

Hoom, Hoom!

Let Us Not Be Hasty

Robert DiNapoli

EndNote and End Times: the death-cult of modern management

All right, my title combines a tag-line from Tolkien's Treebeard the Ent with a poor eschatological pun,¹ but then we all have those days when we find ourselves muttering 'I have lived too long' or 'It's not the end of the world, but you can see it from here'. Treebeard gives voice to Tolkien's misgivings about the haste and impatience that he saw driving modern industrial culture's more destructive lurches, of which EndNote, to my mind, is a small instance. Let me explain. EndNote is a citation and documentation program used widely in the academic world, and for good reason. With EndNote, a researcher needs only once to enter the bibliographical details of any text she wishes to cite; thereafter she can quote, paraphrase or cite it as often as she likes, and each time EndNote will magic up an appropriately formatted footnote, endnote or in-text citation automatically. Academics of a certain age will remember the drudgery of scribbling passages and comments onto stacks of note cards, transcribing these into our typescripts and keeping track of all the fiddly details of whatever citation format they were using, whose arcana could out-fuddle those of hard-ball kabbalistic commentary. The oldest among us will still shudder at the memory of doing all this on typewriters, with something of Dickens' queasy recall of his bottle-blackening days in the workhouse. If you composed your article on the metaphysics of fork-imagery in Dryden's 'Absolom and Achitophel' using MLA citation format, but you later wanted to submit it to a journal that insisted on Harvard format, there was nothing for it but to retype the whole thing. EndNote can do the job for you with a couple of keystrokes; even better, it can convert your notes from just about any known citation format to any other just as easily.

Thus EndNote came to the scholar's rescue like a brandy-casked St Bernard licking his nose where it protruded from under the avalanche of scholarly *apparatus criticus* that had buried him. EndNote saved his labor as dramatically as the advent of the washing machine freed householders from the tyranny of the copper kettle and the mangle or the word processor freed us all from carbon paper, Corrasable Bond and white-out. All good then, no? Score one for scholars struggling to churn out prose in job lots to meet hectic schedules set by hiring and promotion-review criteria and by the 'fascist oiks in suits'.² Win-win, you would think: academics can write and publish more efficiently, and the administrariat gets those vital 'esteem-' and 'key-performance indicators' by the bucketload. All smiles, no tears? Well, maybe.

1 Yeesh. I only just now have noticed the even cheesier Ent/end assonance. Though it pleases me to imagine Ent notes that roll on at far greater length than whatever bit of primary text they elucidate. As a few of mine do.

2 As one of my sharper-tongued colleagues long ago expressed her regard for the apparatchiks in various deans' offices.

A number of essays I've been writing recently have required some old-fashioned research for which I've been reading texts and gathering quotations for illustration and comment. Without thinking about it I reached for tools of which I haven't made use since researching my PhD in the late 1980s or compiling data for my one academic book in the early 1990s. With a pen and a stack of index cards I sat transcribing bits of prose from books by Charles Dickens, Owen Barfield and others, and soon I noticed how, in the slow pace of the exercise, I began to take more deliberate pleasure in the sounds of their words and the rhythms of their thoughts than a quick read or scan would have allowed. That pleasure in turn coloured my response to their images and ideas. Whatever insights I have achieved into those texts, I doubt I could have reached them by racing through, whether in book or hard copy or in files downloaded from a website. It's a little like how the recitation of poetry can illuminate aspects of its structure and thought that no amount of silent reading can discover. The words have more time to find the reader/transcriber, in a more physical fashion, and we meet them more like a fellow hiker on a trail, where our hastier modes of reading, like riding in a car at speed, cannot allow much social interaction. To understand more of a text than just its information content requires an acquaintance, a sympathy beyond the reach of a single hurried read. Too often, however, the common sort of academic literary analyses I have read recently appear to have taken shape off just such a glancing encounter with the texts they discuss. When I happen to know the texts in question well, I experience a kind of cognitive dissonance, as though a stranger has rearranged my bookshelves. It's like listening to someone briskly characterise someone else with whom you've had a long and close friendship. You recognise the broad strokes, but everything that's missing distracts and, perhaps, grieves you.

