is a recipient of the Order of Canada, and who did the Massey Lectures back in 1991, was one of the many contributors to a very important book titled *Changing Maps* (Carlton University Press, 1995). And that book is *still* the most profound – and readable – collection of words ever written about these two subjects. The problem is that 99.99% of the population is unaware that the book ever existed.

So what, therefore, is the average 21st Century insomniac supposed to do? Or rather, what did my younger 20th Century self do? At that time, there was only one option: I had to cycle from Edmonton to Ottawa, in order to try and give a copy of *Changing Maps* to Jean Chretien (who was Prime Minister at the time). And a significant part of *this* book is about that quixotic episode.

Aside from chapters on “public consensus”, “social infrastructure”, and the “crisis of legitimacy”, *Changing Maps* also includes a section on “Culture and Values”. In it, the authors state that in order to counteract the potential for “post-modern nihilism” and “a pell mell jailbreak into hedonism, violence and general disaffection from society” (p.35), we should consider re-visiting, “perhaps with some irony” (p.38), that ancient anachronism we call religion. In my book, I take the discussion much further, looking at religion versus spirituality, belief versus experience, and experience versus physical evidence. I look at it all through the lens of my personal encounters with cannabis and LSD, as well as a disappointing pilgrimage to India, and half a lifetime spent scouring library shelves for concepts such as Carl Jung’s “collective unconscious” and Albert Einstein’s “spooky action at a distance” (more on that stuff later).

I will admit that this book is somewhat of a chaotic mess. You will have the opportunity to read not only about that cycling trip to Ottawa, but also about my earlier quest to find a hippie commune in California. You’ll be free to scoff at the details of my first LSD trip, as well as laugh at the details of how I lost my virginity. You might

squirm as I try to explain capitalism versus socialism, or Alberta versus Norway. But I guarantee it will all be somewhat entertaining, somewhat educational, and generally chopped up into mercifully brief, digestible chunks.

And besides: we all love chaotic messes that are mercifully brief. The internet is chaotic, and we can't fathom how our brains used to operate before it came into existence. Gone are the days when the average person could wade through more than a single paragraph of Thoreau's *Walden* without running from the room, screaming for the comfort of a few pixels on an LCD screen. So don't worry. Just grab a beer (or a glass of wine or a spliff), crack the spine on this thing, and you'll be just fine.

chapter i: the early years

I came into my first big windfall when I was five years old. It involved money from a church offering plate.

In the early 1960's, my father was a United Church minister in the village of Hythe, Alberta.¹ His office was in our slightly dilapidated manse, which was right next to the slightly dilapidated church, which was right next to the post office, which was right next to the only grocery store in the village.



The grocery store was tiny, with narrow aisles and wooden floors. But it had a cooler at the back, which was full of sugary pop. So I took some of the money I found in an envelope in my dad's office, and I confidently strolled into the store for a six-pack of Coca Cola.

Like a lottery winner with more money than brains, I wasn't satisfied with a single bottle. A single bottle might have gone unnoticed. But the shopkeeper was quite aware that Coca Cola had never made an appearance on any of my mother's grocery lists, and

¹ Hythe is now better known as the home of Wiebo Ludwig, convicted oil and gas industry terrorist. But back then, it was just a tiny place on remote highway with a hardware store, a Chinese restaurant, a bunch of muddy streets, and rows of caragana hedges attempting to invade the crumbling side-walks.

that a minister's salary was hardly sufficient to have permitted such an indulgence. So he didn't accept my money, and instead picked up the phone and told Mom about my new financial situation.

I next recall my father showing me a rather thin book with a photo of a happy family on the front cover, and a title that had the word "God" in it. As he turned the pages, it showed the family enjoying a picnic or walking to church or cheering a local sports team or playing fetch with a handsome collie. And each photo was accompanied by some inspiring words.

But the words didn't inspire me in the least. I knew I had done something wrong, and I knew my father was disappointed in me. But neither the words in the book, nor my dad's disappointment made the slightest impression on me...except for a vague feeling of unease and a longing for the lesson to be over with.

Another book in the house was Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care*. Whether it was the lessons in this book or whether it was the lessons from the Sermon on the Mount, Dad never used corporal punishment on us kids. He was (and is) a gentle soul. In my early years, I would sometimes cry at night, knowing that someday he would, just like the rest of us, die.



In 1966, we moved to Fort St. John, B.C. It was only a couple of hours up the highway, but whereas Hythe was a village of 200 people, Fort St. John was a vast metropolis of 7,000. It had a Dairy Queen and a movie theatre and lots of paved streets that seemed to be made for 3-speed bicycles with banana seats and ape-hanger handlebars.

Tommy lived across the street, and he had the best sandbox on the block. It was oblong, so that we could easily reach across from any point to drive our Dinky/Corgi/Matchbox vehicles. And it was on the north side of his house, so it was cool on a hot day, and the moistened sand didn't dry up too quickly.

Brian was another friend, who lived a few blocks away in a

much bigger house and had much finer toys (such as a pool table in the basement and a 90 cc Suzuki motorcycle in the backyard).

The other element in this story was the candy store, which sold 3 jawbreakers for a penny, as well as many other delights suitable for rotting teeth.

One day, I met Tommy out on the street. I was on my orange 3-speed, and he was on his black single speed, with its fake gas tank attached to the top tube.

"Want some Ton-O-Gum?" I asked.

"Sure."

I started to break off a mammoth chunk from the pink slab and casually mentioned that I had taken a dime from Brian's room to make the purchase.

