

30th January 2024

Biased

"He hears but one half who hears one party only."

Æschylus, Eum

Taking my opening quote today from the Greek tragedian playwright (from the triumvirate which included Sophocles and Euripides) I want to get a pitch in early in this election year before I'm accused of being too political ... because I want to say something about bias.

Randomly flicking channels on a cold afternoon earlier this month, I came across the finals of the World Indoor Bowls Championships. I've never played bowls in earnest, either indoors or out, but I love watching it, because I'm fascinated by the skill of the bowlers. (To be clear, this is not "bowling" as in bowling alleys, with pins and bowling balls, which is another sport altogether – though equally fascinating.) A bowl has a built-in bias, being more heavily weighted on one side. So it has to be sent in a curve – on a backhand or forehand trajectory – at the right speed, to get closest to "the jack", a little yellow ball nearly thirty metres away. How the best bowlers manage to do this is beyond me. It's just amazing.

The skill is this – a bowler has to know the bias of the bowl to make sure it travels as it should and ends up where the bowler wants it to. Take the bias away, and bowls would be much less fun – and considerably less skilful. Know the bias, and direct it well, and you have a champion bowler.

We all have a bias, in one set of circumstances or another. In the hotting up of political rhetoric, even some months out from a General Election, some of these biases will come to the surface. I confess that I struggle with the biases I know in myself. I'm conscious that this bias or that will become increasingly strong in the heat of political campaigning. All the more reason, therefore, like a good bowler, to be aware of any bias.

Having a bias isn't a bad thing. And for that bias to influence your thinking, actions and words is, I believe, quite natural. But to be *unaware* of a bias, for it to govern you in an unconscious way, can't be healthy. Can we heed the advice of Æschylus from two-and-a-half millennia ago, to listen to *all*, and not confine ourselves to half the story? And maybe, being aware of a bias that may influence you, you'll be more conscious of the direction you *really* want things to go, bias and all.

A prayer for today

Lord help me to be aware of my failings, and to change direction when I should. Amen

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