

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge Is Power. Francis Bacon

*In a time of turbulence and change, it is more true that knowledge is power.
John F. Kennedy*

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance. T.S. Eliot

PROLOGUE

The time is the distant future or perhaps not so distant future. The place is anywhere on this planet. An innocuous person's recorded message follows.

"We have just lost our most eminent public figure. He had achieved what many have sought. He had conquered the world; all of it. He was our absolute ruler. He brought an end to war among differing ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious clusters. He accomplished this feat without the use of arms, coercive force, or any other physical measure. Perhaps this was the main reason he was so successful even if he was a despot, although a benevolent one at that, perhaps a savior. Under his control peace was established and maintained. How he came to power remains a mystery, notwithstanding our lengthy efforts to solve it.

We communicate with graphic, pictorial and verbal means. We maintain our records on audio-visual tapes. These were thoroughly scoured for some clues to how our deceased ruler came to power. Further complicating our task was the discovery of parchments covered with markings we could not decipher. Some of our experts on ancient times have suggested that these markings represent a long lost, rather primitive method of authorship and communication. With the forlorn hope that someone could make sense of them we decided to release the artifacts. They follow."

THE WRITINGS ON THE PARCHMENTS

I am the ruler of all and what follows is a brief synopsis of my memoirs.

No one has come close to emulating my achievements, although some such as Napoleon, Hitler, Genghis Khan, Attila, and others have flirted with it. What I find most surprising is the energy, resources and manpower they expended to either no or very little avail. I succeeded where others failed by using the only positive attribute I possessed, namely brainpower. The irony is that my successes far exceeded my wildest expectations.

I come from a very ordinary lineage of country folk. There is nothing there that would have led anyone to foretell what I was to become. It is true that frequently my imagination was on fire with vivid illusions ranging from the erotic to downright power trips. However, I knew them to be only fanciful thoughts, an escape from my rather mundane existence. How wrong I was.

I am aware that there has been and I am sure still is a concerted effort to discover how I became the absolute ruler of the world, especially in light of the fact that no-one knows exactly who I am. It is also true that nobody knows how to make sense of these writings

or even recognize what they are. I stumbled upon such hieroglyphics and with the help of my computer was able to learn how to read and write as the ancients once did. In any case I have deliberately written a brief précis of my story because anyone who finally figures it out deserves to know how I succeeded and hopefully will make good use of this knowledge.

I always had the feeling that my folks did not think highly of my mental ability. Yet I was the only family member to ever be accepted by a university even though my grades were mediocre. During my first two semesters I took a variety of courses attempting to find one that I could focus on. I found that I liked math and music but my abilities with respect to them, not surprisingly, were average. During this period I often felt like a corked empty bottle floating on turbulent water and being jostled between the wave crests. Then all of a sudden I found my niche: Computers.

In our world we were all using computers. We were subjected to them. Yet very few of us had any real understanding of their scope and workings. They were mysterious black boxes that provided us with the information we asked of them and performed various required functions. They had become so embedded in our world that we simply took them for granted and never gave any thought to how they had and have shaped our social, political, cultural, technological and economic fabric. What I found fascinating was their near infinite capacity for information and apparent instantaneous speed. Their fundamental unit of computing was organic in nature. It was this latter point that intrigued me the most and persuaded me to take up the area of organic computing as a profession. Perhaps this occurred because I had just completed a fascinating course in Genetics. I spent the next three years studying the subject and became totally engrossed in it despite my inability to excel. Once again, I was just an average student but as it turned out I had an innovative imagination.

First I reviewed what I currently knew about DNA, organic computers and any other technology of interest. Again, the most important fact discerned was that the basic computing units were DNA molecules. The next essential detail gleaned was that everyone's DNA was registered at birth in a huge database and that this was available to all. Finally I discovered a long forgotten piece of information. Our planet was and is encircled by a large number of satellites that monitor everything of importance anywhere on the surface. They had been there for a long time and since they were solar powered it appeared that they could stay in orbit indefinitely.

All this information led me to ask a series of questions.

1. Is it possible to identify an individual's DNA from space and thus because of the database, identify the individual?
2. Knowing an individual's DNA, would it be possible to quickly discover where that person is at any given time?
3. Could this be done for a multiplicity of people simultaneously?
4. Could an individual's or for that matter a group's activities be monitored including any interaction or communication with others who could also be easily identified?
5. Could a record of a person's or a multiplicity of personages originating from a starting point in time be chronicled?
6. Could the computer be programmed to identify any nefarious activities including conspiratorial ones so that the proper authorities could be informed in time to quash them?

