

CHEERFUL MORAL WILL:
*that seriousness which is not so serious
and thereby protects other goods*

—

Jerry Van Polen

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction . . .	1
1.1 <i>Introductions</i> . . .	1
1.2 Formulations . . .	1
1.3 Influences . . .	3
 <i>Era One: Twenties</i> . . .	 4
2. Poetry To Be Heard At All . . .	5
3. Stories Not To Tell . . .	6
4. On The Pedagogy of Ethics And Virtue . . .	9
4.1 Virtue is a Craft . . .	9
4.2 Sixty Characteristics of Ethical Suasion . . .	11
4.3 That Its True Base is Coin . . .	18
 <i>Era Two: Twenty-Eight</i> . . .	 20
5. Tony and His Shoes . . .	21
5.1 But He Knew It Was True . . .	21
5.2 Let Your Tears Be Sweet . . .	21
5.3 Give Us to Someone Who Needs Us . . .	22
5.4 Who Needs the Flowers? . . .	22
5.5 I Will Talk to the Flowers . . .	23
5.6 And This is Their Strength . . .	24
5.7 Tony Lived with the Four Peoples . . .	25
5.8 He Had the Shoes He Needed . . .	25
 <i>Era Three: Thirties</i> . . .	 27
6. Ethics Is Outcomes . . .	28
7. Please Refrain . . .	30
8. Fine Adjustment . . .	32
9. If Leaves Stay . . .	33
10. Grounding . . .	34
11. Friend Not To Know . . .	35
12. It's Not There For Knowing . . .	38
13. Around The Block Blues . . .	40
14. I'm Yours So I'm A Generalist . . .	43

15. Not What You Say In A Song . . .	45
16. We Came To Dairy . . .	47
17. We're Gonna Build An Empire . . .	51
18. Save Lindy For Marriage . . .	52
19. You Take The Lead . . .	54
20. A Five-Minute Date . . .	57
21. Happen Overnight . . .	59
22. Twenty Years And Twenty Minutes . . .	61
23. A Song Is Like A Speech . . .	63

Era Four: Thirty-Five to Fifty-Five . . . 65

24. Some Free-Standing Sentences . . .	66
25. "No more than your conclusions" . . .	69
26. Truth . . .	70
27. Faith (Poetry) . . .	71
28. Faith (Definitions) . . .	73
29. Spirituality . . .	74
30. Balanced Development and Grounding . . .	75
31. Empathy . . .	76
32. Poets . . .	77
33. Equanimity . . .	78
34. Presence . . .	80
35. Integrity . . .	81
36. Boldness . . .	82
37. Genius . . .	83
38. Age . . .	85
39. Duty . . .	86
40. Evidence and Joy . . .	87
41. Brevity . . .	88
42. Lyrical Flight . . .	89
43. Happiness . . .	90
44. Heart and Home . . .	91
45. Grace and Beauty . . .	93
46. Books . . .	95
47. Study . . .	96
48. Science . . .	97
49. Politics . . .	98

50. Trade . . .	99
51. Inversion of Value . . .	100
52. Will . . .	101
53. Reason . . .	103
54. Historical Action . . .	104
55. Ideology . . .	105
56. The Buddhist, Taoic, and Hindic . . .	107
57. Comforting and Style . . .	112
58. Reflective Community . . .	117
59. God-Talk . . .	120
60. Psychology . . .	122
61. Advice 2012 . . .	126
62. Some Parts of a Continuum? . . .	128
63. Framing Some Adages . . .	130
64. Politics . . .	132
65. Miscellaneous . . .	135

Era Five: About Fifty . . . 141

66. House of the Giant . . .	142
67. Validation Massage . . .	143
68. Love as an Overflowing Heart . . .	144

Era Six: Over Sixty . . . 146

69. Delusional Disorder via Compounding . . .	147
70. Self-Entrainment Sam . . .	152
70.1 Sam and his sounds: time coincidences . . .	152
70.2 Sam senses comments: associations . . .	154
70.3 Sam practices both: divination . . .	156
71. Meditation by Counting . . .	158
72. Mealtimes: an Interpretation . . .	160
73. Sevagusta by Opposites . . .	162

1.

Introduction

Many a reformer perishes in his removal of rubbish; and that makes the offensiveness of the class. They are partial; they are not equal to the work they pretend. They lose their way; in the assault on the kingdom of darkness they expend all their energy on some accidental evil, and lose their sanity and power of benefit. It is of little moment that one or two or twenty errors of our social system be corrected, but of much that the man be in his senses.

__ R.W. Emerson, New England Reformers __

§ **Introductions**

I have attempted writing an introduction to my work often enough to have generalized upon the experience. One thing to note in the following is that I have proceeded with more devotion to adding and to editing than to publishing. I now have nearly fifteen years looking back on the following, still my best expression:

There are as many reasons for this collection as there have been reasons in my life. I could write a new introduction each day and never finish. But my best work is sure; sure or silent I must be. ... Allow me to introduce, then, a long-time private companion. Like a lover, she has been a close hold. Like a romance, her facets still intrigue and delight and remind me, reading after reading after reading, year after year. Ingenuie, ever-promise is her appeal, and must be in valor that she succeed. By parts she is of the friend kind, if ye but know her.

§ **Formulations**

I believe in "Single sentences can change lives." I responded to the traditional "Your calling is the most important work you can do which no one else can do." I responded by creating sentences of my own to pass along.

One way to learn small-scale writing, I imagine, is to write every day and read back a week later. I have adopted the luxury of reading back ten years later as one of my best filters.

Decisively, one day in my twenties I was re-reading essays I had recently attempted, and found I liked only one sentence or two in total. I resolved to write only those sentences. Later I would also find pleasure in going two or three steps past cliché.

While the label 'aphorist' broadly applies, many of my passages are too long to be called aphorisms. Considering alternatives, I suggest the clumsy 'formulationist' for a closer look.

The dictionary definition of 'formulations' has three meanings all of which apply:

- A formulation is a *construct*. ... Some logic or sequence-of-reference should inform it;
- A formulation is a *cleansing agent*. ... it can remove dust and cast new light on meaning;
- A formulation is a *phrasing*. ... meanwhile expression makes its particular value.

A formulation: Some logic or sequence-of-reference should inform it; it can remove dust and cast new light on meaning; meanwhile expression makes its particular value.

Here is a longer example which rules out aphorism as a precise label:

From given circumstances we may move to thought of a rule, a principle-at-stake, or a practice-with-consequences. Different schools teach different methods to quickness, and quick decisions are often better than none. However, most framings can be re-framed, given more time and broader reflection. So-called reflective individuals and reflective communities will subject their thought-processes and rationalizations to re-examination and to

continued scrutiny. To be part of a reflective community is to accept the joy and the burden of infinite explication.

§ Influences

I habitually mention Simone Weil, William James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the journal MANAS as motivating influences.

I collected quotations and passages while in graduate school. The resulting collection I have assembled in a volume titled *3x5x1985*. That collection presumably provides a broader summary of influences.

The first *particular* sentence I remember thinking of was: *Physicists are not socialized to retire*. Early on, I assumed I was doing work it would take decades to find a context for. In a manner no one would advise, one model I adopted was that of the ultimately successful inventor in *Longitude* (i.e., success through delay).

Of course, that inventor at least *submitted* his obdurately-refined invention. Whitman likewise published and revised his. I have been remiss in not finishing and publishing. Perhaps I needed to see death approach within throwing distance in order to decisively finish. One could also ascribe failure by featuritis.

I can rationalize that my calling was to do this work and I did it.

Besides, contests? In the late 1980s I requested an application for a Chicago poetry contest; the first page, as I recall, was devoted to asking one's academic qualifications to write poetry.

I did and I am omitting potential readers, yet I was wary of unavoidable conformance.

A remark by Bill Veeck, which I heard in an interview with him, seems fit. He asked: "How much money can you pay a tulip to bloom?"

Era One: Twenties

Categories: Anthem / Essay

2.

Poetry To Be Heard At All (1987)

Poetry to be heard at all
Should be learnt, not passed in drawl
Or at least in sound be sight
Only then can words be right.

And in vision fullness too
Should I remember words from you
For why to learn if not to love
Seek out another voice.

I take no steps or lay no tracks
If my heart in feeling lacks
Announce a rhyme, in verse embark
Only where in soul is marked.

Each poem should make of little much
And if no ring of truth as such
Cannot be said a million times
Is no more good than clanging chimes.

3.

Stories Not To Tell (1985,1993)

Everyone ... Has not been well
Each one a story ... Not to tell
Great grandpa's ill ... We have not cared
Did he die ... That we be spared.

From zealot's force ... Wisdom does flee
In silence still ... Will you be free
Not the choice ... Resolve is new
An answer to ... What will I do.

Got my kids ... See them again
Half my life ... Has gone to them
Making parts ... Go here and there
Not just work ... My life's a prayer.

Scientist ... His theories flawed
W a i t i n g ... What is the law
Now at last ... Night my old friend
Our long wait ... Was clearly planned.

Justice known ... Not at a glance
Love and knowledge ... Mixed in silence
Virtue's works ... Fit like a glove
Its words are deeds ... Its language love.

Now that my days ... Are near done
To give advice ... I have just one
Come now child ... Do not despair
All you see ... Was once a prayer.

It's a giant thought ... This world we're shown
Where not of God ... At least our own
Go heed the call ... Of age to age
Live good a dream ... Go turn a page.

It's true not all ... Starts out with prayer
If it seems not ... We say "vulgar!"
Don't parrot such ... Display some class
By saying "no" ... Not "oh well yes".

We live for ... More than enough
Subsistence hell ... We'll make more stuff
In some ways though ... Could be 'nough mirth
To spend our time ... And not the earth.

All that's been ... And all been done
All to win ... And all been won
All to do ... And all to try
From the question ... "Why not" not "why".

The smallest task ... Comes first to eye
To steer by that ... We do but try
If life gives each ... A star to track
Become one too ... And give one back.

It's a giant thought ... This world we're shown
Where not of God ... At least our own
Go heed the call ... Of age to age
Live good a dream ... Go turn a page.

Little child ... You're back so soon
Prob'ly been ... Around the moon
You're back again ... Remind us why
Travail like ... True love is shy.

Across the land ... Across the sea
We all curse hatred ... Misery
But love's first test ... Is circumstance
Brother can you ... spare a glance.

If eighty 'r well ... There's thirty not
Whose art of sorrow ... Is their lot

Who knows the words ... Knows well the cost
No one's thoughts ... Are by silence lost.

In each a place ... Called to above
So whose pain we touch ... We touch in love
No bridge exists ... From wrong to wrong
Make a leap ... With prayer and song.

It's a ragged song ... No truth I claim
We all have reasons ... Trued by our pain
Each one a pain ... (lost hope for some)
Sing these words ... A gospel for one...

