



Francis Bacon and René Descartes, from *Jornal Opção* (website)

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The Mistake

We done messed up where we shouldna' messed up.

—Nancy Sinatra

Where? When? Who? What
was the mistake we made,
and when did we make it?

Anybody for Descartes? How about Bacon?
Each of those fellows could be said to have launched
the modern world, kicked a pebble that later
loosed the down mountain into an avalanche.

Newton, that showoff, shoots up his hand back of the class.
A spitball zings off Kepler's head.

Copernicus looks around nervously;
all eyes are on him.

Then there's Galileo: he looks smug enough,
his telescope tucked casually under his arm:
"E pur si muove!"
Or Leibniz: between him and Isaac, thick as thieves,
the numbers grew like kudzu over a gazebo.

Then Locke wipes the blackboard clean as a rock
and takes the trash out with a smirking, unwashed Hobbes.

They opened a door that maybe should have stayed shut?
Pandora was their mother: trim Voltaire,
Diderot the dancing encyclopedist, d'Holbach, Mettrie,
their obscene master of the revels, the divine Marquis,
Rousseau the lachrymose, who smelled the corpse of God –
he knew there was *something* wrong there – promptly got
hysterical, and gave us his hysteria like a disease.

I. Kant claimed "We can't!"; J. Fichte
hiccupped; Schelling schlept; Hegel
replied, "Maybe *you* can't, Immanuel, but maybe
I can!"
and with that gave a long Bronx cheer:
the Phenomenology of Farts,
the Philosophy of the History of Farts,
the Philosophy of the Right Fart,
to say nothing of the Philosophy of the Aesthetics of the Fart.

Marx held his nose; however, he saw almost immediately that
a philosophy of farts, if placed upside down,
would lead to a philosophy of world revolution;
so he drew up a Plan for world revolution
that led about five generations of reasonably intelligent people
on several continents, over several cliffs of almost total catastrophe
before it occurred to one or two individuals among them
that, hey, maybe there was something wrong
with the Plan. (Oh yes, they call us *Homo sapiens*
because we are so smart!)

Of course, in the United States of America,
as opposed to those decadent, evil, bloodthirsty Europeans,
we had the Founders! They did their best to right
the just-about-to-overturn-and-collapse applecart,
then made us an iron cage that, just when we might like to,
we can't even dream of escaping from.

Adam Smith gave us the invisible hand that holds a noose
choking the necks of generations of scared wage slaves;
then Darwin gave us genocide (*avant la lettre*), and better yet,

gave it a good name! (“It’s all part of natural selection, of Evolution,
of Nature,
and so wiping out whatever doesn’t survive –
bees, frogs, wolves, grizzly bears, the human race –
must be all right.”)

Then Schumpeter gave us creative destruction, though he forgot to tell
the capitalists about the creative part. “We make profits!
Hell, who needs anything else?”

The rest was depressingly predictable: Maxwell, Einstein,
Fermi, Oppenheimer, Teller, Kahn,
the Waltons, the Koch Bros., Donald Trump, Steve Jobs,
darling of iIdiots
and master of the suicide labor camps of Zhengzhou,
Reagan and Thatcher and dad and son George,
and Rubin and Larry and Timothy and Hank,
the tar sands, fracking, Exxon Mobil, BP,
Blythe Masters, Goldman-Sachs, the anonymous geek
who wiped away the stock market almost a week
before Greenland’s ice melted into the Pond
and turned the seven seas into a lukewarm bouillabaisse
drowning every coastal city from Mumbai to Marseilles.

Mistake after mistake: when James Watt saw that steam
could move a machine, then that fellow from Erie, PA,
discovered a foul-smelling black substance just oozing
from the earth that could, along with its bastard cousin, coal,
burn like hell itself, and fuel half the world –
well, it was over.

Ever since, we’ve been drunk, drugged, blind,
derivative geniuses, idiot-savants of code,
a vast hackers’ network of suicidal gods –
Anonymous, Ubiquitous –
hacking, hacking away at the limb we stand on –

clowns on the abyss, a fog of methane plumes
swirling around us as the last glaciers collapse,

and us dancing like it’s 1999 forever ...

(Bollywood conclusion to life on earth, all of humanity dancing to really
bad, but catchy, music,
as

a bone whistles annihilation to a howling dog.)

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