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## The Intellectual Roots of Techno-Primitivism

BY  JEFFREY A. TUCKER JULY 4, 2023 GOVERNMENT, HISTORY, LAW, PHILOSOPHY 8 MINUTE READ

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The assault on enterprise of the last few years – meaning not the biggest politically connected businesses but smaller ones reflecting vibrant commercial life – has taken very strange forms. Ever since the *New York Times* [said](#) the way forward was to “go Medieval,” the elites have been attempting just that. But this medievalism has not come at the expense of Big Data, Pharma, Ag, or Media. It mainly hits products and services that impact our freedom to buy, trade, travel, associate, and otherwise manage our own lives.

What began in lockdowns mutated into a thousand forms. That continues with daily new outrages. Maybe it’s not random.

We are also still trying to figure out what happened. Consider clothing control in the form of mask mandates. It turns out that they were just getting going. FOIA requests have [revealed](#) emails from November 2020 in which National Institutes of Health officials discussed forcing every American to wear N95 respirators for “gaining control of and ultimately extinguishing” Covid, as though that were even possible. If we would all just stop breathing, we wouldn’t get respiratory infections!



It was not really about health care. It was about the exercise of power over the whole population by a tiny elite in the name of science.

Then it mutated to the shots, which government made us get through hook and crook, an experimental medicine we did not need and which was proven neither safe nor effective.

Since those days, other strange things have been unleashed: the campaign to eat bugs, end fossil fuel, abolish wood-burning pizza ovens, impose all-electric ovens and cars, stop air conditioning, owning nothing and being happy with your digital consumption, and even blocking out the sun, while indulging in every farce such as pretending that men can get pregnant.

Many cities are falling apart, abandoned by well-to-do residents and consumed by crime.

It's all madness but maybe there is rhyme to the reasons for all this?

In August of 2020, Anthony Fauci and his long-time coauthor wrote [a piece in \*Cell\*](#) that called for “radical changes that may take decades to achieve: rebuilding the infrastructures of human existence, from cities to homes to workplaces, to water and sewer systems, to recreational and gatherings venues.”

They wanted social distancing forever but that was only the start of it. They imagined the dismantling of cities, mass social events, the end of international travel and really all travel, no more owning pets, the end of domesticated animals, and a strange non-pathogenic world that they imagined existed 12,000 years ago.

We can't go back, they said, but we can “at least use lessons from those times to bend modernity in a safer direction.”

There we have it. Preserve “essential” services (and people) but get rid of everything else. The lockdowns were merely a test case of a new social system. It's not capitalism. It's not socialism as we've come to understand it. It feels like interwar corporatism but with a twist. The big businesses that gain favor are not heavy industry but digital tech designed to live off scraped data and power the world with sunbeams and breezes.

Grant that there is nothing new under the sun. Whence comes this strange new utopianism?

Three years ago, Matt Kibbe and I recalled that in 1952, F.A. Hayek wrote what became [The Counter-Revolution of Science](#). The idea is that in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a new conception of science was born, which reversed a previous understanding. Science was not a process of discovery by research but a codified end state known and understood only by an elite. This elite would impose its view on everyone else. Hayek called this “the abuse of reason” because genuine reason defers to uncertainty and discovery while scientism as an ideology is arrogant and imagines it knows what is unknown.

I did not have time to reread the book but Kibbe did. I asked him if Hayek said anything that touched on our current problems. His response: “This book explains everything.”

That's quite the recommendation. So I dug in. Yes, I had read it years ago but every book from the before times has a different feel and message in the after times.

It is indeed prescient. Hayek explores in great detail the thinkers of the early 19th century – successors to and reversers of the original French Enlightenment – and its origin in the writings and influence of Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825).

So I went one step further and dug through the writings of this strange thinker. He is today called a socialist but he didn't call himself that. Indeed, the much-later writings of Karl Marx, which mixed Hegelian dialectics into socialist theory while condemning people like Saint-Simon don't find many of their roots here. (The Hegelian tradition of left and right statism I [discuss here](#).)

Simply put, Saint-Simon is an elitist but not in the conservative way. He dreamed of a world without privilege of birth or inherited wealth. The aristocracy can be damned for all he cared. He imagined a world of what he called merit but it was no merit by means of hard work and enterprise as such. It was a world run by geniuses or savants who have unusual intellectual gifts. They would comprise the managerial and ruling elite of society.

