

FAITH AND SCIENCE

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FORUM

At The University of Hong Kong

Redeeming Technology

7th October 2017

Can *stuff* be morally good?



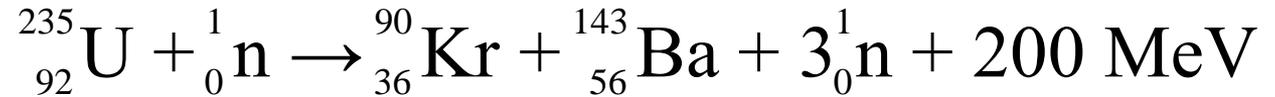
Okinawa Soba

Mike Brownnutt

Somewhere, something happened...

$$2 + 2 = 4$$

$$E = mc^2$$



Cutaway of thermonuclear warhead



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Włodi from London

I have questions...

- Can I lead a nuclear bomb in the sinner's prayer?
- Are "bad things" things made by bad people?
- What does it *mean* for an object to be good or bad?
- Is this my problem?
- How can I even *start* thinking about this?

Form and Function



The Story of Coke



Okinawa Soba

The Story of Coke

Options:

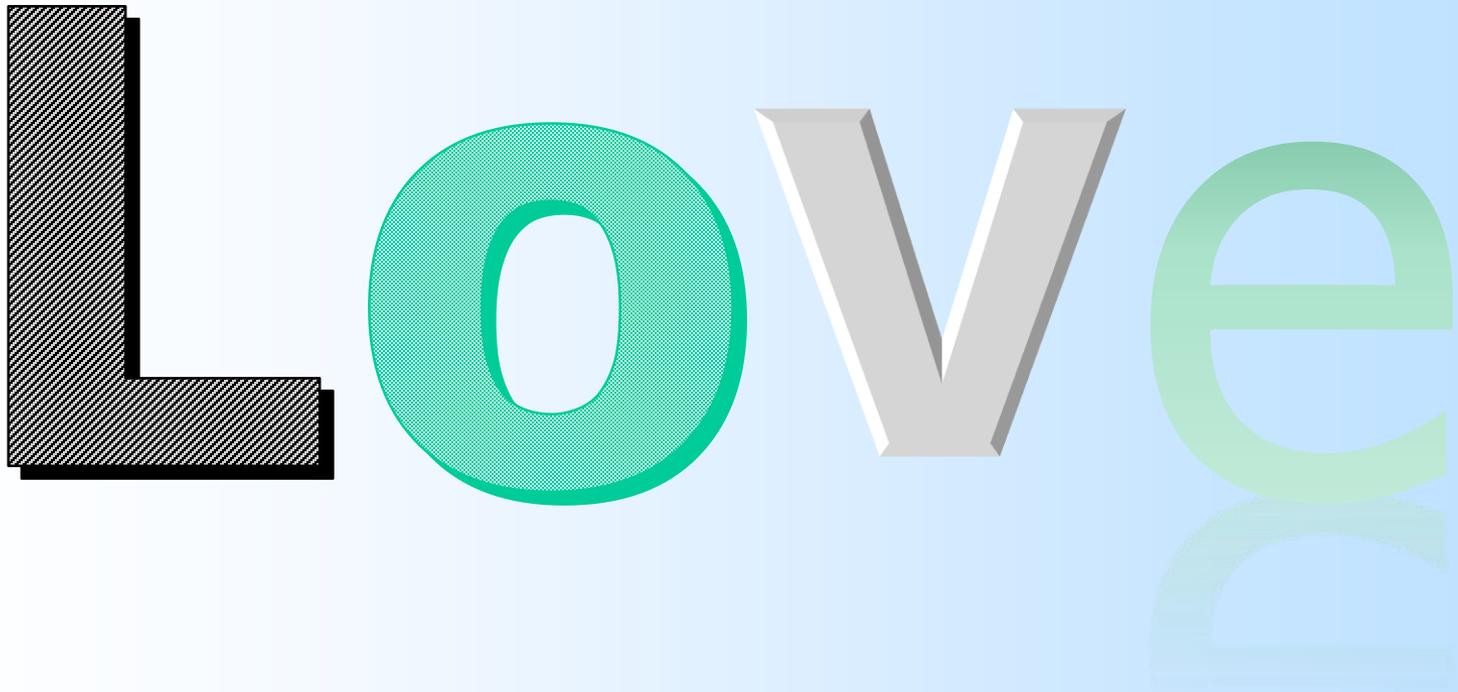
- **Drink half a can**
(and throw the other half away)
- **Drink half a can**
(and save the rest for later)
- **Ask a friend to come and share my Coke**
- **Drink two servings of Coke**