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But the pace of publication demanded of today's aspiring academics compels too many to barge rudely through the objects of their study with just that sort of haste. Voguish critical-theory preoccupations, which have been dominating academic literary speculation for half a century now, have offered one new-paradigm party-hat after another, the donning of which, for some, makes academic journal articles treacherously easy to roll out by the yard. While I cannot doubt the utility of EndNote, neither can I avoid the suspicion that one of its *raison d'être* is the way it slots so comfortably into this culture of haste. The manager's itch to make everything more efficient, to gauge every activity's worth against the ticking measure of a clock, militates against spending the time it takes to achieve any slow, reflective acquaintance with a piece of literature—or just about anything else.³

A second worm nestles in the core of the EndNote apple as well. The labour savings it afforded when it first arrived on the scene have since been gobbled up by ever more demanding professional-advancement regimes imposed by university administrators, a growing majority of whom are not academics but adepts at the dark arts of modern management. Just as writing and publishing get a tiny bit easier, the bosses decree that you have to do a whole lot more for the same promotion-worthy brownie points. Where once you needed to publish an article a year to be acknowledged as an active academic, now it's more like ten, with a book well under way (and, preferably, already under contract) as well. In effect, it has proven a less-than-zero-sum game, in which the bottom-feeding academic trying to get on cannot win. Intellectual productivity, which used to meander through scenes of Socrates and his mates shooting the breeze in the agora, has hit the factory floor with a wallop and now must run some Chaplinesque race against both the clock and the gnashing gears of a mechanised delivery schedule.

3 And it's not just the haste with which they've been composed but also the crazily pumped-up numbers of citations that almost every one of these quick studies swarms with. I have copy-edited recent doctoral dissertations in the social sciences that contained what struck me as obsessive-compulsive or paranoid quantities of so-called literature review and laborious layings-out of methodologies (also swaddled in acres of cited and/or quoted research). One contained no fewer than four such chapters to only one of substantial analysis of the candidate's actual research data. The amount of redundant and pointless text swilling about in this arrangement (much of it abysmally written and of real use to no one) is at best disheartening and at worst terrifying. In what looks increasingly like some sort of mad black market in 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' citation exchanges, it clearly exists mostly to service the need of institutions to heap up concrete 'measures' of viability and (our old friend) 'esteem'. It doesn't matter if those ten articles you published last year are ace or crap. If they turn up frequently enough in sundry citation indexes, they'll serve to make your future that little bit rosier.



Our obsession with efficiency can take us some odd places. This byword of our industrial and post-industrial cultures now moves people, goods, moneys and ideas around the developed world on a scale unthinkable only one generation ago. We take for granted modes of communication—the internet and mobile telephony and the vast expanse of digital culture they undergird—that in my childhood were the stuff of science fiction. Even the humble, outdated CD would then have seemed outrageously futuristic. Now it looks as retro as those dirigiblesque spacecraft from the original *Buck Rogers* matinee serials, which sounded like dodgy vibrators and shed falling Fourth of July showers of sparks from their backsides.

We interpret trade-balance and GDP figures, with a nod to unemployment statistics around election times, as the most telling signs of our weal or woe. Such numbers always measure change, rises and falls underwritten by the flow of time. More broadly, we fret over what nasty surprises that flow may bring us: economic downturns, disease, old age, death. Our itch to be forever getting more done quicker sinks its tap-root into these anxieties. The medieval European peasant understood time in its larger and less hurried cycles: days, phases of the moon, seasons.⁴ Mortality was a common fate: everyone had enough time to die. It is only since the invention of mechanical timepieces that our time sense has come to resemble the ticking of a (what else?) time bomb rather than the flowing of a glacier. Note how, in certain of our figures of speech, glaciers come off as frustrating slowpokes: should a movie, a conversation or peak- or rush-hour traffic (check out the temporal resonances in those last two phrases) make its way at a 'glacial' pace, then we all wind up tapping our feet and stealing frequent glances at our watches. Perhaps the advent of apocalyptic religious sensibilities in the later Judaism of the Maccabean era and its subsequent Christian and Islamic refractions set the whole trend in motion, not so much theologically as in our instinctive habits of thought: out of those traditions Western culture's notions of divinity took in a God with an agenda.⁵ In at least some of our sturdy anthropomorphisms, God has come to resemble the harassed CEO of a shambolic corporation in need of serious rationalisation. Directives get issued. Dire consequences are foreseen if nothing is done. Doing nothing is *not* an option: the end is nigh. Brahma dreaming the world and us in it as he snatches a kip on the couch of eternity? Hoo, boy! You'll have a tough time selling *that* one to head office. The quietist contemplative tendency in Western religion has never entirely vanished, but it remains the withdrawn minority option of, say, sandaled Franciscans hymning sun and moon over cups of herbal tea while the rest of us just get on with things. Definitely more Martha than Mary are we.⁶

