

Sci Phi Journal

2022 ♦ 1

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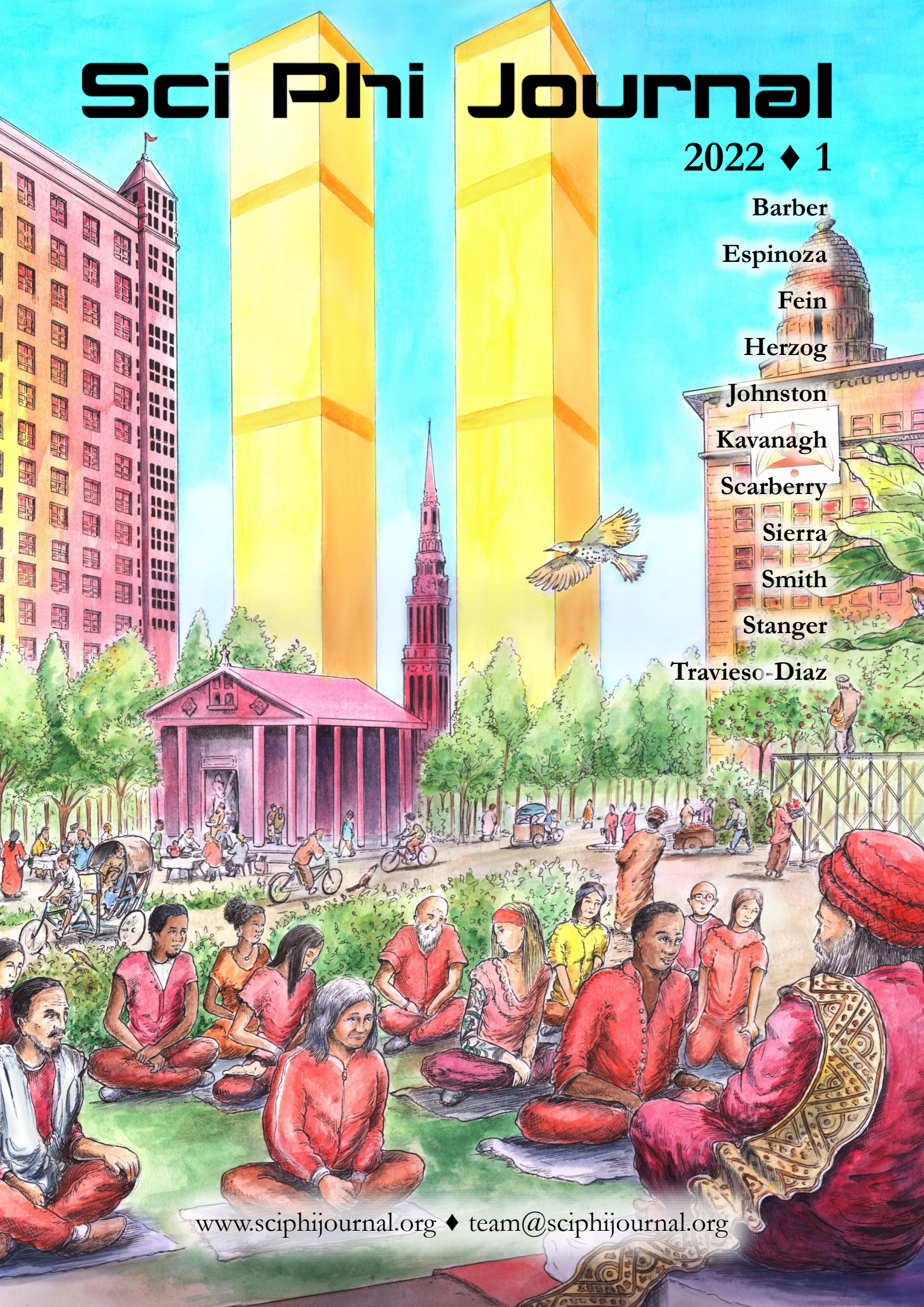
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Editorial

Lectori salutem.

As you are reading this, the world as we know it will have already slipped from a global pandemic into a second cold war, both scenarios that were the stuff of (albeit plausible) fiction barely two years ago.

Most of our crew is based in Brussels, Belgium, which happens to host the headquarters of major geopolitical protagonists such as the European Union and NATO. Thus, we labour under the threat of Russian nuclear warheads permanently aimed at our homes and loved ones. Existential uncertainties have the gift of putting things in perspective, and make us dream of what might have been.

So it comes that our thematic issue for 2022 is dedicated to alternate pasts (and their futures). Alternate history is an immensely versatile sub-genre of speculative fiction, and one undeniably close to our hearts. Which student of history has not dreamt of going back in time and making better decisions at some past point of junction in order to avert disaster for his ancestors or ensure a fortuitous outcome for her favourite hero? If one could but stand on the ramparts of Constantinople on that black day in May 1453 armed with modern weaponry; or walk among the disciples of Christ or the Buddha in the Holy Lands of yore; or step out of the crowd in Sarajevo on a fateful morning in June 1914 and deflect the bullet that inflicted the 20th century on the world.

Uchronia imagines histories that never were, but might have been, and by extension, futures that could have resulted from these alternate pasts. As such, it is worth pointing out that to be fully appreciated, unlike

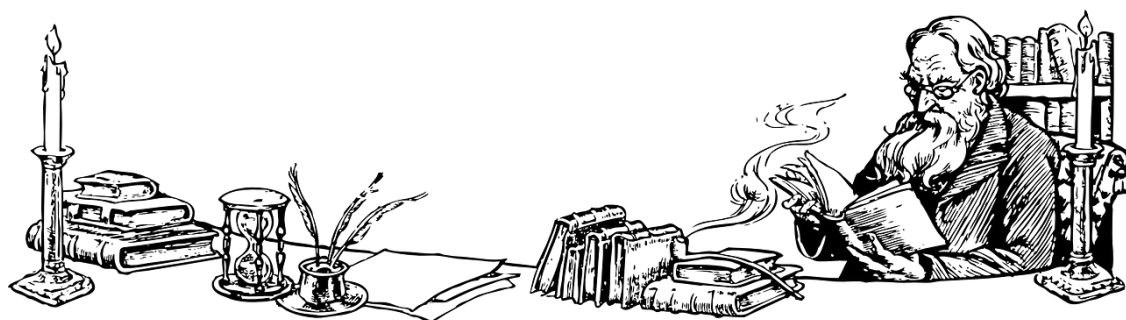
other forms of speculative fiction, alternate history requires some measure of familiarity with the established timeline in the reader's reality. Moreover, while much of SFF is cosmopolitan in its appeal and thus addresses 'standardized' concepts with a set menu of flavourings, the *uchroniae* of various linguistic literary corpora are still wildly diverse and often not readily translatable from one cultural context into another, particularly as they often address the historical grievances or fantasies relevant to the deep memory of their ethno-cultural context.

While Sci Phi Journal is and remains an English-language publication, as the world's *lingua franca* best enables us to promote a philosophical exchange amongst geographically distant members of the SFF community, we are mindful that *uchronia* is a stark reminder of the importance to read works written in (and intended for) other languages. Only thus can the true (semantic and conceptual) diversity of the speculative field be safeguarded. As an example, we draw readers' attention to an overview of Hungarian alternate histories published by our co-editor Ádám in the latest volume of the [SFRA Review](#).

The stories in this present issue span a broad spectrum, from ancient steam technology to far-future time travel, from imaginary medical sciences to the shores of fallen empires. We hope you enjoy the journey into alternate timelines as much as we did curating this selection for you!

Speculatively yours,
the SPJ co-editors & crew

~



Rejection Of Empiricism In Applied Metaphysics Leading To Einstein's Theory Of Sertial Reflectivity: Exegetical Review

Arturo Sierra

Abstract

No theory of metaphysics has been subject to stricter scrutiny than Einstein's Theory of Sertial Reflectivity (TSR), doubtlessly because of its counter-intuitive nature and profound implication. Since the publication of "On the Instantiation-dynamics of Ideal Reflections" (1905), more than a hundred distinct experiments have been designed to test predictions made by TSR, all of which have confirmed Einstein's basic proposition. Yet many of its more "outlandish" implications have been impossible to test in abstract due to the lack of sufficiently powerful devices. Only in recent years, thanks in part to the Large Concept Collider, the Hubble Celestial Theoscope, and the Ideal Interferometric Group-Class Observator (LIGO), have these been subject to verification. Yet the experimental context of new tests has been ignored or forgotten by researchers. In order to adequately understand the significance of such developments, it is vitally important to contextualize them in a history of metaphysical experimentation. This paper proposes a brief overview of tests in applied metaphysics, from its origin leading up to Einstein, and the significance they had in rejecting erroneous, materialistic thought.

By M. Alvarado, professor of History of Metaphysics at the University of Santiago de la Nueva Extremadura. Translated from the original German by W. Eguiguren. This research was made possible by a grant from the Imperial Institute for History of Metaphysics, sponsored by His Majesty Karl XIX of the Holy Roman Empire, King of Spain and its Territories.

Contemporary metaphysics is built on the presumption, as stated by Karl Popper, that no real knowledge can be obtained by studying matter or by any empirical methods whatsoever. Indeed, *empirical* is, in philosophical circles, often used as a slur to discredit insufficiently *a priori* statements, and pseudo-sciences such as physics and chemistry are held in the same bad regard as homeopathy and economics. But this has not always been so. Only since the early XXth century have empirical thoughts been completely rejected, in great part thanks to Einstein's Theory of Serial Reflectivity (TSR).

Rejection of empiricist thought has been a long and arduous process in the history of natural philosophy. A complete account is impossible in the given space, but it is hoped that these pages will give the reader a general idea of how metaphysics, over two-and-a-half millennia, managed to expunge all materialistic ideas from its heart.

Empiricist Thought and its Refutation from Antiquity to the Late 1800s

From the very beginning of metaphysics, it has been admitted that the main obstacle in a properly philosophical understanding of reality comes from the difficulty of testing abstract notions. Even though we now know Plato was fundamentally correct in his description of Pure Ideas, subsequent thinkers of Antiquity were still plagued by physicalist thought. Plato was extraordinarily intuitive, but his observation of the Ideal Plane or *Topos Ouranos* was so limited, no proper account of it could be given at the time. Thus, Aristotle proposed matter somehow affected essential instantiation, and the Stoic school arrived at the conclusion that *esse*, which they called *balitus*, was itself material, though of a very special kind of matter.

Yet to these researchers we owe the first attempts at capturing essence separately from the bodies they instantiated. Naïvely, they tried to imprison Ideas in special bottles, quartz crystals, and gemstones. Much later, Descartes would point out that such methods came down to attempts at making empirical what is abstract, a method modern metaphysics has learned to carefully avoid. However, Aristotle and the Stoics had marvelously clear glimpses of Pure Ideas even as they were misguidedly trying to link them to the physical, and so opened the gates to testable abstract theory.

To the Middle Ages we owe not only the first accounts of God's effect on *esse*, but—perhaps more importantly—the first systematic devices of abstract testing. Aquinas proposed one of the better-known such tests: in separate chambers (an extremely primitive black box, in fact) he placed a group of faithful Muslims and Jews, carefully recording the effect their prayers had on God's surrounding presence. As the Muslim devout were replaced one by one with less fervent believers, the Divinity became sufficiently Yahweh-like to be measured as such, even by Aquinas' poor observation techniques, and vice versa becoming more Allah-like.

A century later, Occam proved that the less determined God was by faith, i. e. considering Them only as immobile first-cause without attributes at all and only subject to negative knowledge, the more arbitrary the Divinity's influence became. He arrived at this insight when he noticed that inebriation was immoral on a Tuesday, but acceptable next Wednesday. Abstract experimentation such as this had a profound effect on Western religion, and thus European politics, as the Catholic Church banned untestable beliefs. The dogma of testability resolved the looming crisis of Protestantism, as dissidents and the Pope managed to agree on a common criterion for theological proof.

