

Ad Hominem and the Postmodern Politic

I've been thinking a lot about some of the process issues in recent attempts at social "reform" here in Tasmania – issues such as abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, legalisation of prostitution, broadening of anti-discrimination legislation etc. etc. etc. It's being called a social tsunami by some people.



The *process* undertaken by those pushing this agenda is of some concern to me. When I first began interacting with this sort of public debate I assumed that it would be a matter of arguing the issues in the public sphere. I was expecting serious inquiries into issues that weighed up the pros and cons and arrived at some conclusions. I fully suspected that I would sometimes disagree with those conclusions, but that the process would at least be reasonable.

How naïve.

The real shape of public "debate" in Tasmania amounts to presumptive assertion, blatant name-calling, and rushed legislation. I think that's obvious, but that's not the point of this post. The question I want to ask here is: why? What motivates this sort of insipid leadership?

Perhaps it is sheer political pragmatism (which has its place). Or genuine ideology (which isn't always something to be disparaged).

But my current hypothesis is that it's actually philosophical. In particular, that it relates to a postmodern deconstructionalism that is both blind and unreal.

Through deconstruction and its associated relativism the great conundrums of the day are not reduced to a consideration of assumptions and analyses and likely outcomes. The conundrums are reduced to power plays. Because truth is not held to be absolute, the promulgation of an opinion can no longer be seen as a simple attempt to persuade and arrive at a shared understanding of truth, it is always seen as an assertion of power. If truth is not a graspable entity, then the argument is about intention not fact.

Public debate no longer becomes the discovery of truth through mutuality, community, and dialogue; it becomes a battle, an innate "us and them." In this battle ad hominem arguments are not fallacious, or even spicy distractions, they are an inherent aspect.

So same-sex marriage is not even "a necessary but painful change of a long-held but out-of-date tradition" it is a "human rights issue" in which the opponents are bigots.

Abortion is not even "a painful, regretful but necessary reality which should be safe, legal and rare" it is about "whether or not a woman is fully human not" and no matter what the opponents say about giving a care for the unborn, they are actually misogynists.

The opponents of euthanasia are all about imposing personal religious beliefs, not raising valid concerns about the role of government in a civilised society

There is no other mechanism in this philosophy but to attack and "construct" (ironically) stereotypes of the others' motivation. It is a shallow form of leadership. It is destructive to harmony, tolerance, civility, community and relationship.

In this State, this method and manner, this abhorrent philosophy, this self-infatuated intransigence, at the highest levels of our government, simply breaks my heart.