In this there lurks an astounding irony, rarely if ever noted, that colours Western modernity's unhappy relations with much of the Islamic world, both in the years since the attack on the World Trade Center and in the whole colonial history of the Islamic Near East. It is of course the still-stinging memory of that history that fuels the rage of Islam's so-called 'fundamentalists'. The more obvious impositions and injustices of that history have involved asymmetrical power relations in which a crude advantage in firepower and other efficiencies of dealing death propped up the colonial powers' assumption of their superior right to govern those

4 The Old English word *monað* (our 'month') is simply an abstract noun derived from *mona* ('moon'), in the same way that 'length' is derived from 'long'.

5 Literally, in its Latin derivation, a 'to-do list'. Do we make to-do lists when we're feeling chilled and unrushed?

6 During the fourteenth-century siege of Béziers, one of the uglier episodes of the Albigensian Crusade against Cathar heretics in the south of France, the commander of the orthodox forces, Simon de Montfort, when told the town held many orthodox believers among its interdicted heretics, infamously replied, 'Kill them all. God will sort them out.' A modern slash-and-burn corporate rationaliser can only gape in awe at such an instance of (literally) ruthless efficiency. Can you say 'take no prisoners'? What's *that* phrase about, in its literal origins, other than the need of an army not to be slowed by excess baggage? The too-familiar proverb 'haste makes waste' takes on new and darker resonances in such contexts.

they colonised.⁷ They imposed on the traditional cultures they colonised various forms of clock-bound, bureaucratised modes of management that sought to exploit their subjects' resources as efficiently as possible. Get the most out in the least time. From the coast of Virginia to the Caribbean, from Khartoum to Botany Bay, this has been the dominant colonial theme. The sufferings imposed on the locals in the process have been amply recorded, and it's not my purpose to catalogue them here. Once in a while, in a figure such as Joseph Conrad's Mr Kurtz, the psychopathological blow-back of ruthless colonial efficiencies upon their practitioners gets a literary airing.⁸

If, however, you were to read any of the late Osama bin Laden's published declarations, in which he articulates his protest against the colonial presence of the West (to which he repeatedly refers as 'the Crusader kingdoms' or 'the Franks,' as though he were addressing an audience in the age of Saladin) in his native Saudi Arabia and his dissent from Western values, you'd be hearing a voice from an authentic Western tradition: the apocalyptic denunciation and defiance of domineering earthly powers.⁹ With surprisingly slight difference in content, it is the same voice that thunders regularly from the pulpits of extreme American Pentecostal churches and videos recorded by survivalist libertarians in their Idaho redoubts. *Allahu Akbar!* and 'Don't Tread on Me!' reflect contrasting religious and intellectual traditions but voice an identically passionate conviction. Puffed up with their falsely arrogated privilege and authority, the powers against which such dissent sets itself have commonly imposed a more structured and—in their eyes, of course—a more civilised administrative regime upon a messy and (need I say?) less efficient native scene. In the process the colonisers have run roughshod over beliefs, sensibilities and lower-tech economies that simply make no sense in the context of their imported values and agendas. They depress or outrage those they commonly claim to be 'civilising'. Thus the Maccabees decried the Hellenising Greek occupiers of Palestine in a rhetoric that anticipates that of Hamas and bin Laden. Thus did the early Christian martyrs bear witness against their Roman persecutors. Mohammad himself spoke his truth to the powers of the dominant Jewish and Christian communities of his place and time, who he believed had largely betrayed their own visions of God's transcendent otherness in favour of mercantile grubbing after earthly trash.