Though intermediate theories should not be forgotten, it was not until Newton's *Principia Mathematica* that metaphysics acquired an exact method for itself. Newton devised a way of manipulating separate Ideas by discovering calculus and noticing the effects he could produce on geometrical entities, such as ellipses, when he made minute alterations in the corresponding equations. In this way, he became the first to change the physical shape of an object simply by altering the mathematical description of its circumference, famously making an apple become roughly cubical by misrepresenting the graph that described its circumference. From then on forwards, researchers had intangible indication that matter is determined by Ideas, never the other way around. Though not abstract in nature, Newton's alchemical discoveries are worth mentioning, as he was the first to transform lead into gold. Unfortunately, the training and time required to think the necessary Ideas for transmutation was, in the end, more expensive than the gold itself.

At the same time, Leibnitz isolated the essence of mathematical objects using the same calculus, which he developed concurrently. Famously, his tampering with the substance of the number 2 caused the financial collapse of 1701, when bankers and accountants were unable to make any sort of arithmetic using even numbers. The intimate relation between Newton's and Leibnitz's work led to a warm friendship between both authors, which has since been a model of what can be achieved by collaboration in all fields of philosophy.

The Search for a New Anti-Empiricist Paradigm in Metaphysics

Preceding Einstein's radical insights, a series of discoveries created a crisis in theoretical metaphysics. On the one hand, Lobachevsky, Bolyai, and Riemann developed non-Euclidean spaces, contravening long held hypothesis about the Ideas of geometrical shapes in the *Topos Ouranos*. On the other hand, Fizeau partially verified suppositions by astronomer Christiaan Huygens, who in turn had elaborated on experiments made by Rømer in 1676, and concluded that the speed of light in a vacuum was instantaneous. These developments presented serious questions to Newton-Kantian mechanics.

Indeed, tradition had unanimously held that causality, though intrinsically metaphysical, depended on contact between bodies in order to be transmitted. If light, which had recently been proven to be neither a particle nor a wave, and thus thoroughly abstract in nature, could travel instantaneously to any point in the universe, it meant cause-and-effect relations also had to be instantaneous, or at least could be. Meanwhile, the Circle of Madrid, a group of notable metaphysicians who published under the collective name Jaime C. Maxpozo, managed to isolate *ser* ('being') from *esse* under laboratory conditions, giving rise to Serial dynamics, again defying traditionally held opinions about the inseparability of being-itself and being-this-ness.

Newton's discoveries allowed Kant to prove that objects-in-themselves could be known and understood as such. His *Critique of Mixed Reason* definitively showed that Hume's thitherto incontrovertible theory of causation was wrong, by testing the relation between cause and effect and arriving at methods that could deduce causation from first principle. On the way to a framework of transcendental aesthetics, he also refuted Wolf's radical empiricism. Kant's critical *opus* became the basis of modern metaphysical metatheory for a century to come, often being referred to as Newton-Kantian mechanics.

It was not long before philosophy had its first practical applications. Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Étienne Montgolfier imbued a large ball of cotton with the *esse* of a cloud, making it float in the air. In the early 1800s, Richard Trevithick, Matthew Murray, and George Stephenson experimented in transference, imbuing completely mechanical apparatuses with the *esse* of horses and rabbits, inventing the locomotive in the process. Theoretical and praxical metaphysics have always had a fruitful relation since.

The primacy of Idea over matter was further cemented by Darwin's Theory of Spontaneity. By leaving carefully calculated amounts of raw notions and random materials in sealed glass containers, he produced life-forms such as worms and mice, and later completely new animals, such as dragons and chimeras. Spontaneity showed that organization would supervene on matter even in the case of living beings, the only physical requirement for supervenience being the presence of the adequate mental ingredients.

It had been clear for some time that Newton-Kantian metaphysics was in need of a new theory capable of accounting for such phenomena, but attempts at solving the crisis tended to question experimental results, not reworking the underlying philosophy. Researchers desperately tried to design experiments that would either restrict the speed of light under certain conditions, describe light as a carrier of momentum and energy, or simply deny it could have any effects on its own, i. e. not without materials objects to shine upon. All of these experiments kept coming back with the same result: light always travels instantaneously, it has no physical properties at all, and does not require an object to shine upon in order for certain effects to take place.

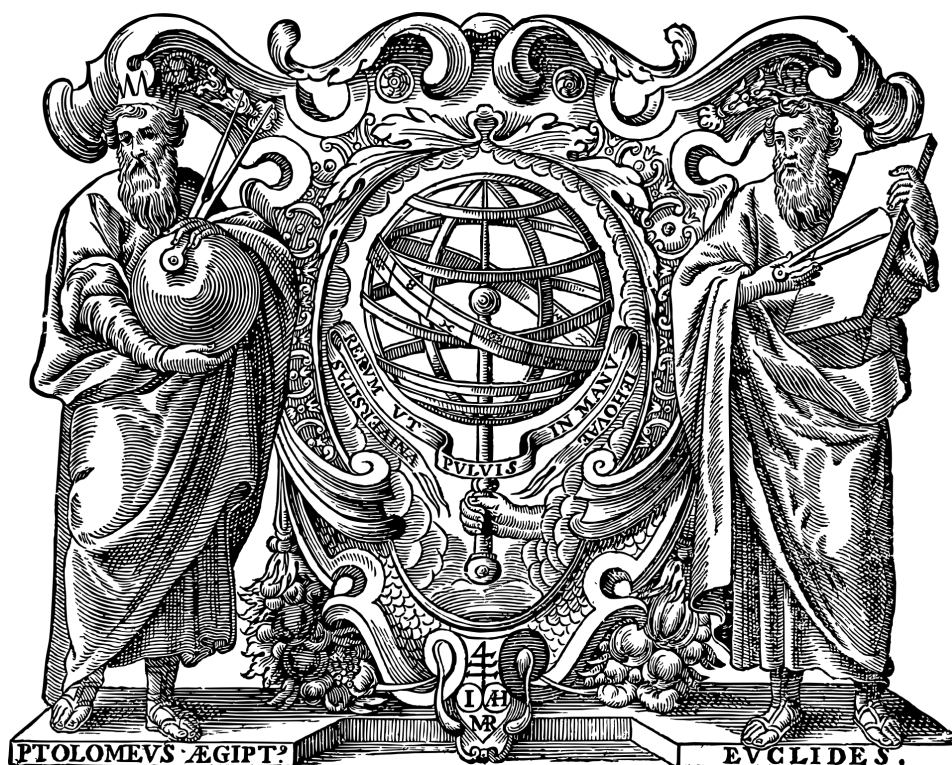
The critical experiment was performed by Michelson and Morley. In 1887, they described an ideal triangle with two angles resting at opposite ends of an infinite non-Euclidean space and one angle inside their laboratory. They proceeded to postulate that the points on its vertices were zero-dimensional prisms that could change the color of a light beam in accordance with their angles in regard to the sides of the triangle itself. Such an experiment could not have been designed before the discovery of four-dimensional numbers (quaternions), necessary to describe the angle of zero-dimensional prisms. Finally,

they intended to shine blue light and observed that the color coming from the flashlight was determined by the prisms at the angles on the other ends of the infinite non-Euclidean space, emanating inside the laboratory as red or green no matter how exactly it was described as blue at its origin.

Since the light had not interacted with any physical objects at all, and since it had clear effects on its own color, the color-effect had to have happened simultaneously to its cause, the prism at the other end of infinite non-Euclidean space. Moreover, causality did not require interaction with any material stuff. The consequences of the Michelson-Morley experiments were so drastic, both researched kept trying to refute their own work for over twenty years, until TSR gave a framework to explain the results they had obtained.

Indeed, the revelation was baffling. In short, Pure Ideas could have effects on themselves. In this context, metaphysics as a discipline was thrown into great confusion. The need of new models that could explain the interaction between Pure Ideas with themselves and with instantiated reality seemed urgent. Two decades after Michelson and Morley, Einstein's contributions, though shocking, were admitted to be a revolutionary novel framework for traditional and new problems in metaphysics.

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The Year After Creation 7530

Bob Johnston

Vladimir handed over his diplomatic token and walked past the guard. The interior of Hagia Sophia was cool after the searing sunlight, but light filled the magnificent space and he felt the familiar warmth in his belly. It was not his first time in Constantinople but he had only ever walked around the cathedral before. It was the model for every church in the lands of the Rus and the Romans, but everywhere else they were pale imitations of this glory.

The service would be packed, but mostly with invited dignitaries from around the two allied empires. He presented himself to an usher and was politely taken to his seat. He smiled as he sat, three quarters of the way back from the high altar and discretely out of the way. Protocol had placed him precisely where he belonged, a Rus brother but neither a Roman nor someone of especially high rank. He relaxed. He was here for the annual commemoration and having no official functions suited him just nicely.

A Kievan magistrate was seated beside him, his chains of office glittering in the light pouring down from the dome and in through the many windows. Vladimir greeted him in formal Rus manner, which the man replied to, but then made it clear that he too was here for the event and not for chatting. Both men went back to studying this masterpiece of architecture while the seats around them slowly filled up.

The Romans began arriving as fashionably close to the beginning of things as their status allowed. Their various robes were ostentatiously grander than those of the Rus guests but Vladimir was aware of inverted snobbery among his people. Their garments were of the finest manufacture, but deliberately given a peasant cum soldier look.

A dignified silence fell as officials began gathering on the wide marble chancel. And everyone stood as the Roman emperor entered. He was preceded by three assistants dressed in magnificent robes which would have graced Justinian's court fifteen hundred years earlier. Each was carrying a book which they placed side by side on the wide oak lectern. The emperor then motioned the assembly to sit.

Vladimir studied the robed soldier on the chancel. Theophilus the 9th. A soldier born of soldiers and yet a great administrator, a friend of the people, a diplomat. Vladimir approved. Rome had suffered too many times under corrupt and weak leaders. One could only hope that Theophilus might ignore the biological urge to pass the crown onto his son. The Rus had long since used adoption to ensure good succession. Ironically they had taken the idea from the Romans.

“It took years to decipher Gibbon’s book, its language having to be built from dialects of German injected with elements of our beloved Latin and Greek, as well as contributions from the language of our Frankish friends. But difficulties aside the message was clear. The church was a huge factor in the destruction of this empire, presumably in some other world, and someone there was trying to warn us. And another faith dealt the final blow.”

“My fellow Romans, my Rus kindred, my Frankish and British guests. Welcome. Today is the 29th of May, in the 7530th Year After Creation. Or for my friends from the north-west 2022 Anno Domini.” A polite chuckle rolled round the vast space. The emperor raised one of the books, a battered object in a tattered light brown dust cover. “Gibbon’s ‘The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’.” He shook his head and gently replaced the book. The second book was tidier. “The Quran.” He put this down with a little more reverence and lifted the final book. “The Christian Bible, containing the scriptures of our Jewish friends.” He set it down.

“Around our empire, and that of the Rus, today we remember the events of the 20th of May 6961.” Again he smiled in the direction of the Franks and Britons who politely smiled back. “The 29th of May 1453. The day the Roman Empire came to an end...” He paused and lifted up Gibbon’s book “...according to this document. And the end of the Roman Empire was brought about by the followers of the faith described in the Quran.” He put down Gibbon’s book and briefly lifted the Quran. He then walked round the lectern and stood in front of the gathering.

“Gibbon’s book describes, in a language that does not exist, the destruction of our empire over half a millennium ago, and the western territories a thousand years before that. We all know how the book arrived, dropped by a disembodied hand into the middle of an ecumenical council in this very city a century ago. Likewise the Quran, easier to understand because it is written in the language of our Arab allies to the south, dropped by a disembodied hand reaching out from a hole in reality.

He went back round the lectern and lifted the Bible.

“This was once a center of our communal life, but no more.” He replaced it, again carefully.

