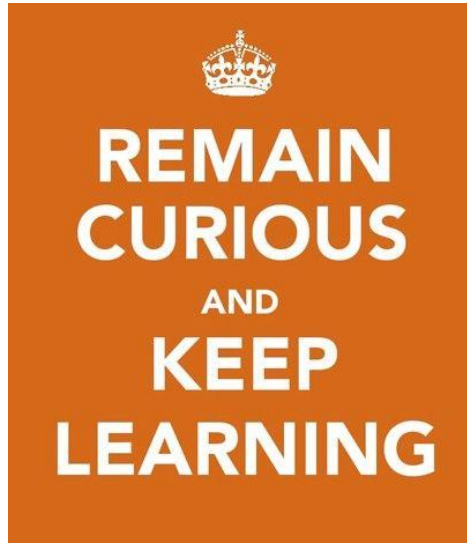


Attitudes toward curiosity in  
the early modern era

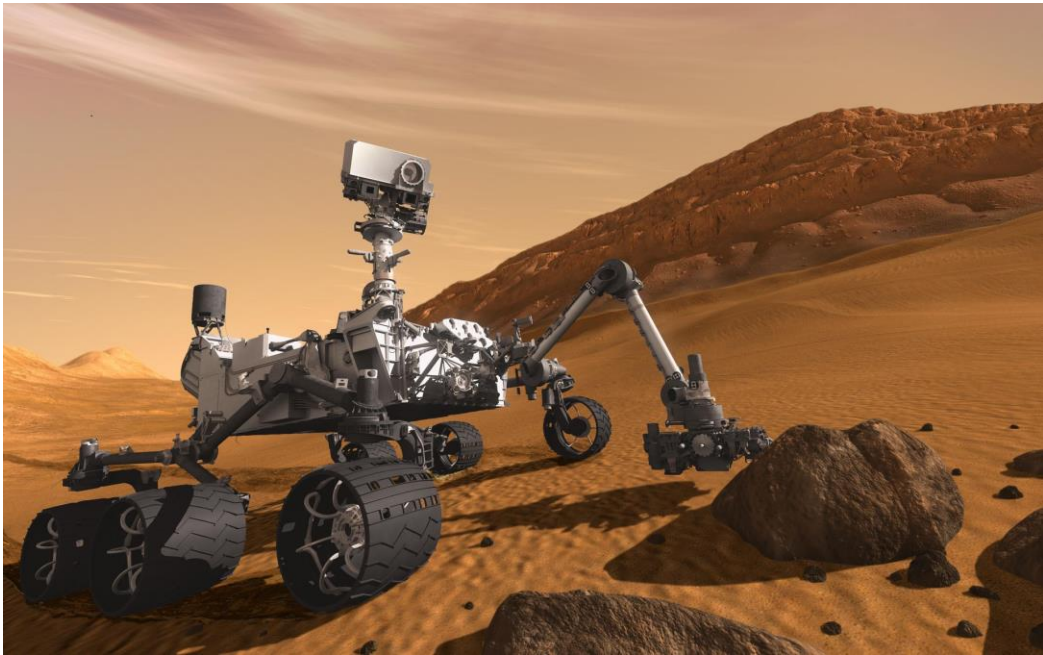


Research is “feeding curiosity and answering questions”



I HAVE NO SPECIAL  
TALENTS. I AM ONLY  
PASSIONATELY  
**CURIOUS.**

**-ALBERT EINSTEIN**



center for  
CURIO?ITY

# 'Quite backwards': Chinese tourists gawk at impoverished North Koreans

Thousands of tourists flock to a stretch of the country's 880-mile border with North Korea each month to point binoculars at their poor neighbours

