

Individuals, Journalism, and Society

by
Stephen B. Waters

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BQ

Dedication

To my wife Wendy, and Sarah and Brad.
They are the reason to try.

The unnamed characters in this book are fictional and any resemblance between them and any real person is purely coincidental. Named characters in this book may be real and any opinions presented about them are likely to be richly deserved.

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Preface

It's Election Day, 2008, but the change people hope for is not the change they need. Because there was a need to think better to survive, modernist author Virginia Woolf claimed in 1923 that on December 10, 1910, the world had changed. She was premature. The world would actually begin to change 100 years later on December 10, 2010.

As accessible simple wisdoms empower people, character becomes easier to develop. New metaphors encourage processes kids understand, admire, and wish to emulate in a deeper way.

And none too soon. Journalism suffers from pervasive fog. Consciousness slips away. Schools lose traction. Character develops by chance. Politicians play games. Economists forget what works. History and philosophy drift. Scholarship loses perspective. Religion and tradition stall at cultural boundaries. Misbehavior threatens society's fragile fabric. Literature and language languish as destroyers march through civil institutions in a world made more dangerous by scientific progress. Fortunately, all it takes is a change of mind.

You are the main character of this book. Your experience shows patterns that can nudge your thought toward strong and useful character. Enjoy! People seldom get to revel in history to discover golden threads of simple wisdom.

Modern, Post-modern, and Post-colonial literary styles that preoccupied 20th century fiction fail to offer a way out of the fun house. This book avoids such styles, marking the trail back to what matters using Socratic dialogs indented to label different speakers. The chapters provide one order, but read them according to your interests—try 12 Noon for character, 2 PM for politics, or 5 PM for practical lessons.

6 AM - On the fog of consciousness

“Morning, sweetheart!”

“Morning, dear. What are you doing?”

“Looking out over the lake, thinking about today... thinking, in a way, that we have been betrayed by politics, journalism, philosophy, history, ... and literature.”

“Hey! Literature’s my job not yours.”

“Literature represents many things. For you it’s a tool by which you teach English.”

“... a tool by which I help students learn how to learn.”

“I see in it a means to telescope past, present, and future, a tool to pass on life lessons. I look for reflections that illuminate the collective mind.

“Novels, for instance, bring to consciousness a sense of time and one’s place in it:

- Dickens’ *David Copperfield* begins, ‘... I was born on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.’
- Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* has each hour tolled by bells of the Palace of Westminster.
- James Joyce’s *Ulysses* works Leopold Bloom for one June day.
- Salman Rushdie starts *Midnight’s Children* with Nehru’s famous declaration that ‘At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.’

“Me? I ponder the impact of Rushdie’s next sentence, ‘A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.’ Today *is* such a moment and I wonder who else, if anyone, can see it.”

“What prompted all this?”

“Voters are poised today to elect a fantasy that follows a century of unintended consequences. I doubt the election could turn out otherwise, looking at my generation.”

“Why your generation?”

“For all its potential, my generation has not fulfilled its promise. Hell, the whole 20th century has not fulfilled its promise! My generation lost its bearings and its traction in a century of chaos, and the opportunity to make a difference has passed substantially unnoticed?”

“Why do you think so?”

“I read a novel once about a person whose life fell apart so completely that rather than end it all he gave in to chaos. Leaving things to chance is the modern day equivalent of astrology or reading entrails. A stranger found the man sitting catatonic and unable to move on a train platform. To help pull him back from the abyss, the stranger counseled that everything was therapeutic, anti-therapeutic, or irrelevant. The book charged *you* to determine which of the three. *You* make life work.”

“How should one work out of a world that seems in chaos?”

“We can only understand the world around us as best we can. We recognize from experience what has not worked. We deduce what matters, and we decide to will ourselves to work.”

“That’s easy to say but it doesn’t convince me to work.”

“You know enough to convince yourself already, but don’t quite see that clearly.”

“Why not?”

“People give in to chaos by default. They check out. Despite schools’ best intentions, they get distracted, urged on in one direction in the classroom, when another direction would work better. Each of us, independently equipped, makes things work, but we have not yet the tools, the skills to use them, or the habit. Above all, the understanding to motivate us—the reason why—seems to elude us.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Look at politics, news, and literature. People spend more time unconscious than engaged.”

“How can you look at literature and believe that people are unconscious?”

“Literature is like a flashlight pointed into a dark room. Where the flashlight gets pointed, the room appears lit. But is the room lit or only illuminated temporarily by flashlight? Is the flashlight bright or dim? Does that flashlight project a subset of colors or the full spectrum? Illumination asserts consciousness to a degree and for a moment, but everywhere else unconsciousness reigns.”

“How can people know if they are unconscious?”

“They don’t. Where is the edge of consciousness? Sleep and awake change for each other with no discernable boundary. Day and night fade unnoticed into each other. Vision—acutely sharp in one part of the eye—vanishes silently in another. The eye, personal consciousness, and the fog are so very slippery—impossible to touch. Edmund, in Eugene O’Neil’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* described it, ‘Seeing the secret, are the secret. Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on towards nowhere, for no good reason!’”

“That’s eerie.”

“Like this dreary November morning on Lake Delta where autumn fog waters down the ultramarine blue and burnt umber landscape. Unconsciousness is morning fog that never visibly drifts in, but appears unannounced, undiscovered before dawn.

“Look at all the geese. Canada geese and snow geese paddle together, culture and society overlapping although they neither know nor care. No matter. While they defend their territory, mate, and have children, their mastery of Mother Nature isn’t enough to destroy us all. Humanity, on the other hand, knows too much of one thing and not enough of the other. Jacob Bronowski warned, ‘you cannot possibly maintain that informed integrity if you let other people run the world for you while you

yourself continue to live out of a ratbag of morals that come from past beliefs.”

“Are the geese conscious? Near the shore some geese drift slowly across the water, showing no purpose, effort, or direction, like a droplet of ink aimlessly spreads in still water. Leaderless, each goose inclines one way or another on its own terms as its senses integrate the inclinations of other single geese that, in turn, recursively integrate the senses of other geese spread across the sea.

“Following unplanned notions, geese drift this way, or that, or stop altogether in swirls and eddies, at first tentative, that wash into slow waves along the water until one certain pivot point that individuals generate a collective mood of spotty commitment. Wings stretch almost into a flap that dies out one time or breaks another time into to the urge to lift off in unison into the fog and out of it.”

“That’s lyrical, but what’s your point?”

“It’s not at all random. While I’ve been watching, two birds peeled off a smattering of geese almost asleep near shore, and then a third joined them to slowly swim the full mile to the middle of the lake, leisurely stroking toward others. Far from Brownian motion, it’s purposeful. The pivot point to move or to fly is never detectable until it happens, but when the instant arrives, decisions come hard and fast. Swirls of wings shade the sky as geese close ranks, then drift apart like the cream in unstirred coffee drifts across its surface. People act like that. You have to look to see it. How people act is scary because they think they know what they are doing, but they seldom have enough skill to check.”

“So I’m wasting my time, trying to teach?”

“Far from it. You’re one of the good ones that understand the art of teaching. You go beyond the pedantic, professional curriculum standards that the state grinds out. Schools teach and test to those standards. But you, you are an outstanding teacher of English and don’t settle for that, either in what you teach or how. The state neither requires you to teach your way nor

encourages you to do so. Their standards for English Language Arts never mention the word ‘think.’ They might argue it is implied, but thinking is central to what you do, because you know your art. You don’t teach ‘English’; you teach ‘Tools for thought.’ You know you can’t pour that wisdom into your students. You care for each student, show that you care, and nudge them toward their own individual success because by yourself you can’t make them succeed.”

“Thanks for good words, but you don’t give the state enough credit. It’s buried down in the detail and good teachers work on it all the time.”

“No doubt good teachers do, whether it’s in the curriculum or not. The curriculum is primarily designed to foster general knowledge. It wasn’t until after schooling was finished, I stumbled on a pivot point that caused me to see things differently. My point of view changed. My consciousness changed. Facts hadn’t changed, but my awareness had. You do it intuitively in your classroom. How do we bring your colleagues along?”

“When did your consciousness change?”

“It’s a long story. Let me explain while you get ready for work. Fog today mirrors the billowing drifts decades ago across a Canadian lake in the Kipawa Reserve one cool morning as our canoes pulsed through the mist. That’s when it started.

“Canoeing was hypnotizing. Each return stroke of the handmade paddles streamed a beaded necklace of water across the trailing edge of the blade in an arc that softly marked the calm water. Underneath the bow, the wooden keel of the canoe surged and gurgled quietly at each power stroke. Dampness on the thick red and black checked Woolrich shirts, steamed away from the heat of teenage muscles that worked to find their pace, their place, and their purpose.

“Nine canoes cut through the morning fog as two oarsmen each stroked in unison towards a rare sandy beach among the boulders and small firs visible in the distance on an island that would mark the midpoint of a month-long trip through the

lakes, rivers, and rapids deep in the wild. Like geese caught up in their flying ‘V,’ after thousands of strokes, over hundreds of miles, over many days, easy familiarity came to a canoeist’s stroke. Stroking made sense at level within level within level. Repetition helped sternmen meld with bowmen. Harmony established itself in the flight of nine canoes. Goals became intuitive as the prow of each canoe, with each J-stroke, consistently pointed within degrees of the faraway tall tree on the island.

“In the quiet bay of the island, a single-engine, high winged pontoon plane drifted, ready to deliver another ten days of stores for the final leg of the trip down 100 miles of river rapids back to civilization. It was not to be a dangerous trip, but one worthy of care. Last year a canoeist had been killed for not respecting the river.

“So far, every day but today had been damp with late August rain. It was cool, but the sun would soon burn off the fog. There would be no 20 miles of steady paddling today. Today was for drying out, fishing for Walleye, soaking up the heat on a sunny rock, and eating a bonus meal of fresh food just flown in.

“Oatmeal steamed in the aluminum kettle in the early flames of the morning fire as cooks wrestled to fold aluminum reflectors of the baking oven into shape before placing it beside the glowing coals. From his handmade green canvas canoe pack the counselor pulled something special to celebrate the midpoint of the trip—a chocolate cake mix.

“With cake batter slowly rising beside the coals, the counselor called a meeting. ‘Each person will get one piece of cake. There will be an extra piece left over. To give everyone a fair shot at winning the extra piece, I’ve got a puzzle. The first to solve the puzzle wins the extra piece of cake.

“Now listen up! Three people are sitting on chairs in a circle. Each one holds a cane and each wears either a white or a black hat. They cannot see the color of their own hat, but can see the color of the hats worn by the other two. Instructions call for each person to tap the cane if they see two white hats or see a black and a white hat. They should not tap if they see two black hats.

When you figure what color your hat is, stand and explain how you got your answer. On the signal to begin, three canes began tapping. Tapping continued, and then continued longer, as the three looked at each other. Some time later, one person in the circle stood up and said, “I know the color of my hat.” What color was his hat and how did he know?

“Well after the cake was cooked, cooled, and frosted, more than an hour later, a young canoeist finally spoke. ‘I think I have the answer.’”

“What was the answer?”

“I’ll tell you tonight if you haven’t figured it out by then. But here’s a clue. The puzzle demands you think for yourself and also project what others might think. It demands you project different possibilities into the future and consider alternative consequences. It demands consciousness of community over time. That’s a subject that might only rarely be covered in school, but it should be covered if society—civilization, if you want to call it that—depends on the answer.

“Hell, I was out of school 20 years before I found someone else who spent as much time on his thinking as I spend on mine. Everyone thinks they think about thinking, but Michel de Montaigne, in *Essays*, disputed that presumption 400 years ago. He said, ‘There never was street-porter or a silly woman who was not sure of having as much sense as was necessary. We readily recognize in others a superiority in courage, physical strength, experience, agility, or beauty. But a superior judgment we concede to nobody.’

“Montaigne calls us to task because we believe if only we had turned our thoughts that way, we should ourselves have found out as well as they; that whoever should be able clearly to discern the height of another’s judgment, would be also able to raise his own to the same pitch.

“Montaigne was talking philosophy, but not in the popular sense as Philosophy has come to be known. Capital-P Philosophy is rigorously engaged in doing a different job.”

“Things like the ‘Mind-Body Problem?’”

“That’s their job. My job is to consider what to know, how I should act, and how to deal with others. Philosophy, with a lower case ‘p’, represents the way Seneca wrote in *Letters from a Stoic*, dealing with the simple daily problems of living—ordinary, practical wisdom, accessible from classical thinkers, if we only dared to look.

“We think about the same things that occupied the keen minds of yesterday, but we seldom have the good sense to use their expertise. Neither do we think as well today as we might, and we seldom exercise the opportunity to think more clearly.”

“Let’s see. Your opinion is that I’m ignorant, bullheaded, unpracticed, and sloppy. That doesn’t encourage me to pay attention.”

“On the contrary, I admire what you do and the skills you bring to the table, complimented your potential, and suggested that if you look at things only slightly differently, you will be encouraged toward a happier life.

“French historian Fernand Braudel concluded that what we think about has not changed significantly over the last centuries, while Julian Jaynes’ investigations of literature deduced that *how* we think about what we think *has* changed. In *Structures of Everyday Life*, Braudel noted that if Voltaire were suddenly to appear in our living room, he would marvel at the absence of a smoky fireplace, but, on the plane of ideas, he would be able to carry on a conversation as if he had just walked in from next door.

“That was Braudel’s first great insight. The second was that the price of bread matters. He tracked the cost of wheat across four centuries of the Middle Ages, examining the quality of life. You are unlikely to consider that citizens of Rome of the first two centuries after Jesus probably enjoyed the most individual liberty, the greatest economic freedom, and greater freedom from external oppression than individuals at any other time in history, including today.

“Braudel’s day-to-day scope makes sense, but Jaynes, acting like a forensic psychologist in *Consciousness and the Breakdown of the*

Bicameral Mind, saw subtle differences in thought evident in literature over a longer period of time. The signature of the words used, for instance, demonstrated that the *Iliad* was written prior to the *Odyssey* because it was absent a sense of subjectivity, introspection, and awareness of awareness that later Greek's called *nous*. *Nous*, Aristotle's word for mind or reason, first appeared well after Homer wrote the *Iliad*. Braudel's Voltaire might well communicate ideas comfortably with us, but, over the longer scope, Jaynes believes newer metaphors let people think better now than before, even though not all of us have the habit, and not all of us who have the ability practice it all of the time.

"It's not that people can't think—of course, most can. Answers appear in their heads. It's that they haven't the habit—haven't the practice—to check their work. They'll say, 'I'm thinking now' and, of course they are, for a time, until the attention wanders, the wattage lowers, and the autopilot takes over.

"Richard Mitchell was a college grammarian who dissected the casual approach to words of those on his campus in a newsletter, typeset by hand, called *The Underground Grammarian*. He nailed to the page the sloppy habits of casual thought that led us to a sorry state where we are no longer vigilant. If I have mastered a metaphor and you have not, who's deeper in the fog? If I value metaphors and you don't see the point of them, who is deeper in the fog?

"Schools teach a lot, very well."

"Schools have little time to invest in such things, as they stovepipe subjects in a race to achieve uniform mediocrity in their test scores. Scores don't attest to enlightenment of individual students, but instead manage for those schools to keep bureaucrats at bay."

"What evidence have you..."

"Take misspent journalism as further evidence, where ratings are achieved not from excellence, but through popularity that earns either broadcast time, front page space, or suspect awards from peers. Take politics, where rhetorical ploys allow the practiced to dance through one question and a follow-up, abetted by

abdication of the press. Take work where just doing one's job has been raised to an art and labor agencies protect the incompetent.

"Hell, why stop there. Look at history, culture, and society where rust never sleeps."

"Is the cause lost?"

"Not yet. But to understand how close we might be, look across time. After all, people act according to their experience. Dr. Morris Massey lectured in the 1980s, 'You are what you were when...' making the point that what is important in your teen formative years remains important to you all the rest of your life. To be lost as a youth puts adults at risk.

"After too many campaigning days, today is a pivotal day, ... but what lesson will voters take from it, and when will that lesson penetrate? God help us all!

". . . Listen! Looks like enough individual geese have moved the masses to consciousness. There they go, honking into the air while we pull ourselves out of our own sleepy fog. Let's get on the road, my dear!"

7 AM - On footprints in literature

"Let me get the car door for you. . . . Thank goodness for heated seats and dry roads."

"I'm with you! Who would think the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November could be so cold already. Here, I've got the radio."

"... and welcome to NPR Radio News. Today is the day that 200 million potential voters may go to the polls to choose the next President of the United States. This will mark a turning point in the direction of the country. It may mark a watershed..."

"It's funny how newscasters from every network feign breathless anticipation when the rest of us are so sick of the campaign our emotion is relief."

...

"Look at that bumper sticker—'Peace: Give it. Get it.' Now they hold Clement Atlee's appeasement up as heroic! I swear, for this generation, history begins at dawn."

"People are lazy. They readily resort to clichés to avoid having to think."

"You know, sweetheart, ... even the 15-minute drive to work is less satisfying. The drive used to be an opportunity to catch up on the world. Now it's an exercise in frustration, reaching to punch the radio button every time a network forgets the purpose of journalism."

"That's why I plug in my iPod."

"What used to be news has turned into story time. Pull some talking head off the street to grant them 15 seconds of fame to reinforce the producer's preconceived notion of news. They

highlight anecdotal trivia—the angle that's significant only because it's different."

"Then why do you listen?"

"I listen until they abuse journalism, then I punch the button. Some faceless Middle American finds himself in a newscast simply because he's foolish enough to feel that a candidate with strong religious beliefs would not be able to deal pragmatically with a foreign leader—I punch the button."

"A newscaster reads that a candidate joked on a nighttime talk show how he used to be on *Time* magazine covers. When such non-news elbows aside real news, I punch the button."

"Let one candidate fire unchallenged broadsides at the opposition on the air. Do newscasters not recognize it? Is it intentional? Do they not care? They play back a recording in which one candidate doubts whether voters know enough about his opposition, but they fail to report the accuser hasn't been forthcoming about his *own* past—the only defense is to punch the button."

"Some still worries on the air that 'swift-boating' might happen again where people tell 'half-truths and outright lies.' That's when any reputable journalist would explain that such a view of swift-boating, while popular, is inaccurate. Real swift-boat accusations were rhetorically sidestepped and never refuted and the candidate originally 'swift-boated' still hasn't released military records promised years ago that would prove whether the accusations were half-truths or lies. Until that happens, newscasters have unprofessionally kneecapped a candidate at the expense of the listener—punch the button! Five minutes seldom goes by on the drive to work without at least one button punch."

"Why do you listen at all?"

"I'm drawn less to the news than to the journalism behind it. Journalism fits between you, as an individual, and society as a whole. Few seem to notice that if journalism is warped, the other two may be dangerously threatened."

"That's not at all clear."

Reporting like this does not live up to the obligation news has to improve the mental map of reality one needs to plan for a better future. These highly educated talking heads—these credentialed morons—have been schooled only to give me what I don't need.

"At least I know the difference between news and blather. Most listeners never learned to protect themselves from charlatans gussied up as experts. Radios drone on while few are equipped to resist."

"But what does it matter?"

"More than you realize. Journalism is like the canary in a coal mine carried to warn miners of danger, and this bird is dead, expired, spent, shot, kaput."

"Even if it were dead, what would it matter?"

As the middle ring of three concentric circles that share the same characteristics, I can show that what is essential for journalism is essential for the other circles that represent individual and society. If one fails, the other circles are at risk. It matters because my quality of life hangs in the balance.

"Not to put too fine a point on it. I'm not willing to buy into that simply because you say so. You're going to have to show me with enough clarity that on my own I am compelled to agree."

"I wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, that's the only way we'll pull ourselves out of the pickle the last century has put us in."

"But, not now. I have to get to work. Have we time to stop at the coffee shop before you drop me off at school?"

"For you? Anything. I was saying that so little journalism lives up to its promise and so much more journalism fails. That's the same situation one finds with coffeehouses, blogs, or classrooms. It ought to matter to good citizens to discover qualities that distinguish successful coffeehouses from others, or, similarly, blogs or classrooms. Blogs can be either community smart or community dumb. I spend several sessions a day on the *JustASecond* blog. What sets that blog apart from echo chambers

is that when commenters at this blog smell a rat, they call it out the way the classically educated used to challenge for evidence centuries ago. Commenters at other blogs cover up flaws or shut down criticism of the party line by any means, and dare call that 'winning an argument'."

"So where do you do your research? How do you check things out?"

"It may not come to mind, driving through Rome, that this small city in central New York would have been Goldilocks' perfect city—not too big and not too small. Larger cities have economic engines that mask the underlying health of the community, able to temporarily suck in wealth from outside its own local resources, or use political sway to make growth happen. Walking along Broadway, Park Avenue or High Street, you'd never notice an unhealthy economy. Both mask underlying rust. On the other side of Goldilocks' choices, a backwater village hardly has an economic engine to speak of. It's part bedroom community for a semi-distant city, part subsistence farmer, and part welfare scabbler."

"Rome is a well-equipped research lab. Large enough to have an economy, small enough to see that economy work—or fail to work—and to recognize the perturbations that set it off kilter. The people who live here have enough latitude to be interesting—the way they act, the way they think, and the way they don't. You can see people get into their own way, and observe when they never notice."

"I'm very lucky. A newspaper publisher in a community the size of Rome has the opportunity to study society. I get to learn what works and what does not, and, if we're lucky, we can learn how to do better."

"We're both very lucky."

"Let me get the door for you. You normally go to the other coffee shop, don't you?"

"Yes. Different clientele, I'm sure. Who are those people?"

"The regulars. They sit in the corner each day and sell themselves to each other by what they say."

"Do you talk with them?"

"Talk with them? I've tried. They don't want to improve; they want to be validated. The coffee shop version of geese, they honk at each other for entertainment and to justify themselves through each other. When I walk in they raise their voices to be theatrically loud and pretend I'm the audience. I seldom respond."

"Anything in the newspaper last night?"

"Never is."

"You're right. That doesn't call for a response."

"Maybe they'll print some good news tonight."

"Are they always that unkind?"

"Not always. They'd be embarrassed if you brought it to their attention, ... if you could get them to see it at all. There is meanness under their laughter they choose not to see."

"... Good morning. Medium coffee, please. Leave a little room for cream, please."

"Same for me, thanks, and a bagel with butter?"

"Oh, more theater from the counter crowd..."

"Them people get you every time. To them you're low class and nothin' but dirt!"

"Them people?"

"Not us. Whoever the target for today might be. Often as not they make class distinctions. 'They'—whomever they might be—always seem out to get people because of their class. 'Class' is a convenient target because class doesn't sit on the next stool to contradict you. 'Class' provides an excuse to stop thinking. 'Class' let's you never discover the real reason. 'Class' lets you stop helping yourself. 'Class' lets you give up."

"I *seen* that..."

"Ow! 'I *saw* that'—'*seen*' hurts an English teacher's ears."

"Yes, they address everything of import with carelessness. Lazy language is as characteristic as always finding the other guy the

fault for your problems. It's a sign of institutional rust."

"... Come *on*!"

"Even where language is correct, pronunciation sends signals. The lazy ending where the 'n' the tongue never reaches the roof of the mouth? 'Come on' becomes 'Come ah' where a nasal 'ah' that obliges the listener to decode further to add the final 'n.'"

'Come *on*' is a pseudo-judgment that says, 'I'm smarter than those assholes and could clean things up if they only put me in charge.' 'Come on!' plays Monday morning quarterback. Pundits like him telescope time for the luxury of making judgments after the fact. Without fail, the pundit and fawning sycophants gather every morning to validate their own existence."

"Be sensitive about the way they speak."

"Is he to be sensitive to how I listen? How did he come by his habit? Is it by hardship, by nature, or by laziness?"

"... *Aaaaay!* ..."

"That's how they greet, buddies, friends, and toys they want to play with. It's lyrical. It's musical. 'Aaaaay!' joins other phatic utterances they sing back, more for sociability than for information. They'd call it good-natured fun—Naïve and good-hearted on the surface. 'It was a joke!' is what bullies say when caught. They can't be wrong, and underneath the surface, they're desperately insecure."

"Give them a break! Everyone has a reason for being who they are."

"That's a sentence an enabler would use. Everyone has a rationalization for their own misbehavior they are aching to get away with."

"Does it matter?"

"Look, they are, if not good people, trying to be good people, within the limits of their training. They'd be anguished to come face-to-face with their limitations. All they want is coffee and collegiality. Can I begrudge them that? No. But, should moral

relativism excuse them from becoming who they can become? Should it obstruct square dealing with others? Should experience justify bad behavior or simply explain it? How should one respond to people who do not understand and do not care to understand because it would interfere with their cocoonishly comfortable model of reality? Don't mess with their security. Their defense requires a prickly response as if to say, 'Don't threaten my small world. Security is all I got. It's all I think I got.'"

"Don't become a language bigot."

"Language is the symptom of carelessness; attitude is the problem. Dizzy Dean, 1930's baseball pitcher turned broadcaster, was known for butchering language on the air: 'He slud into third base' or 'He shouldn't hadn't ought-a swang.' Perfection isn't the goal. Why be prissy and pedantic when it's attitude that matters. Dean was not careless. He didn't hide behind language or use it as a weapon. 'Let the teachers teach English and I will teach baseball. There is a lot of people in the United States who say isn't and they ain't eating.'"

"But these people are not evil. . . . Thanks for the coffee."

"You're welcome. . . . Let me get the door. . . . No, they're not evil. They take care of their spouses and children, work in the community, and go to church. Are they intentionally damaging? No. They are good people who hurt people unnecessarily—a few instigators, but more just tolerate the misbehavior, enablers, destructive because they leave bad behavior unrecognized, unlabeled and unlaughed at. With content devoid of meaning, they run for protection at the coffee counter or water cooler at work, hiding their fear and anger, seeking comfort in company, lashing out at everyone else—eager to blame other people and put them down. Martin Heidegger, the philosopher, called it finding 'humor' in the cheapest tricks while never looking in the mirror."

"Give the coffee counter culture credit; they have a community cocoon of sorts. If it goes nowhere else than that, it's useful to them."

"You're right. I can see that. For them it is important—Hell, more than that, it is critical to their sense of self—to believe they are right. To be validated is worth more to them than to be right. They resisted learning back in school where no one convinced them that is in their own long-term best interest. Perhaps no one tried or explained why. Perhaps no one cared. Perhaps no one knew how."

"You paint education with too broad a brush."

"No, not everyone. Paint should stick only where it's needed. School isn't wrong; it simply isn't right enough. Within the straight jacket of traditional subjects, it teaches very well. You are a wonderful teacher—and you can pick out others equally good—but so many teachers, administrators, and government education hacks would fill a student vessel with knowledge rather than enable them."

"This coffee counter class contrives jocularity at others' expense to represent themselves as better than thou. It's a thin veneer like that painful last line of *Long Days Journey into Night* before the curtain falls, and 'we were so happy for a time.'"

"Sadly, such desperation labels both perpetrators and victims. Their uncomfortable laugh masks that the political class uses them and busily picks their pockets."

"Hasn't that always been that way?"

"Coffee houses have a 400 year history. Some work and some don't. Some liberate and some imprison. What sets one apart from the other?"

"Back in the 1600s, for the most part, schools were for the special classes—the wealthy and the religious. In the 1700s communications were sparse and slow, journals were expensive, and most people didn't read, but still they were hungry to know of the world. Men went to coffee houses and women created salons. By the late 1800s, Victorian and French salons would invite celebrities like Oscar Wilde to stimulate and puncture conventional wisdoms in salons."

"But by the 1910s and 1920s coffeehouse efforts to decrease entropy were challenged. People tend to think of entropy as

disorder when a tendency toward miss-order applies equally well. Seen that way, Hitler and your neighborhood talk show or politician share the same distasteful tendency. People can be dangerous when they do not appreciate what is at risk.

"The world of the 1920s was quite uninhibited. Prohibition in the United States was flaunted. Suffrage expanded. KDKA became the first commercial radio station on Pittsburgh. Linotypes, invented in 1896, churned out copy for books and magazines at an astounding seven lines per minute, which put more people in touch with affordable literature. Dance, dress, and customs were liberated."

"So, are we talking cause or cure? The freedom that was as much the cure of problems might be the cause of more."

"Exactly. Is the host obliged to educate with opening monolog jokes on the Tonight Show? Salons in the 18th and 19th century were where stupid ideas went to be laughed into oblivion. TV monologues, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Daily Show* are where stupid ideas go to be laughed into legitimacy."

"Where is your respect for the patrons at this coffee counter?"

"They respect neither themselves nor me. My position does not exercise judgment about respect. I simply choose to keep my distance where we are unlikely to have a positive effect on each other. I suspect they are afraid. School has left them fragile and they protect their wounds with bluster and distance."

"Then shouldn't you help them?"

"Preach to the unwilling? Impose myself on them? So long as they do me and no others harm, I wouldn't presume to invade their security. The coffee counter is full of insecurity. When I don't banter with them they wonder if their ideas are good enough. It's not their ideas, but how they choose to use them. Their ideas float on the surface to serve as entertainment."

"Confucius had it right, 'To fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefiting is to let a man go to waste. To speak to a man who is incapable of benefiting is to let one's words go to waste.' A wise man lets neither men nor words go to waste."

Sanctimonious and small has no place, even in coffee houses. Addison and Steele relished the 1700s coffeehouse, as a home for worthy citizens who lived more in a coffeehouse than in their shops. Businessmen berated today were respected then for their character and their zest for the fullness of life and company to be found in a coffeehouse. Let's reclaim the coffeehouse as a haven for civil people, the way Addison and Steele saw it."

"So what does distinguish a coffeehouse from a coffeehouse, a blog from a blog, or a classroom from a classroom?"

"Fear. Arrogance is an inadequate defense put up by people who dare not face more pain, which is an attitude that creates more pain. They are the gullible."

"Who are the gullible?"

"The gullible are those for whom learning is by rote. 'Facts' matter more than learning how to detect them. 'Faith' matters even when it is at odds with experience. It's where 'think' is omitted from learning standards, where words change meaning without consequence, where tolerance suspends all critical yardsticks and where history begins at dawn."

"You have just indicted almost all of our institutions."

"If I wished to defeat society, I would patiently poison the well to weaken the next generation at the roots. Dull the roots and who will notice but the elderly whose warnings carry little weight."

"How do you overcome such creeping doom?"

"Use their own intellect against their own obstructions"

"... that journalistic college education doesn't work for you!"

"Oops! More entertainment. Let's go. Sophomoric coffee house theater never ends. So far, we've been assaulted by the media, lectured by bumper stickers, derided by coffeehouse clientele, and we have yet to arrive at work. Pretty sad considering no one seems to recognize how important today is."

"You mean as a Republican or a Democrat?"

“Goodness, no! We’re at a pivot point in how people choose to see the world.”

“And you, Carnac the Magnificent, are the special dude who can see that.”

“Laugh if you must, but I am acutely aware of what I see.”

“You sound almost reverent.”

“I suppose I do. But when each new century attempts to climb out of the mess left by the old century, and to avoid the mistakes of the past, they destine themselves to make new and greater mistakes.”

“How do you mean?”

“Look back on the centuries gone by. The 1500s ended with the awareness that organized religion had simply become politics by another name. Reaction to that fostered the rise of humanistic awareness of the world around us—consider Francis Bacon, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Galileo.

“In the 1600s, religious wars of the previous century were supplanted by absolutist rulers in the hope that would lead to a better, more stable society. Along the way, rudimentary science, art, and philosophy offered a foothold for the secular empire in the century to follow. For that, consider Bacon, again, René Descartes, Hobbes, and John Locke.

“When secular autocratic empires of the 1600s didn’t live up to expectations, the 1700s represented the next great hope that science and reason would overcome superstition, prejudice, and dogma and would lead to a better society. Intellectuals that blossomed then included Edmund Burke, Denis Diderot, Moses Mendelssohn, David Hume, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith.

“When reason proved not enough, the 1800s turned to industry and commerce as the next great hope for better society. It turned out that while education matters, facts and reason were not enough. Hegel championed human will but Arthur Schopenhauer warned people not to forget their hidden drives.

“By the 1900s, superstition, prejudice, and dogma fought back,

consolidating power using clichéd notions to drive the masses. They harnessed communications, technology, and social institutions to grab for power in a way the great hope became the great hype. Chaos, it turns out, is not enough and neither is regimented schooling. Our 20th century deserves to be called the pathetic century. It became known for consolidation of both industry and governments into large institutional dinosaurs. Ironically, the election of 2008 was not to be the beginning of hope and change for the new century, but the last wheeze of spent dogma recycled from decades earlier.

“Is it too much to expect of this new century that superstition not be used on you by any politician or priest? The new century—the 21st—represents the small hope that individuals can reach sufficient awareness to inoculate themselves against usurpers in ways that necessarily lead to better society.”

“Where would the character come from to do that?”

“Where does character come from? We stopped looking for character more than 50 years ago.”

“Why would you think that?”

“It might take a century to explain. Not a century in clock time, mind you—the decades of the 20th century reflect the circumstances that brought us to our current. . . ah. . . opportunity. Along the way, we forgot how to pull a community together, not just across distances, but over time as well. We don’t recognize the golden threads that draw us all together.”

“Give me a hint.”

“Experience, language and practice all matter . . . and knowing how to look.”

“Okay. Explain how it makes a difference.”

“Footprints in the mind of a culture tell a fascinating story of the last century.”

“How does one see footprints in the mind?”

“Novels document what representative thinkers, acting as scribes, chose to put down on paper. They tell us as much about the

20th century as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, passed down by generations of oral mythic tradition, tell us of the classic Greek era. The *Iliad*, for instance, was a chronology of external events and much less an exercise of the mind like the *Odyssey*, written much later. Similarly, the last century of literature is illuminating for what it might have taught us and did not. Heavyweights like Henry James and Joseph Conrad, around the beginning of the 1900s, carrying forward to the election today, have been engaged as if society has been in a century-long slow motion train wreck that has gone mostly unnoticed.

"At the forefront of literature of his time, James' *The Art of Fiction* championed authors' liberty. James was looking for something else and, with neither space nor time for him to ventilate, he left morality as an afterthought. As a sop for readers, at the very end, James suggests that good writers will always write moral fiction because good writers write according to their core values. With that throwaway remark, James granted the 20th century license to write pretty much anything. He diminished morality to be whatever an author says it is."

"Well should literature be moral?"

"Phrased using 'should,' your question turns morality in literature into a mandate, when, over that last century, it has been a marvelous opportunity underused as an excellent vehicle. In *The Americans*, James juxtaposed new American ideals next to longstanding European traditions in a clash that forced people to look at how they relate to each other, but he did not nudge them towards how to act. He presented American traditions as fresh, open to challenge, rough, and occasionally embarrassing, and European tradition, rooted in feudal times, as beautiful, engaging, and rusting from within. James exposed the weaknesses of both but left readers no further instruction."

"Do you believe you could take the last century, a decade at a time, and map literature in a way to reach useful understanding?"

"Yes, but someone else could take the literature, a decade at a time, from then to now, and come to the conclusion that ostensibly educated people might take *no* useful understanding

from that literature—first, because they didn't read it for that understanding, and, second, because much of the literature missed significant insights about society."

"It's brassy to assert that your way is more useful."

"Perhaps. But living in Rome, working in journalism, reading great literature, studying history, stumbling on wonderful books, rejecting pseudo-sciences, dabbling in philosophy, recognizing what does not work, and, in general, learning voraciously, all blend to reaffirm insights I call golden threads that extend all the way back to the earliest thinkers. I'm having a delightful time, because there may be a way out of this mess we are in."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yes, and the first step is to recognize that the Augean stables Hercules was challenged to clean out in a single day represent as long-standing and intractable a mess as society finds itself in today."

"What makes the challenge so serious?"

"Jacob Bronowski warned that science has put such power in the hands of any who cares to learn enough to use it, that no longer can you insulate yourself from their actions."

"And are you so special that you would see a way out?"

"No. I see nothing that hasn't existed long before me. I'm just humble and happily encouraged to see some pieces to fit together. You talk of igniting the spark of self-regulated learning in your students. That's your job as a teacher. That's what happened to me. The spark makes me want to learn more; to learn enough to coach myself and others to make better judgments and better choices; to take these simple wisdoms and make them more accessible."

"Good luck! You are looking at people who are degreed but not educated; who may be professors, but who can go into any coffee shop and not see what is there to learn; for whom a coffee shop is no more than a place of personal approval."

"Bingo. You cannot be inquisitive and insecure. Be confident in your doubt. Laugh at it."

“Heh! Have a nice day! Thanks for the ride! And finish for me tonight how you think it might turn out.”

“Sure! Love you!”

“Love you, too! . . . Hey! Look at that red, white, and blue political bumper sticker! It says, ‘He’s no Messiah.’”

“Ah! There is hope for reality.”

8 AM - 1880s On modernity and self-doubt

“Before this the managers meeting, and before we get today’s newspaper out, someone half-joked this morning, ‘I don’t mind meeting, so long as you don’t talk politics. Some of us disagree with what you say.’

“That remark hit me the wrong way at the wrong time. I don’t mind someone disagreeing with an editorial I wrote. That’s no problem. The problem is that people don’t know how to disagree. A recent letter against an editorial listed half a dozen concerns, and not once did its writer identify and counter a single substantive point the editorial raised. That letter asserted the previous President was a fool. Even if I concede the last President was a fool, that point is not germane. The editorial was not about the last President. A letter that doesn’t correct an editorial where needed fails to move the discussion forward. Writers who talk past each other fail society because they never learned how to disagree or never learned why they should.

“Argument is a learned craft. An argument should restate clearly and cogently the strongest case for the argument you wish to counter. If you don’t, you don’t care to be correct and would rather win by any means necessary. That’s selfish, small, anti-social, and today’s everyday habit.

“To argue, make the clearest statement. Then explain why a premise does not stand up to scrutiny, or explain why the conclusion does not logically follow. Don’t waste time saying you disagree when you are not in a position to explain how or why.

“I am not wedded to *my* ideas. I am wedded to sound ideas. I want to know where I might be mistaken. I need to know to make decisions based on the best information available. Michel

de Montaigne invented the essay as a literary form in 1585 and would run to embrace truth from others when he saw it coming.

“The problem is systemic. People used to learn to discuss in schools, once upon a time, when it was taught in the seven Liberal Arts as the *Trivium*—Grammar to put your thoughts in order; Logic to see if those thoughts were consistent; and Rhetoric to explain those thoughts clearly to others and analyze their replies. You’ve heard stories that people in the Middle Ages would argue how many angels could dance on the head of a pin? Well, they didn’t care how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. They cared to exercise skills used in discussion. They prepared themselves to recognize any fallacy thrown at them calling *Distinguo!* when they detected one.

“To come to understanding? Why should people bother since schools seldom test for it? Too many want to stop discussion, not participate in it. For them, winning is what matters. They want to put you down, shut you up, and get you to give up. That’s uncivil. If you don’t recognize it—if it doesn’t bother you—you don’t care!

“But you should care. How should I feel about people who don’t understand how serious a problem this country is in? How should I feel about people who think it’s a game? ‘Hey I voted for this candidate because the candidate is cool!’ Well, the economy of this country is collapsing. Power looters talk down the economy to win an election because they either don’t know the mess they are creating or don’t care. Businesses are not going to be able to afford to advertise, and if they don’t advertise, then the newspaper won’t be able to pay your salary.

“Now, I seldom talk about such things. My job is to keep my balance and my sense of direction. I apologize for the rant, but I live this problem day and night. I arrive here early in the morning and leave here late at night trying to shape this newspaper so it can survive this manmade economic tsunami. And I’m going to keep on trying. But I’m fed up with people who don’t know what they are talking about, who don’t care, and who don’t know the consequences they risk.

“You want to know how much I care for this newspaper, . . . for

this community, . . . for you? I don’t have to work for this company. I could shut it down, close it up, and live comfortably enough off what’s left after liquidating. But that wouldn’t be in the best interest of a community that deserves a quality local newspaper. It wouldn’t be in the best interest of the people employed here. And it wouldn’t be in the best interest of the businesses that advertise with us.