Such militant dissenters all grow tetchy with the stress of time, but they are not officious managers. Their fixation is not with the delivery of change to a particular schedule but with an intolerable circumstance they simply want overturned.

7 In another noteworthy and little-acknowledged irony, the RAF in 1923 dropped poison-gas ordinance from heavy bombers onto Iraqi insurgents. Sound familiar? The crude efficiencies of modern arms are, thanks to a ruthlessly efficient international regime of trade, available to all. Cue the National Rifle Association...

8 Note that Kurtz goes mad in his creative pursuit of efficiency in filling the production quotas of his colonial masters.

9 I say nothing here about the relative virtues or demerits of Western rationalist materialism and bin Laden's militant Wahhabi convictions. My sole concern is to point out militant Islam's place in a long Western tradition of apocalyptic dissent that has been largely overlooked in the mostly hysterical media responses to bin Laden's various coups de théâtre that so preoccupy Western thought on the question. I can also point out incidentally, to those of us of an age to have been caught up in the desert world of Arrakis in Frank Herbert's classic science-fiction novel *Dune*, that the contentions between Herbert's desert nomad Fremmen and their resource-ravenous outworld colonisers are essentially a sci-fi restaging of the historical drama scripted by the West's hunger for Near Eastern oil reserves. In its eco-conscious admiration for traditional Fremmen culture's adaptation to its marginal environment, *Dune* can be read as a kind of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom in Space*.

Yesterday, if possible. Whatever the rights or wrongs of their respective causes, their engagement is messily emotive, their impatience all too human. Many them can't organise a piss-up in a brewery. They don't seek to use time prudently but rather wish it simply to go away. 'How long, oh Lord?' is their anguished cry, a rhetorical question that denies any necessity of measure and expresses a desire literally incommensurable with the unsatisfactory reality it recoils from. This is where the irony I alluded to some paragraphs ago really kicks in. That revolution in consciousness that prompts dissent involves a suddenly heightened awareness of a reality or a paradigm wider and more significant than the default values of your inherited culture. Dissenting narratives almost always involve a moment of conversion, a 'turning around' that profoundly revalues everything in sight.¹⁰ In such moments of revelation, the individual so struck becomes supremely and superbly aware of herself as an individual, over and against her familiar world, out of which the burden of her revelation has forced her to step.

It could in fact be argued that such 'aha' moments of contrary revelation, when an individual wakes up to an awareness, perhaps shared with no one else, that this or that aspect of an otherwise familiar world is in fact not at all what before it had so inevitably seemed, may lie behind the West's sense of the individual self as a significant agent, on its own, of thought and action. From the first *nevi'im* of Jewish prophetic tradition to Karl Marx, from Socrates to Descartes to Blake to Nietzsche, we can trace the ever-more-hefty crystal of the self-aware ego precipitating out of the solution that had held it in suspension and then turning around to level some pretty harsh critiques at that very

10 English Dissenters were Christian sects, largely Puritan, that in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries dissented from the government of the established Church of England: its episcopal administration and its subjection to the earthly authority of the Crown. They felt the pure, aboriginal (and therefore more authentic) voice of Jesus recorded in the gospels had been colonized and suppressed by the meddling, officious and vaingloriously self-serving institutions of the medieval church. Modern Christian fundamentalists are the direct heirs of this tradition. But so is every barmy New Age fringe movement. So was William Blake. All of these instances share with Mohammad a burning desire to show the efficiency-focused administrators—the powers and principalities, if you like—of this world how they've got it all wrong.

