

Essays, Fast and Slow

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Jerry Van Polen

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1.

Introduction

As I write this, to a degree I am racing against death in an effort to preserve an understanding it has taken me nearly fifteen years to: a) develop; and b) more clearly explain.

I have split my essays out from my collection/miscellany *Cheerful Moral Will*: in part to be able to rearrange them; in part to be able to add to them.

Add to them I have, as the dates on three chapters in the front section show.

I have placed my work/essays related to modeling delusions first.

Happily, at the moment I am satisfied that they now speak adequately for themselves.

Jerry Van Polen

1 July 2024

A Fifteen-Year Study

2.

Let's Model a Philosophical Disease! (30 June 2024)

Let's learn the steps in modeling a philosophical disease!

Our disease X relates to knowledgeability in some way.

First step, let's describe a virtuous circle for good knowledgeability.

Reproducible evidence, matched to explanatory understanding or hypothesis, matched to apt perception of the evidence.

Second step, let's convert from this to a vicious circle view of bad disease X knowledgeability.

Strange evidence, matched by strange hypotheses, matched by strange perception finding strange evidence.

Third step, we conceive of listing out *categories of strange evidence* and *categories of strange hypotheses*. And remember that strange evidence and strange hypotheses interact.

Okay, one way to indicate that they interact could be to imagine writing out the lists at 90 degree angles to each other. We can expect to develop an $N \times M$ grid.

Fourth step: Yes imagine a grid. And now imagine that disease X has many specific symptoms—and the symptoms reflect or depend upon which specific category of strange evidence and which specific category of strange hypotheses are interacting.

Okay, that's just a clue. It does not tell us how large the grid is. However, we might infer that if one has a description of the disease X symptom, one could find where that description can be found in the grid (once filled out, and if unique), and project from there onto the lists/axes, and thus use the symptom description to identify which category of strange evidence and which category of strange hypotheses are interacting.

Fifth step: This another mental-priming step. Imagine there is specific criterion for adding an element to the list of categories of strange evidence. Likewise, imagine there is a specific criterion — a different one — for adding an element to the list of categories of strange hypotheses.

Okay, again just a clue. However, now we can infer or surmise that the two specific criteria might be absolutely critical, absolutely determining. That is, by structuring and restricting what can be added to each of the lists, then each interaction point — and each symptom description — on the grid, will also be structured and restricted. The “symptomology” of disease X will essentially fully follow given only the two criteria.

Sixth step: The two criteria will now be stated for an actual disease X. Before going moving into detail, the first question is: What are you inclined to guess about the general characteristic of this disease X — in one word?

- Categories of strange evidence must rationally explain an “X-manifesting” person being able to recognize strange evidence practically anywhere, at any time, as if at will.
- Categories of strange hypotheses must “explain” — i.e. disease-X-style “explain” — how a person could expect to be able to find confirming “evidence” practically anywhere, at any time.

With “anywhere, at any time” occurring in both, a single word should be ‘paranoia’.

Seventh step: Yes. For homework, consult the study guide. Links are given to the literature describing how the lists of categories can be plausibly defined, given either “X equals delusional disorder, paranoid variety” or “X equals delusional content in paranoid psychosis, apart from hallucinations”.

3.

Toward a Deeper and Model-Informed CBTp (29 June 2024)

I once spent a few hours, as I recall in a bookstore in Madison, Wisconsin, reading for the first time a rather masterful account in the *sociology of science* (indeed by the recognized master in the field, whose name I do not recall). I found it in many ways more explanatory than all of the philosophy of science I had read up to that point. For example, what explains the enhanced likelihood of two Nobel Prize winners having been roommates in college, though in nominally unrelated fields? Apparently it relates to becoming exposed to conversations near the edge of scientific discovery, these also a contagion for hopeful energy, expectations to be *present at* and to *witness* breakthrough conversations, and sure expectation of imminent new understandings.

A science can still be “a field of dreams”.

If a mental affliction derives from a particular bad individual *epistemic* or particularly unsuitable *epistemology*, then we would expect improved face-validity in pursuing and/or offering a logical, stage-oriented, and/or axiomatic characterization of the affliction. An alternative way of saying this might be: a philosophical characterization of the affliction.

Likewise, if a mental affliction is low in apparent mood-aspects, emotional-aspects, and affective-aspects, again we could ascribe a higher face-validity in pursuing and/or offering a logical, stage-oriented, and/or axiomatic characterization of the affliction. Again an alternative way of saying this might be: a philosophical characterization of the affliction.

Likewise again, if measurable correlates of a mental affliction have apparently been modelled in a manner well-tied to theory and

empirical findings in cognitive science, already there can be a degree of established validity, as well as cause-and-effect-based theory to inform predictions around prognosis and progression.

As a counter to such happy scenarios, consider the following cautioning quote:

The philosophies of the past have an attraction of a similar kind for us. Their clear and simple schematic pattern, their ingenious illusion of being discoveries of truth in its entirety, the confidence with which they rely on formulae which they imagine incontrovertible, convey the impression of a closed circle, defined and definitive, where there are no more problems to solve and everything is satisfactorily determined. There is nothing more pleasant than to spend a few hours in such clear and mild atmospheres. But when we return to our own thoughts and again react to the universe through our own particular sensibility we perceive that the world defined by the philosophies we have been examining was not really the world, but simply the horizon of the philosophers responsible. What they interpreted as the limit of the universe, beyond which there was nothing, was only the curve that closed the landscape their particular perspective afforded them.

__ Jose Ortega y'Gasset __

One could stop there confident that there are no more clear and simple schematic patterns to be described.

Indeed that quote offers a counter-view and a caution, but it also offers an invitation — an invitation to spend a few pleasant hours, if opportunity presents, enjoying a sense of previously-unknown structure in understanding, matched with previously-unknown new-recognition of structure within familiar observations.

Moreover, the mention of a landscape invites a paraphrase of Newton's reference to his lucky "reach of view" standing on the shoulders of giants. Namely, if science involves expanding explored landscape, then a modest self-description of discovery

could state: “I have only expanded the landscape based upon landscape already expanded by giants.”

And now we may turn to the final paragraph in the final chapter of the consistently even-handed monograph *Delusions: Understanding the Un-understandable* by Peter McKenna. That concluding paragraph being:

This is the argument recently made ... in a theoretical exploration of the possibility that delusions are a linguistic phenomenon. While what the authors propose might be considered to be at the outer limits of reasonable speculation, such an argument does have one undeniable advantage — invoking language brings with it the possibility of senses of meaning beyond simply that of stimuli having significance for behavior. One well-known form of meaning that exists at the linguistic level is semantics, the meaning of words. This does not seem particularly relevant to delusions ... when deluded patients say they are Jesus, or that the Mafia are persecuting them, they are using words in the same way as everyone else and we know exactly what they mean. However, there is also another type of linguistic meaning, which is well recognized, particularly in philosophy, that of propositional meaning. This is the kind of meaning that arises from grammatical structuring of lexical-semantic information when the level of complexity of full sentences is reached. Furthermore, it is generally accepted in philosophical circles that it is this form of meaning which gives statements their quality of being true or false. With this, a point might finally have been reached where Jaspers’ (1959) proposal that all kinds of delusions, not just referential delusions, represent a change in meaning might not seem so strange after all.

___ Peter McKenna ___

I read McKenna’s last chapter as a nearly-intentional setup for a missing next chapter; as a setup for the next turn the literature on delusional disorders should, I believe, take: *an epistemic turn*.

That is, the last chapter and last paragraph allow for the possibility that something about delusions has been a *philosophical* problem all along, addressible via terms including “evidence”, “hypotheses”, “strength of suspicion”, “degree of confidence”, and so on. In short, addressible via ordinary language epistemology.

Recognizably, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy/Theory entered such ordinary-language philosophical ground decades ago. However, to the extent of my knowledge, CBT-for-psychosis (CBTp) is still in too much of a cut-and-paste phase, advising focus on evidence versus belief, yes, but not having pushed deeper into understanding particular aspects of the problematic “evidence”, and particular aspects of the problematic “beliefs”, and any particular restrictions on the *relationship* between these. The passability of a mere cut-and-paste approach could delay the taking of a next deeper step.

The following axioms might describe such “particular aspects” in a suitable way.