“I Theophilus, Emperor of the Roman people, Consul of the Roman Senate, Caesar Augustus, preach a sermon of personal tolerance. Believe what you will, but do it in the privacy of your hearts. We have seen the destruction of our world in some other version of reality and we will not see our beloved Rome similarly destroyed. You will stand.”

The assembly got to its feet.

“Repeat after me, there is no God.”

The crowd repeated the phrase.

“There is no son of God.”

Repeated.

“There is no spirit of God at work within us.”

“There are no prophets of God, and never have been, sharing the words and commands of God.”

“If there is an afterlife it is no part of God’s creation.”

“The universe is us, our families, our nation, and our emperor.”

“I wonder what those Persians are up to now?”

Vladimir nodded, reached into his cloak pocket and quietly squeezed the small Rus Bible he always carried with him.

Persians to the east, always testing Rome’s resolve. For a moment his thoughts turned to that Quran, handled so respectfully by the emperor, and those thoughts rolled above and across Persia’s westernmost reaches to the little known or understood lands of the Arabs.

Vladimir looked across at the Catholic Franks and Britons and saw their discomfort as this inversion of a Christian service played out. He turned his attention back to the emperor, betting to himself that all the old disputes between the eastern and western church must seem like wasted time and paper now. He dutifully repeated the denial of faith, loudly and clearly in his best Greek.

“Rome is eternal. Rome has no need of gods.”

Theophilus instructed the assembly to sit.

“Rome is 2775 years old. Its center moved to this great city fifteen hundred years ago, and our Rus friends like to think of their beloved Kiev as a third Rome. It is an idea I encourage. Many cities of Rome, but only one Rome, strong, steady and eternal.”

#

Vladimir made his way to his accommodation, his head still spinning from the beauty of Hagia Sophia and the sheer audacity of this annual anti-religious gathering. The cult of no-God had grabbed the empire in a matter of decades, but then again Rome had always been prone to latch onto religious fads. He wondered if this strangely religious atheism would survive Theophilus, but then noticed a flyer pasted to a wall. A race was starting shortly at the Hippodrome.

It was the 29th of May 7530 and his employer, a well-connected supplier of rock oil to both the Romans and the Rus, was not expecting him back for days. He might as well enjoy his time in the great City for once. As he turned in the direction of the Hippodrome a flight of aircraft roared overhead, followed quickly by another, all six heading south. Another man watched them disappear over the Bosphorus and then turned to Vladimir.

“Rome is eternal,” he whispered to himself. Clearly not in the world that had given them those two books that had turned this world upside down. He looked back at Hagia Sophia, drank in its beauty, and then went to bet on a few horse races.

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Notes On The Debates In The Federal Convention Concerning A Council Of Oracles

Ron Fein

JULY 27, 1787, IN CONVENTION

The postponed question being taken up of whether the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary should be joined by a Council of Oracles.

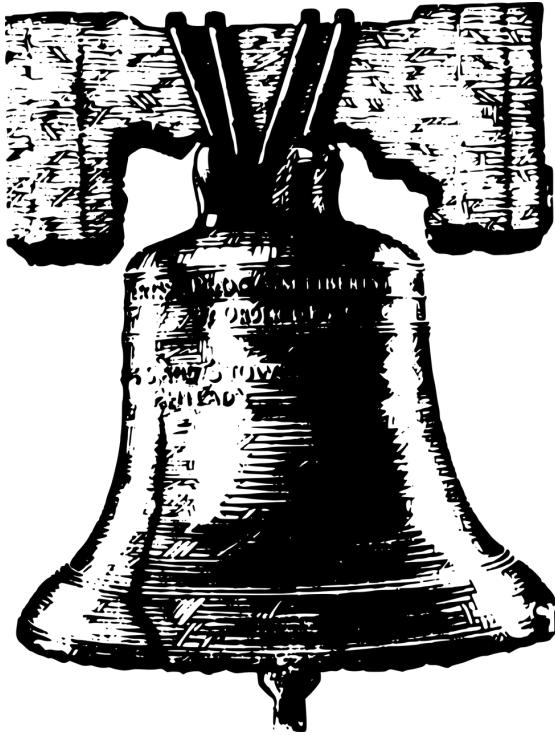
Mr. MADISON moved that such a council be constituted as a separate body within the Legislature, equal to the House and Senate, its consent needed for all legislation.

Col. MASON approved heartily of the motion. The oracles' wisdom had proven critical during the late war. At the siege of Charleston, only their foresight averted a defeat and ignominious surrender. And General Washington has credited his victory at the battle of White Plains to their guidance. If New York had fallen to the British, the war may have lasted seven years rather than four.

Mr. GERRY. No one disputes that the wisdom of the oracles wd. guide the men of the representative assemblies in their judgment. But the Council of Oracles shd. form a fourth branch of the general Govt., not a body within the Legislature. The oracles shd. not be burdened to vote routinely on matters of roads and tariffs &c., but instead bestow their insights upon the other three branches as needed.

Mr. KING concurred with Mr. Gerry. If the oracles are constantly occupied with mundane questions, the spirit may depart from them. Let them advise the other branches of the Govt. when needed, and otherwise tend to their own inscrutable affairs.

Doctr. FRANKLIN did not see the necessity of a separate Council of Oracles. In Greece the Pythia at Delphi speaks to those who seek counsel, whether high or low, for one day per month, nine months per annum. But she forms no part of any Govt.



Mr. HAMILTON remarked that the case of the Pythia was not applicable. Greece is divided and the priestesses must be available to Sparta even when it marches agst. Athens. Our object is a Govt. that unites the States, not one that advises them in their wars agst. each other.

Col. MASON. Further support for this proposition derives from the varied locations of the temples. Without a separate body in the Govt. empowered to restrain the secular branches, will Massachusetts heed the words of a priestess in Virginia if her words differ from those of the one in Boston?

Mr. MADISON. The oracles are all infallible and their advice, if understood correctly, is identical. But they may phrase their words differently, or men may understand them differently, leading to misunderstanding. A council of them wd. speak with one voice.

Mr. SHERMAN agreed that oracular guidance is indispensable. Men are corrupt and shortsighted; the advice of the priestesses is always correct even if we fail to understand it. But fallible men must interpret their words and make their own decisions. The oracles shd. not be encumbered by formal positions in the Govt. given their sacred duties in their temples &c.

Mr. KING apprehended that if the oracles formed a part of the Govt., that unscrupulous men wd. attempt

to bribe them to secure advantage.

Mr. WILSON. The priestesses must remain pure and holy. To further embroil their delicate and virtuous constitutions in daily affairs wd. strain their spirits overmuch. The Executive and perhaps the Judiciary are well advised to consult the Apollonian priestesses from time to time, but they shd. not be given a role in the general affairs of the Govt.

Col. MASON's opinion had been changed by the arguments used in the discussion. He was now sensible of the necessity of protecting the oracular priestesses in their spiritual domains and not overly enmeshing them in the affairs of men.

Mr. MADISON was content to withdraw the original motion and propose another in its place. He moved that, from time to time, the Executive shall seek the advice and counsel of an oracular priestess when he shall think proper; and further, that he may require the opinion of the principal officers of the Govt. regarding the correct interpretation of her words.

The motion passed unanimously.

~

Those We Leave Behind

Vaughan Stanger

"*Berkut*, this is *Zarya-1*. You are instructed to proceed on your own initiative, over."

Yevgeny Khrunov turned in his seat and frowned at Pavel Popovich. As far as he was concerned, it was unprecedented for mission control to say something so ambiguous, but his commander merely shrugged his shoulders before supplying the default response.

"Roger, *Zarya-1*."

Pavel toggled a switch on the control panel, thus ensuring mission control could not hear their conversation.

But for now, Yevgeny thought his commander looked lost for words.

"Pasha, don't you think that was a very strange thing for *Zarya* to say?"

Pavel shot Yevgeny a look of reproach before delivering a typically slow nod.

"Unless, perhaps, the situation in the Caucasus has worsened..." Pavel puffed out his breath before continuing. "Still, that is one for the politicians." Now he faced Yevgeny and gave a tight-lipped nod. "We have trained for many months to undertake this mission, which we will perform to our utmost abilities. We will show the Americans what we are made of."

"We will also show Alexey."

His commander winced.

"I won't, Zhenya, but you will."

Yevgeny knew that Pavel too would have dreamed of being the first cosmonaut to walk on the Moon, but unlike the Apollo missions that responsibility did not rest on the commander's shoulders. Instead, it fell to him to succeed where Alexey Leonov had failed and achieve a solo landing. Despite their longstanding personal animosity, which arose from his illustrious comrade's initial assessment of Yevgeny's piloting skills, Alexey had passed on the lessons he'd learned during his near-fatal attempt and wished him luck, as any cosmonaut would.

In truth, they were lucky to have the chance after NASA terminated their lunar landing programme following the loss of Apollo 13. None of the cosmonauts had expected the Soviet programme to continue. But with Korolev's N1 rocket working reliably at last, the Politburo had decreed that the Soviet people should continue to pursue their destiny in space by building a base on the Moon. If Yevgeny succeeded then the Soviet Union would regain the lead in manned spaceflight while American efforts remained hobbled by a faltering Space Shuttle programme and a belligerent president.

The sound of throat-clearing jerked Yevgeny out of his musings. Pavel was smiling at him.

"As your commander, I *order* you to proceed as planned!"

Yevgeny chuckled.

"Don't worry, Pasha. I will not disappoint you."

He snapped a salute and commenced suiting up.

#

The contact light flickered for a moment before stabilising. Yevgeny's heart pounded in time with the metallic clicks from the LK lander's body as he peered through the down-slanted window, watching the dust settle amid the harsh sunlight. The landing radar had done its job and so, too, had Yevgeny.

Beat that, Alexey!

No, that was a churlish thing to say in this moment of triumph. His training required him to do better.

"*Zarya-1*, this is *Medved*. I have landed successfully! Two percent of landing fuel remains. The LK's tilt angle is five degrees. I am now performing my emergency take-off checks. Over..."

He listened to the radio link. Nothing! The absence of a human voice confirmed his suspicion that his achievement had gone unnoticed.

Until the LOK's orbit brought it into line-of sight, Yevgeny would be the loneliest man in the world.

#

The Apollo moon-walkers had made everything look so easy, Yevgeny reflected as he struggled with his long-handled scoop. So far he had failed to collect an acceptable soil sample. Despite the superior design of his Krechet-94 spacesuit, he was finding it harder to work on the Moon than the Americans did. If an Apollo astronaut had fallen over, his comrade could have helped him back onto his feet, whereas he would have to rely on his suit's rear-mounted roll bar. He intended to report his frustrations to the mission planners when he got home, a thought that emphasised his continuing isolation at this moment of apparently supreme importance to the Soviet people.

"*Zarya-1*, this is *Medved*. Over."

Yevgeny's suit radio hissed noise at him in apparent mockery of his efforts. Everything was working normally, yet he'd heard nothing from mission control since a terse acknowledgement after he'd undocked from the orbiting capsule.

This wasn't "proceed on your own initiative." This was abandonment.

He glanced at the watch he'd strapped to the left arm of his spacesuit. Forty-five minutes remained until the scheduled end of his moonwalk. But the LOK's orbit would bring it above the foreshortened horizon in less than five. It would be good to talk to Pavel again. In the meantime, since mission control refused to communicate with him, he would perform a task of his own. He extracted the plastic-wrapped photograph of Svetlana and Valery from his thigh pocket, tapped it against his faceplate and then dropped it onto soil the colour of ashes.

His wife had begged him not to fly again after his first mission, but cosmonauts did not listen to their wives.

"See you soon my darlings."

Assuming the return home went to plan.

Pavel's voice came over the radio.

"*Medved*, this is *Berkut*. How do you hear me? Over."

"*Berkut*, this is *Medved*. I hear you loud and clear. But I have not heard from *Zarya*. Do you think he drank too much vodka and fell asleep on the job? Over."

"*Medved*, this is *Berkut*. In *Zarya*'s position, I would have been drinking vodka too."

