Democracy, Science and the Orange Scourge

By John Smith

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Interviews from his younger years show that Donald Trump is or was perfectly capable of rational, diplomatic comportment. Later, of course, he became a reality TV star; and then the Orange Scourge was unleashed upon the world—the incarnation of everything objectionable in the vulgar sort of tycoon-actors, a walking proof against democracy, not so much a president as a caricature of a parody of one. Different comedians on different channels, presumably with different writers, were telling the same Trump joke on the same night; did the same writers or AI supply Bill Gates with his corker, that Trump still can't figure out the difference between HIV and HPV? Is the Orange Scourge democracy's Trojan Horse, a straw man scripted to facilitate the transition to technocracy?

David Runciman is heir to the Runciman baronetcy and, apparently, not an admirer of democracy. He heads the department of politics and international studies at Cambridge and is the purported author of several books, including *The Politics of Good Intentions: History, Fear and Hypocrisy in the New World Order*. You may never have heard of him, but he probably

outranks anyone you will see in the Corona circus, including fellow aristocratic actor Bill Gates. His 2018 book *How Democracy Ends* opens by pronouncing that, alas,

> Nothing lasts forever. At some point democracy was always going to pass into the pages of history . . . until very recently, most citizens of Western democracies would have imagined that the end was a long way off. They would not have expected it to happen in their lifetimes. Very few would have thought it might be taking place before their eyes. Yet here we are, barely two decades into the twenty-first century, and almost from nowhere the question is upon us: is this how democracy ends? Like many people, I first found myself confronting this question after the election of Donald Trump…

A companion piece in the *Guardian* (1 May 2018) was even more precipitate: "Why not ditch the charade of voting altogether? Stop pretending to respect the views of ordinary people—it's not worth it, since the people keep getting it wrong. Respect the experts instead!" As one of the *plus ultra* anointed, an expert *and* an aristocrat, it is fair to ask him: Is voting a farce? If so, are the unwashed masses, in fact, to blame—not, as we thought, the bankers and baronet department heads at ancient elite universities? And would voting really be less of a charade if it were performed automatically by algorithms that track our likes on Facebook and "determine, with a strong degree of confidence, what 'We the People' would want, if only 'We the People' understood what we were talking about"? Hell, why bother at all?

> Democracy is tired, vindictive, self-deceiving, paranoid, clumsy and frequently ineffectual. Much of the time it is living on past glories. This sorry state of affairs reflects what we have become. But current democracy is not who we are. It is just a system of government, which we built, and which we could replace. So why don't we replace it with something better? This line of argument has grown louder in recent years, as democratic politics has become more unpredictable and, to many, deeply alarming in its outcomes. First Brexit, then Donald Trump, plus the rise of populism and the spread of division, has [sic] started a tentative search for plausible alternatives.

American political rhetoric, with its flattering platitudes and Orwellian euphemisms like Operation Iraqi Freedom—admittedly this is bad enough—but it is worse to be scolded like an English schoolboy, by someone whose opinion actually matters, for "this sorry state of affairs … what we have become"—then, in classic manipulative fashion, offered a chance at redemption, becoming the potentially decent person I really am deep down (i.e., not tired, paranoid, clumsy and ineffectual), simply by ditching democracy and adopting technocracy (he calls it epistocracy, the rule of the knowers. I'm not kidding). Anyway, didn't Brexit obviate the need for this discussion, showing that democracy, when its results displease baronets, may simply be ignored, rendered "ineffectual," until the baronets are secure in their knowledge that it no longer matters?

Runciman thinks democracy is strong enough to survive the Orange Scourge; sadly, the answer to his question "What are the things that an established democracy could not survive?" appears to be that no established democracy anywhere in the world, except maybe the lunatics in Sweden, could possibly survive a mild respiratory illness like the flu. This is what The Science tells us; computer model estimates were very scary, but now we have tested, we have The Data and The Virus is really not that bad, something very like the flu and other coronaviruses. "But Bill Gates says this is just *Pandemic I*! It's like we're in a superhero movie—before you know it

we'll be in the middle of *Pandemic 8*! We need something more scientific! Away with the Scourge! We want Bill! We want Bill!"

~

The general theme of *2020* is science vs democracy; in the end they will both die, and out of their ashes will rise The Science and His drones, never to be challenged again. Seeing that our calendar is actually a 400-year affair, completing its leap-year cycle once in that period, it is poignant to notice that this year is the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower Compact, the birth of autonomy and democracy in the New World, as well as the 400th anniversary of the scientific method, introduced in Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (New Organon, "new instrument"). Essentially this was the same event happening in political and intellectual spheres; before 1620, science was a monarchy under Aristotle, whose *Organon*, the standard work on logic, uses a top-down approach (deduction or the syllogism) that starts with a premise assumed to be true universally. Bacon's *New Organon* proposed the opposite, induction or Socratic logic, a bottom-up system that establishes truth progressively:

> There are and can only be two ways of investigating and discovering truth. The one rushes up from the sense and particulars to axioms of the highest generality and, from these principles and their indubitable truth, goes on to infer and discover middle axioms; and this is the way in current use. The other way draws axioms from the sense and particulars by climbing steadily and by degrees, so that it reaches the ones of highest generality last of all; and this is the true but still untrodden way.