“This newspaper has a future. When you hear people suggest that newspapers are dead, they make the same ignorant overgeneralization that underlies racism—the same sweeping misreading that believed Iraq would become a quagmire because *Sunnis* and *Shia* could never work together. The last election in Iraq was at least as peaceful as what we have around here, with fewer deaths than any run-of-the-mill week in Chicago. Those pundits failed to disaggregate into functional parts. There is no unified whole when all politics is local. Liberty that people yearn for is felt at the personal level.

“Similarly, pundits fail to disaggregate newspapers into national, regional, and local. There is no substitute for what our newspaper does at the local level. People don’t want to attend the city council meeting but they need to know what affects them. And even if they attended the high school football game, they want more detail about it and to relive the picture of the great catch. They want to know what gatherings are scheduled or the details of the burglary down the street—all from a reliable source.

“The money subscribers pay for each newspaper does not cover the cost of the newsprint it’s printed on, added to the cost to deliver it. For 150 years, advertising is what we have used to cover the rest of the expenses—to pay for reporters, editors, heat, light, and insurance. Advertising pays your salaries. Where this economy is headed threatens our operation. When the velocity of economic transactions slows down, businesses can’t afford to advertise, even if that is precisely the time they should, to elbow for market share and a larger piece of the shrinking economic pie.

“The campaign strategy for politicians out of power has been to

scare people into a business contraction that would stampede voters to help them win the election. Hell! Not just win the election, but win by such a commanding majority that they could rule without opposition. And that could just happen in the election today.

“Like with their housing fiasco, they didn’t try to kill their gravy train. They just wanted more gravy. Did they know the consequences? Do they care?”

“It’s like the frog and the scorpion who asks the frog to carry him across the river. The frog refuses, worried the scorpion will sting him. The scorpion claims he’d do no such thing; that to sting the frog in the middle of the river would kill them both. The frog accedes. In the middle of the river the scorpion stings the frog. As they sank, the frog cried out to the scorpion to ask why. The scorpion confessed that it was his nature.

“We seem to be headed for the biggest economic collapse seen in our lifetime, and it needn’t happen. Now, I may be wrong. If so, show me where. I want to know. I need to know. And so do you. But stop the useless crap that passes for rebuttal. They are right in their own mind because their convictions are their own. Nietzsche understood that convictions are a greater threat to truth than lies.

“In the 1957 movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Colonel Nicholson led fellow prisoners of war to construct a train bridge across the river to demonstrate the caliber of British engineering, resolve, and character. As allied commandos try to blow up his completed bridge, he recognizes too late that in folly and fullness of himself—in his hubris—he had aided and abetted the enemy war effort. ‘Oh my God, what have I done!’ With collapse of our economy near at hand—whether permanent or temporary we do not know—shallow thinkers from a new generation are about to admire their own bridge of folly. In their economic ignorance, they never learned Margaret Thatcher’s observation, ‘Socialism works fine until other people’s money runs out.’

“Now, I’m going to try to keep this newspaper afloat. We need to change how we operate to run as efficiently as we know how. Efficiency is a concept that over 200 years has lost its meaning.

In 1776 in *On the Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith explained where wealth comes from. Using the manufacture of a seamstress’ simple straight pin he showed that had you to do all the work from mining iron, smelting steel, and shaping the pin you couldn’t produce ten pins a month. By specializing tasks—division of labor—efficient workers could produce thousands of straight pins. Wealth is simply increased productivity for the amount of labor invested. Our company and our country use division of labor to produce goods and services efficiently, and the wealth we take for granted is the ability to select which goods and services we want, without manufacturing them ourselves. Wealth is not a zero sum game. Wealth, once created, works to the advantage of everyone.

“In this newspaper we create this wealth by doing our jobs. Should workers devise a way to get their job done with less work, the extra time and resources they free up to create other goods and services is new wealth to be shared by everyone—by readers who may buy a newspaper for less, businesses who may get more advertising for their dollar, workers who may get pay, benefits, or even just keep their jobs, owners who get return on their investments. Creating efficiency—creating wealth—is the job everyone is hired to do, and competition is what encourages everyone to create new wealth. Maximum gross domestic product (GDP) represents the greatest wealth created when everyone at a company or country is working with the greatest efficiency.

“You have to be part of the solution for this company and part of the solution for this country. If you aren’t, you deserve the lower quality of living you will have created. This newspaper is important to the community, to advertisers, and to the employees who depend on it for a living. If you object to the politics we editorialize on, then, for God’s sake, explain why, in a manner that moves the discussion forward. We just might agree with you. But, filling the air with noise or telling us to stop talking is uncivil.

“Now that the roots of liberal arts, the *Trivium*, have disappeared we are losing most of the plant that grew from those roots.”

"Isn't that a bit overstated? We have excellent schools, well funded, with certified, professional teachers. We are well-schooled."

"Absolutely. We are well schooled. We teach subjects very well, test thoroughly for those subjects, and meet exacting standards. But suppose the meat is missing from the stew. If we don't know what we don't know—and care less about learning—we become dangerously exposed. For the most part, we remain uninterested in what we used to know. Comfortable where we are, we are reluctant to consider whether we should know more."

"What does it matter?"

"Few recognize that our just-in-time culture is tenuous. We expect fresh cold milk in the grocery store every time we go there. Most of us don't have an emergency stock of food and don't know how to hunt, fish, or grow food. Learning intensive gardening techniques and other skills put me in touch with nature, helped me relax, gave me emergency skills just in case, and the vegetables taste wonderful."

"You sound like a survivalist."

"Not at all. Call it sensible perspective. I feel closer in touch with life and better able to protect my family and myself. I give thanks every time I take a hot shower or take something out of a cold refrigerator—but what really matters is the realization how tissue-thin society is and what we take for granted is in jeopardy if we don't protect it. It's dangerous not to know what one doesn't don't know and doesn't care to learn. Classical Liberal Arts sharpen our ability to recognize such things."

"The major institutions we use to guide us are rusting. Journalism reflects that unfulfilled potential. Darkness and dirt in the current campaign are disgusting, with a political class bent on winning at any cost—which means at our cost. Communication of every stripe has been corrupted. The press has been turned, willingly or unwillingly, into a political agent. Even the newest electronic communities, blogs, are used to poison, bludgeon, incite, and subvert."

"'Astroturf,' the purposeful insertion of lies or noise, gained

acceptability. Too many institutions on which we depend have been sold down the river with not even an eyebrow raised.

"I wish different things had been taught back in school. I received a solid education, but knowing what I know now I'd have been better prepared had I learned differently. David McCullough's *1776* belongs in introductory college curricula and two chapters, in particular, deserve to be read in high school. The first chapter details contemporaneous accounts of deliberation among members of British Parliament about the impending war in the colonies. Consequences of action were considered from all sides. Similar questions face governments today. The chapter helps people anchor their place in time—their place in history."

"McCullough's last chapter examines the factors that made a difference in the outcome of the war. Downplayed were geography, international relations, and weather, amongst others. What mattered most was Washington's appreciation of why he needed to persevere. Washington's character mattered, because character instills the courage to persevere. McCullough helps anchor in you understanding of the place of character in history."

"Should it be there? Should it be somewhere? History ought to be humbling. It ought to remind us of our failures. Since journalism is the tool that stands between us, as individuals, and the rest of society, when it fails, it warns that a lot more may be at risk."

"The press throws a lot of spaghetti against the wall each day, hoping that some content will stick. Not all content thrown is news and many journalists don't seem sure what is or is not. A newspaper can be described as a box of four smaller rectangles arranged in two vertical columns and two horizontal rows. One box in the top row is what you think you *need* to know and the next box on the same row is what the editor thinks you need to know. Below that is a row that has a box of what you *want* to know next to a box of what the editor thinks you want to know. Needs are different than wants. Wants are entertainment and other such information like which celebrity is going out with whom and what is on TV tonight."

"Days after The September 11, 2001, World Trade Center collapse, gossip columnist Liz Smith confessed at a newspaper convention, 'Gossip is a luxury we can no longer afford.' It was a pregnant statement. No one seemed to notice that the 'wants' in the press have overtaken the 'needs.' If anything, the journalistic 'talent' has sharpened its elbows, dug deeper in the mud-wrestling pit, and tuned its blather to win three more inches of front page space or three more minutes of airtime. News be damned. And why not? There has been no immediate cost to ignoring legitimate news.

"Meanwhile, our newspaper fights against the tide, advocating whenever we can for Reliable Community News. Our goal is to be the indispensable provider of local news and advertising.

"The journalist is a surrogate, responsible to provide the reader what the reader would have learned had they been at the scene. Rather than make decisions, responsible journalists provide necessary details so one can make one's own decisions.

"News should reflect the community back on itself. It helps people relate to others whose future they share. Without reflection, there can be no community.

"Where does one counter today's ambivalence about the use of history? Any student should approach, 'What have you learned from history?' not from the facts acquired, but from what they made their own to guide them forward. Who asks those questions?"

"Not many teachers."

"If you want to see fingerprints of the problem, the first place to look is in literature . . . in fiction . . . in the novel. Back in 1889, colonial exploration was both exploring moral complications and covering them up. The rush to control Africa was called "imperialism" by some, but that distorts the word "imperator" which was a Roman compliment offered to a successful general. Nevertheless, then, as now, power and greed were the heart of darkness. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* explores both the slippery nature of storytelling and whether one had the ability to face up to it. The end of the book forces a hypothetical on the

readers, 'If there can be no end to imperialism . . . then perhaps there can be an end to some of the more absurd and self-deluded idealizations of it.'

"Conrad said, 'Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow.' He despaired, 'There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that . . . is always but a vain and floating appearance . . .'

"His fingerprint of fading consciousness smudged a whole century.'

"That's the way it has been, but not how it needs to be."

9 AM - 1890s On journalism, narratives and belief

“Mornin’. How’s the newsroom working?”

“Busy but quiet. Not as tough a day as tomorrow will be, scrambling to get tabulated election results on the pages. Have you put some thought into an editorial for tomorrow?”

“I’ve been trying to avoid it.”

“Why?”

“We may be poised to elect a liar, a cheat, and a thief and those who should have investigated before the election may have willingly papered it over as if it does not matter. Who framed the story? What are they trying to accomplish? A frame within a frame is slippery recursion, and people learn so little about recursion that it will come back and snap ’em in the ass. All this may be the case, but today is not the day to say so in an editorial.”

“No, you can’t teach someone something they are unprepared to learn.”

“Editorially, we’ll stick to the issues and deal with consequences when it’s time. We also need to write on how the campaign hammered predetermined narratives throughout.”

“Narratives?”

“Frame narratives—the story within a story—became popular in novels just before the turn of the century a hundred years ago. Today, network television news pushes the producer’s point of view as the narrative. Without narratives, National Public Radio would lose its style and *60 Minutes* would have no plot line.”

“That doesn’t speak well of journalism.”

“Journalism shows symptoms of academic abuse. History should be mined for what is useful; it’s dishonest to leave out what

threatens one’s prejudices. Will and Ariel Durant’s histories make pseudo-historian Howard Zinn’s contrived narrative seem laughable. Journalism has forgotten the difference between Herodotus’ descriptive *Histories* and the thematic narratives of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. Journalism serves readers poorly when it imposes a presumed narrative that overpowers the events.”

“What makes you so pessimistic about journalism?”

“About 40 years worth of experience.”

“That’s flip. You speak as if you have serious concerns.”

“I think journalism is dead. The real question is when did it die.”

“Die?”

- It might have been the fawning of NBC/MSNBC’s Chris Matthews admitting to a tingle going down his leg discussing a presidential candidate during 2008 campaign.
- It might have been the rampant Bush Derangement Syndrome going on since the 2000 election.
- It might have been CBS News anchor Dan Rather’s conviction in 2004 that the Texas Air National Guard memos were legitimate. The documents were exactly reproduced using present-day default Microsoft Word settings that used proportional spacing, raised superscript characters and apostrophes rare for typewriters of the early 1970s.
- It might have been the absence of journalistic outrage at the 2003 Islamic Danish cartoons that religious fundamentalists considered offensive.
- It might have been the 2003 admission by CNN news chief Eason Jordan that the network enjoyed a special relationship with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq that caused CNN not to report Iraq’s human rights abuse.
- It might have been CNN’s *Point/Counterpoint* theater whose only journalistic highlight came on the *Saturday Night Live* parody of it, with the epithet, ‘Jane, you ignorant slut!’
- It might have been fostered by J-school dreams of becoming the next celebrity journalist like Woodward and Bernstein after their 1973 Watergate reporting.

- It might have been the 'Gotcha!' journalism that CBS' *60 Minutes* made notorious in the late 1960s.
- It might have been the 1968 leap away from news into opinion made by Walter Cronkite after he was taken in by the Vietnam War *Tet* Offensive propaganda campaign.
- It might have been the parody of Helen Thomas' entire career as a White House correspondent.

"Why does it matter?"

"The only way journalism will revive is if you decide if you want to reclaim it."

"How?"

"Make it better. Subscribe to quality press only. Read and react to it. Identify misbehavior. Label what is wrong and laugh at it. Hold the press responsible."

"But, why does it matter?"

"Individuals, journalism, and society are interrelated. Individuals, journalism and society overlay each other like concentric circles. What is important to one is important for the others. If you don't hold one accountable, it warps the others."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"If we don't make the connection clear, you'll have no foundation upon which to build society."

"Psychiatrist Carl Jung's collective unconscious suggests people can assume things without checking their work. If your task as an individual is to make your map of reality most accurate, how should you wish others to represent themselves to you?"

"Accurately."

"How would others wish you to represent yourself to them?"

"Accurately."

"How would you wish to represent yourself to others?"

"Accurately."

"How would feel if you discovered others misrepresented themselves to you."

"Cheated. Angry. I'd feel they did not respect me."

"And yet you tolerate 'political spin' without so much as a squawk. You tolerate lies as part of normal discourse. You tolerate 'appearances' when 'substance' matters. Why?"

"I have no answer."

"In the 1890s, Henry James used frame narratives in *Turn of the Screw* to insert a tale within a tale. Characters in his story tell stories with changing points of view so, in the end, you don't know which view, if any, to trust. In the stilted and abstract campaign that, thank God, ends today, frames matter more than facts. Each cardboard cutout candidate is so crafted that jaded handlers don't notice their distance from reality and, if they did, they would not let *you* notice. Candidate imperfections are buffed and polished into oblivion, so no one notices how much rust has set in around them.

"We are poised to elect someone from whom the mainstream media has shielded us on purpose. We don't know how these candidates acted in the past, which leaves us unable to project how they will govern in the future. Candidates play us with *faux* outrage, driven by politics, not principle. That tells us how they think of themselves, us, the world, and all that has gone before. History is absent from the equation for mainstream media, voters, pollsters, pundits, and, hell, even supporters."

"Back that statement up."

"Easily. Footprints are everywhere. Pick a medium. Newspapers? TV transcripts? Blogs? Books? Like spoor in the woods, writing leaves sign any tracker can follow."

"Then why do people support such candidates?"

"Long explanation or short one? Novels over a century lay out a more telling theme than just this election but they are like statistics, a blunt instrument one can use to either to tease out useful understanding or destroy the evidence. Follow the trail left by Modernist, Post-modern, and Post-colonial novels and even Post-post-modern novels—and it ties together the last century or so of literature. They reflect the environment in which they were created. Novels freeze popular thought of their

time and promote concerns through their then-current community. The seeds of novels reflect what occupied the minds of philosopher academics at the time, and reflect the soul of the community, the science, the politics, the culture—the life as they *saw* it, not how it was. We have toyed with frame narratives for a century, unable to put them in their place. They represent the structure on which situational ethics is built—much principle having crumbled in 20th century politics and philosophy. Absent foundations, we live in a nasty time where charlatans would gamble the future of society for temporary personal power. To them, power matters more than country, culture, or society. To them the candidate is the ticket in. To handlers it's only a game."

"A game?"

"Damn straight. Those who label mistakenly themselves liberal or progressive are today's *sans culottes*—the mob engine that rode to power in the French Revolution and collapsed for needing constantly to be fed, as leaders of the French Revolution discovered to their regret."

"Aren't you the optimist! So, we're screwed."

"Not so. All it takes is a change of mind."

"Do you suppose the likely winners today know what they are getting into?"

"What is the difference between 'I don't know' and 'I don't care'? It doesn't matter to them. Whoever offered this guy the presidency considered him their ticket to power."

"But why would they do that? How could they do that?"

"The tools they chose to use show lack of respect for voters and society. If they understood what they were doing or if they cared—character would not let them use such tools. What's more, their understanding of history is so . . . so . . . superficial."

"Why superficial?"

"Talking with my wife this morning, on our way to work, the conversation reminded me of Joseph Conrad. He criticized his century as filled with, 'The truth for which you have forgotten to

ask.' Imagine the modernity lived by Conrad, whose hard experience exposed the political fiction of his time. In 1897, Conrad wrote in *Nigger of Narcissus*, 'by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel... before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.'"

"I'm not sure what you are driving at."

"Modernity is a trial for anyone in one's own age—self-reference, questioning, and doubt. Being caught up in modernity—the awareness of now—takes one out of now and into a meta-consciousness that is sometimes helpful and more often a hazard. The more time spent looking at yourself and your place in time, the less time you are fully engaged in 'now.'"

"People seldom see their place in time. They can't even manage today. They haven't the habit to say, 'From this moment until bedtime, I don't care what time it is, my world will be the fun of what's happening now!'"

"What has that to do with today's election or the campaign leading up to it?"

"One of the plot threads in the book *The History Boys* has a teacher in an English grammar school encourage students to invent facts to game a testing scheme that will allow them to enter Oxford or Cambridge Universities, a lesson that winning matters while ethics does not."

"I would venture that history gets treated with less respect now because it's reputation is suspect as different narratives of 'history' get used. Rather than 'histories' it's the past that needs to be treated with respect."

"I'm not sure how to respect it, or, for that matter, what it can be used for?"

"What is the use of history, uncertain as it is? A weight? An oppressor? An education? An opportunity? We all play against it. Different flavors of humanity single themselves out for special treatment because of it. They claim, 'We are more oppressed

than you are!' because they continuously try to turn yesterday into competitive advantage."

"We all live under the crushing weight of the past."

"Not always. Every now and then, when someone sees the past more clearly, the weight of tradition is lifted . . . for a time. Then the past isn't an oppressive weight, it's light and nutritious food for the selective eater who discovers within it some threads of history worth examining."

"That's a shade too enigmatic for me."

"To those ignorant of history, the present is what is oppressive. History is not so far away that what has happened once can't repeat today. Do you dare discount that possibility?"

"History is littered with crushing tragedy caused by unrestrained, unexamined animalistic rage. For us to project more such behavior into the future should bring thoughtful people to their knees. The only way to avoid this future hell is to plumb the past to discover its weakness and marshal its strengths."

"But how?"

"Medusa, the gorgon, represents the past—an underworld creature, with hair of writhing snakes—amorphous, constantly moving, changing shape, ready to strike at the inattentive, and equally deadly to those who fixed their attention directly at her."

"I didn't expect mythology as justification. So far, you make as much sense to a layman like me as Freud's Medusa interpretation makes sense as an image of castration suffering unresolved conflicts with her father Zeus who raped her."

"Explanation, not justification. There is more than one way to interpret Medusa. Find value that works and use it."

"Seeing history as Medusa teaches you how to use the tool to better your own future. Perseus slew Medusa, with the help from the gods Athena and Hermes who provided winged sandals, a helmet of invisibility, a sword, and a mirrored shield to avoid looking directly at Medusa."

"Great! Give me winged sandals, invisibility, a sword, a shield, and the future is mine!"

"The Gorgon's deadly head, according to mythologists like Jane Ellen Harrison, 'was made out of terror, not the terror out of the Gorgon.'"

"What's the difference?"

"History is filled with writhing, senseless terror, waiting to be repeated. Douglas Adams, who understood that, had Zaphod Beeblebrox, in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, face the crushing awareness of the nothingness of the universe and its supreme lack of purpose. He understood and survived while others, unprepared and reduced by the horror of that understanding, became gibbering idiots."

"Look closely, if you dare, at the complexity of the American Civil War, with both sides fighting well-reasoned positions founded in the Bible, the Constitution, and history, systematically killing off 600,000 civilian and military sons and daughters, each side convinced of their moral right. Try to make sense of the tragedy of Severinus Boethius, one of the last Roman officials, in the service of King Theodoric the Great."

"Who was Boethius?"

Boethius wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy* in the early 500s while imprisoned and awaiting execution by Theodoric for charges of treason that were probably unfounded. *Consolation of Philosophy* was singularly responsible for projecting the writings of Aristotle and Plato from Boethius' prison a thousand years into the future. According to some records, Boethius was executed by tying a wet sheet of rawhide tightly around his head, so that as it dried, it crushed his skull."

"Looking for sense in history could drive us mad. Either paw the rubble of the past for understanding and justice, or, better yet, keep history at a distance as fair warning how quickly the angry sea can tip you overboard. Look too closely at the past and the rage and despair can poison the reader. Softly reflected in Perseus' mirrored shield, hope and invention remain intact to negotiate a more solid future."

"History is another country. We don't live there, but Perseus' winged sandals take us there, even though it's located far away. Invisibility offers the chance that we can learn enough about the need to defend ourselves before we actually have to do so. The sword reminds us that the past, the present, and the future require us to find the courage to stand up for ourselves. Was Perseus born courageous, or did he discover along the way some source of courage?"

"You're asking me? How would I know?"

"Some people would have you treat courage as a vocabulary word. Others would tell you stories of courageous people for you to emulate. While they mean well, wisdom seldom works that way. How would you do it?"

"I'm not sure if that is an assignment or a game."

"Generations forget themselves and go stupid over time. Hubris grows. 'Hey! I'm the center on my universe and must be right!' Literature is called to refocus the magnifying glass of consciousness to remind humanity that the lessons of history are there for their benefit and, if forgotten, will bite them in the ass."

"You tie history and journalism together. Do you mistrust journalism?"

"That crept up on me a decade ago. At *Woodstock '99*, the notions that the press carried around were preconceived and laughable. Our newspaper and just one other went into the event to report squarely what could be seen.

"After that, when Internet's blogging first became popular, I spent time reading journalism blogs and responded occasionally where I thought comments were mistaken. Academic journalists showed themselves to be profoundly disinterested in real-world experience from those of us in the journalistic trenches. They, who accused President George Bush of living in a bubble, lived in their own bubble, unwilling to listen to critics.

"That came to a head with a New York *Times* article that framed a narrative that Bush was irrational because of his religious faith. Accusing Bush of faith-based governance, the journalists practiced faith-based journalism. The journalists were convinced

their preconceived notions had to be right. As believers, they were unwilling to consider the possibility they might be wrong, and used any means to undercut opposing arguments."

"That's irrational."

"Try to point out irrationality to those whose world appears rational to them. These journalists believed. I was appalled. I approach journalism differently. To me, a journalist is one who, despite years of experience, approaches each new assignment with tools, but with little baggage."

"Why would journalism be different for them?"

"The world they grew up in splashed Watergate on the front page, cast Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford as the protagonists in the motion picture version, and manufactured journalistic drama every Sunday night to the tick, tick, tick, of CBS Television News' *60 Minutes* stop watch, complete with unnecessary trench coats.

"Watergate's profoundly useful journalism put television heroes of the olden days like Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers out to pasture. It fostered dual unintended consequences: journalists became celebrities, and 'Gotcha journalism' became every college kid's dream, destroying, among others, Stephen Glass, who perpetrated serial fraud at *The New Republic* in the 1990s."

"Of course, journalism has enjoyed a peculiar reputation since Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell romped in *His Girl Friday*, the motion picture version of *Front Page*."

"Journalism is a symptom, not a disease. Journalism didn't sour on its own. Those who became journalists had to be lovingly disabled beforehand to be ripe for the harvesting. I think a book on the subject would have a title like *50 Years of Bad News* but don't expect J-schools to buy it for students—too uncomfortable for them. As a result, we get hit jobs, sensationalism, below the fold justice, and double standards. We get editorials that tell us what 'must' be done rather than an explanation of what is important and why.

"It's funny to hear journo-types say 'we've created a crack investigative team' when the useless information they generate is distracting noise. By God, they have a tool and they are going to use it. It's like the weather cam. It may be foggy out, with nothing to be seen, but they will burn 30 seconds of airtime, and call it news, to show you the nothing that they see.

"Today's 'If it bleeds, it leads' is a clichéd judgment of news value, not news worthiness. Journalists seldom distinguish between the two. Too often, the habit is to mistake the scale of news value—the priority of where to place competing news on the page—for an indication whether something is news at all. They are two separate judgments. Is this news? If it is, where does it fit relative to other news?

"I'm sure you love pundits."

"Pundits often get to pundit again because they have punditted before, not because they are worthwhile. I am supposed to trust refugees from the government revolving door, whose predilections are well-known, whose analyses have been flawed at best, whose observations add neither clarity nor insight, and whose best hope is not to make egregious blunders lest they get trashed by the outrageous fortune of the next Nielsen Ratings.

"I reserve my deepest disappointment and greater anger for what passes for journalism. Charged to work for you and for me, they seem not to understand that that is their job. And even if they knew to work for us, they do not know how to perform that job. They are degreed and they are popular—credentialed morons, loved for what they do wrong."

"Hey! I'm a journalist, too. You're cutting damn close to my heart!"

"If I had included you, you would not be working in our newsroom.

"The first fault of national-level, mainstream media is that they undermine the accuracy of your mental map of reality rather than improve it. The Associated Press, for instance, reports as news that current unemployment has reached an all-time high.

"That's true, isn't it? A milestone worth reporting."

"A milestone, certainly, but more likely a millstone, because, while true, it is not useful. Journalists are obliged to differentiate between information and news. Instead, they report their content absent context."

"What context. How would I know it's not in context?"

"You shouldn't have to. AP should automatically include the context. Unemployment reaching an all-time high is less significant than the last high reached almost 30 years ago, because today 30 percent more people are working. As big as the absolute number might be, it's a smaller percentage of the total workforce today than back then.

"In Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, new wave educationist Thomas Gradgrind snookered the community just as AP has snookered our community with its preoccupation with facts at the expense of understanding. I wave AP's performance in front of our state bureau chief regularly, but what can he do if AP management is unprepared to recognize it or be embarrassed? The challenge to AP remains unanswered: 'You've got a job to do that you don't do very well. Is it that you don't know any better or that you hope no one will notice?'

"AP is just one news source."

"No need to single them out. Listen to Canadian Public Radio on National Public Radio. When a *Rolling Stone* journalist claimed the press has adequately vetted American presidential candidates, the *As It Happens* anchors accepted the statement unchallenged. Do we need to itemize the uncanny ability for the press to turn away from its job? How dare so-called journalists accept the notion that if other journalists say something that somehow provides adequate proof."

"So what is the purpose of journalism?"

"Journalists are charged to find the good questions to ask. We need better questions. For the last 40 years, journalists were taught to be an objective reporter of facts."

"Objectivity is important."

"Well, that's Dickens' Tom Gradgrind again. Facts alone do not

necessarily provide an accurate map. That flaw that Dickens could see in 1854 should not be beyond those who live today.

“How so?”

“Journalistic success is measured by popularity on TV and in print. Does popular equate to good?”

“If not popular, what would measure good?”

“If journalists didn’t exist, what would you do yourself?”

“I’d have to go to a lot more meetings and events.”

“But *why* would you go?”

“I am affected by what they do. If I go, I can vet their decisions, and act on them.”

“Precisely. Based on what you learn, you change your understanding of the world around you. News helps improve the accuracy of your mental map of the world that represents the sum of your sense experience. That map is the only tool available to make important decisions that affect your life. If so-called journalists hired to improve your mental map of reality don’t tell you what you need to know to plan your better future, they offer only entertainment that, however interesting, is not news.”

“Have we forgotten this?”

“Did journalists ever know? I mean, despite what journalists tell you—especially when they give each other awards—journalism doesn’t have a stellar history.”

“It doesn’t?”

“According to author Eric Burns, in the 1500s, a man some call the father of journalism, Pietro Aretino, was actually extorting money from people to write good things about them. He trashed those who wouldn’t pay.

“Some father of journalism.”

Some time later, at the time of our founding fathers, journalists were downright scurrilous. Thomas Jefferson, perceived as a fine, upstanding, principled man known as the father of his political party, financed journalistic propaganda under the table. The

great Jefferson compartmentalized misbehavior in one part of his brain so as not to appear inconsistent to the rest of his brain. Rationalization of behavior like Jefferson’s hasn’t changed for people today.”

“Wouldn’t today’s journalists jump on that kind of behavior? Wouldn’t they have learned to avoid such simple flaws in their reporting? Wouldn’t they notice and reject such flaming blunders in their work and that of their peers? Wouldn’t they care?”

“If journalists don’t see such things as blunders. . . then the flaw lies further back—built in to the system that helps them learn to see. They have never been taught to notice. . . by teachers who never noticed themselves.”

“That’s quite a damning indictment to make with just one or two examples.”

“Want more to back it up? Okay. There is enough evidence that for all the talk of ‘bias’ today the real problem is ‘blunder.’ Legions of journalists’ mistakes today often go unnoticed by readers and viewers. Which mistakes do you want to consider in detail: gotcha journalism, stylistic abuse, ignorance, statistical misuse, gullibility, amnesia, misrepresentation, misplaced tolerance, misplaced judgment, silence, overused or underused language, or the ubiquitous politics?

“I give specific examples to the community in presentations about the press. When people are taught by example to recognize abuse they become inoculated against the disease. They learn to defend themselves against shoddy journalism. A subset of examples are enough to show the types of mistakes popular journalists make every day that go unnoticed.”

“Unnoticed?”

“Readers don’t slam the newspaper down in disgust or punch at the remote to turn the channel. There has to be a particular place in Hell for bad journalists.”

“I can see the poster: ‘Danté for Journalists.’”

“Do you realize how deep down the Hell of Danté’s *Inferno* bad journalists would be found? Not until deep into the eighth of the nine levels! Danté described Hell this way:

Level 1 for virtuous pagans,
2 for lust,
3 for gluttons,
4 for waste,
5 for the angry, sullen, and slothful,
6 for heretics, and
7 for those who do violence.

“Level 8 sets aside 10 ditches for bad journalists, if you include putting some pimps, panderers and seducers in Ditch 1 along with the journalists.

Flatterers go in Ditch 2.
Ditch 4 is reserved for fortunetellers and
Soothsayers call Ditch 5 home
Hypocrites suffer in Ditch 6.
Ditch 7 houses the thieves.
Ditch 8 must be a large one to hold evil counselors
and deceivers,
Ditch 9 needs room for the sowers of discord and
scandal.
And, ah! Ditch 10, for falsifiers.

“Some journalists would find themselves down even lower, because Circle 9 claims the treacherous. Who do you think would suffer at the ‘Gotcha Journalism’ level?”

“Has to be CBS’s *60 Minutes*—the poster child for such abuse. If they didn’t invent it, they certainly perfected it.”

“Don’t forget the White House press gaggle whose propensity was to pounce on George W. Bush or his press secretary if they refused to respond according to the journalist’s pre-determined frame narrative. The transcripts are full of examples.”

“And Sunday wouldn’t be Sunday without CNN, MSNBC, and NPR’s David Gergen, *Washington Post*’s E. J. Dionne, ABC’s George Stephanopoulos and the rest of the feature pundits. They play preconceived irrelevancies as the main storyline: preaching which candidate ‘won’ a debate. They

might have illuminated significant policy differences presented in the debate, but that would waste NPR’s precious Daniel Schorr ‘Let’s talk about me’ time.”

“Populate the rest of that ditch with all the broadcast journalists who close their set pieces with overblown last sentence zingers—that final pontification before sending it back to the studio.”

“What’s at the next level?”

“Outrageous Style—CNN’s Anderson Cooper earned front and center at that level with his Academy Award theatrics during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. No one misplaces emotional righteous indignation like him. ‘The hell with accuracy, give me pathos!’”

“I can see CNN’s theme, now: News you can abuse: Misplaced fear and anguish repeated *ad nauseam* on the hour.”

“Don’t forget ‘Location, location, location!’ By God, if you can read the same story from the Baghdad Green Zone as in the studio on 52nd Street you have added ‘drama’—pronounced, of course, with a flat ‘a’ as in ‘gramma.’”

“The Iraqi Green Zone is as far removed from fighting as New York. The byline suggests first hand knowledge, but the reporter is AWOL. Reliance on press releases and phone interviews leave both the newscaster and the viewer clueless.”

“Strewn throughout that level are newscasters teasing news with come-ons instead of news, just to keep readers’ attention past the commercial break—‘Breaking news’ that isn’t worth breaking, repeated every eight minutes.”

“Yesterday’s news is presented breathlessly and fluffed into features. Action! Go for action.”

“I think junk science deserves a level of its own. If there were an award for the decade—I mean, *60 Minutes* is so 1968—it would be awarded to journalists who present junk science as news: ‘If the population continues at this pace . . .’ is as silly as saying, ‘If my lawn keeps growing at this pace, the whole world could be overrun!’”

“What’s the next level?”

“Well, Danté had sub-levels, and the ‘Misuse of Statistics’ is a kind of junk science. Journalists love ‘Milestone Journalism’. It should be called ‘Millstone journalism’ because it drops quality like a boat anchor. Numbers are no substitute for reporting news.”

“‘There is a consensus among scientists . . .’ is a certain ticket to this level. Consensus isn’t bad science; it’s no science. Science is about understanding the mechanics of causation, not whether a majority are believers. So-called consensus science is bad reporting, and identifies charlatans who would pick your pocket, given the chance.”

“That’s a version of reporting polling results when popularity does not imply good sense and does nothing to move forward the understanding of candidates.”

“This is too easy! Trumpeting high gasoline profits misrepresents small profits on large sales and ignores governments reaping windfall taxes. Emphasizing income disparity does not recognize the improved quality of life of many in recent years.”

“Missing Comparatives create a double standard of reporting. It distorts context to report an administration fired 8 U.S. attorneys without mentioning that 93 were fired by a previous administration. Besides, what matters is not the number of attorneys fired, but the reasons why.”

“For another example, few report that the meme—the popular symbol—‘culture of corruption’ extends to both sides of the Congressional aisle.”

“It’s hard to order the levels of journalistic hell, but one of the deeper levels has to be reserved for gullibility. Gullible journalists suffer from mental viruses. Their immune systems have been compromised. When major media channels accept and promote both *Photoshopped* and staged pictures unchallenged, that’s ‘fauxtography’ not photography.

“News teams rush to photograph and interview pathetic staged demonstrations even when chanted clichés are embarrassingly juvenile, pathetic, and nonsensical. They call

it being balanced and objective when it’s neither one. Bogus stories fed to news organizations are run without challenge by organizations unwilling to recognize or retract them. Run with the rumor and never look back to fix the damage.”

“Shall we put ‘Celebrity fetishism’ at this level—when someone known for well-knownness is presumed to have expertise about something else? Reporters and photographers surround stars from, say, *The West Wing* as they walk the halls of Washington’s Capitol Building when closer examination of their message shows them selling style rather than substance, mouthing a script they do not understand.”

“Cronyism is one of the nastier habits at this level, like coverage written to protect franchise players such as NBC practiced with high profile leak investigations that involved marquis commentators like Tim Russert, Andrea Mitchell and David Gregory.”

“Historical amnesia also belongs at a deep level. The press reports legends, not news, when popular notions are reported instead of what solid historical scholarship substantiates happened. No one reports, for example, that virtually every major politician on both sides of the aisle expressed concern over reports of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction before the war.”

“More than five years later writers continue the urban legend promulgated by CBS, the *Washington Post*, and the BBC that George W. Bush served a fake turkey in Baghdad over Thanksgiving in 2003, when even the New York *Times* issued a correction in July, 2004.”

“Deeper down in hell, almost to the bowels, has to be ‘Misrepresentation.’ CNN made self-censorship deals with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. To keep access in Iraq, CNN’s Eason Jordan compromised its content. They tempered it to what they believed would be acceptable to Hussein. When news is not fully accurate and representative, it cannot be called news.”

“Along that line, networks and national press parrot popular fictions like ‘Bush lied, people died’ when what happened is much more complex. Like the many reasons laid out for

United Nations support, with which many independently concurred, and that administrations before the one that went to war supported the 'Iraq Liberation Act of 1998,' the no-fly zone, and bombing Iraq. News organizations tolerate politicians revising their personal histories to suit the political winds of the day. For too many journalists today, history begins at dawn."

"So does 'Misplaced tolerance' fit in at this level, or does it deserve its own? Journalists abdicate their responsibility to label bad behavior what it is. Either they try to get a free pass by claiming they are only being 'objective' but, mired in their own moral relativism, they don't seem to recognize when they see it that abuse of individuals is always wrong."

"There is enough of it to fill a level of its own."

Misplaced judgment is slightly different from misplaced tolerance. News anchors like CNN's Lou Dobbs act as if their judgment is so special it should take the place of your own. He gives extended diatribes on offshore jobs in a way that presumes to do your thinking for you."

"In doing that, he misses half the data you need to know to make your own decisions. As some jobs go offshore, other jobs that we do better come onshore."

"One of the more insidious practices that deserves a level of its own is 'Silence'. The newly configured U.N. Human Rights Council is run by countries with long records of human rights abuse and, so far, has ignored most human rights problems. Where is that reported?"

"Double standard silence lets Congressional leadership get away claiming, 'Inserting Congress into an international crisis while ongoing would not be helpful' but, at the same time that leadership travels to, say Syria, to insert itself into an international crisis."

"Another kind of silence is perpetrated simply by moving lips: A newscaster says "A says X and B says Y" absent any digging to the accuracy of the content to distinguish noise from news."

"But that just represents an ordinary news day."

"One level should enshrine those who have abused language through over- or under-use."

"It's easy to tap journalists destined for those levels. Journalists belong there who use euphemisms like 'insurgents' when more properly someone who randomly kills civilians to instill fear is a 'terrorist.' Calling something a 'civil war,' or refusing to call it a civil war is more than simple judgment, it's a commitment to accuracy."

"More insidious than that is labeling some politicians by their philosophy, but not others, as if the label is derogatory. Now one would not want to prejudge, but it is surprising over the last decade how much malfeasance reported a Republican involved and, when a Democrat was involved, overlooked the Democratic label. Who can say it was conscious or unconscious? But it is flawed by any measure."

"What about politics itself?"

The press regularly commits politics . . . which is okay, when readers and viewers understand. MSNBC's Keith Olbermann is the poster child for turning news into entertainment regarding anything against Bush. Entertainment is not a sin. Suggesting that it is news is the sin."

"I think we have more levels than Danté did, but we have more sinning to work with. I'm sure our list isn't complete."

"We really haven't found a place for those transfixed by their own celebrity. With so much to lose, they remind me of heavyweight fighters in a championship bout who never step out of their defensive posture. But a short list is good enough to help people recognize journalistic failings when observed. It prompts people to put the press side-by-side to compare and contrast reports. It hones the skill to detect journalistic inadequacy. Once they learn to exercise their smell detectors it becomes easier to turn the page or punch the button."

"But where do you start?"

"Reliable journalism can be found in the most unreliable publications and programs. Journalism's ability to function within the external world is not at issue, but its attention to a

useful frame of reference is. 'Objectivity' and 'fairness' do not differentiate what is at issue. Journalists who regularly make mistakes seem to have no yardstick to recognize those mistakes. Unable to differentiate news, information, and opinion, they seem not to understand journalism's purpose."

"Which is . . .?"

"Which is to help a reader improve his or her mental map of reality—help the individual know enough that he or she can plan a better future and better society. My reading habits have changed and so should yours. Don't read to be informed; read to understand. Decent journalists should appreciate the difference and help."

10 AM - 1900s On art, consciousness, and society

“Thank you for your telephone call. I don’t very often get calls from art museum directors asking if I’d be willing to speak to them. What subject are you looking to address?”

“Mostly we’d like to learn how your newsroom works, to know how to get better coverage for what we do.”

“Public relations. Interestingly, the best advice I learned came from an attorney.”