One bad premise can lead to formulating and adopting another bad premise — and so on — hence the apt expression for a quasi-exponential process: “spiraling out”.

Once one’s epistemics sufficiently change, it becomes possible and common to find or recognize “strange evidence” anywhere, at any time. This experience in turn demands explanation.

One essential characteristic-in-common for subsequent “strange hypotheses” (in order to explain “strange evidence” found in profusion) is that they be capable of explaining “finding [strange] evidence anywhere, at any time”. Logically, this entails a demand to embody exceptional scope. I believe three standard categories of “strange hypotheses” — ones indeed embodying exceptional scope — become and can be observed as:

- the super-natural (e.g., via non-human, non-technological cause,

substance, mechanism, agency)

- the super-technological (e.g., conceivable but “impossible” or “ridiculous” technologies such as distant electromagnetic mind-reading or mechanical influence)
- the super-social (e.g., broad conspiratorial/coordinated human-agent-based surveillance/interaction)

Backing up one step, and assuming “strange evidence” is to a degree generated by intention/expectation and filtered awareness, the requirement of *ably generating* such evidence *anywhere, anytime* serves to restrict and define natural and fitting categories of “strange evidence”. The list can, I believe, be expanded, but the most common and illustrative categories of easily-created “strange evidence” seem to include:

- recognizing time-coincidences between observables (including time-coincidences with observable thoughts)
- recognizing [quickly-completed] chains-of-association (a completed chain presumably serving as a criterion of “meaning”)
- combinations of both, particularly in go-with-the-flow-divination and related question-posing-sign-recognizing-divination

The beginning of my development of these axioms traces to ordinary CBT.

Very early in my psychosis/delusional-disorder I found in CBT literature an emphasis on vicious circles. Almost immediately I then took what I knew of a virtuous circle — specifically one combining reliable evidence, good hypotheses, and resulting compatible perceptions— and derived the obvious parallel in a vicious circle version, naming “a vicious circle between strange evidence, strange hypotheses, and strange perception” as likely a key problem.

It was not until well after the end of my seven-year experience — with either delusional disorder or some psychosis-without-hallucinations — that I started to see a role for naming sub-structure, for naming categories, within each of “strange hypotheses” and “strange evidence”. In fact, it might have been a full twelve years after my first diagnosis, and five years into remission, before I did so. I had persisted.

Once I did take that step with each, I soon had a powerful personal experience, leading to a unified view:

When I believed I was experiencing psychosis and I was attempting to write about it, one of the most profound aspects seemed to be a sense of being, so to speak, *adrift and always in the dark* — as with no directions or references to orient to, let alone navigate by. Years later, after I was back to normal consciousness, the day I imagined this prompt — *What category of strange evidence was at work, and what category of strange hypothesis?* — was an amazing one; I was able to recall and consider thirty or forty incidents/memories I had not previously examined, and see one after another as, in effect, now satisfyingly some combination of understandable/placeable/graspable/processable; perhaps satisfyingly *done*. These two extremes suggest to me that *naming categories of strange evidence* combined with *naming categories of strange hypotheses* could serve to make the conventionally unnavigable experience of delusions/psychosis now navigable — nearly Cartesian in more than one sense. I imagine that one practical approach could be for current sufferers to practice “experience sampling” based upon the above prompt; I imagine that frequently naming distinct categories could help reify them, rendering them of Cartesian aid.

Had I known of *delusional disorder, paranoid variety* as an available diagnosis, I might have been spared years of repeated grappling and introspection involving this question: Is/was my

experience one of a uniquely *epistemic* variety of psychosis — and what seemed special and/or discoverable about its nature?

Fortunately my “loss” in that regard could be an overall gain.

4.

Delusional Disorder via Compounding (2023)

All are lunatics, but he who can analyze his delusions is called a philosopher.

___ Ambrose Bierce ___

[Added note, 29 June 2024: Compared to the preceding essay, this one presents a more “parts of the elephant” approach. As I have tended to rewrite from scratch, without notes, every six months or so, resulting essays tend to vary between “whole elephant” (more nearly axiomatic/the-essential-logic in focus), versus “parts of the elephant” (as here). This essay was the best I had available when, in a hurry, I first put together a privately printed version of my collection as *Cheerful Moral Will*. I am fortunate to have had time to correct the deficiency.]

One day I was arriving home, at perhaps 10pm, on the Chicago Green Line. One man and myself were at opposite ends of the train car. As I exited the door closest to him (in the direction of my station exit), he stood with his side toward me and said quite loudly into his cellphone: “He has written his own bible and all he wants is to be left alone.” This happened.

Based upon several monographs I have read, I believe that for seven years I experienced a delusional disorder of the paranoid variety. It came and later it went.

Delusional disorders are perhaps the most purely-epistemic of diagnosed mental illnesses.

For the last twelve months or so of the seven, I had intentionally (at least to start) practiced interpreting license plates according to playfully absurd premises. On occasion this led to equally absurd

behavior. However, perhaps interpreting license plates — while knowing I had once chosen to — gave me a smaller “toy model” to reject in getting scared straight and rejecting the larger delusions.

My analysis, including breakdowns into categories of “strange evidence” and categories of “strange hypotheses”, could be novel.

Suppose you invented a few kinds of “strange evidence” sharing the following characteristic: If you choose to notice (and soon become habituated and entrained to notice), you could find such evidence anywhere, anytime, at will.

Soon enough, not realizing exactly what you had done, you would be compelled to invent and puzzle about “strange hypotheses” capable of explaining *finding evidence everywhere, at any time*.

I believe there are three usual categories of strange hypotheses, of attempts at explanation:

- Super-natural (meaningful, with design, with mystery)
- Super-technological (RF, secret video, “a loom with an arm miles long”)
- Super-social (conspiracies of surveillance and stalking)

Conceivably, after exploring a full range of hypotheses from different culturally-available angles, one might give up attempting to decide among or reject hypotheses, in turn accepting all three categories inseparably. Notably, in a “Truman Show” disorder, one expects both “cameras everywhere” (super-technological) and players-in-the-know everywhere (super-social). Also, reportedly, the typical Truman-show case involves salient expectation of some large monetary payoff or special celebration/elevation; these could be symbols for “divine resolution” (super-natural).

Suppose you and a compatriot decided to: a) travel somewhere without knowing the language there; and b) without researching the culture or history in advance. In addition, suppose: c) the two of you agreed that each time one of you asked a yes-or-no question — along the lines *could this be what is happening now* — together you would flip a coin and statistically-half-the-time take yes as the answer. This would make for a wacky adventure, as follows:

Imagine how it would progress. After a few questions “answered” yes, now there is an expanded set of premises. From there, given the next few questions randomly “answered” yes, there will be a further-expanded set of premises. Each larger set of premises will likely be a bit more wild. In more than one way this becomes a self-amplifying procedure. First, the set of premises (and resulting interpretations) grow more wild. Second, a growing lack of introspection: the wackier the resulting adventure, the greater the distraction from questioning the original procedure of taking flips-of-a-coin seriously.

At some point, amplification may result in recognition by others of a “break from reality”. One’s now-wacky body of premises will inform one’s *attempts to explain* to a degree where non-overlap with the premises of “baseline reality” becomes evident.

Getting to the topic of strange evidence, delusions may also be fed by *too much contact with reality* — this when misinterpretation of *actual* events is involved. If someone recognizes, in frequent ordinary events, *some evidence*, then there might be no limit to what that person might prove to themselves or convince themselves of.

I believe three kinds of strange evidence are most relevant. Note that all three are compatible with the requirement: *such evidence can be found anywhere anytime at will*.

- Time coincidences with thoughts

- Connection-by-mental-association
- The previous two combined, as in divination

Partly as an illustration, in one form of divination one can pose or consecrate a question, have some implicit time-window in mind for recognizing a response, and in turn recognize a response as a “sign” or *answer* by applying power-of-association (aka interpretation).

Time-coincidences with thoughts represent a very powerful trap. To illustrate the potential power of the trap, we can estimate an expected rate of time-coincidences. An expected rate can follow from combining a base rate with a rejection ratio. To begin, as even in the quietest room there is sound within your body, take a base rate for short or immediate “audible events” to be about one per 6 seconds. Now for the rejection vs. coincidence ratio: If, on average, a one-second recognizable thought occurs every ten seconds, then there will be about a 10% acceptance ratio versus a given random time. It follows: Starting with one raw audible event per six seconds, 10% acceptance gives us one time-coincidence-with-a-thought every sixty seconds. That is, we can expect a rate of one “positive meaningful event” (aka “false-positive meaningless event”) per minute.

