

## What I'm Reading (Jan. 17)



By Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA — January 17, 2020

*It's January, with an increase in gym memberships as people vow to get fit; but the fitness craze has its roots at least 100 years ago in Victorian Britain. Did HAL, the super-smart computer in 2001 - A Space Odyssey commit murder? Stories with a kernel of truth and a dash of obfuscation or misdirection make TRUTH somewhat negotiable even in textbooks. Finally, images that capture birds in flight by compressing time.*



Image courtesy of Bill Nye [1]

***“The Victorian era is often remembered as an age of industrial innovation, staunch morals and hard work. When we imagine the stereotypical Victorian, we often picture stiff collars and heavy, head-to-toe dresses – not celebrity weightlifters or homemakers practising callisthenics. But it turns out our obsession with physical fitness isn’t just because of 20th-century stars like Jane Fonda, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. In fact, the Victorian age saw the beginnings of modern celebrity fitness culture and new forms of exercise – which we might credit for our current obsession today.”***

I am not sure anticipated is the correct word, maybe we are just repeating history. From The Conversation, [Fitness gurus and ‘muscular Christianity’: how Victorian Britain anticipated today’s keep fit craze](#)

[2].

***“When IBM’s computer Deep Blue beat world chess champion Garry Kasparov in the first game of their 1996 championship match, it did so by discovering and executing, with exquisite timing, a withering attack, the purposes of which were all too evident in retrospect to Kasparov and his handlers. It was Deep Blue’s sensitivity to those purposes and a cognitive-capacity to recognize and exploit a subtle flaw in Kasparov’s game that explain Deep Blue’s success. Murray Campbell, Feng-hsiung Hsu, and the other designers of Deep Blue, didn’t beat Kasparov; Deep Blue did. Neither Campbell nor Hsu discovered the winning sequence of moves; Deep Blue did. At one point, while Kasparov was mounting a ferocious attack on Deep Blue’s king, nobody but Deep Blue figured out that it had the time and security it needed to knock off a pesky pawn of Kasparov’s that was out of the action but almost invisibly vulnerable. Campbell, like the human grandmasters watching the game, would never have dared consider such a calm mopping- up operation under pressure.***

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***HAL may, then, have suffered from some emotional imbalance similar to those that lead human beings astray. Whether it was the result of some sudden trauma — a blown fuse, a dislodged connector, a microchip disordered by cosmic rays — or of some gradual drift into emotional misalignment provoked by the stresses of the mission — confirming such a diagnosis should justify a verdict of diminished responsibility for HAL, just as it does in cases of human malfeasance.”***

From the MIT Press Reader by way of [The Browser](#) [3], a curated reading list. [Did HAL commit Murder? -The HAL 9000 computer and the ethics of murder by and of machines](#) [4]

One of the many controversies today is dissembling news and science. Stories with a kernel of truth and a dash of obfuscation or misdirection. It has made TRUTH somewhat negotiable. We see this in science quite frequently as our expanding knowledge contradicts, and corrects, older beliefs. This week in the New York Times, they explored the problem with respect to textbooks, specifically those of US history, produced by the same publisher, and modified by the California and Texas state educational boards to “their” needs and views.

***“The textbooks cover the same sweeping story, from the brutality of slavery to the struggle for civil rights. The self-evident truths of the founding documents to the waves of immigration that reshaped the nation.***

***The books have the same publisher. They credit the same authors. But they are customized for students in different states, and their contents sometimes diverge in ways that reflect the nation’s deepest partisan divides.”***

[Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories](#) [5]

***“Dark, sinuous lines float in a blue sky. It seems straight out of sci-fi or fantasy—a fantastical spacecraft transitioning into its cloaking shield, or a mythical beast in flight. In reality, it is cranes at Gallocanta Lake in Spain, dozens of them, traveling between where they feed in the fields and where they sleep in the water. It is many frames, compressed to a single moment.”***

Take a moment to view these photos of birds in flight – they are awesome. From Atlas Obscura, [How One Photographer Captures the Glory of Birds in Flight](#) [6]

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[1] <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Reading-jester-q75-760x753.jpg>

[2] <https://theconversation.com/fitness-gurus-and-muscular-christianity-how-victorian-britain-anticipated-todays-keep-fit-craze-129522>

[3] <https://thebrowser.com/>

[4] <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/when-hal-kills-computer-ethics/>

[5] <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html>

[6] <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/photograph-birds-in-flight>