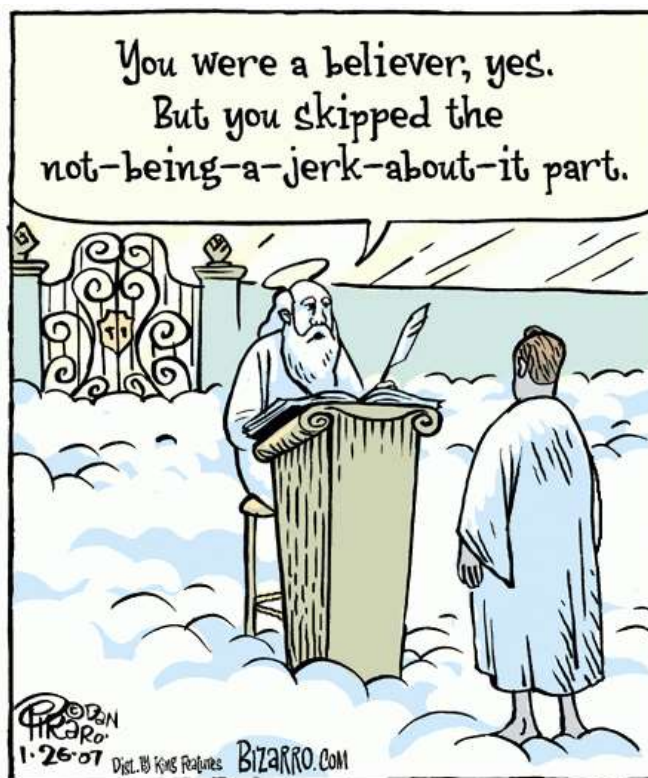
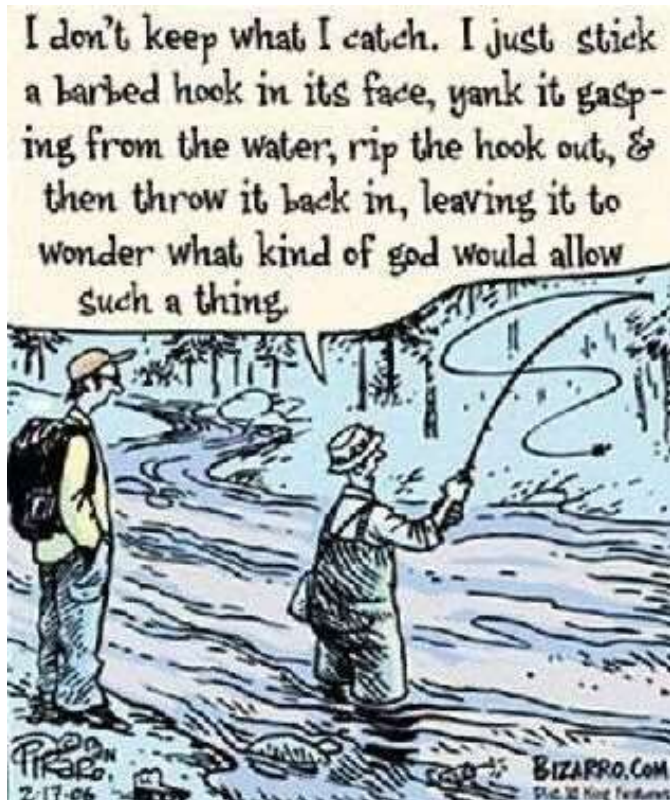


Tribalism and trout

By Ian Cox



There are trout anglers in this country and abroad who think that their fellow trout anglers who do not practice catch and release as a religion are schmucks or even worse criminals engaged in the crime of trout genocide.

The extremity of these views, the irrationality of the arguments, if indeed you can dignify the drivel that is spewed forth in defence of these prejudiced notions as arguments at all, are so nasty that one wonders how it can be that our community has come to this.

Of course this is not the first time trout anglers have descended into madness. The dry fly movement and the vitriol that it heaped on the thoroughly decent Skues some 80 years ago is another example of just how nasty and stupid grown men and women can get when bees in bonnets mix with self-interest and prejudice.