As an illustration, place a rate of one coin-flip per minute into the previous scenario. At one strange premise answered yes (compounding) every two minutes or so, one would self-amplify very quickly; one would expand-strange-premises very quickly; one would spiral-out very quickly.

As another factor, connection-by-mental-association can be extremely quick and sometimes automatic. (Just as persons can *speak* quickly in terms of allusions, persons can see quickly in terms of allusions.) “Perceived synchronicities” (bridged by quick association) provide another domain where false-positive evidence can be found or invented at a rapid rate.

As a last illustration, we can name *go-with-the-flow-divination while walking*. In walking go-with-the-flow-divination, a person moves in

an environment expecting to see just-in-time signs they can take to answer: *which way next*. As a result there is: a) a short time-window just before a *which way next* decision; and b) through association or such, some assignment of a *meaningful sign* within this short time-window. Once again, we can associate divination with invoking both a time-window (for accepting time-coincidences) and a source of events/signs through association.

One reason not to act: your action may come at great cost.

Another reason not to act: even at lesser cost you will create more behavior in your past to live down.

If one feels panic, there is considerable value in remembering a third option — specifically to freeze. The options are not merely “fight-or-flight”; the third option is “freeze”.

A third reason not to act: Action reinforces recognition; action-following-recognition *promotes* recognition. As with the phrase “We learn by doing”, perceived evidence, perceived explanation, and action (affecting perceivable cause) mutually reinforce. Indeed, given suspicion and/or delusion, action can help close a vicious circle, merging suspicion with constant recognition of threats.

A fourth reason to practice non-action: When we refrain from acting and see no bad consequences, this can help quiet anxieties-to-act and/or priorities-to-act. Proven non-disasters help attenuate and extinguish fear of disaster.

A fifth reason: To act on a premise, even to test it or reject it or defy it, is still a way of saying “yes” to it. Better to stay occupied and distracted.

CODA:

There can be an up-side to delusional capacity in the historical

long term, because surely conditions will change.

If the evidence you see, what you understand, and what you do all agree, you can inhabit a different world.

Others have; other will.

High-rationality tends to be only one phase in civilization; human universals manage to reassert themselves.

5.

Self-Entrainment Sam (2021)

§ Sam and his sounds: time coincidences

Sam liked to read about good intents and think specifically about goods and good intents. He thought thinking about such things was important.

One day Sam had the bright idea: “Sometimes I am so absorbed in work. What if every time I hear a bird chirping nearby, I let that be a reminder to think of something good. That can only increase how often I think of good things, right?”

Oh, what Sam was to find out.

Sure enough Sam started to notice occasional bird sounds more, and made a habit of thinking up a positive thought when he did. This became familiar and Sam felt good about it.

One day Sam noticed a bird chirp, thought of people doing good things with good intent, and suddenly thought: “I must have needed that right then!” Sam felt grateful.

Sam drifted into more often feeling gratitude after thinking a positive thought in response to hearing a bird chirp. He might have thought at some point in the process: “Feeling more gratitude can only be a good thing, right?”

Sam thought of other rules he could adopt as reminders to think of more specific types of goods. If he heard a siren, he could think of people in public service. If he heard a car horn honk, he could think of examples of people being alert and careful and giving caution.

Quickly enough his intentions here became habit became nature.

On a day when Sam was specifically pondering goodness and good things, different sounds he heard were almost contributing suggestions he could use. Sam followed a few of those hints and not only liked some new thoughts he had, he enjoyed that way of thinking.

Soon enough Sam had some inkling of being “in dialog with nature”.

Sam soon thought of the term “moral symphony” to describe such dialog, to describe a harmony between many specific thoughts and nature.

Fast-forward and Sam suspects his neighbors upstairs are watching him. Too many times, in the past and now, he had made some motion and immediately heard them moving furniture or closing drawers.

One bad night Sam was in bed afraid to even move. It seemed with his slightest motion his neighbors upstairs would move a chair or close a kitchen drawer in response.

Fast-forward again and Sam is in bed afraid to even think. In months prior, so many times he had scribbled some thought on a notecard while in his apartment, assuming a sound would appear in response. Now he is expecting sounds in immediate response if he so much as thinks.

Over time, Sam alternately cowers and acts in defiance.

What Sam can never settle upon or figure out is *at what level* everything is happening.

Nothing is consistent enough to become sure about. At one point Sam thinks: “If this is cosmic, it is a sign of very bad cosmic management.”

Sam does not see any way to decide whether the birds near his windows are directed by nature, or whether they are electronic birds serving as another way to deliver feedback he will notice.

Sam can never bring himself to wrap aluminum foil around his head as a test, although occasionally he has been tempted to.

Thus Sam qualifies, but has not baptized himself into the *literal* tinfoil-hat club.

§ Sam senses comments: associations

Sam liked words, and joining words to add associations, to add meanings.

Sam was quick with words; at times he could hear a rhythm in some sound and immediately think of words to match. Eventually this became a problem when, sometimes, he made up matching words which told him something imprudent to do, and he did.

At one point Sam frequented a message board, a strange but very public one. He wrote to the email for some posts, but soon looked for a reply not by email, but on the board itself. Many posts were cryptic and it was hard to tell if one of those was in reply: one had to guess; one had to see where the personal association might be; one had to see which posts held marginal-but-plausible personal meaning.

One post on the board seemed to disclose method: in particular it mentioned “signal-to-noise ratio” and other relevant terms.

A fair warning might have been: “Here stands a method of induction into psychosis or paranoid delusion, into treating low-signal-to-noise associations as evidence.”

Eventually, Sam thought it certain. Operationally, it seemed, some passersby wanted him to *hear* them, making it clear to him that they knew things about him and wanted him to know this.

Sam also slowly recalibrated, from “how could they” to “surely they would”, in terms of “his powerful government” and “having people who mess with people if only to keep in practice”.

Still, even though seeing strange behavior (or hearing an odd word) and interpreting it personally became Sam’s ingrained habit, the majority could be logically very marginal and subject to interpretation. Recognizing a difference, Sam eventually came up with a specific category of “outlier events” which might *possibly* cross a threshold for someone else to say or admit: “That *is* a little strange” or “I would notice that and wonder about it myself”. Sam had only a handful of outlier events.

It was the incessant non-events — and constant interpretation — which were most enervating. Someone walks by with a demeanor and smoking a cigarette: *What movie is that from; and how is that a comment on me sitting here?* Multiply by five thousand. These fed into Sam’s models of the world, which kept shifting.

The little evidence as Sam had was in frequency and circumstances of forming associations.

Soon enough, no longer would some *person’s* action be needed to trigger Sam’s acts of forming association. As with sounds, soon for Sam occasions could come in any context and they did. In his kitchen, a moment of picking up a green pepper could suggest associating from ‘green’, in one or more near-instantaneous steps, to some angle on a thought in his mind.

At times Sam would adopt obscure signaling in reply to imagined commentary or criticism. In the privacy of his apartment, he would sometimes adopt some ridiculous pose or posture (meaningful to him in the imagined context), then listen in turn, as if in conversation with whoever might be watching with cameras.

Again, as with sounds, for Sam reminders could come from anywhere and they did. It wasn't conscious so much, just quickly things could come from anywhere, as if it had always been.

For Sam, short of disproof, it became natural to assume the maximum. On the evidence he had, he would have no way to argue against it.

§ Sam practices both: divination

Sometimes Sam would go with the flow.

To some, "go with the flow" means not planning their day, then seeing how their inclinations arise, allowing for unknown demands or invitations. For Sam, as for others, it was more.

For example, Sam while walking in the city sometimes approached a busy corner with the thought: "I don't know which way I will turn, but something will suggest a direction (a decision) to me." In such event something as small as the movement of someone's hand (while they were walking cross-wise just ahead) would spur a decision at the last second.

Sam confirmed for himself that such going with the flow can lead to unexpected discoveries and surprises, and reward for planning not to plan.