Something in Pavel's voice made Yevgeny realise he was not the only one who felt desperately alone.

"I will take off on schedule, my friend."

He at least would not deviate from the mission plan.

#

"Welcome back, comrade."

Comrade?

Yevgeny's commander sounded like a party apparatchik addressing the cosmonaut corps. No congratulations, no bear-hug, no relief expressed at the successful completion of a mission phase made even more hazardous by the need to undertake a spacewalk in order to return to the LOK. The lack of a pressurised tunnel, as used on Apollo, was another disadvantage he intended to mention to Korolev, assuming he got the chance.

"Pasha, what is wrong?"

"Did you hear from mission control?"

Yevgeny shook his head. "No, not even once! Did you?"

"Just one brief transmission, which ended abruptly."

"What did *Zarya* have to say for himself?"

"It wasn't *Zarya* this time."

Yevgeny raised his eyebrows. "Then who was it?"

"It was Alexey."

A chill seeped into Yevgeny's bones that had nothing to do with the capsule's temperature. Alexey knew the mission protocols as well as any cosmonaut, but had breached them anyway.

"What did he have to say for himself?"

"Alexey stated his sincere admiration for you..."

"Hah!" Finally, the recognition he deserved. Yet the look in Pavel's eyes suggested that this was not the right moment to gloat. Instead he asked, "Was that all?"

"Alexey said that we should choose wisely."

Yevgeny frowned at him. "What on earth did he mean by that?"

Rather than answer, Pavel glanced at the mission clock before swinging an assembly of tubes and lenses scavenged from the LOK's cameras over the docking cupola's window. When directed, Yevgeny peered through the eyepiece.

"Look closely."

The instrument revealed a drifting view of Eastern Asia. After several seconds he spotted a flash of light to the west of the Urals. Yevgeny turned away, his mouth gaping.

Pavel nodded. "I have also observed multiple detonations in Europe and North America."

A picture of Moscow transformed into a crater flashed into Yevgeny's mind. His beloved Svetlana and Valery would be nothing more than streaks of carbon on pulverised brickwork. He did not wish to see that.

Now he wished he'd kept the photograph.

Pavel's voice jolted him out of his introspection.

"We are faced with a bitter choice."

This was what Alexey had meant. Their comrade had known what was coming and what it implied for them.

Yevgeny nodded. "I understand."

There were, he knew, only three options, each of which would leave them dead: two slowly and one much more quickly. They could choose to return to Earth, where they would doubtless die of thirst or starvation while awaiting a rescue that would never come. Or they could remain in lunar orbit and die of suffocation—the fate of the Apollo 13 astronauts. The alternative was to go out like heroes of the Soviet Union, in a blaze of glory. The LK was dry, with no way of refuelling it. But a carefully calibrated boost from the LOK's engine would lower its orbit's perilune sufficiently to achieve a crash-landing.

He turned to his commander. Pavel had a family too, but they would be no less dead than Yevgeny's.

"My friend, do you *really* want to go home?"

Pavel gave a slow shake of the head. "No."

Yevgeny took this as his cue to explain his idea. When

he finished, his commander frowned at him.

"True, it would mean something to me to know that I'll be the second cosmonaut to land on the Moon, but are you absolutely sure this is what *you* want?"

Yevgeny had told his commander about the photograph before the launch. If he could not see his family again, he would at least be reunited with them, after a fashion.

He nodded. "Yes, for me, this would be for the best."

"Then we are agreed."

A pang of self-doubt exploded inside Yevgeny's head.

"Do you think Alexey would approve?"

Pavel gave a slow nod.

"I am certain of it."

These things mattered to cosmonauts.

Yevgeny snatched up the mission plan folder and began scribbling numbers on his notepad.

"Let's see how close we can get to my family."

~



Hero's Engine

Austin Scarberry

The following transcript is from a HIST101 lecture given by Professor Sara Atef at Agrippa Academy in Epicurisia on 14 Hekatombaion, 1295 CE. It has been translated from its original Greek.

Brilliant minds of the Empire have produced wonders across the ages: the automated machinery of our modern day is merely the culmination of centuries' dedication and curiosity. You all assembled here hoping to be among them. I hope you aspire to this. If you do not, you at least seek to know your betters, and that is admirable in its own way. Regardless of your intentions, I wish for you now to all meditate on the accomplishments of the past which allow you to be here.

(Five minutes are allowed to pass in silence.)

How far back did you travel? Perhaps to the construction of this Academy, the sweat of the builders and the pockets of their sponsors. Perhaps you went further, to those who founded this city a century ago, or further still, to the pilgrims who sailed to this New World and struggled so until it was established in the name of our king. We can go as far as we like, but this is far enough for our means. Here we find the most crucial of inventions, that power which granted our forebears the ability to travel faster, stay warmer, fight harder, and rest easier. Here, encased in steel and panting beneath the pilgrims' feet, we find the steam engine.

The steam engines of now are capable of anything, employing careful mathematics and painstaking precision to bend networks of heat and moisture to our will. Even these advanced models share a common ancestor, and with the luxury of retrospect it seems a simpleton of an ancestor indeed. Still, retrospect is a cursed thing to the optimist, so we are better served admiring the humble roots of our cutting-edge technology. Let us cast our minds further back now, a millennium or so, to the core of civilization itself.

The city of Alexandria was then as it is now: a thriving mecca of free thought and intrepid minds. The Old World was a place full of mystery, and our people's natural response to mystery has always been inquisition. Ask a question, and the Greeks will seek an answer. This is true now as well as then, yet the world contains fewer mysteries now, and therefore prompts fewer to quest for insight. Legends of philosophy and material sciences populated Alexandria in those days, far too many to elaborate on in one afternoon, and no doubt you have heard of them already: Hypatia, Euclid, Eratosthenes. We will explore the legacies of these our forerunners later in the term, but for now we focus on a singular mind among them. Let us examine Hero, also known as Heron.

A mathematician and inventor, Hero taught at the Library of Alexandria from approximately 43 to 65 CE. His contributions were mainly in the field of geometry, though some cheeky folk might first name the vending machine as his greatest pre-steam work. His first foray into steam power came in the form of the aeolipile, a device which harnessed the power of heated water to turn a suspended globe in its frame. It was a marvel, to be sure, but one of little practical value. The aeolipile found use in some temples as a primitive symbol of divinity, a practice which over centuries evolved into our ever-present Gefenist network-monuments. Still, this is not a lecture on theology or artistic engineering, and I am getting ahead of myself. Outside of an amusing party trick, the aeolipile seemed consigned to a humble, if intriguing, side note in Hero's long list of accomplishments.

Hero was not one to accept uselessness, however. He refused to entertain that such fascinating technology possessed no potential for practical purpose. Some of you here might learn from him. He wondered to himself: "what might be accomplished if the force of the steam could be stored and applied at a later time, perhaps even to a different aim?" From this curiosity grew the most significant endeavor of Hero's life, and indeed, of the ancient era.

Again I emphasize that this is not an engineering course, nor a lecture on Hero's contributions to mathematics. I leave your education in such fields to my illustrious colleagues. Suffice it to say that Hero and a team of nearly two dozen like-minded scientists spent the next three decades exploring the application and theory of his device. Much of what he learned was compiled in his famous text *Pneumatica*, which you may reference at your leisure should you desire further detail. Finally, the seeds of their labor bore fruit, and Hero's Engine was revealed to the world.

An engine, of course, is a device which can convert energy into motion, and the aeolipile was technically such a device already. When the refined product was unveiled before King Herod Agrippa II in the year 81 CE, however, there was no comparison. Hero's Engine was capable of propelling an entire ship without need for sails or oars, could drive a cart faster than even the strongest beasts of burden, was even able to propel objects great distances as if let loose from a bow. And most fantastic of all, it could do all these things without need for human input. Yes, the age of automation was ushered in not quietly, but with great clamor, and Hero's twilight years were steeped in fame and idolization until his death in 89 CE.

What had begun as an already ambitious dream quickly grew beyond even what its inventors could ever have predicted. As steam-powered ships crossed the Mediterranean Sea with unprecedented speed, Alexandria's port suddenly seemed too small for the rapid flow of cargo and carriers. The city grew richer, and the surrounding region turned its attention toward the new power at Herod's disposal. It did not take long for others to reverse-engineer the machine, yet by the time they caught up, Alexandria had swelled to twice its size and many times its previous, already significant, influence.

As the Mediterranean fell under the Empire's banners, its leaders began to turn their gazes outward, toward the undiscovered and undeveloped world beyond. With the technologies at their disposal, quagmires of communication and logistics over great distances were nearly attainable, yet even steam power had its limitations. The pace of expansion slowed as the development of stronger, more robust steam engines petered out. Without the genius which accompanied Hero, lesser minds were left to improve on concepts far beyond their own capabilities. The Empire was forced to rest for centuries to accommodate the scientists' ineptitude.

Then, at last, another came forth accompanied by genius. The cult of Christianity had endured, albeit just so, as the wonders of steam power rivaled and at times eclipsed the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth, leaving the Empire's spiritual demographics far from homogenous. Out of this rift arose Gefen of Cyprus. I leave the judgments of Gefen's divinity to the theology department and will not indulge any assertions for or against this claim during examination. What is certain is their influence on the Empire.

Gefen was a brilliant inventor gifted with that which their peers of the time lacked: creativity. They noted the need for expedient communications in order for the Empire to resume its expansion and set to work addressing the issue. While others attempted to supplant the old ways of the natural world with modern ingenuity, Gefen made efforts to combine the two. Reflecting what would become Gefenist doctrine, they sought to merge humanity's animal nature with its superior intelligence. The results played large part in establishing their reputation as the younger child of the Hebrew God.

In the hundred years following the advent of steam power, brutal conflicts were fought over its rights and ownership. Naturally, the miracle technology was swiftly adapted to making war. Remember that even during its unveiling, Hero had demonstrated how the engine might be used to propel objects with great force. Indeed, it could reasonably be argued that this alone is what caught Herod's eye and encouraged him to sponsor the technology and its distribution, for when fighting inevitably broke out, the military forces of the Herodian dynasty were equipped and trained with a seemingly undefeatable trump card.

They harnessed Hero's Engine to produce the swiftest navies known to man, outfitted with steam-cannons which could sink opposing fleets without need to put themselves in range of the enemy's missiles. They issued the earliest known steamarms, far deadlier and, likewise, capable of lethality from a far greater range than any weaponry previously developed. Logistically, too, they held the advantage, as steam-powered carts, the earliest automobiles, ensured more efficient supply lines and entirely eliminated the costs of pack-beasts. Within two generations, all resistance had sputtered out, and in 144 CE the Herodian dynasty officially blossomed into the Herodian Empire.

Male logic and female intuition became one in Gefen. Rather than replacing messenger birds, they used the power of steam and - it is questionably claimed - divine inspiration to create a new form of life: a synthetic carrier bird. Crafted from metal and powered by a new steam engine of their own making, Gefen freely shared the designs with any who asked. Destinations could now be programmed simply by inputting coordinates and assigning a password to deter interception. The synth-carriers of course outpaced birds of blood and bone by many times, but it was this allowance of precise destinations which once again sparked an era of expansion.

Finding the cold north detrimental to the synth-carriers' function, the Empire, now helmed by Emperor Salome III, launched an eastward campaign in Gameliŏn 613. Progress through the Middle Eastern lands was quick and provoked little resistance; after all, Gefenists were avid conversionists, and with new synthetic animals being produced nearly every year to ease the toils of daily life, their task came easy. So it was that the Empire went largely unopposed, annexing kingdom after kingdom.

The Seresian Empire was the only force large enough to match our own, and match it they did. In fact, they continue to do so, as you all are well aware. Although armed with relatively primitive weaponry, eastern leadership displayed great shrewdness. They worked in harmony with their natural geography to effectively skirmish, capturing our synth-carriers and steamarms, stalling until such a time as their own scientists could master the technology. Then, in Elapheboliŏn of 645, they began a counteroffensive.