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solution. Everything we now see as ‘the world’ out there beyond our noses, all the physical stuff, all the conventions and values of the societies into which we are born, hold us and hand us ready-made identities in which, should we so choose, we can virtually sleepwalk from cradle to grave without a second thought. Once, perhaps, long ago, most of us did exactly that, and the prophetic clarion calls were, very precisely, wake-up calls. They summoned their audiences to wake up to how unjust, evil or simply odd their given scenes were. To those audiences they were often unwelcome, but they did not and have not stopped. Today most of us regard ourselves as autonomous rational beings—sometimes in the teeth of occasional evidence to the contrary—thinking thoughts we perceive as having originated in our own heads, reviewing them, comparing and assessing them. The dawn of the so-called ‘Age of Reason’ in the eighteenth century would have felt to its participants like waking up from a febrile dream whose irrational, religiose absolutisms had achieved little beyond stoking the brutalities of the wars of religion that had blighted the seventeenth century. Yet the great reasoned ‘no’ spoken by Descartes, Rousseau and their heirs against merely falling back upon the reassuring boundaries and props of traditional piety carries the authentic prophetic notes sounded earlier by Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. *Ecrasez l’infame!* When Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens takes the part of reason against what he sees as the toxic unreason of traditional religious belief, he is actually sounding the authentic prophetic note of old.



There are two well-known gospel episodes that, to my ear, sound a telling note in the face of our modern obsessions with efficiency. The first is Jesus’ miraculous bit of high-volume catering that saw a multitude fed with preposterously inadequate supplies. The crowds had gone out of the town into the open spaces to listen to him speak, i.e. beyond all those interlocking infrastructures of civic societies and markets that, on any normal day, manage to feed and to service the other needs of whole populations of well-administered cities. This remarkably oft-told tale originates in an Old Testament episode (2Kings 4:42-44), in which the prophet Elijah’s successor Elisha feeds his company of a hundred followers with an impossibly small number of fish and loaves. The gospels contain no fewer than six tellings of a similar marvel: Matthew and Mark contain two variant versions each,¹¹ Luke and John one apiece.¹² Even Jesus’ resurrection gets narrated only once in each of

the four gospels, so it looks as though this oddly shy miracle of the fish and loaves somehow caught the attention of the early church with peculiar intensity. I’ve always regarded it as a shy miracle, in that it always keeps its literally miraculous component, the so-called ‘multiplication’ of the fish and loaves, wholly out of sight. A modern media miracle mongerer,¹³ of your common publicity-hound sort, would have worked the PR angle hard, perhaps by making loaves and fish rain from the sky or get dished up by legions of miraculously sudden French waiters who appear from nowhere, or some other equally vulgar display. A modern image consultant would regard Jesus’ performance here as a golden opportunity gone begging.

In the context of my present discussion, however, rather different aspects of this episode stand out. Notice how its set-up involves a *logistical* crisis: too many people too far away from the provisions they need. A case of poor planning, no? Not efficient at all. And yet Jesus responds not with a logistical solution (i.e. some worked-out, calculable, pragmatic plan) but with an immediate redress of the people’s want. Not counted out but passed around, those few fish and loaves feed everyone, and the only visible sign that a miracle has occurred is the *leftovers*, which bulk impossibly larger than the scanty fare they began with. But these are surplus to requirements; they don’t *count*: the miracle cannot be measured or calculated, only pointed to. To call this episode the ‘multiplication’ of the loaves and fish mistakes it. There is no ‘multiplication’. The apparent arithmetical fact of a handful of loaves and fishes ‘multiplying’ to twelve baskets of scraps after miraculously feeding a multitude really signifies nothing of itself. There might have been one basket of leftovers, or a hundred, or none—we would still find ourselves standing in the presence of a life-giving wonder. Numbers¹⁴ constitute the ineluctable infrastructure of our sense of measured time (all those seconds need a powerful lot of counting) and, by extension, our only sure way of gauging efficiency (how many x’s can we produce or do in y hours?). But they ultimately betray us into the gears of clock time that grind us down to our deaths. Is our efficiency fixation a death wish, then? In some ways, yes. Certainly, if we choose to tie down our most vital energies and pursuits to the warp of time’s loom (a frequent image in Blake’s poetry): parcelling them out thus to some abstract measure, we ultimately enervate and kill them. The miracle of the loaves and fishes stands resolutely outside and against the aims-and-outcomes mentalities to which our time-bound perceptions are mortally prone: they hold out the promise of an abundance that cannot be reached by adding thing to thing. Idiot iteration can only pile up more of the same. Death accumulates and counts its gains, like the multiplying headstones in a graveyard. Life simply abounds, without giving a fig (or a fish) for how much or how many it can generate of anything.