In other words, "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties." In terms of its consequences, this was by far the most important insight of the Scientific Revolution—not heliocentrism or gravity. Curiously, over forty years earlier—just after Bacon left Cambridge—an anonymous writer began his rebuttal of Machiavelli with the same material.

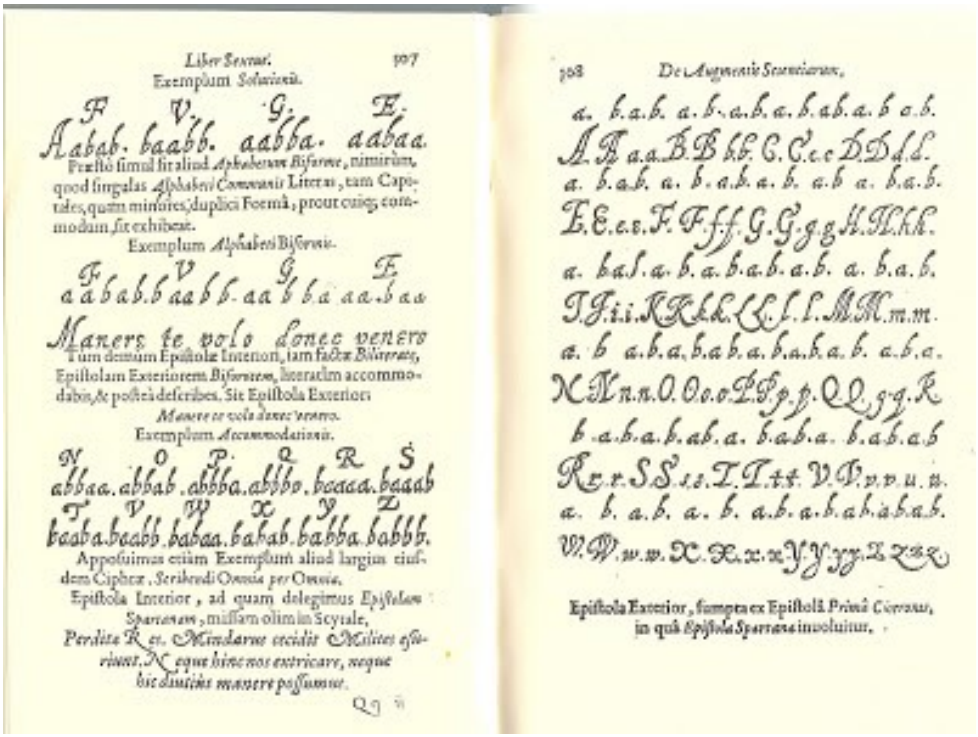
> Aristotle and other philosophers teach us, and experience confirms, that there are two ways to come unto the knowledge of things. The one, when from the causes and maxims, men come to knowledge of the effects and consequences. The other, when contrary, by the effects and consequences we come to know the causes and maxims. . . The first of these ways is proper and peculiar unto the mathematicians, who teach the truth of their theorems and problems by their demonstrations drawn from maxims, which are common sentences allowed of themselves for true by the common sense and judgment of all men. The second way belongs to other sciences, as to natural philosophy, moral philosophy, physic, law, policy, and other sciences…

If it is true that "those ignorant of the historical development of science are not likely ever to understand fully the nature of science and scientific research," this book deserves much wider notice. From the second edition on, it bears a dedication "for kinred" to Edward Bacon, half-brother of Francis Bacon; in over fifty places it parallels Bacon's prose. Bacon was only fifteen when it was published, but according to Lord Macaulay, "His gigantic scheme of philosophical reform is said by some writers to have been planned before he was fifteen." When he was sixteen

or seventeen, living with the English embassy in France, Bacon invented the first binary code, a biliteral cipher, as a means to send messages home.

Neither is it a small matter these cypher-characters have, and may perform: for by this art a way is opened, whereby a man may express and signify the intentions of his mind, at any distance of place, by objects which may be presented to the eye, and accommodated to the ear: provided these objects be capable of a twofold difference only; as by bells, by trumpets, by lights and torches, by the report of muskets, and any instruments of like nature.

—Francis Bacon,
Of the Advancement of Learning



Liber Secund. 107
Exemplum Solutionis.