“An attorney? How did that help?”

“A lawyer’s job, he explained, is to do the judge’s job for him.”

“I don’t see the parallel.”

“A judge is typically a very busy person, with a lot on the docket, and anxious to move on to the next case. An attorney who can prepare his brief in language and form the judge would normally use, makes it easier for the judge to adopt his client’s position.”

“What has that to do with newspapers?”

“The news editor, on deadline, is as busy as the judge. Your job is to do the editor’s job for him. Write the way the editor would write. Include news the editor would include. No fluff. Write tight. Send a picture the editor’s photographer would shoot.”

“Would you meet with our group to say that?”

“You don’t need me in person to make that point. Besides, what needs to be said is quite different.”

“Something different we should hear?”

“Artists I know often posture that art *is* culture. They seldom appreciated the purpose of art preserving or encouraging society. They see culture represented by music, dance, cuisine, or poetry as fragile, perhaps helpless, and needing to be nurtured. But such

a superficial characterization of culture, describes outward trappings. As one blogger noted, that is no more culture than clothing is.

“The raiment of art is a trapping that can be adopted by any culture as its own without plumbing the depths of that culture’s beliefs. Culture is a polity’s collection of beliefs held most deeply and strongly. Superficial multiculturalism finds enrichment in different culture’s art, music, or food but can easily miss the unchangeable underlying beliefs or their part in supporting it.”

“You’re telling me what art isn’t.”

“Art is the continuation of 10,000 years of humanity fighting for consciousness. Museums seldom reinforce the awesome power artists wield—to bring people to consciousness . . . even if you cannot necessarily keep them there.”

“Is that a compliment or an accusation?”

“Well, you can also lead them away . . . but you have an opportunity to go beyond mere consciousness to describe the evolution of consciousness and explain what and why. Art has the power of the fictional narrative to convince or manipulate.

“What evolution of consciousness?”

“We don’t have to go all the way back to cave art 10,000 years ago for examples. The 1300s experienced a cataclysmic change of mind, represented first in painting, and then in literature. Between 1310 and 1325 painters determined how to represent three-dimensional linear perspective on a two-dimensional space represented by a canvas.

“Art had created a metaphor that showed point of view differed according to where a person stood. Around 1348 Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron*, which presented perspectives from ten different characters. The concept of point of view leapt from painting, to literature, to every-day thought and people became more powerful thinkers for it.”

“Perspective did not so dramatically appear. There were instances of it used earlier.”

“To be sure, but the concept became more accessible to ordinary

people. Because of the examples, it could become easier to teach. We can think better than humans did 10,000 years ago, and absolutely have to. Yet, art is a mechanism that can be commandeered by either the powers of good or evil.”

“That sounds overly dramatic.”

“You can become a civilizing power by helping to inoculate people with the skills to defend themselves as they see fit. I don’t need to explain Modernism...”

“Heh! No.”

“Modernism in art reached perhaps from the 1870s to about 1970. It’s parallel in literature was probably from the early 1900s to World War II.

“Modernism was ‘self’ conscious of consciousness. I’m more familiar with literature, but in art, Andy Warhol’s MOMA exhibit of 32 canvasses of Campbell Soup cans drew people into consciousness to remind them of an everyday object that all too easily faded into the background.”

“A wonderful piece of art.”

“... whose societal opportunity is often overlooked.”

“Opportunity?”

“Consciousness is a habit people mistakenly assume is ever-present. One can be called to consciousness when someone else asks if you are conscious. Drawn back to consciousness, it’s too easy to presume it never to have disappeared. When art brings us again to consciousness reminds us consciousness *can* go missing.”

“Why should I believe that?”

“Ask yourself, where does your vision end?”

“I’m not sure. It’s not something I think about.”

“There is no easily discernable boundary where eyesight ends. Tests have been devised that bring the boundaries of vision to consciousness, but without ingenuity and effort the edges of vision are out of sight and out of mind. Where is perception of consciousness taught in social institutions like schools or churches?

“Only incidentally.”

“In classical Greece, Plato’s Socrates spoke of the gadfly, stinging a horse to action. Thomas Mann, in *Magic Mountain* in the 1920s wrote of consciousness lost after surviving a snowstorm. In the 1950s and 1960s. Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time* begins with Nick’s reverie watching snow descend on a coal brazier. It brings to his consciousness the ancient world of legionnaires, mountain alders, and centaurs that recall his school days and a question of upbringing. Art draws us back to consciousness. What a great responsibility. Because we do not believe it gone, we give it no credit when, through art, we are brought back to it. Too easily the ‘Hey! Pay attention!’ of great literature just as quickly becomes the ‘maybe not’ of *Bachelor* or the *Jay Leno Show*.”

“But art means different things to different people.”

“To be sure, but beyond that, some concepts are accessible to others. People can read whatever they want in Tacitus’ *Histories*. However, I need not I resign myself to moral relativism in Tacitus or in art. What makes Tacitus valuable is not authority, accuracy or precision, but his ability to recognize and label a pattern of behavior that we, in turn, detect in our own time.”

“What then would you say to museum directors?”

“There are different ways to approach understanding. Author Robert Persig once explained people look at a gasoline engine valve shim and see different things. Some see what it is—a cold, greasy piece of metal—while others see what it does—hold a valve moving hundreds of times a minute at precisely the right height to control combustion. How you see something provides critical insight to your understanding of our world. Consciousness is a view that art lessons can teach. If not in art, where should respect for consciousness be taught?”

“How could it be taught?”

“Dutch artist M. C. Escher’s drawings often use optical illusions that call upon recursion. Recursion is a tool, a computer programming technique where in order to efficiently solve a problem like the ‘Tower of Hanoi’ the program will invoke itself

again and again. Our brains think recursively. They can think about thinking about thinking about thinking . . .”

“Is that a useful tool?”

“Useful inside the mind and externally as well. For thinking it helps recognize the fragility of the only tool we have to negotiate our way through life, and externally, it allows us to examine, using the Hegelian or Marxian dialectic, the integrity of our plans over time.”

“Feedback means one can take the consequences of thinking—the results—at the top level of this strange loop and input them as a factor again at the bottom level. It can be constructive or destructive. Recursion can act like a microphone attached to an amplifier held too close to a speaker, where the smallest sound gets repeatedly reinforced into an ear-splitting squeal. Or, suppose a monk under a vow of silence reaches such a state of contentment while meditating that he audibly sighs. Recognizing he broke his vow of silence, he says, ‘Oops!’ Recognizing his oops, he says ‘Oops!’, ‘Oops!’, ‘Oops!’ . . . oopsing infinitely. To invoke the same thought process again and again and again is recursion.

“Recursion is a process of the mind. If I hit my thumb with a hammer, I am in pain. When you are in pain, sometimes you are in pain and other times you are at a distance, not really feeling pain, thinking ‘Oh, wow, that really hurt!’, watching yourself feel the pain at a meta-cognitive level, then you remember that you had been hit and are back in pain. Such in and out looping also applies with anger and with grief. Loops are important. When I am in an argument, when I am discussing things, it is possible for me to stand aside and look at myself in that argument.”

“That seems a useful, practical way to think about things, but I don’t recall that we teach it.”

“Conversation can be as recursively slippery as thoughts. R. D. Laing gave examples of such conversations in *Knots*. If you say to me, ‘you snore too much’ and I reply, ‘All you ever do is gripe, gripe, gripe.’ That itemizes two separate subjects worth discussing. One is the snoring, the second the repeated griping.

The ability to stand apart and look at the situation in perspective is one simple wisdom. Conversely, caught in your head, looping negatively, the loop is difficult to escape from intellectually without looping more. Effective action to recover requires getting out of your head—walk, sleep, read, exercise, or watch a Marx Brothers slapstick movie.

“Escher graphically represented recursion in *Print Gallery* where, in an art gallery window, a patron looks at a cityscape that contains a building that is an art gallery where, in a window, one can see a patron looking at a cityscape that contains a building that is an art gallery—an infinite loop. Art like that can help teach metaphors undreamed of a hundred or a thousand years ago.”

“That would give one an advantage philosophers of the past did not have. Do other concepts matter?”

“To recognize our circumstance, it pays to have a well-developed sense of time and one’s place in it. Sighting along time from the past, through the present, to the future is another check on the accuracy of what we think. People unpracticed in dialectics or feedback, who have been brought up in classical Newtonian physics, tend to snapshot the physical universe absent the continuum of time. Sight from the past as if looking along the frames of a piece of motion picture film, through the present, to possible futures, a sense of time and your place in it helps evaluate the gravity of potential decisions.

“That which distinguishes people from most animals is that we can plan for tomorrow. Like a child’s Chinese toy yo-yo—a stick fastened to one end of a tightly rolled paper strip flicked forward with a snap of the wrist, we can repeatedly project into the future the potential results of different choices one might make. Intelligence can jump out of a task and survey from a different level the consequences of what it has done, creating the foundation of all sociability and the foundation of all ethics and morality.

“But why do we need that.”

"Because, so far, we aren't terribly well equipped to deal with either one. We are in a big mess."

"How do we get out?"

"You are the only hope."

"Thanks, but I don't know how."

"Use your experience to figure out how. I have found no other way that works."

"Why not your way?"

"You trust your experience and can't trust mine. Socrates said this couldn't be taught like geometry. I can only nudge you on your way with questions."

"What questions?"

"How do you know we're in a mess?"

"Institutions we depend on aren't dependable."

"Good observation. Journalism, for instance, is broken and most people seem too complacent to notice or care. Humans tend to recognize patterns that are out of the ordinary. That suggests institutions charged to sharpen such skills aren't dependable either."

"How can a newspaper publisher like you think journalism is broken?"

"Contemporary journalism has circuit breakers that never seem to pop. Every day, articles get published and aired that fail the smell test."

"Press coverage sets a narrow depth of field on the lens of coverage. They dwell on the action in the foreground — milestones, trivia, artificial competitions, appearance versus reality, games, style—they record easy things at the expense of the important. Like a camera lens, their narrow depth of field leaves the background stubbornly out of focus, as if it did not matter."

"What goes out of focus?"

"Society is the background. A tapestry or rug is a useful analogy."

Cultures are like the pile in the carpet—so many different colors, varied in texture, fabric, thickness and length—but underneath it all, and holding it all together, are the crisscrossed warp and weft threads of society. A background brought in focus by the camera lens would draw attention to those necessary threads that underlie society. Such threads get overlooked if people are not inoculated by experience to recognize them.

"Here's another analogy. Leonardo da Vinci painted masterpieces on surfaces that undermined his great art. *The Last Supper*, painted in the 1490s on gesso that was subject to mold and flaking, was almost ruined within 100 years. Either Leonardo did not know or did not care about the quality of the background upon which he painted his masterpieces.

"Centuries later, we know better about quality background and know enough why we should care. So when I criticize great literature for the background on which it is painted, I do not diminish its genius, but I can wish for more.

"For instance, when cultures interact, they are treated as 'us' and 'them' and any underlying warp and weft of common social fabric that joins the two is overlooked. At the same time, journalists see themselves standing apart from cultures, as independent observers accountable only to themselves. Oblivious of any underlying fabric, journalism interacts, unsupervised and indifferent, absent guiding lights or yardsticks to measure its own misbehavior."

"What does that mean?"

"Necessarily, but indulgently unregulated, journalists wallow in the luxury of shallow work. They rationalize that any popularity they earn somehow implies they are good."

"I don't see why that matters."

"Precisely. We have become complacent. Educational institutions on which you depend only incidentally guide you to see what matters. If institutions can't get you out of the mess, you are resigned to understand only to the degree you can."

"That doesn't show me the way."

"Actually, it shows you the first step—that you are alone."

"Am I alone?"

"Even people when they are together are alone."

"Hub?"

"Each person is insular and unique, with his or her own history, obliged to make decisions from singular experience. You can never hug anyone close enough that they can make those decisions for you."

"Even if it's true, why is that significant."

"If you are alone, why manufacture society? What compelling reason can you deduce from experience why you should associate with others?"

"Machiavelli would say that together we can conquer the world."

"Machiavelli wrote at a time when an iron box would protect your wealth and a barred door protect your family. Science has put such knowledge in the hands of anyone who cares to learn enough to use it. Machiavelli has become too risky."

"That leaves me alone and still without a plan."

Then set up a mind experiment to model circumstance. Set a scene where you are nowhere, alone, facing Mother Nature."

"You are going Zen on me."

"Seriously. It is worthwhile to discover that it is in society, rather than culture, that journalism has its place. We discussed the difference between society and culture."

"Cultures were the varied pile of the carpet and society the common threads holding them together."

"A culture shares traditions and experience. Society does not have to. Society is the edge at which any two individuals or any two cultures interact."

"Then society happens within cultures, across cultures, and apart from cultures."

"Yes, but within a culture how one interacts with another can be

determined by cultural mores or longstanding experience that mitigate the problem of how to behave."

"But absent those mores, how does one establish minimum standards of behavior between cultures, where there is no shared experience?"

"That, my friend, is up to you."

"I thought it was a fair question."

"I gave a fair answer. It *is* up to you. I can't discover the answer for you. No one else can either. You have to find the way yourself. But find your answer and you'll discover that the same sturdy way is what others invariably discover, too."

"You can't show me the way, but you can show me how to find the way for myself. And my way will invariably resemble your way? Color me skeptical. We're 2500 years into written history and such an answer has not been teased out by our institutions."

"The answer has been there for those who looked. But the answer is easier to see now that professional philosophers have done the heavy work pruning away unworkable alternatives. Professional philosophers historically reduced your choices to two. Plato and Aristotle proposed that universals exist as forms that are absolute and eternal. On another side, culturally based conventions like to form according to historical traditions and concepts handed down through shared religious experience. Universals have never been verified and the culturally-dependent solutions resign players to moral relativism and intercultural conflict that answers only to a Machiavellian play of power."

"Then how can it be up to me?"

"The early 1990s forced us to reexamine intercultural relations in an attempt to resolve the conflict between cultures in the Middle East. Was one culture merely extending colonial power against another or could one deduce an applicable standard of behavior to apply?"

"Traditions based in history or philosophy can't resolve those conflicts?"

"You can't guarantee that any stranger you attempt to deal with will accept premises based on anything other than his or her own experience."

"That makes me feel isolated and alone."

"You *are* alone. That's a good first step. Imagine that you are alone, adrift in a storm-tossed sea of life. Some time ago, philosophy tried to come to your aid and build a framework to bedrock at the bottom of the sea, but as Gödel and Wittgenstein discovered, that plan proved unworkable. Although that did not work and you are unable to touch bottom, you have options because you can see others, also alone and also adrift."

"If society is the edge at which any two individuals meet, you're trying to nudge me to manufacture society using only the tools of my own ingenuity."

"Correct, with the caveat that a precise philosopher would object because the rudiments of language are culturally dependent. But for the purposes of this mind experiment, we assume some ability to communicate is essential to society and the specific assignment is to fashion a workable solution in this environment, not establish perfection."

"So I can shout to others who are adrift?"

"You *must* communicate with them. You are, after all, trying to lash people together to form society. Your options are limited, at the outset because what you can communicate must assume neither absolutes nor culturally based assumptions."

"I'm stumped."

"Outdated notions of citizenship accumulated over a lifetime can befuddle otherwise educated people. Citizenship's unexamined notions need to be jettisoned, at least temporarily, to build a sound foundation. Later, they can be dredged up to retrieve and mine for useful threads. There is enough experience each day—confirmed by the last century—to figure what is wrong, deduce what to do, and, from purely personal experience, understand why."

"I'm still stumped."

"I like the image of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, the 1832 woodcut by Katsushika Hokusai, where small boats are threatened by an unruly sea. How would they connect together, had they the necessity? How would modern boats do it?"

"Toss lines to each other?"

"Ever hear of a Lyle Gun?"

"No."

"A Lyle Gun on one ship can launch one end of a thin messenger line across a stormy sea to another ship. The ship receiving the messenger line would lash to it the end of a heavier line to be hauled back to the first ship. At each pass, a successively heavier line could be sent across until the ships were tightly lashed together."

"I understand the example. One thin thread tied to a larger line would build a successively more stable connection. But to establish society what would be the communication equivalent of a thin messenger line untainted by your culture?"

"Recall in your past an instance when you thought you were correct but were mistaken and painfully hurt by it."

"That is culturally dependent because it relies on experience."

"It would be culturally dependent if the question relied on *my* experience, but it does not. Show me what in the question is cultural? You think it's cultural because I ask about past experience, but I don't care what that past experience is."

"You are imposing your way."

"Not at all. Not my answer, but a process of your own discovery that may or may not yield my conclusion. I have simply nudged you to think for yourself."

"Why is what you say not merely opinion?"

"Because I am not expressing my point of view, but rather recommending a process by which people can see for themselves. Opinion as argument would say, 'I believe this, and therefore so should you.' There is quite a difference between an opinion and

a recipe that describes useful process. The particular experience recalled is irrelevant. In any lifetime, regardless of culture, there will invariably be such an experience.”

“What will that recognition get you?”

“People recognize patterns from experience. The question suggests a pattern to consider that sometimes we *think* we are right not because we *are* right, but simply because we think we are right.”

“Is that an important insight?”

“Pivotal. Essential. If your intellect works on a mental map of reality and not on reality itself, it is not necessarily accurate.”

“Does that matter?”

“To be brought face-to-face with the fragility that the only tool you have to navigate through life, a humbling awareness that inaccurate perceptions create risk matters more than anything else in the world. An accurate mental map of reality becomes essential to minimize the possibility of future painful experiences.”

“Isn’t that a universal then? Isn’t that absolute?”

“Not at all. Simply because different experience invariably leads to the same conclusion does not suggest that the conclusion can be deduced with the unchallenged logic of a geometric theorem. We have not rediscovered Platonic forms. Each personal conclusion is based on individual experience. Each individual, each generation, has to revalidate the process and the result.”

“Then what has been accomplished?”

“The incentive to associate with others springs from individual humility about how exposed we will be if we don’t cooperate.”

“This isn’t very original.”

“Originality isn’t the issue; it’s how the insight is applied that matters. Hobbes described life for the individual in the state of nature as ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’ Scots philosopher Douglas Hume wrote significantly about doubt in the 1700s. John Stuart Mill believed free speech was required for

the same reason. Doubt and the humility that springs from doubt follow from each other. One who recognizes doubt becomes humble. Humility comes to those who recognize doubt. Rene Descartes ostensibly said, “I think therefore I am”, but he was really saying “I doubt, therefore I am.”

“The incentive to manufacture society leads to two threads:

- Processes that foster humility — which is the understanding that there may be a better way of doing things, and
- Reciprocity — which is the understanding that others can help us find that better way as much as we can help them.”

“Why should I value humility and reciprocity?”

“If manufacturing society allows us to lift ourselves infinitesimally above the rest of the animal kingdom, it improves the odds of survival.”

“Society as the creation of individuals would fly in the face of many philosophers and politicians who put the state first.”

“Those who put the state first tend to be those who would benefit if the rest of us meekly acquiesce to reestablishing serfdom. ‘For the good of the state’ is an often unchallenged cliché that we just challenged.”

“Your ‘society’ doesn’t have much meat on its bones.”

“Humility and reciprocity are the foundations from which to deduce morality.”

“I thought morality was culturally dependent.”

“That is yet another instance where we have one word that represents two flavors of behavior. Separate words do not exist to distinguish between culturally dependent morals passed down by tradition, and process concepts—morals deduced from humility and reciprocity, the minimal requirements for society.”

“How do virtues map with process concepts?”

“Gosh, there are so many. Humility, of course, maps to humility, but so does forgiveness. Benevolence, compassion, generosity, gentleness, tolerance, justice, loyalty, and others map to reciprocity and a sense of otherness. Responsibility,

truthfulness, sensitivity, dependability, alertness, and sincerity all map to regard for the accuracy of one's mental map of reality. Contentment, initiative, joyfulness, patience, map to a sense of time and one's place in it. Other so-called virtues are skills like rhetoric or worthwhile habits like creativity, orderliness, or endurance.

"Other useful understandings are important to know but are not usually classified as virtues. Balance, consistency, and simplicity come with perspective. Understanding facades and what is possible deal with differentiating ideas versus self. Recursion and continuous re-evaluation are processes useful for problem solving.

"If I were to try to find a word to make a clear distinction, 'Character' label the morals deduced from humility and reciprocity. Character represents the processes one mind uses to decide how to act toward others. Small-p philosophy of Seneca was meant to be about how to deal with the simple problems of living. It addresses on a practical level, 'What can we know?', 'How should we act?', and 'How should one deal with others?' As Socrates had to work within the limits of language with *polis*, we work within the limits of the word character as it is represented in literature, personality, virtue, and process."

"Character. I think I missed that course in school."

"Didn't we all."

11 AM - On schooling children

“Career Day convinced me more than ever, as a newspaper cartoonist, that education is screwy.”

“How did it go in the classroom this morning?”

“The kids were wandering down the aisles with sheets of paper, each listing some seven or eight questions, all the same. That was their assignment. Get answers to the questions. The assignment took no thought.”

“How did you feel about that?”

“You could sense their indifference. I was afraid. Actually, it was a two-way street. They were indifferent and afraid. I was afraid and indifferent. I wanted to shout one question to them all: ‘Why are you here?’ And, if they didn’t want to be where they were—and that’s okay, they have to be there—‘What can you take away from this?’

“I want to go into their classrooms and tell them, ‘My curse is that I think . . . It is also my blessing. As long as I have to think, I’m going to do it the best at it that I can.’”

“And what about them?”

“I want to tell them, ‘Get down and start doing your push-ups! If you don’t, in the end, you’re the one who’s going to be the 90-pound weakling. It doesn’t matter much if you get ‘D’s in math or history; just don’t get a ‘D’ in self-motivation. Self-motivation is everything . . . and the only thing you need to take away from school.’”

“Are schooled people educated? By third grade, many schools have failed to live up to their potential. Of school in *Hard Times*, Dickens despaired, ‘It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love

or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions.”

“How can you tell they have failed to live up to their potential?”

“Even simple things show it. They can’t write. They tire too quickly. They hold pencils in a death grip. Decades ago, teachers would range the room pulling pencils out of hands as we wrote. Woe to those that gripped the pencil too tight.”

“That’s an anecdote, not a compelling explanation.”

“It’s indicative of what has been lost. We teach cobwebs of nothing worth paying attention to. Educationists fritter away class time teaching thin threads that gum the mind with accumulated clutter strong as steel.

“Why don’t schools get better?”

“The professionals would assure you that they do, citing statistics, all vetted by credentialed academics. It’s a charade . . . as if educators don’t know what else to do and are scared you’ll find out. Students are busy in school with enough to do to fill the time, but they have little to show for it. Underneath the educational hokey so many classes are empty so that students never learn to detect empty news when they see it.

“It’s knowledge. It’s testable. It’s standardized. But it’s childification no different than increasing the drinking age higher than almost any other country in the world so that students don’t learn moderation. We imprison children in schools so that teachers—who suffered through the same schools themselves—can test current students on their success at testing them for success. When students fail, they are punished with stricter rules for not living up to constantly changing standards while their schools are rewarded with extra money for having failed.

“Some teachers escape to become administrators or guidance counselors, to fetter other good teachers and overlook failures of

the poor ones. Together they produce adults proud of their ignorance and ability to bully, while too few seem to care.”

“The more time I spend in the classroom the more I wonder, as the years pass, whether we are getting less and less of a person to work with. Is our clientele really changing?”

“Are the teachers who prepare them changing? Is it that their parents do not value education? Is it that government creates people who don’t have to care?”

“Our children have education handed to them but they don’t feel the need because the system cares for them even if they don’t care. We build in disincentives—our welfare system is lax, without checks. It’s easier to game the system to get Medicaid and welfare benefits.”

“It’s odd because somewhere elitism leaks into the process to close unwary minds. Education majors in college are taught some superior tools and methods to use to educate students, but then they are also taught to follow standards designed and implemented by state bureaucrats. Educators have run the gauntlet to become credentialed. Credentialed teachers are the chosen few to decide what must be taught, Credentialed teachers are officially right, even though the process of re-righting the educational ship has been repeated dozens of times with little evidence to support success. This time offers no special reason to get it right. Nor are unions at the core of today’s educational flaws. While a union does hold afloat the unsuccessful to preserve uniformity, insinuating itself into the process as if educational matters were job conditions, some states that are anti-union have some of the least effective schools in the country.”

“What is the problem?”

“Ayn Rand called progressive educationists *comprachicos*—child-buyers: mythical allusions to those who, for their nefarious ends, would manipulate the minds of children. Educationists commandeered John Dewey’s model of learning, developed in the first half of the 20th century. His ‘learn by doing’ promoted real world experiences, not just reading and drill. Somewhere,

Dewey’s nurturing of the process of thinking was distilled out of the exercise. Education became very ‘now,’ encumbered by a full set of blinders. What worked in classical education became *passé* because it ostensibly favored those of higher socioeconomic class. They promoted group work and cooperative learning rather than nudge students to think for themselves. They educated for social responsibility and democracy even if strong individual thinking is how one can deduce what society is, what responsibility one has to it, and what in democracy to value.”

“Written out of revulsion of the carnage wrought by World War I, Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain* said that we produce people conditioned to behave, not think. Leopold Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses* was a passive observer. Stephen Dedalus was introverted and cerebral, thinking, thinking, and thinking, but not of useful things. He was spent internally, confronting a hostile universe, admitting, ‘History is a nightmare I’m trying to forget.’ Philosopher Michel Foucault believed schools create people who are docile and capable. They are equipped to produce goods without complaint.”

“The apple falls near the tree. Many essays that come out of a high school classroom show the need for remediation for student’s style and substance. More clearly they show their parents needed to be remediated years earlier when they were in school.”

“Those parents would have attended school in the 1970s and 1980s. What was missing then? Is it still missing? What didn’t they learn to understand? Those parents would have been taught by the boomer generation teachers, flower power kids who escaped the Vietnam War by becoming teachers—confident of themselves while cynical of others.

“I’m embarrassed for them. They had the power to expose Post-modernism for its style-without-substance except that that would have required them to look in a mirror.”

“One of the students has a glimmer. ‘If I look at myself in the future I will realize how stupid some of the stuff I have done is and I’ll want to go back in time and punch myself in the face.’

"If journalism has not lived up to its potential, why is that fact not being trumpeted from the highest parapets? People aren't busily changing channels, turning pages, or buying different newspapers. Why are people not laughing at what they see?"

"Journalism at the national level is also myopic. I fired off an email to public radio in Canada: 'When you didn't laugh derisively at the *Rolling Stone* writer who claimed the presidential candidates 'had been fully vetted' by the press, I realized *As It Happens* had stumbled undetected from news into entertainment. To tell the difference, first remember that news should improve your map of reality, not tell you what to do.'

"They have lost the means to recognize what news is and rediscover what to do. It's systemic and goes beyond journalism to their education. They can't see anything they haven't been prepared to see. Bureaucrats and journalists can be forgiven for not getting it right. After all, more important than doing their jobs, they were busy 'making a living.' Someone needs to tell these people to pay attention."

"Pay attention to what?"

"Bingo! Since people should recognize the problem, it suggests the underlying problem is something else. If people ought to see differently and don't, it is as if the basic understanding upon which society depends needs recalibration."

"What school subject lesson would that fall under?"

"If students see no reason to go to school, that should tell you something. For the most part, outside the mechanics of working numbers and simple reading skills, one cannot put what is learned in school to work for oneself. Classes of empty content are a lousy substitute for developing character and developing character is a lousy substitute for education. School should help develop reliability of judgment, but Aristotle 2500 years ago had a more developed sense of the power of the mind than we do."

"Are we getting less to deal with?"

"It's more complex than that. Education is handed to students but they don't care to work at it because the welfare and health

care systems create people who don't have to care and they have little specific to work for."

"They can go lemmingly toward false security or get to work."

"Consider a new word, 'half-think.' That's thinking something through just far enough to avoid think any further. Look at Robin Williams, Jon Stewart, and Jay Leno. These are brilliant comedians in their own way. How can they not care about their misrepresentations?"

"Hey, they make money off it."

"But at what cost? They are either oblivious to the consequences or care less. Which half-think is theirs—the one that doesn't know or the one that doesn't care?"

"The opportunity of the century for humor is to poke fun at brittle shallowness. They share the same responsibility as art. They can puncture unconscious complacency. They can ridicule the inadequacy of education that has brought us to this place."

"Leno shouldn't be forced to be neo-politically correct, but he ought to be able to be laughed at for what he says, too. Rather than 'Enlightenment' we are in the midst of an era of 'Endarkenment.' No one ever admits to living in the midst of Middle Ages."

"Hey. Here come the kids. See you after the newspaper tour."

...

"Eyes! I want to see all your eyes! . . .

"Thank you for coming to tour our newspaper. Settle down on the floor, please."

"You are all 10 to 12 years old. Some 150 years ago, when my great-great-grandfather was your age, he started work at this newspaper. Back then, they made up the newspaper one letter at a time, one story at a time, one page at a time. His first job was to recycle each letter used in that day's newspaper, after the issue

had been printed, so they could use it again. The letters, called type, were sorted one-by-one, into a California case. Type was expensive. Each letter was hard to replace. Setting news that way was expensive. Each word, each sentence, was valuable. But it was worthwhile because people were hungry to learn. Has anyone told you why you should be hungry to learn?

“Okay, look at it this way. Who has seen people lift weights? Whoa! That’s a lot of hands! Why do people lift weights?”

“Get stronger!”

“That’s right. To build muscles. Tell me, then, what is weight lifting for the brain?”

“ . . ?”

“Don’t know? Reading. Writing. Talking with people. We call that conversation.”

“Ooooh!”

“Now, why do you want to have a strong brain?”

“ . . ?”

“You want a strong brain, because that is the only tool you’ve got to plan your best future.

“If, before now, no one explained to you why you attend school, now you know. Someone could have told you this, just by reading a book. Hundreds of years ago, Sir Francis Bacon wrote, ‘Reading maketh a full man; writing a ready man; conference an exact man.’ He wrote that in a book, and books have useful things to say if you listen to them.

“Now, please follow me through the advertising department to what used to be our composing room. . . . Watch your step!

“How can you tell news from information or opinion? . . . It’s important. If you learn, you’ll know something many grown-ups don’t know. See that big black cloth dot on the floor? Some of you walked across it on the way in.

“Okay, look at this poster: News, Information, and Opinion.

- News: The black cloth dot may cover a hole in the floor.

“News tells you something you need to know to plan your best future. You need to know that there might be a hole underneath that black dot. It’s important. News helps you learn useful things about your world, but not every fact is news.”

- Information: Many people like ice cream.

“That information is also true, but often not what you need to know. While true and entertaining, information is not always news.”

- Opinion: I like ice cream!

“Opinion may or may not be true, entertaining, or important. Opinion is not news.

“ . . . Now, follow the guides as we walk around the plant. You are going to enjoy seeing the presses, but don’t touch anything. The pressroom is inky. Printer’s ink, I’m told, can jump at least a foot, and you don’t want a permanent reminder of your tour.”

. . .

“Thanks very much for taking our classes around.

“You are welcome. You have a great responsibility teaching these children. Learning to read is a useful building block. Just a start. The idea that learning to read is somehow quite enough education is as absurd as suggesting that learning to press the accelerator to make the car go is quite enough learning for one who wants to drive.”

“No. Testing reading skills is not enough. I think you got to the students.”

“Thanks for saying that. What you do is so much more valuable. Not in subject teaching, specifically, but as a role model.”

“How so?”

“The small things. When you make a mistake in front of the class on the whiteboard and a student points out the error, some teachers would gloss over the problem. Good teachers make it a teachable moment. ‘Thank you. I’m really grateful that you pointed out my mistake.’ To be seen as not perfect and in need of the assistance of others shows they need to be humble and open to have their own mistakes pointed out.”

“By now, in the fifth grade, they should all be readers. By the fifth grade it’s almost too late to remediate one who is not. If you want to know the number of jail cells you’re going to need for adults, just count the males who can’t read by seventh grade.

“A frightening statistic.”

“In education and journalism there is a difference between telling you what to do or believe and pointing you toward the evidence to figure it out for yourself. Students need to learn not to let anyone wearing a white lab coat, sporting a clerical collar, or standing on a soap box assume more authority than the soundness of their ideas deserves. If you give in, it is the moral equivalent of baloney.”

“I wish older students understood what they are after. The idea that you don’t have to be good at what you do is naïve.”

“To become all of yourself, you must be aware of things greater than yourself. Threads of wisdom over time matter more than chronology, but chronology is what we teach. One year it’s state history, then American History. After that is ancient history up to Napoleon at Waterloo, followed up to the present day. Chronology offers students no pattern and no relevance to today. We teach what happened rather than how to think. To learn the date of birth of Paul Revere but not that he was a propagandist whose illustrations helped foment a revolution by misrepresenting what actually happened bypasses the useful lesson. Do the ends justify the means? If the goal is to better society, does undermining society along the way matter? And who put him in charge of tearing apart social fabric because, in hubris, he thinks he knows better? What matters the date of birth of Paul Revere when the lesson to be learned is how, even flawed, he affected society. But we don’t teach that because the good guys won.”

“So what should we do?”

“To live up to our humanity, build into education that society is the only means by which we can learn about flaws and how best to deal with them. What is so laughably silly is the angst and villainy of bureaucrats and administrators who misunderstand

the problem, and would regulate order rather than teach humanity. Show your work, dammit! If you get the answer ‘right’ but the process was flawed to get to there, you don’t have the answer.

“In the end, order isn’t the answer, and far more important is the humility that drives us to be social.”

12 PM - On exploring character

"I like coming to The Savoy for lunch."

"Please pass the garlic bread. I can't keep away from it. Tuesdays the Savoy is revered for serving 'Used Meat.'"

"That's supposed to be appetizing?"

"It's really unused meat—the small pieces of good meat not used to prepare other dishes—simmered in an Italian tomato-based sauce, served over macaroni."

"I'll try it. While we are waiting for lunch, the members of the Character Committee are soliciting support for the Character 'Virtue-of-the-Month' posters and we hope the newspaper will help sponsor them."

"Are you trying to encourage the appearance of character, or character itself?"

"I don't see the difference."

"P. J. O'Rourke referred to Richard Brookhiser's biography of *George Washington, Founding Father* to explain how people looked at things differently 200 years ago. 'We worry about our authenticity—about whether our presentation reflects who we "really" are. Eighteenth century Americans attended more to the outside story and were less avid to drive putty knives between the outer and inner man. "Character" . . . was a role one played until one became it; "character" also meant how one's role was judged by others. It was both the performance and the reviews. Every man had a character to maintain; every man was a character actor.'

"Do you want today's children and adults to live by the 18th century standard where character was a role the immature would play until they discovered through life experience what constituted real character?"

"What's the alternative?"

"To establish a solid foundation of process concepts that lead to character among those capable of grasping it."

"That's what understanding the vocabulary of character tries to do."

"If that's the case, does having respect develop character or does character lead to respect?"

"That's a false choice, isn't it?"

"Try a different virtue. Does obedience result in character or does character result in obedience?"

"I don't know how to answer that."

"If teaching virtues are what should be taught, then there should be a clear path to explain how one gets from the vocabulary to character. Does teaching virtues effectively develop strong character? If not, how do you develop strong character more effectively?"

"Virtues are laudable and rote learning is easy to teach."

"To teach someone to 'Be this way' or 'Be that way' attempts to teach the result you want to achieve, absent the process to get there. People who know the vocabulary don't necessarily act with character. Complicating that, the virtue presented doesn't necessarily apply to the situation. Virtues like 'respect' and 'obedience' sometimes lead to the wrong result. Suppose 'respect' is not deserved. Suppose, authorities demand action that would be unethical, in which case blind obedience would not be a virtue. 'Obedience' is important, until it comes into conflict with other virtues. If teaching just virtues leads to lack of character, how do you determine the difference?"

"People do have to learn to exercise judgment."

"But you propose to teach vocabulary, not judgment. The practice of teaching the vocabulary of virtue may not develop character by any means other than chance. Perhaps learning virtues is different than developing virtue."

"There is a long track record of teaching virtues and we can

show that the children react positively to our program.”

“Yes, it’s delightful to see schools of smiling children happily singing along in the promotional videos. Teachers vouch for participation, but that doesn’t indicate success. Teaching that way is immediate and easy. Downloadable lesson plans promote the vocabulary of virtues. Definitions are easy to test. Essays that explain why a role model demonstrates one virtue or another are easily graded.”

“There are universal rules.”

“Plato proposed rules 2300 years ago but no one could prove their universality. Churches, which typically depend on rules and examples demonstrating them, have difficulty getting the message across to others beyond their faithful who already are convinced. Campaigns based on religions don’t convince, they compel, with no less power than Machiavelli proposed 600 years ago to coerce people to behave.”

“The founders of our country believed there are moral values in the lessons of history waiting to be recognized, and you need to know the vocabulary to recognize them.”

“We both can agree on that sentence, but each of us will take away something different. You will take away that virtues are, as St. Augustine wrote, written on the fleshy tablets of the heart as some kind of natural law. I’ll take away that experience can reveal patterns that, if we choose to recognize and think about them, can give us insight into a more advantageous way to think.”

“So how do we move forward?”

“I used to attend meetings to promote character. At one meeting, after the immediate work had been accomplished, I suggested spending perhaps ten minutes each meeting to consider what lessons might best promote character. Prominent members of the committee—elected school officials, mind you—declined to pursue the idea. They had decided not to learn. I thanked them and left the meeting, there being nothing further able to be accomplished.”

“Then, what is character and how do you get it?”

“Where does the courage represented by the Hobbits in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* come from? Characters in books find a well of strength to draw from as surely as they find it in real life. Thomas Mann’s hypothesis in *Magic Mountain* does not have to play out, that our culture creates people that are docile and compliant. Docile and compliant isn’t courageous. Joshua Chamberlain at the battle of Gettysburg was courageous, not docile and compliant.”

“Virtues do develop character.”

“So you think. What virtues would you teach?”

“Kindness. Wisdom. Integrity. William Bennett wrote a book on them.”

“Looking back to Homer, the virtues the poets favored were warlike qualities—legends and fictions that were oracular. Romantics after the Enlightenment, and perhaps of the 1960s wanted to get in touch with feelings. Those qualities were once taken as the exercise of virtue. Socrates argued that perhaps one could find a more rational approach. That challenge to the livelihood and power of poets did not sit well, so some, like Aristophanes, misrepresented Socrates as someone who would present the worst case as the best.

“Seneca saw justice, moral insight, self-control, and courage as the cardinal virtues in Rome 2000 years ago. Others in the early Roman republic saw slightly different virtues at the heart of citizenship. These were the actions that made you a man, or *vir*, in Latin, the root of virtue or *virtus*:

- Piety, because they felt they were a chosen people.
- Honesty, because they could be trusted.
- True, because they kept their word.
- Just, because they believed in equitable application of law.
- Vigilant, because they would fight to protect that which they believed.

“Literature uncovers interesting observations about virtue. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain represented the ideals of the Round Table. The tests of desire and the fear of death faced in *Gawain* are the same tests that Buddha faced.

“The medieval pentangle stood for the five chivalric virtues: fidelity to others, promises, principles, faith, moral righteousness, and personal integrity. Elsewhere they are recorded as generosity, loyalty to and love of others—sometimes called piety, temperance or freedom from lust, courtesy, and benevolence.”

“Is there overlay in what different cultures consider virtues?

“That’s a fair question. Confucian virtues were very similar to those of Socrates in ancient Greece or Mohandas Gandhi in India—wisdom, justice, moderation, courage. Are there universal human values that stand up to scrutiny better than the virtues? And how do you know the virtues you’d teach are true virtues? What about wealth or fame? Are they virtues?”

“That’s *ad hominem*. The real question is ‘What is character and how do you get it?’ Virtues have been described as those traits a culture values. Our job is to discover them.”

“So we should accept what has gone before as gospel?”

“Go with what works.”

