

Dragon Energy

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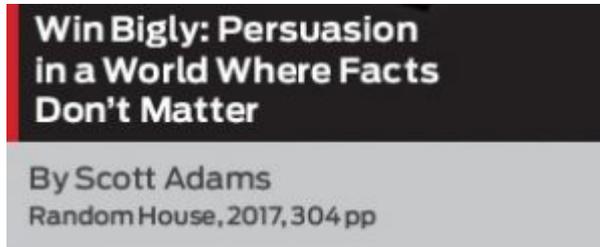
Mega-popular music artist Kanye West caused mass outrage with a series of Twitter posts in April 2018. The controversial rapper wore a Trump-style Make America Great Again cap and expressed his support for black conservative activist Candace Owens.

Soon after, cartoonist and author Scott Adams of Dilbert fame broadcast a video online titled '*Kanye West showed the way to the Golden Age*', in which he described how West's tweets 'ripped a hole in reality'.

Adams was also publicly vilified as his video swiftly went viral. Why?

At least part of the answer lies in Scott Adams' latest book, [*Win Bigly: Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter*](#). The book outlines Adams' unique world view and his analysis of Donald Trump's persuasion techniques that have formed the basis of his political commentary since 2015. It was this analysis which enabled Adams to be one of the few pundits to predict Trump would be elected president, giving him significant credibility as a result.

It has also, by Adams' own account, cost him many friends and commercial opportunities. For calling events as he sees them, even once-reputable media outlets label him as 'far right' or 'alt right'.



TRUMP DERANGEMENT SYNDROME

In the aftermath of Trump's successful campaign for the US presidency in 2016, the progressive side of politics has largely been stuck in stages one and two of the Kubler-Ross model of grief: denial and anger (perhaps acceptance will come, but only at the conclusion of Trump's term in office). This emotional response has resulted in a toxic response to anyone who doesn't share their contempt for Trump, and conservatism more broadly.

This 'Trump Derangement Syndrome' follows the pattern first identified in 2003 by the late Charles Krauthammer, an American columnist and psychiatrist, describing the reaction to George W Bush's election. Krauthammer defined 'the acute onset of paranoia in otherwise normal people in reaction to the policies, the presidency – nay – the very existence of [then President] George W. Bush'.

For the sufferers of this terrible affliction, people like Scott Adams are thought criminals who are more than merely wrong on policy grounds. It is a moral failing even to associate, however loosely, with Trump. Accordingly, there are now huge restrictions on what is deemed respectable – or acceptable – discourse. A failure to properly observe the tenets of modern progressivism has seen individuals swept (further) out of polite society.

Adams is perhaps the most unusual and unexpected person to find himself in this non-compliant cohort. He achieved prominence and success through the creation of his popular comic-strip, *Dilbert*, which satirises office life and various corporate idiocies. More recently, Adams has used his blog to comment on all manner of issues.

THE ACUTE ONSET OF PARANOIA IN OTHERWISE NORMAL PEOPLE IN REACTION TO THE POLICIES, THE PRESIDENCY – NAY – THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE PRESIDENT.

Adams is a self-professed non-voter and does not personally associate himself with the Republican Party or Donald Trump's politics. His political story began in August 2015, when he first predicted that Donald Trump's presidential campaign would be successful. This was a notable

prediction: at this relatively early stage, Trump's campaign was taken seriously by very few political experts. To make these observations carried a significant personal risk of professional embarrassment if the mainstream predictions of a Trump implosion and landslide defeat were to come true.

Win Bigly explains why Adams thought Trump possessed such mastery of the tools of persuasion that he could change the world. As Adams writes: 'It wasn't until the first Republican primary debate that I realised what was happening right before our eyes. Trump was no ordinary politician... I have to say that Trump is the most persuasive human I have ever observed.'

THE MASTER PERSUADER

To demonstrate the power of persuasion, Adams uses the example of the McGurk Effect. Harry McGurk first described this effect in a 1976 article in *Nature* titled 'Hearing Lips and Seeing Voices'. As the title indicates, when a speaker moves their lips in a different way but the same sound is broadcast, [the viewer will nonetheless hear a different sound](#).

This reveals that the visual medium is more persuasive than the audio. It also uncovers a truth about humans that few people are comfortable to accept: that people are fundamentally irrational by nature.

According to Adams, people act irrationally 90 per cent of the time, and the most significant source of this behaviour is the phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is triggered when a person's self-image doesn't fit their observations, so the mind generates an illusion to resolve the inconsistency.

