

From the Kitchen

8 February 2012



Sometimes I read what I posted some time ago and it seems rather negative in hind-sight. This set me thinking about the difference between listing all that is wrong with the world and imagining what we can do to solve existing problems.

The list of problems is probably infinite and doesn't take much effort to get started on. Thinking about possible solutions takes imagination and effort and there are relatively few people undertaking this in any consistent way. If, like me, you keep an eye on new books being published, you will see that there *are* those making the effort.

The latest example is Eric Knight¹, whose book *Reframe* has just been published by Black Inc Books². I will post a review when I have read it, but I understand that he tackles current issues and offers solutions by changing the frame of reference. Other books that I know, that offer solutions are *Good News for a Change*³ by David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, *The Medicine Family Vision*⁴ by Jai Daemion, and sections of *The Quest for Justice*⁵ by Ken Crispin.

Many, if not most, of our current problems come from wrong thinking. To try and find solutions by using the same thinking is not likely to make a difference. Yet that is what mostly seems to happen. When someone suggests that we should redefine our frame of reference (ask different questions), many people feel fearful and want to stay with the (comfortable) existing questions (probably because most of the answers are familiar). Most of the solutions people come up with, as a consequence, are attempts at more, bigger, better.

Much of our thinking comes from times before we were faced with the challenges we now have. Some of our approaches to challenges come from those facing humans millennia ago and many are from well before modern problems were even possible. Much of the thinking is pre-industrial and certainly pre-information age.

In 1800 the human population was at around one billion. It doubled by the 1920s and doubled again by the 1970s. It *could* reach eight billion by 2020 or plateau at 7½ billion around 2030. I was still taught at school in the 1960s that the oceans could feed the whole of humanity for the foreseeable future – they didn't foresee very far and probably did not imagine how much of the oceans' wildlife we would be feeding to our pets.

Let me give some examples of how thinking can be shifted, through asking different questions (I am not suggesting any answers).

Do we need international money markets? Who do they serve? Are they about more than the profits made by the traders? Can money be made available to people without 'lending' with interest?

From time to time we hear or read of orchardists not being able to sell their crops for a high enough price (often because of fruit flown in from more than 13 000 Km away) and they leave their crops to rot or bury them, even cut down and burn entire orchards. Can oranges, apples, peaches, etc., be used for anything other than food? What about the fruit trees themselves – are they useful beyond growing fruit?

Can thousands of kilometres of disused railway easements be used for anything other than running trains?

Is there anything outside of what we can ascertain with our five senses (with or without the help of machines)? Does it matter if there is or not? If there is, does it matter if we do not know about it?

What is the purpose of government? Is it necessary?

Who or what does commerce serve? Can we do without corporations?

There are many more questions that can be asked, of ourselves and of others. The ‘others’ especially include politicians and leaders of industries, businesses, institutions and communities.

When office buildings in the business district of central Melbourne became partly or completely empty, because businesses found it cheaper to operate from some suburban centres, the early questions were about how to entice businesses back. Someone must have asked, “What else can these empty buildings be used for?” As a result of asking useful questions many buildings were converted to apartments. One consequence has been the re-enlivening of the centre of the city.

The only ways to change outcomes are to dream new possibilities or ask different questions. Are you game?

1. www.ericknight.com.au
2. www.blackincbooks.com
3. Greystone Books, 2002
4. Ajna Media, 1997
5. See [my review](#) of this book