Are bad designers bad people?



But how can a *thing* be good?

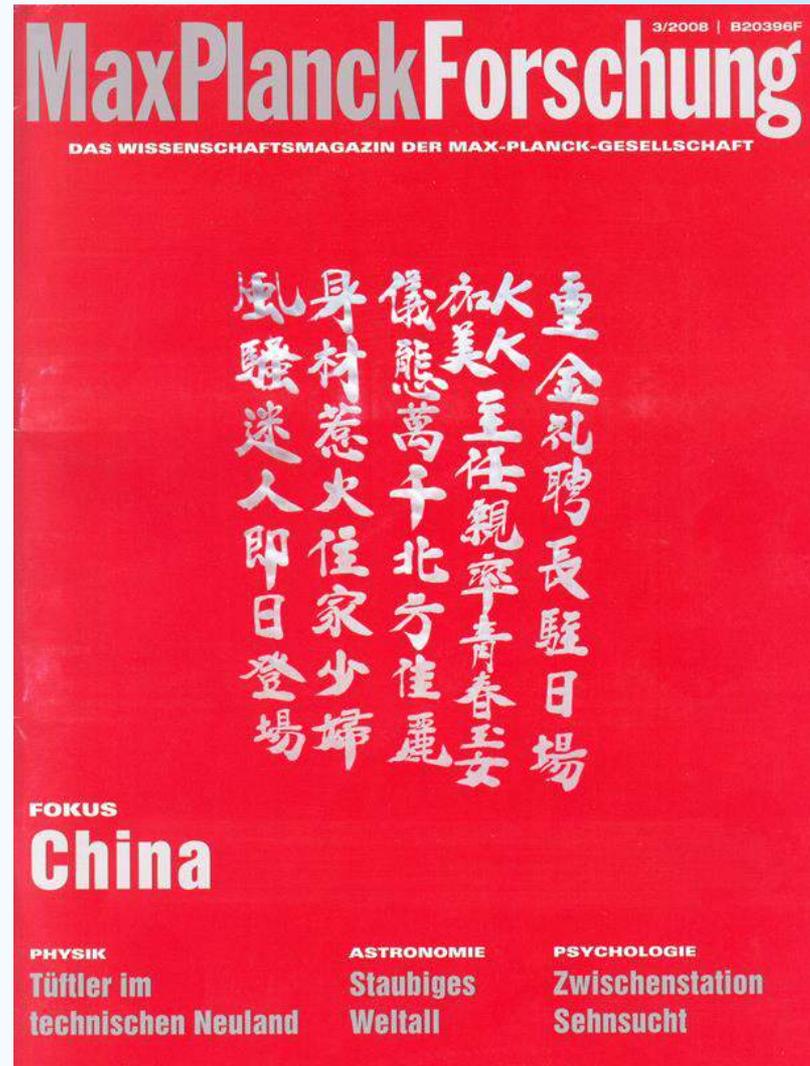
An analogy: good words, bad words.



Love

But how can a *thing* be good?

An analogy: good words, bad words.



What is that do do with *me*?



Where do I start?

What does the technology serve?

What are you optimising the technology for?

- Medical technology
- Industrial technology
- Phone technology



Medical technology



“This is desirable, ... for the invention of innumerable devices ... and most importantly, for the **maintenance of health, which is undoubtedly the chief good** and the foundation of all other goods in this life.”