“What works? Whose gospel do you accept on faith? Which of the hundreds of conflicting religions and sects should win out . . . the one you believe in, simply because it’s yours? George Bernard Shaw sarcastically asked in 1919, in *Heartbreak House*, ‘Do you think the laws of God will be suspended in favor of England simply because you were born there?’ In our world, World War I dashed any vestige of belief that liberal values and technological advancement in natural sciences would lead to steady, civilized society. The world was left in wreckage with cultures in conflict.”

“You’ve got to use some common sense.”

“You mean you have to figure out why?”

“Well, yes . . .”

And do you adopt that which other cultures discover to be virtues?

“If they add value.”

“What criteria do you use to measure ‘value?’”

“I’m not sure.”

“What of those things that further society?”

“Perhaps.”

“And what of the ‘virtues’ of different cultures, can you discover those?”

“I suppose.”

“Perhaps you could explain to me your virtue detector.”

“I . . . I don’t think I know.”

“Well, character certainly isn’t promoted through character vocabulists plastering posters in public places. Consider the posters you want to hang:

- *Loyalty – Using difficult times to demonstrate my commitment to those I serve.*

“Hogwash! —A platitude that masquerades as wisdom. Who are those served, and why should one commit to them? Commitment became a liability during the Nuremberg trials after World War II.”

- *Wisdom – Making practical applications of truth in daily decisions (versus foolishness)*

“Now we’re grasping at straws to find both the vocabulary and the definition.”

- *Integrity – The moral excellence in my life as I consistently do what is right.*

“Aye, there’s the rub: to decide what is right is left as an exercise to the student.”

- *Vigilance – To be conscious and consistent requires constant vigilance and community.*

“What fascinates me is these character vocabulists can walk right by insight, never notice the gold mine, and manufacture trivial tributes for any fine sounding adjective. Suppose we were to manufacture one of our own:

- *Voluptuousness – Using one’s beauty to best advantage!*

"It's as fact-based as anything they have offered."

"You should post that one, just for fun."

"Far from promoting 'Character', virtue-promoters want the warm feeling they get when they convince themselves they promote character. Results don't matter. The number of posters posted matters more. If enough posters are posted, those who need character must get indoctrinated."

"So they don't know what character is?"

"They think mastery of the vocabulary of virtues *is* character. Virtues to them are like numbers trying to substitute for mastery of arithmetic."

"Numbers?"

"Sure. 'Seven! Seven is a good number! Learn seven and arithmetic will certainly follow. Five! Five is another worthwhile number. Master seven, five, and several more and arithmetic will magically appear.'"

"But, numbers and arithmetic are not the same thing."

"Tell that to the character vocabulists. For them, if one learns to define the words of character, mastery must be just around the corner."

"Not everyone promotes virtues, some hold up exceptional people to emulate—Luther Burbank, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington."

"Should you emulate their actions or emulate how they decided to act?"

"I'm not sure."

"How do you learn how they decided to act? Where do you learn that? Brookhiser noted something interesting about the northern Virginia culture that George Washington grew up in. In Washington's time character was a role one played until one grew into it. Rules were a substitute used early in one's life until one could be nudged—and 'nudged' was Socrates' word—toward processes that allowed one to figure out for oneself how one should behave."

"Washington's persistence is a virtue worth emulating."

"How do you decide who to emulate or what trait to emulate? Emulating virtues leads to the appearance of virtue, not to the solid processes that lead to virtue. Solid thought processes lead to compelling understanding why virtuous behavior is worthwhile. Persistence shouldn't be emulated because Washington had it. Persistence comes from understanding what is important and why. Teach virtues alone and we risk overlooking the need to nudge people toward recognizing for themselves critical processes of thought."

"Why do people teach the result they want but not the skills to get there?"

"The problem of how to teach character is very old. Socrates died for it in 399 B.C. In the 1700s, Immanuel Kant wondered, why it was that moral instruction accomplishes so little. Yet, he observed, even little children understand that you should do a thing just because it is right. Our challenge is to go beyond rewarding good behavior, which Kant recognized was ineffective, to do that which Socrates called not 'teachable, like geometry,' but teachable in a way, that we might produce not docile sheep but responsible, growing, inquiring citizens."

"That's why we do what we do."

"Do you? Some 2500 years ago, around the dawn of civilization, Confucius thought about the way one should behave. He called it *li*, which is Chinese for *the way*. He determined there were those who intuitively knew *the way* to live—natural saints, as it were. Then, he believed a second, larger group of people could learn *the way*. He considered himself in that group. The remaining group of people required fixed rules of behavior he called laws or ritual.

"You direct your fixed rules to the third and least capable group, leaving others without instruction to master the more useful skills. As many people as possible should be encouraged to join the group that learns how to figure out *the way*—the group that isn't just told the way to live, but constantly considers whether their personal choices are honorable.

"Everyone deserves to be put the question why they should choose a character-centered life. That question really asks why is such a life in one's own long-term best interest. Professor Peter Kreeft in *What would Socrates Do?* pointed out other questions, too. Why do people assume that what is popular will be effective? Why is character education an effort even for adults? Why do youngsters not embrace character education as easily as other things they see to their benefit? Why do people teach the result they want but not the skills to get there? Why should I be consistently moral? Why not be moral only when it pays to be moral? Why not be immoral if you can get away with it?"

"We don't answer every moral concern, but we do our part to help."

"That's funny. Although your boat is turning in circles, with oarsmen rowing only on one side, you are satisfied with your progress."

"Realistically, what can be done?"

"Perhaps character education is only taught the way that it is because alternatives have not been clear."

"Make it clear, then."

"Virtues are the result of thinking about yourself, society, life and your place in it. Our job is to seed that path with a handful of process concepts that people easily turn to help themselves."

"What are 'Process Concepts'?"

"A virtue is a shorthand label for the result of thoughtful analysis about a general concept that is, itself, easily acceptable and easily understood from one's own personal experience. Process concepts help people decide what to do so they can plan for their better future."

"People insist on trying to push character onto others when much of the real work—the work inside their own head—remains unfinished. If you think you know what to do but don't know why, then you don't know character, much less how to convey it to someone else."

"Youngsters may have to be guided by rules until they mature"

enough to come to see the practical value in it for themselves. They need to develop the skill to consider points of view, and to value critical thinking as a tool for self-protection. Critical thinking is only now reentering the curriculum. Then they need an opportunity to practice and to see it in practice. Character not a habit but, rather, a skill honed with practice."

"We want people to learn to behave—to follow the law."

"Which law? Any law? Popular laws?"

"We need order."

"*Socrates' Apology* was about order versus responsibility and discipline versus free speech. Those who are afraid of speech don't trust people. You don't trust anyone other than yourself, and yet we are supposed to trust you? For what reason? Socrates asked the question 'Who has the right to educate students?' which is really the question 'Who governs?' You call it order, but it is about who governs, and order is not judgment. What are these children to do when you are no longer present to exercise your judgment for them? Character is not about applying rules. It's about being able to make complex life decisions—and to understand and justify them. This is not easy. Sure, people can fake character by following rules for one reason or another, but Descartes called rule-based living a magnificent temple built on a foundation of mud. Those who live by rules have no certain criteria for determining good and evil. Kreeft reminds us that an act is good because of the principle that motivates it, but rules aren't principles."

"There has to be a better answer."

"You seem to be in the same stew as recent philosophers who have resigned themselves to believe morality is relative and therefore ineffective for organizing society. Relativity is irrelevant if views are expressed in a framework that others recognize will hold equally true for themselves. Frames of reference, constructed from similar experience, while not universal, are as effective as if they were universal. How to act can then be explained in terms even the culturally distant understand and can believe."

"I don't understand how."

"Developing character has to be a two-step process. First, stimulate the distant party to examine their own personal experience for useful lessons. Second, compare their lessons from their experience with your lessons from your experience to extract shared observations that could lead to a common framework for decision-making. For example, can you identify with Montaigne who wrote, 'If a man remembers how very many times he has been wrong in his judgment, will it not be foolish of him not to mistrust it ever after?'"

"Yes."

"Have you ever had similar experiences?"

"You bet. Sometimes embarrassing; sometimes painful."

"Given such personal experience, would that lead you to mistrust your judgment?"

"I would be more careful."

"So cultural relativism does not preclude developing that shared understanding."

"Explain that."

"Montaigne's personal experience certainly is distant from yours, but you can identify the same pattern in your own unique experience. Montaigne and you share a frame of reference despite extreme differences in religion, language, upbringing, culture, time-shift, and almost everything else. You, Montaigne, and people in general can go beyond the traditions that only carry them so far."

"Why does that matter?"

"People seem adrift, infected by moral relativism—the idea that moral judgments are founded in cultural background which implies that what is considered proper behavior for another person differ from our own opinion. What appears as lack of morality is the hollow framework of earlier philosophers crumbling under the heavy weight of more recent criticism like Friedrich Nietzsche's 'God is dead' and Jean Paul Sartre's nausea

at discovering a universe both Shakespeare and Faulkner called 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.'"

"They found nowhere to turn."

"Which left authorities to beat the same drum louder and harder, with no greater expectation of success, to hand out binders full of character notes that miss the mark. They trundle out credentialed experts whose lofty and traditional words mask their limited success. It is easier but less useful to drum into our students a fixed set of rules, or we can help our students develop a process by which they can decide how to respond honorably. That takes more effort, but it produces better citizens."

"Why are they better citizens?"

"They are better able to recognize the ethics of a situation they find themselves in, and to decide how to respond appropriately to those circumstances. People can deduce shared concepts of Respect and Responsibility from experience. Respect is inwardly directed towards ourselves and towards our treatment of others. Responsibility is outwardly directed towards our friends, our school, our community, and our world."

"Nudged to recognize them, constructive patterns of behavior almost leapt out of the past. Extract threads of wisdom that can be labeled and projected into the future as options to help learn to do better next time. It happens every day. As kids connect language and thought, they are empowered and motivated by simple wisdoms extracted from their own experience:

- A sense that they might sometimes be wrong.
- A sense that the map of reality in their mind could be better.
- A sense that others live their lives as acutely as I live mine.
- A sense of time and one's place in it.
- A sense that they are responsible for themselves.
- A sense of process thinking about thinking.

"These are processes kids understand, admire and wish to emulate in a deeper way.

"From simple wisdoms garnered from experience, people can deduce that their long-term interests are served by a character-centered life. Because it comes from personal experience, these

observations are accessible to everyone across cultural and religious boundaries. They foster virtues, a compelling framework for civilization, and a path to honorable decision-making.

“Given a choice between the temptation to teach rote virtues half-heartedly—the ‘we tried’ approach—or teach process concepts, I’ll teach process concepts that encourage thinking about yourself, your place in society, and life itself. A path seeded with process concepts offers practical help that people can easily embrace that ultimately leads to virtuous behavior. Process concepts ignite the spark of self-regulated learning that just this easily pass Socrates’ torch on to the next generation.”

“You seem to be challenging what we teach.”

“We have filtered classical wisdom out of education. Where do you learn to work the complexity of life? Montaigne, when he despairs of making sense of himself speaks to the internal complexity with which every individual must cope. ‘All contradictions may be found in me—bashful, insolent; chaste, lascivious; talkative, taciturn; tough, delicate; clever, stupid; surly, affable; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant; liberal, miserly and prodigal: all this I see in myself to some extent according to how I turn—I have nothing to say about myself absolutely, simply and solidly, without confusion and without mixture, or in one word.’

“And where do you learn to struggle? The myth of Sisyphus tells how the gods condemned him for all eternity to roll a boulder up a mountainside only to have it tumble down again just before it reached the top. The myth is a metaphor—a fiction that tells a truth. In his interpretation of Sisyphus in *Once and Future Myths*, Phil Cousineau reminds us of something every generation has to learn for itself: It is not what happens to us that matters; what matters is our attitude towards what happens. The story doesn’t ennoble suffering, it ennoble struggle. Struggle is inevitable, and those who learn to see it as an obstacle rather than a burden make life a lot easier for themselves. Cousineau concludes, ‘the secret of the creative life consists in taking the next step, doing the next thing you have to do, but doing it with all your heart

and soul and finding some joy in doing it.’ If you forget all the facts and formulas you learn in school, you will nevertheless have grown to be an educated person if you shun the self-absorbed, downward spiral of suffering and develop in yourself, instead, the will to apply yourself each time you approach the mountain.

“We clutter the curriculum when the central subject worth teaching is how to live.”

1 PM - 1910s On hope and reality

“Can’t the newspaper do something?”

“About what?”

“This poor person in need of a transplant came in today to place an ad looking for donations.”

“Every day we run articles for free that point readers to events scheduled to help people who are in need.”

“I just feel like I should do more.”

“Should? What ‘should’ be done? Who ‘should’ do it? It’s gut wrenching, I know, but where should the newspaper invest its resources? Where should you invest your resources? What about your family? What about the families of all our employees? Should I take money I could spend on employee pay and put it towards a transplant? Is it callous of me not to donate money for the operation or for ads to solicit funds? And in the abstract, where do you learn the equations you use to balance your life?”

“What equations. I didn’t learn any in school.”

“Not at all . . . and usually not in church either. How can we put your perplexity in context? Tell me, how many people are there on the planet?”

“Not a clue.”

“Let’s Google the question to find out. . . . There are some 6.8 billion people on Earth, of which you are one. You are the most acutely interested person of them all from your point of view. Your universe revolves around you. You experience the universe through your senses. But where do others—and everything else—fit in? You need perspective, but without reeling and buckling your knees. What is your responsibility to these 6.8 billion people?”

“Well I can’t help everyone.”

No, your shoulders are not broad enough to carry them all. So, do you give up? How many do you help? Should you help as many as I help? I mean, should we all tithe?”

“I don’t know!”

“Socially imposed altruism has others pressure you into what to do for those in need while charity is how you decide for yourself what to do. Altruism is bunk. It gives you no practical way to answer the question, ‘Do you help one, two, ten, or ten thousand?’ But if altruism is bunk, you need to come to your own terms with generosity to create a reasonable, human alternative that puts your today, your life, and that of others in context. Charity comes from the one heart and one home, not from government. Dress it up as they might, the tyranny of the few who sway a gullible majority is coercion even when they claim it is for good cause. Worse than a socialist is someone who wants the power to control others to get certain results ‘for the good of the disadvantaged,’ for they are socialists who don’t know their own disease.

“Absent government direction, how should you discover your personal charitable balance? From where you are in space-time, place yourself between the very, very big, and the very, very small. Then, place yourself between the long, distant past, and the unimaginably distant future.”

“How?”

“The universe is, perhaps 156 billion light years wide and 13.7 billion years old. Ever think of where you fit in?”

“Hah! Not at all!”

“In the book, *Powers of Ten*, at 10^{25} meters—that’s 10 to the power of +25 or ten with 25 zeros after it—most of the universe can be seen. Each number increase or decrease in power is ten times more or ten times less than the previous number.

- At 10^{22} (to the power of +22) you can see the entire Milky Way.

- At 10^{14} the Sun is clearly visible and the solar system begins to resolve.

- At 10^9 the view contains the Earth and the orbit of the moon.
- At 10^7 the Earth fills the frame.
- At 10^6 1,000 kilometers would cover the state of New York.
- At 10^2 100 meters would cover a football field.
- At 10^0 or one meter, would cover from your nose to your fingertips. This is where you fit in.
- At 10^{-3} a millimeter, would cover several human hairs.
- At 10^{-4} cells would be visible.
- At 10^{-6} a cell nucleus would be visible.
- At 10^{-8} DNA's helix structure would be visible.
- At 10^{-10} the electron cloud of a carbon atom would be visible.
- At 10^{-14} 10 femptometers, the nucleus would be clear.
- At 10^{-15} a proton would resolve itself.
- And 10^{-16} puts you at the level of quarks. And maybe, if you go smaller, superstrings become visible.

"Humbling, isn't it, to know your consciousness fits in between 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 meters and 0.000,000, 000,000,000,1 meters, and between 13,700,000,000 years of history and an infinite future, among a world of 6,800,000,000 people, many of whom are in need of help.

"Well, that puts things in perspective, doesn't it. I certainly feel pretty small."

"Small? Yes. But it puts you in charge of that single point in the universe that is the center of your unique consciousness at this one instant in time, gifted with the will to make decisions. Whatever its physics, the center of the universe is here, now, where you and I meet.

"Just as you are in charge of your point of consciousness, and I of mine, others are in charge of theirs. It is your responsibility to defend your point and path from others, and, reciprocally, resist the temptation to impose your trajectory on them. You can teach, but you cannot rule, except insofar as they violate the minimums of society. Now, how do you decide what to do?"

"Thanks for the pressure. It's not easy to figure out. I didn't even know there were minimums to society."

"First, decide whether to give up on altruism. In my opinion, altruism is a premise whose time has never come and never will. You have no obligation to help others—although those who would take advantage of you for their own reasons may try convince you that you do. But do recall Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge after his epiphany. Scrooge's new perspective on his own existence led to reverence for the situation of others. More alert to your own journey, you are more sensitive to others, which presents an opportunity and a personal interest in charity.

"Few people, if any, read Adam Smith's first book, *Theory on Moral Sentiments* any more, but he recognized that altruism was not an effective virtue. Self-interest brings the truth of experience and, ironically, can be more effective at prompting people to help others. That may sound ridiculous and contrary to observation in today's selfish world, but Smith described a principled position not to be confused with unthinking consumerism. Have you heard of Dr. David Livingstone, the explorer, missionary, and physician once thought lost in Africa in Victorian times—of the 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume.' fame?"

"I don't know anything about him."

"He worked to abolish the slave trade, educate Africans, and improve their health care. While his efforts may have encouraged colonization at the outset, his educational efforts fostered independence movements later on. Ever hear about Dr. Albert Schweitzer?"

"Never heard of him."

"Schweitzer was a theologian, philosopher, musician, physician who organized clinics in west equatorial Africa, and who sought a universal ethical philosophy. Schweitzer said, 'Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace.' And, of course, everyone has heard of Mother Theresa."

"Certainly. In Calcutta, she ministered to the poor, sick, and terminally ill for almost 50 years."

"So who did Livingstone, Schweitzer, and Mother Theresa do their work for?"

“The poor?”

“That’s the conventional wisdom, but they worked for themselves. Joseph Campbell advised people to follow their bliss. That’s what Livingstone, Schweitzer, and Mother Theresa did. They put themselves where they felt they belonged. Is central Africa, India, or our poorest neighborhood where you belong?”

“I don’t know.”

“And I don’t know either. It is not a role someone else can press upon you. Not altruism, but your own inquiry into yourself will lead to your particular answer. Let’s approach it from a different way. For each of these questions, figure how far along a continuum you’d place yourself:

- Are you most comfortable when you are busy or idle?
- Are you most comfortable with physical work or mental work?
- Are you most comfortable solitary or social?

“Along the X, Y, and Z axes you can, respectively, place answers to those questions. There is only one location in the graph that describes your unique comfort zone for today. It will be different on other days and different for other people. Certainly there are more questions and axes possible, and all of them challenge you to be responsible for setting the mean between the extremes, that balance point of yours Aristotle called the virtue between the vices. Your balance point for each question can change over time. Your task is not to put yourself at the center of one continuum or another, but to understand where, along each continuum, is the healthy, comfortable place for you to be.”

“And if, among your considerations, you find your bliss tending to a garden, tending to your family, tending your neighbor, tending to your community, or tending to your world, at that moment, that is where you belong. If it is in the heart of Africa, at a soup kitchen at the Welcome Hall, teaching, writing, or coaching Little League, or simply loving your family or friends, go for it! It is not the job of someone else to shame you into altruism. How dare they try!

“When you are at peace with your place in the universe, when you are in balance, you will find that Kant’s concept of duty is

not the powerful motivator. Reciprocity—the sense that others live their lives as acutely as you live yours—is a powerful motivator to help and share, and you’ll find great joy in it.”

“But what about this person who needs a transplant?”

“We are prisoners of our times. Walk with alacrity, but don’t rush.”

“That makes no sense at all.”

“You eat meat, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“How barbaric, to take animal life for sustenance. There are other ways to get protein.”

“Not as nourishing. Not as satisfying.”

“I agree. Eat meat now, but in a hundred years people will look back and laugh at us for barbaric eating habits. By then, science will have synthesized proteins and their manufacture that will likely be every bit as nourishing and flavorful as a decent steak. In their time they may judge our meat-eating as ‘morally repugnant’ but all that will show is their time bigotry—shortsighted chronological prejudice, their challenged sense of time and place in it, and how light in meaning is their understanding of the word ‘moral.’

“If I live so long, with my replaced body parts, I’ll stop eating my corn-fed, farm-bred livestock. Until then, I am a prisoner of my time, as my ancestors were prisoners of theirs. We do not have to arrive in our future at the expense of living in the present. We cut through our chains slower than our projections into the future would wish. Leave the anguish of having been born in our time up to the zealots and defend yourself from their brickbats with laughter.”

“What’s the point of talking about food when the issue is transplants?”

“Look at all we have accomplished! In one short generation, how many more people are alive today, with quality of life unimaginable just 50 years ago when Christiaan Barnard

transplanted the first human heart. Transplantation is today almost an ordinary event. Beyond that, the science to make transplantation unnecessary, through disease control or organ regeneration has rapidly advanced, even if such things are not yet ordinary. Those people who died in Louis Pasteur's day because pasteurization had not been conceived are no less and no more to be anguished over than your transplant patient today. When time is compressed, compassion becomes confused.

"The circumstance of your transplant candidate is unfortunate. But do not let that circumstance force you beyond where you belong. It is your job to find the joy in life that comes from giving the fullness of your time and effort. Life is experienced as a string of todays strung together, and, as certain as you are close to turning out the light tonight before you jump into bed, you will, before you know it, be just that close to your death. When you shuffle off this mortal coil you should be filled with the joy for having found your balance and lived well whatever your length of life that fortune grants."

"Life isn't always joyful."

"No, it isn't. Neither is it so bad as some often portray it to themselves. It is always a wonder. For some to think their lot in life is so bad to contemplate suicide is hubris unchained. It is the presumption that you understand the world so well you can unerringly predict the future. Sometimes people get so wound up."

"I try to relax!"

"I know. I believe it. You try very hard. It has to be very frustrating. It's a paradox. The harder you try to relax, the further away you get."

"A paradox?"

"As in a Zen master's lesson to his pupil, 'Okay, grasshopper, what is the sound of one hand clapping?' A paradox is a seemingly logical inconsistency that nevertheless expresses a life lesson."

"But, I *do* try to relax!"

"That's a sweet irony. Look at the two halves of what you have said. 'Try,' on one hand. 'Relax' on the other. Try takes resolve. Intensity. Effort. Tension. . . . Building up exactly the stress you are trying to relieve. Yet that is the method you'd use to relax."

"Then what can I do?"

"I read a book once with little to say for it—except for a single kernel of useful information on how to meditate."

"Meditate?"

"Meditation, the author said, is not the absence of thinking. Meditation is recognizing what it is you *are* thinking about and then, for a time, putting that thought on the shelf. Subsequently, should you discover you have begun to think about something else, calmly put that on the shelf also. Thoughts on your shelf will wait until later to be worked on. But, for now, thoughts resting undisturbed on the shelf help you relax just that much more. Meditation is learning how to empty your mind."

"But, how?"

"Let's see if we can find a good analogy. The brain is the best tool we've got to deal with what we sense, but it is far from perfect. Evolving over eons to do what it can now do, it's a double edge sword that can work for you or against you, and there is no instruction book how to operate it or to set its limits."

"I certainly never found one."

"Where, then, do you learn to control it? In school? Not according to the curriculum of specific subjects. That's why I get miffed at schools and the certificated pooh-bahs that presume to run them. For all that is taught, everyday useful wisdom is easily overlooked. Your brain is like a thoroughbred horse. You hold the reins. Either you control the horse or the horse controls you."

"Seneca speaks to everyone on internal balance, 'What's the use, after all, of mastering a horse and controlling him with the reins at full gallop if you are carried away yourself by totally unbridled emotions? What's the use of overcoming opponent after opponent in the wrestling or boxing rings if you can be overcome by your temper?'"

"If you are unprepared when you get in a mental bind, you are handicapped trying to work your way out of it. You can't use your intellect to pull yourself out of it when your brain loops back on itself. It's called recursion. Caught in a loop, the best way to escape is to get outside the engine in conflict. Read a book. Take a walk. Exercise. Sleep. Play with your children. See a movie."

"What kind of movie?"

"Marx Brothers movies were made for this. Laughter is therapeutic. Seeing your brain slip up, you'd normally get angry and frustrated, but, since you are human, *let* yourself be human. Laugh.

"If you want to test that you have lost yourself in a loop, see how hunched over you are. Try to stretch your left ear away from your left shoulder, then your right ear from your right shoulder."

"I see."

"Probably not. You tell me you do, but you have a lifetime of habit to address. You'll leave here and loop on what's been said. You'll go home tonight and loop on what's been said. You have been told something, but you do not own it."

"You know me too well!"

"Like any effective teacher, I can't teach you anything. I can only see where you are headed and try to set something in your way for you to stumble over so that you have the opportunity to learn from the experience. You are in charge, not me. You need to practice to make it your own.

"Don't get frustrated. I'm twice as old as you are. My lifetime of experience came the hard way to learn all that you have an opportunity to learn much sooner."

"I probably spend 90 percent of my time in business as publisher counseling employees and only 10 percent managing. My time is spent on remediation—like colleges whose many students carry weaknesses with them from high school, and high schools before them to attenuate weak students from middle school. Someone who says 'I seen that. . .' illuminates an obliviousness to life—not

an indication of social station, but evidence of an ordinary habit of a lifetime, abetted by our social institutions like families and schools."

"When would you start counseling someone?"

"When an employee who is corrected indicates confusion by asking, 'Why do you hate me?' that's an opportunity. They stand in their own way, a victim of their own mental misdirection about the root of the problem. Misdirection is as common a defense in individuals as in cultures. Organizations single out excellence for teaching awards when that papers over the need to identify the weakest for mentoring. Literature awards often celebrate the conventional. Nobel Peace Prizes celebrate posturing, not results. And the *Times* still keeps Durant's Pulitzer Prize for gullibility. It is often a habit to resist learning.

"In prominent literature from 1910 to 1920, much like today, authors took pride in their descriptive powers. Literature then hinted at hollowness not unlike the elephant in the room today. When E. M. Forster paints *Howard's End* in 1910, he pits the capitalist against the intellectual and against the lower middle class. He discovers class is not monolithic, with connections between classes that tie the disparate classes closer together, exposing the flaws in each. His conclusion, 'Only connect', was thin. In 1913, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is descriptive and dramatic covering themes of family, work, passion and freedom. Modernist in style and substance, James Joyce's 1914 *Dubliners* presents characters that seem powerless and almost paralyzed, working for a political candidate they don't really respect in a town of declining prosperity."

"You describe a pessimistic time and a pessimistic circumstance."

"In 1915, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* calls attention to his own ignorance and confusion wondering why he should confront his own limited power of understanding. Joyce returned again in 1916 with his modernist *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, self-reflective, with timid personalities, full of anxiety and fear, complete with an ambiguous and unexplained ending. Perhaps he did not see it might have offered so much

more.”

“Why did I miss learning these things?”

“Much of your generation has. What school subject do tools fall under? Not English. Not history. You’re at the leading edge of a century-long train. Ours is a generation for whom history begins at dawn. History offers nothing to them because they have no connection to it and no use for it. It doesn’t speak to them. Squeezed of all value, Social Studies became a set of notes students sweat over to pass a final. If history begins at dawn, you are at the mercy of feelings and inclinations. Without a sense of history, principles can’t happen.”

“Why would that matter?”

“Willful disregard of history isn’t the most egregious offense, but those who dare to disregard it open themselves up to misuse of history by others. The political class will intentionally rewrite events to attempt to get their way. I don’t need to ascribe mendacity to them, but such violation of trust betrays an ignorance of consequence. Spared the consequence of real pain in their protected lives, to them politics is just a game. Pain bides its time, waiting for some great collapse to launch them into the eighth level of Danté’s hell, reserved for the fraudulent and the deceivers.

“The first decades of 1900s and the 2000s shared the same false hope that motivated progressives. The 1900s pinned that hope on new technology—electricity, transportation, tall city buildings—the institutions of their day, just as early Romans had their arts, their aqueducts, and their army. Technology seemed the answer. Hubris gnawing at the brain, gave misplaced confidence that this generation—academics in particular—were correct simply because *they* were doing the thinking. Clichés, recited, and repeated, entranced them. Enchanted, they bet everything in their wallet on promises of hope and change, while every promise came with an asterisk and an expiration date.”

“But this is not new?”

“Henry James’ 1903 book, *The Ambassadors*, displayed an attitude toward life and society. He experimented with form and style,

paying close attention to new understanding about the workings of human consciousness and psychological truths. He could feel confident in his science because although so little was known, earlier novelists knew less and seemed superficial. James’ characters were liberated; ready to live life to the fullest . . . until they detested the lives they led. As one of his characters said, ‘What I hate is myself—when I think that one has to take so much, to be happy, out of the lives of others, and that one isn’t happy even then. One does it to cheat one’s self and to stop one’s mouth—but that’s only at the best for a little. The wretched self is always there, always making one somehow a fresh anxiety. What it comes to is that it’s not, that it’s never, a happiness, any happiness at all, to take. The only safe thing is to give. It’s what plays you least false.’”

“That sounds so . . . so . . . hopeless!”

“What seemed hopeless then is not hopeless now. It just takes time to for understanding to work its way to conscious awareness. James could only work with intuitions. Fortunately, today, we have access to metaphors he could, literally, not even dream about. Strong metaphors make it easier to grasp hold of concepts.”

“Metaphors were part of English class, not my world.”

“Exactly. You were taught their use as a decorative in literature, but not their practical value as a tool of your mind. Literature often forgets what great power it can exercise. Literature typically unfolds personality as developed by events. But, is it character or is it personality that is unfolded when George Eliot uses accidental events in *Middlemarch*? Character development is the name authors use for what they should call personality development. In *Middlemarch*, personalities do not share the same values, and as the plot unfolds, the core of what should be character is left as an exercise to the reader. Authors typically develop personalities. They do not develop character.”

“Why criticize literature? John Kennedy was talking about art and literature when he said, ‘I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we, too, will be

remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit.”

“A novelist can aspire to be more than a cultural ornament and go beyond entertainment. The novel can have a positive influence to help some sort out what E.M. Forster called the ‘muddle of life.’ A novel telescopes the exercise of choices and their consequences too often absent from school curricula. Studying Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the classroom doesn’t necessarily encourage better life choices, particularly when based on multiple choice questions that ask whether it was Laertes, Polonius, Rosencrantz, or Claudius whom Hamlet skewered through the tapestry.”

“Literature is the jewel of our humanity.”

“Here’s a question, then. In a novel, is it the fiction that matters or the fact? Is literature a jewel for what it is or for what it does?”

“Literature is a beautiful achievement. No one can look at Shakespeare and be unimpressed.”

“And other writing? Is journalism to be revered as an object of art?”

“It might, but journalism’s purpose is to educate and inform.”

“Isn’t that literature’s purpose? Being, not doing, undermines art no less than place-holding teachers undermine formal education: ‘Hey! You have a degree, you must have earned it, you must be worthwhile, and I must respect you for your credentials.’”

“I can’t imagine any educator would think literacy was an end in itself.”

“If you have a student who earned excellent grades for reading, is that student educated?”

“Not a all.”

“Correct. The student reader is in a position to become educated.”

“But, excellent teachers cover diverse subjects thoroughly and professionally.”

“We teach subjects very well, but that specialization comes at a price. Carving out ecology, for instance, creates experts who thoroughly understand the consequences of humanity’s existence, but they seem unable to turn their microscope around. Their detailed lens throws off the scale of judgment outside their area of expertise. Nietzsche was right. Zealotry in any form is suspect. The scope of remediation for generations of pollution should not be thrown upon one generation’s shoulders, to crush their quality of life. Sometimes the costs of remediation are out of line with the benefits and if we tread water today, the march of science over time will bring economic solutions sufficiently soon.”

“But if we do nothing . . .”

“Shouldn’t you support the need to understand climate change before rushing headlong to pass legislation one way or another?”

“The consensus among scientists is that something needs to be done now.”

“Consensus is popularity, not science. You would short-circuit science for political gain. You don’t even know the history of climate change.”

“What history?”

“We owe the blossoming of government in the cradles of civilization in Egypt and Mesopotamia to climate change, the population of the Americas to climate change, and the dynamism of Europe to climate change. Climate change brought us to where we are today, taught us the understanding to use energy to deal with it, and created the wealth to cushion the impact from it. Climate change isn’t the problem, but rather that we don’t understand the science of it—the causal connection—or our relation to it.”

“In 3000 BC, climate change brought about governance that made society possible. In the cradles of civilization, Egypt and Mesopotamia, humanity was obliged to transform from hunter/gatherers to tame the flooding rivers, store food, divide labor, develop industry, tax citizens, defend borders, set up governance.”

“But we need to reduce man’s impact on the climate.”

“Back up what you say with science. Science means understanding the mechanism behind it. Science means independent verification of the data and the models. Science means rejecting what is demonstrably false. Without that, and on both sides of the issue, what you call ‘science’ is no better than mystical reading of goat entrails.

“It is either hubris for politicians to say we know enough to understand and control it or mendacity to seek to restrict the energy we use to defend ourselves from nature. The political class would misuse data and call it science to gain power and control. They want the power to tax the creation of energy and the power to control the tax revenue that comes from it.

“These are such significant questions.”

“Congratulations. You have discovered that what to teach and why are enormously important questions, but they pale when one asks the question *who* should teach. That’s the question that caused the state to put Socrates in the dock.”

2 PM - 1920s On politics and post WWI Modernism

“While we are waiting for the congressman to arrive, explain what you meant when you compared today with the 1920s.”

“In the 1920s, reeling from the war, people were primed to be led astray by smooth-talking idealists and academic hoodoo. Karl Marx had undermined class, Darwin had undermined the historical foundations of religion, and Freud had established that sex unconsciously challenged reason as a driving force. Public imagination was prepared to run away with any half-plausible conjecture.”

“Why more so then than at other times?”

“Communication had begun to penetrate the farthest reaches of society. By the 1920, automated typesetting invented before the turn of the century put cheap, popular books and magazines in the hands of almost everyone. Radio, press, and other public communication arts made sure there was no escape from unproven conjectures. In a bubbling soup of social uncertainty, any number of ‘-isms’ could rationalize tearing down society and not offer a viable, practical alternative to rebuild it again. In that environment, Virginia Woolf made a sweeping statement repeated in the early 1920s, “On or about December 1910 human nature changed.”

“What changed?”

“She alluded to change in human relationships and conduct in religion, politics and literature. Observers watched in horror as society, with technology’s foot on the accelerator, accelerated toward meaninglessness and destruction. In *Metamorphosis*, Kafka’s character metamorphosed into a cockroach. Conrad’s Colonel Kurtz embraced situational ethics. Nabokov’s characters relished their madness. In Joyce, cities crumbled and in Kipling, empires did. Throughout the rusting of characters, the form of

literature rusted its way toward Post-modern self-conscious self-reference.

“Woolf described ‘Modernism’ as an artistic intent to push deeper into the literary representations of consciousness. Examples included James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. If character is the question of life, should it also be the question of literature? Should characterization of characters mirror character in life?”

“By characterization of character do you mean descriptions of characters?”

“Polished plots and witty characterizations of the day were superficial, and unrepresentative of significant issues. If literature was supposed to help to bring to conscious awareness how people thought and chose to act, it had failed to accomplish its task. If characterizations, by their example, were to show readers how to behave, or show the consequences of bad behavior, they were singularly unsuccessful.”

“How we look at character has changed over time.”

“As P. J. O’Rourke explained, referring to Richard Brookhiser’s biography of *George Washington, Founding Father*, ‘We worry about our authenticity—about whether our presentation reflects who we “really” are. Eighteenth century Americans attended more to the outside story and were less avid to drive putty knives between the outer and inner man. “Character” . . . was a role one played until one became it; “character” also meant how one’s role was judged by others. It was both the performance and the reviews. Every man had a character to maintain; every man was a character actor.’ It’s as if in the 18th and 19th century we were learning about ourselves. To Woolf’s point, early in the 20th century we still hadn’t learned how to write about ourselves.”

“Haven’t we always been able to write about ourselves?”

“Early philosophers did not have refined words to write about themselves. Aristotle could not express character, but his intellectual virtues encouraged character. Character is not about demonstrating virtues, but about validating the internal processes that deduce virtues. My wife explains, ‘Well, I don’t love to iron;

I love to have things ironed.' The example differentiates between the process and the result. People love the result we call virtues much like they love pressed clothes. They don't care to do the slogging that will get them pressed. To them, admiring pressed clothes is quite enough to get them all pressed. That would sound like a joke if it weren't an accurate analogy."

"You can talk about something, want something, and not understand the thing you want."

"That's the point. Woolf's novels tried to represent how uncertain and complicated thinking and consciousness are. They did not advocate a process by which an individual could develop mastery of character in oneself or society. Joyce and Woolf describe consciousness at work. Their Modernism does not address how individuals gain their society. As Woolf represents consciousness, she does not address constructive use of consciousness. Consciousness is not character but the mechanism by which character can happen. Literature like Woolf's can describe your despair, but great literature should suggest a way out.

"Herman Hesse, in *Siddhartha*, tried to reach for a new level of understanding—of 'consciousness' as the word was then understood, but almost in the way that people of the 1920s were pursuing the occult. Hesse reached for knowing, without knowing where to reach, just as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* pursued unknown and unknowable consciousness. 'Ooh!' and 'Ahh!' in the same breath as 'Huh? What's the point?'

"In its superficiality, literature can either be shallow or a sign of its times—needing an 'Ah! Ha!' of awareness or revelation. It's not that they can't think a certain way, but that they don't, absent the desire, the practice, or the incentive.

"Take away from the 1920s that lessons need to be remanufactured in each generation to endure. If not revalidated, they become hollow clichés. The last generation of the 20th century has yet to recover those lessons.

"The 1920s were also when the basics of economics were forgotten. What we learn about Adam Smith in many

introductory economics courses isn't the essential Smith we need to know to pull the lever in a voting machine. Smith didn't discuss what we ought to do, he warned us of things that never worked and never will."

"The best advice is to mistrust and verify any utterance by any official and any credentialed moron."

...

"The congressman is here to see you."

"Thank you. . . . Welcome back from Washington."

"Thank you. Let me get to the point. As an elected representative I'm trying to represent this community and you're killing me!"

"How so?"

"Writing all those negative editorials about me."

"The editorials speak to your positions, not you. While ignorance is no barrier to elected office, remaining ignorant after an election is a disservice to those you serve, to your country, and to yourself. We offer the opportunity to consider quality advice and you fail to recognize the favor."

"You criticize me when I am trying to get stuff for my constituents."

"Get stuff for your constituents? Is that what the voters in your district elected you to do?"

"Darn right they did. I represent them and get as much for the district as I can."

"Phooey! You weren't elected to 'get stuff.' You weren't elected to mirror voters' popular wishes. You weren't elected so your party can rule. You weren't elected to exercise majority muscle."

"I was elected to do all of those."

"You were hired to think—to sort through, sift out, synthesize, and understand. You were hired to learn enough to make sound decisions and to help constituents understand why the reasoning behind those decisions is sound. You were hired to *deliberate*."

“Practical politics is learning to work the levers of government.”

“You think your job is to bribe your constituents using money from their own wallets, so you can keep your job, so you can soak more money from those constituents to piss away. You have crooks for colleagues and wash your hands of responsibility for calling them out. You know they are crooks and you tolerate their misbehavior.”

“I have to work with them. I don’t control them.”

“You have a voice you are afraid to use to label their behavior. Your brain sees a pattern of misbehavior but you won’t speak out against it to pin their behavior down and let them squirm.”

“That’s the way things work in Washington.”

“That’s the way things *don’t* work in Washington. You are a nice enough person, yet ill-equipped to be a congressman because you dare not stand up against patterns of misbehavior. If you are resolute in principle, who knows, some other member of congress may admire and try to emulate how you act. Others may follow until the Augean stables actually come clean. If not, at least you will come home with your character and your reputation intact.”

“You second guess the voters. I won the popular vote.”