This same sensibility finds a briefer but to my mind profounder expression in the tale told in each gospel¹⁵ of Jesus’ extraordinary flogging and dismissal of the money-changers and dove-sellers from the precincts of the temple in Jerusalem. These traders offered financial services and other amenities to common folk visiting the temple to make their occasional humble offerings to God—a dove would have been the poor man’s sacrifice, the least expensive sacrificial animal still acceptable to the priestly guardians of temple ritual. The money-changers would

13 With apologies for accidental (trust me) but aggravatingly aggressive alliteration.

14 We must keep in mind here that numbers lie behind the Pythagorean vision of the whole world being generated and sustained through their harmony. This vision in turn informs Plato’s philosophy and, subsequently, the entire Western intellectual tradition to which it gave rise. In another direction, to count objects is one of the first faculties mastered by children learning to know themselves as autonomous thinkers over and against a world of *things* out there. The ticking of the clock and the telling (i.e. ‘counting’) of time and of things *tell* us, count us out in finite units so we can establish a confident sense of how we stand in a world of objects and dimensions. Yet even as that sense *integrates* us in space and time, it *disintegrates* the seamless garments of love and imagination out of which we draw our various intimations of purpose and delight that, for most of us, make the whole game worth pursuing in the first place.

11 Matthew 14:13-21, 15: 32-36 and Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10.

12 Luke 9:12-17, John 6:1-35.

15 It is told in Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:47-48 and John 2:13-22.

likely have converted foreign coin to acceptable local currency and perhaps broke travellers' larger-denomination coin into smaller units, allowing them to offer no more than was ritually prescribed. A combination of ATM and bureau de change. Either way, they made their living through the medium of measured exchange: so much money for one dove, this many denarii for this many drachmae. The details don't matter as much as the basic operation of exchanged values, which assumes known quantities on both sides of the equation: so much of this equals so much of that. The services thus provided seem to have met with no objection from the priests of the temple. They no doubt facilitated a smooth and efficient flow of worshippers through the temple's outer precincts to fulfil their ritual obligations at set seasons of the liturgical year.

Why would such an apparently harmless, practical and even helpful enterprise throw Jesus into such a towering *physical* rage, such as we never see him unleash anywhere else in any of the gospels? His denunciations of the hypocrisies of the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees rise to an occasionally shrill pitch, especially in John's gospel, but nowhere else does Jesus' anger prompt him to violent direct action. Knotting a cord in John's account he not only upsets the traders' tables but whips them off the premises. Something in their presence has outraged him, or at least those telling this story in the gospels, deeply indeed. Here we need to think about the significance of the temple and its basic architecture. Without delving into schematic detail, the most sacral element of its structure was its inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, which all its other layers of walls, chambers and porches surrounded and held apart from common access or view. The first temple of Solomon replicated in stone the wooden beams and curtains of the portable temple, or tabernacle, which the Israelites had, at God's instruction, assembled and carried, like God's own dedicated campsite, around and across the Negev Desert in their forty years of wandering after their release from bondage in Egypt. Atop the Ark of the Covenant, at the hidden heart of this mobile desert temple, tradition held that the Shekinah,¹⁶ a visible manifestation of God's presence among his chosen people, hovered and shone like a living flame. Although it could not embody God's fully transcendent *otherness*, the Shekinah was regarded as a living sign of God's immanent presence, as holy as that presence itself. Hence it was hedged about with taboos that governed who might approach it at what seasons and times. Access was generally limited to members of a professional priesthood who'd been trained in the exacting rituals that they themselves were obliged to perform in entering into and exiting the divine presence. The Shekinah was physically sheltered from the curiosity and uncomprehending gaping of the uninitiated, whose consciousness was dominated by day-to-day, temporally bound earthly cares.