Tommy looked away. "Uh...I gotta go."

And then there was an uncomfortable silence as I had my first realization that not everyone in the world was a selfish jerk.



One day, a new student walked into our grade four class and the teacher introduced him. Tim had an English accent, curly hair, and a sweater with a few holes in it. When we were asked if anyone would like to help Tim get settled, my hand shot up. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Mom and Dad were born in Britain, and that we had gone there on a vacation a few years previous.

I hung out with Tim occasionally after school. Sometimes, we took our bikes to a huge undeveloped lot behind Brian's place, where there was a scrub forest criss-crossed with trails, and a frog pond teeming with tadpoles. And sometimes we hung out at the schoolyard with its rusty playground amusements and a surrounding fringe of willow bushes (the branches of which could, with a pocketknife, be fashioned into decent whistles).

I do remember that one day, Tim took me to see his house. It was on the outskirts of town and it seemed small and grimy. After that, I don't remember seeing Tim very much. He may have transferred to another school or moved to another town.

A year or two after that, I was at home when the door bell rang. It was Tim.

"Hi! Remember me?" he said with a big smile.

"No, I don't remember you at all. Sorry."

"I'm Tim. Tim from school!"

"No. Sorry. I don't remember you." (Like Donald Trump, I had yet to develop any sense of shame.)

"Oh. OK." And with that, he simply walked away. And I shrugged, relieved that the burden of an inconvenient friendship had so easily disappeared.



I also remember this:

“McNab’s fleas!”

“McNab’s fleas!”

It was a cruel game of tag, which took place in our Grade 3 classroom. We pawed off imaginary fleas on each other from _____ McNab. She may not have been pretty, and she might have worn hand-me-down clothes, but we all knew damn well that she didn't have fleas.

Years later, in Junior High, the taunt was “Choke it!” “Choke it!”, a cruel reference to the last name of _____ Choquette, a girl with a rather unfortunate DNA inheritance. I never called out the dreadful nickname, but neither did I have the intelligence or backbone to tell my friends to shut the fuck up.²

² The “sin of omission”, defined rather well in James 4:17 (“So whoever knows



In Tommy's sandbox, we played with Dinky Toys. But in the late 1960's, Hot Wheels arrived. Dinky Toys had wheels that turned, but Hot Wheels had wheels that turned fast! And they had their own slippery, smooth tracks with loops and jumps. And there was a finish gate with a plastic checkered flag that impartially told us who had the fastest car.

But after we had sorted out which cars were fastest and which were slowest, and after we had exhausted all the other possibilities (like sending a speeding Corvette off of the ramp into the ribs of the family pet), the fun started to wear off.

But wait! Brian had the updated version. Now, we wouldn't be slaves to a mere clamp on a table edge. Brian had the new Supercharger set that accelerated the cars via a pair of foam-edged spinning flywheels that gave each car a boost as it went through the little plastic garage attached to the track. And when that got boring, Brian managed to get Sizzlers, which were Hot Wheels with their own tiny batteries.

I couldn't afford those tracks, but at some point, Hot Wheels produced an evolutionary dead end that I *could* afford. It was heavily discounted at the store, presumably because no one else wanted it.³ It didn't have batteries and it didn't have humming flywheels that ran off of household current. It had big rubber bands attached to a set of catapults. Each time a car came around the track, I would have to reset the catapult, so that it would hit the back end of the car and send it whizzing off for another lap.

But even before I got back from the department store with the catapult contraption in my grubby little hands, my ten year old brain managed to form an extremely sobering thought. I realized that the novelty of the new track would not last. I might play with it for an
the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”)

³ In fact, it was such an evolutionary dead end, that even with a fairly extensive internet search, I could only find one other reference to it...from "Jeff" on www.feelingretro.com.

hour or two – or maybe even a day or two. But the glitz and glamour would rapidly vanish, and like all of my other toys, it would gather dust. I had discovered the Buddhist concept of anicca (or impermanence).

...at least for month or so. My birthday was approaching, you see, so the concept of anicca rapidly lost ground to the much more enticing concept of Kenner's Smash Up Derby! ⁴



At that age, I looked forward to the next MAD magazine like I currently look forward to the next Atlantic Monthly. MAD in the late 60's and early 70's was a refreshing antidote to anything authoritarian. Plus, it was a secret entry into a lot of the adult pleasures that I wouldn't normally have access to – in particular, the sardonic send-ups of movies that I still was too young to see in the theatres.

I first came across MAD in a department store in Edmonton (a rare family trip, since it was a full day's drive from Fort St. John). I grabbed a copy off of the stack and showed it to my dad, asking if I could buy it with my hard earned nickels. He thumbed through it for a while and gave me the nod. I don't think he had ever seen it before, either. But I suspect that certain aspects of it – such as its anti-Vietnam war slant – resonated well with both United Church theology and his NDP (New Democratic Party) voting patterns.

I'm not sure how much the MAD ideology rubbed off on me, but it certainly gave me a window on the world which I had previously ignored. Before MAD, I was so ignorant about world affairs that I thought Martin Luther King was a prime minister of Canada. After all, it was just a couple of weeks after he was shot that Pierre Trudeau became our head of state.

MAD magazine may have been a learning tool, but it was also a commodity to be coveted and hoarded. Our grade eight Language

⁴ “..crash, bang, crash ‘em up. Put ‘em back again. Crash, bang, smash ‘em up. It's smash up time, my friend.” (Sung with a slightly southern-Country twang)

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