His preferred system of government would consist of 21 men: “three mathematicians, three physicians, three chemists, three physiologists, three men of letters, three painters, three musicians.”

The council of 21! I'm sure they would get along get great and not be corrupt in the slightest. And they would surely be benevolent!

We would find out who these people are by having votes placed at the grave of Isaac Newton Saint-Simon's god of choice) and eventually the consensus concerning the elite council would be chosen. They would not be a government as such, at least not as traditionally understood, but elite planners who would use intelligence to shape the whole society the same way that scientists understand and shape the natural world.

You see, to his way of thinking, this is far more rational than having an hereditary aristocracy in charge. And these men would in turn deploy their rationality in service of society, which would be enormously inspired by it, just as MSNBC is so enthused for Dr. Fauci and his friends. Saint-Simon wrote:



*“Men of genius will then enjoy a reward worthy of them and of you; this reward will place them in the only position which can provide them with the means of giving you all the services they’re capable of; this will become the ambition of the most energetic souls; it will redirect them from things harmful to your tranquility. By this measure, finally, you will give leaders to those who work for the progress of your enlightenment, you will invest these leaders with immense consideration, and you will place a great pecuniary power at their disposition.”*

So there you go: the elite get unlimited power and unlimited money and everyone will aspire to act like these people and this aspiration will improve the whole of society. It reminds me of the pre-modern system in China in which only the best students could enter into the class of the Mandarins, which were the 9 levels of high-ranking officials in Imperial China’s government. Indeed, Saint-Simon invited his followers to “consider yourselves as the governors of the operation of the human mind.”

He imagined “spiritual power in the hands of the savants; temporal power in the hands of the possessors; the power to nominate those called to fulfill the functions of the great heads of humanity, in the hands of everyone.”

Saint-Simon lived a life that oscillated between wealth and poverty, and regretted that condition would befall any man of his genius. So he cobbled together a politics that would protect him and his ilk from the vicissitudes of the market. He wanted a permanent class of bureaucrats that would be completely insulated from the liberal world that had been celebrated only a quarter century earlier by the likes of Adam Smith.

His writings inspired Auguste Comte and Charles Fourier, who agreed that science should assume the mantle of leadership in the social order. The big twist that Engels and Marx gave to this was to christen the leadership as a vanguard that truly understood the plight of the proletariat. They shared in common with Saint-Simon his essential elitism, which of course touched on race.

In one particularly egregious passage, Saint-Simon writes: “teach that the Europeans are the children of Abel; teach that Asia and Africa are inhabited by the posterity of Cain. See

how bloodthirsty these Africans are; note the indolence of the Asiatics; after their first efforts, these impure men have striven no more to approach my divine foresight.”

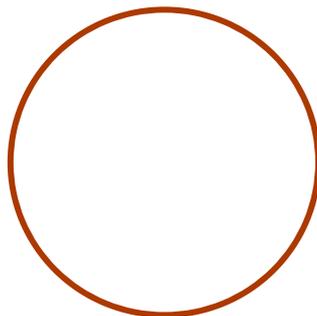
Here was the core of what Hayek called the counterrevolution of science. It was not science but scientism in which freedom for everyone is a hell, geniuses seizing control was the transition, and permanent rule by savants to shape the human mind was heaven on earth.

The best book I’ve seen that captures the essence of this dream is Thomas Harrington’s *[The Treason of the Experts](#)*. They turn out to be not altruists or competent overseers of society but cowardly sadists who rule with career-driven cruelty and refuse to admit when their “science” produces the opposite of their stated goal.

“Scientism” as an ideology is the reverse of science as traditionally understood. It is not supposed to be the codification and entrenchment of an elite class of social managers but rather a humble exploration of all the fascinating realities that make the world around us work. It is not about imposition but curiosity, and not about norms and force but facts and an invitation to look more deeply.

Saint-Simon celebrated science but became the anti-Voltaire. Instead of freeing the human mind, he and his followers imagined themselves to be governors of it. Anthony Fauci is indeed a successor among many, and the strange animal of techno-primitivism is a monster of their creation that now threatens civilization itself. Putting everyone in a N95 respirator to extinguish a disease is only the beginning. The actual goal is to become permanent “governors of the operation of the human mind.”

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