“Popular vote is no excuse for doing an unacceptable job. Does that vote outweigh the social consequences of tolerating misbehavior? Does the vote that gives you the power to meddle give you the necessity?”

“You don’t expect an answer.”

“No, but I expect you to think deeper than you do. People think less and act emotionally. You owe your constituency more. You owe them your best intellectual effort and your best character. What you tolerate litters your legacy with unintended consequences, over-centralized government, ineffective laws, opaque administration, special privilege, and rent seeking.”

“What would you have me do?”

“First of all, learn from history not to embrace what has never worked and never will. Second, understand the large forces of history.”

“And you think you know them better at home in Rome than I do in Washington?”

“If you understood the economic forces at work you’d be reading about them, speaking about them, and acting on them. This is not new. In the middle 1800s, Dickens wrote about the stressful transition to industrialism in Britain. English novels have always dealt with mankind’s relationship with the community around them. Industrialization occurred at different times in different countries, but in America industrialization began after the revolutionary war, was affected by westward expansion and Andrew Carnegie, and changed again after Henry Ford.”

“That’s common knowledge. Why are you telling me?”

“Large waves of history are commonly overlooked. In 1875, 75 percent of Americans earned their living working on farms. By 1925 the percentage reversed with 75 percent of households earning their living in the cities. Technology brought about cataclysmic social change with stunning consequences whose evidence is fixed permanently in the literature of the day.”

“But why does that matter?”

“We are in the midst of another cataclysmic social change brought about by technology. If you overlook the change washing over us, you risk imposing more problems than you solve. In 1975, 75 percent of Americans worked in manufacturing or retail to bring dollars into their households. By 2025, we can expect 75 percent of Americans will work in the service sector, pushing information, or at something new we have yet to dream. The change from manufacturing to service is every bit as cataclysmic as the transition from agriculture to manufacturing. Our political class is not engaged to manage the transition. And that, my friend, includes you.”

“I’ve been working to help those in economic distress.”

“You’ve promoted European social programs that never worked there, as if Europe, simply being Europe, had something special

to offer. Our forebears fled to escape Europe for good reason. What makes something European worthwhile? If Europe outlaws guns should America do the same? Guns have done damage and guns have stopped damage from being done. The problem isn't that we're right and they are wrong, but how do you solve that misused guns cause some problems and the absence of protection causes others?"

"I respect your opinion."

"The hell you do! You're not even willing to consider it. You will not put it to the test. You are afraid to challenge your opinion because it is yours, and your ego is bound up with it being right. You pay lip service to those in need . . ."

"We care for them."

"You care so much that you are willing to steal other people's money to 'help' them?"

"It's charity."

"Charity is a donation of your own money. You steal."

"It's not stealing."

"It is stealing if you take by threat of force something that belongs to someone else. It's worthwhile to tie yourself to others, but not to rope someone else to do your bidding."

"But it's to help someone in need."

"Charity is individual, voluntary, and important. Help requires one to work to solve a problem, not use it as a pretext to collect power while you kick the real problem ahead to the next administration and keep those who need help beholden to you. You want to pay them off to get them out of your sight for a month and buy their vote along the way. You care for yourself. As Francis Bacon said, 'Laws are made to guard the rights of people, not to feed the lawyers.' The state does not exist to cheat people. You don't govern to minimize unintended consequences; you govern to get re-elected. For instance, you accept financial support from unions outside your district, don't you?"

"Unions have every right to participate in the political process."

"A union PAC is an artificial corporation, designed to centralize political weight that should be treated as any other business corporation. At issue are consistency, transparency, accountability, and resistance to abuse. What is the purpose of a union?"

"To advocate on the behalf of workers."

"You believe that people should be miss-employed and protected."

"Certainly not."

"Then why do you support featherbedding? Your policy makes a passenger ticket unnecessarily more expensive for everyone else. Might as well pay one person to dig a ditch and another to fill it in. If union worker A is an unnecessary worker like a fireman on a diesel train, and the union lobbies to preserve that job, does that position work to the benefit of union workers B and C at the same company?"

"That's a trick question."

"Not at all. The company forced to unnecessarily pay worker A is less profitable and less able to pay B and C higher wages."

"Jobs are why I vote the way I do."

"What kind of jobs? You are like the cartoon character in the locomotive who, needing the engine to travel faster, grabs the needle on the speedometer gauge to pull it higher. That's funny to watch in a cartoon, but in real life, it's an appeal to magic, not science. So badly do you want the gauge to read higher, that you are willing to support make-work."

"Jobs available should be decided by individual choice that creates legitimate demand, not by agonizingly inefficient centralized planning. You don't care about the economy. You care about the numbers. You won't admit to yourself that it won't work. You'd steal velocity from the economic engine with artificial government jobs to pump numbers for your next campaign brochure. What's the difference between that and

cheating on a test? When you cheat on a test, you're the one who doesn't learn."

"I want good jobs. Preserving jobs is important."

"What is a job? Is a job a conduit for welfare payments or is a job an attempt to match people up to work in demand where they can fulfill their greatest potential? Should we reward people who cheat other employees with their incompetence?"

"No."

"Yet if we let them go, they win the unemployment lottery at my expense. Should we preserve make-work or real jobs?"

"Real jobs."

"Then those who want only to 'preserve jobs' pay only lip service to the jobs we want and, instead, set a false goal just to buy votes."

"What would be a better goal?"

"Gross Domestic Product is the measure of wealth generated. GDP peaks when all people work efficiently to create goods and services that other people want to buy."

"How do you get everyone to work like that?"

"Not the way most unions and politicians work to impose a static world. The rest of us have to live in a dynamic one. A union that couldn't guarantee members' jobs should see that those who have jobs are well-trained for them, and retrained for different jobs if their current job no longer lets them work at capacity to do work that needs to be done."

"But income inequality is excessive."

"Inequality is a smaller problem than your mechanism for correcting it. You do nothing to solve the problem if you break the economic engine, destroy incentive, cheapen education, and damage quality of life for everyone else. Something broken by government cannot be fixed by piling on additional burdens with unintended consequences that break it further."

"The poor deserve more than they are getting."

"Who put you in charge of social engineering? Who put you in charge of coercion? Who put you in charge of stealing resources to do it? Who put you in charge of enforcing results? You throw grit into the engine of the economy our parents built to earn the quality of life that empowered you to piss it away."

"Too many aren't paid enough for their work."

"You presume they are working."

"Well, there aren't enough high paying jobs for them to do, so some are not working and the rest are not paid well enough."

"So you presume they should do something for their 'entitlement'?"

"Yes."

"Then I should be working, too? I'm a journalist with few journalist jobs around today. If I can't find a job as a journalist, should I be paid to sit around because no job fits my immediate skill set?"

"No. You might have to take a different kind of job."

"Well, if this area happens to be depressed such that no jobs are available nearby, should I then be paid to sit around and do nothing? If there are jobs in the next town or in the next state, should I be paid to sit around?"

"That's a hard question. I don't want to break up families."

"Paying someone to sit around doesn't enhance one's job skills. Whose money do you propose to use to pay someone to do nothing—other people's money?"

"Money from taxes."

"Money from taxes is other people's money. You voted for a luxury tax. Who suffers under a luxury tax?"

"The rich."

"Not really. Other working people suffer: the boat builder, the deck hand, the maker of boat bumpers, the galley chef, the craftspeople, the jewelers, and the clothiers. Yeah, sock it to the

rich. Let us know when hitting yourself in the face begins to hurt. Leveling programs undermine confidence and lock up the economy in ways bound to fail. It hurts the little guy and puts the small-minded in power. What benefits the person, the community, or the state to have a person do nothing?”

“The person gets some quality of life.”

“But I thought that you believed people should work, that they have to do the work that is available that they are qualified to do?”

“Yes.”

“Then no one should be paid to do nothing. What would you have them do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Perhaps, if they are going to receive unemployment benefits they should spend some time learning skills to do a job that needs to be done, receiving counseling if its needed, and doing other tasks around the community that the unemployment money might otherwise have been spent on had this person not been employed. Should the unemployed just be given wealth or should they work for it?”

“They should probably work for it.”

“If they are not, you are simply stealing wealth from other people to pay the poor to keep them out of your sight.”

“I don’t see it that way. Society has an obligation to those without means.”

“An obligation for opportunity, not guaranteed result. If government has a place, it is to facilitate transition, not to support. There is a joke about the person of faith in the middle of the ocean who turns away rescue convinced that ‘God will provide.’ The person succumbs and, at heaven’s pearly gates, demands of God why he was not rescued? God replies, ‘I sent you a helicopter.’ Help people become successful. Do not undermine their possibilities.”

“I still don’t see it that way.”

“And, hence, the problem. What does a trade deficit tell you?”

“That we are buying too much from abroad.”

“Then you are looking at the problem with the discredited view of an 18th century mercantilist. If you reach across a border and barter a good or service you desire for a different good or service that you produce, is it an even trade?”

“Yes, we both benefit.”

“The good or service doesn’t matter, does it.”

“Not really. But a deficit isn’t barter; it’s money.”

“Money is a token for goods or services yet to be determined—a stack of chips to be redeemed later for something the other party finds worthwhile. That stack wouldn’t exist if this side had goods or services in demand. Rather than artificially lower the deficit, our job is to figure out what we can make efficiently that others want to buy. If one can buy something cheaper abroad, for you to require it to be made at home steals wealth from the poor and reduces their quality of life. You should learn how economic engines work and cease to embrace ideas that have never worked and never will.”

“I am a patriot.”

“As a charter member of the ‘Cult of the Flag’, symbols seem to matter more to you than the reality behind them. You’d trample on the Constitution to save the symbol of it. Would you give your life for a greater whole? Individual? Family? Church? Religion? Nation? Principle? Society? Would you know how to decide? You have no comprehensive worldview that can be ‘proved’ one way or another. Your political party is built on a foundation of platitudes. Their dogma is designed to win elections, not encourage you to think. And you don’t care, because the appearance of power is a good enough narcotic to keep your shoulder to the wheel.”

“You just want your own way.”

“My job is to empower individuals, not with my ideas, but to that which they, themselves, validate. Only then do individuals become powerful enough to attenuate power. Only then can

individuals laugh you away from the foolish and unworkable. Until then, our foreign policy is rudderless.”

“We don’t believe America should impose itself on the world.”

“Do you honestly believe that a political vacuum is benign?”

“We believe that the United Nations is the proper forum for international decisions.”

“So you practice passive injustice. Toleration of evil comes from being unable to nose it out. President Woodrow Wilson, educated in history and the classics as he was, still believed in hope more than in lessons of humanity. He missed the basic principle that lust for power is a great motivator. His League of Nations, as the United Nations after it, was designed to fail since it could not and would not hold people accountable for what they do or say. United Nations Charter, in Chapter II, Article 2, Paragraph 7, shields ostensibly local activities of member nations from the basic principles of society expressed in its own Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

“I believe that nations should be free to decide for themselves how they will be governed.”

“You believe that states matter more than the individuals who create them. Freedom is not a universal principle, power is. All history from the Mesopotamian kings and Egyptian pharaohs to today has been about gaining power and keeping it. And you dare to think we are different? Each century finds a new way to battle for control. The only issue we face is what next?

“The smart answer should be ‘no more of what has not worked before’ even if gussied up with new lipstick. Ironically, if we can mediate the grasp for power with a fabric of society that endorses educated, thoughtful, responsible liberty, the governance that results may be more powerful than that what has gone before, yet able to temper hubris . . . for a time.”

“Untrustworthy in what you say, your compassion does not translate to consistent sensible action. If the political class controls the bureaucracy that interprets the regulations, you get to suck up to those with their hands on the levers of power.

“The only candidate worth supporting is one who can recognize the difference between a principle and a platitude, and who will begin to simplify the Byzantine government you would build for selfish reasons.”

“I have principles. I’m liberal and proud of it.”

“You think you are liberal, no doubt, but have you really examined your positions or worked at why you have them? You don’t understand the principles of classical liberalism or know whether your party follows them. Is a liberal authoritarian?”

“No.”

“Then why are so-called liberals in government so bent on imposing their social views on others. Is a liberal dogmatic?”

“No.”

“Then why are so-called liberals in government tied to collectivist economic policies that have never worked? Is a liberal protectionist?”

“No.”

“Then why do they insist on legislating protection for their special friends? Is a liberal closed to the opinions of others?”

“No.

“Then why do liberals in government belittle the opinions of others and use specious arguments to stop the discussion? Do you apply your intellect to passing the best laws?”

“Yes”

“Then why do you vote for laws you have never read? And why would you vote for laws that if you read them, would be incomprehensible? You would manufacture magical laws with a mumbo jumbo of legalese that you would control as a high priest privileged to decipher the incantations. Laws must be able to be understood . . . and if you can’t understand them, how am I supposed to? Yet you think you are doing your job.

“Those who call themselves liberals are what they are, but their character flaw is to see themselves as something they are not. A mirror would show them distasteful things if they dared look.”

"Nonsense. I'm an independent thinker."

"You listen to your leaders and tend to toe the line behind what is said, but where do those notions come from? What experience makes you more than grass blowing this way and that?"

"Well, they sound good to me. They feel right. I don't support laws about manners and politeness."

"Then you don't feel that hate speech should be punished."

"Hate speech is, well, hateful."

"But political correctness should not be legislated."

"Well . . .

"Look at liberality in classical philosophy. Aristotle proposed the Golden Mean, proposing that balance between extremes was the virtuous place to be, and that that point might vary from individual to individual. For example, courage is the proper point between recklessness and timidity and temperance, the proper balance between too little and too much. For Aristotle, liberality is the balance between prodigality and meanness."

"I can believe that."

"To be sure, Aristotle believed taxation was appropriate, but what is the balance between taking too little and taking too much? Today, one political group uses unbridled sympathy to justify the taking of the wealth of another and calls it liberality. The Aristotelian virtue of liberality admires personal contributions, not forced contributions from others. If the Golden Mean may vary from person to person, when it comes to liberality, perhaps the law should command little and education should commend much."

"But there is so much injustice and so much to be done!"

"And you would save your own conscience to do it with other people's wealth?"

"That's not fair!"

"Precisely. That's not fair. But what is unfair is that the means you use to achieve your end have unintended consequences that defeat your very purpose. By commanding and complicating tax

law, you open the door to political partnerships that defeat the efficiency of the economy. Wealth corrodes government. It always has. Corruption and abuse lead from autocracy to oligarchy to democracy to republic, yet wealth still corrodes. President Eisenhower warned to beware the military-industrial complex. He described the political economic collusion practiced today by Congress, their puppet bureaucrats, and non-governmental organizations—be they businesses, not-for-profits, or political parties. Adam Smith was correct to be wary of everyone, including you, a willing shill. Let a classic cliché appeal to your emotions, your guard drops, and, *voilà*, you have become an accomplice."

"I'm not that gullible."

"What makes you gullible is your need for instant gratification. You want results. Fix this problem now!"

"Results matter."

"If this generation's breadwinner hasn't the skill to earn bread, you give bread from someone else's larder with no thought whatsoever that you will have to raid the same larder next month for not having retrained the breadwinner to earn his own bread. The process to get results matters. If this generation's breadwinner hasn't the skill to earn bread, then make sure the children in the family become capable. Our schools do break the cycle of poverty quite well, but that happens over time."

"I do the best I can with principles I believe."

"You see no inconsistency that your politics misuse words to entertain, complain, club, and confuse. For you, politics, the art of the possible, means behavior that for ordinary citizens would be out of bounds. Your political class plays to the flaw in journalistic "objectivity." For a generation the habit of major news media has been to relate positions and duck judgment. If one side denies every claim by the opposition *ad nauseam* and without evidence supporting the denial, your uncritical audience, swayed by the journalistic company it keeps, will never recognize its error."

You don't support me because of your party affiliation."

"I am disappointed to hear you suggest that. I expect challenge—intellectual scrutiny, but I don't expect that you would challenge my integrity, my motives; that you would set up straw men, easily shot down, just to deflect attention from the substance. I expect an accurate précis of the argument made and then a cogent challenge to it. In its absence, I won't bother to address it. Democrats and Republicans are closer than you think. Small-minded, big-talking psychopaths hijack both parties in their lust for power, and the journalists who should detect it for us are so gullible they don't laugh the hijackers off the stage.

"People see the shortcomings and don't trust the process to be better at self-correction than newly offered alternatives. They see change and run to the dream of order that demagogues project as a panacea, when underneath lies only a grab for power, playing one group against another. The villainy they accuse others of is the villainy they themselves practice. You don't trust the engine of the economy, do you?"

"You won't admit that America is in its decline and we want to do something to cushion people from it."

"Decline is an unsubstantiated opinion for which you'd force everyone to submit to an unworkable response. What you take as decline is change. How funny that you call for change but are unwilling to embrace it. You don't trust the checks and balances of government. You don't trust people. Well, I don't trust you. You're afraid of the future, instead of feeling the exhilaration of facing the unknown, confident of tools honed by experience."

"I work politically with others to make things happen."

"Does politics require one to dirty one's hands? The power class would hijack campaigns for so-called rights, and then try to define additional 'rights' to consolidate even more power. H.L. Mencken wasn't too cynical to suggest that the urge to save humankind is almost always a front for the urge to rule. You might as well shout 'Power to the Sheeple!' while you make decisions in their name for your own interest. You hurry to get somewhere, and call it progress, but it's a backward push of organized power, skating over the surface of facts just fast enough to keep your fantasies afloat.

"Politicians accused Socrates of what they practice everyday—to make the worst case seem better. But politicians never pay the price when costs exceed the benefit. Instead they get special consideration, pensions, directorships, lucrative speaking engagements, and buildings named after them. Remind me what you and your political party have done to protect us, keep our money safe, stamp out voter fraud and pork, enhance education, get the world to live civilly, control spending, defeat racism, deal with unwanted children? The political class claims to represent the common man, but instead of representation, they abuse them. What makes you believe you deserve my vote?"

"I don't have to listen to this."

"Do you prefer to learn from private conversation in this office or from public outcry in response to printed editorials? You may not wish to listen, but you need to hear. Ever hear of the phrase 'the banality of evil'? Hannah Arendt coined it to describe the casual toleration of extreme misbehavior. You see misbehavior, ignore it, and then go home, your conscience clear, to play with your wife and kids. You are being unmasked. Politicians make conscious attempts to make us stupid, using cheap rhetorical flashes designed to confuse. And should I respond to that with anything less than full-throated anger? Your party has come to believe things it can't possibly understand. Good people have had their party stolen from underneath them and they don't know where to turn."

"I'm not getting anywhere."

"Congressman, you're on the wrong end of reality to be able to get somewhere. Where's your compass? Where do you want to go? Right now you act like a sheep herded by party leadership. If you feel you aren't getting anywhere, first decide where you want to go.

"I can't afford you. You travel too close to the edge. Civilization has such a thin veneer and so many, ignorant of the fact like you, would milk it into collapse.

"I appreciate you taking the time to visit,, but I wonder if it is time to change the editorial vocabulary of the conversation."

“What do you mean?”

“You debate rather than discuss—to win rather than come to understanding. The goal of a debate is to win, regardless of the merit of your position, and not get caught using misleading premises and unsubstantiated warrants. You are like Guildenstern, whom Hamlet exposed, asking him to play the flute. He said he had not the skill. And yet, Hamlet chastised, ‘You would play upon me?’

“An editorial’s job is to detect and expose the misuse of democracy. Public conversation is infected with abuse for which we have no acceptable label. It’s not lying, but reckless disregard for the truth. Until now, polite conversation has required euphemisms for such behavior, but there is a word that fits it precisely. Because abuse is so ubiquitous, drastic action is called for. The sensible response whenever such behavior is identified is to use the word in editorials.

“When people will say anything to get their way, when people will dance a sidestep to avoid responsibility, when the political class bloviates endlessly, the time has come in our editorials to explicitly call ‘Bullshit!’ when we see it.”

3 PM - 1930s On economics and citizenship

“What do you do with people who say, ‘If you don’t give in, I’m going to hold my breath until I turn blue in the face?’”

“It would be unkind to laugh. They hold themselves hostage and hope you’re gullible enough to fall for it.”

“National advertising agencies threaten to withhold advertising if we don’t give them a rate that would force other local advertisers to subsidize them.”

“You don’t give in?”

“Hell, no. Other newspapers do, underwriting unfair competition for a few extra pennies of revenue from outside advertisers. Experimental philosopher Joshua Knobe proposed a problem where one company CEO had the option of producing a product that would be profitable but harm the environment, and another company CEO had the option of producing a product that would be profitable and help the environment. In a survey some 82 percent believed the first CEO intentionally damaged the environment but only 23 percent believed the second CEO intentionally helped the environment.

“Is that the same problem?”

“Suppose a national advertiser wants advertising delivered with a newspaper but does not wish to pay for the newspaper’s newsgathering that is essential to the community. They want rates so cheap that competing local advertisers would have to shoulder the extra costs. To parallel the experimental philosophy, the national advertiser would damage the environment to further its own profit. It does not have to live in this environment. In fact, this advertiser would siphon its profits out of the area to spend millions each year to buy naming rights for a huge sports arena near its headquarters.”

“They don’t care. They don’t have to.”

“A newspaper prepared to live within its means can gamble in a face-off against national advertising agencies and stand up to such poor behavior. A national advertising agency serves the ad agency first, then the advertiser, and newspapers last of all.”

“I thought an agency ought to serve the advertiser.”

“Not at all. If an advertiser’s business is to sell product or service to the community, and a newspaper’s business is to provide as much news to the community as ads and subscriptions support, an agency can insinuate itself between the advertiser and the newspaper with the promise to hold down costs. But it’s too easy for the agency to attempt to maximize its own profit at the expense of both the advertiser and newspaper. Agencies often are not about a creative response to win market share, and often do not have the advertiser’s best interest at heart.”

“What do you do about it.”

“We won’t be bullied. We don’t have a rubber rate card. We can’t depend on the whims of national advertisers who are not invested in our community for revenue to support the newspaper. Either support the community like every other retailer or take your business elsewhere. We’ll size the newspaper to fit the revenue from those willing to support it.”

“The economy really is putting pressure on newspapers now, isn’t it.”

“Yes. Advertising is both a leading and a lagging indicator of recession. Today is like the 1930s in more ways than one.

“The economics of the 1930s forced people out of their comfort zone. In 1935, the Harlem riots brought to an end the Harlem Renaissance. Rising unemployment led to disaffection and they abandoned Adam Smith economics they never really understood. Wanting quick solutions, they followed charlatans who claimed to know a better way—socialism, communism, the occult. People escaped into motion pictures and magazines. Father Coughlin drew 40 million people to his radio shows using as a slogan a contrived claim of social justice. Faced with similar economic crisis today, many are as gullible as radio listeners were

back then, as gullible as the Marxist socialists popular at the time, or as gullible as those who followed Adolph Hitler.

“The times were tuned for Karl Marx, whose 1840s world was rocked by industrialization and urbanization, and well documented by Charles Dickens. How silly to presume the world Marx analyzed is like the world of today. We can check his computations with an additional a hundred years of experience and, for the most part, find the answers wanting.”

“In what way?”

“Take competition, for instance. Marx suggested that competition was destined to undermine workers wages and the political system should remove it from play. All practical attempts to remove competition from play have simply changed the venue for it. Competition occurs within the party, ostensibly hidden from view but obvious nonetheless. Power and privilege are still exercised, so Marx was wrong.”

“If competition cannot be removed, what can challenge competitive abuse?”

“The remedy for competitive abuse, as Adam Smith understood, is transparency and increased competition. During political silly seasons, candidates decry the failure of competition and propose more regulation. Then they decry the failure of that regulation and propose further regulation. Such calls for order are either hubris, a subterfuge to gather power, or both. Practical Marxists understand from experience that imposed order is almost always abused.

“Regulatory practice today tolerates collusion between legislators, bureaucracy, and private organizations to pass laws that set favorable rules to game the system to ‘legally’ loot it, returning a fraction of the ‘donations’ they have milked to the very politicians that posture they had set regulations to help the little guy. Isn’t America great? Excessive regulatory intervention—all in the name of cleaning up government and business—does more damage than transparency and competition. At least with competition, people who mistrust can vote with their

pocketbook. When government takes you to the cleaners, you have no choice but they milk you.

“If capitalists can misuse labor, Marx believed that labor should control the means of production. But Alexis De Tocqueville observed the American republic will endure ‘until the day Congress discovers that it can bribe the public with the public’s money.’ Democracy in industry is as susceptible to abuse as democracy in a nation-state.”

“For example . . .?”

“In the 1930s, Hitler was democratically elected. Hitler played on what people longed to hear. Hitler did not care whether what he said was true or false, and neither did the polity. His book, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) and his speeches, cast as a struggle against lies, were themselves lies used in his struggle to overpower others. His lies were as readily accepted then by those who wanted to believe as the gullible today accept the current political drivel.

“In occupied Germany after WWII, conversation with those who survived gave a different perspective to the enticements of Hitler in the 1930s. Post-WWI reparations touched Germans in the pocketbook, but not as keenly as its defeat held a mirror to a national identity Germans did not want to face. Europe was caught up in the popularity of Darwinism and Hitler told Germans what they wanted to believe—that they had special national character: native intelligence, physical beauty, and traits of loyalty and service. Hitler told them to ignore the mirror of defeat and regain their personal image. People believe in nationalism, regardless of its truth, as much as sports fans believe their support wins games.

“In the 1930s, as in 2008, as trust declined, the velocity of money slowed to a standstill. Velocity is a measure of wealth transactions in a given time. One dollar that changes hands six times has the same velocity as a single exchange of six dollars whether one buys something, invests in a business, or puts in a bank the dollar someone else then borrows. To destroy wealth, destroy velocity. Wealth destroyed, reduces resilience and limits the ability to adapt.

“Wealth isn’t the problem. Wealth isn’t evil. Creating wealth increases options. How wealth is used determines whether it is good or bad. Wealth that creates enterprise is useful. Wealth used to consolidate power warps the world. A union PAC might misuse wealth to consolidate influence. One foundation might launder and misuse wealth to undermine society’s institutions while a different foundation might usefully fund science or health.

“I worry that today, like the 1930s, opportunistic economic infections can occur. To appreciate how quickly things can change, consider how much the world, advertising, and the game of *Go* have in common. Ever hear of the game of *Go*?”

“No.”

“Often described as Chinese chess, *Go* is a simple game to learn, simpler than all the subjects thrown at us in school, but infinitely complex in strategy and strikingly beautiful to watch. In 1951, Yasunari Kawabata won a Nobel Prize for Literature for his work that included *The Master of Go*.

“People interact in life like the stones played in *Go*. We empower a person or a *Go* stone to contribute to the best of his or her ability. Advertising is like a game of *Go* where the goal is to move a limited army to command territory while conserving your own resources. Each move from one side is matched by a move on the other. Competitive like war, the framework for survival in *Go*, as in life and civility, is tissue thin. *Go* stones and advertising representatives are uniform in function. One stone—one piece, one move with timing, leverage, position, shape, and luck makes the difference between life and death for an entire army of stones. Ever hear of Joshua Chamberlain?”

“Civil War general?”

“That’s the one. Chamberlain was a grammar teacher from Maine, by chance the guardian of Little Round Top during crucial hours at Gettysburg, the major battle of the American Civil War. Chamberlain understood what was at risk—what was important and why. His mastery of what mattered—his understanding of his circumstance—meant Chamberlain didn’t

so much have courage as courage had him. One stone played in *Go* can turn a game. Chamberlain was one stone in the history of a single nation that made a difference in the history of the world. Throughout history—and still today—one stone can make a difference for that instant, or for the unimaginably distant future.

“Confucius was a failed bureaucrat, examining what was his nurtured nature to think, who explained those thoughts to others. Some who heard him fixed those thoughts in ivory. That engraved wisdom survived in books projected into the future so unimaginably distant to Confucius. Many still don’t see his value, but he touched at least one contemporary mind. Mine. Continuing the real-life game of *Go*, I’ll set down useful patterns I have come to appreciate for others—and if it’s not accessible in this generation, it can be telescoped ahead for a mind of someone else in the next unimaginably distant future. Who knows what it will stimulate.

“That’s a nice board. I like the sound each stone makes.”

“When played, each stone resonates with a satisfying baritone ‘tock!’ Each play creates a new opportunity to project into the future and prune unreasonable options. *Go* is a useful metaphor for the dynamic nature of the game, its sense of time, and its pivot points.

“Ever use regular old lye soap of the kind great-grandma used to make?”

“No.”

“To sell their replacement for soap, some advertisers used to claim their products left no soapy residue, complete with graphic illustrations, promoting a perceived advantage. But suppose that residue—the protective film—helped keep skin moisturized after a shower. Wooing the audience, the competitor would promote the advantage of soap as a disadvantage. Advertisers often prey on ignorance. Isn’t that uncivil? A thoughtful person seldom resorts to reason to parse an advertisement’s words to decide whether to purchase this or that aftershave.”

“Isn’t the purpose of advertising to sell?”

“The purpose of advertising is to inform. The current use of advertising is to sell by any means, even if it doesn’t inform. No one takes offence at the ad that succeeds at selling while it fails to convey useful information. Imagine what would happen to our economy if aftershaves or hot combs stopped selling because buyers, aware of what society needs, started demanding precision in what advertisements said. Imagine holding advertisers accountable for advertising and politicians responsible for their Astroturf and political blather.”

“Are we talking advertising or politics?”

“We’re talking hermeneutics, which is the attempt to establish meaning, and contemporary politics which tries to obscure meaning. Astroturf—or Axelturf—is the willful clogging of the arteries of communications. A lie is antithetical to society. Politics, through lies, does incredible violence to society, and it occurs unremarked by journalists and academics.

“Right now, the difference between Democrats and Republicans is that the Democrats believe in compulsion while the Republicans believe in compulsion—they just disagree about what you should be made to do.”

“Each party is afraid of the other and, as a result, unreasonable. Their advertisements appeal to fear, not reason. Democrats would put you under the control of the state, because they are the state. Republicans would put you under control of the state, because they don’t like what the state allows. ‘Give your property to people who do nothing to deserve it!’ ‘Stop killing the unborn!’ ‘Reduce your carbon footprint!’ It’s the same only different.”

“But times are different than in the 1930s. There is a greater disparity of income now than in the 1930s.”

“You seem bothered by that but fail to put the information in context to make it news. Compared to the poor of the 1930s, the poor today are decidedly middle class. Technology has advanced; reaching into every household so that even the poorest of the poor have electricity they did not have in 1900. They have access to urgently needed medicine, even when the delivery system is

inefficient. Instead of insurance, those without coverage show up at the hospital emergency room for expensive care, but they are treated. The less fortunate are more connected through cell phones, television, and Internet. Economist Mark J. Perry notes that virtually all households have electricity, refrigerators, stoves, and radios. More than 95% have color TV. More than 90% have telephones, microwaves, and automobiles. Almost as many have cell phones, air conditioning, and washers and dryers. Almost 75% have computers and better than 60% had Internet, and that was in 2005 according to the Census Bureau. Consumption spreads faster today, and our economy makes it possible.

“Like much political science, your comparison may be true but not useful. If an inventor creates something that makes him wealthy, income disparity may increase but everyone benefits because the whole pie is bigger.

“Too often those who challenge income disparity are simply envious and want a cut of the wealth to control.”

“No, the little people deserve more.”

“That’s your feeling. Because it is only a feeling, not a principle, you have to resolve the issue using principles forged from experience or risk that you make things worse when you create unintended consequences. If the little people deserve more, train them to earn more in an economy that works. We’ve declared war on work. We don’t prepare people to do work. We pay them not to work. There is a sense of complacency. We need a public relations campaign to promote work. If you post a chart on income disparity, let’s also post a chart representing the ‘Power Index.’”

“What’s the Power Index?”

That’s the amount of liberty people have to cede to you so you, the presumed expert on social justice, can set everything right. It charts the amount of control you get to exert on people’s lives. We’ll mix in Tax Freedom Day, the day you stop working for the government, which has crept from January 2nd in ancient Rome to mid-April or May last year, depending on the state, and

is getting worse by the day. Then we'll measure the control you exert doling tax money out to special friends. And we'll factor in mandates where no money changes hands. We'll add in Pigouvian taxes, named after economist Arthur Cecil Pigou, that assume the market is not efficient at pricing and calculate non-market social costs into a fee to assess over and above the price of a good or service. Pigouvian taxes are suspect when easily prejudiced political hands, for the so-called good of the people, identify a supposed abuse and set the penalty.

"You know, it used to be that fascism represented the right side of the political spectrum, but now those on the left have created 'Compassionate Fascism' and are proud of it. Their slogan might as well be 'Your work are mine' for its toleration of abusive control."

"How did we get that way?"

"Ask yourself what is the *quid pro quo* for your citizenship."

I haven't thought about it."

"Consider how we prepare people to make civil decisions. Athenian democracy was utilitarian—the greatest good for the greatest number, but they lost it all for mistaking democracy to be a principle. Even today we promote 'One person-one vote' and 'majority rules' and miss entirely its virtue that it codifies the humility that one just might be wrong, and that the smallest voice might be the one who can point out a better way."

"You doubt the value of democracy?"

"If voters elect stupidly, should I not point it out? Members of the early Roman republic taught citizens citizenship. What is citizenship?"

"Citizenship is belonging to a group, accepting certain responsibilities in return for being granted certain rights."

"Aristotle felt members of the *polis* had obligations toward that community. Romans treated citizenship as essential individual military and thinking skills that could serve the greater community. In 1962, Britain's Bernard Crick advocated citizenship politics where one learned to play by the rules as a

path to avoid war. Politics was to be a way to establish understanding between competing parties.

"Citizenship education, to the English parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Skills, consisted of knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens, skills of enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action. Ironically, officials doubt the courses have the desired impact.

"So they are convinced of the general goals, the aptitudes needed to reach them, and the value of teaching citizenship but they are not certain what to teach."

"That is scary."

"It should be. Society fosters exchange, whether in goods or ideas. Here they don't know what to teach, but try to teach it anyway."

4 PM - 1940s On history and philosophy after WWII

"If the 1940s showed one thing, it was that the hamburger of history can be cut many ways, many probably valid, but validity does not necessarily imply usefulness. Epochs can be political, economic, social, literary, and even musical. If cutting the hamburger one way makes no sense, then cut again to find something more useful."

"Do such artificial periods matter?"

"Contemporary popular music mirrors the culture as much as the literature does, but it seems to have ten year periods, changing around the fourth year of the decade—1944, -54, -64, -74, -84 and so on. In the middle of the 1940s the 45-RPM single was invented, followed closely by the 33-1/3 RPM long playing record. Music blossomed as it fit the new formats' ease and accessibility. Driven by so simple an invention, patterns of human association changed, as they did later in the mid-1950s when the transistor arrived on the scene, making music more portable. Such distinctions help us understand."

"Periods for the novel over the last century seem fuzzier. When did Modernism begin? Was it with Henry James and Joseph Conrad before 1900? Was it after the horror of World War I? Was it, in the early 1920s when Virginia Woolf cavalierly asserted that on or about December 1910 human nature changed?"

"Modernism's metamorphosis to Post-modernism may have begun at the cocktail parties of the 1920s where worries were amplified by an onslaught of new media like radio and talking motion pictures infatuated with style over content—and where artists drowned their concern over the failure of literature to anticipate and prevent the horrors of World War I. Joyce straddled Modernism and Post-modernism. *Ulysses* tried to

represent consciousness using a dramatic stylistic break with what preceded it. His *Finnegan's Wake* completed the leap to style. Overlapping Modernism, Post-modernism looked to replace it with better substance. Finding little, Post-modernism settled with sarcastic polishing of style instead. Meanwhile, under assault from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the stability of language was slipping away. Waves of Nietzsche-like desperation washed over academia, expressed by existential philosopher Jean Paul Sartre in 1949. Sartre's generation concluded that the war had destroyed any plausible intellectual framework, a realization that led to a 1950s sulk. They were not stuck with a fine kettle of fish, but with a kettle that was philosophically empty."

"What did that mean for you, growing up then?"

"Insulation from what happened. World War I, the war to end all wars, had been supplanted by an even worse war. And those who lived through the war decided they were going to protect their children from ever having to face either the want of the depression or the horror of war again. Except for cleansed television versions of *The Big Picture* and *Victory at Sea*, they hid the horror of war and famine from their children. Along the way, they also hid from them the substance of what was worth standing up for and why. They left an entire generation unprepared intellectually to defend itself—not by design, mind you, but by misplaced compassion. Nothing filled the vacuum that remained after order broke down. When students asked 'why' in class, unable to answer, the teachers could only rap knuckles with their rulers and say 'Because I said so!'

"Life kept them busy enough. Maybe we didn't need anything in the philosophical kettle. If we pretend to our children, they won't know the kettle is empty, and substituting authority, prudishness, and Sunday school, may suffice. They were wrong, but they did what they did out of consideration for us; that we might never have to relive their horror."

"Is the kettle really empty?"

“No. For example, I did find Confucius early on, but well after I had been exposed to Socrates and Plato in the then impenetrable academic collegiate way.”

“How can you like Confucius. He believed in a patriarchal society. Look what that did over the millennia for China.”

“That confuses the philosopher with philosophy. Don’t confuse Confucius with the religion Confucianism and with religious institutions later created in his name. That’s like confusing the ideas of Jesus with the beliefs codified by his disciples and those further confused with any of the hundreds of orthodox churches that claim him as their founder. The philosopher can be quite different than what successors develop.

“More to the point, don’t discard any sound ideas Confucius might have expressed because he also came up with a clunker or two. You have an advantage on Confucius, who had to think in ancient Chinese, limited as it was 2500 years ago, and without benefit of 2500 extra years of history and the genius of other more recent great thinkers. Seek out across history the golden threads that still work.”

“Do you deduce golden threads that are then confirmed by others in history or do you confirm yourself the threads that others have arrived at?”

“I am obliged to look at history through my experience, but others’ experience colors mine. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

“What do Confucius and those early Greek philosophers share in common?”

“Confucius believed there were three kinds of people: saints, who intuitively knew ‘the way’ to behave—called *li* in Chinese; others who could learn how to behave—and he considered himself one of those; and a third group who could never learn the way but who needed instead fixed laws he called ritual.

“Socrates, a contemporary of Confucius, who lived half a world away, was recorded by his pupil Plato to have believed that character could be taught, but not by rote like geometry. Plato’s student, Aristotle, believed ‘the way’ for him was to be a realist in

philosophy who tries to conform his mind to the way things are. He wanted his mental map of reality to be accurate.

“Aristotle was brilliant for his time. But, today, given our vocabulary, habits, and experience, we can know more than Aristotle could possibly know—if we learn from experience and look around. Perhaps Aristotelian ethics were limited by his approach as a biologist. Taxonomy is his creation—he observed nature and then classified patterns he saw. For Aristotle virtue was the mean between two extremes—the extremes being vices. For example, courage was the mean between the vices of the emotions boldness and fear. Aristotle’s insight came from analyzing what he saw rather than deducing how it came about, which set limits on what he could know.”

“What limits?”

“It’s as if he saw his specimen in the abstract, dissected and labeled it, and, he did not consider the relevance of the specimen being outside its natural environment. When the specimen is isolated it is hard to deduce how it evolved.”

“For Aristotle, virtue is taking one’s particular rationality and developing it well. Finding our own virtuosity, as it were. For both Confucius and Aristotle, rationality seems to be process-oriented at a time when people did not see things as process. For them, virtue seems to be more than a habit but they seem not to be able to do more than detect an underlying fabric.

“Why is it important to know how ethics evolved?”

“Why it exists matters as much as what exists. Over 2500 years people have unsuccessfully tried different approaches. Aristotle would have us get our mind to conform to the way the world works through the exercise of intellectual virtues:

- Science (*episteme*)—Understanding cause and effect or theory to explain effects
- Art (*techne*)—How to make things
- Prudence—Good judgment; knowing how to find the mean and act
- *Nous*—Ancient Greek for mind, intuition, and self

“For Aristotle, freedom came from knowing one’s options and choosing for oneself, a view taken up centuries later by Saint Augustine. Aristotle believed all creatures have natures and the virtue of each was to exercise that nature well. St. Thomas Aquinas followed Aristotle’s belief that humanity’s nature led to natural law. He believed four cardinal virtues were revealed in nature: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.”

