

Life after Death? Evidence and the credulity of crowds

What we can learn from charismatic pastors and shock jocks

Bruce Hugman

Hungry for more?
VISIT **Luilekkerland** or **Cockaygne**
Where you'll never have to think or want for anything again
Welcome!

RUSH TO NUBICUCULLIA

OUR VERY OWN CLOUD CUCKOO LAND

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A SPECIAL WELCOME TO:

- Magicians
- Fantastists
- Dreamers
- Spin doctors
- Flat-earthers
- Clairvoyants
- Mountebanks
- Homeopaths
- Politicians
- The deluded, disaffected, disappointed and despairing
- Ordinary folk

THE WORLD'S STRONGEST MEN
Find and follow your ideal leader!

TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL
All the skills of misdirection
Amaze your friends at parties!

TAKE BACK CONTROL!

The secrets of sowing doubt and cultivating cynicism
Seminars with leading business and political leaders. On the hour every hour

WISHING WELL
Make your wildest dreams come true

THE TWEET FACTORY
Amazing viral fabrications!
VIRALITY NOT VERACITY!!!

ROLLERCOASTER
Thrills beyond the ordinary!

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM
Find out what's really going on
(Waterproof footwear advised)

THE FLAT EARTH FERRIS WHEEL
See the evidence from on high!

THE ECHO CHAMBER
Latest digital technology
Hear the world endorse your opinions!

WALL OF DEATH
Stunts you could never have imagined!

STOCKS AND COCONUT POT SHOTS

Hone your skills with projectiles

Nominate your victim: choose from politicians, officials, immigrants, lords and ladies, know-it-all snobs, arrogant scientists, fancy lefties.

SPECIAL: daily delivery of rotten tomatoes and bullshit

THE CHARISMA CLINIC

Be loved and changed by great men
Let the wave of love sweep you up!

DODGEMS AND DEMOLITION DERBY

Take the wheel – take control! Knock their socks off!
Perfect for boy-racers and real men

BURIAL PLOTS

1,000 hectares of landscaped garden
Lay the truth to rest. Sign up today!

YOU'LL BE AMAZED!

MIRACLE CURES RESURRECTIONS

SACRAMENTAL CLEANSING

EXORCISMS REVELATIONS

THE NO SURPRISES WHIRLIGIG

Stay in motion; go nowhere.
You'll love it!

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Pills and potions for every occasion
TODAY ONLY: Pact with the devil – Lifetime supply for an eternity of flame-resistant skin
Special offer for EBHC: Holy water and real snake oil

FASHION THE FACTS

Your very own fact factory to take home TODAY!
Never rely on second-hand fake news again: make your own.
Special session: irresistible anecdotes

ETHICAL PAIN RELIEF
Unique offer! Non-addictive opioids from the best companies. Repeat prescriptions are part of the deal
No animals were harmed in the preparation of these products

PICK 'N' MIX
A fantastic selection of ready-made opinions and prejudices; perfect for the kids!!
TODAY ONLY: half price!!

This poster is one of a series from a long-term project investigating the contemporary threats to facts, evidence and truth, and exploring the visual presentation of complex ideas.

The Greatest show on earth

It's the circus fairground of life - in which we all participate, knowingly or unwittingly. We love it and love to hate it. We repudiate its vulgarity, but covertly admire and employ its values and techniques. Politicians, bureaucrats, officials, scientists, professionals and many others erect a notional *cordon sanitaire* around themselves, but this does no more than camouflage the fact that they are secretly complicit in the show, even while repudiating it publicly. Their duplicitous communications and behavior create public polarization and alienation. The elephant in the room – our common humanity – is somehow invisible, while the elephant in the brain* – our primitive urges for status, sex and survival – are left, unrecognized and untrammelled, free to cause mayhem. Charismatic pastors know the wounds and orifices that admit insinuation and infection; they know the communion and hope and certainty the people crave. The rest of us must either learn from their leadership, or remain on the sidelines as impotent observers.