Everyone ... Has not been well
Each one a story ... Not to tell
Great grandpa's ill ... We have not cared
Did he die ... That we be spared?

4.

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.

Era Two: Twenty-Eight

Category: Story

5.

Tony and His Shoes (1988)

§ But He Knew It Was True

Sometimes people thought Tony was just a poor boy without shoes. They would say to him, “Dear boy, don’t you have some shoes to wear?”

Sometimes Tony could find his shoes; sometimes he couldn’t. Sometimes, when he had his shoes on, people would say, “Oh, those are very nice shoes!. Tony, what a man you are becoming!”

Growing up was so funny. Tony laughed when people talked about him like this. But he knew it was true.

Sometimes he tried to forget. Perhaps that is why he left his shoes on the rocks by the lake — where he now could not find them.

§ Let Your Tears Be Sweet

Tony remembered how he had acted when he discovered his shoes were missing. It had rained and the shoes were gone. Tony went back five times each day for six days; then he went back six times each day for five days. Even so, he did not find them there.

On the twelfth day Tony did not go to look. This time he went to wait. He went and said, “I will wait for the shoes to float back to me. They will! They will!” He knew the shoes would come back.

Tony waited by the water. It was hot, then it was cold, and then Tony cried.

That was when the flowers talked to Tony. “Tony, why do you cry?” “Your tears are like rain, but they are salty. They are like water

from the ocean. Let your tears be sweet.”

Tony did not think he just answered: “Flowers, I need to find my shoes.”

And the flowers said, “You will find your shoes, Tony. We will help you. But we need you to take us home.”

Tony took the flowers home.

§ Give Us to Someone Who Needs Us

When Tony got home he slept. He slept like it was forever — but when he woke up it was like only half of forever. Everyone else was still sleeping like it was forever. Tony was the only one awake.

The house sounded so quiet. Tony stayed in bed. He put his hands behind his head. His feet came out from under the covers. They were saying they couldn’t sleep without the shoes either.

Suddenly Tony remembered the flowers and looked over and said, “Flowers, you are beautiful!”

The flowers said, “Remember our promise Tony. But there is one other thing.”

Tony opened his mouth and his eyes. His whole face was a surprise. He jumped out of bed and took a big breath.

“What, flowers, what!?” — Tony begged them to tell.

And the flowers said, “Be quiet Tony. We cannot speak to you again. But we can speak to anyone you find who will listen.”

The flowers said, “You will find someone, Tony. Give us to someone who needs us.”

§ Who Needs the Flowers?

Tony now had both a secret and something to do. He started to say to himself, “Who needs the flowers?” “Who has lost something?” “The flowers can only help two people at once.”

He talked to himself this way two times a day for ten days, then four times a day for five days, then ten times a day for two days. He would wake up and ask, “Who needs the flowers more than I do?”

Then, in the same way he had decided to wait for his shoes at the lake instead of looking, he decided to just wait for someone to give the flowers to. That was when Tony started to learn the language of flowers.

Tony’s eyes started to say without asking, “Will you take these flowers.” Tony even started to look like a flower himself. He became sweet like a flower — silent and there for to see.

Tomorrow would be a special day.

§ I Will Talk to the Flowers

When Tony got up this day, he knew he still needed help.

And today he learned from where it would come.

This day, when no one was looking, a little girl came to Tony and said, “Yes Tony, I saw you asking. I will take your flowers. I need them too.”

Tony said, “Thank you. How are you? Did you know I’ve lost my shoes?”

She said: “I will help you get your shoes back. I will talk to the flowers.” ... And, with Tony still there, she asked the flowers where Tony’s shoes were.

And the flowers said, “We do not know, but we can ask the soil.”

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil where Tony's shoes were.

And the soil said, "I do not know, but I can ask the trees."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees where Tony's shoes were.

And the trees said, "We do not know, but we can ask the wind."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind where Tony's shoes were.

And the wind said, "I do not know, but I can ask the clouds."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds where Tony's shoes were.

And the clouds said, "We do not know, but we can ask the rain."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain where Tony's shoes were.

And the rain said, "I do not know, but I can ask the river."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain who asked the river where Tony's shoes were.

And the river said, "I do not know, but I can ask the lake."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain who asked the river who asked the lake where Tony's shoes were.

And the lake said, "I'm glad you asked. Now you Tony, just listen."

§ And This is Their Strength

The lake continued: "I've been saving your shoes Tony. You still have a mission to accomplish, then you will have them."

"I need you to go to the four peoples. Meet them and make friends; they are my friends too."

Tony listened.

"This is the story of the four people."

"The first people have the strength of tradition. They know how they have done things for as long as they can remember. They do not need to question these things, and are from day to day at rest. Tomorrow does not trouble them. They laugh, cry, and work, and time passes, and this is their strength."

"The second people have the strength of decision. Each person is a law by themselves. They move, try, fail, jump and run; they do what is best for themselves, and what they find they share with all. Theirs is to step into the future, and this is their strength."

"The third people have the strength of listening; they hear the people that no one else can hear. They hear the old woman alone. They hear the man who is down. They hear the child who is lost and cannot come around. They hear the fish in the sea. They hear the bride not to be. They hear the blind and the deaf and the words not to see. And this is their strength."

"The fourth people have the utmost respect for personal duty. ..."

"And this", said the lake, "is their strength."

§ Tony Lived with the Four Peoples

Tony went and lived with each of the four peoples in turn. He made friends with them all, and they were all his friends.

§ He Had the Shoes He Needed

The next day, it seemed, Tony went back to school. He did not worry about his shoes; he had the shoes he needed. He met the same people at school that he had lived with in four lands. They were wearing different faces was all.

Tony remembered his friend Mr. Lake.

He also remembered the girl.

Now when Tony cried his tears were sweet.

Era Three: Thirties

Categories: Light Verse /
Songs of Love / Songs of Dance and Song

6.

Ethics Is Outcomes (1999)

Ethics is outcomes ... in fact or in theory
It's casting the terms ... of that you are leery
The pleased child says ... success is no lie
But each mother says ... you'll put out an eye.

Preacher man says ... Divine Retribution
Comes to a person ... or whole institution
Ignore the rules ... that's braver than I
Cosmic slap in the face ... or pie in the sky.

Some go on the face ... of what doesn't happen
What goes as right reason ... in them a'nappin
They don't go abstract ... they don't even try
There's only each act ... "let's make it fly".

It's getting abstract ... that makes thought a mission
Abstract to practice ... but your or my version
Is that an example ... of "quid pro quo"
Or the dark motive ... "I don't want to know".

Go buy a grape ... do you hurt a fruit packer?
Get out of shape ... perspective or slacker?
Different abstractions ... so much to know
Infer to a "practice" ... then on with the show.

Ethics is outcomes ... in fact or in theory
It's casting the terms ... of that you are leery
The pleased child says ... success is no lie
But each mother says ... you'll put out an eye.

You wash your hands ... to make the world better
That's a good practice ... we'll send you a letter
Whatever you do ... 'cause everyone should
Is part of the charm ... of how you be good.

Whatever you do ... 'cause everyone should
Is part of the charm ... of how you be good.

7.

Please Refrain (1999)

Refrain is not just counting reps
It's like a shift uphill
It marks a moving journey
It marks poetic will.
Refrain is more than repeat line
More than recurring dream
It's like giving second thought
It's like a puff of steam.
To push and push and push a point
To drive a chugging train
One way to surely do it
Is do it in refrain.

Refrain is not just gobby glue,
Holding in a ball
It's like a trinket-holding thread
Chain between them all.
We gather diff'rent souvenirs
Something stays the same
We cycle diff'rent stages
Yet follow given name.
If you want to talk of change
But have one thing remain
One way to nicely do it
Is do it in refrain.

Refrain can also sound so good
Melodic for the mind
Nice sometimes to keep a wit
Leave the what behind.
Refrain might make a pretty time
Or poetry anoint
Parsley sage rosemary
Hi ho scrabble point!

If rain should fall on plains in Spain
Again again again
One way to gladly say it
Is say it in refrain.

Refrain is also like a friend
It's like respect that's earned
Such trust as one can give you
If tellingly you've learned.

If you say you've tried all that
Results are not so nice
In reverse compassion,
In advance advice.
Should you have a meaning clear
Or point to better gain
One way to clearly say it
Is say it in refrain.

Refrain can also false report
Moving from inside
Compared to master essay
Poetry can hide.

Hide a shallow history
Hide no fear of wrong
Did not a Mr. Plato say
There's danger in a song?

To that crowd with fury
Yours half or twice a brain
Hang 'em hang 'em Sieg Heil!
These also in refrain.

8.

Fine Adjustment (1999)

Devotion is never trendy
 To a trendy thinker
They say you have succumbed
 To a goody-hoody winker
The most obsessed they say
 Are up a loony tree
As defined by current standards
 Of psychology ...

First it was the moon above
 Then a stale air
Then it was desire
 For daddy and affair
Forsake the thought of justice
 Forsake on-high or God
There's only fine adjustment
 To society and sod.

9.

If Leaves Stay (2011)

One glass of wine
At the right time
Is my religion

And creed I have none
Except in the end be gently undone

Time I have had
And peaceably glad if forgotten

But if leaves stay
It's been a good way
Gladly trodden

10.

Grounding (2012)

Grounding: Notice, feel, sense;

Focus, patience, and presence.

Every pore a place to go;

Embrace a way of going slow.

11.

Friend Not To Know (1991)

Well I really don't dream
Of mischief with you
I'll guess you're happy in your marriage
I'm sort of happy too
But if ever our lives
Were to both turn blue
Seeing you gentle
Could make things new.

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers.

I suppose it's a shame
That life limits us this way
But I've got a good family
I've got a full day
A bird in the hand
Is worth in a bush two
And in my wife's hand
I won't need you.

We have not discussed it
In so many words
But if we did there is a voice
I think we both have heard
Some pairs could not be lovers
If not first friends
And one friend to trouble

Another would not send.

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers.

Marriage isn't easy
It sometimes makes us blue
So we look out for kindness
We look for what is true
When time comes I don't see you
I will remember you
My life is richer having heard
A gentle thought or two.

I'm not looking for a shoulder
For when my wife won't do
"Private solace leads to touching
And touching leads to fools"
I'm trying to place a value
On the not unhappy news
There's beauty around and in life's arc
We're not just two by two.

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers.

Yes I'm not deeply searching
For what I seem to lack
So you don't need to need me
I need not need you back
But if I had for reason
A new love now to find
If you did too
You sure would come to mind.

But if I had for reason
A new love now to find
If you did too
You sure would come to mind.

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers.

12.