Descartes (1637) *Discourse on the Method* Pt. VI

Medical technology



“Why did I not perish at birth,
and die as I came from the womb?...
For sighing has become my daily food;
my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil.”

Job 3:11,24-26

Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

“Not to worry, there’s a pill for that.”

Job 4:1 (MHV)

~~“I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
My ears had heard of you,
but now my eyes have seen you.”~~

~~Job 42:5 (NIV)~~

Industrial technology



Xu Hongzhi

The primary, if not the only, goal of human labor is efficiency.

Neil Postman (1993) *Technopoly*

Summarising Frederick Taylor (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management*

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Westminster Confession Q.1

Phone technology



The findings of these studies resonate with the gut feeling of many in academia - that a lot of **published research findings may be false**. Just like any other information source, academic journals may contain fake news.

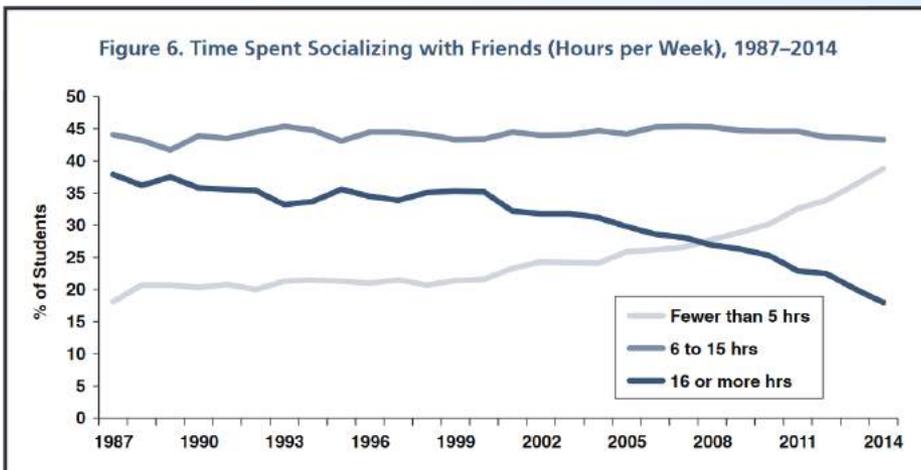
Some of those who participate in the March For Science movement idealise science. Yet science is in a major crisis. And we need to talk about this instead of **claiming that scientists are armed with the truth**.

It's time for academics to take back control of research journals. **Ninety-seven per cent of March For Science participants (pdf) want** policymakers to consider scholarly evidence when drafting their policies. I, too, used to think that **influencing policymakers was** part of a modern academic's job description. Now I am less confident in the validity of many research findings.

There are multiple reasons for the replication crisis in academia - from accidental statistical mistakes to sloppy peer review. However, **many scholars agree (pdf)** that the main reason for the spread of fake news in scientific journals is the tremendous pressure in the academic system to publish in high-impact journals.

These high-impact journals demand novel and surprising results. Unsuccessful replications are generally considered dull, even though they may make important contributions to scientific understanding. Indeed, **44% of scientists (pdf) who carried out an unsuccessful replication are unable to publish it**.

We need to rethink research funding for UK regions to prosper
Jonathan Adams
Read more



The effect of optimisation

Technology	Effect of optimising for clicks
“Information” technology	Distracts you from information
“Communication” device	Inhibits communication
“Social” platform	Makes you un-sociable

Option 1

Optimise technology for things important to technology.

Option 2

Optimise technology for things important to
people,
or the world around us,
or God.

Thinking differently

“Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Rom. 12:2

Concern:

This phone design does not optimise how easy it is to be contacted at all times and in all places.

Response A:

You are right.

Response B:

You are wrong.

Response C:

Who cares?

Summary

- *Stuff* can be morally good or bad.
- We usually don't think about it.
- We have an opportunity to make *good* technologies.
- We have an opportunity to pioneer new research.