

I have extensive notes of my reactions to the nomination, the campaign and the election of Trump to the office of the US presidency. The following pieces are a sampling:

Dead rat for president?

Of all shocks of the last year in which Donald Trump has emerged as the Republican candidate for president—most shocking of all—is that so many Americans are prepared to overlook his utter lack of decency.

If there were a checklist of the admonitions that responsible parents supposedly inculcate in their children, Trump would epitomize the scorning of them all: *'follow the Golden Rule'*, *'cheaters never prosper'*, *'pride comes before a fall'*, *'don't get your hand caught in the cookie jar'*; *'your lies will catch up with you...'*

With hardly a tweak of conscience, the party that purports to embody homespun values has betrayed the mythic America where braggarts, philanderers and bullies get their comeuppance.

Most unfazed by their candidate's character are evangelical Christians. To 'values' conservatives, it matters not a whit that Trump that embodies the vices grandmas warned against—or that he shamelessly revels in his own slime.... A supposed absence of the hypocrisy that marks other politicians appears to be what his fervent supporters most adore...

It is not that his core message is much different from other Republican presidential candidates over the last half century. From Nixon onward, they have ranted about America losing respect in the world, the burdens of taxes and a growing welfare state. They have raged against abortion, gun control and "softness" on crime. They have stoked the bitterness of "hard working" white Americans. Yet until Trump, Republican candidates usually only dog whistled that too many non-whites are freeloaders who do not share "traditional" American values...

Yet in his bluntness, Trump has taken the politics of fear and resentment into uncharted territory... He has tapped into an Eldorado of potential voters who adore his vulgarity. His idolizers believe he is one of their own—a scrapper who punches back hard. They see him as their champion who will "drain the swamp" and put the "snowflakes" in their place...

So, what are the chances that he could win? Polls now put him at about 45%—still about 4% behind Hillary. But the Democrats would be fools to be over-confident. While Clinton's support is tepid—Trump's base is fanatically loyal... They will certainly vote.

Clinton is obviously a flawed candidate. But it would folly for Americans to think that both choices are equally bad. Trump is so pernicious—that even if voting for a dead rat were the only alternative: the dead rat would clearly be America's—and the world's—best hope...



Meanwhile, those of us on the periphery who cannot vote—closely watch with growing trepidation... However ignorant swathes of the American electorate appear to be—as citizens of the behemoth that bestrides the earth, they have the rest of us at their mercy...

There is always anxiety in the weeks leading up to a US election. There has always been a belief, however naive, that a Democrat in the White House is better for common Americans and even better for the world. So, if/when the Democrat loses, we always brace:

There has always been a fear that that next Republican president will really be as dangerous as he postured as in red meat-tossing campaign speeches... Yet mercifully, those fears always proved to be somewhat exaggerated. Yes, the poor were in for a sustained assault—but somehow the institutions of democracy survived. Perhaps that was because the Bushes, Reagan, Ford—even Nixon—however execrable their policies—were not entirely devoid of human decency... With Trump, it feels fundamentally different...

This American election seems especially ominous, in coming with my 65th birthday... I wonder how many who were growing old in the mid 1930s, felt a similar dread amid the gathering storm of fascism... Even those who had faith that democracy would endure a sustained darkness must have doubted they would survive long enough to see a dawn...

2016, September

Of the postmodern Trump:

Every lie that Trump throws onto the dunghill of his campaign breaks new boundaries of acceptable conduct and further numbs Americans to his capacity for shamelessness:

‘650 illegal aliens will flood in under a Clinton administration’; ‘I opposed the war in Iraq’, ‘Climate change is a hoax’... He has recently recanted the insidious “birther conspiracy” by which he leveraged his run for the GOP nomination— yet only by cravenly claiming that it was not he—but Clinton—who started the rumour that Obama was a Muslim born in Kenya.

The reality that any one of his outrageous falsehoods can be easily refuted by fact does not faze the human reptile in the least... Trump seems to operate on the assumption that any self-serving claim need only to be repeated to gain legitimacy. He assumes that by bluster and “doubling-down” he can drown out any opposition...

Many have observed that Trump could never have amassed his legions of supporters without such widespread distrust of mainstream media... With no population in the western world as literacy-challenged, Americans are especially prone to wild conspiracy theories divorced from empirical evidence. Correspondingly, the sewers of the internet and right-wing media has been a perfect medium for the culturing of the Trump virus...



Still, few have yet made a connection between Trump’s statements of his own ‘facts’ — and a mode of thinking that may have filtered into the mainstream from academia. Even more astonishing is that this mode of thinking is bound up with ideologies of the left!