It's Not There For Knowing (1999)

We're old enough to know
Takes two to make it grow
Each of us can say you were the first to let it show
Nothing locked in store
We'd be defining more
There's still time to try the rhyme of all that I adore

We've seen peculiar weather
Now that we're together
Things will come 'round again you wish were gone forever
At least we're still connecting
New styles resurrecting
Clear the air, avoid despair, avoid resent perfecting,
Avoid resent perfecting

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
And finding if we can

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
La da da da da da

Years mark dedication
A lot of this and that
Live a private language
And a dance around the hat

What worthy constellation
What good unfolding bind
And good that's gone before
Is good to leave behind

What worthy constellation
What good unfolding bind
And good that's gone before
Is good to leave behind

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
And finding if we can

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
But keep a good light showing
But keep a good light showing
But keep a good light showing
Be you woman, be you man

13.

Around The Block Blues (1999)

Been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin round again
With some time and with some cure

I been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Be goin' round again
With some time and with some cure

I thought I knew her well
Though she lied I thought her swell
I thought I knew her well
Though she lied I thought her swell
I thought I knew her well
You know I knew a living hell

Yea I've been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin' round again
With some time and with some cure

I've been to hell and back
Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
To get me through this veil of tears

I've been to hell and back
 Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
 Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
 To get me through this veil of tears

I've been to hell and back
 Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
 Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
 To get me through this veil of tears

Yea I've been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin' round again
 With some time and with some cure

It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell
It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell
It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell

Yea I've been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Now I'm going 'round again;
 Yea I'm goin' 'round again;
 Yes I'm goin' 'round again! ...

She's quite a time
And quite a cure! ...

14.

I'm Yours So I'm A Generalist (1999)

Was it your eye I saw wander
Out there by the pool
Well if you're looking for some fonder
Don't catch that ship you fool

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
So much to share and tell
If you found a specialist
Of course she'd ring some bell

And that good girl Friday
Attentive to the max
So efficient and a lady
Well I'm sending you this fax

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
It's not all rock and roll
She's not so she's a specialist
You just think her tank is full

No one's found the formula
For making it all right
No one's found a perfect way
To skip a healthy fight
No one's got the answer,
No one's always sure
No one's always dancer,
No one's always cure
But if you trust me with your needs,
I'll take them to account
If you trust with dark complaint,
We can work it out
If you trust me I'll meet you,
Half way if I can

If you trust me love can flow,
Isn't that a plan?

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
It's harder then it's new
At risk of overlong digress
I stand here now with you.

15.

Not What You Say In A Song (1999)

[[She with sing-song lead-in:]]

Loving words ... are so rare
I conclude ... you don't care
Say I can ... say I must
Ash to ashes ... dust to dust

[[He with sing-song lead-in:]]

I love you ... there it was
Any reason? ... just because
I love you ... twice for show
Don't complain ... now you know

Said I would ... said I do
Isn't that ... enough for you
Must I repeat ... and endure
Don't you really ... know for sure?

[[She, singing:]]

It's not what you say in a song
It's what you are saying all day long
It's not what you say in a show
It's what you will say to those who know
It's not what you say and then flee
It's what you will say to me

It's partly a look and a smile
It's all of the things that are worthwhile
It's not I should read your mind
It's seeing if you respond in kind
I'm finding the words to say
I'm missing a gentle way

Its not running or standing still
Or climbing up too steep a hill

Not just effort not just will
It's knowing small things are the thrill
Are the thrill
Are the thrill

It's not what you say in a song
It's what you are saying all day long
It's not what you say in a show
It's what you will say to those who know
It's not what you say and then flee
It's what you will say to me

16.

We Came To Dairy (1991)

[Duet, Him:]

I came here wealthy
A bank account healthy
No burden in traveling
An unwrinkled suit

Then my car broke down
On way to nex' town
Me traipsing through mud
The car was kaput

On way to dairy
Was there I met Mary
 Oh for the sight of her
 Song of her
 Plight of her
 First sight a trusting stare
And wit like a flute

CHORUS:

We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But by fine habit
We've stuck one by two

Your pers-pi-cac-ity
My upper-class-ity
It started with friendship
And romance to boot

I thought:

“What have I tried for

“What has life lied for

“This is true privilege

“So many things moot

“How now to love her

“Brown cow above her

“Please be my garden

“My heart will take root”

We came to dairy

Not for to marry

But as luck had it

We both said “I do”

We came to dairy

Not for to marry

But by fine habit

We’ve stuck one by two

[Duet, Her:]

You were a fine man

A cheese and a wine man

But you soon found I could

Make great cheese too

Heart like a round cheese

Hope-by-the-pound cheese

Will like a brick and

For variety, blue

I told you my story

Heart like a quarry

Many a stone turned

To find just one true

Then you were lovely

Our hands hand-in-glove-ly

Not just friendly ...
But happy
Oh God was it true

We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But by fine habit
We've stuck one by two

[Duet, Together:]
You are a fine one
A wine and dine one
Although I may see
I want nothing new

Oh yea there's money
But I don't care honey
The most valuable green
Comes from the blue

[chorus-as-instrumental]

[Duet, both, hushed:]
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
And when we married
From kiss until bury
We pledged to each other,
"I pledge unto you"

We came to dairy
Not for to marry

But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
And when we married
From kiss until bury
We pledged to each other,
"I pledge unto you"

17.

We're Gonna Build An Empire (2017)

A slow-loving song
Doesn't have to end strong
It can be a normal thing

And speaking of things
That go well with rings
So does avoiding some wrong

A dozen approaches
None without their reproaches
Life's concocted that way

And working to say
It might work partly this way
For today is okay.

We're gonna build an empire
regardless what is true
We're gonna build an empire
where the grass is green and blue
We're gonna build an empire
half-knowing what to do
We're gonna build an empire
just me and you.

18.

Save Lindy For Marriage (1999)

Oh

I was raised an orphan ... By Sisters of Swing
They could move and shake it ... And they could sing
Said it wouldn't help me ... At fitting in
Save Lindy for marriage ... Or it's a sin

Save Lindy for marriage ... Save it for a marriage
Not being mean ... Don't mean disparage
But it's so nifty ... And so nice
You better heed ... Our strict advice

Said a good date ... Would be in Latin
Said to wear a nightie ... Burlap on skin
Said of boys and girls ... A difference between us
Leaders are from Mars ... Followers Venus
Leaders are from Mars ... A difference between us

Save Lindy for marriage ... Save it for a marriage
Not being mean ... Don't mean disparage
But it's so groovy ... And so cool
You hafta have ... A major rule

Said to all the leaders ... t' go and confess
But what some did for penance ... Has their minds a mess
Would you trust a priest ... Who said with a gurgle
"Do three hail Mary's ... Two swing-outs and circle"
Three hail Mary's ... Two swing-outs and circle?

Save Lindy for marriage ... In public it's lurid
Save it for marriage ... Six-count for courage
Save it for a marriage ... There's no going back
Take it from us ... The swingers in black

Said "keep those hands up" ... Your frame is your mission

Keep those hands up ... In every position
Keep those hands up ... There's Mork and there's Mindy
Jitter-bug enough ... You'll know how he'd Lindy
Jitter-bug enough ... You'll know how he'd Lindy

Save Lindy for marriage ... In public it's lurid
Save it for marriage ... Six-count for courage
Save it for a marriage ... There's no going back
Take it from us ... The swingers in black

A modern generation ... A new Lindy option
Something deep in me ... Says that's a concoction
In my life the truth ... Will have it's way
I'm saving Lindy knowledge
Saving Lindy knowledge
Saving Lindy knowledge ...
For marriage day!

19.

You Take The Lead (1999)

[chorus-as-instrumental]

You take the lead
Toss me and turn me
You take the lead
Know me and learn me
You take the lead
You take the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

You take the lead
Show me and earn me
You take the lead
Grow me and yearn me
You take the lead
You take the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Sharing the lead
Balance and flowing
Sharing the lead
Newly ways of knowing
Sharing the lead
Sharing the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Sharing the lead
Talking and strolling
Sharing the lead
Rocking and rolling
Sharing the lead

Sharing the lead

CHORUS:

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Keeping it going
Finding a way ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Keeping it going
Finding a way ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Taking the lead
Such a funny honey
Taking the lead
Aren't we in the money
Taking the lead
Taking the lead

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Fire is glowing
These things I pray ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Balance and flowing

New ways of knowing
Fire is glowing
These things I pray ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

20.

A Five-Minute Date (1999)

One dance
Partner for a song
Used to be quite rude
There has been a healthy
Change of attitude

With a brief commitment
Each can risk some wrong
Nice to stay together
For the length of a song

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

I could joker wild
Like a pick up line
Act like your attention
Spanned eight seconds maybe nine

But where is the incentive
For either to be real
If every moment serves
Another one to steal

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil

Let's not hesitate

You might say don't be dorky
When it flows it flows
Others say commitment
Gets you through when smoothness goes

The rule is wrong in flirting
Run when you've made nice
Why give juice to distance
Fear of pleasure has a price

The rule is wrong in flirting
Run when you've made nice
Why give juice to distance
Fear of pleasure has a price

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

This scene is so distracting
Distraction sets the tone
What if we just spent
Five minutes less alone

This scene is so distracting
Distraction sets the tone
What if we just spent
Five minutes less alone

A five minute date
It could be divine
A five minute date
Your watch or mine?

21.

Happen Overnight (1999)

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Left it on ... my coffee table
Just started class ... on lyric writing
Wonder what to think about that

Some things ... will happen overnight
If you work at 'em long enough
Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Kissed a girl ... starting heart desire
Both now thinkin' ... yes we could
Prob'ly known her ... little over seven years
Some things just go like that

Some things ... will happen overnight
Trust your senses long enough
Some things ... hold despite the fight
Work work work work work work

Got a job ... better than I hoped for
Fin'ly needin' ... what I do
Been a hobby ... ever since high school
Some things just happen like that

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Kissed a girl ... yes we could
Got a job ... ever since high school
Some things just go like that

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Kissed a girl ... yes we could

Got a job ... ever since high school
Some things just go like that

Some things ... will happen overnight
If you work at 'em long enough
Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

22.

Twenty Years And Twenty Minutes (1999)

He takes a pen to paper
Mostly knowing what to say
There'll be surprise, in the end
But in the end he'll know the way

Others take the cloth to model
Or model to a pose
Every thought that takes a form
Every form where knowledge flows

Twenty years and twenty minutes
Twenty years and twenty minutes
It's what you know and how you spin it
Twenty years, twenty minutes

The child turns for comfort
To a mother or a dad
Now what to say or what to ask
For the sake of girl or lad

A lover asks for changes
Mostly knowing reasons why
Its a risk all on the line
But someone has to try

Twenty years and twenty minutes
Twenty years, twenty minutes
It's what you know, how you spin it
Twenty years and twenty minutes

What once we called precocious
We now do credit age
Doesn't matter old or young
Part is printed, part blank page

What once we called precocious
We now do credit age
In a tablet given form
Part is printed, part blank page

[chorus-as-instrumental]

No surprise now, near the end
It's all in how you've lived
Who you are and who you've been
Every moment yours to give

Scores of years and scores of minutes
Scores of years and scores of minutes
Who you are and how you give it
Scores of years, scores of minutes

Scores of years and scores of minutes
Scores of years and scores of minutes
Who you are and how you give it
Scores of years, scores of minutes

Twenty years ... how you spin it
Twenty years ... how you give it
Twenty years ... that's how you live it
Twenty years, twenty minutes

23.