For Sam, such going with the flow also became a gateway to erratic behavior. For example, one time Sam saw a stop sign he had not noticed from that particular vantage before, and turned around away from his destination, changing his plans.

Deeper into the erratic, a few times Sam would be going with the flow and suddenly have a stark thought of danger to himself or someone else, immediately moving him to panic. Already within an action cycle, a fearful-but-fearless state led him to disregard of both his better interests and his usual prudent limits.

A few times Sam presented with "acute psychosis" leading to treatment coincidentally as long as the insurance would pay.

During Sam's first week as an outpatient after so-called first psychosis, he bought some fortune cookies at an Asian store within walking distance. The first cookie Sam opened said, "You will make a great contribution to medicine." His first thought was "okay". His second thought was to wonder who planted the cookie there.

6.

Some “oral history” level recall (29 June 2024)

It is unquestionably “self important” of me to include this chapter.

However, if my model is dismissable, this chapter will be easily dismissed as well.

If, on the other hand, my model proves useful or valuable — that scenario implies some duty upon me in history-of-science terms.

The following amounts to a single-take oral-history-like recall-based report.

For years my style in discursive meditation (i.e., creating isolated sentences, aphorisms, and passages) has been to rely upon ordinary language and keep technical concerns in philosophy at a safe (but occasionally curiosity-prompting) distance.

The label “ordinary language philosophy” has long held a ring to me, and such sense as I had of it — particularly given my lack of any technical qualifications — seemed appealing.

Seemingly CBT — cognitive behavioral therapy — made a move to rely upon ordinary language epistemology decades ago. Very early in my psychosis I found in CBT literature an emphasis on vicious circles. Almost immediately I then took what I knew of a virtuous circle — specifically one combining reliable evidence, good hypotheses, and resulting compatible perceptions — and derived the obvious parallel in a vicious circle version, naming “a vicious circle between strange evidence, strange hypotheses, and strange perception” as likely a key problem.

Upon my first admission with “Psychosis NOS”, in my first discussion I felt immediately insulted by heavy-handed use of the label/monolabel “delusions”. I had literally written up my suspicions

about technical possibilities in surveillance and subject manipulation in a *movie treatment*, to emphasize that I saw my concerns as one possible story. I also still felt able, at least given time to calm on some newer acute fears, to articulate degrees of certainty and uncertainty relative to the write-up on concerns which led to my admission.

(FWIW, my first presentation was pre-Snowden. My movie treatment described the possibility of man-in-the-middle interception of *both* someone's cell phone connection and their internet domain server, as *likely* to be sufficient to manipulate their world, e.g. by altering web pages and blocking text messages. When I returned to work, I was informed that the police had stopped *every* person leaving the building that day, to confiscate any copies of my write-up which might thus get out.)

As a physicist, as a scientist, I had long been accustomed to and aware of mentally tagging any overheard scientific statement or tid-bit with some measure of reliability-vs-unreliability; for example, do I believe I reliably understood what was said, did I consider the source reliable, and similar.

Perhaps in part based upon the preceding (and with reference to “ordinary language”), I have a natural confidence in the average person's ability to discern many different levels of confidence relative to, say, a suspicion. First, there are the many modifiers available: very, not very, somewhat, sort of, I lean toward, I am backing down on, tentatively, knowingly, and so on. (Arguably, reasoning is not separate from feeling, and people find many words to describe their feelings.) Second, there is common lay use of terms which relate to would-be knowledge, such as hunch, suspicion, theory, worry, concern, picture in my mind, hypothesis, understanding, and so on.

I can convince myself that fast clinical decision-making and decision-communicating will necessarily result in use of stereotyped (or monotyped?) unsubtle terms. However, to the extent I have seen the same unrelenting use of the word ‘delusions’ in the medical literature—even when other words exist, so many

distinctions exist, and even when etiology is being discussed—I have been led to conclude that to some degree thought has stopped, and that “intellectual curiosity” seems not to apply. (When thought and intellectual curiosity are at work, one expects alternative words and descriptions to be applied to notions or concepts which not completely understood, which have not been completely nailed down.)

I carry some of the physicist’s characteristic arrogance that, knowing only a few terms applicable in a different field, one is none-the-less a candidate to solve problems in the field others have not solved.

My many different diagnoses all referenced psychosis to a degree: psychosis NOS, depression with psychotic features, schizoid, later schizophrenia (after a single appointment in which my mother did half the talking). However, I never reported or related to visual hallucinations, and I never reported or related unmistakable command voices. What I did occasionally experience and report included: 1) seeming to hear very very quiet apparent short sequences of words, which I took to be echos from having been exposed to loud crowd noise at a concert the night before; and 2) matching words to audible rythms, which I now interpret as somewhat intentionally practicing audio pareolia(sp?). As the term “delusional disorder” was never offered or described, I concluded and remained motivated-to-analyze based upon a supposition that I was experiencing (and later, had experienced) a *uniquely epistemic* variety of psychosis.

My motivation to understand was such that, hired for a job where the job-level was increased to require a security clearance, I delayed application and eventually declared to myself: “Fuck the security clearance; I am going to write about psychosis.”

For decades I have considered sideline-writing a calling, based upon the common phrasing: “Your calling is the most important thing you can do which no one else can do as well.” Once aware of the magnitude of psychosis as a social, medical, and economic problem, I recognized that a proper contribution relative to

psychosis would be of far more worth or importance than all the other writing I had done.

Prior to psychosis, I had learned of enough cognitive science so that, whenever Kant and “things in themselves” came to discussion, I immediately mapped the discussion, in my head, onto a picture of multiple brain layers each doing [inbound] filtering, enhancement, and/or other transformation. Later, I have read in some detail about predictive processing (including Andy Clark’s *Surfing Uncertainty*)—this enough to update my mental image to one of two-way flow, with branching-out flow outward, and branch-merging flow inward, allowing for very substantial overlap in the flows.

I return now to my very early model of psychosis: a vicious circle between strange or unusual evidence, strange or unusual hypotheses, and strange or unusual perception. My expectation with this from the beginning was that, of the three, strange or unusual perception would be the most difficult to describe or to attenuate. This helped me keep some focus on strange evidence and strange hypotheses as a pair, which is to say that it kept me closer to seeing the core problem as *epistemic*.

It might seem unusual that I used the term “strange hypotheses” even in my early conception of a vicious circle, but in the context of experiencing shifting frames of understanding, I also had an experience I interpreted as involving “intrusive hypotheses”. So, just as I was employing language referencing “frames”, I was employing language referencing “hypotheses”.

At some point, I became partially acquainted with an understanding or misunderstanding of Hume’s epistemology. I took him to have suggested that “common sense is a paranoia”. That is, we move from a few examples of cause-and-effect taking place, and universalize to assume that the cause-and-effect relationship obtains everywhere, at all time. The notion of paranoia as related to scope, to *to everywhere*, played some role in my eventually

seeing part of the link between “strange evidence” and “strange hypotheses” as involving “an *everywhere* scope”.

If paranoia-as-scope played one role of three in my supposed breakthrough, the two others were to recognize and list categories of strange hypotheses and categories of strange evidence. As I recall I recognized categories of strange hypotheses — the three of them I name — first. It was later that I became able to name and/or predict particular categories of strange evidence.

Why have I devoted such effort? I imagined I had a background providing a good fit to the apparent problem. I also felt insulted early on by heavy-handed clinical language.

Varied reasons I was devoted to unravelling my own experience include these: I have a background interpreting murky science (part of my dissertation work having necessitated this); I have background experience reading philosophy of science; I also have limited background reading philosophy generally. I have also remained confident—consistent with the quote “Science is common sense gone systematic”—that ordinary language gifts everyday people with remarkable-if-underappreciated abilities to recognize, for example, many fine gradations of confidence in their supposed “beliefs”—from naming “slight hunches”, “growing hunches”, “growing suspicions”, “possibly confirmed once or twice”, ... , all the way up to, say, “proof demanding action, no question”. Thus, in part, I remained motivated by early experience of having my suspicions and hunches—which I was at least *prepared* to be a bit measured and nuance around (given time and some calm)—be labeled flat-out delusions.

A Several-Year Study

7.