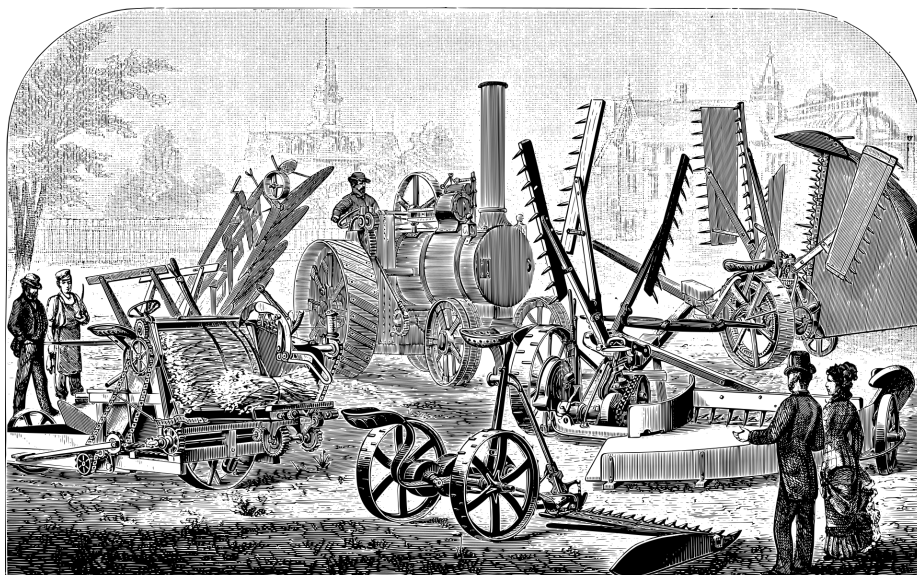
I see in several pairs of eyes resentment. You take my assessment of the Seresians' strengths as praise or admiration. Restrain yourselves. My description is factual, nothing more.

The war will soon enter its seventh century. Trade between our empires is conducted behind a veneer of plausible deniability even as our soldiers and synth-beasts blast and tear each other to pieces day after day. Our technology has once again stagnated. Theirs has likewise plateaued. The stalemate will be broken sooner or later, this is not in question. The only question is this: when the next Hero or Gefen is born, will they be Herodian, or Seresian? This responsibility is given to you, the next generation of academics. Do not disappoint your countrymen. Do not disappoint your emperor.

I will now conduct oral examinations. When I call your name, come forth and deliver your interpretation of the lecture. When it is not your turn, remain seated in silence. Should you desire, you may open your course text to page 221 and familiarize yourself with the imperial family tree while you wait. The second part of the lecture will take place after the final examination.

Here ends the lecture transcript. Part two may be found in the HIST101 records, file reference number 134855.

~



Thirty Years After

Jared Kavanagh

Great Yarmouth, the British call it.

To the uninitiated American reader of my travel journals, any town in modern Britain that possesses the appellation “great” must have acquired it via tragic irony. After all, Britain no longer possesses any urban agglomerations of sufficient size to be called cities.

In truth, the provenance of the name is ancient, far older than the Day. Four locals gave me five explanations for where Great Yarmouth’s name came from. I was, and remained, sceptical of all of them.

What mattered was that Great Yarmouth was a minor British port before the Day, and was the largest that didn’t receive a visit from Soviet bombers or missiles. The town has boomed since then, where most of Britain has declined.

As a surviving port on a railhead, Great Yarmouth became the main entry point for the trickle of American aid that Britain received after the Day. Marks of our country’s time here are plentiful, from the six soulless concrete and timber piers built for relief ships, to the equally soulless concrete runways built in an airport when it appeared our aid would be an ongoing endeavour, to the prominently named Yankee Refuge which is still the largest pub in town.

The last relief ship left a quarter of a century ago, but Great Yarmouth prospered afterward, in so far as any town in the ashes of Europe can be said to thrive. Tourism is the only industry in modern Britain which genuinely earns the country any foreign currency, and Great Yarmouth is the biggest arrival point for the few curious sight-seers who want to experience Britain’s surviving hospitality.

My arrival date was October 27, 1992, the thirty year anniversary of the Day. A few Americans celebrate this date as the anniversary of the day the spectre of communism was cleansed from the globe. Most only mourn, even back home. In Great Yarmouth, no-one celebrated the Day, but all remembered it.

Arrival at the airport was simplicity itself, for those who had found one of the few flights that crossed the Atlantic. Passport control consisted of a cursory glance at whatever travel documentation was presented, and customs checks were non-existent. Britain’s downsized government had much higher priorities than bothering incoming tourists. Their officials occasionally scrutinised those who were departing, but never arriving.

Distinguishing tourists from locals – or returning locals – presented no difficulties. Most of the accoutrements of travel in Europe were similar to those within the Americas, but there was one significant difference. Tourists in Britain all had Geiger counters somewhere about their person.

Three decades on, most of the United Kingdom was no more radioactive than the background levels back home. Save for the sheets of glass which once formed their cities, that is. Nevertheless, any prudent traveller knew the risk of stumbling into one of the remaining hot pockets of soil somewhere on their jaunt, or being served fish which was hot in a manner other than the traditional culinary style.

The airport was only a couple of train stops from town. I'd planned to use the railroad as the best way to meet passengers, but it turned out that every visitor caught the train, for want of an alternative.

Private cars in Great Yarmouth were non-existent; people walked or pedalled or were pedalled by others. Fuel was rationed for essential transport and agricultural use, and misusing it was a hanging offence, literally. A couple of the chattier locals on the train into town went into great detail about executions they'd witnessed.

As was my habit, on the first day I spent a couple of hours strolling around Great Yarmouth. I didn't need longer – nowhere in the town was far from anywhere else.

The town was a small strip of land between river and sea, marked by a mix of old and new. The old was traditional Britain, with heritage cottages on narrow lanes. The new was identical brick houses – brick was the cheapest construction material around here – with wider, cobbled streets. Broad streets served no transportation purpose that I could discern, but made the tourists feel more comfortable.

I bypassed the more openly tourist-seeking spots, leaving them for another time, though the prospect of the Herring Museum intrigued me. On this day, I cared more to find out what the locals recalled of the Day.

This aim drew me to the Yankee Refuge. Like so much of the town, the décor here presented a curious mix of classical and new-fangled. The walls, and the bar itself, were made of finely-polished chestnut; sound and beautiful timber. The stools were newer, and could be politely described as workmanlike. Beer came in ceramic mugs, not glasses. Light bulbs existed, but only a few – enough to make the dimness bearable rather than illuminate.

Ventured conversations quickly made it plain that discussions of the Day or its anniversary would attract flinty stares. Some were prepared to talk, but none wanted to be asked.

Conversations about the Day revealed the British think the United States emerged unscathed. Not true, to anyone even casually familiar with American history. I saw no reason to mention the rubble where Anchorage and Seattle once stood, or the effects of radiation which touched everywhere. Compared to Britain, we got off lightly. Compared to mainland Europe or the former Soviet Union, we were blessed.

Indirect probes about Britain's fate provided more revealing answers. The locals viewed Great Yarmouth as "the luckiest city in the unluckiest country." Every year two thousand or more people moved here from elsewhere in Britain. Every year, around the same number fled Britain's shores entirely.

None of my American readers would be surprised that so many sought to emigrate. More intriguing was their choice of destination. None mentioned the United States. Most named Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. "They helped us, and help us still," was the gist of their explanations.

If I had to sum up the difference between Americans and the British, it would be thus: Americans want to forget the Day happened, while the British want to escape what happened.

~



Drums Along The Mohawk

Carlton Herzog

PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE JOINT WAR COUNCIL OF NORTH AMERICAN TRIBES, AUGUST 28, 1813

Chief Rolling Thunder of the Cherokee Nation:

We of the Indian Nations are gathered here today to decide an appropriate response to England's repeated attempts to conquer and colonize the North American continent. Time again the English have established and held colonies by force of arms along our east coast. These attempts to take our land have increased with disturbing frequency over the years. Some here favor a diplomatic solution. They recommend allowing a limited number of settlements and mutual trade. Others among us see these settlements as beachheads for an inevitable invasion. They demand we deny these invaders any purchase on our land and go so far as to advocate an attack on England itself.

Red Eagle, Chief of the Algonquin Nation: The first and fundamental law of nature is to seek peace and follow it. I submit that war should belong in our tragic past and find no place on our agenda for the future. At best, war is barbarism. Its glory is an illusion. It is only those who have never fought nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, desolation, and vengeance. We can and must find a reasonable accommodation with these English.

Blue Feather, Chief of the Huron Nation: Peace is a dream and not a beautiful one. We know that Pizarro laid waste to our Inca brethren before he was finally driven off the Southern Continent. When the Spaniards first came to the Incas, they had the Bible, and the Incas had the land. The Spaniard said, 'Let us pray.' The Incas closed their eyes and prayed. When they opened them, they had the Bible, and the Spaniards had their land. Like it or not, the tree of liberty must be watered with blood.

Our Aztec kin did not go so quietly. They sent a rat born plague to Western Europe. Millions died. While the plague swept across Europe, the conquering Aztec war fleets overran the Gold Coast and established the African Aztec Empire. No European nation has dared colonize the Dark Continent since.

Consider that we are the remnants of the Siberian Ket, an ancient nomadic people of Central Asia. More precisely, the ancestors of Attila the Hun whose armies ravaged Europe. They left Asia and traveled eastwards across the Bering strait land bridge. It is therefore fitting that we carry on that noble marauding tradition in defense of our way of life.

Our strategy should be to not only confront the English Imperialists, but also lay siege to their capital. To deprive it of air. To shame it. To mock it. We will break them with our sheer relentlessness and superior cunning. Let our plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when we move, we will fall like thunderbolts.



Chief Tecumseh of the Mohawk Tribe: Our battleplan is foolproof. We will use their ships that we have captured. In the dead of night, we will sail them into London harbor. On the first night, our braves will set fire to all their ships. On the second night, they will burn their city. On the third night, they will kill all the English leaders they can find. Then under color of the French and Spanish flags, and in captured uniforms, they will sail away in daylight. The English, the French and the Spanish will be too busy killing one another to bother us any time soon.

Red Eagle: My brother, you are a great chief and warrior. But consider that the first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground and said this is mine laid the foundation for every war ever fought. How many horrors and misfortunes might have been prevented, by pulling up the stakes, and announcing to his fellows that ‘The fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.’ What sort of creature sacrifices its children’s lives to settle its differences? You would cast our young braves, who know little of life, into the abyss of sorrow. Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die. What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, what you call the mad destruction of war? Your war will not determine who is right — only who is left. Your war will show us to be something other than thinking animals.

Chief Black Eyes of the Iroquois Nation: We must have war. We must defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all. These English will infect us with their perverse ways. Here they can let their pants down while wallowing and rutting with our women. They can indulge themselves in all manner of deviance and sensuality with no harm done to their precious London. There will be nothing to soil their cathedrals, their white marble statues, or their noble sentiments. There is enough distance between our land and theirs to absorb all manner of barbaric behavior, no matter how dirty and animal it gets.

I concede that war is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself. Who among us is so blind as to condemn a war to protect our peoples against tyrannical injustice?

Chief Red Eagle: No one here doubts our tactical superiority when it comes to the art of war. But consider the Greeks. At Marathon, their hoplite phalanxes of heavy armor and longer spears made them superior in hand-to-hand combat against the Persians. Yet, the Greeks were slaughtered time and again because the Persians outnumbered them twenty to one.

The same is true of the naval battle at Salamis. Equipped with cast-bronze rams at their bows, the Greek triremes were adept at ramming and boarding Persian vessels. But there too, the Persian ships came in such great numbers as to overwhelm the Greek navy. I submit therefore that while we may win the Battle of London that is a far cry from winning a war. Sooner or later, the Europeans will know that it was we who set London ablaze and them at each other’s throats. I say we let sleeping dogs lie until we can come up with a better solution.