Consider the case of British Channel 4 presenter Cathy Newman's infamous interview with Dr Jordan Peterson in January. Newman's bizarre style of questioning was particularly humorous, beginning every sentence with 'so what you're saying is', followed by a gross mischaracterisation of Peterson's beliefs. But through Adams' persuasion filter, we know this a reliable tell for cognitive dissonance ('tell' being a term in psychology describing an unconscious action that is thought to betray an attempted deception). Newman attempted to reaffirm her own worldview by mocking and misrepresenting the views of her interviewee. Fortunately, Peterson, another thought criminal to emerge in recent years, was up to the task.

Rather than convince voters to change their world view, Trump effectively dodged cognitive dissonance by convincing voters on an irrational level that his policies were the ones they should care about the most. Some techniques are especially straightforward, such as social proof persuasion ("many people are saying..."), repetition ("it's true, it's true"), and speaking with simplicity, which most people find more relatable and easier to remember. Other techniques are more complex, such as strategic ambiguity, where Trump addresses contentious issues in such a way that viewers from across the political spectrum would see something they like.

A study by the Pew Research Center in 2017 found that the ascension of Donald Trump coincided



with a drop in positive views about free trade among Republican and Republican-leaning voters from 56 per cent in 2015 to just 29 per cent at the time of the 2016 election. This is probably not a coincidence, and the entire drop in positive views can't be attributed to changing voters alone. It is more likely that it is the phenomenon of 'pacing and leading' at work: Trump followed the Republican party by adopting many of its traditional economic and social policies, which enabled him to lead the party in his preferred position opposing multilateral trade agreements. Like it or hate it, this is shrewd persuasion.

In light of Trump's electoral victory, Adams' observations were undoubtedly credible. However, his detractors objected to the idea that Trump's success was the result of something other than bigotry.

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST MASS HYSTERIA

Austrian-British economist F.A. Hayek noted in 1949 that it is the 'professional second-hand dealers in ideas' such as journalists, academia, artists, and ministers that ultimately dictate a nation's political agenda. In more recent times, American publisher Andrew Breitbart updated this as 'politics is downstream from culture' to argue that cultural change is necessary to achieve desirable political outcomes.

The limits of acceptable speech are more restricted than ever. Cultural authoritarians have taken control of much of the media, academia and the other institutions that comprise Western popular culture, and they're using them to impose their world view.

THOSE ON THE 'INTELLECTUAL DARK WEB' TURNED INTO HERETICS FOR OPINIONS THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED TABOO ONLY A DECADE AGO.

Anti-bigotry is unsurprisingly the justification of the left's latest restriction of acceptable speech, reaching self-evidently absurd levels. Kanye West was labelled a 'mouthpiece for white supremacist ideas' by *New Republic* magazine for his tweets in praise of Candace Owens. His wife, reality TV star Kim Kardashian West, was widely mocked in May for meeting with President Trump to discuss prison reform and to encourage the president to pardon a non-violent drug offender that had been sentenced to life in prison in 1996. Also in May, Peterson, YouTube star Dave Rubin, British author Douglas Murray and several others spoke to *New York Times* journalist Bari Weiss about how their rejection of toxic identity politics has seen those on the 'Intellectual Dark Web' turned into heretics for opinions that would not have been considered taboo only a decade ago.

The limits may appear new, but the underlying derangement syndrome driving it is the same as it ever was: the hostility to Trump is essentially no different to the hostility to Mitt Romney's candidacy in 2012, or the hostility to either of the Bush presidents, or the hostility to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.



It wouldn't have mattered who the Republicans chose to run as president in 2016 – no matter how upright or middle of the road – if elected the reaction would be the same. Irrational behaviour is a feature – not a bug – of humanity, including politics. The absence of evidence that the supposedly 'far right' Scott Adams actually holds any views which could credibly be regarded as far right is proof of how detached from reality much political debate has become.

If a lesson of *Win Bigly* is the nature of irrational humans and mass hysteria, Trump's victory is the demonstration of how the art of persuasion can overcome and win in both culture and politics.

More recently, Kanye West and others like him are daring to break free from imposed orthodoxy. Conservatives would be well-served by reading Adams's account of Trump's victory in 2016 in order to learn how they can win bigly in an irrational world.

[This article first appeared in the August 2018 IPA Review.](#) See also companion article, [Ye vs the People.](#)