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On Political Judgment

By **Isaiah Berlin**

What is it to have good judgment in politics? What is it to be politically wise, or gifted, to be a political genius, or even to be no more than politically competent, to know how to get things done? Perhaps one way of looking for the answer is by considering what we are saying when we denounce statesmen, or pity them, for not possessing these qualities. We sometimes complain that they are blinded by prejudice or passion, but blinded to what? We say that they don't understand the times they live in, or that they are resisting something called "the logic of the facts," or are "trying to put the clock back," or that "history is against them," or that they are ignorant or incapable of learning, or else unpractical idealists, visionaries, Utopians, hypnotized by the dream of some fabulous past or some unrealizable future.

All such expressions and metaphors seem to presuppose that there is something to know (of which the critic has some notion) which these unfortunate persons have somehow not managed to grasp, whether it is the inexorable movement of some cosmic clock which no man can alter, or some pattern of things in time or space, or in some more mysterious medium—"the realm of the Spirit" or "ultimate reality"—which one must first understand if one is to avoid frustration.

But what is this knowledge? Is it knowledge of a science? Are there really laws to be discovered, rules to be learned? Can statesmen be taught something called political science—the science of the relationships of human beings to each other and to their environment—which consists, like other sciences, of systems of verified hypotheses, organized under laws, that enable one, by the use of further experiment and observation, to discover other facts, and to verify new hypotheses?

Certainly that was the notion, either concealed or open, of both Hobbes and Spinoza, each in his own fashion, and of their followers—a notion that grew more and more powerful in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the natural sciences acquired enormous prestige, and attempts were made to maintain that anything not capable of being reduced to a natural science could not properly be called knowledge at all. The more ambitious and extreme scientific determinists, such as Holbach, Helvétius, and La Mettrie, used to think that, given enough knowledge of universal human nature and of the laws of social behavior, and enough knowledge of the state of given human beings at a given time, one could scientifically calculate how these human beings, or at any rate large groups of them—entire societies or classes—would behave under some other given set of circumstances. It was argued, and this seemed reasonable enough at the time, that just as knowledge of mechanics was indispensable to engineers or architects or inventors, so knowledge of social mechanics was necessary for anyone—statesmen, for example—who wished to get large bodies of men to do this or that. For without it, what had they to rely on but casual impressions, half-remembered, unverified recollections, guesswork, mere rules of thumb, unscientific hypotheses? One must, no doubt, make do with these if one has no proper scientific method at one's disposal; but one should realize that this is no better than unorganized conjectures about nature made by primitive peoples, or by the inhabitants of Europe during the Dark Ages—grotesquely inadequate tools superseded by the earliest advances of true science. And there are those (in institutions of higher learning) who have thought this, and think this still, in our own times.

Less ambitious thinkers, influenced by the fathers of the life sciences at the turn of the eighteenth century, conceived of the science of society as being rather more like a kind of social anatomy. To be a good doctor it is necessary, but not sufficient, to know anatomical theory. For one must also know how to apply it to specific cases—to particular patients, suffering from particular forms of a particular disease. This cannot be wholly learned from books or professors, it requires considerable personal experience and natural aptitude. Nevertheless, neither experience nor natural gifts can ever be a complete substitute for knowledge of a developed science—pathology, say, or anatomy. To know only the theory might not be enough to enable one to heal the sick, but to be ignorant of it is fatal. By analogy with medicine, such faults as bad political judgment, lack of realism, Utopianism, attempts to arrest progress, and so on were duly conceived as deriving from ignorance or defiance of the laws of social development—laws of social biology (which conceives of society as an organism rather than a mechanism), or of the corresponding science of

politics.

The scientifically inclined philosophers of the eighteenth century believed passionately in just such laws, and tried to account for human behavior wholly in terms of the identifiable effects of education, of natural environment, and of the calculable results of the play of appetites and passions. However, this approach turned out to explain so small a part of the actual behavior of human beings at times when it seemed most in need of explanation—during and after the Jacobin Terror—and failed so conspicuously to predict or analyze such major phenomena as the growth and violence of nationalism, the uniqueness of, and the conflicts between, various cultures, and the events leading to wars and revolutions, and displayed so little understanding of what may broadly be called spiritual or emotional life (whether of individuals or of whole peoples), and the unpredictable play of irrational factors, that new hypotheses inevitably entered the field, each claiming to overthrow all the others, and to be the last and definitive word on the subject.

