



The University at Buffalo scholar David Castillo:

We must know how the media edit, frame, and construct the world

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PART

EXCLUSIVE



David R. Castillo is Director of the Humanities Institute at The State University of New York at Buffalo and Professor of Spanish in the department of Romance Languages and Literatures. With William Egginton, he is the coauthor of *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) and *What Would Cervantes Do?: Navigating Post-Truth with Spanish Baroque Literature* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

We are living in the absence of the authorities that could have determined the truth for everyone. In the very old time, it was God or the religions. After the gods, there were scientific authorities. And right now people do not believe in science that much. How can we search for an authority or a source or whatever that can tell us how to agree on a collective level on the truth?

That's a very good question. You know, Egginton and I are Cervantes specialist, first and foremost. So going back to the time of Cervantes, certain beliefs were deemed to be true on account of their origin. So if those notions came from official sources, such as the church, or monarchical authorities, or a combination of the two, that was the kind of authorized framing of the world that would come with fortified versions of the truth. Cervantes was not particularly inclined to accept those notions. Instead, his fiction worked in such a way as to show us how the media of his time, including the kinds of authorized sources and vehi-

cles, can edit, frame, and construct the world, and show the tools that are used for that editing of the world. And in the act of showing you that, he didn't tell you, "Okay, so this is what you need to believe in. This is the truth." He didn't do that. He didn't give us that easy way out, to say, "Okay. They are editing the world, they are framing the world in this way, using these particular framing devices, but the truth is here." No, he didn't do that. Instead, he essentially called his readers, his forewarned readers or discerning readers, and asked those readers to make up their own mind. And that's really the key. It's not really to fight a version of the truth, the fortified version of the truth, with my own fortified version of the truth, but rather to show how that fortified version of the truth was produced, and that can give us the freedom to make up our own minds with the information we have.

With that, I would like to ask you one question right now: Do you think that everything that

we consider as truth should be open to question, and we should not have any source of truth at all that would deserve to be fortified?

I do believe that every notion needs to be open for examination. Now, that doesn't mean to have a negative default position. Right? What it means is every notion ought to be open to our own judgment calls. That doesn't also mean everything is relative. This is something that Egginton and I discuss in *Medialogies*. We also talk about this in our recently released book *What Would Cervantes Do?*. When we place ourselves in the position of the other, we have to be very careful to not usurp that position. So that also requires a sort of understanding of the truth at situation. But again, it doesn't mean that everything is relative. The opposite. We talk about this. We say that the problem that we have with the truth right now is not a problem that comes with the truism, that everything is relative; but rather with this notion of the ineffability of my own beliefs. So it's not

really a problem of relativism, but a problem of what we call modern fundamentalism.

Okay, that's actually a very good prelude to my next question, which was about modern forms of fundamentalism. What are their dangers? I know you partly answered this question, but I would like to be more explicit here: What are the dangers of this kind of modern fundamentalism that you talk about?

Again, a very good question. How about increased isolation, inability to work together and with common goals, in general weakening our communities? A lack or an inability to be able to respond to emerging crisis? If we think of the pandemic we just experienced or are still experiencing, this is a perfect example. All kinds of anti-vaxxer conspiracy theories have been filling the airwaves and making it difficult for us to develop and follow commonsense strategies to protect ourselves and our communities. Another example would be our inability to change course to address the climate change emer-

gency. Again, with the caveat that climate change denialism is often amplified by interest groups tied to corporations, for whom climate change is clearly an inconvenient truth.

Yeah, the "inconvenient truth." Okay. You talked about the problem, and partly offered your view on Cervantes framing the frame, or trying to find the frame as a first step. Here I would like a bit more detail: You seem to offer a critical humanist thought that can help us survive and get out of our current situation. What's that?

So this is I think where much of our both implicit and explicit thread of argument can be located, in both *Medialogies* and this new book, *What Would Cervantes Do?*

So, our argument is that the set of distinct disciplines from fields of knowledge that we call "the humanities" can help us by allowing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of our predicament today. The long view of history, for example, can be very valuable, to the extent