On The Pedagogy of Ethics And Virtue (1984--1986)

§ Virtue is a craft

In the years since 1945 there has been an enormous intensification of interest in Design. The word is everywhere. But there has been no corresponding interest in workmanship. Indeed there has been a decrease of interest in it. Just as the achievements of modern invention have popularly been attributed to scientists instead of the engineers who have so often been responsible for them, so the qualities and attractions which our environment gets from its workmanship are almost invariably attributed to design.

__ David Pye __

Virtuousness (aka 'virtue') is a craft in the sense that it can be "taught" by example and learned by doing. As in all crafts, often the best instruction emphasizes rediscovery and recreation: integration and fluency, and an attention to detail conducive to independent progress, require as much.

In this craft virtue involves "materials" the nature of which is open to description and investigation. Direct study of these—of human nature—is a natural complement to learning by doing. The craftsperson will find such study useful so far as it helps relate imagination to the possible and intention to effect.

Virtue is an art in the sense that it has an end in view which is beautiful or divine. If "the true painter is he who can paint everything" (Tolstoy), the virtuous can paint eternity in the moment as well. Its canvas: its life; its subject: the glory of Truth or All; its brush: a loving heart; its paint: true words and truer deeds. Virtue in this sense is—as Simone Weil said of science and art—

something “which we practice to keep from deceiving ourselves.” We can deceive ourselves with the untrue and the ephemeral.

One everyday reminder of this virtue is esteem reserved for so-called heroes. Of these it can be a comfort to daydream that “they exist” or “in principle they would stand up for one such as me”. To believe like this is to believe in providence; absent such belief neither civility nor civilization would for long survive. So great is the need, people will countenance any deception or imminentism, including the invitation to die for the glory of war.

Virtue-as-an-art is not a self-conscious, stuffy manner. What could be more dreadful than living in a community of saints! Art, rather, must make us want to recall the experience itself in detail, as a whole; art must play well in the theater of memory. As Austin Warren wrote, “There is an informality which is below formality—which is crudeness and rudeness. And there is an informality above decorum—the harmonics, the easy grace, of a perfectly disciplined nature.” Virtue needs no patches on its elbows, and a saint will not love you to the point of disrespect.

In this way, too, does the noble in us recognize the noble: realizing that nuance can reflect the whole of life, and respecting the mystery of such precision. Art is when a good sample of the world it implies.

That virtue which is its own end—which involves “true knowledge of the good” and is “higher than justice and the virtues”, as Socrates said—is in a sense self-defining. Hence: “Virtue is as virtue does”, or “He who knows the Good, does the Good” (and vice versa). This state is commonly associated with grace; it is seemingly with this state in mind that Socrates (in the *Republic* at least) stressed his “ignorance”, called dialogues about virtue just “popular expositions”, and said that one needs to view the Good directly, with the “mind’s eye” (which requires no assistance from other senses).

§ Sixty characteristics of ethical suasion

Ethical edification or pedagogy is the concern of those of us who as yet require craft—particularly discrimination—as well as grace: we who are not as yet as offspring. It concerns itself with “our nature”: our destiny, what we may know of it; the means by which we may realize it; and the manner in which we divert some of these means to ends other than the Good. It is an accoutrement of love, devotion, and service. It is—at its best—accessible, practical, verifiable, and from the heart.

Ethical pedagogy as “influence” or “edification” can be said to admit of the following attributes:

It can be ineffective—in the sense that bad ideas have a way of assimilating good ones in benign form.

It can be confusing and stifling—to the extent that it subjects us to a mass of indigestible detail (as for example with the dry, means-confused-with-ends calculus of sin).

It can be divisive—to the extent that it serves the inquisitor—reflecting presumptuousness and innuendo. (And, where there is attachment to the person of the inquisitor, crisis can be provoked.)

It can provoke destruction—as by catalyzing internal conflict which is then projected outward and acted upon.

It can be timid—in part to the extent that its certainties are all borrowed from the mortician (or, from the living dead).

It can be demoralizing—to the extent that, in preparation for sowing the good (i.e., “the rightly desirable”), it only plows the bad and destroys faith in the good. Also: to the extent that it portrays Truth as something which can be affirmed or denied—as opinion.

It can be counter-productive—to the extent that it extols the good while demonstrating no real means by which to attain it—provoking rebellion when the spells of guilt, ritual, enthusiasm, and custom wear off.

It can be discouraging—to the extent that it suggests practical steps to take towards the good, but offers not the support required to repeat such steps—failure after failure—and to learn from failure.

It can promote haughtiness—in the sense that, say, dichotomies and labels often encourage us to speak of differences of “quality” and not merely of “degree”.

It can help promote self-respect—even in the face of failures (both past and present). It can also promote complacency—this beginning with a sentimentality concerning failures which displaces resolve “to stop now” or “no more opportunities lost”.

It can help structure a “rite of passage”—legitimizing both “immature” and “mature” views, and justifying the replacement of the former by the latter (perhaps by building a bridge which connects them).

It can, in the form of developmental accounts, assist in *discrimination* (not just concerning situations, but our very hearts). Therein lies the value of such accounts to *individuals*, particularly when these are stated from a pilot’s-eye view. (Also: great lives and great deeds define distinctions.)

It can set boundary conditions—by way of clues (and a vision) sufficiently complete that what does not yet fit them is not a solution.

It can render itself easily dated—largely in proportion to what it leaves out, and what perspectives it fails to include.

It can kill with want of encouragement—as at the hands of those with inspiring but too-cold and rigid temperaments, who would never offer a complement they couldn’t keep.

It can reflect “impatient reform”—in part to the extent that it (or its communicator) blames others for their failure to respond, and fails in sensitivity to the pain and terror which “the message”—understood or misunderstood, if ever even defined—might

provoke. Likewise, it can be romantic, to the extent that it maintains a too-flattering distance between itself and its audience — too forgiving of false hope.

It can promote self-deception—in part to the extent that it promotes controversy at the personal level, nothing creating liars like courtrooms and confrontation. And it can invite presumptuousness—would that its critics be more easily ignored.

It can be scholastic—to the extent that it concentrates on applications at the expense of examining basic assumptions or the means of verifying them. (Also: to the extent that it seeks to resolve essential paradoxes—this with a “foolish consistency”.)

It can overstep its welcome—by persisting in giving unasked for, uninformed, even if principled advice. If to offer advice is sometimes charitable, the laws of human charity demand that none be persisted in without reverential attention to the specific compensations and the balances established in peoples’ lives. (“No vice”, says the motto, “is as bad as advice.”)

It can contribute to the diminution of memory—as with that placard too bold, or that voice too loud, which does not say “I see this issue as might the community”, but “I do not see the community at all”.

It only indirectly the addresses the problems of “moral courage” and “constancy of purpose” (and thus, in part, those of deeds, not words). In part, it gives us principles and examples to appreciate and to copy (in comparison to which we may recognize our failures—both in practice and in essence.)

It can affect conscience and behavioral disposition—in large part by influencing our unconscious beliefs about our motivations and tendencies. In this respect learning by doing is king: we subconsciously believe what *we do*, not what we say; therefore “The voice of conscience fades quickly.”

It is not virtue—to occasionally mistake it as such is something we associate (rightly or wrongly) with sophists and hypocrites (indeed,

anyone who overlooks the roles of courage, grace, truth and true living).

It can betray life — even as it most instructively characterizes it — by creating fictional characters within which people then live, a piety which softens the outside only being as nearly rot as ripening.

It can be comic — to the extent that it tries in championing a single virtue to promote what one hundred unaddressed tendencies contradict.

It can be merely analytical — if it succeeds in identifying all of the categories but none of the motivation.

It can be ungrammatical — in the sense of suggesting corrections referenced only to whim, not potentially articulate rule.

It can be original — in part as it paints *all* life in its own terms; or derivative — in part as it becomes mere criticism or caricature, devoid of humanizing depth. This can mark the difference between the master artist (whose work makes us consider quitting art) and the slipshod artist (who makes us angry enough to pursue it).