Messianic preachers—prophets—such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Comte, dogmatic thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, Spengler, historically-minded theological thinkers from Bossuet to Toynbee, the popularizers of Darwin, the adaptors of this or that dominant school of sociology or psychology—all have attempted to step into the breach caused by the failure of the eighteenth-century philosophers to construct a proper, successful science of society. Each of these new nineteenth-century apostles laid some claim to exclusive possession of the truth. What they all have in common is the belief that there is one great universal pattern, and one unique method of apprehending it, knowledge of which would have saved statesmen many an error, and humanity many a hideous tragedy.

It was not exactly denied that such statesmen as Colbert, or Richelieu, or Washington, or Pitt, or Bismarck, seem to have done well enough without this knowledge, just as bridges had obviously been built before the principles of mechanics were discovered, and diseases had been cured by men who appeared to know no anatomy. It was admitted that much could be—and had been—achieved by the inspired guesses of individual men of genius, and by their instinctive skills; but, so it was argued, particularly toward the end of the nineteenth century, there was no need to look to so precarious a source of light. The principles upon which these great men acted, even though they may not have known it, so some optimistic sociologists have maintained, can be extracted

and reduced to an accurate science, very much as the principles of biology or mechanics must once have been established.

According to this view, political judgment need never again be a matter of instinct and flair and sudden illuminations and strokes of unanalyzable genius; rather it should henceforth be built upon the foundations of indubitable knowledge. Opinions might differ about whether this new knowledge was empirical or a priori, whether it derived its authority from the methods of natural science or from metaphysics; but in either form it amounted to what Herbert Spencer called the sciences of social statics and social dynamics. Those who applied it were social engineers; the mysterious art of government was to be mysterious no longer: it could be taught, learned, applied; it was a matter of professional competence and specialization.

This thesis would be more plausible if the newly discovered laws did not, as a rule, turn out either to be ancient truisms—such as that most revolutions are followed by reaction (which amounts to not much more than the virtual tautology that most movements come to an end at some time, and are then followed by something else, often in some opposite direction)—or else to be constantly upset, and violently upset, by events, leaving the theoretical systems in ruins. Perhaps nobody did so much to undermine confidence in a dependable science of human relations as the great tyrants of our day—Lenin, Stalin, Hitler. If belief in the laws of history and "scientific socialism" really did help Lenin or Stalin, it helped them not so much as a form of knowledge, but in the way that a fanatical faith in almost any dogma can be of help to determined men, by justifying ruthless acts and suppressing doubts and scruples.

Between them, Stalin and Hitler left scarcely stone upon stone of the once splendid edifice of the inexorable laws of history. Hitler, after all, almost succeeded in his professed aim of undoing the results of the French Revolution. The Russian Revolution violently twisted the whole of Western society out of what, until that time, seemed to most observers a fairly orderly course—twisted it into an irregular movement, followed by a dramatic collapse, foretold as little by Marxist as by any other "scientific" prophets. It is easy enough to arrange the past in a symmetrical way—Voltaire's famous cynical epigram to the effect that history is so many tricks played upon the dead is not as superficial as it seems.^[1] A true science, though, must be able not merely to rearrange the past but to predict the future. To classify facts, to order them in neat patterns, is not

quite yet a science.

We are told that the great earthquake that destroyed Lisbon in the mid-eighteenth century shook Voltaire's faith in inevitable human progress. Similarly the great destructive political upheavals of our own time have instilled terrible doubts about the feasibility of a reliable science of human behavior for the guidance of men of action—be they industrialists or social-welfare officers or statesmen. The subject evidently had to be re-examined afresh: the assumption that an exact science of social behavior was merely a matter of time and ingenuity no longer seemed quite so self-evident. What method should this science pursue? Clearly not deductive: there existed no accepted axioms from which the whole of human behavior could be deduced by means of agreed logical rules. Not even the most dogmatic theologian would claim as much as that. Inductive, then? Laws based on the survey of a large collection of empirical data? Or on hypothetical-deductive methods not very easily applicable to the complexities of human affairs?

In theory, no doubt, such laws should have been discoverable, but in practice this looked less promising. If I am a statesman faced with an agonizing choice of possible courses of action in a critical situation, will I really find it useful—even if I can afford to wait that long for the answer—to employ a team of specialists in political science to assemble for me from past history all kinds of cases analogous to my situation, from which I or they must then abstract what these cases have in common, deriving from this exercise relevant laws of human behavior? The instances for such induction—or for the construction of hypotheses intended to systematize historical knowledge—would, because human experience is so various, not be numerous; and the dismissal even from these instances of all that is unique to each, and the retention only of that which is common, would produce a very thin, generalized residue, and one far too unspecific to be of much help in a practical dilemma.