*Kevin Simler and Robin Hanson, *The Elephant in the Brain*, Oxford (2018)

Rhetorical Tips from the Greeks

On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is terrible), how do you rate scientists' and health professionals' performance in communicating with multiple audiences?

Logos: the strength, integrity and clarity of the message

Pathos: the emotional richness of delivery, and acknowledged, shared emotional context

Ethos: the reputation and credibility of the communicator

Style: the appropriateness, attractiveness and fit of content and form

Voice: the respect, attentiveness and empathy of tone

Language: the accuracy of match to the topic and to recipients' needs and abilities

What reforms might we hope and work for in social norms, thinking and behaviour?

- Acceptance of complexity and diversity
- Alignment of self-interest and civic vision
- Rejection of binary perceptions and solutions and of polarizing interventions
- Rejection of policy-based evidence and data-dredging
- Policies, conversations and systems that foster a harmonious sense of inclusive community and mutuality
- Fundamental political and economic reform, including inclusivity, equality and evidence-based policy
- Development of the faculties of metacognition, self-awareness, empathy and humility

What reforms might we hope and work for in the functioning of medicine and science?

- Promotion of the methods and benefits of science in public life and education; asserting the nature and integrity of facts and truth as far as we can know them
- Embracing the knowledge and skills of social science in policy, implementation and communication
- Active, respectful, imaginative engagement with young and old; working alongside multiple populations, especially those that are sceptical or hostile
- Abandoning top-down, centre-out models of management and communication; elevating the periphery
- The fostering of ambassadors for science (in the footsteps of David Attenborough and Brian Cox)
- The adoption of variable plain language

- Development of imaginative and creative narratives and images (telling stories)
- The rooting out of fraud, commercial interference and conflicts of interest (not least philosophical)
- Empathetic exploration and engagement at the roots of scepticism and science-denial
- Strenuous efforts to establish a credible voice and presence in human affairs

'Only connect! That was her whole sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.' – E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, 1910

Life after Death?

On Sunday 24 February 2019, in Pastor (Prophet) Alph Lukau's Alleluia Ministries International Church, Kramerville, north of Johannesburg, before a congregation of hundreds, the sick were healed, the disabled were liberated from their wheelchairs and crutches, and a man in a coffin, was brought back to life. '...believers know that GOD is strong and mighty with ALL POWER is in hand, What a Mighty God we serve...The God of Alph Lukau is too much.' Tweeted one devotee. See the Prophet's video on YouTube: <https://www.facebook.com/alphlukau01/videos/422488705160482/>

'Miracles' provide reassurance and hope for susceptible populations for problems that are complex and intractable in an unpredictable and alienating world; charismatic pastors provide an embrace in which the poor, the vulnerable and the fearful can find comfort. Their appeal absolutely overrides reason and critical thinking.

'Miracle' – an event in which natural law or all rational expectations appear to be suspended or confounded.

Nubiculla (Cloud Cuckoo Land)

In Aristophanes' fantasy comedy, *The Birds*, (414BC), two humans, Pisthetaerus and Euelpidides, tired of bureaucratic and litigious Athens, conspire with the birds of the world to create a new city in the sky. This will enable reassertion of the historic supremacy of birds over mankind and over the johnny-come-lately Olympians. Charlatans and chancers line up for roles in the new administration, but all are rejected.

Cockaygne

A fantasy land of pleasure and abundance that has appeared in many forms in many cultures since ancient times; a place of ultimate abandon and escape. Het Luilekkerland ('the lazy-luscious-land' in English), the subject of a Dutch rhyming text from the 15th century is one example; prelapsarian Eden, and the 1567 painting (possibly) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder are two others. Elgar's Cockaigne overture draws on the tradition.

Among the influences behind this poster:

- Aristophanes
- Aristotle
- Hieronymus Bosch
- Pieter Bruegel
- The Lightning Seeds
- Niccolò Nelli
- Pastor Alph Lukau
- Radiohead
- Simler & Hanson

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