

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

It's almost 8:30 p.m. and getting dark outside, but the birds are still singing. Early in the morning, I hear them singing in the trees and now I hear them in the evening, too. A few years ago, when I retired from teaching in public schools, I started to learn the names of birds. Listened to their calls on CDs. Read about their habitats and habits in books. But then I went back to teaching and my spare time disappeared.

Well, not all of my spare time. I'm still reading books. Mostly nonfiction lately. Right now, it's the *Workshop of the World* by Robert P. Crease (W.W. Norton & Co., 2019) about ten people from history who can teach us how to think about science and how to respond to events in our world today. I've learned about Frances Bacon - from the 17th century - who showed that scientific discoveries should be used to help make life better for everyone, not just the wealthy or powerful in society. I've also learned about Galileo - also from the 17th century - who showed that even though scientific conclusions change as new evidence appears, it does not mean that ordinary people should ignore scientific findings.

The ideas of those two philosophers - Bacon and Galileo - are important to remember today during the coronavirus pandemic. I've been hearing on the news how poor people are disproportionately dying from Covid-19. I've been hearing how some people are finally saying that we - as a society - need to start providing medical attention to everyone, even if they cannot afford insurance or cannot afford a home. I've also been hearing on the news that some people want to ignore the health warnings because the advice is changing. For instance, earlier we were told that wearing masks was unnecessary; now we're told it might be helpful in containing the disease. But as doctors learn more scientific information about the virus, we would hope that they would give us updated advice. Reading this fascinating book by Crease, I'm learning about history and about modern life.

It's all dark outside now, and I'm too tired to do a good job of marking assignments. I'm going to go curl up with my book and a cup of tea and read some more.