Obviously what matters is to understand a particular situation in its full uniqueness, the particular men and events and dangers, the particular hopes and fears which are actively at work in a particular place at a particular time: in Paris in 1791, in Petrograd in 1917, in Budapest in 1956, in Prague in 1968, or in Moscow in 1991. We need not attend systematically to whatever it is that these have in common with other events and other situations, which may resemble them in some respects, but may happen to lack exactly that which makes all the difference at a particular

moment, in a particular place. If I am driving a car in desperate haste, and come to a rickety-looking bridge, and must make up my mind whether it will bear my weight, some knowledge of the principles of engineering would no doubt be useful. But even so I can scarcely afford to stop to survey and calculate. To be useful to me in a crisis such knowledge must have given rise to a semi-instinctive skill—like the ability to read without simultaneous awareness of the rules of the language.

Still, in engineering some laws can, after all, be formulated, even though I do not need to keep them constantly in mind. In the realm of political action, laws are far and few indeed: skills are everything. What makes statesmen, like drivers of cars, successful is that they do not think in general terms—that is, they do not primarily ask themselves in what respect a given situation is like or unlike other situations in the long course of human history (which is what historical sociologists, or theologians in historical clothing, such as Vico or Toynbee, are fond of doing). Their merit is that they grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation—this and no other. What they are said to be able to do is to understand the character of a particular movement, of a particular individual, of a unique state of affairs, of a unique atmosphere, of some particular combination of economic, political, personal factors; and we do not readily suppose that this capacity can literally be taught.

We speak of, say, an exceptional sensitiveness to certain kinds of fact; we resort to metaphors. We speak of some people as possessing antennae, as it were, that communicate to them the specific contours and texture of a particular political or social situation. We speak of the possession of a good political eye, or nose, or ear, of a political sense which love or ambition or hate may bring into play, of a sense that crisis and danger sharpen (or alternatively blunt), to which experience is crucial, a particular gift, possibly not altogether unlike that of artists or creative writers. We mean nothing occult or metaphysical; we do not mean a magic eye able to penetrate into something that ordinary minds cannot apprehend; we mean something perfectly ordinary, empirical, and quasi-aesthetic in the way that it works.

The gift we mean entails, above all, a capacity for integrating a vast amalgam of constantly changing, multicolored, evanescent, perpetually overlapping data, too many, too swift, too intermingled to be caught and pinned down and labeled like so many individual butterflies. To

integrate in this sense is to see the data (those identified by scientific knowledge as well as by direct perception) as elements in a single pattern, with their implications, to see them as symptoms of past and future possibilities, to see them pragmatically—that is, in terms of what you or others can or will do to them, and what they can or will do to others or to you. To seize a situation in this sense one needs to see, to be given a kind of direct, almost sensuous contact with the relevant data, and not merely to recognize their general characteristics, to classify them or reason about them, or analyze them, or reach conclusions and formulate theories about them.

To be able to do this well seems to me to be a gift akin to that of some novelists, that which makes such writers as, for example, Tolstoy or Proust convey a sense of direct acquaintance with the texture of life; not just the sense of a chaotic flow of experience, but a highly developed discrimination of what matters from the rest, whether from the point of view of the writer or that of the characters he describes. Above all this is an acute sense of what fits with what, what springs from what, what leads to what; how things seem to vary to different observers, what the effect of such experience upon them may be; what the result is likely to be in a concrete situation of the interplay of human beings and impersonal forces—geographical or biological or psychological or whatever they may be. It is a sense for what is qualitative rather than quantitative, for what is specific rather than general; it is a species of direct acquaintance, as distinct from a capacity for description or calculation or inference; it is what is variously called natural wisdom, imaginative understanding, insight, perceptiveness, and, more misleadingly, intuition (which dangerously suggests some almost magical faculty), as opposed to the very different virtues—very great as these are—of theoretical knowledge or learning, erudition, powers of reasoning and generalization, and intellectual genius.

The quality I am attempting to describe is that special understanding of public life (or for that matter private life) which successful statesmen have, whether they are wicked or virtuous—that which Bismarck had (surely a conspicuous example, in the last century, of a politician endowed with considerable political judgment), or Talleyrand or Franklin Roosevelt, or, for that matter, men such as Cavour or Disraeli, Gladstone or Atatürk, in common with the great psychological novelists, something which is conspicuously lacking in men of more purely theoretical genius such as Newton or Einstein or Russell, or even Freud. This is true even of Lenin, despite the huge weight of theory by which he burdened himself.