Both the original temple of Solomon and the second temple of Jesus' time preserved in their design the desert tabernacle's division between its within and without, demarcating a sacred interior that could not be profaned by exposure to common perceptions and

interest. The Shekinah was thought to have migrated to the inner sanctum of Solomon's temple after its construction was completed, and the book of Ezekiel records its wondrous departure on the eve of the Babylonian destruction of that temple, never again to be seen on earth. The single theological point embedded in all this detail is the ancient Jewish insistence on God's singular, transcendent otherness. His unbounded being and power place him infinitely beyond the grasp of ordinary human cognition, rooted as it is in the fixed reference points of space and time. To suggest anything else would have risked lapsing into the blasphemously anthropomorphic or zoomorphic idolatry of Israel's pagan neighbours. The temples' small and secluded interiors, with or without the Shekinah's not-of-this-world effulgence, enclosed infinity.¹⁷ Their insides were incalculably larger than their outer walls—like some quantum physicist's black-hole singularity, there could be no natural communication across that threshold, except through the convoluted and defensive rituals of priestly observance.

In this context, the money-changers and dove-sellers so roughly dismissed by Jesus might have appeared to him as a blasphemous mockery of the temple's proper priesthood. Presiding at the grubby altars of their trade, they served as mediators of a kind. But mediators between what and what? Between one currency and another, or between currency and birds, between two different but analogously enumerable, countable embodiments of value. The two worlds such anti-priests stood between could both be captured in a mathematical ratio. But in the worship of the temple, the priest's proper place was to stand between wholly *incommensurable* realities: between the finite dimensions of earth and temple and the dimensionless infinities of deity, neither of which could be translated into the other. To suggest there could be a kind of exchange rate between them would constitute a blasphemous horror, to which a pained and outraged 'NO!' would have been the only appropriate response. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Jesus, as he came to be understood by the early Christian communities that eventually composed the gospels, was a living incarnation of these infinities in an actual human body. The Shekinah with legs, as it were (an equally blasphemous notion to Jewish sensibilities, of course, which is why Christianity was eventually obliged, from the vantage of normative rabbinical authority, to go its own cheerfully heretical way). The presence of those grubby priests of finance in the temple offered an intolerable affront to the temple's whole purpose and history, which

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16 The Hebrew word is derived from a verb meaning 'to dwell' or 'to remain'.

17 Blake's 'to see infinity in a grain of sand' is a humanised romantic reflex of this sensibility.



centred on God's *incommensurable* reality. Equally, they offered a personal affront to him whose person alone could participate directly in both that reality and the human reality of earthly existence.

Each of these gospel episodes insists in its own way that our most significant and profound labours and aspirations on earth, in order to be profound and significant, must be directed toward more than simply shifting stuff from here to there in space and time. Such significant labour, at its highest pitch, cannot be measured, metered, or assessed by committee or efficiency consultant. Labour and time saving are no bad things in themselves: why work like a dumb brute if you can do it smarter? But to allow such material considerations to encroach on our notions of our *greatest* good is to corrupt and, ultimately, abandon and lose any such notions altogether, and to reduce ourselves back to the condition of a dumb brute, however ergonomically we apply our muscle.



I realise I have strayed far from poor old EndNote by this point, but I have wandered with a purpose. Since coping, over the past two years and more, with the winding down of my modest and Entishly slow academic career, I am working hard to locate the root of the anxiety any manifestations of managerial briskness can still trigger in me. Especially as so many different species of hyper-managed efficiencies have so queered the pitch for anyone seeking to negotiate a full-time career as a university academic. You can only conduct such a negotiation by compliantly responding to the demands of managers whose operational values are, as far as I can see, impatient with and hostile to the kinds of slow, measured regard for literary texts that is the only way their deep virtues can even begin to be fathomed. EndNote is only the tiniest tip of a mammoth iceberg—a labour-saving device wholly innocent in itself that nevertheless stokes the would-be professor's paranoid anxiety that he will never get enough published to meet his managers' punishing expectations.