“Renaissance humanism changed that outlook, prompted by explorations that reinforced otherness. For rationalist philosophers like 17th century’s John Locke and John Toland, the ways to know (Aristotle’s equivalent to *episteme*) were sense experience, reflection, testimony, and scripture. Suspicious of the priest’s craft, Toland put religion at the edge of civil government so not to allow religion an escape from the reins of reason. Voltaire was haunted by the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in France, where thousands died for no reason other than their religion.

“In his ‘Dictionary,’ Voltaire said the Enlightenment’s goal was to change the way people think about their world. Enlightenment was domination giving way to liberty. Joseph Priestly considered the Enlightenment an opportunity to see what men are and see what yet they can do.”

“Where does ethics fit in?”

“Scots philosophers of the 1700s considered ethical behavior detached from religion and also recognized the limitations of reason. Early in the century, Bernard Mandeville’s poem *The Fable of the Bees* took exception to the classical definition of a virtue as that which benefits the rest of society. He believed what benefited the individual could also benefit others. Shortly after that Francis Hutcheson wrote that virtue was what served the public good. He believed mankind is naturally social benevolent, that moral sense is part of human nature, and that sentiments and judgments matter. Their intentions may have been good, but that definition of virtue presents too many problems. In the middle 1700s another Scot, David Hume, a utilitarian influenced by John Locke and George Berkeley, used Newtonian arguments to suggest reason was imperfect, but useful, along

with experience, as a check on sentiments. Reason is and ought to be a slave to passions.”

“Is something a virtue because it promotes the public good?”

“That’s too sweeping. Would building a new Yankee Stadium be a virtuous action? Would consigning people to sit idle under welfare be virtuous?”

“No on both counts.”

“Adam Smith acted like an anthropologist to examine how people decide in practice. Smith’s notion was that people learn to do morality by judging others and then internalizing the lessons learned. Smith, like Hutcheson, felt that people could be capable of distancing themselves from their internal sentiments. Adam Ferguson tried to combine Hume’s benevolent civic interest and Smith’s sympathy into the law of society. He believed man is a social being, and mankind was working toward perfection. He did worry, along with Montesquieu, that liberty would become considered ordinary and inconsequential and that people would lose their liberty as a result of their passivity. He foresaw danger from too much order rather than too little of it.

“Thomas Reid, a Scottish contemporary of Hume and Smith, believed common sense was an important tool for moral development. He bypassed other unanswerables about what one can know that vexed philosophers. Reid understood that what mattered was that different people could agree on some principles. ‘For, before men can reason together, they must agree in first principles; and it is impossible to reason with a man who has no principles in common with you.’”

“Immanuel Kant objected to Reid’s conclusions.”

“While Kant put limits on reason, he believed that morality arises within oneself. It is not imposed from outside as in natural law or a set of scriptures. Significantly, what works for an individual fits comfortably with what other individuals will deduce, given the opportunity. Kant championed reciprocity. Man is not a means to an end, but an end into himself. That’s why Kant believed one should never lie, since each individual is owed the most accurate mental map possible of the universe.”

“But Kant fell out of favor.”

“The whole Age of Enlightenment that sought to empower individuals fell out of favor after 1789 when reactionaries masquerading as a new age of romanticism misled the masses, demeaning the value of reason. Individualism and reason have remained out of favor for two hundred years. Most people consider themselves guided by reason but the political classes repeatedly manipulate what passes for reason to stay in power.”

“Philosophy seems removed from everyday life.”

“That’s been the trend since G. W. F. Hegel in 1800 advocated historical relativism weakening the place of ordinary individuals in society. Marx in the 1840s reinforced the notion that outside forces rule. A long string of philosophers since Nietzsche, in the 1880s, have been either anti-free will or focused on structure. Fernand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida all challenged knowing and being—epistemology and ontology—with Freudian unconscious determinism. And to what end? Since one can never know whether the will is free or not, one might as well act as if it is, given the complexity of self-reflection, exercised across infinitely recursive levels, interacting with innumerable others.”

“Philosophy seemed to wander without a moral compass.”

“On the other side of the philosophical tug of war were turn-of-the-century pragmatists like William James, a follower of Charles Sanders Pierce, who believed something is true if it works. John Dewey, a staunch advocate of democracy, pushed that view in his progressive educational program. In the 1970s, John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* proposed that ‘most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position’ and Richard Rorty said truth was a word for what a culture determined was useful. But popularity is subject to manipulation and what ‘works’ depends upon the yardstick. To support democracy because it is popular misses its real advantage—the potential to foster processes of thorough, ongoing discussion. Popularity is a stop-think word. Popularity often disguises social thuggery. Emancipatory social changes

pushed because they are popular too often lead to unintended results that delay the very goals they wish to achieve.

“In the late 1970s, when *Orientalism* author Edward Said’s trendy multi-cultural views preoccupied progressives, Rorty wrapped the structuralists’ irony around the pragmatists’ preoccupation with ends to advocate a popular recycled Marxian utopian platitude that all people are the same and deserve to be treated the same. That led to the notion our cultural behavior might cause adversarial misbehavior in others if they misunderstood us or mistook our intentions. If we are all the same, we need only act nice and lower our defensive posture to bring peace to the world. Rorty’s feel-good relativist notion overlooks Karl Popper’s advice that the purpose of science is to prune away the demonstrably false. What remains, while not verified, is not relative and deserves attention. People may be built the same, but some would kill us for the smallest justification. As easily as different and dangerous programs might infect computers, similar ideas can infect people to keep them from recognizing and embracing the minimum requirements for society that most people otherwise would find easily accessible.”

“Then why mention Rorty at all?”

“Rorty deserves credit. Thousands of college students who drudge through Philosophy 101 never reach Rorty’s conclusion that each generation has the responsibility to take the best of what has gone before and validate it for itself using the best tools currently available. If one cannot take a philosopher’s word for truth, you must become your own philosopher. Robert Nozick, a contemporary of Rawls from the other side of the political spectrum, encouraged such independence, because people own themselves. The state does not own people.

“To rediscover philosophy for everyday life, go back to Thomas Reid. The essential task of everyday life for individuals is to engage others to establish a reliable fabric for interaction—not by force, religion, culture, or presumed eternal principles, but by common sense working on experience. Along the way, that continuous process inoculates you to defend yourself from those

who would harm you, even if they may sometimes operate under the guise of the state.”

5 PM - 1950s On scholarship and moral ambiguity

"We have a few minutes to wait for my appointment with the Dean where I hope to offer some useful insights to grow the college's Core curriculum."

"Why?"

"When I see the range war between the Hatfields on the political right and the McCoys on the political left I'm convinced we have returned to the cultural conflict of the 1950s."

"What conflict?"

"When Elvis Presley appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in September 1956, it represented a face-off between forces diametrically opposed each other. Traditionalists were outraged at Elvis' libertine behavior and wanted the TV camera to show him only from the waist up. Others, feeling liberated from artificial and, in their opinion, unsubstantiated constraints, wanted Elvis from tip to toe, including the swiveling hips and legs."

"That's a funny analogy."

"It might be funny except every so often the belief recycles through popular culture that liberal ideas lead to libertine behavior. It doesn't have to be true. They only have to believe that it is."

"Behavior matters to me. I read the Bible as a Christian. I read other books as a Christian. I live my life as a Christian."

"Go ahead. Read the Bible as a Christian; Interpret other books as a Christian; Read the whole world as a Christian . . . but, to be fair, sift your Christianity, Judaism, or Islam through a lifetime of human experience. If you don't, you'll risk confusing what it means to be Christian with someone else's shallow interpretation of it infused in you."

"So who was right: the traditionalists calling for yesteryear or those willing to shuck the encumbrances of the past?"

"None of the above. Just like now. The world in the 1950s was changing too fast. Fear and lack of institutional trust led some to feelings of helpless desperation. The election of 2008 has similarly been a hope against hope that things would work, absent any reason to back up the hope. The 1950s were as unhappy a time as today seems to be."

"Do you think we are reliving the 1950s?"

"Today's newscasts remind me of 1950s newsreels. For all that technology has changed, artificial, contrived newsreel content remains the same. NPR just aired an anecdotal interview with an Iowa caucus member who was interviewed probably because she could be found in an Iowa telephone directory. NPR presumed she had a prescription for what was needed for the Republican Party. Clichéd generalities that waste today's air time are no more useful than filmed newsreels of prancing 1950s starlets or model boats towing squirrels trained to water ski. After that, NPR's Mara Liasson spouted irrelevancies about energizing the party base, musing whether anything would flummox the—and note the favorable adjective 'unflappable'—opposition candidate. That's entertainment that displaces news. More frightening, it passed unnoticed by listeners. News is not about speculation on keeping a vice president candidate under wraps, or about a vice presidential candidate's influence on poll numbers, and certainly not about criticism that a vice presidential candidate didn't finesse an Iran-Israel question better. People should be outraged when editors prefer crap to reliable content that equates to news you can use."

"Did such things matter back in the 1950s?"

"Well, look at the sweep of time. Patterns in what has happened across history—even in literature—can be mined for value. Literature is a shortcut to experience—allowing a reader to 'live' an experience as if it were one's own."

"Modernism in literature was murdered, the first blow struck by World War I, but the final blow was long coming. In a sweeping

arc, Modernism in novels reflected the last of the 19th century's technological advancements in energy, travel, biology, psychology, and brute mastery of science, only to have the 'march of progress' hammered by the brutality of war. Meanwhile, the signal scream of Post-modernism, the despair that replaced Modernism, took 50 years to cry out, even though that's not a long time to penetrate the masses."

"Which 50 years?"

"Edvard Munch created *Skrrik* in 1893—we know the painting as *The Scream*—but it reached from the late 1890s when Nietzsche died to the late 1940s and Sartre's post-war existentialism before the sentiments expressed colored the 1950s. Post-modernism essentially gave up on Modernism's search for meaning, and often poked fun at the quest. Post-modernism was the exasperated 'I give up!' for Modernism's lack of success either defining the world or saving it from itself. Reacting skeptically, authors faced the Elvis dichotomy and either retreated to familiar neoclassical traditions or gave up on traditions altogether.

"Post-modernism is a perfect example to wonder where the gain is if, for all its lessons, a body of literature does not bring home the fabric of society clearly enough for readers to accept and own enough of it to live by. What matters the excellence of style, the depth of character, the drive of narrative, the tension of conflict, the emotion of phrasing, if in substance the lessons for life are missing. Conversation alone—content alone—should be enough to reaffirm the essence of society."

"You speak against what has happened in literature, and then you use it. I'm not sure how you can do that."

"It's like archeology or anthropology. I am not criticizing so much as observing to understand it better for my own safety's sake. They were of their time, and could not have acted any differently. We are of our time, and if we *don't* learn how their time came to pass, ours will never improve upon it. To learn to look at literature with a sharp eye is to learn to look at life as clearly, and at others who would presume to live your life for you."

"So what about the 1950s?"

"The 1950s wallowed in the depths of negative self-consciousness. In the destructive feedback loop that festered after World War II and the existentialism that followed it, the self-consciousness about self-consciousness spiraled disastrously downward. Samuel Becket's public showing in 1953 of *Waiting for Godot* represented an agonizing milestone of Post-modern hopelessness. It was as if literature gave up. Samuel Becket moved beyond James Joyce to represent, not contemporary thinking, but the failure to think how to better the human condition. William Golding, in *Lord of the Flies* in 1954, wonders if society is a natural human characteristic or if culture, created by man, contains the seeds of its own destruction."

"Self-reflection follows every war."

"Yes, it does, but post-World War II doubt became doubled, redoubled, and doubled yet again. We had been forced face-to-face with how little we knew. Philosophy, History, Religion, Literature, Art, and Politics had failed to live up to the potential promised by academics. How frightening that people were left without tools to cope."

"How did those institutions fail to live up to their potential?"

"Philosophy had become a search for absolute answers until philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein furthered Immanuel Kant's understanding that reason had limits. In Philosophy, language, abstracted from experience and inserted into metaphysics, became non-useful. Philosophy, which was initially meant to be a means to knowledge and a guide to living, engaged in a quest to discover Ultimate Truth and came up short. If there was no Truth, where could one turn?

"Meanwhile, History learned too much about itself to trust itself. A hundred years earlier, Dickens, in *Hard Times*, had challenged reliance on facts, facts, and facts alone. Even if consensus on salient facts could be reached, no adequate mechanism seemed to exist to achieve consensus on how to weigh one set of facts against others or to interpret what those facts might mean. To those in the 1950s, society based on History would be built on as

slippery a foundation as professional Philosophy. Neither could people turn to religion as each religion appeared caught in a range war with every other religion over which owned ultimate knowledge, relegating others to mere superstition. No religion was able to legitimize itself over any other."

"How did that apply to the 1950s?"

"The centuries that had gone before had tried different successive approaches to governance and had not delivered results. The most recent century, the 20th century, in its turn, had precious little to offer. In the resulting political vacuum, obsessive order on one side and anarchy on the other were sucked in to culture in the middle of the 20th century, with each trying to wrestle the other into submission."

"Children of the 1950s would not have cared about anarchy or order."

"Every Saturday, children would pay 25 cents at the movie theater to watch the highly stylized, almost fictional five-minute newsreel that preceded two cartoons, a Hopalong Cassidy or Gene Autry the singing cowboy two-reel horse opera cliffhanger, topped off with the artificial Puritanism of a Hollywood-approved feature. Every Sunday meant church and Sunday school before driving the USA in our Chevrolet to visit grandma and grandpa for ice cream.

"If history seems cyclic, it may be that parents, like those in the 1950s, try to protect their children from the horrors of war they had been forced to live. Insulated from the horror, children become distant from the consequences and susceptible to let down their guard. They papered over the pressure with a culture of pretend.

"My parents distanced themselves from World War II's wartime memories, but—and bless them for trying—while they protected their children from what they lived through, weeds grew that later would clutter the garden. Couched in a protected environment the children's view of the world remained incomplete. There are people out in the world who want to kill you for greed or for another small reason. Overly-protected as

children, those students grew up to become teachers who would perpetrate their flawed reality on the next generation of students and that's made the distance from the reality of war become greater still."

"Does the death of Modernism matter?"

"Everyone was set adrift in a storm-tossed sea. Everyone *is* adrift in a storm-tossed sea. That's not only *worth* knowing, staying afloat *depends* on knowing that.

"Modernism's concerns are as relevant today as they were in the 1920s. Modernism was concerned with humanity, no less than the early development of the novel was, for instance with pre-Victorian Jane Austin, trying to address the proper relation of one to one's surroundings and culture.

"Me? I believe that if you're going to use your wits to manufacture something from nothing, you ought to create something that works. It had better travel across culture and time and be easily accessible and compelling.

"Post-modernism—PoMo—blossomed in the anything-goes 1960s where an author's creation became merely a score, open to interpretation by anyone who, by right of his or her own individuality, claimed *ipso facto* qualifications to give a 'valid' interpretation of the work. Words and objects no longer seem to matter. Reality and fiction moved closer to each other.

"PoMo pre-occupied itself with self-reference in a superficial way. Self-reference turned away from intense examination of the protagonist's engagement with society. For authors in this style, self-reference applied to the form of the writing rather than thinking about thinking or the ideas within. Post-modernism certainly wasn't a triumph of style over substance. It wasn't a triumph at all, but the failure of substance. Two generations of failure left us to clean up after the third. My generation missed its opportunity to take 50 years of aimless Post-modernity and force it to face itself in the mirror."

"What would you have them face in the mirror?"

"These children, protected for the best of reasons by their parents, whose dreams discounted reality and colored the reality

of later children and whose hopes for change ought to be honored, can only honor those hopes if they recover the past.”

. . . “The Dean will see you now.”

“. . . Thank you for meeting with me about the college Core course content. Academic deans are very busy and it is kind of you to take the time.”

“We think constantly about the goals of college education. Every ten years or so we re-evaluate Core courses and we are engaged in that process now. In my opinion, Core courses should advance both confidence and humility.”

“I agree. The question is how to become more successful at it. Education can be misused, as anyone who considers Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong’s pseudo-educational indoctrination can attest. In our own time, we fail to use teachable moments like the mistaken Duke University lacrosse scandal, Yale’s handling of Danish Islamist cartoons offensive to Islamic fundamentalists, Harvard’s distress at president Summers’ remarks to research gender in science, or the New York *Times*, even with its ombudsman.”

“That doesn’t speak well for academic success.”

“Our experienced and engaged faculty is a generation removed from students taught by the previous generation of faculty that likewise did its best. If, in the long string of history, after so many valiant cycles we are still not as successful as we need to be, then who can point out a reasonable explanation, uncover a more useful goal the a path toward it, and motivate others to achieve it?”

“That’s every professor’s job, of course.”

“Certainly professors are encouraged to seek wisdom wherever they can find it.”

“That doesn’t always happen.”

“No one likes to have a mirror held up to self and work, particularly by one who is not one of them, but only a product

of their work.”

“That’s a gracious way of phrasing it.”

“It is an interesting challenge to a mature faculty, fully engaged in doing as much as they do now, to ask them how useful and necessary ideas can be made more accessible.”

“We challenge ourselves every day. We read, research, undergo self-evaluation by our peers.”

“Education at all levels deserves to be more effective—working better, not harder or longer.”

“We can always do better.”

“Each subject has opportunity: English has literature to reinforce tools for thought; History has the record of people convinced they were right when they were mistaken; Professional Philosophy has shown instances where ultimate answers cannot be found, and that the best we can do is focus elsewhere.”

“The Core curriculum is designed to foster inquiry.”

“Without an ‘Ah, ha!’ or *eureka* moment, those empowered to make decisions won’t realize that something different needs to be done, that it can be done, and, that a plausible path can take us there.”

“How do you make accessible something as nebulous as character?”

“Superior educators struggle with how to bring about the good character they wish to see. Current courses do address individual subjects well, but professors at a public university recently lobbied to reduce the number of Core courses in favor of more professional training. That suggests they do not see the value of Core courses, or how to successfully implement them.”

“Core represents the faculty’s best reflection on materials crucial for an educated person to be exposed to, if not fully cognizant of. It reflects faculty judgment that such and such a background is an important common fabric for all educated persons and the common background for subsequent development of diverse skills and knowledge.”

“Some course needs to shoulder responsibility to address where useful tools meet the simple daily problems of living and the problems of society.”

“Secondly, Core should leave at the least an imprint of that which tends to bind and unify—in the face of later fragmentation of experience and activities.”

“A common frame for subsequent development is essential and education should bind and unify society. But those lobbying show little consensus how to address essential understanding that is missing.”

“What would you consider missing?”

“Essential thinking techniques, the humility that comes from thinking about thinking, and a handful of simple wisdoms that have been passed down from the greatest minds in history who turned their intellect to the simple daily problems of living.”

“Specifically?”

“Classical undergraduate college education used to consist of the first three of the Seven Liberal Arts, known as the *Trivium*—Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric: Grammar to put your thoughts in order, Logic to see those thoughts were consistent, and Rhetoric to convey those thoughts to others and back. As Dorothy Sayers, reminds us, we taught students to think, and then practiced on subjects. Now we teach subjects and hope they learn to think.

“That leads to the second concern of hubris. We often think we are right, not because we *are* right, but simply because we *think* we are right. As a habit, people will concede greater beauty, strength, or speed, but no one will concede better judgment.

“That suggests a third concern where, in a way, we lose consciousness. Consciousness is a sometime acquired trait. Think of it as recognizing you were unaware when peripheral vision vanishes. Or, if you walk into a room, shine a flashlight at one corner and then other corners, when you leave the room, can you tell if it was lit? Consciousness is ours only when we have it and no one considers that it might ever go missing.

“Fourth, when it comes to character, Socrates felt it could be taught, not like geometry, but in a way he did not, or could not, explain, perhaps because of the limitations of his ancient Greek. But we have new metaphors, tools, and language that can reach beyond Socrates to make accessible concepts he could not.

“Fifth, a handful of simple wisdoms help make character more accessible because, rather than teach fixed virtues, they encourage dynamic process to which Socrates could only allude. As the kids connect language and thought, they are empowered and motivated by simple wisdoms that underlie their conversation:

- A sense of time and their place in it
- A sense that the mental map of reality could be more accurate
- A sense that they might sometimes be wrong
- A sense that others live as acutely as they do
- A sense that they are responsible for themselves
- A dynamic recursive process of thinking about thinking

“Traditional education is very good at what it does, but what it does well isn’t all we need. We have little leeway anymore.”

“Why not?”

Over 2500 years, the conundrum of how one should behave has thrown us into a downward spiral of moral relativism that resigns ethics to ‘might makes right’ because religions are ineffective outside their believers and so-called natural laws are culturally dependent and cannot be proven to be absolute.

“If students of today are to escape from moral relativism to establish minimum standards of behavior then they have to work within today’s constraints of language but go beyond those that limited the brilliant Socrates. Fortunately, they can. Where Socrates had only the word *polis*, today’s students can differentiate *polis* from ‘city,’ *polis* from ‘culture,’ and *polis* from ‘society.’ For their own safety’s sake they must.”

“You challenge Socrates?”

“Our language lets us see more clearly than he could. Socrates’ notion was that if one looked at the society that mankind created, one could project backward to gain insight into the make-up of an individual. The single word available did not

differentiate between culture and society, which led to notions about the individual that do not follow. But the converse, notions deduced about the individual, provide insight about society.”

“How is society different than culture?”

“Society occurs at any edge where two individuals or cultures meet. Society requires no religion, no shared experience, and no natural law. Society can be built projecting forward, in an exercise like linking two ships on a storm-tossed sea. One ship uses a Lyle Gun to send a messenger line between ships that the second ship uses to return a stronger line. The process is repeated until the ships are lashed together.”

“What has that to do with society?”

“People are like ships, alien and alone on uncertain seas. Every individual is essentially alone, adrift in a stormy sea of sense experience, with only the pattern-recognition skills with which one was born, and the rationality developed over time. Yet, from simple threads fashioned from humility and a shared sense of need, a sturdy fabric can be fashioned between individuals, to stand independent of their cultures, to lift them above the rest of the animal kingdom and embrace a peaceful process of problem resolution.”

“What sort of ‘messenger line’ is practical?”

“This one: Can you recall an instance from your personal experience when you thought you were correct but later events painfully proved you to be mistaken?”

“I suppose I can.”

“The recollection makes it clear that your decisions were based not on reality, but on a mental map of reality, susceptible to errors, that you had created and refined. That is humbling. If you can’t know when you might be mistaken, any plan for your very best future requires a mental map of reality more accurate than you alone can make. If sometimes you think you are correct when you are mistaken, it is better to discover that before a harsh lesson from reality brings you back to reality.”

“But how can you discover that?”

Fortunately, as alone as you are, others are in a similar circumstance. Others, just like you, have something to gain from society, if they can recognize the need and make society happen.

“One could easily perform a thought experiment in a classroom to deduce minimum requirements for behavior in society that are humility and reciprocity:

- The understanding that you just might be wrong, and
- A sense that others live their life as acutely as you do.

“Society is created by individuals for their benefit. For society, humility is as essential as humility is important to the individual. It represents the continuous and everlasting opportunity for improvement.”

“But is it practical?”

“You need no more proof than your own experience. Governance with institutionalized doubt has been tried in one form or another in ancient Greece and today.”

“They were not successful then.”

“Those governments were instituted for other reasons and when they fell they were undermined by the lack of understanding of its underlying advantage.”

“Then why were they instituted?”

“Instituted as a check on consolidated power in Athens, their faith in democracy was based on one person—one vote and majority rules. Instead, the strength of democracy is that it codifies humility into a permanent appreciation that there might be a better way. It represents a commitment to freedom of speech because the least of us deserves the opportunity to convince the rest that, whatever the present decision, there may always be a better way.”

“Democracies are susceptible to tyranny of the majority and to buying votes for political advantage.”

“Every form of government can become tyrannical. In a democracy, the capacity to make individual decisions matters.

Democracy assures the ability to call “bullshit” in front of an audience tuned to judge the accuracy of the argument. Brought to consciousness by the charge, individuals choose to laugh into submission one side or the other. And, in the end, the penalty for bullshit ought to be to be ignored.”

“Free speech is enshrined in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.”

“Only the timid justify with the parchment of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence rather than the principle behind it. Society depends on the liberty to laugh at any stupid idea put forward by anyone else who chooses to speak. It is not law that protects the laughter, but simple good sense open to anyone who cares to work it out. For those unable to work it out, then your ‘friend-or-foe’ indicator should flash in warning.

“To prepare for times of warning, a representative democracy, when supported by an education system that actually works, is able to put forward candidates with enough character to stand up to a misguided crowd long enough to educate them about what matters. But we are only just learning what matters and how to make it accessible to everyone so we can incorporate into Core classes such wisdom that students can discover and use to inoculate themselves.”

“And if we don’t see it or do it?”

“Mother Nature will not care. But we do—for ourselves and our children. Among the things that distinguish between ourselves and others of the plant and animal kingdom are the skill to communicate complex ideas to each other and the potential to project the ramifications of plans for the future. If we do not exercise these, we revert to the level of others in the world of nature—governed by the rules nature requires and nothing more. Be human or be no more than an animal.”

“How does one make the choice?”

“Most other animals are outside the framework of morality. Morality is purely a creation of thought. A seal that snips off the fins of a fish, leaving it a terrified, living, helpless toy to be batted around until boredom and hunger make it lunch, has no

conception of good and evil. Good and evil don’t exist in the world of seals and fish; life is simply the way things are.”

“That is stark, but not everyone will be convinced.”

“No compelling reason in the laws of nature or mankind will irrefutably justify morality to any and all men. One who chooses to act by the laws of the lion need not even consent to listen to the arguments in favor of morality. He need not choose to heed anything but that which compels itself to be heard by the laws of nature, if even that. People cannot be forced to join together under the protection of a moral umbrella; we can only encourage them to do so by presenting its advantages and encouraging them to develop the thought processes necessary to weigh them. Our own best interest demands we help as many as possible to become so thoughtful they clearly understand such things. Our security depends upon it.”

“I can’t see people lining up and signing up.”

“Protection under the moral umbrella is not so much explicitly subscribed to by an individual as it is rejected by an explicit act. The minimums of society are few. Restriction of the freedom of communication, such as muzzling free speech or press, or hostage taking amongst the diplomatic community casts one out from the umbrella’s protection to put them at the mercy of the laws of nature. By such action one opens oneself to any response in the arsenal of the laws of nature we may choose to take. He has chosen the battlefield, not us. We, in turn, are subject to the laws of nature in our response. We need not reply using the standard of the moral umbrella the offender has rejected, although we may choose to do so. Pacifists and generals of quality understand that war is a nasty place to be and should be avoided, if possible. But those of us who understand morality reserve the right to protect themselves by any means necessary. And one might survive or both might die. Nature does not care.

“Kurtz’ monologue in *Apocalypse Now* is brilliant even though neither Francis Ford Coppola nor Marlon Brando may have understood the insight that one can be willing to temporarily set aside morality to fight those who undermine it. Morality is the creation of those who choose to live under its protective

umbrella and, in so doing, lift themselves just a fraction above the law of the jungle lived by the animal kingdom. Those who by their actions choose to reject living under the umbrella's protection can have no expectation that morality will protect them when society turns around on them. Do not underestimate the value of the umbrella. Robert Bolt's Thomas More explained in *A Man for All Seasons*, 'And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down (and you're just the man to do it!), do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake!'"

"Morality is not abstract. It is integrally tied up with the immediate practical protection of my own life. My proper concern is my own life. Your proper concern is yours. The future safety of any individual is integrally tied up with convincing as many other people in the world as one can the value of living under a moral umbrella that is equitable and valuable for wellbeing, and by actions that decide under what conditions they will be treated. Our own best interest is to encourage the kind of thoughtfulness to understand the ramifications of individual actions."

"But why should I buy into this?"

"Looking at society this way sets up a practical, culturally independent 'friend or foe' detector to identify behavior that would undermine society. More to the point, society is put at risk when doubt is replaced by certainty."

"But truth matters."

"You can't know what is true. You can only discover if what is asserted as true does not match patterns of experience. Philosopher Karl Popper explained that science is not about deciding what is true, but embracing a continuous process to identify and reject what is demonstrably false. Phrased another way, society is at risk without the freedom to say something someone may not care to hear. That said, the freedom to offend

does not imply the necessity to do so or determine the form it might take."

"How can this be taught?"

"Journalism is the perfect vehicle to make these essential concepts accessible, and is a division of labor that, for usefully serving individuals and society, would have pleased philosopher Socrates in ancient Greece, sociologist and historian Ibn Khaldun in the Islamic empire, and economist Adam Smith after the modern industrial revolution. As a surrogate for the individual, journalism fits neatly in a concentric circle between the individual and society."

"That which is important to the individual is equally important to journalism and to society. Therefore, developing the skill to detect bad journalistic habits identifies similar misbehavior for individuals and society. Studying journalism exposes "gotcha" techniques, style over substance, ignorance, misuse of statistics, gullibility, historical amnesia, double standards, misrepresentation, misplaced tolerance, misplaced judgment, silence, politics, overused and underused language, rhetorical games, and logical fallacies. Similarly, the purpose of a discussion is not to win, but to come to understanding."

"What takes this from being only interesting to being compelling?"

"Dorothy Sayers, the 1930s mystery writer and medievalist said, 'For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects.'"

"It is too dangerous to be ignorant about judgment in our age. As Jacob Bronowski noted, science has put such power in the hands of anyone who cares to learn that an iron box will no

longer protect your valuables nor an iron door protect your family. We are in a race that there is no guarantee civilization will win. Happily, civilization has a better chance today than ever before, because all it takes to inoculate people to defend themselves is a change of mind. All it took for the villagers to see that the emperor had no clothes, was a change of mind.”

“You are asking us to do something completely different than we currently do.”

“The core of Core is not knowledge, but embracing the process by which we become compelled to engage in life-long learning and the tools by which to proceed.”

“So are you going to be the one to tell schools they are teaching the wrong subjects?”

“They are not the wrong subjects; they are subjects from a point of view that gives students little traction.”

“Traction?”

“Students see little in it for them. Across all grade levels and subjects, current courses already contain teachable moments to which simple wisdoms easily attach. Simple wisdoms refine processes used to make decisions. Process matters because, as Robert Heilbroner pointed out, when you master logic, logic masters you. It becomes compelling and unavoidable. When you understand that two plus two equals four, nothing will entice you to believe it equals five.”

“Can people change so dramatically?”

“In the early 1300s, painters learned to map three-dimensional space on two-dimensional canvas in a way that brought cataclysmic change to the way they saw the world and to thought and literature. Linear perspective—what we call point of view—changed the metaphors ordinary people would use, finding its way into the dozens of points of view Giovanni Boccaccio used in *The Decameron*.

“A similar cataclysmic change seems imminent as pressure from language, examples, and experience has built over the past century:

- Edison’s motion pictures look across time.
- Einstein’s theories expressed time relatively.
- Karl Marx used the dialectic to dynamically sight from the past, through the present, to the future.
- Computers and M. C. Escher’s graphics demonstrate how the mind thinks recursively.

“Compelling representations of time builds pressure to break loose from static Newtonian views to more useful dynamic metaphors in thought and literature.”

“Is such a change worth it?”

“Echoing Heilbroner, the courage to defend what is important springs from mastering why something is important. Herodotus believed the Greeks at *Thermopylae* found courage because they valued liberty so highly that they would rather sacrifice their lives to try to preserve it than live any longer without it. Socrates was a tenacious soldier during the Peloponnesian War because he understood his duty. Defending Little Round Top against all odds at Gettysburg during the Civil War, earned a grammar teacher from Maine, Joshua Chamberlain, the Congressional Medal of Honor.”

“Our professors are committed to their teaching what is needed.”

“Professors are committed to incredible depth and insight, which they then test with astounding precision: where were these words used in the readings; why were these quotations significant; write an essay on such and so. They test for, and show the course covers material that is fascinating, delightful, complete, in-depth, but nevertheless information, not news.”

“Information not news?”

“Elementary visitors to our newspaper learn information is true, but news adds context to plan your best future. If the core of Core in college leaves to chance that which you need to know to plan your best future, you go into the world unarmed.

“Professors *are* totally committed within their frame of reference, but it is not enough to test the pedantic learned as students sweat through their readings.”

“So, summarize for me, why should one choose a character-centered life?”

“That question really asks, ‘Why is a character-centered life in your own long-term best interest?’ In your own experience can you recall painful experiences that occurred because you thought you were right and later discovered you were not?”

“I can see that.”

“Point 1: Sometimes we think we are right, not because we are right, but simply because we think we are right.

“It’s possible for you to be wrong, even when you think you are right, because your brain—the tool you use to plan your very best future—decides what to do using not reality itself, but its very own internal map of reality. If that map of reality is inaccurate, you can get hurt.”

“I can see that, too.”

“Point 2: Your long-term self-interest depends on maintaining the very best map of reality to work with.”

“But where does that get me?”

“Other people can recall their own painful experiences, that even though they are different experiences from yours, will invariably lead them to the same conclusion.”

“And this means . . .?”

“Point 3: Those other people live life as acutely as you do. They have the same needs with reason to join together in society. Society becomes mutually beneficial so we can help each other refine our individual mental maps of reality.

“Language is the tool we use to maintain our map of reality, to check it, to refine it, and to represent it on paper so that tomorrow we can look back and see if it makes as much sense then as it does to us today.

“More than that, the *Trivium*—the first three of the Seven Liberal Arts—are what we use. Grammar is how we express our thoughts clearly. Logic is how we check our language for consistency. Rhetoric is how we express what we think to others and check

what others express to us. They capture our expressions of concepts to convey them over immeasurable distance and time to others.”

“So we establish that quality of language and its tools matter.”

“Point 4: Reading, writing, and conversation hone our skills used to better individual futures.

“Point 5: A sense of time and one’s place in it provides a check on one’s map of reality and decision-making.

“Point 6: Thinking about thinking is a powerful tool that needs to be harnessed to be constructive.

“These points are accessible to everyone across cultural and religious boundaries. Using them we can fashion virtues, a compelling framework for civilization, and a path to honorable decision-making.

“Point 7: people are responsible for themselves and need to take that responsibility.

“As children connect language and thought, they are empowered and motivated by Simple Wisdoms that underlie their conversation:

- A sense that they might sometimes be wrong.
- A sense that the map of reality in their mind could be better.
- A sense that other people live life as acutely as they do.
- A sense of the tools for thought.
- A sense of time and their place in it.
- A sense of the power of recursive thought.
- A sense that people are responsible for themselves.

“These are processes kids understand, admire and wish to emulate in a deeper way.”

6 PM - 1960s On religion and traditions

"The 1960s offered a lot to like, but recall the lyric from the 1968 musical *Hair*:

When the moon is in the Seventh House
And Jupiter aligns with Mars
Then peace will guide the planets
And love will steer the stars . . .
This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius

"Back then, a whole generation hoped for a pivot point but Aquarius never rose beyond dawn. The stars seemed lined up in 1968 to hit the ball out of the park, but when they swung at the pitch they missed the ball. Dissatisfied with history and desperate to leave it behind, they gave up the very tool they needed to succeed. They valued individuals but never got beyond moral relativism to figure how to connect individuals together."

"Pundits are falling all over themselves today to call today's election a pivot point."

"If it is, it's not the pivot point they're looking for. Welcome to the last gasp of the last century; another triumph of style over substance. As hip and naïve as 1968, they were as gullible then as this generation is gullible and beguiled by a voice so resonant they miss the words. They have fallen for 9th Grade poetry from Ernest Dowson, 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! In my fashion.'"

"In his fashion?"

"Whatever the suitor wants his words to mean. Remember, 1968 was not all flowers and love, but also about race riots, sit-ins, Students for a Democratic Society, and anti-war activities."

"Were race riots and student demonstrations caused by social permissiveness or were they caused by disaffection?"

"Does it matter? The Vietnam War let my generation peek under the veil. Absent a framework to justify behavior, 'No rules' ruled. But their pseudo-academic tolerant moral relativism ended up used against them. Cracks in their alertness opened the door for others to take down society with a slow-motion controlled explosion caused by those who worked the institutions with patience to undermine them. It didn't matter that those revolutionaries had nothing to replace it. They could work on the naïve, of which there were many, and those naïve were more naïve than ever. Ever hear of the Cloward-Pivin Strategy?"

"No."

"Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven were Columbia University academics and political activists in 1966 who proposed to manufacture a political crisis by overloading the welfare system to cause such bureaucratic pressure that the political status quo would have to change or break down."

"Why does that apply today?"

"Because that is a political tactic in use today, along with rules for radicals by Saul Alinsky, and both are frequently associated with misrepresentations. They lie, yet does one institution today teach the ethical consequence of even a single lie? The loss of trust from a single lie means one can never, ever, believe anything that person says ever again."

"Isn't a candidate allowed to change his mind?"

"Is the mind changed? Is today's position more concise, completely different, or is it a calculated recalibration of words the better to penetrate defenses? If change was made to pander to the voters to get elected, then who's the rube?"

"Looking back at today's journalists, products of the 1960s, they presumed their purpose was to present terrorists, whistleblowers, and everyone else the way that lawyers represent their clients, regardless of innocence or guilt, as if the journalist's job was to impartially, and without regard to content, conduct the message of the terrorist or whistleblower to the public, and not to inject nationality, beliefs, or frame of reference."

"That's said with disdain."

“Disdain well deserved. Rather than an *immoral* approach to news, this is an *amoral* approach. Because they are only doing their job, and they know no better, they would willingly claim innocence as others tear apart the fabric of society.”

“Do you take that as a legacy of the 1960s?”

“It echoes of the 1960s, but it’s a legacy of the fall of Rome after which Aristotelian rhetoric became separated from its requirement to reflect reality.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“People in the 1960s wanted something different. They were unhappy with recent events, unsettled about how to make things better, but for the most part convinced they had to try.”

“But, is that good or bad?”

“Perhaps they could be given an ‘E’ for effort. They shed many useless conventional institutions. People looked elsewhere for useful ideas. My goodness, some wonderful music started then, but people applied themselves in such peculiar ways. Other conventions lingered on. Uncertainty led to an escape to faith.”

“Faith isn’t negative.”

“Faith may work for an insular community, but faith cannot succeed with those unwilling to believe what you believe. No one can ‘faith’ someone else. If I would not bow to the faith of others, I can’t expect them to bow to mine. Religion does nothing to promote inter-cultural governance.”

“My religion matters to me.”

“And you have benefited from it. You are fortunate; others have been led astray by theirs.”

“What do you consider ‘astray?’”

“Work on that with your God-given tools.”

“How can I examine faith when faith takes a leap of faith?”

“It’s God’s existence that takes a leap of faith, but once you have bought into that, you have God-given tools to sort out God’s instructions from the noise humanity adds to it.”

“Blind faith . . .”

“. . . is the gimmick of those who would blind other people of faith.”

“So God, religion, and churches are different.”

“And raise interesting questions. How does religion bind to an individual? Did you find your religion? Did it find you? Was it a match by choice?”

“You are not prying my religion away from me.”

“If Galileo and the Copernican Revolution can eventually convince the church that planets revolve around the sun, and the church can relinquish its opinion otherwise with no loss of individual usefulness then, if without faith’s intervention one can justify civil society between two people, the church need not weigh in that it cannot be so.”

“Must there be an arbiter? And, if so, isn’t the arbiter just another religion?”

“The history of religions shows their province to be the unknowable. As human understanding of how things work has increased, as with the Copernican/Galileo revelations about the planets and stars, the boundaries of religion have receded without any loss of their authority over the remaining unknowable.”

“Religion has been long intertwined with society. Many believe social order cannot be maintained without it. My choice is to live under God’s laws.”

“Which of his laws—the ones in so many different religious books or the ones revealed from a world of experience filtered through the generations and your insight?”

“We do not learn from history.”

“Well, we search for meaning using it.”

“History is the story of forces greater than ourselves.”