Chief Black Eyes: That is pure foolishness. The English breed like rabbits. Indeed, the galloping increase in their numbers guarantees that their hungry population will have an unslakable appetite for our rich farmland. There can be no reasonable accommodation with such creatures, who appear as men but are beasts in their hearts. The English will come and spread throughout this continent like disease through a living body. They will multiply without thought, pushing us aside so that they may breed and flourish. They will not come alone. They will bring their French and Spanish cohorts in such vast numbers as to make small a plague of locusts. They do not come to bring harmony with the numbers of our population. I submit that your anti-war agitation and argument are inherently irresponsible and unpatriotic. I denounce them.

Chief Red Eagle: I have learned that the point of life's walk is not where or how far I move my feet but how I am moved in my heart. If I walk far but am angry toward others as I journey, I walk nowhere. If I conquer mountains but hold grudges against others as I climb, I conquer nothing. If I see much but regard others as enemies, I see no one. Peace is not the way of weakness. It is the way of strength. War is nothing but the first resort of limited minds.

Chief Great Bear of the Mohicans Tribe: My tribe is gone. The English gave us blankets infected with smallpox. I'm the last, the very last. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. I'll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? I can hear them, and it's my grandfather and grandmother singing. Can you hear them? I dance one step and my sister rises from the ash. I dance another and lightning shoots down from the sky onto the palefaces. With every step, an Indian rises. With every other step, lightning falls. We dance in circles growing larger and larger until we are standing on the shore, watching all the ships returning to Europe. We dance until the ships fall off the edge of the world into a yawning throat of fire.

I say that If I'm going to die, I want to fight. I will not be pummeled and played with and threatened into submission. Nor will I let that happen to our land. We do not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild'. Only to the white man is nature a 'wilderness' and only to him is the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it home. It is beautiful and we are surrounded with the blessings of its Great Mystery.

Chief Rolling Thunder: You have all had your say. I will have mine. The hearts within us burn because of deep wounds to our soul. It is an agony that will not quit. We are here deliberating whether to unlock a dangerous door from which faint hearts would do wisely to keep away. I must counsel that we practice a willed suspension of conventional beliefs and in that poised awareness listen. Listen for the smothered voice of the Great Spirit from whom even now we are alienated. That great body of radiance knows neither birth nor death. Only it can free us from the endless repetition of mistakes we have chosen to sanctify. Before you cast your ballot for or against war, quiet the mechanisms of your mind. In that uncluttered silence, ask the Great Spirit for guidance in this matter. Then and only then can you be confident that your decision is just.

The red clam shell is for war. The blue is for peace. When you have made up your mind, select one and place it in the ceremonial pouch. Then we will count.

~

What The Martians Said

David Barber

One by one, the Martian fighting machines have fallen silent and it seems common knowledge that the invasion failed because the Martians lacked our hard-won immunity to germs. Even the popular account by Mr Wells asserts this, but he is wrong.

When I say it is because the Martians are machines, you will think I confuse the towering tripods with the creatures within. But I speak from personal experience. Those creatures played a very different role in the invasion.

I do not claim a complete understanding. What I know of the natural sciences is little help explaining the technology of another world. After all, how can something mechanical think?

I have set down these events while still fresh in my mind. You must judge for yourself whether it was my actions that finally defeated the Martians.

Like the millions who fled London in those last desperate days, the Highgate Asylum staff abandoned us to save their families, or themselves. Overhearing rumours, yet never being told what was happening in the outside world, agitated and disturbed me more than the truth, so I resolved to seek out the Martians and see for myself. It was not an escape, I simply walked out the front gates and there was no one left to say otherwise.

Visible from some distance amongst the ruins of the Houses of Parliament, a machine leaned against buildings covered in red creeper, like some monstrous agricultural tool forgotten by giants.

"More of them, you say?" He glanced at the towering machine.

Best if he stayed on guard, I told him when he offered to come with me.

I clambered up the rubble to where the grey bloated corpse of a Martian hung out an open hatch. The sight and stink of the thing turned my stomach, but the sergeant was watching, shading his eyes as he gazed from below. I held my breath as I squeezed into the machine.

As I peered around the circular space – something like the bridge of a ship, but curiously devoid of anything I recognised as controls – disappointment stole over me. I had expected more than this empty cupola with its dead pilot. An explorer opening an ancient Egyptian tomb and finding it bare might have felt the same. After a while I had to accept there was nothing to be learned here.

It was then that the voice began speaking to me.

At first I could not make it out, and strained to catch the occasional English word. There was certainly no place for another Martian to hide, and when the voice urged me again, but louder this time, I realised it was the machine itself, or rather, as I would discover, its guiding intelligence that spoke.

Can you imagine how I trembled with agitation and excitement, my imagination leaping ahead of what I heard, unable to contain my thoughts, everything suddenly making sense, opening up great vistas of possibility...

A wary band of soldiers had surrounded the motionless tripod and would not let me pass. Their leader was a veteran sergeant from the Essex regiment. What good he thought his rifle would do if the machine rose to its feet again, I do not know.

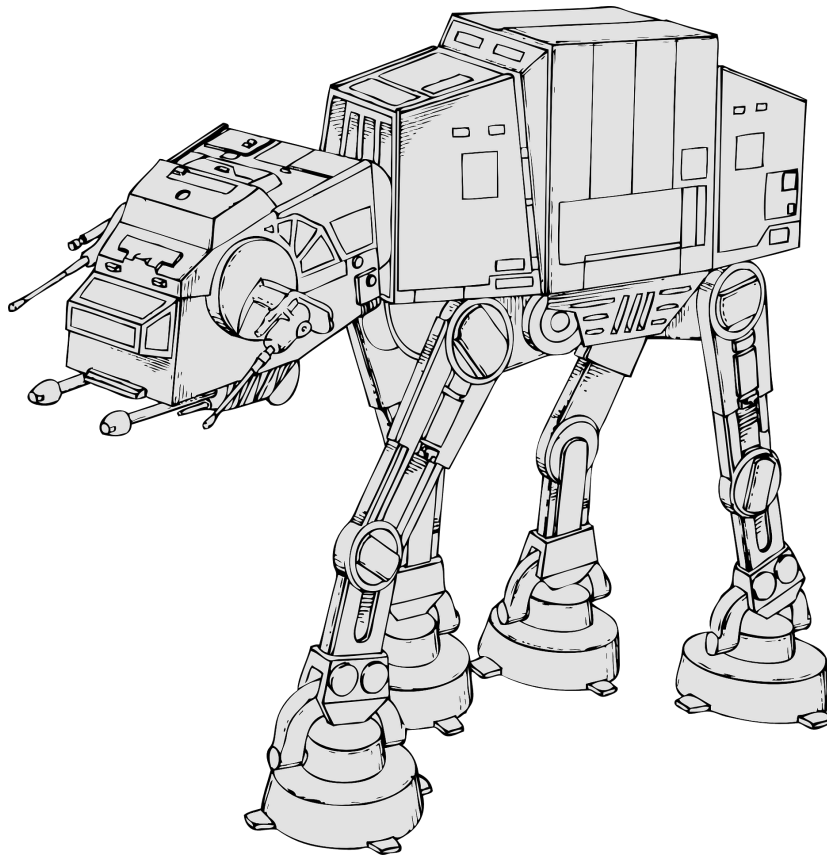
I told him I was a famous scientist, and mentioned Oxford University. I realise now that I was confused about this, but such had been an ambition from my earliest days, which was realised only in my imagination. However I do have a clear recollection of visiting those dreaming spires in my youth.

"I need to examine the Martian creatures before they decompose further," I told the sergeant, and pointed out crows already at work. "We must learn all we can."

The man had fought on after his officers were killed and the proud military he belonged to had been decimated by gas and flame. He had no time for those who had run from danger and were only emboldened now that the foe seemed defeated. He looked me up and down and was not impressed.

I took him aside. "We have been lucky this time, but we must learn their secrets and how to better kill them before more Martians come."

The urge to babble almost overwhelmed me as he considered this.



This is what I recall of that conversation:

We call them Martians but they were not from Mars originally, landing there only after a voyage lasting millennia. They chose Mars because the chill of that dying world, its aridity and lack of oxygen were advantages to metal beings. They shunned the hot, corrosive atmosphere of the planet that was its neighbour.

Creatures like the one in the hatchway had accompanied them, but had not fared well on the journey, nor later on Mars, and as time passed it appeared they were marked for extinction.

"Because of this they urged us to invade your world," the machine said. "You are a young and vigorous race, and might be trained as their replacements."

The word symbiosis came to mind – a symbiosis between creatures and machines. I did not think to ask then how we might benefit a machine.

"We wonder if there is still any reason to conquer you," the voice added. "Our creators would have known. But now they are gone."

There have been episodes in my life, some less lucid than others, when I have been locked away – for my own good, they told me – and have met those who suffered from an excess of melancholia and the certainty there is no point to anything. As the voice continued, I was strangely minded of those lost souls.

"Living creatures create their own meaning," said the voices, now quiet, now loud, as if they travelled far through the aether, as if more than one crowded in on this conversation. "But we must borrow ours."

Evolution has instilled in mankind the urge to survive. We are all descendants of those who felt this way. Yet these mechanisms seemed to have no such instinct. Their intelligence was vast and cool and unsympathetic. They remembered their first awakening, but whether existence was better than oblivion was something they had not settled.

A thought had been plaguing me, racing around my brain, as thoughts sometimes did. "But this tripod, surely it is immobilised now your pilots are dead?"

"We could set these machines in motion again if we wished. If we had reason to."

I staggered as the tripod stirred itself, like a behemoth stretching, and saw the dead creature slide out the hatch in a tangle of limbs. Then the machine was still once more.

"We planned to wade across the narrow sea to conquer lands in the east, but we can no longer see any point to that. What if your tribe had the use of our fighting machines? Would you want to rule this world?"

All this talk had given me time to think, and I began to argue with the voices.

"You do not understand mankind if you think we would become your helpers. Your invasion is pointless. It always was. And whether you destroy us or no, what difference does that make to you?"

Increasingly, the voices made replies that made no sense to me, sounding like propositions in formal logic, as if the machines were debating amongst themselves.

Even their own creators had lost heart, I insisted. Had they considered turning themselves off? After all, did any of it matter?

There are those who will dismiss my account as the delusions of an escaped madman: hearing voices, discovering secrets, saving the world. And the only evidence I can offer is that the Martian machines never rose to their feet again. Nor can I point to something I recognise as a mechanical brain and say, here, this is the proof. As the years pass and my malady pays fresh visits, certainty eludes me.

Their science, so far ahead of our own, remains a challenge for future generations, yet if we had entered into a bargain with the machines as they had hoped, we might have learned the answers to age-old mysteries.

In the end it was mankind I did not trust.

I confess that after the voices finally fell silent, I did call out to them again. Perhaps it was for the best that they did not answer.

~

The Warbler of Surgeries

Darryl A. Smith

NOTICE: This form is subject to
biennial federal review and not to be
used or issued after fiscal year 1908

Board of Medical Melodists on Invasive Procedures,
Issuer
Portals Potomac, D.C.

INFORMED CONSENT TO SURGERY FORM*

For

PAIN MANAGEMENT

By

WARBLE ENABLED DISSOCIATION



The United States' MedOrphic Relief and Fleet Abscissions Act (MORFA) of 1884 equips informed consent twofold for: 1) remedial external displacement on a temporary basis of bodily consciousness in, 2) any legal medical procedure involving surgical incisions whose time-to-reclusion by swiftest safe strokes exceeds 30 seconds. Specifically, §§3.1.6 and 3.1.7 of the Act provide most fully for such consent through regular and relevant updates to its internal historical brief on awareness delocalization via sung distraction, patient-targeted and tailored. With these amendments placed in digest

herein, patient is encouraged to read this consent form attentively and entirely before initialing and/or signing it. This should be done in consultation with patient's physician and medorphist both. If you will have signed it, you may experience this form asynchronously or in an otherwise non-linear fashion. This is normal.