We now know the dry fly movement for what it was; a clever scheme to drive up the value of riparian rights in areas where fishing pressure is such that restrictive practices such as casting up stream to a rising fish will accommodate more rods than fishing wet.

Happily we now recognise that both dry fly purism and other forms of trout fishing have their place and that each is appropriate and acceptable to that place. Dry fly enthusiasts and those of different mind now rub shoulders in amity. The vitriol of the past is now reduced to gentle ribbing one way or the other.

The evil that is inherent in an extremity of positions has been replaced by the civilised recognition that neither is better than the other and those circumstances rather than dogma determine which is more appropriate.

Tribalism has given way to co-operation and our world of trout is a better place for it.

Hopefully the good ship that is trout fishing will navigate these turbulent CAR waters and emerge on the other side without the ship foundering or too many souls being lost overboard.

But it would be a mistake to take this for granted. Tribalism and the dichotomy of thinking that tribalism entrenches are on the increase in the world. The will to co – operate, and to try and find ways of cooperating, is decreasing. Extreme views are beginning to predominate and we are beginning to see the impacts of this on human health wellbeing and happiness.

Sociobiologist EO Wilson writes interestingly of the success of a species in terms of their ability to cooperate with one another and how by this measure we can count ants, termites, bees and human beings as the most successful species on the planet. The source of this success lies in our ability, whether as a matter of instinct or conscious decision work selflessly towards a common goal and to put differences aside, both perceived and real in doing so.

Tribalism flourishes where this capacity to cooperate becomes sectarian and directed improving the position of a one group at the expense of another. It a case of homiphly (birds of a feather flock together) gone mad. Separation and conflict swiftly follow resulting in unspeakable behaviour being justified as necessary for the protection of tribe. This is left unchecked leads inevitably to bloodshed, war and the collapse of civilisation.

Our Constitution and indeed the ANC Freedom Charter that gave birth to it both recognise the power of cooperation of what has become known as Ubuntu. Both seek to institutionalise this in the hope by doing so all South Africans regardless of race, religion, political belief or gender will be able to live together in peaceful prosperity.

Sadly these noble sentiments are under attack across the world by what Bill Clinton recently called tribal separatists. South Africa is not immune to these attacks. Our Constitution, the Freedom Charter and our futures are increasingly threatened by these so called tribal separatist who will see decency, respect and cooperation replaced by big men driving populist rhetoric informed by hateful and pejorative and prejudiced messages of them and us.

The animal rights movement is part of this tribal separatist attack on our Constitution and the spirit of cooperation that is required to deliver the Constitutional promise of a peaceful free and prosperous South Africa. Being a lawyer, I find the clearest indication of this lies in the writings of Cormac Cullinan. He is a South African environmental lawyer a consultant to government and the author of the book Wild Law. He likens the Constitution and our Bill of rights to apartheid. Thus he wrote:

“I was probably fortunate to have studied law in apartheid South Africa. It meant that right from the beginning I was very aware that states use law as a method of social control, that laws reflect a particular view of the world held by those with political power, and that there is not necessarily a healthy relationship between law, justice and morality. It also meant that I was never in awe of the ‘majesty of the law’ or believed that having a complex yet rationally consistent set of rules was an end in itself. The fact that I was involved in organising student marches and other anti-government activities that were illegal at the time, also gave me a healthy disrespect for many of the involved debates that some legal theorists immersed themselves in. Issues such as whether or not there is a moral obligation to obey the law simply because it is the law, or whether or not a morally repugnant law is law, seemed simple in those days. Whatever the niceties of the various academic points of view, when confronted with really repugnant laws that are nevertheless enforced with whips, imprisonment and worse, the doubts evaporate. I, and many others, found that at these times we took guidance from our consciences and hearts and not from logic or theory. Valuable though logic is in discerning truth, sometimes the heart or intuition is a better guide in the turbulence of experience.