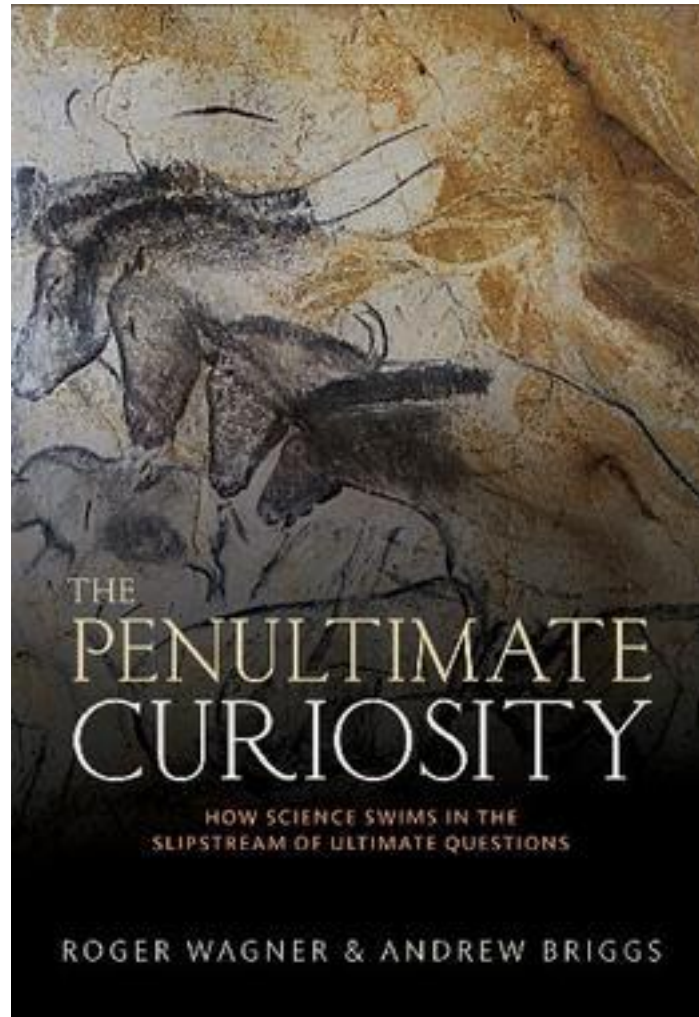
*The Guardian*  
14 September, 2017



**i** Chinese tourists look and take pictures of a North Korean soldier in a watchtower as they ride on a tourist boat on the Yalu river with North Korean territory on both sides, north of the border city of Dandong, Liaoning province, northern China near Sinuiju, North Korea in Dandong, China. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

**Part 1: pre-modern thinking about curiosity**

**Part 2: early modern transformations**



THE  
PENULTIMATE  
CURIOSITY

HOW SCIENCE SWIMS IN THE  
SLIPSTREAM OF ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

ROGER WAGNER & ANDREW BRIGGS

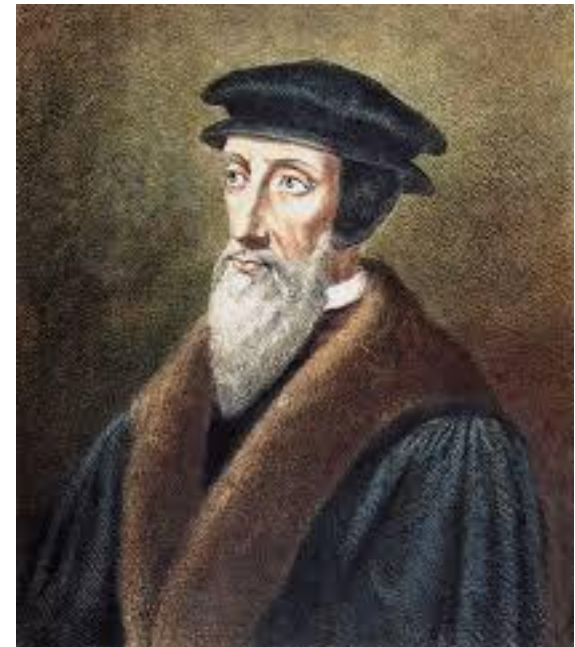
## **Part 1: pre-modern thinking about curiosity**

- “I looked over the text of your letters and examined them with quick glimpses of my eyes and contemplated them with a certain natural curiosity for hidden things (and this, it seems, is innate in me) and admired the exuberant style and the maiden urbanity of your eloquence.”<sup>1</sup>
- “he had examined and understood the Sacred Scriptures with such *curiositas* that when he was questioned about them he always had a fitting answer and responded without delay”<sup>1</sup>