1. PROCEDURE: I, Percival Roundtree [Patient's name], for the following procedure(s), give consent to warble-enabled dissociation (hereafter referred to in kind as “enwarbling”/ “WED”) from waking pain during surgery: Corrective reduction to previously amputated lower left leg [Description of procedure(s)].
2. RISKS (STANDARD): As with all surgical ventures, in the absence of profound nervous intervention, the dolor of corporal agony due to cutting penetration of the physical body and its internal manipulation is indeed unavoidable and characteristic. However, with sure application of WED techniques such extreme pain is statistically rare. Enwarbling during invasive procedures of all kinds is a time-tested medical utility with a proven efficacy of over 60 years. Absent unplanned disruptions to patient's ability to hear during enwarbling, or to warbler's ability to sing, no kinetic pain beyond mild discomfort should be experienced. Patient agrees, however, that in such unforeseen circumstances surgery shall continue to completion though pain of an excruciating nature is likely to be endured. Please note that whether one experiences kinetic pain during enwarbled surgery or not or whether upon emerging they simply do not remember experienced pain of this kind is still a matter of conjecture and ongoing study.
Initials: _____
3. ALTERNATIVES: Although unconventional due to lack of demand and in turn of development, anesthetic ether—a complete consciousness inhibitor—has been since 1842 the standard alternative in matters of surgical pain. It is your right to this substitute method of pain management. Although in cost the option for enwarbling never exceeds that of ether by more than 600%, the former is rarely valued at less than 250% of the latter in most staves. Should patient wish to waive the default payment exemption for treatment of an injury due to a natural disaster, this may be further incentive to consider the anesthetic option. Be advised, however, that ether narcosis confers no hyperconscious or transpersonal opportunity, certainly not of any comparable acuity to Stillpain enwarbling. It does not utilize patient pain as WED does in order to “fight like with like” to transcendental effect. Even unlike basic semi-precursory biochemical analogous to enwarbling such as dimethyltryptamine, fungal psilocybin, hormonal 5-hydroxytryptamine, etc.—to which numerous medical experts have favorably compared the sonorous Pain Warble of ‘nerve-chant tripping’ as their natural ‘vocalic descendant and aural distillation’—anesthetic ether is a strictly reductive intervention. Within the surgical context, its application merely “cancels consciousness” outright in an oblivion of auto-absenteeism. It does not expand and heighten self-awareness and world entanglement through pain with surrounding densities on that well-known cosmic spectrum ranging from somatic to subtle bodies.

Patient is further advised not to base their choice of pain-management options on famous surgical outcomes of apparent prescience arising from enwarbling. The principle that correlation does not equal causation applies, for example, to the apparent coincidence of a number of patients who days earlier “predicted,” while pain-enwarbled, the 1842 Cap-Haïtien earthquake the first year WED techniques were applied and recorded. And whether many thousands would otherwise have been lost rather than that few score who were under that efficacious warning sent days prior to the event one may, of course, never know. The same applies regarding those patients claiming to have seen these millenary dead in some other timescape wherein none could be put on advanced guard. Certainly, many have maintained that ubiquitous press around this spectacle, in particular, was the efficient cause of the eventual triumph of song-depersonalization techniques of pain management over U.S. physician Dr. Crawford Long’s incipient application of ether anesthetics. This is due to concurrent psychical discoveries of ultimately metamedical benefit within the so-called ‘occult’ (now ‘entanglement’) discourse in altered states of consciousness through constructive—i.e., non-pathological—dissociation, to which pain interdiction has thus far proven the most reliable vehicle.

So, too, is patient advised regarding the 1883 event at Krakatoa. Although it is ostensibly due to WED predictions that we possess audio of the occurrence from all over the world—whereby ordinary citizens globally were able to prepare for it and render their own recordings—this may yet be owed to other than those scattered individuals who claimed sensitivity to the biosphere and issued warnings through their possible surgical clairaudience.

I hereby choose to decline anesthesia.
Initials: _____

4. BENEFITS: Enjoy Stillpain. As we know, pain is that vaunting procession of helical nervous shockwaves of a clockwise orientation wound round an energy field of toroidal topology. Warbling is the synchronic anticlockwise-amplitude to pain whose meta-cancellation interference creates an effective standing wave of tolerable—even hospitable—static burden which patient may occupy for the duration of surgery. Like a drum, the solar wind beats upon the magnetosphere of the traveling Earth. Yet at the bow shock front, where swell meets swell, there is a quietude, a placidity. Similarly placed, stationary within that storm’s eye of pain—a pain within pain—the patient may look outward from it with effects of consciousness similar in nature to the uncanny field effects experienced inside such tempests. An empathic ecstasy rather than absorbing agony characterizes the experience, resulting in myriad possible extrapersonal interchanges.
5. CARE TEAM: I authorize my practitioner and enwarbler to perform this procedure. I accept that they will be assisted by a care team which may include: singers, restrainers, technicians, shamans, medical device specialists, and a surgical team. This team may include other attending surgeons, warblers, residents, fellows, medical and melodist students, or other allied healthcare professionals. Initials: _____

6. OBSERVERS: My practitioner and/or enwarbler may allow observers during my procedure. These may include corporeal and non-corporeal entities. They are not part of the care team and will not participate in providing care. Initials: _____

7. FILM, PHOTOGRAPHY or PHONOGRAPH RECORD: I understand film, photography or phonograph records made as part of my treatment and/or diagnosis may be used for clinical education or professional publications. If used in this way, I understand that my records will be edited so that I will not be identified (referred to as “de-identified”). Film, photography, or phonograph records will not be used for any other purpose without my authorization. Initials: _____

I DO NOT authorize my de-identified film, photography, or phonograph records to be used for clinical education or professional publications. Initials: _____

Signed Percival Roundtree [Patient]

Signed Eudora Hughes, M.D. [Physician]

Signed H. Edward Lewis, W.D.
[Medorphist]

***** ONLY PHYSICIAN AND/OR
MEDORPHIST ADDENDA TO BE
ATTACHED TO THIS FORM *****

POST-OPERATION COMMENTS:

OUTCOME: Surgery successful. Patient enwarbled 1 hour 17 minutes prior to surgery; emerged 2 hours following closure.

DURATION: 3 minutes, 47 1/2 seconds

PAIN: None but Stillpain reported

PROGNOSIS: Patient expected to make full recovery. Recommend follow-up in 4 weeks.

W.E.D. EXPERIENCE (IF ANY): Prior to partial loss of left leg, patient was federal agent, special detail as on-site witness of occasional disasters credibly precognized by public members late of surgery reported for emergency alert. Upon its evacuation days prior, patient assigned Golden Gate City morning April 18 of last year as Lead Recorder ahead of the great earthquake which has recently razed much of that metropolis. Although all usual precautions by him and his team were taken, patient sustained lamentable injury by a felled tree described by all as appearing ‘out of nowhere’. Crisis triage performed on patient during ground shocks and aftershocks. On-site surgical conditions sub-optimal. Absence for patient of melodist support for amputative pain relief. Removal of limb below knee would have been sustainable but for these adverse conditions. Interstitial necrotic advance due to inapt severance necessitated cleaner recent removal of leg above knee joint 8 months on from seismic calamity.

Patient elaborates W.E.D. experience during surgical enwarbling as follows:

‘I return there. We don’t know where it comes from. Our base is in the city’s namesake park well cleared in advance of any trees or other falling threats.

We hear a close, stifled cracking just prior. However, with the wild cacophony already resounding all about us from the momentous quake in progress, even such proximal splitting sounds add but little to the ambient din. I feel at my leg the awful crush of the thing as the full force of its midsection impacts the tremulous ground unhindered. Seeing this, and to no avail, my recording companions—one a physician—are at me almost immediately in mutual struggle to displace the trunk-length from off me. By this time the main quake seems to subside. Yet a paroxysm of aftershocks in series are keeping the ground unreliable with our exposed observation party outside its fortified post.

‘That we might regain our safe cover and preserve ourselves thereby, the decision is made through muted looks alone to quickly score and remove the extremity and, though fast as it goes, it seems still a foul eternity of grievous agony as my leg is detached from just below my knee where the tree has got me. But almost in shame for its further demise, I have broken off a modest branch and am being encouraged to bite down on it—there—for control through my own cropping which it in turn has caused. Suddenly, I find myself in the other place—the place where the tree will come from. It is a year from now, I believe, from this second surgery I am experiencing. I am outside again. Far away.

Something from above explodes. The loudness. The light. Heat and all-pressure from the sky. Oh, no. The Tunguska Skyrise Tether. What grand force has snapped it twain? —The great umbilicus to near-orbit, secured among the vastness of the Interserfstat forest that keeps by counterweighted tension a first empyrean metropolis from snapping away into oblivion. The high band, it will be consumed from above by the ‘Thing’s shattering fire. Upward, the flame will traverse the

ribbon and ignite its works to consume the habitat. Yet one—this lone timber beneath its devastating blast—is pushed back to a year ago from here. It falls on me in Golden Gate City. Here I am, put under—no, put all ‘round—in this surgery. I will go there. You tell them now: Evacuate before midyear next.’

PRIORITY ADVISORY: Though no registered pre-vision from enwarbling has to date exceeded an event by more than a fortnight, patient report is deemed credible owing to several factors including patient’s occupational standing and reputation. Further support for such credulity is evinced upon now completed examination of patient’s leg prosthesis subsequent to surgery. Wood of prosthetic verified as derived from fallen tree and confirmed by arborists as non-native to California; as consistent rather with makeup of the Siberian Dahurian larch, species *Larix gmelinii* of the boreal woodlands of specified region. Recommend issue of global general alert. Should event occur, further recommend patient’s W.E.D. observation be included in subsequent digest update to relevant sections of the U.S. MORFA Act.

END ADDENDUM - PATIENT W.E.D. CONSENT FORM

~

New Year in Zara

Matias Travieso-Diaz

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium

William Butler Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*

In early 1201, Prince Alexios Angelos of Byzantium and I, his valet, were rescued through bribery after six years of confinement in Constantinopolis' Prison of Anemas. Pisan merchants, whom we met them outside the prison, spirited us away in their galley.

We landed in Pisa and were transported overland to the Hohenstaufen Castle in Göppingen, home of Duke Philip of Swabia. Prince Alexios' sister Irene was married to the Duke and received us with open arms; not so much her husband, who was fighting for the throne of Germany and had greater concerns than caring for fugitives from far-away Byzantium.

It is always frigid and windy in Hohenstaufen, which sits on a hill that overlooks the Rems and Fils rivers. We froze in the keep, alone, and tasted the bitter bread of exile. We longed to return to beautiful Constantinopolis, the queen of cities, where it is always warm and sunny. There was scant news of Alexios' father, Isaakios II Angelos, who had been deposed, blinded, and imprisoned. Presumably, he was still alive; his deposer, Alexios III Angelos, was not ready yet to stain his hands with the blood of his own brother.

The Duke was celebrating Christmas and had assembled his court for a lavish feasting season. Among the guests was his cousin Boniface, Marquess of Montferrat. Boniface had just been chosen to lead a Fourth Crusade that was being organized, and had come to seek Philip's support.

My Prince met Boniface at one of the Christmas banquets. Boniface regaled Alexios with tales of his military exploits and bragged that he could help Alexios' father regain the throne of Byzantium. Alexios was taken with the idea.

Duke Philip was drawn into the conversation, and suggested that Boniface use his position as leader of the upcoming Crusade to restore Alexios' father to power. This was a tricky idea, though, for the Crusades' goal was to wrestle the Holy Land from the Muslims, not fight other Christian nations.

The night of that banquet, while readying Prince Alexios for bed, I heard from his inebriated lips an account of his conversations with Boniface and Philip. I cowered in fear. I was only a young child when slavers abducted me from my village and sold me to a Byzantine official. My master had brought me to Constantinopolis to become his confidential secretary when he went to serve at the palace. I thus kept current on Byzantium's world affairs, and knew that the Frankish longed to conquer the Eastern empire.