“That sounds daunting. Why try at all? What can you know? How to behave? How to interact with others? That’s a much more manageable task than wrestling with forces greater than

ourselves. History is more usefully presented as a core of today's issues framed in experience. The founders of our country believed there are moral values in history to be recognized."

"Why do you have a problem with religion?"

"Some parts of some religions concern themselves with moral expression encouraged by various inducements. 'Behave this way or go to Hell; behave that way to go to Heaven.' That moral rules have been left to religion in the past does not mean that foundations for them must necessarily be religious."

"Give me an example."

"Thou shalt not commit adultery is passed down through religious tradition but there are reasons beyond the fear of God to follow that rule. One who disobeys and cheats on a spouse is cursed for a lifetime to have to edit every conversation lest one reveal one's transgression. Or consider prohibitions against relations with children where the real crime would be to cheat them out of their childhood innocence. There are plenty of non-religious reasons to follow the guidelines set down by religions and as many reasons to disregard others set down by religions. As someone said of homosexual relations, 'It will wash off.'"

"If what you want in politics can only be justified in religious terms then you have found no explanation that will compel non-believers. That means politics can rightfully ignore it. To act otherwise leaves religion susceptible to be hijacked by zealots, and there is no difference between a religious zealot and a bigot."

"So much for the 'one true religion.'"

"But across the board, religious ritual does share something interesting. Confucius talked of *li*, or the proper way to live one's life. Regarding *li*, he described three types of people: Those saints who intuitively knew *the way*. The second group could learn *the way* and Confucius considered himself a member of this group. The third group he despaired would ever be able to learn *the way* and he advocated ritual for them; if you cannot learn why, learn what to do by rote."

"Orthodoxy in religion is ritual for those unable to deduce behavior for themselves. The problem is that orthodoxy can be

used or misused by charismatics to consolidate power for themselves. Religious orthodoxy—church dogma—is designed to undermine your authority to accept or reject a religion's presumption of authority over you. Unquestioned faith is called for.

"Faith is critical to religion."

"But what are the limits of faith? If a charismatic leader like Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana, decides that you are to drink poisoned Kool-Aid, on what basis would you oppose him? If followers of a religion decide that you must convert to their worldview, on what basis would you oppose them? Where religion is misused by charismatics to consolidate power, who but you is in a position to declare what you see?"

"What do you do when faith conflicts with faith?"

"Welcome to the multi-cultural world where, finding no answer, others would avoid the question."

"The quest for religious uniformity is equally fraught with error."

"Enforced diversity is as demeaning, dysfunctional, and divisive as enforced unity. Celebrate individuality and diversity but avoid moral relativism. Prof. John Schmidt relates that German Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn recognized that none of us thinks like our fellow man, so we should not deceive ourselves that we do. He warned that attempting to unify religion does not create unity. It imposes equality at the expense of liberty and prevents diversity that constantly works to find a better way."

"Mendelssohn's friend, playwright Gotthold Lessing, explained in *Nathan the Wise*, the parable of the man blessed with the ring of God. The man had two identical rings made and gave the rings to his three sons who asked which of the three was the true ring. The only proof was in the practice. What makes me for you a Christian makes you for me a Jew or Muslim. But it is what they share and what differentiates them that is worth celebrating. Specific religions matter less than the humanity they sponsor."

"What did collapse in the 1960s?"

“From the 1960s, people could look back through the 1950s to survey the intellectual wreckage built up over earlier centuries. For example, Historiography, the humbling history of the study of history, had, by the 1960s, cast doubt on our understanding of why things happened.

- William Bradford’s journal ‘Of Plimoth Plantation’, from 1620 to 1647, blended fact with the belief that the community’s history was a representation of God’s will.
- Hegel watched Napoleon around 1800 and thought that history was determined by the actions of great men.
- After 1820, in the Jacksonian era, historians attributed the natural expansion of America as manifest destiny.
- Around the 1890s, in Frederick Jackson Turner’s interpretation, ‘frontier’ history, fostered a social interpretation of people forged by their circumstance.
- Between In 1910 and 1913, Charles A. Beard offered a progressive interpretation that the motivating drive in history for the founding fathers had been economic self-interest and conflict. Beard’s interpretation lost influence in the 1950s when his underlying research was questioned.

“Awash in the cultural collapse mirrored in existentialism, in the 1960s, historiography lead to the chaotic conclusion that, since all previous interpretations of history had been colored by contemporaneous bias, every new interpretation of history must be relative. The 1960s generation—my generation—started to ask ‘Why?’: Why can’t I listen to this music? Why do I have to go to church? Why must I use a separate water cooler? Why are we in Vietnam? Traditions crumbled. Rules for art lost their meaning and crumbled away. Chaos appeared at every turn. Many professors of 1960s college students had had their underpinnings cut out from under them.

“In some cases there were good answers that teachers could not themselves see or express clearly. In other cases there were no considered answers. How could professors give answers—taught as they were by teachers educated in a previous generation where, when they asked ‘Why?’, they were told, ‘Because I said so.’

“It was a difficult time, threatened as people were by Communism’s slow, persistent, expansionism. School was where one learned to behave. Teachers did not learn better answers until it was too late to help my generation.”

“‘Because I said so’ shows a particularly non-useful rigidity.”

“Our grandparents’ generation, decimated in the trench warfare of World War I, was physically lost. Our generation, maturing in the 1960s, became mentally lost. Many of them, clinging to the trappings of the 1960s, remained children of the ‘60s and never grew up . . . to become today’s grown-up juveniles.”

“Nonsense. This election represents the same Camelot-like hopes and aspirations that John Kennedy’s election had in 1960.”

“If you mean fantasy-like, Camelot might be closer than you think.”

“Don’t be facetious. 1960 was a new beginning.”

“1960 was less a new beginning than hype tuned to resonate as hope for a new beginning. It was a shrewd campaign move to reinvent it as a new beginning, much like ‘Yes we can!’ and ‘Hope and Change’—clichés absent foundation, meaning, or intent to deliver.”

“Why trash intent to do better?”

“Because change has always been the American way of life. It’s built in. America was founded on change. Thirteen different colonies represented change. It’s audacious to think that one party owns change or that centralized government is the acceptable agent of change. Competition is change. Competition is change on top of change on change again. Have you no cynicism about new beginnings? A ‘new beginning’ implies there is little to be extracted from that which has gone before. It’s lazier to propose an imaginary vehicle gussied up with a spritz of ‘new car smell’ than to value what has gone before.

“A wide swath of people posture platitudes as ideals that are ill-conceived, poorly thought out, and invoked only to snow others. They are not examined or weighed because they only serve as

ammunition to damn others for not believing certain convictions. They believe in situational ethics, not ideals.”

“Why call them unexamined?”

“If they were examined, inconsistencies would cause either peals of laughter or cramps from twisted pretzel logic. Those whom progressives accuse of being unprincipled are more likely to have examined prospective ideals for soundness than are the progressives.”

“Today we have a principled candidate.”

“Principled? Name one principle.”

“The campaign is full of principles: diversity, empathy, tolerance.”

“Platitudes aren’t principles. Clichés aren’t principles; they are used to avoid principles.”

“The slogans represent principles.”

“Slogans represent beliefs.”

“Beliefs are principles. Compassion is more than a belief. We want to take care of the poor.”

“If one understood compassion for the poor, one wouldn’t lead them on, doling out stolen dollars to keep them beholden but never training them to earn real money on their own. A party whose campaign bypasses understanding to get you to believe manipulates to gain power. What they call principles are convenient fictions. They cannot list bedrock principles or explain why they might hold them—and neither can you.”

“It’s too easy to make that allegation but that doesn’t prove lack of principles.”

“Principled people value clarity. A campaign to insert noise as camouflage reveals it does not value society and would destroy that society for temporary private advantage.”

“Idealism does matter. Someone has to retain ideals.”

“Idealism? Living by principles instead of caving in to realism? Where do these ideals come from? Ideals don’t arrive in full bloom, do they?”

“No, they don’t.”

“When picking ideals, how does one know a false bloom from the real thing?”

“I know it when I see it.”

“Take peace for instance. Is peace an ideal?”

“I believe it is. Peace is preferable to war.”

“So you’d rather leave people oppressed to preserve peace? Is that your ideal?”

“No, but you can’t fight just because you’re the one who thinks something is right.”

“‘Right’ is a red herring, not an issue. Peace isn’t the absence of war; it is the absence of the *need* for war. Peace is a process—a commitment to problem resolution that leaves war unnecessary. ‘Give peace a chance’ is a slogan that short-circuits thought before it can find a principle. Where do real ideals come from?”

“Ideals are like natural laws.”

“Herodotus wrote frequently about respect for the values of others, but which ones? Whose natural laws? Yours or the ‘natural laws’ the other side believes?”

“If not natural laws, then what?”

“Ideas with potential begin as wisdom distilled from hard experience. What is distilled is used to project different futures. Some imagined futures would be silly—Utopian models that collapse, unworkable even in dreams. Others show potential. Projections, tested for plausibility against both the past and future, propose paths to work until fresh experience teaches us otherwise.

“One would have thought that those in the 1960s might have known what foolish ideas shysters convinced them to flirt with. But even today old fossil advocates of the same silly ideas have yet to be unmasked, so we need better wisdoms to replace the

conventional ones.”

“You want better conventional wisdoms?”

“The teachers of 1960s students had had the underpinnings of education cut out from under them, and yet were obliged to teach something. These teachers taught in a world resonating with expanding media. Marshall McLuhan, a rhetorician who wrote *The Medium is the Message* in 1967, warned of media’s cognitive effects. Media-driven Post-modernism deals with self-reference, a single label with multiple interpretations, including one purely about style. Self-reference can also apply to poseurs and posturing. Assuming a lag between the philosophy and the literature, and between the literature and the culture, Post-modernism dawdled along for the last 50 to 75 years. Nietzsche to Joyce, to Woolf, to Sartre, to everything we currently live. We are *still* in the Post-modern era because, plumbing the depths of our shallowness, we cast desperately about trying to find a way out. We are, as Post-modern writer John Barth titled his 1968 book, *Lost in the Funhouse*.”

“Students at the end of the 1960s were lost. Their professors, educated 10 to 30 years earlier were lost. They had no place to go for their history, philosophy, literature, or art. Society is fragile, as *Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, argued in 1962, when it examined whether depth of culture brings morality. We are at the mercy of our thoughts and the thoughts of others. Post-modernism arguably peaked in 1961 with Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* although that peak was more a valley because Heller described the problem, not the solution. Like Bob Dylan’s 1968 lyric from *All along the Watchtower*, Heller despaired, ‘There must be some way out of here!’”

“But suppose the media and the message are inextricably tied together. The art doesn’t exist if the media doesn’t exist.”

“Yes and no. You, the artist, are caught in what appears to be a deadly embrace, with no way out. Then, someone says, ‘Stop. Take a breath. Step out of it. Instantly you have gone ‘meta’—traveled to another level. That is not intractable.

“To be sure. If I say you have lost focus you are instantly snapped back, and, now focused, typically are convinced you never lost it. That’s the purpose of writing. Ideas nailed to page can be examined in the cold harsh light of the dawn. That is one purpose of art. All it takes is a change of mind that can be accomplished in an instant.”

“Who defines society? Who watches over it? Can society be protected? Is it protected from the center, from the edge, or must it be protected from above?

“Who the hell has the answer?”

“You do.”

7 PM - 1970s On literature evolving

“A student said something intriguing today. She said, ‘A lot of things are helping my future, but mostly it’s JROTC.’ When I asked why she liked JROTC she said, ‘They bond together and would do anything for the colonel.’ And then she added, ‘They find strength in the weaknesses others have that they try to help to overcome.’”

“That’s a turnaround. Reserve Officer Training Corps was forced out of schools in the 1970s.”

“There were some regrettable actions then.”

“The most negative effects of the Vietnam War had less to do with the war in the field and more to do with many who stayed home. Deferments from serving in the military were extended to those who entered academic careers for which they were not suited. It’s a double whammy. The teachers of today’s students would have included those who escaped the draft during the Vietnam War in the 1970s, and the parents of today’s students were colored by those times as students themselves in the 1970s and 1980s.

“Following the intellectual vacuum of the 1960s, the 1970s were a kidney stone of a decade, warped by multiculturalism, misguided attempts at social justice, and activist incursions trampling through cultural institutions like schools and the press.”

“How were they warped?”

“Edward Said’s major book, *Orientalism* written in the 1970s, led the popular charge of Post-colonialism. His notion was that cultural bias might be incidental, but not when held by the major political and economic powers of the day. To Said, expansionism, historical confrontation, sympathy, and classification lead to modern prejudices, but to make his point he

compressed history, as if 200 years of hard work meant nothing, and he discounted inconvenient plausible evidence to the contrary.

“The problem with the Eurocentric view, according to Said, is not that it isn’t true, but that the value of that truth must be questioned. Edward Said was familiar with the philosophies of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, and believed that culture works not by exerting physical force on civil society, but through the unspoken consent of the language used to construct opinion. Foucault distinguished police power from the power that makes knowledge authoritative and determines how knowledge is transferred. Ostensibly, that which is perceived as free is actually infused in people by structure that lulls them into docility. Critics who assume this point of view numb others with discussion of Hegelian master/slave dialectic and ambivalence of both the colonizer and the colonized. But they fail to address when one doesn’t respect a culture, what it is specifically that one does not respect. Nor do they address what betokens consent by the colonized, what fosters that consent, or, on the other side, how coercions and seductions enslave, and what to do when the slave enslaves.

“Undermining the whole process, if one culture has no yardstick to challenge another, no one is in a position to value truth. Racism turns out to be in the eye of the beholder. Said himself never took a position on whether, for instance, the bias of a man writing about a woman was worse than the preconceptions of a woman writing about someone. His popular but flawed concept, still in use today, fails to distinguish a difference between culture and society. People need to determine how disparate cultures can relate and function so as to avoid an inescapable morass of moral relativism unable to support a process of peaceful problem resolution.”

“What would make Post-Colonialism more tolerable?”

“What views are intolerable? When does tolerance become a disease? When does multiculturalism become nihilism? When does passivity become resignation to the fates? Take criticism of men, for instance, but it could as well be Euro-centrism, race,

gender, or something else. That criticism was superseded by criticism of women's criticism of men's treatment of women—and relativist looping began. The sheer accretion of it all! And to what end? Orientalism fails to demand you make your choice to become a victim or weigh in. Become a voice. Don't study the problem; remove it. Present your view. Give those who follow some purchase. Then be multi-cultural wherever a better idea does not take hold.

"Meanwhile, muddying notions in the 1970s, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* proposed a modern welfare state, charged to distribute wealth 'fairly.' That may have sounded good to ears tuned to the 1970s, but 'fairly' turns out to be a euphemism for disproportionately, with some central authority as the arbiter of fair. For Rawls it was important that the thumb on the scales of justice be hidden behind a veil."

"But other cultures *do* have value."

"Of course they may. Other cultures have value, but only where value can be evaluated. Value cannot be presumed simply because you are different than me, which gives you some special legitimacy that I can't possibly understand."

"That's a diss."

"Should I listen to you because you are loud and in my face?"

"Another diss."

"There is a long history in literature of advocates trying to elbow their favorite book into the literary canon. There *is* no single canon and crosspollination fosters continuous competition. If Post-colonialism—PoCo—has something to say, its message should stand on merits independent of culture of origin and absent that culture's authority to decide who can talk. Jacob Bronowski explained it is possible to respect and dignify without conceding unproven validity."

"When did Post-colonial literature start? Will it end? What is it?"

"By the time Post-colonialism gained popularity outside literary circles—by the time Edward Said wrote politically in the

1970s—pseudo-intellectuals who invoke him had forgotten what Post-colonialism means but not how to wield it as a weapon. Post-colonialism presumes that colonial expansion was a one-way street—that the mother country suppressed any cultural expression from each subjugated country."

"Colonial powers did suppress cultures."

PoCo arguments work both ways, as the rediscovery of *Gilgamesh* ought to teach us. *Gilgamesh*, perhaps the earliest book in the literary canon, was 'lost' because a conquering power has two options—either assimilate the conquered culture or stamp it out. In the case of *Gilgamesh*, it was among tens of thousands of cuneiform clay tablets from the royal library recovered from the rubble of Nineveh. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by a sister nation of Persians, much as citizens of Nineveh destroyed other cultures that earlier they themselves had conquered. 'West versus East' as pushed by Samuel Huntington in *Clash of Civilizations* is an inaccurate confrontation. Prof. John Bowers advises that "Assimilators versus destroyers" is a much more descriptive label. Assimilation is a two-way street, as contemporary music clearly shows."

"I'm not convinced."

"Okay, move from *Gilgamesh* forward to the early 1500s, shortly after Gutenberg's printing press liberated books from tedious handwritten transcription. Erasmus, paying an extended visit to Sir Thomas More, convinced him to write a light-hearted spoof that was eventually published under the title *Utopia*. In the book, a diplomat from an imaginary foreign 'colonial' culture explains that his country imported books from the famous Italian Aldine Press. How colonial, you might say. But the diplomat adds that they also imported presses and paper to print books of their own. Clearly, then, cultural ideas travel in both directions."

"That was a fantasy."

"Move forward still further. Herman Melville wasn't a fantasy. Ironically, his writing was made possible by luxury economics—the market for ambergris and oil. Melville wrote probably the first Post-colonial novel, *Moby Dick*, around 1850, that was

immensely popular in the mother country of Great Britain. Filled with radical multi-cultural characters and rituals, including homosexual marriage, it went far beyond what the home culture would have produced.

“Regional voices speaking above the level of cultural competition—is nothing new. Daniel Owen, in the Dickensian tradition, wrote to preserve the culture and institutions of Wales. Oscar Wilde wrote for the Irish. Willa Cather wrote in the voices of Native American tribes in her frontier novels of the Southwest.

“But Post-colonialism has been abused by its practitioners, its advocate academics, and its political opportunists. PoCo may have something to say, but legitimacy for what is said belongs to its truth, not to its accent. Simply because PoCo is PoCo, it cannot presume to be the only voice to talk. PoCo needs to drop the trendy conceit that claims it is better than those who have gone before. PoCo, because it is PoCo, cannot slip into a mantle of multi-cultural moral relativism that renders it immune to scrutiny.

“The tragic fault of Post-colonialism is to presume that geo-political fault lines are the difficult ones that must be understood and navigated. Fault lines are found everywhere. How do you learn to cross the more pressing and immediate fault lines of family and neighborhood?”

“You’re suggesting Post-colonial concerns are misplaced?”

“Amongst all that is not the case, PoCo deserves to be recognized as an opportunity to expand horizons. As difficult as it is to give the Dutch word *gezelligheid* meaning in English, the word’s feeling of warm hospitality can be generated for English-speaking people who have no single word for it. Post-colonial awareness is more than an opportunity to learn; it is a necessity. ‘Holier-than-thou’ doesn’t build society; it destroys it. Understanding is what constructively builds society.

“Today’s elite seem to reward meandering. Repeating themes run through Nobel awards—PoCo cultural clash, superficiality, linguistics, history, values, class dignity, literary theory, and

imagery. The Nobel Literature Prize committee seems to prefer and reward imagery in their selections, but what about reality? As a result, today there seems to be more fantasy in real life than real life in real life: the frame, the narrative, and the selective recollection of facts. Build the fantasy, force it on others, and if you don’t like my fantasy, I’m offended, and I’ll make that a crime.”

“What are you criticizing?”

“Novels have played the important part of educating the masses not by their logic, but by their emotions. The characters feel through their compressed lives the consequences of events and decisions. Characters don’t so much project into the future as they have, in 300 pages, a lifetime of future compressed upon them. Non-readers cheat themselves of lifetimes of experience compressed into books. They lack the tools to reach beyond themselves and rationalize they lose nothing for it. Feeling the experience of others, readers live an injection of life lessons as entertainment. For many readers novels bypass mental mechanisms of logic.

“Look at 100 years of award-winning novels. Too many held up as excellent have been praised for style rather than content. It would be pivotally important if we could recalibrate. A novel should be more than a pass time.”

“What else should it do? Not every piece of literature needs significance. Dickens was entertainment—the *90210* or *Dallas* of its time.”

“Henry James would have said that the novel has always served a moral purpose. How vague. Good guys win and bad guys lose? Moral instruction? Aristotelian poetic justice? Rewarding virtue and punishing vice is not instructive. Correlation is not causation. It is the moral equivalent of the cartoon character who pulls back the speedometer dial to slow the speeding train.”

“Not every novel rewards virtue. Thomas Hardy certainly didn’t.”

“Character shouldn’t have to be a silent subtext in a novel. It’s an artistic affectation to expect the reader to work hard for an

insight for it to be valued. A book can leave you hanging, but hanging shouldn't be an excuse for an absence of understanding.

"Henry James believed the novel had an ability to expand perception. In an effort to do so, he developed the stream-of-consciousness style. In *The Art of Fiction* James said that the moral sense and the artistic sense lie close together because '... the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer.' Never does James address the question of what the moral sense is. To James, as an artist, 'perception and sensitivity to experience' take precedence over morality.

"Meanwhile, Joseph Conrad's Marlowe is ambivalent about history and morality. Marlowe said Jim was not clear to him, as we are not clear to ourselves. Both James and Conrad put the reader in the action, full participants in uncertainty and subjectivity that for us came to a head after World War II. Conrad, after the Congo, turned away from the idea of idealism. Some 50 years later after World War II, absent an absolute framework, existentialists had no idealism they could turn away from. They were in no position to see clearly culture or personality they called character.

"Understanding character is different than understanding human nature. James and Woolf urge understanding human nature but they do nothing to explain what to do about it.

"Conrad's Colonel Kurtz was an educated man with refined values, but hollow character. 'He had something to say.' 'He had judged.' 'The horror.' Conrad's Marlowe says Kurtz had gone mad, but he did not nail down why. Conrad may encourage self-knowledge, but he encouraged readers toward self-knowledge without providing a compass. His readers wandered in the wilderness for another century. Conrad challenged idealistic colonization, but succeeding writers have yet to do more. Literature is always pitched as a way to understand people better, yet books frequently present a high school sophomore's understanding of human nature."

"Literature gives you the leeway to come to your own conclusion. It's not necessary that the author unravels everything that should be taken from reading it. In *Turn of the*

Screw, Henry James wants the reader to think of different outcomes."

"But suppose Henry James didn't have an answer, much less *the* answer? Suppose it's only effete pseudo-intellectuals who presume he knew where he was going but didn't say? Suppose many authors are like pretend artists who pile some crap together with a supercilious attitude and dare you to claim there is no art in it to be found? Suppose the emperor has no clothes? Suppose that in this house of cards there are rooms for each of the subjects in the curriculum, rooms for educationists, politicians, and do-gooders.

"My concern for literature is not that every book needs some moral thread or needs to advocate for society, but some do, and if schools overlook the need to draw those threads together, if politics does not advocate for those threads, along with families, and churches, we must remember that Lady Fortune does not care."

8 PM - 1980s On empires and language

“What of the 1980s?”

“That was the decade when the equation changed even if people didn’t know it yet. Ronald Reagan warned of evil empires, Gorbachev pursued *glasnost*, and Pink Floyd’s *We don’t need no education*, from *The Wall* was banned by South Africa’s apartheid government. Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu registered typewriters only to be hounded from power and executed. An Orwellian smash of Big Brother’s TV screen debuted the Apple Macintosh in 1984, and, in Orwellian irony, that was the year personal computers partnered with Ethernet networking to become practical in newspapers. An unrecognized pivot point in history, those networked personal computers began to undermine the control empires could hold on individuals. It was as if having read *1984*, people were repelled and vowed to defend against it.”

“What made the difference?”

“As internal networking developed, IBM discovered it had to make a hard choice: either control internal network content or liberate the economic creativity that networking allowed. A networked organism could have control or creativity, but not both. In IBM’s case, they decided to favor creativity that fostered economic development. Countries behind the iron curtain faced the same dilemma. To network to compete against Reagan’s economically powered arms race risked losing control.”

“So collapse was likely.”

“Sooner or later. Tightly controlled communications reveal that efficiency is a false façade within empires. Centralized inefficiency throttles the ability to cope. The Great Wall of China was either a remarkable human achievement of central government to protect citizens or a squandering of millions of

man-hours of human capital that might otherwise have been unleashed to challenge the marauding hordes and improve quality of life.

“Competition managed with a light hand sets individuals free to maximize wealth. Competition, like science, prunes that which is unproductive and the extra wealth that is generated opens options that otherwise might not be available. Dutch dikes were built through government coordination, but privately created wealth allowed the option. A strong check on centralization is required to assure government is not hijacked to build a great wall or to charge after the next trendy political pet rock.”

“But with the collapse of the superpower standoff, didn’t you wonder if, without a countervailing force, having a single surviving superpower would be dangerous to the independence of others?”

“That question was put to rest by Harry Truman and the Marshall Plan, when Americans did not colonize Japan or Germany but lifted them from rubble to individual, economic, political, and national independence.”

“Do you think America is misunderstood?”

“Both at home and abroad.”

“How so?”

“America is different from the scores of empires throughout history that yearned to rule the four corners of the world: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, China, Greece, Rome, the Mongols, the Ottomans, Spain, France, England, France again, England again, Germany, Japan, Russia, and China yet again. Empire is dominion of area not your own.

“America did expand across the frontier two hundred years ago, like any empire, but one cannot be held hostage to history, and should only learn from it. The mature America became a reluctant empire. It did not start World War I to expand empire, but entered the war to face down countries that did. It did not start World War II to expand empire, but entered the war to face down those who did. Since then, it has reluctantly entered to oppose expansionism and to fill political vacuums an inadequate

United Nations has never stepped in to fill. Once the wars were over, Americans retreated to their traditional boundaries, asking, as Colin Powell reminded former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey at Davos, Switzerland, in the 20th century, when America has risked all to defeat abusive power, we have asked for nothing except enough ground to bury our dead, and returned home to seek our own lives in peace.

“America transitioned from an empire that projected dominion over area, to an empire that projected ideas worth living that others could decide for themselves to value. Those who protest America’s so-called lust for empire should reassess their shallow understanding of history.

“War is misunderstood, so people toy with it. War can be more fearsome than frequently realized because participants have the option to set aside morality to fight using any weapon. That is a lesson for everyone. ‘No rules’ is a nasty place to be. I am a pacifist for good reason because I, with other pacifists and good generals, understand honestly what war is. So do all who have ever fought one. In war consequences are uncertain. That is the point of *Apocalypse Now*. We defeated ourselves in war in Vietnam because we didn’t understand, while some of our enemies did, the willingness to set aside principles. We have to encourage the kind of thoughtfulness that will make war an anachronism. We have to be willing to resort to no rules, but to choose, for now not to do so. That is the encouragement to join a durable and effective process of problem resolution.”

“Why has American empire been different?”

“Look at the rise and fall of empires. Command authority was typically religion. Empires of faith ruled in early Rome from the first century BC to the second century AD with Jupiter and the Caesars. The Holy Roman Empire followed with Christianity, Islam ruled in the Middle East, Catholic Christianity in Spain, up until the 1700s and the Age of Enlightenment. Even succeeding empires like the Soviet Union and China have been secularly religious.”

“Absent religion, what is an effective substitute for ordering dealings with others?”

“Not democracy.”

“Why not?”

“Democracy is often assumed to be a principle, but it is more a tool like a screwdriver or pliers. It is a process, not a goal. ‘Let’s bring democracy to the world’ is as much a prescription for disaster as demanding autocracy or oligarchy. Each can be abused.”

“What, then, offers a plausible, safer future?”

“Nothing so dramatic as a cry for freedom that has fizzled more than once. The French Revolution ostensibly valued liberty, equality, and fraternity. Their Declaration of the Rights of Man called for all to be free and equal. But along the way everything old and useful was jettisoned costing them the good lessons of history. Much earlier, Augustus gave Romans the appearance of freedom. Personally, and economically, citizens were given great latitude, but not at the political level. Augustus believed that Romans were no longer worthy of a republic, and that proved to be the case.”

“What if I don’t want freedom? What if I don’t want the uncertainty of a market economy?”

“Freedom has never been a driving force for society. Complacent populations who prefer order and security have regularly rejected freedom. Successful empires in over the last centuries show people would gratefully trade freedom for security. They have not learned to fear the consequences, or are afraid of future insecurity. It’s understandable to want not to have to work and to be taken care of regardless. It’s reasonable to want to avoid dirty jobs if that’s all that are left to be done. If ‘Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ aren’t really your style, it’s not freedom you would forgo, but responsibility. You don’t care to take responsibility for your own life, because you don’t want to face that you might fail. Afraid for the future, you don’t trust yourself to compete and call your own fear ‘compassion for others.’ For your security, which freedom would you sacrifice?”

“There are more than one?”

"I have already mentioned four enumerated by Prof. Rufus Fears: individual freedom where others are tolerant of behavior, economic freedom to own what you earn, political freedom to select your type of government and governors, and national freedom to live independently of foreign rulers. But consider two reasons why order and security aren't worth the price of lost freedom. Dreams for order and security never match reality. Those dreams are appeals by the power elite who would game the system for themselves. Look at bad behavior swept under the rugs day after day by politicians who turn a blind eye to their own misbehavior yet who would punish you for the same indiscretions. Perhaps the highest quality of life ever enjoyed was that of Roman citizens 2000 years ago. They traded away their political and national freedom for individual and economic freedom. They gave up responsibility to choose their government and to defend their empire for the freedom to trade and choose their own lifestyle—and lost it all to greed and bad governance."

"You said there were two?"

"The second reason for freedom is your quality of life. In America, the least of us enjoy a standard of living of which others around the world can only dream. Natural resources or empire are not the reason, but a market economy that allows inventiveness and dynamic corrections by individuals."

"Then freedom is a sound and worthwhile principle?"

"I don't call it a principle. People need freedom, but they don't want it. They need free and unfettered communication with feedback loops so that what is said can be checked by any individual who cares to do so."

"What kind of freedom matters?"

"The freedom that matters was described by Justice Hugo L. Black in *Times v. Sullivan* in 1964, 'An unconditional right to say what one pleases about public affairs is what I consider to be the minimum guarantee of the First Amendment.' If you are afraid of speech, you do not trust people. If you do not trust anyone but yourself, then we have no reason to trust you either."

"But free speech is a modern creation."

"Socrates' *Apology*, by Plato, was a test of free speech. Beyond that, it asked the question who has the right to teach students, and that is the real question—who governs. Socrates pitted philosophy against the poets. Oracular and committed to feelings, poets stood for fiction and legend. Their virtues were the warlike qualities that Socrates opposed. Socrates represented a claim staked in favor of a wholesale transition in how to think and how to govern—a claim as yet unresolved. How to govern addresses whether people can exchange ideas and goods with simple contracts that assure the transactions and a process of peaceful problem resolution. It is not freedom that we would wish for others in the world, but the opportunity for individuality. Freedom is the result of individuality, not individuality the result of freedom. The rest is incidental. It is the freedom to laugh at abuse of power so that others might recognize it and laugh with you until that abuse can get no traction."

"History shows centralization is a powerful force. It's easy to call for liberty but can one person make a difference to assure it?"

"You don't have a choice. You are all you have to work with."

"I mean that question seriously."

"What is at risk if we don't try? If the individual does not matter, there is no reason for the individual to do anything except rust. We don't do our best to develop skills to strengthen individuals."

"Show me."

"Now, you don't have to be an ass about it, but every 'like' used as a useless placeholder in a sentence is rust. Every poorly constructed syllogism increases entropy. At the newspaper I take every opportunity to correct malformed speech that should never have survived high school. Corrections have become so commonplace that they expect it from me, and I can't not do it."

"Why are so many remediations necessary?"

"It's more than casualness, or misunderstanding. For too large a segment of a generation of credentialed teachers, clear language has lost its importance. They don't know what they should value

or why, and just as likely, neither did their teachers. Those teachers were students who grew up in the 1980s, a cosseted generation protected from fear. The economy was improving from the 1970 Jimmy Carter years. They no longer feared the bomb because a rusting Soviet Union had imploded. That's when Jacob Bronowski, Lecturing at MIT in 1985, warned people to shoulder the load themselves and not to accept an expert's title or costume as the measure of the idea. *Magic, Science, and Civilization* advised against taking scientists, politicians, or preachers as gospel at face value."

"What do we need to understand to make this work?"

"Francis Bacon said, 'Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.' People who are not readers have less of a chance of becoming thinkers. The power of the mind requires language and the precise choice of words—'full,' 'ready,' and 'exact.' Exact language and expression represent an exact thought, although linguists raise doubts that thought can be accurately transferred to others. Nevertheless, we do the best we can. Language is inextricably intertwined with thought, and *visa versa*. When we read we exercise the mind. When we write we carefully weigh one word against a different one. I fear that subtle distinctions are learned more by chance today in schools. When we teach someone to write, we give that person the power to lift intellectual weights. When we were in school, we wrote because teachers made us write, not because we understood that we were strengthening our ability to discern. Purpose was not made clear. I was fortunate. I was one of the last students at a time when people honestly taught reading and writing.

"In *Less Than Words Can Say*, Richard Mitchell wrote, 'Many of my students seem unable to express themselves in any language whatsoever. They aren't utterly mute, of course. They can say something about the weather. And give instructions about how to get to the post office. They are able to recite numerous slogans, especially from television commercials, and the lyrics of popular songs and recent—very recent—political campaigns. They are able to read traffic signs and many billboards and even some

newspapers. They can claim certain emotions with regard to various teams and even individual athletes whose names they often know. They can spin more or less predictable reveries about the past, or the future, either in very simple concrete terms or in sentimental banalities or both. But they cannot pursue a process. They cannot say why evidence leads to a conclusion. They cannot find examples for analogies. They have never even heard of analogies. People in that condition don't think of themselves as being in that condition because they don't THINK of themselves. They honestly don't think at all.'

"That's frightening."

"There have been pivotal times across history when experience lets us synthesize a more useful form of thinking; where inconsistency, conflict, misdirection like rumples in a blanket can be shaken flat again for a time. Mitchell warns how rumpled the blanket is. Multiple Eskimo words for "snow" have discrete and perhaps lifesaving meanings that multiple ghetto English synonyms for money do not. Mitchell argues that to know a language is not enough any more than being able to wiggle your fingers is enough to make you a pianist. 'The aim of education is to make those rudimentary skills into the medium of thought.' He argues for more sophisticated literacy than mere ability to do some reading and some writing.

"Ignorance of the essential nature of language—that language is essential for thought—jeopardizes our future. Mitchell issues a warning, 'Everyone who has succeeded in learning a foreign language has come to 'think' in that language.... Now it seems that there are millions of Americans who can't even think in English. How is it with them? Do they plan, or do they merely fantasize? Do they solve problems or do they merely rummage around for a suitable slogan? Are they the people Socrates had in mind in thinking about the unexamined life that wasn't worth living? Can they examine life? People in that condition don't think of themselves as being in that condition because they don't think of themselves—they don't think at all.'

"What makes the problem so immediate?"

“Bronowski explained that the more that one learns to bend the strength of nature to personal will, the more we have to depend upon *good* will and not isolation to protect ourselves. Where previously we could use an iron bolt to protect our door, now that people are learning to master nature by learning to obey her, an iron bolt is no longer sufficient and a strong box will no longer protect our gold. Powerful weapons threaten both safety and security. My generation that saw Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos* should have learned that violence could succeed. As the city of Alexandria was ransacked and burned centuries ago, an irreplaceable library of knowledge was lost. It took 1400 years to regain some of the knowledge. On the next go around, we may not have any chance to recover.”

“How can we change?”

“For the first time in history we may be prepared to understand that common sense, or thoughtfulness, may be able to be taught. Well, not taught, because one seldom teaches anybody anything. More likely it is ‘caught.’ One of the premises of Julian Jaynes’ *Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, is that, thought—our common sense—is an acquired trait, more likely caught than the result of our best efforts teaching. Good teachers set up obstacles in the path they see people likely to take. Stumbling over them, they discover for themselves wisdom worth knowing. Douglas Hofstadter, in *Gödel, Escher and Bach* gave some symbols to use to help teach people common sense. Balance. Perspective. Understanding. The future is up to you.

“Do we have enough time?”

“Time is another single word with so many meanings easily confused or easily abused. One can be oblivious to it, or one can become transfixed by it. Wittgenstein said that if you consider eternity to mean, not all time, but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. If you can put time on a shelf, say for the duration of a party, or play, that is not ignorance of time, but being judicious in its use. Still others live their life transfixed as if they must always look back in the mirror and ask ‘How am I doing?’ Some people look at time vertically, while others look at it horizontally.”

“That makes no sense to me.”

“The dynamics of time escape many people at our business. A problem comes up and they solve it and they continue, satisfied they have done their job, convinced they care about our customers. People have been trained all their lives to analyze from snapshots. If time marches along on the horizontal, a snapshot would be a vertical instantaneous slice of time. That’s how students study the Newtonian physics of a ball bearing dropping under the influence of gravity.

“If we run a replacement for an ad that ran the wrong day, or to correct a typographical error, staff often presumes the problem has been solved.”

“We did, didn’t we?”

“That instance of the problem was solved, but the process that allowed the problem in the first place is still operational to allow another instance of the problem to occur in the future.”

“Is this a big problem?”

“While news media aren’t always correct, a mistake doesn’t invalidate them as a source so long as they are committed to a process to become correct. Commitment to process does not come easily to generations schooled on static, Newtonian snapshots or fact-oriented curricula. People haven’t the habit to think dynamically and often fight the metaphor. If you sight along time, as if it were a strip of motion picture film held out in front of you horizontally, one frame of the film—one shot—would be like a single vertical slice. Schools more often teach as if students live in a static Newtonian universe. Process is less significant as a tool to better your life than for your parents who grew up in an environment that made them more sensitive to time and their place in it.”

“How so?”

“Back then, grandparents lived their senior years under the care of their children. Back on the farm, they cared for the children while the able-bodied worked the fields. Grandma in the house used to be the repository of lessons about time.

“The literature of the 1980s was often preoccupied with chronology rather than time. In 1981, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* told a rigid chronology of Saleem Sinai, born at midnight on August 15, 1947, the moment of India’s independence from England. He synthesized mythology, Disney movies, and the tradition of many previous novelists. *Satanic Verses*, followed, describing the struggle to put together lives shattered by cultural clash, migration, and change in a world where reality seems relative and fragile, and religious faith and revelation can be politically manipulated.

“Even literature used to carry the lesson. Stendhal, when he wrote *Charterhouse of Parma* shortly after 1800 transformed the sense of time in the novel, carrying it over several generations. Tolstoy followed suit shortly thereafter. But now, we live in a generation of time bigots.”

“Time bigots?”

“Yes. They hold previous generations to their own standards oblivious to the march of time and experience between then and now. What is the difference between Joseph Conrad’s recognition of colonial boundaries, PoCo author Chinua Achebe’s 1975 criticism of Conrad’s unrecognized boundaries and recognition that Achebe and Conrad do not see the boundaries of society clearly? Who is the bigot? We should celebrate those who, limited by their culture, were deserving of respect for their time. Similarly, I am humble in my own limitations, and must get out of bed tomorrow.”

“Seneca said, ‘What really ruins our characters is the fact that none of us looks back over his life. We think about what we are going to do, and only rarely of that, and fail to think about what we have done, yet any plans for the future are dependent on the past.’ Absent a sense of history and their own place in it, yesterday happened today and tomorrow will never come. Yes, for this generation of time bigots, history begins at dawn.”

“The young—not the very young, but those in their prime—recoil at their elders. They are as bigoted as any. Their ‘I’m hot!’ overlooks that all too soon they will be ‘Not!’—unprepared to face their wrinkles and grow old gracefully.

“Time and your place in it is another golden thread of wisdom that many great thinkers have addressed throughout history. Where in the school curriculum or the state education standards that it is addressed?”

“I don’t know.”

“And—he says with loving respect—don’t know enough to care.”

9 PM - 1990s On a long march through the culture

“Election Night seems as good a reason as any to have a party so don’t complain.”

“Complain? I like parties. I admit, I am preoccupied with the election—and not the battle between the candidates, but on how others can willfully ignore the metaphorical spirits past, present, and future that hover around. Which is more fascinating, the ghosts themselves, or people ill-tuned to see them?”