A Song Is Like A Speech (1999)

Tell a story of anticipating
Tell a story of a heart in waiting
Tell a story of a love to cry for
Tell me now what I search the sky for

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

Tell me something ... to go on working
Tell me something ... to go on shirking
Tell me something ... to go forever
Tell me something ... now or never!

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

Make me sad ... I've been happy
Make me sad ... life is crappy
Make me sad ... pain is real
Make me sad about some raw deal...

Tell the truth about looks and weight
Tell the truth about lies and hate
Tell the truth about working it out
Tell the truth — I want to shout!

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

A song is like a speech!

Era Four: Thirty-Five to Fifty-Five

Categories: Sentences /
Formulations by Topic / Additional

24.

Some Free-Standing Sentences (as-of-2012)

(Warning: many of these are repeated later.)

Every one at once a sage: What once we called precocious, we now do credit age.

If we carry in mind a thought which can be taken to the very end of life, then the same thought can carry us through.

As luck would have it, a life limited to high-class problems is not a high-class life.

If you stop fighting for something it soon won't be worth saving.

To say "I believe" can be an admission of failure, for, in one sense, to-believe is to-live-as-if.

Those who are of influence are not mere recipients of process; they jostle to contest premises of cause and effect.

Who carries too much passion in one endeavor will soon look for enemies.

Those who do not go to the source of quotations are condemned to repeat them.

There are no moral prodigies; as with soldiers and live bullets, our mettle is tested only within a line of fire.

The one-hundred most truthful, angry, hypocritical, kind, or humble words you say or hear might determine, to surprising degree, the course of your life.

Given the choice a drop of rain would still fall — thinking it natural.

Santa must have the most frightful backstory — for out of what we have lost can we give to others.

What would be falsely said can be seen together.

The mere moralist resists an examination of premises; moralisms are political, psychological, rhetorical, diabolical.

One way we can nurture is with tiny proverbs and prophecies — auspiciating futures either within grasp or worth reaching for.

Every species has a moral logic and it is seldom sex-neutral.

To give sudden and authoritative praise is a sacred obligation.

The book cannot be written which will teach us to say it with a single touch.

No one looks at old family pictures and worries about the timeliness of the decor.

Celebrity: questionably and/or profanely that one should matter a little to many than much to a few.

Less is more only if each person's less can be different.

In the end, the only thing you can own is the way you own choices which were not entirely your own.

25.

“No more than your conclusions”

I ask for no more than your conclusions on the great matters of human life and destiny. Let me know them, and I shall not trouble you to set out the arguments. I can myself supply them.

__ W. Macneile Dixon __

Look back to the opinions universally held in Europe in 1435. ... Ours will amuse our successors a few hundred years hence, and theirs, no doubt, be recalled with amazement a millennium later. Our business is not to solve problems beyond mortal powers, but to see to it that our thoughts are not unworthy of the great theme.

__ W. Macneile Dixon, The Human Situation __

26.

Truth

To seek truth can be to seek that which, once found, remains true forever. Thus our lives are not true; but the patterns of life are true — find we them in a microscope or a market, one library or a loved one, the closest acre, or a familiar congregation.

Not by head alone but heart and motion. Unless we are also feeling the truth we aren't knowing the truth. The gentler passions tell us clear stories; they are reasons of their own to declare.

Not all things demanding are true and beautiful — be though admirable the passion they inspire.

27.

Faith (Poetry)

By some who dream it is said we are separated only by sleep.

A religion can be a river or a swamp, and placid the land or on fire,
but faith glides freely on any of them.

The word 'faith' is admirable, but less so the possessive forms "my
faith" or "your lack of it".

Faith is a moment-to-moment blessing, not a possession. It is least
fleeting when we are individually least grasping.

Faith is courage. Faith is equanimity. Faith is a relationship to
change; and change being constant, faith can be constant.

If you would testify to perfect value, accept the world as it mostly
is; act on what it could be. If there is a light beyond light it will have
its way. Only in world we claim too much credit for is there a dark
beyond dark.

If we carry in mind a thought which can be taken to the very end of
life, the same thought can carry us through.

It requires a still faith to take silence as an option.

28.

Faith (Definitions)

“Faith in” can correspond to “trust in” a person, “trust in” a knowledge process, or “trust in” an institution.

‘Faith’ can refer to a substantial set of cultural and religious practices.

The word ‘faith’ can also serve as a stand-in for other words naming one or more useful and/or sustaining personal states or qualities. Thus we have the form of sentence: Her X got her through.

One sometimes-sustaining personal state can be the state of holding strong opinion. In this role, holding strong opinion can serve as a means, not an end in itself.

‘Faith’ can characterize a relationship to change. ‘Faith’ can characterize a relationship to a specific foreseen future. ‘Faith’ can characterize a relationship to an open future.

29.

Spirituality

The self is like that magician's box where any two opposing sides can simultaneously open. Try too many pairs at once and the structure collapses. But be flexible in opening any single pair and no gale can threaten it. That we can call strength is not breaking in the wind.

The self is like a house where windows can be opened letting light and fresh breezes through. "Light" and "breeze" provide metaphors for things infinitely divisible, responsive to openings and invitation, evanescent, and from an everflowing source. They are metaphors for indestructible and unstoppable being. When we open ourselves up, "being" can flow.

Anything which has helped alter the perceived boundaries of the self has been called by someone "spiritual". To alter a spatial sense; to alter boundaries of body or identity or attention; to alter boundaries of belief or conception or culture; or to alter a mood which has been persistent enough to be taken for granted; — each defines a part to so-called spiritual experience.

The spiritual side of belief, contrasted to the religious, posits that Reality or Truth is by some measure "less" than meets the eye and simple, not "more" than meets the eye and ornate. On the "less than" side there are seen books in a single breeze, and suspicious that eye toward words and writing.

30.

Balanced Development and Grounding

When we relax into one group or another we can begin to lose social muscle or intimacy muscle. That is, when we start to gravitate towards people who ostensibly think just like us, an atrophy begins. First the sect, then the sub-sect, then the sub-sub-sect, as the need for ease increases. The muscle for intimacy is the muscle to be closer and love — though difference exists. Our rapport might be a thing of love, but so is the thou of difference.

A person who feels well-connected socially can perhaps more lovingly contemplate, as such, *everything beyond human influence*. Many describe that loving contemplation as the more-or-less “sweet remembrance of God”. However, for most, trying to be spiritually grounded without being socially grounded can become a contradiction in terms. It can be forced and too far test the requirements of self.

It might be best to combine significant spiritual or emotional work with significant physical or intellectual work, as one means of staying grounded.

Consider? Strive and measure yourself toward the fully human, not anything other than human. When you work to improve, improve in at least two areas at once. Always be striving in some area which is unforgiving in terms of cause and effect.

31.

Empathy

Empathy cannot be continuous. But a moment of empathy can spark recognition, recognition can spark a change of values, and a change of values can bring lasting change in behavior. The child who once hurts an insect and *knows* it, stands to be the different child.

Empathy for an individual goes to heartstrings and generosity. Empathy for an entire class of people wronged goes to *rage or indignity at injustice*. A sure indication of power is the ability to artfully deflect all criticism.

To want for comforting can be to want for help to a middle. That middle can be one of neither under-identifying nor over-identifying with a feeling or situation. Under-identifying can mean not hearing one's own or another's problem. Over-identifying can result from an excess of empathy.

32.

Poets

Poets, prophets, artists, moralists, statesmen, others. Through society and habit what once arose true becomes false. They — the sometimes “true legislators” — plow. They plow. A turn of voice true is a product of toil and soil.

33.

Equanimity

There are some states which seem to have “simplicity” written on them. If every person has access to such states — and if finding “simplicity” correlates to genius — it follows that every person possesses some particular genius for living.

In a state of equanimity, it becomes immediate that the longest term and most subtle of projects are certain in both effect and value. At such moments no choice is right but is made right through the patience, love, and indomitable spirit which will see it through.

Projecting backwards from times of more completion, we become infinitesimals. Projecting forward, we remain delicate and soon to break — but butterflies’ wings (setting winds in motion).

Tasks for a lifetime: Know yourself alone; calm yourself alone. Know yourself with others; calm yourself with others. Be true with yourself; be true with others. Move towards your fears; converse with your emotions. Finally, love people by seeing them apart from their assigned status.

Reflection gives action direction; direction gives our pauses meaning. Equanimity gives meaning to an in-between.

It stands at the blend of the freedom to act and the freedom not to act. Likewise, it is always in relation to a whole. Not only speaking,

but listening. Not only moving, but seeing ahead. It can stop when others would but start, and start when others stop. In it, an opposite is always an option.

34.

Presence

In the young it must, but with age our particular life does not need to matter.

There is nothing you can take away which could so harm me, save what I need to grow. There is nothing you can take away which could so make me, save what I need to grow.

Strength of character: the part of oneself made from will after giving up on relation, chance, and fortune.

The most visible and present persons are also the most invisible —the person is quickly forgotten but the effect is not. Fearing nothing inside which others might react to, “present” persons can see out, having ceased to watch themselves with fear of what others could see. ... Opening our eyes without fear we meet these people and we meet ourselves.

Present in a passing gaze the briefest is the truest.

35.

Integrity

Blessed those who convey this blessing: “May you be whole.”

There is more than one approach to integrity. One is: no one has anything *on me* of any significance—a stance of relative innocence. This is a limitation. Another is: as bad as I can be known to be I am worse—a stance of relative humility. The latter is a path of certitude; we can be certain of making the latter case.

The mind demands that we invent justifications for what we do. Integrity calls for a standard to be applied in the process. If we will not deceive ourselves in this moment, we might not as easily deceive others later.

We are not single but we can be whole. The whole person is not merely one of convictions; as well they stand the first ready to convict themselves. Were my motives to help or hurt? My reasons best? My admissions to myself true? Are they at this moment? ... Who can later judge can judge now. Who can be powerful later can be powerful now. Who can be compassionate later can be compassionate now. ... For those with conviction there are not moments *of* time, there are moments *in* time. As I shall own myself I am am I now.

36.

Boldness

In general our unrelated survivors find our deaths a forgivable offense. The living do not blame the dead for their bold living.

Every prohibition has been advisable for *someone*. But for all? The sum of all negative advice, like the mixing of all paint, holds no light or color. Thus:

I heeded all the warnings, heard them all, I never crossed the line. If you don't make your own mistakes, you'll be making mine.