7. *If all the above questions were answered positively what would be the best use of the information collected about individuals and collectivities?*

It took me ten years of in-depth research to come up with affirmative answers to the first six questions. Of course I was not alone in these endeavors. I had carefully assembled a team of very bright innovators. Instinctively, I made sure they worked in isolation, without any knowledge of what the others were doing or indeed, of the fact there were others. Thus, I was the only one who had an overall view of what was transpiring. If the reader is wondering where I got the resources for all this, the answer is simply that a distant relative had left me a lot of money. In any case the irony was, that during all these efforts, I still did not know or even investigate how I was going to use the results or even if they could be used. I had initially undertaken this project as a lark, as a bow in the direction of my bizarre fantasies.

Without going into the technological aspects, the undertaking turned out to be totally successful. However, I had not gotten around to answering my seventh question. I pondered over it for about a year spending many nights without sleep considering the pros and cons and the ethical implications of using my newly discovered potential. I consulted anonymously with academics in philosophy, psychology, political science, economics, as well as theologians, journalists, respected members of the bar and anyone else I thought might be helpful. I found the diversity of responses bewildering, leading me to conclude that the decision must be mine and mine alone.

I chose to start with a few test cases. There were some in high places that I did not trust. It did not take me long to discern that my suspicions about them were correct. Their malfeasance had to be stopped. Unfortunately, I discovered their links with other powerful officials including a disproportionate number ranking high in law enforcement and the judiciary. I realized that a meaningful result would require a clean sweep. It turned out to be rather easy. I was able to quickly gather very damaging information, which I used to oblige them to resign from their positions, return most of the funds they had inappropriately appropriated and disappear.

Of course they represented the tip of the iceberg. The corrupt members of the police and the judiciary not only had links with the criminal element but also with many at the political and bureaucratic levels, who in turn were being bribed by iniquitous executives of the industrial-corporate-financial etc. institutions. Further investigation revealed that this corruption permeated all segments of our society, indeed our world since it had become international in scope.

In a relatively short time I identified all those unscrupulous and nefarious people individually and in clusters. I also identified honest officials whom I provided with the means to eliminate these mendacious characters. I was able to endow the citizenry of our planet with governance that was totally honest and fair, complemented by a very effective criminal-justice system. One straw in the ointment was that I had to retain my position of despot and keep monitoring the world's inhabitants to ensure that humanity did not fall into its old evil ways.

Another troublesome predicament that I had not foreseen and never did resolve was the emergence of groups of superstitious fanatics imbuing me with deistic attributes. I suspect that my anonymity was a major factor. Indeed some of them actually came to believe that I was the Almighty One. Each of them named me differently and created

myths purporting to explain where I came from and why. They dogmatically asserted that I had come to rid the world of sinners. However their definition of ethics and morality was more wide ranging than any such ideas I had ever had. In numerous instances they advocated punishments that would radically diminish personal freedoms. This I found intolerable and was usually able to prevent these measures.

I had hoped that some form of democracy would emerge but such was not the case. I was kept constantly busy making certain that the levels of honesty and fairness were maintained and that fanatics of any stripe would not gain ascendancy. This duty I discharged until old age with its corresponding infirmities, my growing cynicism about the human condition and just plain boredom caused me to rethink what I had been doing. Actually I had come down with an incurable disease and I had very little time left. Then one day I had a sudden revelation. I was reminded of Lord Acton's famous quote. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I realized that as I aged and became filled with ennui and pessimism, I had become guilty of imposing my moral and ethical views on others. I was the reason that democracy had not surfaced. I had become tainted by all the power I had been wielding. I immediately decided to quit. Again, I was reminded of a famous quote from ancient times spoken by Mme. de Pompadour to Louis XV after France and Austria had suffered certain military defeats: "Après nous le deluge." I could not help wondering what would come after I left the scene. I had never taken the time to select someone to replace me, perhaps because I felt that humanity would get what it deserved. I will not live long enough to observe humanity's fate or the ultimate fruit of my endeavors.

POSTSCRIPT

As the despot had imagined, the world reverted quickly to its old ways until a scholar working totally alone managed to successfully decipher the message on the parchment. He promptly became Despot 2. Then came Despot 3 followed by Despot 4. Currently we are in the reign of Despot 20. There does not appear to be an end to the rule by Despots. As long as they have total control over the knowledge they possess they will remain in power. Of course, the superstitious fanatics claim that all the despots are one and continue to worship him or them in their various fashions.

Those of us who know the truth choose not reveal it. We believe that if it were widely disseminated most societies would succumb once more to crime, dishonesty, vicious exploitations and chaos. We do not use the term, "despot". It connotes someone who is totally self-serving. We prefer "Benevolent Ruler". We have selected the last ten benevolent rulers. We are an elite few who have sole veritable knowledge of the whole story. Actually, we are an Advisory Board, a cabinet modeled after those of ancient times. We are the real rulers. The Benevolent Ruler is a useful fiction. Of course, our line of succession is biologic. We have had our DNA records expunged from the public archives to ensure that any peccadillo we enjoy cannot be used against us.

Democracy may be nothing more than wishful thinking, a hopeless ideal unless humanity undergoes a major transformation to a 'Super-Humanity' as a 19th century German philosopher once espoused.

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