TRUMPIAN MOTION

Posts in this series; some of the terms I use are described more fully in these posts.
Trumpian Motion
Negative Responses to Trumpian Motion
Economic Elites Drive Trumpian Motion
Beneficiaries of Trumpian Motion
Notes on Trumpian Motion Series

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The press has taken to bemoaning the speed of the news cycle, as in this Washington Post story. Harpers Magazine sends a weekly email listing some of the previous week's craziness before it falls down the memory hole. The constant uproar in our media environment over every little thing reminds me of Brownian Motion. This is from the Wikipedia entry:

> Brownian motion … is the random motion of particles suspended in a fluid (a liquid or a gas) resulting from their collision with the fast-moving molecules in the fluid. Fn. omitted.

Think of a grain of pollen in a drop of water on a microscope slide. When you look through the lenses, you can see it move around randomly as the molecules of water bang into it; at least that's what Einstein said. If there is an external force, the particle moves gradually in accordance with that force. Imagine that the particle is iron and that there is a magnet near one end of the drop of water.

The analogy I see is that we swim in a pool of media water, being bounced around randomly by whatever we click on or see in our news feed, crashing from one stupid to another outrage. The water particles aren't organized either. Each one acts under forces it can't completely understand, and often with no purpose other than to slam into us pollens. Then there are the people aggresssively trying to influence us. Think of them as the magnets. The forces are all

unseen and to the pollen undetectable. The clamor is deafening. Thought is inconceivable. Understanding is impossible.

That's part of the reason I've been reading and writing here about old books by French and German writers. They were trained in a different time, under different scholarly imperatives. Unlike so many of us, they weren't trained to get a job; their training was specifically directed at creating at least a few people to study society as objectively as possible. They were all raised in intellectual traditions, including Marxism, but they proved capable of seeing the problems of their own training as clearly as any other problem, and of advancing human understanding. And since Arendt and the members of the Frankfurt School were directly affected by the rise of totalitarianism, they too faced horrifying societal conditions. Foucault and Bourdieu came later but were raised in a similar tradition, in which the intellectual life was valued, and the effort to understand society and history were valued.

I personally feel battered by the media environment. I don't watch cable news or tv news at all, but even the Twitter is so confounding that some days it's hard to concentrate on my reading. So, I'm going to write a short series trying to use the ideas I've picked up from my reading to provide a sort of grounding, a context, a historical analogy, a comparison to the times observed by some smart people. I've tried to do a bit of this in my posts on these old books, so this isn't new, it's just a bit more direct. I will start with Hannah Arendt, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part 3 on Totalitarianism.

We are told that the Republicans are a movement, and we know they are ideologically driven. The ideology is neoliberalism. The most important principle of neoliberalism is that markets know best, and if let alone that Invisible Hand will drive the human race to perfection. Any interference in the workings of the market will

only make things worse. The market is the most marvelous information processor imaginable. No human or group of humans can hope to match its deliberations. Therefore, no human interference with the workings of the markets is permissible, including especially concerted action through government. The market will always work for the best interests of all of us.

Arendt doesn't think much of ideologies.

> Ideologies [are] -isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurence by deducing it from a single premise….
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> … The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas. P. 468-9.

Ideologies work by the process of logic, the deductive working out of the idea behind the ideology. The ideologies Arendt is discussing, the Marxist idea of the progress of history, and the Nazi idea of racial purity, both have an inherent motion, from the past to the present and on into the future, all driven by a deductive logic. The same is true of neoliberalism. The state of the market at one point in time and the actions taken at that moment create the next state of the market, and on and on like a clock stepping forward.

In Arendt's description of the rise of totalitarianism, the primary tool of the leaders is terror, a gradually increasing level of fear of armed force, first under the guise of law, and then without any pretense of legal justification. The analogy in the case of neoliberalism is also fear, not of armed force,

but of immigrants, or of losing jobs, or that lack of cash will mean death from the money-centric health care system or outright starvation, or of a loss of status that might lead to those terrifying outcomes.

That kind of fear doesn’t work on everyone, but it works on enough people to set a swarm in motion. Suddenly a large group of people are moving almost in lockstep. The racket, the noise, the movement, all draw the attention of the media, and of everyone else through their ceaseless yammering. and the weak-minded hangers-on join in. The goal of the leaders, the Republicans, is to get that mindless crowd in motion. It is the movement itself that they seek, because once in motion, the masses can be led wherever the leaders want them to go. The constant injection of new and more terrifying fears increases the movement; faster and faster, until the very notion of thought disappears in a whirlwind of brainless and frightening activity.

Even if you don’t want to pay attention, the threatening noise and action are everywhere. They’re driving people nuts. That’s what the Republicans want.