The logic of avoiding "near occasions of sin" can be carried all the way to an impoverished life.

In passion we forsake awareness of distracting alternatives.

Just as soldiers are tested with live bullets, there are no moral prodigies. Only within the line of fire can our mettle be found.

Cold front on the mountain: no time to get timid. The once-brave also perish who cannot cut the last rope behind them. Past a certain point, unless we are being the men and women we can be, we will not become the men and women we could be. Thus from strength to strength our truest path lay — no short or easy one.

37.

Genius

My third essay on genius: Genius can consist in the courage to seek, see, and say something simple.

“Any X which appears sufficiently advanced will be indistinguishable from Y”; repeat with X = parsimony; Y = genius.

Nature lends her genius freely.

Every true statement about the role of genius can also be phrased as a statement about the role of a true friend. The true friend proves the extraordinary in the ordinary. The true friend takes our half-thoughts and deprecated impulses and makes them grander, infinite, shareable, true. The true friend gives us a new hold on our destiny. The true friend states simply and sublimely a truth we could sense—did sense—but could not other-than-for-them embrace. The true friend does not need first of all to be loved, but to be True.

In citing a human “genius” we associate an individual with some truth or demonstration otherwise eternal.

Of these Originals we might say they were fishermen and anglers: having sweeps of territory at their command; able to wait—long long wait—while remaining sharply aware; trained by many a fish thrown back to recognize worthy, worthier, worthiest from first flash of fin; precisely able to set the hook (again having practiced on

many small fish); and then so true to their method and also patient, landing the smallest and largest of their life with the same grace and sureness of a master.

38.

Age

Every one at once a sage. What once we called precocious, we now do credit age.

Oh, to know now what we do not now know about the source of our actions.

A man who knows and appreciates himself will find many things beautiful in women his own age.

39.

Duty

Beautifully firm souls effect poetry in motion. The beautifully infirm effect prayer in motion. As with the perfect poem or prayer, 'Dharma' suggests a sense of duty so natural we can return to it a million times.

A drop of rain given the choice would still fall, thinking it natural.

In ethics, even proponents of duty must come back to consequences. Theirs is simply to weight consequences for our senses of meaning: "What would I become?" "What would we become?" "What would life become?" Thus in consequences is duty grounded.

40.

Evidence and Joy

If we constantly seek evidence that wonders exist, then life is wonderful. If we constantly seek evidence that small coincidences make for bigger openings, then luck smiles on us. If we are open to evidence of someone liking, laughing, listening and lingering with us, then love can be found. If we are prepared to speak the truth, then truth and honesty exist. By those trusting, warmth and assurance can be found.

Joy is not a neutral disposition. Our joyful moods depend on possessing the *persistent intent* to find evidence of good, as our sorrows, in part, from habit or intent to find evidence of pain.

There can be no perfect freedom. However, there can be perfect refusal to look for answers in the wrong place.

Your life is written in the kind of evidence you seek, and where.

It is not what you find which defines you, but where you continue to seek.

There is no interpreting everything, and we can certainly over-interpret. Yet, one can be too timid in interpretation and, as a result, miss signs, signposts, sayings and soothings. Don't expect less from the universe than you would expect from a consistently thoughtful friend.

41.

Brevity

Ancient sages: copywriters with eternity as a client.

To say much, it is necessary but not sufficient to say little.

It is always useful to say less than one knows.

I am confident that the less I write, the more certain I am to realize my gift.

No one's thoughts by their silence are lost.

42.

Lyrical Flight

There are sentences one can be sure are true without being able to parse or to translate them.

There are convictions we can approach but cannot touch. Essential that ambiguity for us to circle.

We must speak with the greatest precision when it essential to be understood. We must speak with less precision to attempt greater understanding.

A high aphorism might present muzzled madness, and thus not straight of aim.

First making them true, write the sentences no one else could have written.

43.

Happiness

As luck would have it, a life consumed with high-class problems is not a high-class life.

Based upon biased reports, the world has been one giant mistake.

Happiness is not the direct goal. To be comforting — alone — calls for experience from within many fires. But to be both comforting and joyful — now the comforter too must be comforted.

A paradox not upon which to falter: the recipe view of happiness ("do X, Y, and Z") contains the tragic view ("do not aim directly"), and the tragic view contains the recipe view.

Santa must have the most frightful backstory, for out of what we have lost can we give to others.

44.

Heart and Home

Brain surgeons are expected to do examinations after surgeries to see if any essential functions have been lost. Practitioners of popular therapies should be expected to do “heart” exams in the same sense. Popular therapies can be like any other shallow happiness religion in that they can teach us to un-think things which might challenge us and leave us uneasy, but are essential to keeping, savoring and at some times acting on convictions in our heart.

Each person at some point realizes that they have opinions which: (a) appear to be true; yet (b) are such that no one else ever need believe or say the same thing. Call these intuitions, instincts, and insights “personal convictions”. Some of these personal convictions remain with us longer than others. The set of our longest-held personal convictions comes to define, in part, what is “held in our heart”. Thus, what we hold in our hearts eventually defies explanation. Those things become given of who we are. They must be re-examined, but only at great cost may they be forgotten.

Toward those we have held in our heart the longest, what other disposition but love?

A truism: wherever you travel you remain the same person. A corollary: don’t stay where you will have to change your heart to feel at home. You have a heart. There is a place you can call home.

Even the follies at home are ultimately more important than the successes at work.

No one looks at old family pictures and worries about the timeliness of the decor.

Is it mass error to commonly lack immediate safe access to soil and trees, yet still call or make that a home?

45.

Grace and Beauty

Social power is like a small miracle in that it can be created freely out of nothing. However, it has the property that it can only be freely created or increased by acts of sharing with those who have less (or no more) of it. Not much can be given, let alone forced upon, those whose wealth exceeds our own. Good the stew, but that twig bends brought to stir too large a pot.

Teachers, lovers, parents, those who would lead, and those who would speak the truth: one's next remark can change a lifetime, as can one's apology.

For those who can to give sudden and authoritative praise is a sacred obligation.

Connection either short or long term: towards listening, comforting, pleasure, daring truth, and gifts of attention.

Subtlety, gift, nuance, honor, humor, wit, and beauty can speak to some boundaries in art.

Meditation is not a thing; it is more of a category name, like 'sport'. Happy they for whom their sport is their dance, although many the sad meditators left injured.

That book has not been written which would teach you to say it with a single touch.

46.

Books

We mortgage ourselves to mass in a thousand forms. Just as most tools should be kept in a shed or shop, most books we own should perhaps be hidden. Of books, as of society, keep those close to whom you owe the allegiance of a friend or neighbor. Only they know their souls who select the company they keep.

Books are — compared to infinitely available electronic content — what intimate friends are compared to general society. When was the last time you gave a good book a call?

If you cannot commit to reading a book, soon you might be unable to commit to any project large or small.

47.

Study

We are matter with meaning. Sciences speak to choices as adaptive or not in a world of matter. Humanities speak to choices as adaptive or not in a world of meanings.

The way of all knowledge is the way of all flesh: living, real, sturdy, but infirm.

Those who do not go to the source of quotations are condemned to repeat them.

Those who are deep in knowledge are not deep enough if they do not love.

48.

Science

If you can get there by rail science is the fastest train going.

It is essential in our humanity to take hold of imaginative truth. It is essential in science to know when to let go.

49.

Politics

To call an act “political” can be to imply an act combining calculation and concealment. This is not necessarily an insult. A feint is also part of nature.

Who spends too much of their life in one mad endeavor will soon look for enemies.

50.

Trade

Some make height the measure of value; some breadth. Some seek to raise the highest peaks; some might broaden the base. But by some law of similarities, height and breadth are never far out of relation. Who serves one might serve both and serve all. Absent barriers which cannot long stand an honest light, wealth, knowledge, and understanding tend to spread with a predictable slope. Gradualness in inequality is itself one measure of justice.

The ambitiously smart person sees in evidence of relative ignorance the opportunity to appear smart. The ambitious tradesperson or businessperson, by contrast, sees in examples of relative ignorance the opportunity to make a product or make a sale. Trade and invention can remedy ignorance without the overt presumption to teach.

A person of the cloth, surveying human toil with equanimity and professional detachment, reifies to the extent of declaring, "There are souls." A person of the law, surveying human toil with equal equanimity and detachment, can reify to the extent of declaring, "There is legal product; — constitutions, laws, articles and bylaws, contracts and resolutions ... a chain of legal coinage and authority." The person of the cloth can declare: "Owing to souls, people can make more complex decisions than if there were only matter." The person of the law can declare: "Owing to words coined on paper, people can make more complex decisions than if there were only souls." Not to be left out, the money-lender declares: "Owing to money and interest, people can make more complex decisions than if there were only goods."

51.

Inversion of Value

The desire for celebrity: presuming it could matter more to matter a tiny bit to many, than much to a few. Taken to its conclusion, this is a formula for almost everyone to matter to no one.

Do Hollywood writers understand what philosophers have not? As I surmise in common with movies, 'evil' implies: (a) a harmful mechanism; and (b) a sentience (human or not) which could reasonably anticipate the mechanism's effects; but (c) chose not to prevent or forestall that mechanism. Exhibit: We have the monster which cannot not now be pleaded with, yet a responsible act of prevention was at one time possible.

The evil person is always lazy in some way, expanding the range of congenital disdain for duty.

52.

Will

It was suspected before the appearance of quanta that there is not only continuity in the universe but also discontinuity ... The notion of qualitative change has always implied certain actions 'impossible to represent within our usual spatio-temporal frame.' It is only a physicist who can speak of 'the apparent determinism of the macroscopic scale'; on the scale of our senses there is no appearance of determinism except in the laboratory. Ask a meteorologist or a peasant if they see much determinism in storms or rain; look at the sea, and say if the shapes of the waves appear to reveal a very rigorous necessity! The truth is that nineteenth-century physicists believed there were no more things in heaven and earth than in their laboratory—and indeed in their laboratory only at the moment when an experiment succeeded. Their excuse was their professional obsession but those who shared their belief without that excuse were fools.

___ Simone Weil ___

Will rests on intent and its effects. Lose the intent, lose the will. Lose the possibility of effect, lose the will. Effective will follows from the habit of effect. Without act there is a limit to agency.

We converse to discover the world and those around us. Actions too are words or phrases in a conversation.

In a self-persuasive social-physical determinism there will be a deft 100% explanation at hand for any behavior. Naively perhaps, it seems a problem that there will be such deft 100% explanation at hand five, six, or ten times over. What does that then make of explanation, and how can anyone do anything at all, rather than

nothing due to overconstraint? In physics, inertia is not the only principle.