The general idea is that truth is ‘situated’ within competing ‘discourses of power’ and authority of validity is relative to socio-political power. The language attending to this mode of thinking, along with a grab bag of notions, is borrowed from philosophical studies in post-modernism and critical theory. It has been especially influential in faculties of sociology, education and feminist studies. There are corresponding notions bound up with the promotion of social justice for ‘marginalized narratives’... Indeed, questioning of objective truth was stirring in the social sciences long before the rise of Trump...

So it is that however utterly unintentional— Trump may be regarded as the first post-modernist presidential candidate! Yet such an irony is not to be appreciated only for intellectual amusement... His scorn for verifiable truth is far more dangerous than the mere bellicosity of typical Republican candidates. His assault on truth strikes at the very foundations of reason and science.

Those who hardly pay attention to public affairs like to claim that politicians have always lied—that their tongues are just more slippery than the blunt-speaking Trump. Some say that Trump, as business mogul, is accustomed to using hyperbole to sell his products. Some have defended his

outrageous statements (e.g. “*Mexico will pay for the border wall*”) as exaggerations crafted as opening bids for later negotiations...

Yet with excuses like these for doubled down lies upon doubled down lies—standards further erode and those Americans who should know grow more benumbed and cynical.

Despite all the reasons for voting against Hillary, it is still shameful that Americans would reject her in favour of the most morally despicable presidential candidate ever to be nominated. But then the outrage of the despised ‘libs’ is exactly what fuels Trump’s supporters and eggs him on to ever more numbing contempt for truth...

So it is that the stakes in this US election just a few weeks away— are far higher than whether a middle of the road or a right-wing ideology prevails. This election will show whether or not a majority of Americans believe in supporting the foundations of civilized discourse...

2016, October

Blind agent of the blind Watchmaker?

As a non-American who cannot kick the compulsive habit of ogling over every outrageous aspect of the Trump presidency—I am conflicted. On one hand, I cannot deny hoping for his spectacular failure. Yet in wishing for bankruptcy of his policies, I realize that there can be no such justice that inflicts the damage of his incompetence only on his own supporters... I also realize that the more spectacular his failure the greater is the potential for global disaster...

Should the Trump administration bungle into a war—either on the Korean peninsula or in the Middle East—there would be tens of thousands of casualties. An escalation to nuclear weapons could be the end of civilization. Of course, after a nuclear war there will be no authority to record history let alone enact collective punishment upon those responsible for what would be the end of history itself...

Yet if death and destruction of any magnitude does begin with a decision by the egomaniacal buffoon in the white house, the blame would not lie with him alone—but with every American who cast a vote for him.... Just as with the Germans who first voted for the Nazi party in 1928, there will be a collective guilt for whatever suffering Trump may unleash—whether by blunder or by design. Of course, any warm-blooded and sane person cannot hope for the worst. Still Trump's “poorly educated” core supporters deserve a hard lesson. They need to understand that a vote is more than a Molotov cocktail hurled against the ‘deep state.’ The need to know that Molotov cocktails can bounce back in one's face...

Yet more culpable than the typical Trump “deplorables” are the so called ‘independents’ and educated Republicans who voted for Trump. While they may have cringed with every new detail of Trump sleaze—they were too eager for low taxes and conservative social policy to worry about little details of character. They too, should face a reckoning...



Nearly a year after the election, I still grapple with the question: how could such a repulsive specimen of humanity succeed to the most powerful political office in the world? Why should such excrement be thrown up to such a pinnacle where he could determine the fate of our species?

I sometimes wonder if Trump was thrown up by the ‘Blind Watchmaker’—to use the term of evolutionary biologist R. Dawkins in describing the evolutionary process of natural selection. This is not at all to suggest that Trump is in any way a lion king of our species. An individual thrown up does not necessarily possess outstanding intelligence, adaptability or physical prowess. Its selection may not even be to promote the survival of its species. It is possible that the greater interest of the Blind Watchmaker is in survival of an entire ecosystem which a dangerous species may destroy...

If *homo sapiens* be a ‘failed experiment’ of evolution, one might imagine a Trump as a suitable agent thrown up to wipe the slate clean. From this same misanthropic view, one might hail Trump for his immanent agency in setting evolution back to square one. If the planet is not sterilized of all life by runaway greenhouse effect or atomic radiation, perhaps a billion years from now, another form of intelligent life will evolve advanced technological capacity. Perhaps unlike *homo sapiens*, such an intelligent species will be worthy of extending its civilization beyond the confines of this planet...

As for this precarious moment for our species— Perhaps there is some ironic truth in the buffoon’s boast of being an alpha male with “racehorse” genes...

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