

## Catallaxy Files

Australia's leading libertarian and centre-right blog

### An evening with the stars at Mannkal

[3 comments](#)

A high point of my fishing trip to the west was the Sundowner Seminar at [Mannkal](#), the free enterprise economics education outfit inspired by Ron Manners. This was a huge thrill because the audience included Jo Nova who is one of my special heroes and as if that was not enough, out of the blue, a complete surprise, the international superstar, Christopher Monckton. He is an admirer of Popper and so he is my new best friend (sorry Ron). I was delighted to catch up with John Hyde who rates in my esteem with his great mentor, Bert Kelly. It was interesting to find in the audience the President of the [Mars Society Australia](#) who gave a fascinating account of the society at the dinner after the seminar.

The seminar was billed as a “Sundowner” for people after work, running between 6 and 8 with dinner to follow at a Greek restaurant around the corner.

To mix theory with practical issues we planned the session in three segments, first a bit about Popper and von Mises as the sleeping giants of classical liberalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then a segment on communicating the message, noting the rise of new media such as blogs and Facebook. And then a discussion on the theme “what debate should we have?” to consider whether it is more important to debate the old “dead forest” of the left or to engage the more lively and radical libertarians.

#### **Popper and Mises: a tragic lack of communication**

Popper and Mises were founding members of the Mont Pelerin Society but of course it is well known that von Mises was impatient with most of his colleagues and Popper never really got on top of the reasons for monopolies and mass unemployment. His best statement of minimum state liberalism came in a [little-known MPS paper](#) that he delivered in Italy.

They never worked out their differences, to the great loss of the MPS and classical liberalism. Popper recorded in a talk at the Cato Institute many years later:

“I was always very conscious of Mises’ absolutely fundamental contribution, and I admired him greatly. I wish to emphasize this point since both he and I were aware of a strong opposition between our views in the field of the theory of knowledge and methodology...I respected Mises, who was much older than I, far too much to begin a confrontation with him. He talked often to me, but he never went beyond allusions of dissent...Like myself, he appreciated that there was some common ground, and he knew that I had accepted his most fundamental theorems, and that I greatly admired him for these. But he made it clear, by hints, that I was a dangerous person – although I never criticized his view even to Hayek: and I would even now not wish to do so.”

To the present day, most followers of Popper tend to be social democrats, with notable exceptions such as Jeremy Shearmur and the late Gerard Radnitzky. On the other side, many followers of Mises, notably Hans Hermann Hoppe, detest Popper and his ideas.

In very important ways they were closely aligned. (1) as critical rationalists meaning that we can’t be certain about our theories so we have to consider all possible criticisms, (2) as piecemeal social engineers – though von Mises rubbished social engineering he daily practiced the piecemeal form of policy adjustments (that Popper advocated) while he worked as an advisor to the Austrian government, and (3) von Mises was a falsificationist in the sense that he used the evidence of failed interventions to argue against socialism, central planning and all forms of unhelpful interference with markets.

#### **Communicating the Message**

Harking back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Vienna, the coffee shops and private seminars were major conduits to spread ideas, albeit in limited circles. Some of the best known seminars were convened by von Mises himself, Shoenberg (progressive music), the Vienna Circle of logical positivists, one of Freud’s daughters, Karl Menger (son of the great economist) and Richard Mises (brother of Ludwig).

We discussed the role of blogs, facebook and other innovations but it was generally agreed that the mainstream print media and especially TV would be the real battlefield for some time to come.

One of my main points is the need to mould the message to meet the audience (indeed many audiences), especially audiences who are not sophisticated and those who are well-meaning but inclined to interventionist strategies. The strong libertarians and many followers of Ayn Rand are probably ready to put their bodies on the line to save freedom but they need to make put more effort into making the ideas comprehensible and palatable to outsiders.

### **What Debate Should We Have?**

The issue here is how much of our time and energy should be invested in arguments with the social democrats, regulators and Big Government forces (the “dead forest” of the left), and how much should be diverted to debate with anarcho-capitalists. There is no simple answer to this question, everyone has to make up their own mind about trading off between the things that they like doing, the things that they are good at, and the things that most need to be done. Happy the person who finds that the three things coincide.

One of my shots at a response to this issue is a paper called “[Uniting the non-Left](#)”, written shortly after the Fall of the Wall when the disunity of the anti-communists was becoming an issue (see [the trajectory of Robert Manne](#)).

Anyway, thanks to Ron Manners for the opportunity to address such a multi-talented and enthusiastic crowd and thanks to Andrew Pickering and the other helpers who make Mannkal a very happy place to spend time.

### **The fishing trip**

A gang of ten spent a week at Carnarvon in Shark Bay, 950 k north of Perth. Four of us made the trip from Sydney and one from Melbourne but he had to leave midway to do a business deal in Beijing.

On Monday the wind and swell kept us on shore, then we spent four days on the water, catching the limit each day, so we all came away with 20k of fillets, mostly snapper and mullet with a bit of coral trout, cod and perch.

The drill for the day was to breakfast at 7, then hit the water at 8 for a one and a half hour trip to the fishing grounds. There were two modes of fishing, (a) trolling with tailing lures in deep water on the outer side and (b) bottom fishing with weighted hooks baited with squid and small fish pieces in shallow water 25-35 m.

We spent very little time trolling, scoring only three fish and most of the time passed pulling up 50-60 fish per day from the bottom. Two crew sorted out tangles, gave advice and unhooked the fish. We all scored a reasonable number of fish each day, even the least experienced because there is not a huge component of skill involved.

One day we had competitions, first fish, longest, ugliest (an eel), prettiest (coral trout), most impressive (a big cod), smallest, and a team event where NSW defeated WA but the result was not accepted because there were more WA people and I was keeping the score.

On Friday we scored a bonus with some whales sighted both on the way out and back, at one stage two were traveling alongside for several minutes.

And so at the end of the week we all went home, tired but happy!

Written by Rafe

July 1st, 2011 at 1:45 pm

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## 1. Great Article Rafe.

1) is there a simliar seminars to Mannkal held in Sydney.

2) re

The issue here is how much of our time and energy should be invested in arguments with the social democrats, regulators and Big Government forces (the “dead forest” of the left), and how much should be diverted to debate with anarcho-capitalists.

how to we cut out the dead forest once and for all.?



**RodClarke**

1 Jul 11 at [2:24 pm](#)

## 2. Rafe

I usually try to get to Ron’s MannKal meetings but he seems to have them when I have to be bush – and great to read you enjoyed it.

NEXt time your lot go fishing, try Farway Bay in the Kimberley but don’t expect to land any Spanish Mackerall off Revesley Island – the sharks are just too quick.



**Louis Hissink**

1 Jul 11 at [3:07 pm](#)

## 3. Have the Mars Society of Australia extended an invitation to Mr Graeme Bird, Esq, B.Ec (Mount Pirongia Volcano University, NZ) to speak on early 5th century BC Martian pyramid architecture?



**jtfsoon**

1 Jul 11 at [3:16 pm](#)

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“The cornerstone of trade unionism is compulsory membership.”

— Ludwig von Mises

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