In our brave new cyber-world, awash in Noachic floods of pointless academic publishing that exists only to be cited by other pointless academic publishing that will return the (still pointless) favour, this is a brittle mockery of any sane notion of efficiency. It can be called 'efficient' in only the most brutally reductive terms of how much product over how little time, and content be damned. To end on an appropriately literary note, consider how John Milton sets up Eve for her inevitable fall in his *Paradise Lost*. In Book Four, the guardian angels posted by God around Eden discover Satan, who'd managed to sneak in, squatting in the form of a toad at Eve's ear,

Assaying by his devilish art to reach
The organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams,
Or if, inspiring venoms, he might taint
805 Th'animal spirits that from pure blood arise
Like gentle breaths from rivers pure, then raise
At least distempered, discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits engend'ring pride.
(IV. 801-809)¹⁸

At this dramatic juncture the angels give Satan the bum's rush to the gate, but Milton never says whether his whispering has had any specific effect on Eve. It reads to me, though, like a prophetic catalogue of the distempered modern obsession with efficiency I have been seeking to trace throughout this essay. 'Vain aims'! It's all I can do not to add, 'Don't forget vain outcomes, too!' And, lo and behold, Eve wakes on the big day in an unaccountably restless bustle of aims-and-outcomes-style management consultancy. She expresses an efficiency consultant's dismay that the luxuriant growths of their garden are threatening to outpace their efforts to prune them back, and she proposes a bold new management initiative: 'Let us divide our labors' (IX. 214). On the day, as Adam is painfully aware, on which they might have to face some unpredictable attempt on their happiness by a powerful foe bent on their destruction,¹⁹ Eve suddenly suggests they should split up, in order to work, well, more efficiently:

220 For while so near each other thus all day
Our task we choose, what wonder if so near
Looks intervene and smiles, or object new
Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
Our day's work brought to little, though begun
225 Early, and th'hour of supper comes unearned.

The suicidal silliness of Eve's proposal here takes really considerable appreciating. We must recall that Adam and Eve at this juncture (though, sadly, not for much longer) are immortal, with a literally endless expanse of time stretching out before them, and no prospect of their powers diminishing in any way whatsoever. How can you even begin to gauge 'efficiency' in a situation where time is no object at all? And what does she see as the impediment to their achievement of better outcomes? The loving intercourse they share while labouring as partners in a joint endeavour, which she now regards as a distraction from their proper toil. Eve insinuates the measure of an as-yet-unknown clock time as evidence that living human relationship is a drag on productivity. The snake in the garden has Eve thinking like Henry Ford. And this before the factory floor or the dark mill was even a gleam in Satan's eye. The next thing you know she'll be proposing an open-plan office for two, so each of them can act as the other's supervisor. This bit of wayward managerialism on Eve's part will have, of course, fatal consequences. In fact it's one of Milton's grand cheats, by which he sneaks an element of *fallen* human consciousness into his unfallen Eve to grease the chute of her and Adam's eventual fall. And fallen consciousness, as Milton would understand the term 'fallen', it unmistakably is. Just as its arbitrary and meddlesome busyboding—which denigrates the 'merely' human in favour of some abstract standard of bloody-minded time management—stands unmistakably forth to us moderns, who have by now endured centuries of this sort of borderline-psychotic managerial bullying ever since the industrial revolution foisted its culture upon us.

By all means let harassed academics enjoy and profit from what relief they can find in the small blessings afforded them by widgets like EndNote. But such small-scale labour savings can never really conceal the fact that whatever virtue they possess is wretchedly provisional: as with triage, tourniquets and transfusions at the site of a ghastly smash-up, the only people glad for such resorts would have to be in a desperate plight. The children of Israel might have welcomed a better brick-making gizmo, but Pharaoh would still want his bricks made without straw, in even greater quantities, and in the modern university his put-upon slaves have no Moses in sight. **□**

18 John Leonard (ed.), *Paradise Lost*, London, Penguin, 2000.

19 In the intervening books, God sends the angel Raphael to tell Adam the story of the angelic rebellion and warn him of Satan's arrival in Eden.