One cogito could be: I am ignorant of my full self and my full circumstances, therefor *my experience* is of blindness to full cause and that I have some freedom. If I am externally *determined* to remain ignorant of all cause, then I am externally *determined* to feel somewhat free (as are others). And for the same reason I must speak to others in appeal to their experience of feeling free; I cannot resist!

In the sense that there are no strictly separate individuals, we might say: "There is no strictly individual choice, but there is choice." For example, will could belong to some group, and influence fundamentally directed toward a group.

Tractable: There are five main causes of any action or behavior and there are five main consequences of any action or behavior. It is reasonable to ascribe at least one cause to choice.

Inhibition could be the water and *will* be the fish in the water.

53.

Reason

What we call our reason is forever attentive to scenarios of persuasion. If in a dream we saw a convincing association, a moon of cheese seems for a moment logical.

In philosophy and rhetoric, there are two aspects of progress. One is to advance the state of approachable understanding. The other is to advance the state of best argument. Towards these ends some arguments are “squishy” and some are precise.

When “reason” becomes worn and familiar and unable to reconstruct itself, appeal to reason easily becomes appeal to emotion based in comfort.

When reason becomes exceedingly deft and dismissive, it may similarly be stuck.

54.

Historical Action

The movement of history clings not wholly to justice. It cannot. If there were perfect justice to the past and present, there could not be enough justice to the future, to the unknown, and to the what-could-be-brought-to-be.

Moderate justice for me please. The sophistication needed for extreme justice—if such exists—cannot live in the wild. In the wild, extreme justice marches the same tune as extreme injustice.

55.

Ideology

For some, there is some *this-is-it* which can justify all means to its presumed end. If it is further assumed that the *this-is-it* cannot be adequately articulated in the “historical present”, but only after, then *destruction* might be romanticized as a necessary goal. Observe and beware then the powerful yet inarticulate movement or ruler, sure of goodness and saying, “you wait and see”.

If the most cosmopolitan people around you routinely lament *this world of X*, or frequently toss the comment *That's the way it is in this world of X*, you will easily be induced to assume there is a place of not-X.

Someone will always come along to give a name to that supposed not-X place. Occasionally with *marching orders* to get there.

Be wary of any movement which is stopping more thought than Buddhist Meditation.

Ideology: a form of romantic love. The fool takes it as possible only once in a lifetime.

The utopian wants to bite that looks-like-an-apple on the next tree over.

Others add: Let's cut off the branch we are on and catch a better one on the way down.

Some would inject the roots of a tree with dye, awaiting a spectacle.

Saving trees is a value, along with Let's plant some new ones.

In that place which might never exist but we can live as-if; in that fair, harmonious, and sustainable State of limited scale; in fitting that hole in our heart for Shangri-La; — if it were a *productive* near-paradise with not all simply given, then we might expect to find coordination by a handful of absolutes in no particular order, exceptions taken to deal with those who take extreme exception, tit-for-tat with outsiders, and internally a mutually-supportive set of *roles* each with their means, goals, constraints or necessities, and corresponding excellences or virtues.

Life-in-motion requires meta-meta-ethics; this can be say: ordinary ethics.

56.

The Buddhic, Taoic, and Hindic

If the goal is to be quiet you can take your sweet time getting there.

Grounding: Notice, feel, sense;
Focus, patience, and presence.
Every pore a place to go;
Embrace a way of going slow.

Tao, Set, Match

The Tao.

Word of the Tao invokes intuition about sets.

In that vein...

Say the Tao is the union of all sets — of all ranges —
of themselves limited perspectives.

Thus there is no way of seeing which is not within this Tao.

Thus this Tao encompasses all times and all points of view.

Thus this Tao encompasses all partial interests
including our own.

Justice is what this Tao contains.

Suppose the The Everything is *all* forms plus *all* perspectives plus none-of-the-above. Shall we need a set-theorist to unpack this? Is the group of all groups a group which can be named?

Most religions have a creation myth; Buddhism has a cessation myth.

God and Maya

On Hindic view

God is short on resolve;
The constants can change
And matter dissolve.
God says: "My freedom is Maya,
and Maya's a curse;
With each Intervention
it seems to get worse."

Pie-in-the-mind or Pie-in-the-sky?

Confucius said to the Continental Philosophers: "Sons, you have too many desires in your heart to remain effective."

I do not know about a vow. But there can be worldly and psychological moments when one's life feels realized enough to make it possible to imagine it never happened. Then a choice seems to exist. We can think of those in misery and say, "Our lives have to be real. Our efforts real." If that for others, also for ourselves.

A person runs up a hill and—before reaching the top—slows down and stops at the top. This person will need to descend at some point, yet before that they may look and wait and choose a particular path down. This person rightly expects to limit momentum while descending. ... Contrast a second person. The second person runs up the hill and is over-tired when reaching the top. Rather than think and slow to a stop, this other person pushes through and over. Tired as this other person is, they are barely

able to regulate momentum in descent. ... Deliberateness. Equanimity. Timing if not control.

To a degree, received wisdom counts less and less compared to the practice of frequently viewing or interpreting one's experience to make better or simpler of it.

Calm energy. High meaning. Low inference. Ours is to choose what we let in and make well of our canvas of meaning.

Is your mind occasionally clear and in equipoise, and not detectably in search of answers or solutions? Blessed the realization and trust, "there is only so much work which needs to be done". Blessed be momentary retirement. But momentary retirement is still only one healthy frame among others.

I sense "non-dualistic awareness" as a frequently puffed-up term. Yes there are apparently default networks and phonological loops which can vary and yield "silence". But what is one doing with that silence?

In a silence one might become philosophically non-dualistic.

Yet how about a little code switching? There is and there is not an I. If others see a *me*, might it be solipsistic and/or obstinate of me to deny their views?

There is always a decorum to recognize and assess before rejecting.

And aren't contrasting and surprising perceptions part of the fun? Re-member?

One practice defined in Buddhism is “choiceless awareness”. Imagine more forgivingly speaking of “relatively choiceless awareness”. Most people know the experience of listening to a favorite recorded song they have heard many times and whose nuances they appreciate. At times we listen to such a recording and let it flow through our full attention. Call this relatively choiceless and very appreciative listening. Worry not; as you knew until you were told otherwise, your same brain is capable of relatively choiceless and very appreciative seeing, hearing,— indeed five senses — all together.

Cultivated ignominy is like practice for death. Your name dies but you do not.

The notion and practice of *people-watching* speaks to the degree to which one’s mind is another sense organ; thus, without a *sense* for people our mental pictures are incomplete. In so-called dharma terms, this suggests an analogy worthy of essay. For example, just as one can rest on a bench and watch people, one can rest on the breath and body awareness and watch dwellings in the mind. One extreme taught by both mind-watching and people-watching is idleness.

At the root of watching the mind and images, there are still the echoes of three-dimensional experience in time. It would be interesting to see a folk “brain-layers” mythology compete for mindshare with the existing commercial/folk “brain-chemistry” mythology. Indeed, suppose drugs and practices could selectively change weights, thresholds, or parameters at particular brain network layers. Could introspectionists learn to taste-test drugs and comment on the apparent weighting effects for brain layers?

Somewhere in Buddhism there is room for an analogy between the mind and clean glassware. A strict Buddhist might assert that most people are distilling moonshine, and that good values are not to be titrated in as an afterthought.

Newton: a mathematical time-present, everywhere. By contrast Relativity, Buddhism, Stoicism, and Process: subjective thicker presents, not everywhere.

Given the Calm-and-You-Describe-It; — continue and abide. Given Tao; — continue and abide. Given guide ... ; given Earth ... ; given God, given Mother ... ; given forgiveness ... ; given humanity ... ; given friendliness ... ; given grit ... ; given courage ... ; — continue and abide.

The heart-sense subtends more solid angle than only desire. Awareness in a wider cone.

Sand mandalas. Okay for art. Meant for art.

57.

Comforting and Style

I heeded all the warnings, heard them all, I never crossed the line.
If you don't make your own mistakes, you'll be making mine.

You can settle in; you can rebel; you can escape; you can
renegotiate.

In the end, the only thing you can own is the way you own choices
which were not entirely your own.

The bold might die faster but the living do not fault the dead for
their bold living. Were they reckless? Either reckless, useless, a
hero, or a half-assed saint.

Absent carefulness, assertiveness expands to fill the space left by
un-assertiveness. The best-hearted are not immune to bluster.

The one-hundred most truthful, angry, hypocritical, or humble
words you say— together with the one-hundred most truthful,
angry, hypocritical, or humble words you hear spoken to you — will
most likely determine the entire course of your life.

Perhaps comics are small saints. Simone Weil, not known for her
sense of humor, might approve. For who but a comic must provide
and enjoy pleasure without in any way letting or wanting a distance

between persons to decrease. For Simone Weil, constant distance was essential in the grace-filled appreciation of any person and all beauty. If a comic starts to need us or need approval at least half the funny won't be.

One kind of thanatos leads to rejecting earthly life. A different kind of thanatos leads to rejecting some life-beyond-death. With a gesture some flip the finger at the gods or the god-given.

In her book *The Art of Comforting*, Val Walker lists these as qualities of those who are comforting: Being-present-and-listening; Empathic; Genuine; Respectful; Patient; Caring; Reliable; Clear; Warm; Accepting; Calm; Hopeful; Humble; Supportive-and-validating; Appreciative; Generous; Gentle/tender; Adaptable; Wise/experienced; and Strong. Comforting is a use of character as healing. Comforting can be spread by practice and example.

Be comforting. Granted, a number of paths—psychology, normative ethics, good stories, and common sense and socialization—deal in arguments for having a particular kind of life; more power to them. But proponents must also be silent, for in being present, refraining, and lacking objective we find an end in someone else.

Perhaps there is no noun which can be called forgiveness. However, there are forgiving attitudes and closely-related practical forgetting. For example: Nature forgives us and forgets us.

Assuming that some truth or Truth exists within our belief or point-of-view, many of us then presume that there is truth in our particular way of defending or articulating it. The resulting behavior

has been described as “logical rudeness”. Logical rudeness can occur when we assume that talking *about* truth and rightness gives rightness to our way of talking.

When one can easily do something quite bad it is a great time to do something quite good.

We need a wiser world to have a more caring world. Unwise, each of us can easily become a greater sink than source of care. We all know of the givers who go empty. Many of the saints we need will also be saints of self-care.

Degrees of modesty are universal, but do you believe the human body is a scandal?

May I count and solicit the trees to reacquaint my faith.

We have no self without circumstances, but to be self-assured can be to be more clear and certain of our self than our circumstances.

There are things you will never know about yourself while you are busy with what you say about yourself.

Why do I think it will be an advantage to not know what I am doing?

Those with clean hearts can truly arrive to a place once there.

Imagine or invoke a witnesser. Trust in the truth of things. Create value.

There are multiple half-truths about relationships. Two half-truths can be greater than one supposed truth. One half-truth is that your actions of being in relationship help create your habits, including habits of thoughtfulness and generosity.