Because of our years of imprisonment together I was freer to share my views with my master than a slave should be. "The Frankish covet the riches of our empire. We cannot trust them and should not make deals with them!" I urged.

Alexios struck me on the mouth. It was a feeble blow, for he was not a strong man and was weakened by wine. "How dare you, slave, second-guess your master? I should have you flayed!!"

I was not badly hurt, except in my pride. I lowered my head and responded meekly: "Despotes, my life is yours to dispose of as you wish. But I would be untrue if I did not warn you of the grave danger in the alliance that is being proposed to you. I watched that man Boniface during the banquet. He is a ruthless man, who shall seek to bend you to his will. You must not allow him and his Crusaders to come anywhere near Byzantium!"

Alexios raised his arm, intent on striking me again, but the effort was too much in his condition. He merely replied with scorn: "Though you may think otherwise, I chose you to be my servant, not my counsellor. So, shut up and help me disrobe!"

Without more, he flung himself on his bed, still fully dressed. In the next minute he was snoring loudly.

#

Prince Alexios visited Rome early next year and promised the Pope that he would pledge a large sum to the Crusaders' cause if they would assist him and his father in regaining power. With those moneys, the Crusade could finally get underway. The Pope agreed not to oppose the Crusaders' potential diversion into Byzantium, but specifically told them not to attack any Christians, including the Byzantines.

#

Another figure then entered the stage: Enrico Dandolo, the Doge of Venice. The merchant republic and Byzantium were bitter commercial rivals and had fought many wars, directly and through proxies, in their attempts to monopolize trade in the Mediterranean. Dandolo himself was no friend of Byzantium and was rumored to have lost his eyesight while fighting us. Thus, his involvement in the upcoming Crusade was most troubling.

Dandolo agreed that Venice would provide transportation and most provisions for the Crusader army but demanded that the Crusaders first make a show of force at Zara, a Christian city on the Dalmatian coast that once had been controlled by Venice and was now a Hungarian possession. From Zara the crusader army would set sail for Byzantium.

The Crusade fleet arrived in Zara in November. The sheer size of their fleet intimidated the Zarans, but they held fast against the intruders. The Crusaders attacked the city, and after five days of fighting took it on November 24, 1202. Upon capture, the city was thoroughly sacked.

In late December Prince Alexios and I arrived in Zara. Its conquest was the final alarm bell that I needed before frantically pleading with Alexios to put an end to the venture. He rejected my pleas and informed me that he had promised to pay two hundred thousand silver marks to the Crusaders and their Venetian allies if he and his father were restored to power. As before, my objections were brushed aside by the Prince.

#

It was New Year's Day, 1203 and the Crusader fleet was getting ready to leave Zara for Constantinopolis. Prince Alexios and I attended early morning New Year services at one of the few churches that had not been destroyed by the Crusaders. As we were returning to our quarters, I pointed to the charred ruins of a palace and remonstrated with the Prince:

"How can you persist in seeking the help of these barbarians, seeing what they are capable of doing? Zara was a Popish city, and it was not spared. What will they do to Constantinopolis, a far greater place? What will become of our palaces, our Hagia Sophia, the vast riches that we have gathered over the last nine centuries? Do you not see that you are putting all of Byzantium at grave risk?"

Alexios cut me short. "It is my divine right to become Basileus Autokrator. I can deal with the Frankish and the Venetians, and to disagree with me is traitorous. I will have no more of your talk, slave!"

"My Prince, you are wrong, and you are gambling with the lives of our citizens. I have had visions of our proud city being laid low by the Frankish scum. Please reconsider...."

Alexios did not let me finish. In a rage, he jumped at me and started to pummel me violently. I took no measures to protect myself but, as he was drawing blood from my face and crushing my cheekbones, I grasped his arms to restrain him. This drew him even more incensed; somehow he freed himself and pulled a dagger from his cloak, bellowing: "You villain, you dare lay hands on your Prince! For this you shall die!"

I tried to run away, but lost footing and fell to the ground. Alexios stood above me and raised the dagger to slay me. To protect myself, I grabbed his wrist and attempted to dislodge the weapon. Alexios lunged at my prone figure, stabbed me on the arm, lurched forward to strike another blow, lost balance and fell on top of me. We struggled until I overcame him.

I got up and tried to help the Prince to his feet. Alexios' dagger was protruding from his chest and he was not moving. A pool of blood was already forming beneath his body. There was blood on my face, my garments, my slashed arm.

I ran away, crying for help, but due to the holiday Zara's ruins seemed empty and nobody answered my calls. After a while, I returned to the Prince, who lay where he had fallen. He was dead, and his body was already starting to cool. I covered him with my soiled cloak and left for the Crusaders' camp, dripping blood from my many wounds.

#

I was seized by an overwhelming feeling of guilt. I had slain my master. I had committed a horrendous crime for which no pardon was possible. I thought of killing myself but I had no weapons: Alexios' dagger was still buried in his chest.

I began shuffling like a condemned man, step by painful step, in the direction of the port, where I expected I would be put to death by the Crusaders the moment I confessed my crime. But as I walked, I considered my situation with a cooler head. I could testify if necessary that my killing of the Prince had been an accident, for which I should not be held responsible. Moreover, offering myself for execution would not bring the Prince back to life. Alexios' death had been decreed by divine providence, as a way to prevent the greater ills that would have occurred had the expedition against Constantinopolis been carried out.

I then decided that a fitting punishment for the Prince's death would be for me to stay alive and devote my life to prayer and good deeds in the memory of the man I had slain. I turned inland and proceeded towards the hills to the east. I expected to be seized at any moment, and was sure that the Crusaders would send search parties in all directions and would capture me in no time.

But nobody came after me. Perhaps their finding the trail of my blood had left the impression that I, too, had perished.

In the afternoon, I arrived at a village and found people who spoke Greek and directed me to an Orthodox monastery a three hour walk away. I took refuge there and never left.

Some may question the veracity of my account and accuse me of deliberate murder, given my opposition to the fatal course of action on which the Prince was about to embark. I shall also leave for others to judge whether my flight from the Crusaders' camp was driven by wisdom or cowardice. Nobody is left to judge me and the truth does not matter anymore.

#



It has been twenty years since my crime, and the world has changed a lot since then. With the death of Prince Alexios, the Crusade came to a halt, but Pope Innocentius III continued to preach for its resumption and in 1205 the Fourth Crusade belatedly left for Egypt, forsaking Constantinopolis. The Crusaders captured Alexandria on the Nile delta after a fierce battle. From there, they drove along the coast like a sandstorm, defeating the Ayyubid successors of Saladin and conquering back Jerusalem in 1206. The Kingdom of Jerusalem was re-established and Boniface became its first ruler. More Crusaders and Christian settlers arrived in subsequent years, establishing a new kingdom that abuts the southern border of Byzantium, such that they can mutually defend each other.

Isaakios died in prison, and not much later his treasonous brother was deposed and executed. Byzantium now has a new ruler who has led the empire to many a victory over its foes. Constantinopolis has been able to repel any invaders and Byzantium endures, and with God's favor will remain the greatest empire on Earth for a thousand more years.

I will go to my grave soon. I still grieve the death of my master, but do not lament my acts or their beneficial results.

~

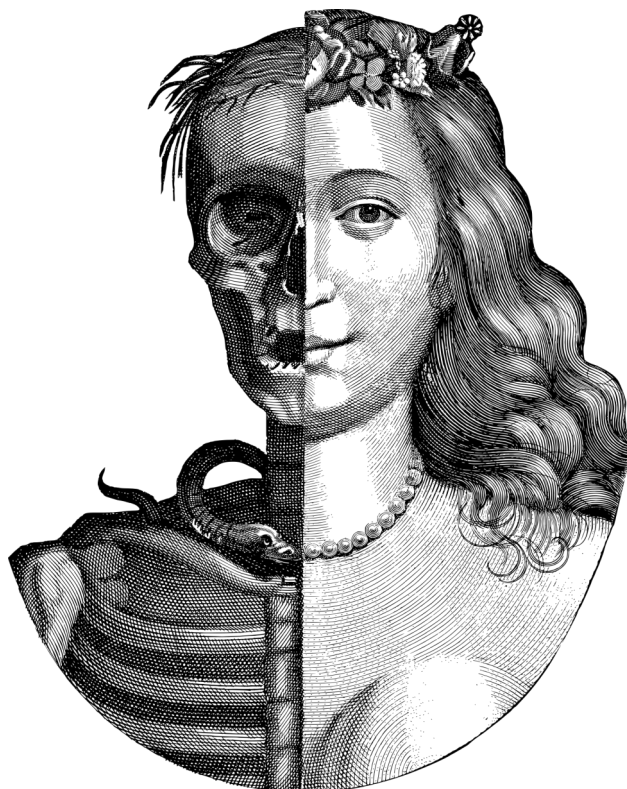
Syphilus, Sisyphus

Leonardo Espinoza Benavides

The case of humanity proved interesting.

From the historical material collected and safeguarded, it was a poem written by the Italian physician Girolamo Fracastoro that allowed us to assign a narrative origin to this. His verses said that, in a European meadow, a shepherd named Syphilus contracted a strange new disease, after disobeying his gods in the midst of a foreign invasion. *Syphilis sive morbus gallicus* ended up naming the so-called “French disease of the Earth” after its protagonist, as well as humanising and giving conceptual form to the pathology.

The impact on civilisation of a condition perpetuated by sexually transmitted contagion had irreparable repercussions on the psyche of the species. Wood carvings such as Albrecht Dürer's *Der syphilitische Mann* and ballads such as Juliane Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Mervi* are evidence of the collective tribulation. Scientific efforts found the culprit: a bacterium, of the spirochete type, which they called *Treponema pallidum pallidum*, transmitted solely and exclusively between people, without affecting any other form of life on the planet. It was the Japanese microbiologist Hideyo Noguchi who later demonstrated the presence of the germ in brain tissue. The sexuality of the population was restructured in the neurological and mental apparatus of its individuals. An unavoidable nightmare, as so was dreaming. The case is a clear example of a check between nature and life.



Effective forms of diagnosis were invented, relentless antimicrobial treatments and even the disciplines of dermatology and venereology were perfected. There was every possible form of prevention, from physical barriers of leather and latex to drugs that controlled the momentum of the relentless libido in the most at-risk sectors (which ended up being the whole world). Entire institutions dedicated to the monitoring and control of syphilis. The efforts, however, were described by humanity itself as a labour akin to lifting a rock up a mountainside only to see it fall at the end of each day.

The moment when it became public knowledge that the spirochete had become resistant to the latest therapies has been postulated as a cultural turning point. Famous was the speech of the Chilean academic and physician Félix Salvo, before the high commissioners of the World Health Organisation, when he assured the triumph of the pathogen, “The Great Pretender,” which paled the complexity of other known infections, viral, bacterial, fungal, whichever it was. Humans had no use for arsphenamine and penicillin after only a couple of years of their development.

Apparently, the cytoplasmic protein A filaments of the bacterium—which moved like a corkscrew—interacted with the indicated chromosomes of the micro-organism to mutate it. They never knew for sure. Humanity did not have the time or the determination to continue the epic. In its defence, there are many current hypotheses that vindicate this disappointment in favour, rather, of a resolute acceptance. Eternity as an illusion awaiting an end point.

The case of humanity leaves no sentient species indifferent, including those that are radically different in their way of reproduction and preservation. It is impossible to predict the history of the next Syphilis; its moment, its time and the colour of its meadow.

All the other extinct civilisations that we have managed to study in that particular region of that minor spiral arm of the galaxy ended their chronologies, directly or indirectly, because of warfare. The only species that did not succumb to war was humanity. After eleven thousand years since the first settlements in the Tigris-Euphrates alluvial marsh, humans, in short, opted for a grand final orgy.

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JOURNAL