It is not easily characterized as being “persuasive” as opposed to “convincing” (or vice versa) — this to the extent that there is no value-free thought or thought divorced from action. In terms of intention, the most telling dichotomy is perhaps that involving “injunctions” vs. “statements”. In terms of effect, the most telling is perhaps that (as described by William James) involving the “strenuous” vs. the “easy-going” moods. In a sense encompassing both, other dichotomies include that involving persuasion to the “examined” vs. the “unexamined” life, and that involving persuasion based upon “informed consent” vs. persuasion exploiting weakness or relatively unconscious expedience. (In Plato’s guardians: a proper rule of wisdom over both enthusiasm and desire, tested by both pleasure and pain. Also, perhaps the defining characteristic of the easy-going mood: “What holds attention determines action.”)

If it can be said ever to work from the social to the individual, one way it might do this is by helping redefine common sense.

It will tend to emphasize theory — largely to the extent that moral choice is taken to be a corporate or collective matter, not one for individuals.

It can prove self-defeating — if it backs into mere apologetics, not qualifying itself as historical and contingent, though ever-renewing.

It can, where fluency has been lost, profitably begin with the resuscitation of vocabulary.

It can be ahead of its time — as if starting a bridge on the unpopulated side of a river and failing to complete it in one lifetime, or discovering a truth but not its cash value.

It is apt to prove offensive — as by painting the universe all in black and white.

It can, despite all precedent, countenance war in the strengthening of institutions — as with those who like jokers speak of “nuclear war” and “moral regeneration” in the same breath.

It can be depersonalizing — if, as through repetition, it succeeds in assuming the absence of any interior life in its audience members (caring only for the behavioral).

It can deceive all parties — particularly to the extent that these revel in being certain in proportion to their ignorance.

It can deceptively portray the price of vanity as martyrdom — as to helpers who are constitutionally dependent upon helpees.

It can perhaps be communicated without hypocrisy only by persons unwilling to let their rhetoric exceed their practice by an amount exceeding their humility and self-naughting.

It can be a cooperative enterprise — partly so far as it involves mutual selective criticism. The true friend can be one who cares

enough to say “yecch” — though always knowing how to err on the forgetful side, for the sake of allaying fear.

On the question of its seriousness, there are no non-combatants — “He who is not for is against” (William James). (This, at least, might be a social/historical truth, if not true for individuals. Also: one can regard truth as both problematic and a matter for serious concern.)

It, proportionally as it fails to relate the individual verifiably to the eternal (immediate truths included), will tend to interest in proportion to its eschatological (or cosmological) content — its concern with ends or grand movement in history.

It can be communicated purposefully yet gratuitously (with detachment). Criticism can be measured and selfless.

It can be lustful and aggressive — where it involves desire to command thought, or to seduce in the realm of belief.

It can be convincing (in part) to the extent that it both tears down the “bad” and builds up the “good”, with equal originality and effectiveness. Or, by proceeding amoebically: pushing an idea in here; teasing it out there; propelling, while leaving the bulk unchanged, unsuspecting.

It can be inspiring — to the extent that it (or its human source) triggers in us a vision of a new possibility; to the extent that it is a call to virtue, a manifestation of righteousness in its fairest sense; to the extent that it demands that we appreciate its nature, and make that a part of our being. (Hence, a picture definition of munificence: *To the man for a slice I say, don't ask my name to thank me, call me brother — then you will always know where to find me.*)

It can render its own content superfluous — if it succeeds in being too competitive in terms of “entertainment” value.

It can resemble romancing — in the sense that never one method but always a variety orchestrated in time is the “advised” practice.

(Two reported dimensions of such practice: caring criticism versus casual humor, and generous attention versus indifference.)

It can be purposefully opportunistic — in the sense that it does well always to match the instruction to the prevailing mood, or to first create a suitable mood.

It is perhaps most effective when it serves to keep eyes on the target and choices in the now — (though with an awareness that we complete the tablet of our life in ink, not pencil.)

It can force the issue of choice — by imposing a rule-governed opposition, first between weaknesses (to assure victories), then between weakness and would-be strength. Similarly, it can replace the shallow with the shallow — finding motive (for alternative behavior) which is just stupid enough to ring true, and granting to laugh at the burden of choice.

It can, in dialogue form, help promote a critical awareness of our “inner parliament” (or mob) — which is an essential component of the examined life.

It can be appropriately authoritative — to the extent that it defends standards outside of which there are only decay and destruction, not creative error. (Or — to the extent it opposes standards inside of which there is loss of life and freedom.)

It is likely to be prized as quotable — to the extent that it demonstrates verbal gestures which promise to be useful in dialogue. Or — it may simply be beautiful, whence our recognition of truth as the beauty which the art was for.

It will tend to invite prolonged, favorable attention (hence belief and trust) — in part to the extent that it offers a key to the ordering and assimilation of experience. (Also — to ask important questions is itself to order experience. And — stories invite attention, and the greatest story is a life.)

It is a practical concern — to be known by its works. Those who can do “teach”, in the sense that “teaching” begins in heart and

deed.

It will tend to be self-correcting — to the extent that it asks: “Was it voluntary?”, “Did I (we) display hypocrisy, lack of integrity or lack of sensitivity?”, “Did I (we) accurately convey ‘the truth’, and that in a manner which was simple, accessible and so-as-to-suggest its necessity and veracity?”, and so on.

It can be gratuitously controversial — in part as it fails to recognize harmony as itself a good, sometimes more valuable than marginal gains in social self-knowledge.

It fulfills its obligations by fulfilling obligations — not by asserting rights. It is in this sense something which holds nations — the world — together.

§ That its true base is coin

This has not happened because the distinction between workmanship and design is a mere matter of terminology or pedantry. The distinction both in the mind of the designer and of the workman is clear. Design is what, for practical purposes, can be conveyed in words and by drawing; workmanship is what, for practical purposes, can not. In practice the designer hopes the workmanship will be good, but the workman decides whether it shall be good or not.

__ David Pye, The Nature and Art of Workmanship __

There is really no such thing as advice, save that which follows the way of God, whose words are few and far between and, if given freely, to be purchased only at the cost of a way of life.

How much is there actually to say? There are people who are sad and could use some gladness, some love; there are people who are happy and could profit from sadness and gain in compassion. Both need to learn how to give — that they might better know how to receive.

How much room? There are people who wait on truth on pain of forgetting (and pain to their friends). And there are those who, finding revelation rare, are more settled to forget than remember.

How much? There are people who will die lonely, having failed to respect their few friends or benefactors. And, there are people who will reach middle age — I do not see how they can get past it — having no more composure in crisis than children, for having done everything to please others (whom they did not understand) and even fancied that they had become little christs, when they failed to become themselves.

Or there are people who did everything according to their nature (and very well, you may guess), but failed that 1/5 against which would have compounded to their glory. And, there are people who have done everything “right”, if all against their nature, occasionally to become saints, but more likely to fray the bow in trying.

If good advice is rare, this is in part because people are seldom ready for it. The good friend might wait — and friends know how to wait — for a polite (if urgent) moment. How much readiness? Perhaps no more than a few words a year are called for. How much room? Advice in the form of currency can be printed in inflationary quantities; but those who know that its true base is coin measure their wealth by the few they carry with them.

Practical Essays

8.

Meditation by Counting (2022-2024)

One way to proceed is to accept and stipulate that there *are* enough hours in the day, adjusting expectations to match.

Nina Atwood, in Chapter 7 of her book *Urgency Addiction*, suggests of “time integrated people” that they:

- never seem to be in a hurry
- experience the present moment to the fullest
- believe they deserve time for themselves
- make time to get what they want
- welcome the future with confidence
- create a rich, usable past
- spend time on relationships that matter.

The preceding assume access to particular qualities of experience, including particular calm, quietness, and so-called presence to the moment. Beyond open awareness, testimony is also given through the faith and focused attention of *one thing at a time*.

(The problem of self-consciousness and related fear-of-failure *might* be exchanged into recognition of time-embeddedness and related impossibility-of-failure. As a caution, while time cannot fail to proceed, generalizing from impossibility-of-failure can lead to carelessness.)

The above provides context for a suggestion. Lately, I have been assuming that as a means of meditation or rest, it can be more-or-less adequate to mentally count to 100, to 500, or more. That is, to

practice “counting meditation” or “meditation by counting”. (Also lately, I prefer to count to 100 repeatedly without mentally “saying” the hundreds-part.)