Behavior with a “named practice” in mind can be of more consequence than the same behavior seen as an isolated action. Additionally considering a “duty”, as part of additionally naming a practice, can result in more consequence than mere action, and help determine what life will become. Caring, as part of naming practice, can be of more consequence than mere action, and help determine what life will become. Even within ritual, action around emptiness can at times be consequential.

Notes on Stoicism There can be intent of God. There can be continuing flow around gods. There can be auxiliary necessities of divine origin. ... Always high-mindedness: “If it is random, don’t be random.” In Marcus Aurelius, as if there exists both an inner Tao and an outer Tao. Live in accordance with each—both personal nature and Universal Nature—the first as impulse and will, the second as Destiny. Higher stoicism. The identity between “nature” and “reason”, together in process and growth. To remain coherent both within and outside oneself. Within the *present* a process of coherence. Stoicism in Marcus has a “process” character? Imagine a larger cloth. There are

individual strands — themselves parts of individual threads. Within the cloth the strand becomes well placed.

The freedom of the religious dilettante: to practice at any moment as if any particular religion did not exist, yet not as if none of them existed.

Breaths are fleeting and so might grace be, like a breath.

58.

Reflective Community

From given circumstances we may move to thought of a rule, a principle-at-stake, or a practice-with-consequences. Different schools teach different methods to quickness, and quick decisions are often better than none. However, most framings can be re-framed, given more time and broader reflection. So-called reflective individuals and reflective communities will subject their thought-processes and rationalizations to re-examination and to continued scrutiny. To be part of a reflective community is to accept the joy and the burden of infinite explication.

Religious involvement helps sharpen these transferable skills: constrained sociability; numinous insight; and credulity.

We may ask: "What will it mean for me as a person to do this?" "What will it mean for us as a people to do this?" "What will I become?" "What will we become?" "Will there be nearly-incalculable consequences for me (and following from me) as a person?" "Will there be nearly-incalculable consequences for us (and following from us) as a people?" From this level of concern there follow answers powerfully referencing individual and collective duty.

If ecumenism is more of a social than a theological strategy, then *big-tent consequentialism* is potentially more of a social than a philosophical strategy. The price of admission to the tent: bare your premises about cause-and-effect meaningful to a life. All will be found wanting, but all welcome.

To anyone I have harmed I ask to be forgiven. I ask to be forgiven my debts as well. Where I have apologized I have done so imperfectly. Where I have learned I have learned imperfectly. I try to learn lessons where I can. For all that is good—trust, and be trusted.

One way of seeing connectedness is through fear; another is seeing associations and memories in positive ways. If you search your life for good advice you will find good advice. Just as there is a distribution of wealth following from positive exchange, there is a distribution of wisdom. When we give thought to whether some advice could be good for us—and how we could apply it—we contribute to a positive sum of moral wealth.

One could coin a cheesy word: faithidence. Faith qua confidence. Faith qua self-fulfilling prophesy. Faithidence: That, acting with which, we make it possible for a would-be truth to live; That which acting with we make it possible for action with faith to succeed. Better and commonly known as confidence in the future and confidence in self-fulfilling prophecy. There are quantities in the world which are increased by confidence and practice.

We have names. Notice that your parents and others say “Hi” or “Hello” to you by name. Notice them saying “Hi <your name>”. Notice that you use names in speaking to others. We have names.

Those who have lost the touch for connection to random strangers will not improve through strength in numbers.

You might be with good people if it feels better saying or hearing “no” amongst them than “yes” elsewhere.

Meaningfulness is objective. Some manner or mode of thinking surely affects you. The meaningfulness of a way of seeing can survive scientific argument that it is mere opinion or fancy.

I half-understand that there is a Quaker practice of stating a personal truth into a silent response. Not with agenda, but for the dignity and pleasure and intentionality of it.

Privacy is to a degree a recent invention for human beings. Thus a situation of being observed and commented upon, rather than being an unnatural imposition on a human being, might instead be a removal of artificial absence. ... Likewise, there are human cultures where feedback is generally indirect. As with most feedback, comments can be made in a nice way or in a less-than-nice way. Comments can also create either more or less distraction.

To be disciplined and loving, with good character and awareness — to have a “basic life” in order — offers a good container for added experiences, goals, and responsibilities. ... All in good match to the well-known weave of love.

Insisting on the value of one half-truth — if it means not listening to other half-truths — is one means by which the truth is lost.

59.

God-Talk

Simone Weil wrote: “We are only geometricians of matter; the Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in the apprenticeship to virtue.” If we move from particular numbers to the concept of number-in-general (as in algebra), and in turn to that concept extended far from solution with any particular number, we get not a number but a symbol — the mathematical ‘Infinity’. If we move from particular goods or excellences to the concept of goods-in-general (as in ethical calculus), and again extend far from solution with any particular goods, now we need an infinity symbol for the Good.

God be with you. God bless you for doing X. Go with God. God willing. God is at work. God only knows. ... Yet beyond the use of the word ‘God’ in a few kinds of sentences, pretty soon it can sound like “God wills this” and “God wills that” — and there is no end to this.

Poetically speaking: ... If human hearts are sacred, then human needs are God’s needs. ... If human hearts are sacred, then a man’s needs are God’s needs. ... If human hearts are sacred, then a woman’s needs are God’s needs. ... If human hearts are sacred, then a child’s needs are God’s needs. ... Human Needs: what they include; how they are met; and how they are not being met.

Human courtesies are beautiful and bountiful. Human inspiration is beautiful and bountiful. Human thankfulness is beautiful and bountiful. Even polytheists tend to recognize a unity principle. To a Buddhist there is still the skin of an onion.

There is a half-truth that meditation is what one does while losing focus upon friends, interests, and attachments. Mysticism can be experience of the the asymptotic behavior of the the mind, the brain, the body. As in mathematics, to explore all asymptotes one need not define, find, or reach any so-called point at infinity.

The limit of zero remains special. It speaks to humility, but also to nihilism and to an empty head, which should be a warning.

The laws of physics could be like that goddess or spirit which can visit the Earth while God cannot.

60.

Psychology

Pain involves a drag on the attention to which we cannot surrender due to a competing orientation.

Seduction can do for us (or promise to do) what we cannot or refuse to do ourselves: command and concentrate our attention.

Many adolescent terms of character (formerly geek, nerd, etc.) serve as sharp reports and predictors regarding individual social development, individual awareness of social development, or lack in either.

In viewing performance art, one's core attention and relaxation of ego become parcel to the performance. You must be able to get high already to be transported.

The association "evil is done by psychopaths" allows ordinary people to avoid taking responsibility for creating evils with single acts. Placing a thumb-tack pin-upwards on a chair is creating an evil. To create an evil is to create a mechanism in the world with a primary telos or end of doing harm. We can also make ourselves into mechanisms — into monsters — by cultivating sufficiently bad character. Many evils have been and always will be created with joy.

In your secrets are the making of your heart.

There are two kinds of people: those for whom disorganization affects their mental health concerns; and those for whom disorganization affects their spiritual concerns.

There are psychological energies in the world which are not merely conserved quantities. To the degree it implies otherwise, the concept of sublimation is an error of first rank.

To some, the possibility of action is a coincidence or miracle to be explained. To others, the possibility of inaction is a coincidence or miracle to be explained.

The question “What ought my oughts be?” invites vicious circularity. This accords with some experiences of clinical depression.

We all have a biological imperative to not feel apart from others. One downside of this imperative is the possibility of profound loneliness. Profound loneliness follows belief in a permanent apartness. One response to loneliness is to tackle it square-on in more social behavior. Another perhaps is to move closer to such work, understanding, and questions where “we are all more alike than different”. Here rubrics include “soul work” and “spiritual work”. If you the lucky one do not believe such work is real and has results, dare say loneliness is not real. Dare if you will to say: we are not more alike than different.

There is a pride in detachment and indifference, and consequence,

making of them no private matter.

Such is delinquency—invalidation can sometimes be felt as validation.

Fear affects memory, as one remembers more reasons to fear.

To the extent of a diversion, having a long-term therapist can be fractional infidelity. Ironic that this is often encouraged.

To be rooted can be to recognize familiar choices of actions in accessible environments—the actions then having some desired effects. One can be too rooted—to the extent of taking everything for granted and having no vision of what one is doing.

If you forcefully isolate yourself from life, then the parts and possibilities you have isolated from will take up too large a scope in your imagination.

Many marriages can be in need of a coach more than in need of a therapist; for example, whenever there is no single part of the game to be working on.

Marriage is at one level a moral good; it is worthy of connivance to save a marriage; it is worthy to take a half-dozen or dozen approaches to preserve a marriage, even if no individual approach is beyond reproach. Thus, while couples sometimes get divorced

for no great reason; neither do they need a *single* great reason to stay together.

Of marriage, but also of religion and relationships, ask: in what sense ethical?; in what sense aesthetic?; in what sense love-based?; in what sense duty-based?; in what sense tautological?; in what sense normative?; in what sense self-contradictory?; in what sense faith-based?; in what sense care-based?; in what sense dependency-based?; in what sense event-creating?; in what sense event-defined?; in what sense comedic?; in what sense pleading?; in what sense existential?

There are at least a dozen significant or hard-earned character qualities associated with those who are comforting to others. One may attempt to find these for a life with a partner, not merely for an hour with a therapist.

61.

Advice 2012

Ah, to see in each new acquaintance one or more of: something to recognize in yourself and to correct; something to emulate; something to be nurtured; something to identify with; and/or something to be admired.

If the manual is larger than the device consider a different model.

If left to guess: love or play or both—love, play, and loving kindness. Move into the hearts and thoughts of others.

Bring the best you can to every world.

There could be little more beautiful or delightful than adults dancing, children playing, or animals at play.

They who are too wild, love them, but keep your reserve and follow not their way.

Within ergonomics it is now said, “The best posture is the next posture.” Psychologically, often the best frame is the next frame.

Just as a compass is not a compass without pointing North or South, a person will not appear to be a full person without showing

direction.

Heed in particular the voices of those who love you, your sweet angels, but not without exception — remain yourself.

Amongst the most rejuvenating company there is always some voice to anarchy.

Where there be power there be taboo. Lead not astray the vulnerable or innocent.

62.

Some Parts of a Continuum? (2012)

No single level or consideration need prevail. In a cross-acting continuum *everything modulates everything else*.

Duties can be characterized as following from consideration of larger-scale consequences of our actions. For example, wherever our own action or that of a group will set or help change a broader precedent, the category of duty can come into play.

Morals tend to invoke absolutes—particularly by implying an “absolute” meaning to particular words. (Single words can also make ontological or idealistic claims. Thus, words like ‘souls’ or ‘life’ or ‘marriage’ can claim to name distinct entities.)