What are we to call this kind of capacity? Practical wisdom, practical reason, perhaps, a sense of what will "work," and what will not. It is a capacity, in the first place, for synthesis rather than analysis, for knowledge in the sense in which trainers know their animals, or parents their children, or conductors their orchestras, as opposed to that in which chemists know the contents of their test tubes, or mathematicians know the rules that their symbols obey. Those who lack this, whatever other qualities they may possess, no matter how clever, learned, imaginative, kind, noble, attractive, gifted in other ways they may be, are correctly regarded as politically inept—in the sense in which Joseph II of Austria was inept (and he was certainly a morally better man than, say, his contemporaries Frederick the Great and the Empress Catherine II of Russia, who were far more successful in attaining their ends, and far more benevolently disposed toward mankind) or in which the Puritans, or James II, or Robespierre (or, for that matter, Hitler or even Lenin in the end) proved to be inept at realizing at least their positive ends.

What is it that the Emperor Augustus or Bismarck knew and the Emperor Claudius or Joseph II did not? Very probably the Emperor Joseph was intellectually more distinguished and far better read than Bismarck, and Claudius may have known many more facts than Augustus. But Bismarck (or Augustus) had the power of integrating or synthesizing the fleeting, broken, infinitely various wisps and fragments that make up life at any level, just as every human being, to some extent, must integrate them (if he is to survive at all), without stopping to analyze how he does what he does, and whether there is a theoretical justification for his activity. Everyone must do it, but Bismarck did it over a much larger field, against a wider horizon of possible courses of action, with far greater power—to a degree, in fact, which is quite correctly described as that of genius. Moreover, the bits and pieces which require to be integrated—that is, seen as fitting with other bits and pieces, and not compatible with yet others, in the way in which, in fact, they do fit and fail to fit in reality—these basic ingredients of life are in a sense too familiar, we are too much with them, they are too close to us, they form the texture of the semiconscious and unconscious levels of our life, and for that reason they tend to resist tidy classification.

Of course, whatever can be isolated, looked at, inspected, should be. We need not be obscurantist. I do not wish to say or hint, as some romantic thinkers have, that something is lost in the very act of investigating, analyzing, and bringing to light, that there is some virtue in darkness as such, that the most important things are too deep for words, and should be left

untouched, that it is somehow blasphemous to enunciate them.[2] This I believe to be a false and on the whole deleterious doctrine. Whatever can be illuminated, made articulate, incorporated in a proper science, should of course be so. "We murder to dissect," wrote Wordsworth[3]—at times we do; at other times dissection reveals truths. There are vast regions of reality which only scientific methods, hypotheses, established truths, can reveal, account for, explain, and indeed control. What science can achieve must be welcomed. In historical studies, in classical scholarship, in archaeology, linguistics, demography, the study of collective behavior, in many other fields of human life and endeavor, scientific methods can give indispensable information.

I do not hold with those who maintain that natural science, and the technology based upon it, somehow distorts our vision, and prevents us from direct contact with reality—"being"—which pre-Socratic Greeks or medieval Europeans saw face to face. This seems to me an absurd nostalgic delusion. My argument is only that not everything, in practice, can be—indeed that a great deal cannot be—grasped by the sciences. For, as Tolstoy taught us long ago, the particles are too minute, too heterogeneous, succeed each other too rapidly, occur in combinations of too great a complexity, are too much part and parcel of what we are and do, to be capable of submitting to the required degree of abstraction, that minimum of generalization and formalization—idealization—which any science must exact. After all, Frederick of Prussia and Catherine the Great founded scientific academies (which are still famous and important) with the help of French and Swiss scientists—but did not seek to learn from them how to govern. And although the father of sociology, the eminent Auguste Comte himself, certainly knew a great many more facts and laws than any politician, his theories are today nothing but a sad, huge, oddly-shaped fossil in the stream of knowledge, a kind of curiosity in a museum, whereas Bismarck's political gifts—if I may return to this far from admirable man, because he is perhaps the most effective of all nineteenth-century statesmen—are, alas, only too familiar among us still. There is no natural science of politics any more than a natural science of ethics. Natural science cannot answer all questions.