Sharing some qualities with so-called box breathing, simply counting:

- Requires concentration and focus to keep one’s place
- Is self-timing (no need to look at a clock)
- Has built-in quality-control (lost focus is objectively defined)
- Provides a test and measure of how scattered one’s mind is
- Provides restart points (last remembered count)
- Can be done while walking, with eyes open, etc.
- Can create rest and mental quiet sufficient to want to continue (or to be ready for whatever is next)
- Can substitute for or help forget unwanted thoughts or impulses
- Provides a means to escape from “hurry” or “not-enough” as a mindset
- Provides space to experience satisfaction
- Can, given an impulse, provide time to consider alternative satisfactions
- Provides a break from one’s own thoughts
- Trains the mind to a threshold required to do well at exacting work
- Can remind of unassailable truth and grounding
- Can help access patience

9.

Mealtimes: an Interpretation (2024)

Sit-down meal focus, not snacking

- time “defined”
- aspects of ritual or expectation, and of gathering
- much to be found in the “negative space” of not eating

One course, all presented at start

- defining “what is a meal”
- visual association with satisfaction
- a matching visual calibration on meal size

Small portions

- a tad more preparation as a feature, not “grabbing something” or gruel
- testimony to balance, simplicity, beauty, style
- added moment-to-moment choices while eating, factorial

Small bites, very well chewed

- with small bites, more time to satisfy
- in mixed bites, a thousand differences of flavor
- with inclination-to-mix actionable and expectations met: choice and confirmation of choice

The “same” meal seldom so.

Immense pleasure. Satisfaction felt. Enough becomes enough.

If three things have shaped our humanity, gratitude might be one of them.

10.

My Approach to Exercise Design (2024)

No one is going to accuse me of being a professionally-trained trainer or a trained physical therapist.

On the other hand, professional standards have been known to embody assumptions and incentives which work against health.

The level of my personal ambition in terms of fitness and ability will emerge clearly enough.

When I set out to create a list for myself—one to improve upon previous ad-hoc habits—I started with some design goals or operational requirements. It seems I rounded these out by adding reference points or informal requirements, along of course with creating an actual list.

§ Adopting design goals

Design goals or operational requirements:

- To avoid injury: on the basis of the delay, inconvenience and impairment following injury.
- To avoid injury: on the basis that exercise which injures is exercise which will be avoided.
- To be scalable (general intent): given injury or illness or loss of habit, maintain habit while on a continuous path back to steady-state.

To be scalable (in detail):

- from few reps to more reps
- from minimal range or strain to range-increasing extra effort
- from more use of stabilizing physical support to less use of stabilizing physical support
- from less fast-twitch to more
- from less eccentric-return effort, to more

To get by with minimum equipment:

- some available physical support (in principle a table, countertop, file cabinet, wall, walker, or pole)
- optionally a treadmill (in an ideal world: self-powered when walking up a slope)
- To be scalable (an emergent feature?): achieving/experiencing scalability might add resilience against *loosing heart* (see below)

§ Adopting reference points

Reference points or informal requirements:

- To walk *down* stairs without weakness.
- To have a spring in one's step, even if staying mostly indoors.
- To have strength to walk toe-to-heel without strain.
- To have strength and body-senses to recover from imbalance while standing or walking.
- To take the occasional long walk without getting tired or sore.

§ Adopting a list of motions

As stated above, no one is going to accuse me of being a professional trainer or physical therapist. I have surely created for myself some omissions or blind spots.

The following is a list which — with some changes included — has worked well for me, over at least several years, in relation to the above goals.

As an example of it “working”, a few months ago after a few months mostly inside for winter, I suddenly did two two-hour walks a week apart, without getting tired or sore either time.

Each “X” in the following means a full cycle back to the starting point (aka, a full cycle back *and* forth).

Neck:

- 30X — F/Neutral with neck
- 30X — L/R tilt with neck

- 30X — CW/CCW level turn with neck
- 15X + 15X — cone CCW, CW with neck

With both Arms:

- 30X — punch air, fast twitch
- 30X — hammer air with fist, fast twitch
- 20X — arc arms out from sides to outstretched sideways/overhead
- 20X — arc arms up from low and behind to high and overhead
- First 40X — lift fists from straight down up to armpits, elbows back/together (1)
- Second 40X — lift fists from straight down up to armpits elbows out/forward
- First 20X — hands from shoulders to overhead, elbows to sides/back
- Second 20X — hands from shoulders to overhead, elbows forward/together

With torso:

- 15X — torso forward (toward touching toes) and backward
- 15X — torso left and right
- 15X CCW + 15X CW — torso rotate 360deg

In chair:

- 40X — lift lower legs at knee to horizontal
- 30X — lift head [reclining back]

With both legs:

- 40X — raise heels to be on balls of feet (3)
- First 40X — squat down slightly, feet parallel, staying upright, head lowering about 3"-4" (2)=b=
- Second 40X — squat down slightly, feet parallel, leaning back, head lowering about 3"-4"

With one leg at a time:

- 40X — shift weight between balls of feet (heels kept close to floor?)

With one leg at a time and with support available:

- 20X right + 20X left — arc leg out to side
- 20X right + 20X left — lift knee up to hip level

- 40X each leg — bend leg back at both hip and knee
- 40X on right foot + 40X on left foot — tilt L/R slightly
- 40X on right foot + 40X on left foot — twist CW/CCW slightly

Treadmill with slope:

- backward: 0.5mph for 10 or 20 minutes
- forward: Just walk in activities, with option for level 2 cardio.

Footnotes:

- (1) doing “fists up to armpits” in both elbows-forward and elbows-back versions *might* have unlocked for me ability to arc my hands from out-to-sides to overhead
- (2)the two versions of “squat down slightly” appear to directly promote stability and confidence going down stairs
- (3) the isolated heal-raising and heal-raised exercises seem to be enablers for walking backwards toe-to-heel

§ Emergent resilience against losing heart?

[this is speculation, but an emergent feature of designing for scalability might be resilience against losing heart]

I am not talking about the physical heart.

I am talking about: What could it mean to lose the heart to play a previously-enjoyed sport including keeping score?

I will be talking about: What could it mean to lose heart for even basic motion or exercise?

Could a common feature be that one gains and loses an ability repeatedly? Could a common feature be repeated loss of ability and a need for re-*abilitation* (aka rehabilitation)?

With ups and downs relative to a sport, one might gain and lose isolated and/or particular skills required to experience reward and to avoid frustration.

With ups and downs relative to isolated exercise, one might gain and lose the strength, balance, and/or technique required to avoid loss of control and to avoid injury.

Loosing heart for basic motion-, basic balance-, and basic strength-preservation is not a good strategy in the context of aging.

Sudden Prose-Poems

11.

House of the Giant (2012)

In the great woods there is a very old house.
In that house there is a staircase without a landing.
Humanity is up a staircase of its own construction.
Those nearest the top have been drawing from the
pantry — food long ago put in store.

The staircase requires constant maintenance.
The lower steps were once made of stone, but no more.
The occupation of this particular house must be temporary.
That house has given food to a civilization.

There is a stigma against stating the obvious.
There is no stigma against exaggerated confidence.
The top priests and most highly decorated fulfill their roles.
The best and brightest perform ritual offerings.
The people make cult of zombies to forestall
unspeakable loss of plenty
and unspeakable loss of goodwill.
There have been no tribunals at which to hear: “We were
only waiting for retirement.”

Moving is never fun.
Soon the top steps will be burned for heat.
At first a few said and now many: “This is what it looks like.”

As from the beginning, those who could not accept their
own mortality accepted that of others.
As from the beginning, those who were of peace
made peace.
As from the beginning, much was good in the land;
to their last morsels of effort the many
claimed the good for their own.

12.

Validation Massage (2012)

For massage and/or touch to be an opportunity for meditation it needs truthfulness in touch. There must be truth in expectations and in limits to help in reducing guesswork for the mind. Guesswork interferes with meditation.

Truthfulness and time, when those promises are met, also contribute to trust. Touch and/or massage should feel very very very safe. Receiving touch and/or massage can also become a meditation in trust.

As we develop trust we should trust also in our own expression. One form of expression is stating preference-for or interest-in specific touch. We might be clear, direct, and perhaps specify a time interval. Massage can become a meditation in self-efficacy.

Massage and/or touch can validate our physical being. Massage and/or touch can validate our agency. In part, massage and/or touch might be about seeking and finding validation. When friends and therapists recommend caring-and-truthful massage as self-care, they can be recommending for feeling touch, feeling safe, feeling trust, and feeling validation — all as part of the experience itself.