F V. G. E.
Aabab. baabb. aabba. aabaa.

Postèa simul sit aliud Alphabetum Bifarum, nimirùm, quod singulas Alphabeti Communis Literas, tam Capitales, quam minores, duplici Formâ, prout cuiq; commodum fit exhibeat.

Exemplum Alphabeti Bifarii.

F V G E
aababb aabbb aabba aabaa

Manere te volo donec veneris
Tum demum Epistolæ Intentionem, tam factæ Bifariæ, Epistolam Exteriorem Bifarem, literatim accommodabis, & posteà describes. Sit Epistola Exterior:

Manere te volo donec veneris.

Exemplum Accommodationis.

N O P Q R S
abbaa. abbab. abbba. abbbb. baaaa. baaab

T V W X Y Z
baaba. baabb. babaa. babab. babba. babbb.

Appositum etiam Exemplum aliud largius eiusdem Cipheræ, Scribendi Omnia per Omnia.

Epistola Interior, ad quam delegimus Epistolam Spartanam, missam olim in Scytale,

Perdita Res. Mandatum occidit Milites obsurdescunt. Nec aqua hinc nos extricare, neque hic diutiùs manere possumus.

Q q 2

508 De Augmentis Scientiarum.

a. b.a.b. a. b.a.b.a.b.ab.a.b a.b.

A A a.a. B B b.b. C C c.c D D d.d.

a. b.a.b. a. b.a.b.a. b. a.b a. b.a.b.

E E e.e. F F f.f. G G g.g H H h.h.

a. baa. a. b. a. b.a.b.a.b. a. b. a. b.a.b.

I J i.i. K K k.k. L L l.l. M M m.m.

a. b a.b.a.b.a.b.a.b.a.b.a.b. a.b.a.

N N n.n. O o.o P P p.p. Q Q q.q. R

b.a.b.a.b.ab.a. b.ab.a. b.ab.a.b

R r.r. S S s.s. T T t.t. V V v.v. u.u.

a. b. a.b. a. b. a.b.a.b.ab.ab.a.b.

W W.w.w. X X.x.x. Y Y.yy. Z Z.z.z

Epistola Exterior, sumpta ex Epistolâ Primâ Cornutæ, in quâ Epistola Spartana involuitur.

Today he is often forgotten in the roll of scientific pioneers; as Mark Twain and Nietzsche were vulgarizing the idea that he was involved in Shakespeare, Bacon's academic reputation became something like that of the Orange Scourge himself. But for Voltaire he was the "father of the experimental philosophy," the *New Organon* was "the scaffold with which the edifice of the new philosophy has been raised." Darwin wrote in his *Autobiography* that he "worked on true Baconian principles"; moreover,

> Where else in the literature before Bacon does one come across a stripped-down natural-historical programme of such enormous scope and scrupulous precision, and designed to serve as the basis for a complete reconstruction of human knowledge which would generate new, vastly productive sciences . . . Where else does one find a concept of scientific research which implies an institutional framework of such proportions that it required generations of permanent state funding to sustain it?
>
> —Rees, Graham and Maria Wakely *The Instauratio magna Part II: Novum organum and Associated Texts*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2004.

Bacon's writings inspired the founding of the Royal Society, the world's oldest scientific body, whose motto is *Nullius in verba* ("take nobody's word for it"), said to express "the determination of Fellows to withstand the domination of authority and to verify all statements by an appeal to facts determined by experiment." We will see what The Science has to say about that.

According to Bacon, the results of his vision would be monumental, “such as men in the present state of their fortunes and of their understandings cannot easily grasp or measure. For what is at stake is not merely a mental satisfaction, but the very reality of man's well-being and all his power of action.” However, he warned

> Evermore it must be remembered that the least part of knowledge passed to man by this so large a charter from God must be subject to that use for which God hath granted it; which is the benefit and relief of the state and society of man; for otherwise all manner of knowledge becometh malign and serpentine.

For a peek of what we can expect under the “malign and serpentine” knowledge of The Science and His drones, let’s conclude with David Runciman’s forebear, the 3rd Earl Russell, Bertrand Russell, in *The Impact of Science on Society* (1952):

> Diet, injections, and injunctions will combine, from a very early age, to produce the sort of character and the sort of beliefs that the authorities consider desirable, and any serious criticism of the powers that be will become psychologically impossible.
>
> War, as I remarked a moment ago, has hitherto been disappointing in this respect [population reduction], but perhaps bacteriological war may prove more effective. If a Black Death could be spread throughout the world once in every generation survivors could procreate freely without making the world too full. … The state of affairs might be somewhat unpleasant, but what of that? Really high-minded people are indifferent to happiness, especially other people’s.