All I am concerned to deny, or at least to doubt, is the truth of Freud's dictum that while science cannot explain everything, nothing else can do so. Bismarck understood something which, let us say, Darwin or James Clerk Maxwell did not need to understand, something about the public medium in which he acted, and he understood it as sculptors understand stone or clay;

understood, that is, in this particular case, the potential reactions of relevant bodies of Germans or Frenchmen or Italians or Russians, and understood this without, so far as we know, any conscious inference or careful regard to the laws of history, or laws of any kind, and without recourse to any other specific key or nostrum—not those recommended by Maistre, or Hegel or Nietzsche or Bergson or some of their modern irrationalist successors, any more than those of their enemies, the friends of science. He was successful because he had the particular gift of using his experience and observation to guess successfully how things would turn out.

Scientists, at least *qua* scientists, do not need this talent. Indeed their training often makes them peculiarly unfit in this respect. Those who are scientifically trained often seem to hold Utopian political views precisely because of a belief that methods or models which work well in their particular fields will apply to the entire sphere of human action, or if not this particular method or this particular model, then some other method, some other model of a more or less similar kind. If natural scientists are at times naive in politics, this may be due to the influence of an insensibly made, but nevertheless misleading, identification of what works in the formal and deductive disciplines, or in laboratories, with what works in the organization of human life.

I repeat: to deny that laboratories or scientific models offer something—sometimes a great deal—of value for social organization or political action is sheer obscurantism; but to maintain that they have more to teach us than any other form of experience is an equally blind form of doctrinaire fanaticism which has sometimes led to the torture of innocent men by pseudo-scientific monomaniacs in pursuit of the millennium. When we say of the men of 1789 in France, or of 1917 in Russia, that they were too doctrinaire, that they relied too much on theories—whether eighteenth-century theories such as Rousseau's, or nineteenth-century theories such as Marx's—we do not mean that although these particular theories were indeed defective, better ones could in principle be discovered, and that these better theories really would at last do the job of making men happy and free and wise, so that they would not need, any longer, to depend so desperately on the improvisations of gifted leaders, leaders who are so few and far between, and so liable to megalomania and terrible mistakes.

What we mean is the opposite: that theories, in this sense, are not appropriate as such in these situations. It is as if we were to look for a theory of tea-tasting, a science of architecture. The

factors to be evaluated are in these cases too many, and it is on skill in integrating them, in the sense I have described, that everything depends, whatever may be our creed or our purpose—whether we are utilitarians or liberals, communists or mystical theocrats, or those who have lost their way in some dark Heideggerian forest. Sciences, theories no doubt do sometimes help, but they cannot be even a partial substitute for a perceptual gift, for a capacity for taking in the total pattern of a human situation, of the way in which things hang together—a talent to which, the finer, the more uncannily acute it is, the power of abstraction and analysis seems alien, if not positively hostile.

A scientifically trained observer can of course always analyze a particular social abuse, or suggest a particular remedy, but he can do little, as a scientist, to predict what general effects the application of a given remedy or the elimination of a given source of misery or injustice is going to have on other—especially on remote—parts of our total social system. We begin by trying to alter what we can see, but the tremors which our action starts sometimes run through the entire depth of our society; levels to which we pay no conscious attention are stirred, and all kinds of unintended results ensue. It is semi-instinctive knowledge of these lower depths, knowledge of the intricate connections between the upper surface and other, remoter layers of social or individual life (which Burke was perhaps the first to emphasize, if only to turn his perception to his own traditionalist purposes), that is an indispensable ingredient of good political judgment.

We rightly fear those bold reformers who are too obsessed by their vision to pay attention to the medium in which they work, and who ignore imponderables—John of Leiden, the Puritans, Robespierre, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin. For there is a literal sense in which they know not what they do (and do not care either). And we are rightly apt to put more trust in the equally bold empiricists, Henry IV of France, Peter the Great, Frederick of Prussia, Napoleon, Cavour, Lincoln, Lloyd George, Masaryk, Franklin Roosevelt (if we are on their side at all), because we see that they understand their material. Is this not what is meant by political genius? Or genius in other provinces of human activity? This is not a contrast between conservatism and radicalism, or between caution and audacity, but between types of gift. As there are differences of gifts, so there are different types of folly. Two of these types are in direct contradiction, and in a curious and paradoxical fashion.

The paradox is this: in the realm presided over by the natural sciences, certain laws and principles are recognized as having been established by proper methods—that is, methods recognized as reliable by scientific specialists. Those who deny or defy these laws or methods—people, say, who believe in a flat earth, or do not believe in gravitation—are quite rightly regarded as cranks or lunatics. But in ordinary life, and perhaps in some of the humanities—studies such as history, or philosophy, or law (which differ from the sciences if only because they do not seem to establish—or even want to establish—wider and wider generalizations about the world)—those are Utopian who place excessive faith in laws and methods derived from alien fields, mostly from the natural sciences, and apply them with great confidence and somewhat mechanically.