- “[Curiositas is] that disturbance of the human will which led to an intemperate desire for the knowledge of perishing, worldly, temporal things for the mere sake of acquiring such knowledge alone, which treated the divine mysteries as if they fit into these categories, and which, furthermore, replaced even the desire for God.”<sup>2</sup>
- Sinful curiosity “likened to a poison which ... stole away the mind and then plunged the soul into death”<sup>1</sup>

- “Eve erred in not regulating the measure of her knowledge by the will of God.”<sup>3</sup>
- “we all daily suffer under the same disease, because we desire to know more than is right, and more than God allows”<sup>3</sup>



- “general defect and imperfection proceeding from Nature corrupted, and tending to corruption, followeth all the Sonnes of Adam, and that is a certaine natural curiosity”<sup>3</sup>
- One should “not ... bee curious in searching mysteries.”<sup>3</sup>
- One may “desire knowledge of God, as Salomon did, but not desire knowledge as Eve did.”<sup>3</sup>
- “We must labour to mortifie our spirituall pride, which is the mother and nurse of this idle curiosity.”<sup>3</sup>
- Curiosity “puffeth them up with pride, and maketh them in the overweening conceit of their owne excellencies to contemn all others.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Curious speculation of creatures” serves to “divert many minds from the invisible creator unto whom the sight of these by nature not misleveled by inordinate or unyildy appetites would direct all.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Part 2: early modern transformations**

- True philosophy lies “buried in darkness, through the mysty and ambiguous clouds of that cavilling, brabbling, heathenish Philosophy, which they so adore and follow, with their Master *Aristotle*, as if he were another Jesus rained down from heaven, to open unto mankind the treasures of ... true wisdom.”<sup>3</sup>

*J<sup>r</sup> Francis Bacon, Lord  
Keeper and afterwards  
Lord Chancellor of  
England, 1617*



- “knowledge of the world is neither forbidden nor exceeds our capacities, [because] God has fitted the world to human capacities.”<sup>3</sup>
- “[W]hatsoever is not God but parcel of the world, he [God] hath fitted it for the comprehension of man’s mind, if man will open and dilate the powers of understanding as he may.”<sup>3</sup>
- “God hath framed the mind of man as a mirror or glass, capable of the image of the universal world.”<sup>3</sup>

- Knowledge of nature “must be subject to that use for which God hath granted it; which is the benefit and relief of the state and society of man; for other wise all manner of knowledge becometh malign and serpentine, and therefore as carrying the quality of the serpent’s sting and malice it maketh the mind of man to swell; as the Scripture saith excellently, *knowledge bloweth up, but charity buildeth up.*”<sup>3</sup>
- seek it “not either for pleasure of the mind, or for contention or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity.”<sup>3</sup>



- “To pry into mysteries of nature that God chose not to reveal, as the brazen magi attempted to do, was to trespass the boundary of legitimate intellectual inquiry, to challenge God’s majesty, and to enter into the territory of forbidden knowledge.” <sup>4</sup>

- “Certain learned men, ... ‘mounting free degree to degree, upon the slippery slope and uncertain scale of curiositie,’ are ‘at last entised, ... where lawful artes or sciences fails, to satisfie their restlesse mindes, even to seeke to that black and unlawful science of *Magick*.”<sup>3</sup>
- “their knowledge, for all that they presume thereof, is nothing increased, except in knowing evil ... as Adam’s was by eating of the forbidden tree.”<sup>3</sup>
- “the cursed art of Magick and witchcraft, as a way to get further knowledge in matters secret and not revealed.”<sup>3</sup>

- magic is “nothing else but the survey of the whole course of nature” 5
- magicians are “careful explorers of nature” 5

- “by welding magic’s experimental attitude to the reason of natural philosophy, he [Bacon] hoped to delineate a true and useful approach to the study of nature. While he accused astrology, natural magic and alchemy of ‘sway[ing] the imagination more than reason,’ he felt that they needed to be reformed rather than abandoned.”<sup>6</sup>

# Conclusion

## Sources

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