



## The Ethical Collapse Of Victoria's Government

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On Wednesday I said on the IPA's [Looking Forward Podcast](#) that in Victoria the key democratic institutions are being destroyed by the State's Premier, Daniel Andrews, in his myopic pursuit of virus eradication. On the podcast we outlined the punitive and counter-productive measures in the "Stage 4" lockdown enforced under a State of Emergency and virtual martial law. I said:

"The institutions that have served us so well, one by one have been cast aside: Parliament's been cast aside, Cabinet Government's being cast aside, free speech has been cast aside (and also) civil liberties. All the institutions that were patiently built up over centuries have just been thrown away. And it's...not only is that galling in its own right - I mean, we should maintain all of those institutions, even if they were the most inefficient and stupid way to manage on the earth because they have legitimacy as elements of liberal democracy – but we've cast all them aside.

"And what we actually have is not better decision making it's dysfunctional decision making. This is exactly what we saw in Soviet Russia and China. The more you centralise power, the harder it is for actual information about what's actually going on to reach the top."

While I have over the past few months considered various (non-exclusive) explanations for the Premier's behaviour (socialist, statist, centralising, Jacobin, Machiavellian, cognitively limited), I realised today its single best fit is with the model of "Ethical Collapse" originally outlined by Marianne M. Jennings in her 2006 [book](#).

Her concern was corporations such as Enron, but the model fits governments just as well.

Her seven signs that ethical collapse is imminent can be summarised as:

- Pressure to maintain numbers
- Fear and silence
- Young 'uns around a bigger-than-life CEO
- A weak board
- Conflicts of interest
- Innovation like no other; and
- Goodness in some areas atoning for evil in others.

In Victoria there is evidence of deep concerns relating to all seven of these dimensions.

The numbers the Premier recounts in his daily interminable and point press conferences are those of 'cases' and deaths. His key aim is for zero cases over a 14 day period in November, something not achieved anywhere in the world.

"Fear and silence" is maintained by ruthless overlordship of his own party, policing of social media by an army of DanBots and the organised #IStandWithDan campaign, and a complicit media which has benefited from the propaganda campaign by dint of being (for the first time in decades) the principal conduit of information to the public (the Premier has addressed a captive Parliamentary Press Gallery in a windowless room for more than 60 days in a row, working very hard to not answer any undesired questions). The opposition is silenced by not having access to the public and televised forum of Parliament – particularly the lower house ([closed for 'health reasons'](#)) - and people [are being pre-emptively arrested](#) for the crime not just of protesting the measures but of *organising* and *promoting* said protests on Facebook.

As Chip Le Grand at *The Age* [has described](#), the Pandemic has just exacerbated Andrews' tendency to centralise power into his own hands, bypassing the norms of Cabinet Government and destroying accountability. He relies on (apparently) more than 100 of his own staff, who we can presume to mostly 'young' and suitably subservient. There is no feasible sanction from the public, which doesn't get to vote again until November 2022.

While the impacts of punitive lockdowns are felt almost entirely in the private sector, the Premier's electoral power base is in the public sector and those reliant upon it. In the June Quarter in Victoria wages paid to private workers fell by \$1.91 billion, while those paid to the [public sector increased](#) by \$88 million. If you want evidence of a conflict of interest, it is that 2% pay rise for public servants went ahead as scheduled, in the middle of the biggest recession we've ever had. As one of my IPA colleagues [has said](#), decision-makers "have not incurred any of the costs of their reckless lockdown measures, yet they decide when and how the private sector



workforce can go back to work.”

There is great pressure to innovate as Victoria has followed the lead of so many countries by attempting – for the time in human history – to defeat a virus through lockdowns. Failures in Hotel Quarantine and contact tracing indicate the State’s capacity has not kept pace with the leader’s desire to innovate.

Finally, there is the moral dimension: “goodness in some areas atoning for evil in others.” Clearly the Premier is convinced that all measures taken (and maybe some more under consideration) can be justified for the good of preventing the deaths otherwise recounted in his grim daily toll (see point 1, above) The most charitable explanation I have read is that he is personally devastated by the deaths of the Aged in nursing homes – the tally of which he reads out daily – and he is determined that it end.

This, however, blinds him to the moral and ethical problems with the measures he’s ordered, and even to *other* deaths that will pile up but which are counted in ledgers outside his narrow system (suicides, poverty-related conditions, deferment of health-care etc). Needless to say speculation about comorbidities and related issues regarding the deceased are *verboten*.

The point is that while all of my original criticisms (socialist, statist, centralising, Jacobin, Machiavellian, cognitively limited) could well be valid, I accept they may be less persuasive to those who do not share my ideological lens. It is true I am pre-disposed to freedom, the private sector, and Parliamentary democracy, and this influences my perceptions, but I understand others may put a greater premium on other institutions and values.

*“And when rules get replaced, what you’re being asked to place your faith in is the ruler.”*

But once you understand that we are approaching Ethical Collapse, I hope even those who don’t share my starting point see what’s at stake. It is not just that the path taken is wrong-headed (though it is), it is that end of the process the State will be hollowed out of its most important institutions and values, and *there will be nothing in their place*. In place of the institutions being destroyed all we have is the Leader, the Great Helmsman, who makes all the decisions and in whom all are called upon to provide absolute faith. As my colleague, Andrew Bushnell, said on the Podcast:

I would say that generally all rules have an element of faith in them... you abide by a rule because you have faith that the longer term consequences of you and everyone else abiding by this rule will work out for the better – that’s generally what we tell ourselves.



And when rules get replaced, what you're being asked to place your faith in is the ruler. And that is a very precarious situation. It's much less stable over time than people having faith in rules, because when the performance of the ruler starts to diminish and people's confidence in him starts to diminish, then you end up you're on the verge of disorder. And I would say, that's what we are on the verge of here in Victoria.

We should be concerned not just at the economic wasteland being created in Victoria, but also its flattened moral and ethical landscape.

If you're still not sure, [watch](#) or listen to the whole Podcast, [here](#).

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