The arts of life—not least of politics—as well as some among the humane studies turn out to possess their own special methods and techniques, their own criteria of success and failure. Utopianism, lack of realism, bad judgment here consist not in failing to apply the methods of natural science, but, on the contrary, in over-applying them. Here failure comes from resisting that which works best in each field, from ignoring or opposing it either in favor of some systematic method or principle claiming universal validity—say the methods of natural science (as Comte did), or of historical theology or social development (as Marx did)—or else from a wish to defy all principles, all methods as such, from simply advocating trust in a lucky star or personal inspiration: that is, mere irrationalism.

To be rational in any sphere, to display good judgment in it, is to apply those methods which have turned out to work best in it. What is rational in a scientist is therefore often Utopian in a historian or a politician (that is, it systematically fails to obtain the desired result), and vice versa. This pragmatic platitude entails consequences that not everyone is ready to accept. Should statesmen be scientific? Should scientists be put in authority, as Plato or Saint-Simon or H.G. Wells wanted? Equally, we might ask, should gardeners be scientific, should cooks? Botany helps gardeners, laws of dietetics may help cooks, but excessive reliance on these sciences will lead them—and their clients—to their doom. The excellence of cooks and gardeners still depends today most largely upon their artistic endowment and, like that of politicians, on their capacity to improvise. Most of the suspicion of intellectuals in politics springs from the belief, not entirely false, that, owing to a strong desire to see life in some simple, symmetrical fashion, they put too

much faith in the beneficent results of applying directly to life conclusions obtained by operations in some theoretical sphere. And the corollary of this over-reliance on theory, a corollary alas too often corroborated by experience, is that if the facts—that is, the behavior of living human beings—are recalcitrant to such experiment, the experimenter becomes annoyed, and tries to alter the facts to fit the theory, which, in practice, means a kind of vivisection of societies until they become what the theory originally declared that the experiment should have caused them to be. The theory is "saved," indeed, but at too high a cost in useless human suffering; yet since it is applied in the first place, ostensibly at least, to save men from the hardships which, it is alleged, more haphazard methods would bring about, the result is self-defeating. So long as there is no science of politics in sight, attempts to substitute counterfeit science for individual judgment not only lead to failure, and, at times, major disasters, but also discredit the real sciences, and undermine faith in human reason.

The passionate advocacy of unattainable ideals may, even if it is Utopian, break open the barriers of blind tradition and transform the values of human beings, but the advocacy of pseudo-scientific or other kinds of falsely certified means—methods of the sort advertised by metaphysical or other kinds of bogus prospectuses—can only do harm. There is a story—I don't know how true—that when the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury was one day asked on what principle he decided whether to go to war, he replied that, in order to decide whether or not to take an umbrella, he looked at the sky. Perhaps this goes too far. If a reliable science of political weather-forecasting existed, this would, no doubt, be condemned as too subjective a procedure. But, for reasons which I have tried to give, such a science, even if it is not impossible in principle, is still very far to seek. And to act as if it already existed, or was merely round the corner, is an appalling and gratuitous handicap to all political movements, whatever their principles and whatever their purposes—from the most reactionary to the most violently revolutionary—and leads to avoidable suffering.

To demand or preach mechanical precision, even in principle, in a field incapable of it is to be blind and to mislead others. Moreover, there is always the part played by pure luck—which, mysteriously enough, men of good judgment seem to enjoy rather more often than others. This, too, is perhaps worth pondering.

Notes

[1] "*Un historien est un babillard qui fait des tracasseries aux morts.*" *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, Volume 82 (University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 452.

[2] In this spirit Keats wrote: "Do not all charms fly/At the mere touch of cold philosophy?... Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,/Conquer all mysteries by rule and line...." *Lamia* (1820).

[3] In "The Tables Turned" (1798).

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Meanwhile, political judgments are in, and the game is over. ENVIRONMENT. climate-skeptic.com. It will be Osborne's political judgment to decide how hard the pips can be squeezed. POLITICS. theguardian.com.^Â They imply that specific political judgments are matters of Church teaching, when by Catholic tradition, the more they descend into the details of policy, the less certain their judgments become. RELIGION. religion.blogs.cnn.com.