The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating. In my view, the deteriorating condition of Earth is the proof that the human self-governance pudding has gone bad. Our systems for regulating human behaviour are not protecting Earth, our home, from destruction, because that it not their purpose. The problem of inadequate self-regulation cannot be solved at the level of legislative reform. The problem is not simply that our laws need refining to be more effective. The fact is that, by and large, these laws do give accurate expression to the defective worldview that underlies them. Our legal and political establishments

perpetuate, protect and legitimise the continued degradation of Earth by design, not by accident.” - Cullinan, Cormac (2011). *Wild Law* (Kindle Locations 1118-1126). Green Books. Kindle Edition.

“There are few areas in which the arrogant and obsessively anthropocentric worldview of the dominant societies is more apparent than in the law. The law reserves all the rights and privileges to use and enjoy Earth to humans and their agents (and usually only selected categories of those, at that). It has also reduced other aspects of Earth and the other creatures that live on it, to the status of objects for the use of humans. The grandiose constitutions of the mighty nations form the arching vaults of the homosphere, and describe it and its aspirations. The law prescribes how we relate to other humans, to other cohabitants of this planet and to Earth itself. It punishes and takes revenge on those who do not conform. It legitimises the eternal extermination of species and the most profound disrespect and abuse of the Earth that sustains us. If all this sounds like hyperbole, consider the following, which is true of the legal systems of almost all the cultures that currently dominate human society.” - Cullinan, Cormac (2011). *Wild Law* (Kindle Locations 1138-1145). Green Books. Kindle Edition.

This dystopian biocentric view of human beings and the rule of law is what drives thinking within South Africa’s Department of Environmental Affairs. It also makes common cause with dominant forces within the ruling party who see the ANC and the values enshrined in the Freedom Charter as disposable means to other ends. It is behind the breakdown of governance that I write about in “[Fake Laws?](#)” that is published elsewhere in this edition of the *Bobbin*. It informs the pejorative notions of alienness and the idea of humans as alien to nature that are driving attempts to make trout invasive.

It is also behind the idea that it is somehow against nature for man to predate on trout and the practice of catch and release as if it speaks to some inherent truth. It does not and clearly this must be so. The idea that those who strictly practice CAR are somehow better than those that do not is tribal twaddle. Of course there are circumstances where CAR is necessary, just as upstream fishing of a dry fly to a rising trout can be said to be necessary. But this does not make it superior any more than the converse would be.

On that subject I can do no better to repeat the wise words of the late Dr Bob Crass in an article “[Some Thoughts on Trout Management](#)” where he wrote:

“Predation is the most significant process from the fishery managers’ point of view. Trout are predators that depend on the production of all the different aquatic organisms that go to make up their diet. Trout are, themselves, subject to predation by other fish (even members of their own species), platanna frogs, birds, otters and, of course, humans. Anglers are normally the top predators that kill trout. Because of the effect of angling on the trout population, the practice of catch-and-release (CAR) has become a world-wide management tool (Except, I believe in Germany). CAR is regarded by many as a means of enjoying your cake without eating it, but it is subject to objection on several grounds. The main point about CAR is that it is effective only in cases where the number of trout in water cannot sustain angling pressure if each fisherman takes his catch. In heavily fished waters with a limited stock of trout, sport may be maintained at an acceptable level. In such cases, the only alternative to CAR is the highly artificial and expensive system of put-and-take.

Fortunately most club waters in South Africa are not over exploited. Indeed, the percentage of stocked trout taken by anglers indicates, in many cases, that natural mortality accounts for more deaths than angling. CAR makes sense only if there is a good chance of recapture after the fish has been caught and liberated. One might argue that sparing a female hooked in a river is worthwhile to preserve the breeding stock. Obviously that does not apply in a dam where spawning does not take place. Even in a river, there is generally no need to worry about preserving the breeding stock. Most of our Drakensberg streams provide good spawning grounds where only a few females are required to supply enough eggs to yield an

ample population of young trout. After a severe drought or a catastrophic flood, such as that of May 1959, a shortage of breeders may occur. A more frequent problem is an excessive number of young fish. A 500g female carries 800 to 1000 eggs so a normal rate of survival to the fingerlings stage ensures that the progeny of only a few parent trout will be competing for available food supplies. And the more severe the competition the less growth is possible for each young fish.”