Massage has also been a treatment for trauma. When two people with skill interact it can be healing.

A massage of the hands can be a beautiful place to start. It need not be about surface area; it does need to prove out intent.

Imagine a strong glass vase polished and clear to perfection.

Primates groom each other endlessly. There is God in the social. There is love in practicing trust.

13.

Love as an Overflowing Heart (2010)

Love-as-an-overflowing-heart is a metaphor and a metaphor-influenced state to be experienced.

Love is a deep reservoir in the heart, overflowing.

(Love may be a container filled to bursting. If a water main could break and create a stream and carry a person up and hold them six stories in the air — that too is love.)

When we are in our heart on love we are floating safely face up in a very large very calm lake. And the sun is warm.

The substance of love is an ideal substance. We must shout in joy that it cannot be held.

When such love flows out from us we marvel in ourselves.

When such love flows out from us, we marvel in witness of every form of beneficent attention toward a person, persons, or animal:

- interest;
- appreciation;
- gentle awareness;
- selfless intent;
- constant surprise;
- wonder;
- parsing of mystery;
- self-aware patience;
- delight;
- sympathetic joy;
- desire to attend.

Such love needs nothing back.

Such love is a joy and end in itself — an intoxication.

One must remain a little empty to remain overflowing. To be full of

oneself, for just a moment, can be the end of a moment's love.

Thus do we find favorite ends and objects, favorite people and pets, to again take us out from ourselves.

The ground of love is trust, trust, trust.

An Invention for Far Future

14.

The Basic Sevagusta Opposites (2022)

To me, 'seva' implies service or being of service.

To me, 'gusta' implies taking pleasure and finding satisfaction.

Let us define *the basic sevagusta opposites* as a set of sixteen:

You might be of service:

A: with-action-sooner

B: with-action-later

A: with-consequences-sooner

B: with-consequences-longer-term

A: with-service-to-a-few

B: with-service-to-many

A: with-effects-more-tangible

B: with-effects-less-tangible

A: working-with-ease

B: working-against-difficulty

A: under-nature

B: beyond-nature

A: necessarily-as-you

B: as-anyone-could

A: as-individually-whole

B: as-part-of-a-family-or-group

A: as-an-initiator

B: as-a-responder

A: for-human-good
B: for-plant-and-animal-good

A: boldly-as-required
B: carefully-as-required

A: by-softening-perspectives
B: by-clarifying-resolve

A: with-efforts-noticed
B: with-efforts-unnoticed

A: with-constant-efforts
B: with-selective-efforts

A: while-aiming-at-results
B: while-avoiding-failure

A: for-the-world-at-its-current-best
B: for-the-world-as-it-could-be

Conceivably there could be a seventeenth meta-opposite; you might work some opposites:

A: daring-extremes
B: avoiding-extremes

I created this list in part based upon John Michael Greer's suggestion: *help preserve something simple enough to make it through a dark age.*

From there I arrogated to the challenge: *create something simple enough to make it through a dark age.*

15.

Some Uses of the Sevagusta Opposites (2022-2024)

§ Uses as doctrine

Uses, if any, of the sevagusta opposites are likely to vary. The set itself is in some sense Categorical, while any use becomes Doctrine.

As mentioned above, one meta-value approaching an opposite could be: a) playing with extremes; versus: b) avoiding extremes as vice and seeing virtue only in balance.

If the sevagusta opposites are conceived of as written on opposing sides of sixteen flat sticks, then a basic operation becomes to mix/randomize fully, then pick/choose N of sixteen sticks—presumably preserving the order—and pick/accept one side of two for each of the N chosen sticks.

The meta-choice embodied in that conception or practice: to play with discretetes and to play with extremes— as if in a pragmatics of action.

Apparently, one way to begin a book of changes is to consider types/conceptualizations of self, types of consequences, and types/styles of action.

A sum of variations can be more amazing than “the moral law within”. And, like the stars in the sky above, practically uncountable.

Individuals do not repeat, but there are patterns repeating which are in no danger of being lost.

§ Use of one stanza

One use could be at the level of a daily reminder or daily prompt, as with a conventional not-individual-specific mass-market-daily so-called horoscope.

What if a 'sevagusta' as a noun were understood as a single generated N-equals-three stanza? For example:

Today you can be of service

- boldly as required,
- working with ease,
- with effects less tangible.

Each sevagusta-as-a-noun could be a writing assignment: a) on paper; and/or b) in life.

§ Inversion of one stanza

When one despairs of any form of life, the first solution which always occurs, as though by mechanically dialect impulse of the human mind, the most obvious, the simplest, is to turn all values inside out.

___ Jose Ortega y Gasset ___

One interesting property of a one-stanza sevagusta-as-a-noun is that the precise inverted sevagusta would, ostensibly (some can disagree), be equally worthy and valid. This is not the general result expected of "inversion-of-value", but follows in this case from the ostensibly meritorious construction of the basic sevagusta opposites.

Today [in the the full inversion of the above] you can be of service

- carefully as required,
- working against difficulty,
- with effects more tangible.

§ Use of several: characterological complexity

One can take nine sticks from a set of sixteen to form three stanzas. Doing so can begin to represent the contradictions, tensions, overlap and/or multiplicity contained in one person.

For example:

You might be of service

- for plant and animal good,
- with service to a few,
- beyond nature.

And you might be of service

- with action later,
- as an initiator,
- with effects less tangible.

And you might be of service

- with consequences longer term,
- with constant efforts,
- as individually whole.

(And, by the way, just as worthy, the exact opposite production:

You might be of service

- for human good,
- with service to many,
- under nature.

And you might be of service

- with action sooner,
- as a responder,
- with effects more tangible.

And you might be of service

- with consequences sooner,
- with selective efforts,
- as part of a family or group.)

Assuming the full ordering matters in the above, we can calculate the number of distinguishable results for three such stanzas.

For the first, $16 \times 2 \times 15 \times 2 \times 14 \times 2$. For the second, $13 \times 2 \times 12 \times 2 \times 11 \times 2$. And for the third, $10 \times 2 \times 9 \times 2 \times 8 \times 2$.

Together these yield 2,125,489,766,400 (about 2 trillion) distinguishable possibilities.

§ Use of several: worthy opposite stances

“To form a stance” implies making choices.

Relatedly, to acquire and *assimilate* an education in a subject can be to assemble a relatively unique *stance* in the process.

How so? One might say that — to indeed *assimilate* a subject — one will to some degree choose sides in small ambiguities or controversies in the process.

Formalizing this, a person might arrive at a stance by making, say, ten choices solidly towards “side A1 or B1”, “side A2 or B2”, “side A3 or B3”, successively to “side A10” or “B10”. In this example, a given “solid” stance might then be represented by, say, A1-B2-B3-A4-B5-A6-B7-B8-B9-A10 .

Much less formally, we know that different persons each have numerous leanings and predispositions, these influenced by their different experiences and backgrounds.

Perhaps some choices will have been made for them, but choices will have been made. A person will “embody a stance” whether they realize it or not.

There are so many causes worth supporting. As is commonly observed: “Everyone can have their *thing*.”

In a manner of speaking, the notion of pluralism connotes recognition of and respect for differing stances.

Properly formulated, the precise opposite of a valid sevagusta-based stance can also encode a valid stance. In place of every A choose B, and every B choose A, yet notably the resulting stance can still be worthy.

In a divisive time, the notion that contradictory stances can both be valid is a lesson in itself.

§ As a conversation prompt

There is a skeptically-trained part of me scornful at the thought of someone promoting and profiting from a “prediction” generator.

On the other hand, there are both paid and unpaid relationships where a mechanism which serves as a *conversation prompt* can be perfectly legitimate.

I believe any given sevagusta-as-a-noun stanza derives from a model of the world which seems sound (for what it is). Offhand I would predict sound or valid use *when the limitations of the model and what might be thereby prompted* are taken into account.

From some perspectives, it could be a sizeable weakness that there are no necessarily “dark” sides represented, nothing necessarily foreboding trouble; in a sense the model is “goody-goody”. Even so, there are surely relationships between friends and between parents and children where uniformly optimistic, service-oriented prompts could be welcome.