Ethics can be associated with the role of steady or clear reason applied to choices. In particular, while several avenues of consequence can be described for any action, the approach of ethics presumes that some avenues of consequence will be more important than other. The term “ethical implications” helps partition these.

Prudential choices involve consequences but without the overtone of strong moral, duty-oriented, or ethical implications. As such, more freedom is celebrated with respect to individual preferences and play.

Learned Instincts involve behaviors we can effect without conscious thought—for example, dancing without thought about the steps involved. Skillful play in sports draws upon learned instincts. Reading aloud draws upon learned instincts. Solving math problems calls for learned instincts. ... One characteristic of learned instincts is that in general we were once conscious of learning-by-parts. Our efforts at learning and practice compound and multiply; we can do so much more having done work which came before.

Inherited Instincts include such things as wanting to be part of a group, wanting to feel connected, and wanting special relationships. They include instincts around appetite, around shelter, around sexuality, around pleasing environments, around social perceptions and status, and so on. One reason to focus upon human universals and needs is that reason itself can wall out recognition of inherited instincts.

Reflexes pertain to behaviors ingrained at the level of sensations and muscles and nerves.

63.

Framing Some Adages

You hear social comments as if they were mirrors, while still caring whether they seem distorted or not. *Ponder the perspectives [and agendas] of those around you.*

The closest kin get the first pie tin. *Charity begins at home.*

Animals tend by instinct. *When you give ask nothing in return.*

Bees find the flower in bloom. *Dwell on the good not the bad.*

Bees bring pollen to the hive. *Remember your intentions.*

You have seen the sad look on a child's face. *Remember your promises.*

One elephant takes a fall to the lions. *Sometimes, put other interests before your own.*

In a herd, those in the middle can only lead those who follow. *Pay it forward.*

The loudest hatchling does not get the best worm. *Don't act entitled.*

A butler never shouts from another room. *Show courtesy and await recognition before demanding attention.*

The female fawn becomes a doe by watching. *Teach by example. Learn by good example.*

You see an acorn hidden by a squirrel. *Don't take what clearly belongs to someone else.*

Geese honk as they fly. *Roll up your sleeves and don't be afraid to ask for help.*

Dogs come together and apart for companion and play. *Be friendly and social.*

Parents chat, gossip, and trade stories at the playground. *Like tending shop or tending young, be open to a life of fulfilling service.*

64.

Politics

Less is more only if each person's less can be different.

In a so-called civilized society it takes more paperwork to mistreat a laboratory mouse than to mistreat a human being.

Leadership begins with what you ask for before you ask for money.

Someday, after asking, "What is a mile?", people will ask, "They burned how many cubic miles of oil?"

Contrary to their assumptions, the first rock-and-roll generations will not be writing their own history.

Tribunals have not been held at which to hear, "We were only waiting for retirement."

Exporting jobs is also exporting marriages.

It often seems "ideologically sound" to make decisions whose consequences you don't have to live with.

The future is not a comic book series to be subscribed to.

If fairy tales tell of dark sides to life, the dark side of our wage sometimes amounts to scrubbing floors for the wicked stepmother.

Descriptive of one “scene” (social dancing) I experienced: An inner-circle, protective against incursion by a larger circle of the relatively distressed “wanna-be” crowd. Outside of those—all those who enjoyed, independent of such aspiration.

If some person or electronic communication goads you to mess with someone, you never know how that person has been messed with in other parts of their life.

Useful and available mechanical and electrical power/energy is like a drug which accustoms human beings to ease. Much like slaveholders of old, we assume we have a “right” to the work done by fossil energy slaves.

“Acceptable behavior” is an interesting term. According to whom? By whom? Where? When? ... How are restrictions made consequential or enforced?

A habit of being snarky can be halfway to religion-forming in defining some “unclean”.

Do popular depictions of ribald “ye olde times” suggest that merriment is to be found in the embrace of hypocrisy?

Most persons carry their strengths silently well enough; commonly, then, their indignation carried in silence as well.

65.

Miscellaneous

Those who do not go to the source of quotations are condemned to repeat them.

You must admire some great work from a different age to be the human being you were meant to be.

“Toward, away, through, along”; boot or sandal, shoe or thong. (Quoted phrase from *Philosophy in the Flesh*.)

The greatest crimes are all unreportable and happen in marriage and other lethal partnerships.

This quotation is a translation of something I probably never said.

Rationalism ascends and then makes peace with other ways.

People turn to history as guide only when their own is about to be written: First they read history. Then they read no history. Then they do.

Sufficient to teach, in five words: Alert! Do this! Look there!

Allowing for eight words, add: Hear this story.

When in the late 1980's I first heard of the moral actor of the Categorical Imperative, immediately thought in terms of four kinds of self along two axes (the Kantian actor apparently falling in one quadrant)] First, "Self" can be a whole or a part—a classic distinction. Based upon electron statistics in Physics, my second axis was: "Self" can be interchangeable or not. The view interchangeable-and-a-part can serve meditation in humility. Not-interchangeable-and-a-part suggests a key team player. Whole-and-not-interchangeable suggests, in part, a meaningful innovator. Whole-and-interchangeable suggested, to me, an interpretation of the Kantian actor.

(Compare, loosely, with the "four peoples" Tony went to meet.)

We are always choosing. Perceived through the filters of our salient choices, the world becomes a symphony for us to hear, a poem to be read in appearances.

Famously, Socrates was said to have "corrupted the youth". It has also been said, "Truth is a castration." Can youth be corrupted by talk about Virtue? By talk about Truth? To an adult who has modularized their senses of needs and beliefs, neither Virtue nor Truth is some One Bag to safely sit inside and judge oneself, "ourselves", and others by. A youngster taught that either Virtue or Truth are in One Bag can be manipulated by talk of what is inside or outside of it. Spiritual abuse exists. There is first-order spiritual abuse in leading someone to harm. There is also second-order spiritual abuse in leading someone away from reflection upon opportunity costs; in pursuing something "good" harm can come from too much of life devoted to one focus of activity, at cost to other personal development.

Much of the work on bounded rationality assumes that heuristics or other techniques still lead to single approaches to things. (For example, use of a heuristic can result in a single-path approach.) But what if the solution space is not one of any final solutions? Or not one of time-bounded action? What if bounded rationality (sharing the weakness of putative perfect rationality) is the wrong model for the *continuing* reasonableness and adaptability required in a circumstance or a predicament?

Reasonable? You *can* reason about it, but not perfectly. *We won't be able to reason about this perfectly, but try we must.*

Directionally correct. Good medicine. Faith, in part, is not closing out a problem list, but dropping a sense of boundaries and looking to a relatively boundaryless future. "Faith or lack of it" can emerge from one or another relationship to the future.

Half a thought can be an incantation; hope can be its issue.

When we meet an old acquaintance part of the skill is in making some small-talk and catching up on new events. Just as important: skill, good feeling, and care are called for in taking leave of the conversation—that it might continue at another time. The same applies to how we engage philosophical questions. Solve them we will not. Yet we can exercise skill and love in how we part from them. We can exercise skill and grace in how we move or wave recognition to a question, end on a particular note, and walk away. This too is aphorism.

A riddle. An ordinary place. Where are you? It flows. Cannot say from whence it comes and whence it goes. Life within clings for its own duration. Outside it, eternal stand watching what must be. Splash they could, but would? From where you have been sitting you may be as if eternal. Where are you?

Time is like a river.

Still night,
Friend familiar,
Colleague in waiting.

We are all the time doing grammar, doing meaning, doing poetry, doing feeling, doing philosophy; we are doing loving, and living with some promise of future events. We all have our private understandings.

Attributes found in others, pertain.
Springs go to rivers.
Those days are not counted which matter most.

While some memories of the most focused and fateful turns are quite accurate, in general over a span of five minutes or five hours we have almost no way to recall and unpack a full set of thoughts, feelings, and motives. A decision can be an act of summary over those hours.

If you have reduced it to a single question you have already done it injustice.

I imagine language capacity grew with new ability to answer questions of the form: Another person? At another place? At another time? ... Earlier primate communication might be driven in part by more immediate questions of the form: Did you hear that? Did you see that? Did you notice that? (Or that you should.) ... Close to all of these: *Can you tell me a story?*

I believe the more powerful question is not, “What is consciousness?”, but “What is [something like] consciousness first useful for?”

Asking “Consciousness, what is it?” yields no clear answer; asking “Consciousness, what is it good for?” yields a dozen, all potentially relevant.

For example, paying attention to physical practice and immediate results can help in improving a skill. Next, paying attention to paying attention can help in improving the latter skill of paying attention (to improve a skill). This becomes skill at improving skill at improving skill. In this sense, consciousness is good for developing and applying higher-order skill.

[2022: A model of predictive perception, as described by Andy Clark in *Surfing Uncertainty*, might agree with the above. As a general description, in a predictive perception model top-level predictions flow downward, branching into sub-predictions and subsub-predictions, etc. Similarly, raw perceptions flow upward, merging say into micro-perceptions then mini-perceptions then more-whole perceptions. As these tree-like branchings overlap in presumed layers, at each presumed layer there can be disagreement registered, between prediction and perception, by some mechanism. “Attention” is then identified with the *weighting*, aka salience, given to different error signals, to different area of disagreement. ... Again, consciousness-as-attention-management can relate to higher-order skills at correcting errors.]

In other words: We become made to the world, like two blanks ground together toward spherical profile perfection.

Era Five: About Fifty

Category: Prose-Poems

66.

House of the Giant (2012--2017)

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.

67.

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 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.

68.

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.

Era Six: Over Sixty

Category: "Sevagusta"

69.

Delusional Disorder via Compounding (2023)

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

___ Ambrose Bierce ___

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 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.

70.

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 this 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 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.

71.

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

72.

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 and in every spoon a salad
- with inclination-to-mix respected 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.

73.

Sevagusta by Opposites (2022-2024)

You might be of service:

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

“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, 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. (As routinely recognized, even “no stance” embodies a stance.)

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.

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

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

To me, the coinage 'sevagusta' allows for many options. It allows for many stances.

Properly formulated, the precise opposite of a valid 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.

One can then randomize sticks with corresponding A and B options on opposite sides, pick up a few of those sticks, and have a generator.

Given a generator of stances or suggested leanings, one might have an oracle.

Here are some matched A versus B corresponding to "How might I be of service?"

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

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 notably and worthily, 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.

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

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

One way to construct 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, uncountable.

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

CODA:

Dependent Arising alludes to patterns as reproducible and yet as ephemeral as the results of a mathematical function call upon the results of a mathematical function call upon the results of a mathematical function call. Does a whirlpool exist? Thus, “ground truth” (or “assumable truth”) represents a selectable dividing line. Arisings necessarily unroll; they are “popped from the stack”. Confidently, however, while each life must pass, once there is some ostensible ground there are patterns at work in no danger of becoming irreproducible.