“I’m just asking you to behave.”

“As if I ever misbehave. I tend to react, not instigate. Even then, I’ll question someone to understand them better.”

“Rubbish! You want them to understand themselves better; which they rarely dare.”

“Finding solid resistance, I usually back away, gracefully. In most instances it won’t make a difference and there is no need to hurt anyone. Even so, that limited discussion is worthwhile for me because I learn to reframe ideas to make them more accessible to others. While the ideas, themselves, aren’t difficult, it is tough to frame them in such a way to make them more obviously worth embracing as one’s own.”

“Why are you so interested in selling your ideas?”

“They aren’t my ideas, they are ideas others developed worth consideration because they have value.”

“A quibble.”

“But an important distinction. Take Dorothy Sayers, for instance.”

“Sayers, the mystery writer? I saw her *Nine Tailors* Lord Peter Wimsey series on public television.”

“Wonderful mysteries. Educated at Oxford, when it was unusual

for women to study there, she studied medieval education and religion.”

“What has she to do with ideas of value?”

“Can you list the handful of cataclysmic changes in information technology that have changed the world in the last thousand years?”

“Gutenberg’s moveable type printing press in the 1400s . . .”

“And one you might not guess—the introduction of coffee houses and public salons from 1650 to 1750.”

“Morse’s code and telegraph in the 1840s and the Linotype machine in the 1890s.”

“The Associated Press started because of Morse, and the Linotype made typesetting books and magazines affordable for the masses.”

“Radio and motion pictures in the 1920s, television in the 1950s caused dramatic changes in the access to information.”

“Certain ideas increased value because access to information changed.”

“Who knew you could sweep your arms across so many centuries!”

“Laugh if you want, but it’s useful to see threads of significance across time. In 1993 Tim Berners-Lee released a paper defining the Internet World Wide Web. Berners-Lee popularized hyperlinks earlier advocated by Ted Nelson in the 1970s for the Department of Defense military and academic ARPANET network.

“Each step accelerated social networking. Gutenberg’s printed books helped Sir Thomas More. Both technologies accelerated communications in unsettling and untrustworthy ways. Writing for the Internet of his age, More authored *Utopia*, a light-hearted romp across social conventions. Each succeeding innovation has brought us ‘closer’ to each other, figuratively—increased the bandwidth, speed, and facility of interaction. While the word ‘web’ like a spider’s web offers a striking visual image, the more

accurate mathematical term for inter-connected nodes is 'graph.' Each node in a graph represents a person and each line—called an edge—represents a possible connection to another person. A message from one node to another is part of a feedback loop. Feedback loops can be either constructive or destructive. Naturally slow interaction has insulated us from being overpowered by destructive information—from other people inserting themselves negatively into our lives.”

“And what of Dorothy Sayers?”

“She gave a lecture at Oxford in 1948 called *The Lost Tools of Learning*, before television became popular and well before the Internet. She warned how unprepared we were to defend against the onslaught of information: ‘For we let our young men and women go out unarmed, in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects.’”

“I believe in literacy. Teaching literacy makes progress.”

“Literacy as a tool is a start. Tools demand you know how to use them wisely and well. It’s dangerous to learn to operate a car’s accelerator without learning to apply the brake. I’ll bet students in your class—all of them readers who score well on the English Language Standards tests required to graduate—can’t recognize a logical fallacy when they read one, can’t list any of the four dozen I know, and can’t even define logical fallacy like a bogus dilemma or *argumentum ad hominem*.”

“Probably not.”

“Students in the Middle Ages were practiced at it. Sayers wrote, ‘We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda

with a smattering of ‘subjects’; and when whole classes and whole nations become hypnotized by the arts of the spell binder, we have the impudence to be astonished. We dole out lip-service to the importance of education—lip-service and, just occasionally, a little grant of money; we postpone the school-leaving age, and plan to build bigger and better schools; the teachers slave conscientiously in and out of school hours; and yet, as I believe, all this devoted effort is largely frustrated, because we have lost the tools of learning, and in their absence can only make a botched and piecemeal job of it.”

“She didn’t pull any punches.”

“She was blunt, like Napoleon who spoke of having an iron fist inside a velvet glove. She was right, and she was ignored both then and now. As the gravity of circumstance increases one needs to peel off as many layers of softness as is necessary to get someone’s attention. The Internet represented the complete penetration of media into culture with people unprepared to defend against it. That allowed rust to eat further into the politics of the day because journalism failed to hold people accountable.”

“Whoa, boy! You’re running a little too fast for me there.

“Okay, small bites. If there was one phrase in the 1990s that measured the decade it would be from Bill Clinton, during his sworn testimony, trying to avoid presidential impeachment, ‘It depends on what the meaning of “is” is.’ That’s waffling on the order of Richard Nixon’s press secretary, Ron Ziegler, who famously declared in 1972 that his previous statements to the press were ‘inoperative’. Ziegler meant, ‘I lied.’ Accuracy and precision matter in language because that’s what you depend on to plan your future.

“Long ago in college I clipped together a list of words in my college dorm that I called a ‘Graveyard of Misspent Words.’ On the list were liberal, conservative, gay, right, left. Today I’d add divisive, and neo- anything. Each word represents a loss to the language. Today they call it ‘nuance.’ It’s not evolution; it’s cheating the people of distinctions they deserve.

“Richard Mitchell explained the difference between the many words Eskimos use for ‘snow’ and the many words ghetto youth might use for ‘money’. A life many hang on distinguishing one kind of snow from another, but calling money ‘bread’ or some other pseudo-distinction only distinguishes class and family without contributing to clarity or understanding.”

“So language matters and it is in trouble.”

“Pronouncements that sound beguiling at first blush may have been crafted to sneak by you in an unguarded moment. Prof. John Bowers teaches that the first sentence in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* asserts, ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.’ Dr. Samuel Johnson would have proposed such a dramatic statement at his chop house dinner, sweeping the air with his fork, and yet, the converse is more likely to be true—that a woman of Austen’s day was more likely to be in want of a single man in possession of a good fortune. Premises, warrants, evidence, and conclusions are tools that can be used to come to understanding but that are more often used to bludgeon you into submission. Language does matter. Author William Gass said we use words to club the living into food.”

“So we have to defend ourselves against misuse of language.”

“The game today is to assassinate people with words and confuse others along the way.

“If people knew how language limits thought they would respect it more. Socrates was chained to ancient Greek. It limited his brilliance. I can stand on Socrates shoulders because I can make more subtle distinctions than he could. For Socrates, *polis* meant ‘city’ and ‘culture’ and ‘society’. Absent different words to distinguish them, it was hard, if not impossible, for Socrates to distinguish between the three.

“Language is also a vehicle we use to convey trust. Remember the famous photograph near the end of World War II of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Josef Stalin at Yalta?”

“I’ve seen it before.”

“In 1993, the New York *Times* ran the photograph but in place of Josef Stalin sitting at the right end of the couch the photograph had been digitally altered to show Groucho Marx in his place. Sylvester Stallone was inserted behind Sir Winston. That early equivalent of *photoshopping* was to make the point that because of technology, photos could no longer be trusted. The *Times* entirely missed the point. Words have always been able to be altered, and pictures more rudimentarily for more than a hundred years. Since the written word was first offered to others as news, the only thing newspapers have to sell is trust.”

“The 1990s were a piece of work.”

“In the 1990s, journalism was deteriorating by the day. And as the political class became more skilled at learning how to take advantage of the weaknesses, as they manipulated without being called to account for it, they became more brazenly willing to do it.

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama re-minted from old coin the phrase ‘History is dead’, drawing from a Karl Marx reference to Hegel. Fukuyama meant not that events wouldn’t continue, but that since liberal democracy was likely to prevail over other forms of government, the race was all but over. Fukuyama later reconsidered the observation, but too late—you cannot keep a profoundly meaningless cliché down.

“Pundits and prophets of incredible lightness in the 1990s, quickly pronounced the end of ideology, the end of differences, because, for them, history begins at dawn. Nor would they have reason to believe otherwise because national media seldom recall for the reader the substance of issues or their parallels. It would be nine long years before when 9/11 reality kicked their hubris in the teeth.”

“The politics of the time was absurd.”

“Yes, as if rhetoric became the enemy. Rhetoric is the enemy because rhetoric exposes rhetorical ploys, which reveal that rhetoric should not be trusted, which means, therefore, rhetoric is the enemy.”

"It's the absence of rhetoric that becomes the enemy—an inability to parse that politicians promised what they could not deliver because they knew it was what you wanted to hear, and knew the press was compliant."

"History requires vigilance by the press. Well-meaning do-gooders and villains are revisionist at heart. Similarly, great literature repeatedly has been stifled by the kind of political correctness that continues today and that dare not acknowledge the villainy of its methods."

"Even politics gets revised."

"Socrates believed of politics was the art of people coming to a collective understanding about what should be done. Politics has become, for the political class today, the selfish habit of trying to get their way by any means. Absent yesterday or tomorrow, political classes are stuck in time. Their horizons are so short, seeing only today. Bad choices lead to dreadful consequences and best efforts to change things for the short term too often complicate things tomorrow."

"Why don't people see what is happening?"

"Politically correctness is low intensity warfare. When progressives attempt to redefine the word conservative as a pejorative they are as venal as those who would corrupt the word marriage to mean civil union. Corrupting political language is an attempt to shape the battlefield before the battle. Networks proffer street soldiers in that battle like David Gergen and David Brooks whose positions often don't match their label."

"Politically correct suppressionists try to police words. Restricting words to what they believe proper undercuts society. On the other side, subversionists undermine the freedom to say what one pleases by introducing noise to block out opposing messages. Both are anti-social. What is one to do? Suppressionists are difficult to stop without subverting the system and subversionists are hard to stop without suppression. The plausible alternative is to superimpose real education on top of current schooling so it nudges students to think, inoculating them to recognize the misbehavior of both."

"Is it war?"

"Most definitely. Within hours after a political incident becomes public, trolls magically appear, commenting on blogs on the Internet, always with a specific agenda, often with a select string of words that appear uniformly and repeatedly. Always on schedule. It's Astroturf. It's noise. It's planted. It's meant to undermine democracy, not contribute to it. Those on the blog often wish the intruding noise makers spent their idle time trying to learn something."

"What can you do about it?"

"We bring out the *pistolas* to figuratively shoot anyone who feeds the trolls. Blog regulars chew 'em up and spit 'em out. Trolls who appear repeatedly get added to our trollblocking software to scrub away the spew that interferes with constructive blog entries, but the plaque remains on the blog to obscure substance from any innocent that happens along, now or in the future."

"What should one think of anyone who makes it his business to insert plaque into the conversational stream of the Internet? What should one think of a candidate who embraces such tactics? They belong in the overcrowded tenth ditch of Dante's eighth circle of hell, with the falsifiers of metals, persons, coins and words."

"How gullible are people?"

"The naïve have been hijacked but are susceptible to it. A naïve will join any chain gain when promised his prison will have a new name."

"Here . . . Let me open the door for you."

"Thanks."

. . .

" . . . Big business is the problem."

"Tell me, what percentage of business is big business?"

"I don't know exactly, but it has to be a lot."

"Only two percent of businesses have more than 100 employees. Why tar all business for the perceived sins of so few."

"Let me rephrase that, then. Faceless corporations are the problem."

"Corporations have faces."

"You know what I mean."

"Yes, but you don't know what you mean."

"They are faceless. Impersonal."

"I represent a corporation. You know my face. I care about every person who works for me, all my customers, and the community."

"But the big ones . . ."

". . . are the ones that the political classes invoke to push your buttons to steal your vote. Most businesses represent opportunity, initiative, and economy. Most corporations like ours, work to serve customers, employees, and shareholders, and struggle against political gamesmanship that would play you like a flute."

"That's unfair."

"If it were not the case it would be unfair, but you are being played and either don't recognize it or don't care. If the political class wanted to raise corporate taxes, you'd support it, but the dollar to pay that tax keeps a dollar from being distributed to employees, to shareholders, or to customers through lower prices. You pay that tax, one way or another. Like a mosquito, the political class has stuck its proboscis into your wallet, injected some numbing words to keep you from noticing that it is busily sucking you dry."

"Government represents a bigger problem than big business. Government is usually the enabling partner in collusion. If you would criticize big business, criticize its enablers. The enablers extend regulatory tentacles into every corner of your life, all, they claim, for your own good. If private business has become public by virtue of its regulation, like childcare has, where you can't care for your neighbors children until the school bus comes, how can everything that happens elsewhere be off limits?"

"Then I should oppose big government?"

"Actually, you should be wary of voters. When good people haven't a clue, they become gullible enablers of contemporary over-government that shows little, if any, respect for citizens. The power class would rather control away jobs and then steal to pay people to be idle and, as a nanny state, keep the dependent under their power."

"Nanny state?"

"The state becomes an enabler of misbehavior. When our business holds job interviews, the pool of potential workers is polluted with prima donnas, job-hoppers, victims, the conceited, liars, druggies, thieves, the self-infatuated, all looking for a free lunch. Damaged goods like that make up a pool of potential voters that venal politicians can manipulate, dangling that lunch before them."

"You don't trust voters?"

"Not all voters. I don't trust those who don't know how to think and don't know how to behave. They get upset at lack of success. When an obstacle appears, blame others. That makes it difficult for one to develop talents. Undeveloped talents set one up for another failure. That leads one to get upset at lack of success."

"That's getting in your own way."

"The dregs in the pool of unemployed have little incentive to improve if the state manages them like livestock. They have no reason to try when they have taxpayer pocketbooks to fall back on."

"I hear it all the time, 'Why should I try in school? I'll always be able to fall back on you and get welfare.' So why should I bust my buns at school and why should I try?"

"I have absolutely no reason for you to try . . ."

"I didn't think so."

". . . you have to find that reason for yourself. Society is put at risk when victimhood seems profitable for those called victims and for those who would use them to enrich themselves with

power and wealth. But the long-term consequence of playing that game robs the economy of energy and cheats everyone of wealth.

"We shall not be rid of racism so long as one can use the history of it as a mantle of personal victimhood where none otherwise would apply. They are willing to misuse it for their own ends."

"We still have racial inequalities in, education, in the economy, and in government."

"Equality? You want delivered what enforced equality has never delivered. You want not just 'a' thumb on the scale of justice, you want *your* thumb on the scale of justice, and *your* thumb is the only true thumb. Shed the robe of victimhood you've wrapped yourself in, because I don't buy it for an instant. You cheer for the Yankees, don't you?"

"Damn straight."

"And you gloat every time they win. You lord it over others?"

"And love every minute of it."

"Well, I hate to break it to you, but you're no athlete, the Yankees never drafted you, and you're not on the team. That, my dear, represents the core flaw of the opportunistic racism you drape yourself in."

"My ancestors were enslaved by your ancestors!"

"You and I live now. Not yesterday, not 1954, and not 1860. You don't get a free ride because, in the lottery of life, your great, great grandfather was enslaved. Don't pull victimhood on me because of your ancestor situation. My ancestors fought for you, and I still do. I don't get a special ticket because my great, great grandfather was drafted to dodge musket balls at Gettysburg to free your ancestors."

"I will not be held hostage to a history I did not cause and cannot change. My responsibility to the past is to learn from it, and I see darned little learning on your part. Too lazy to work out the consequences, satisfied with platitudes instead of principles, you'd rather feel good for a short time and screw your children with unintended consequences."

"What should voters understand, then?"

"Darned few today can recall President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address where he warned voters to beware of the military-industrial complex."

"He was concerned that the military and business could pervert policy in our country."

"That's not a new problem. Adam Smith extracted a valuable wisdom from history: Do not to trust government, groups, or convenient associations of governments or groups. In the abstract, Eisenhower was concerned about collusion between elected officials, government bureaucracy, and outside organizations. In Eisenhower's day, that was the military and business. Today, worse poisonous partnerships put us at risk. While claiming to be autonomous, voluntary organizations receive a substantial amount of funding from the taxpayer via grants and as a result, frequently take positions in terms of public policy that, unsurprisingly, fit in with the fashionable bromides of transnational progressivism, health fascism and too narrow environmentalism."

"Bromides?"

"Bromides were sleeping drafts. A bromide was a cliché used and reused to put you to sleep. Cultural relativism is a bromide. If Jack the Ripper preyed on you, would you defend yourself?"

"Hell, yes."

"I take that to mean you would defend your family, too. How about your neighbor down the street?"

"That's what laws are for, and police."

"Follow the laws of your culture. Suppose Jack comes from a culture that believes that males should take their mates by conquest."

"That's in their land, not mine."

"So if Jack's family and friends emigrate, behave, become citizens, and then change the law, Jack's rules are okay with you?"

"Hell, no!"

"You are not behaving like the cultural relativist you say you are. Equality is another bromide. You believe in equality?"

"Yes"

"Which one: equality of opportunity or equality of result? The only equality you get is the equality to work 40 hours a week to produce goods or services others are willing to pay you for. There is no right to a free lunch, but you are gifted the opportunity for education that may lead to the opportunity for upward mobility. If one does not take to education, it reduces one's opportunity. One has a right to what is earned by one's own hand. No more. No less.

"You want to fight poverty. You see hungry people and demand that government feed them now . . . instead of understanding that your unthinking charitable impulses might be condemning them to handouts forever. A charitable impulse, when faced with hungry people, is to give them some of your money or ask others to give some of theirs. But it isn't charity to compel your neighbor to give his money to your cause."

"But they deserve to be fed."

"I did not say they didn't deserve to be fed. I am concerned about how. There are damned few instances where the world needs you to tell it what to do and a helluva lot more where you should simply behave. Protect yourself where you must, but mostly, teach by example. I am concerned that often your ends justify your means. Who are the new nobility?"

"Business leaders? Hollywood celebrities? The Washington elite?"

"Business leaders may be rich, but they aren't idle. Neither are those in Hollywood. One may argue about the perks. Who doesn't have to work? Who, simply by taking the trouble to be born, does not have to work to get benefits?"

"We are creating a new class of people who, by dint of having been born American, get entitlements."

"They are a new nobility. They don't have to do anything to earn anything. Playing a victim is quite enough."

"Theirs is not a cushy life."

"Food, healthcare. Education. Services. Remember what GDP means? Maximum GDP is when everyone—to the last person—is working to the best of their ability. Are those you are talking about working to the best of their ability? Are they obliged to do anything to the least of their ability? What is the next question?"

"Why are they not?"

"We'll pry you away from the feel-good progressives yet. In 1789, when the French failed to recover from the political class that could not keep France's finances in order, the Third Estate met on the tennis court at Versailles. These were not nobility or clergy, but representatives of commerce, manufacturing, banking, and agriculture—precisely the people who make increases in productivity possible. They created a new political class—a new nobility if you will—who bribed a still newer nobility—freeloaders—that forced working people to carry a greater burden than they should. Is it a bromide or a reasonable expectation that people should work to the best of their ability for the benefits they receive?"

"It's a reasonable expectation."

"People should work. No one should be idle. If there is no work and they are paid to transition, then work while in transition. There is no such thing as a free lunch. You can go all the way back to Socrates to discover why, but Adam Smith said the same thing in 1776. Division of labor can make everyone more productive. Division of labor does not mean that I get to work and you get to work, too. Nor does it mean that either one of us gets complete freedom to do the job we want to do, where we choose to do it. It means we get to apply for the jobs that are available, where they are available, for the pay that the market charges to fill it."

"But that's what we do."

"If, by some chance, you get the job and I don't then I should not get to sit around on the couch, watching soap operas on the

TV, munching bonbons. It means I get to work at the jobs of last resort, to earn welfare pay at the welfare level. That's not the system our elected representatives have set up."

"No. It's not."

"And that, my friend, puts us all at risk. As surely as people who have no liberty yearn for it, and people who have liberty handed to them yearn for a free lunch. Liberty can disappear in an instant when the stomachs that rumble for a free lunch drown out the lessons of those who struggled for liberty and won. The security of a free lunch comes wrapped in chains."

"We don't know much about liberty or freedom. Liberty and freedom are different concepts, as taken for granted and as undefined as gravity. Define gravity for me."

"It's the force that attracts."

"That says what it does, not what it is. We don't know what gravity is, but we take for granted that we do. Liberty used to be a grant from authority. 'You have the liberty to do thus-and-so.' In our case, our Declaration of Independence grants liberties seldom considered by nations before or since: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our Constitution turned government on its head, making it a creation of the governed. Individuals control government."

"Freedom is not a natural law. It's not even one concept. Is freedom individual? Does it allow unfettered political action? Is it the opportunity of a nation to do whatever it wants, unchallenged by other nations?"

"Some award-winning literature of the 1990s meanders with similar drift."

"I'm not buying that without examples."

"Well, A. S. Byatt's 1990 novel *Possession* is quite taken with magic worlds that are . . . ah . . . realistic. It is still Post-modern in style, as if there is a need for more magic in the world we have. We have not sorted out the taxonomy of our own world and Byatt presumes her fantasy to be the means by which we can understand our world better. Rather her work seems like political

science, infatuated with small 't' truths at the expense of what matters."

"Post-colonial literature crept into the limelight in the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient*, was a non-linear narrative in which many cultures are represented, but no society. Things are not as they seem. Expediency is the lens for decision-making. Contact breeds community and events outside one's control change lives. Simplistic interpretations badly skew judgment which leads to unsubstantiated presumptions about western and eastern incompatibility that fall in line with Samuel Huntington's lecture of the same year called *Clash of Civilizations*."

"Huntington, put forward the notion of the clash of civilizations and the belief that cultural and religious identity prompts conflict in the post-Cold War period. Following on from the Greek versus Persian premise of Herodotus, he broadly proposed Western, Eastern or Sinic, Middle Eastern or Islamist (extending into North Africa and Pacific Oceania, Orthodox or Russian, Sub-Saharan African, Hindu, and Japanese. It was so Post-post-colonial an idea that, of course, pseudo-academics acclaimed it."

"One of the games the political class plays to stay in power is to presume conflict with other cultures. In reality, the cultures themselves represent less conflict than exists between the political classes wielding the reins of power *in* each culture."

"You have the skill, but not the will, to recognize both the tactics and what is at risk. You could see what is happening, if you dare. If those in political control respected you, they'd put what they say in context. Only in context can you improve the accuracy of your mental map of reality. But they don't. They want to confuse. They want to use. They want to win. They want to control. There is no morality to power."

" . . . That kind of remark about politics is patently racist, pure and simple."

"You don't do anything to single out genuine bigotry when you accuse everyone who offends you of racism. Samuel Johnson

called politics “the last refuge of scoundrels”, which must make ‘racism’ the next-to-last refuge.”

“There you go quoting the ‘DWEMs’—the dead white European males. Your background made you racist and you don’t even know it.”

“To accuse someone of racism for their reading must be twice as racist because each idea matters, not the make-up of the person who said it.

“Your criticism was racist!”

“Quite. Dissent must be racism. I know you think you mean it, but yours was a superficial observation quite out of context. First of all, if someone calls a candidate a ‘liar’, the basic need is to consider whether the adjective is properly applied. In a recent case, a candidate said that proposed legislation restricted access to health care to illegal immigrants. As a result of the challenge to the candidate’s statement, the Senate moved to close a loophole that would have allowed exactly what the candidate said would not happen. That makes the candidate’s statement wrong at the time he made it.”

“No one should interrupt a candidate’s speech like that.”

“That’s not what you challenged and is a different issue. If that’s your charge, why didn’t you bring it up when previous office holders were booed? If one is going to suggest one have respect for the office even if one doesn’t like the occupant, as Harry Truman corrected General Douglas MacArthur, then your outrage should have been expressed during the past administration.”

“I didn’t think of it.”

“That you didn’t think of it back then would suggest you might be a closet reverse-racist.”

“No!”

“Don’t dismiss that so quickly. Where were you when the last President was called ‘Chimpy’? If such a remark would be called ‘racist’ today—and politically-correct pundits have done so in this campaign—why the double standard before now?”

“I didn’t do it.”

“Worse than tolerate, you didn’t even notice it . . . and if you did, it was only to laugh. Obviously reverse-racism.”

“That’s bull!”

“‘Bull’ is a different subject, but thank you for bringing it up. Perhaps the candidate didn’t lie. There is an essay by philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt called *On Bullshit* in which he suggests that people who bullshit aren’t really lying because, in order to lie, one has to care whether or not what is said is untrue. If truth or falsity is irrelevant to the candidate, then the candidate may not be a liar. He may simply not care.”

“That’s bull *and* racist!”

“. . . and if untruths are said often enough with intent to convince the masses, what is the difference between that and the concept of the ‘Big Lie’ perfected by Joseph Goebbels, the German propaganda chief during World War II.”

“A comparison of the candidate to the Nazis is uncalled for.”

“Again, where were you when comparisons to Nazis were made for the previous administration? Now that’s bull *and* racist *and* a double standard.”

“I would hate to think of you contributing to the calls for the candidate’s assassination, but analogizing to the Nazis carries the clear implication that justified tyrannicide would be welcome.”

“You expend such energy so as not to have to think. To build straw men so you can leap one to the other to avoid dealing with the substance of a legitimate point. In your own head you have a manufactured this fantasy to avoid legitimate consideration of criticism, and you expect me to wear your fable?”

“If you would ‘hate to think’ of me contributing to calls for the candidate’s assassination, then do not suggest it, particularly absent evidence to support the accusation. It’s risible that a legitimate example of bad behavior necessarily implies support for extra-legal activity.”

"It's not appropriate to compare behavior to the Nazis."

"It is appropriate to consider like examples where the evidence supports it. Evidence of political technique used to gain power—the Big Lie repeated often enough to convince the masses—should not be confused with abuse of power after they reached power."

"It's still uncalled for."

"The pattern of this discussion repeats itself uncomfortably. A considered and supported opinion is offered. In reply, a cliché that avoids the initial concern is adopted to oppose it—one that embraces one or another logical fallacy, and, as with most double standards, that is absent consideration of parallels in history."

"What's your point."

"That your opposition is not racism, or your own big lie, or bullshit, but is, more ordinarily, intellectually lazy."

"That's rude!"

"Nonsense. I defended myself against a scurrilous, ill-founded attack. The weapon used was words. I parried the attack with the same weapon and a little more grace. But, I said what I said out of consideration for you. I have a favorite definition of a friend."

"What's that?"

"A friend is someone who, when you make an ass of yourself, realizes it's not a permanent job."

"I'm not sure how to respond to that."

"Lovingly. It's the way I meant it. My judgment in editorials may still prove wrong. I'm open to that. I need to know where. But challenges to editorials have to stand up to the same scrutiny that the editorials have to face, and the arguments you used strike instead at the very heart of society."

"Charges of racism work two ways. They are an appeal that somehow an argument need not be considered on its merits. Second, they are an *ad hominem* attack that claims victimhood deserves a free pass. Such political correctness attempts to shape the verbal battlefield before the fighting starts by defining some

thought out-of-bounds so one need not bother to address the substance of it.

"At the heart of society is the freedom to be able to say something someone else may not wish to hear. That said, the freedom to offend does not imply the necessity to do so. And where do we learn that in school?"

10 PM - 2000s On rust never sleeps

“But what does it matter? Do your concerns really matter?”

“They matter if you can’t trust so-called experts who don’t show their work, and who won’t make you an expert. It might be clearer if you look at it this way. A good portion of our literary canon was lost for a thousand years and not missed. How was it lost? Why was it lost? Why, for so long, did no one know it was lost, or care?”

“I didn’t know it was lost.”

“Discussing the history of our literary canon, Prof. John Bowers reminds us that in 500 A. D. Severinus Boethius wrote about major literary and philosophical tracts by Homer and Aristotle that faded away in Europe and were not rediscovered for a thousand years. If the wisdom had been spread wider, imagine the quality of life that might have been had by the people who lived then had a thousand more years worth of study of those books.”

“We’ll never know.”

“What have we lost over the last 100 years and why might that not be any different? The fog drifts silently in, unnoticed.”

“What about award-winning literature?”

“Awards celebrate those who make all the right moves, not necessarily those worth celebrating. We award ourselves into stupidity and call it excellence. Journalism isn’t any better. Journalism plans to survive whether we live in good times or bad. Absent any real news NPR recently reported as news that hard economic times actually bring more business for some such as cobblers.”

“But what does it matter?”

“We are at a cusp. Today’s children have diverse cultural

experiences that were unavailable to their parents thrust upon them, yet they are seldom equipped with the tools to put those contacts into context. Does liberty matter? Does civilization matter? What kind of freedom are you willing to trade for security? How much of your life do you want the self-obsessed political class deciding for you? What of your country are you proud? Of what principle are you proud? Can you name one? Can you explain why you should be proud? What is important to you? Anything? Are you alive? How do you know?”

“Are you seriously asking all these questions?”

“If you don’t know if I’m serious, you better find out. You better learn enough not to have to take my word for it. You better learn enough because you have put your future and that of your family in the hands of people who care more about themselves than they do about you. If you can’t hear shuck and jive, you are the problem. You are the problem if something is not a lie just because you believe it, if fake but accurate is okay with you, if you are willing to believe anything bad about people with whom you disagree or dislike, if you can’t tell that 800 years of progress since the *Magna Carta* is at risk by smooth-talking fear mongers.

“You are the problem when you can hold two contradictory ideas in your mind simultaneously and accept them both. That behavior is not unusual. Thomas Jefferson could be for slavery and against it at the same time. Orwellian doublethink is most sinister when it seems natural to con yourself into being able to tell deliberate lies, know they are lies, and believe so strongly that because you are you it does not matter so you can discard any inconvenient fact that gets in the way. Deny the elephant in the room and walk around, knowing its location and dimensions to studiously avoid hitting it. To tamper with reality and deny doing so when caught in the act is everyday doublethink. Should you laugh or cry when people lie and then lie about lying because the only failure is to admit that to have been caught?”

“You are the problem when unreason in high places goes unchallenged by the press and then its readers.

“You have to love Washington, where everyone except the power class are held accountable for their actions. Bankrupt the

country? That's okay. Store bribes of cold cash in your refrigerator? A natural mistake. Misstate evidence? Not a problem. Run a gay prostitution ring from your apartment? What creativity. Untaxed homes? Trivial. Mistated income taxes? No consequence. Contributions from loan companies while legislating on an issue? Not an ethics violation."

"For the most part, I don't differentiate between the political parties. It is more useful to disaggregate the kinds of politicians. Some are enablers of poor behavior. Others are high-end looters. Still others are low-end looters. Some . . . no, most . . . are bullshit artists. Others will partner with any coalition, agency, or business to milk others in return for power and money.

"One party is like a younger child, impetuous, easily convinced, slave of passion, demonizing the opposition, empathetic, greedy, game oriented, simplistic, and who believe everyone is like them. The other party at least tried to have principles, if only built on sand, but they have had their own power looters, too.

"Is such decay inevitable? Does Gresham's Law apply? Must the bad drive out the good?"

"When did skeptic become a dirty word even in the world of science? The problem is not new is it."

"Four hundred years ago, unreason in high places lead to Sir Thomas More writing *Utopia*. Bowers warns that More's main character was Raphael Hythloday, a last name that means 'knowing in trifles'. Yet, as More wrote tongue-in-cheek, 'I do not know if there be anywhere to be found a more learned and a better bred young man; for as he a both a very worthy and a very knowing person, so he is so civil to all men, so particularly kind to his friends, and so full of candour and affection, that there is not, perhaps, above one or two anywhere to be found, that is in all respects so perfect a friend: he is extraordinarily modest, there is no artifice in him, and yet no man has more of a prudent simplicity.' In our time similar decay seems inevitable."

"But what does it matter?"

"Currently lingering Post-colonialism in literature is a one-way street. It gives voice to the multicultural views of multicultural

authors. How politically correct! Reminds me that my old college class paraded to defeat a stupid-ass racist incident, and used the occasion to set up a racist house I could not join, and no one seemed to see the hypocrisy.

"I don't have the street cred to be a PoCo author. I can't pass. I can't make character overgeneralizations as racist as others can. I can't focus on trivial truths at the expense of big ones. Great literature can bring important, sound ideas to consciousness. A book doesn't need a special character, much less one with a cultural accent, if it celebrates the ember of a worthwhile idea by blowing sufficient oxygen on it that it bursts into flame.

"In 2005 in *On Beauty*, Zadie Smith borrowed a style from Forster's *Howard's End*, right down to the opening letters. No need to contrive a plot. Find an old one, create some tension, and out come award-winning little-t truths wringing with passion."

"Is contemporary literature moribund?"

"Surprisingly, no. You won't see J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series winning a Nobel Prize for Literature but it obviously has struck a chord with readers throughout the world. It touches on all that we have been talking about—dysfunctional government, journalism that has lost its way, anti-social behavior that goes unrecognized and unchallenged."

"Are you going to call Harry Potter a great book."

"I am not experienced enough to say it is a great book, but it certainly is a useful one. *Potter* can compare to classic epics like *Gilgamesh* that address the significant moral questions of the day. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* Harry faces death and come to terms with it. The book warns of the danger of hubris, because that which the villain does not value he does not take the trouble to comprehend. One character, Professor Lupin, considers Socrates' premise whether dying for a principle is a moral position to take."

"Today, for all the media connectedness, people are incredibly politically naïve. There is a millennial presumption—a casualness wherein some of the brightest people seem to travel at right

angles to reality. But this is not new. Paris before World War II was a haven for the intellectuals of the day. These were the Post-moderns. The last of the realists—the Moderns—had flowered in the 1920s and gone to seed. The writing reflected minds that had gone baroque, creating fawning stylistic excess. They fell in love with ideas at the expense of reality. And when reality struck in the form of a Panzer tank, their ideas acquiesced. The ideas were, literally, unfounded—without foundation. Linguistics, assisted by Wittgenstein, sent Philosophy reeling. Everything became relative. True, some intellectuals fled the onrushing tanks, but more remained and rationalized themselves back into comfort and excess in the shadow of the absurd.

“Fifty years later, the chains they forged rattle in the minds and works of the pseudo-intelligentsia. The presumptuous are special, not because they are smart, but because they are degreed. They presume to themselves special expertise not because they know, but because they know each other. Others are wrong, not because they are wrong, but because the select can find rationalization to discount consideration of them.

“Today’s millennials believe conventional wisdom correct simply because it is popular. Cosseted in their lifestyle, they may be wrong, not know it, not know how to find out, not care, and fight tooth-and-nail to remain that way. The cell phone has supplanted the parent. Support is more often than not provided by peers, not mentors. Problem solving advice comes from a cloud of scores of inexperienced peers in a social network. By all their measures—now-ness, technological connectedness, and talking points—they need nothing more. For them, history begins at dawn.

“Boomers were the first generation with the technology—16mm film, followed by 8mm with sound, video recording, and cell phones—to have the feedback to re-watch themselves. Unfortunately, the technology available to post-Boomer generations X, Y, and Z enables narcissistic superficial reflection, not self-reflection. Comfortable Gen-Xers, young adults in the 1980s, and Gen-Yers of the 1990s, together fostered Gen-Z, the young adults of the 2000s, a zombie generation who, although at

home in a digital world, are unpracticed when it comes to look in a mirror, take criticism, assume responsibility, or easily change.”

“In the absence of substance, style is entertainment. Hollywood is an act. Hollywood is the entertaining substitute. Actor and activist George Clooney’s fantasy is his reality. Comfortable in his popularity, he can, for instance, believe the blather he says in interviews on Edward R. Murrow, but that is no reason anyone else should be so gullible, and certainly not any journalist. Clooney has proved demonstrably creative about past events, yet, celebrities like him are paraded out by Washington politicians who either think so little of us they would play the fiction for real, or perhaps they believe the crap themselves.

“For Umberto Eco, Post-modernism toys with double irony, with double-coded Easter eggs planted as a tip of the hat to the sophisticated reader—a game of special knowing only the privileged can play. But if these authors and readers are so sophisticated they can play games, why is the scope of what they choose to see so narrow? Interpreting an author need not always leave the reader ambiguous results. Eco believes that the imagined—so prominent in Post-modern literature—and real coexist to reinforce each other, and that the purpose of fiction is to educate us what is the case—a notion of truth we pretend to take seriously. But do we take it seriously, or do we let it take us away from that which is important?”

“Does one have to surrender one’s ‘self’ to the fiction? Does the author? How much must be surrendered and for how long?”

“Eco believes the ethical purpose of fiction is to fix in the mind that events do happen—that things go the way they go. Fiction teaches us about fate and death and about how we can live life, if we so choose. Fictional characters live in a granular world, defined only insofar as it is laid down in the text, but fixed exactly for being laid down in the text.

“To understand granular, look up graph theory. You’ll see information held together by links in a representation that looks something like a jungle gym. Rather than swing from bar to bar,

in a graph you swing from node to node. A dictionary is a graph. Every word is defined by links to other words and no more. A dictionary is granular, too. So it is with our graph-theoretic world. Our mental map of reality is granular. We know what we know about the world and no more. We know things with a degree of probability. We can't know what we can't know. But we can do our best to prune away that which is tested and found wanting, and to hold down purposely injected noise. The Foucaults and Derridas of the world are so transfixed by uncertainty that they busily manufacture concepts—creating new nodes in the graph to define it—but in the end, their world is still granular, and rather than improve insight for the most part their information is also noise of little practical use.

“Eco reminds us that mythical creatures are real insofar as they have impact. When they become cultural habits, he says, they are as real as some Christians might take the Holy Ghost. Readers, for example, can dredge up a character from a book to powerfully label someone a Scrooge.

“In this world you either make your fantasy reality or let others overrun your reality with their fantasy. And if you make your fantasy real, you have a responsibility to discover for yourself the principles that make it stable or you become just another animal in the jungle. Sound ideas have to push back or the world of bad ideas is more likely to come about. You have the obligation to narrate the world you move about in as precisely as possible or risk becoming like astroturfers or Axelturfers, not a liar, but a fraud who recasts the narrative toward that which is demonstrably false.”

11 PM - 2010s On pivot points

"I'm concerned about the newspaper."

"That's good. So am I. But—and this may sound strange—I am less concerned about our newspaper than I am about everything else."

"Like what."

"Like the cataclysmic change in how communities bring dollars into households. Like a school system that produces people who think that everyone else owes them a living. Like teetering businesses that win special treatment simply because they are big and in favor. Like government manufactured to promote lottery by litigation. Like an international situation where it's not that enemies believe that we have left the door unbarred, but rather that no doors exist."

"That's supposed to make me feel good?"

"No, it's supposed to put your worry in context. We are comfortable with becoming an all-electronic newspaper. We are in better shape as a local newspaper than most regional and national newspapers. We have organized ourselves into flexible teams, enabled to recognize problems and solve them. We add value to information creating news at the local level that people are still willing to pay for. We are where we need to be. But what can be done for the rest of society? Today is less a pivot point than a rogue wave, when individual waves from different directions pile one on top of another at the same place and time. Politics, economics, journalism, education, morality, and more wash over us without respite."

"Why do so many willingly embrace the implausible? Why is there such shallow and pretentious intellectualism where who says something matters more than what is said?"

"Comfortably familiar premises remain unexamined—including those about character, ethics and morality. Aristotle's favorite practice was observation. He observed morality in operation, and offered propositions about it, but familiarity doesn't assure validity or universality. History is littered with popular bad ideas. Separate but equal was once popular. Hundreds of millions of people still refuse women equal rights. It's popular to believe Elvis is still alive and that UFOs regularly visit Earth, but such beliefs are not universal or necessarily true."

"So how are we going to get unexamined premises examined? Calls for citizenship training seem to do little good."

"Calls for citizenship tend to come from the American entertainment wing of dilators, from British socialist roots, and from progressives that hijacked John Dewey and who are now represented by the American left."

"But their intentions are good."

"Not necessarily. Underneath their slogans lurks nationalism wrapped in sheep's clothing that seems to promote docility and order for their own benefit. What they call altruism, gussied up in red, white, and blue bunting, presents the worst of collectivism, socialism, and progressivism as if it were the American way, which it never has been. America has always valued 'we, the people,' as individuals, not 'we, the collective' as directed by a privileged political class. Mature individualism is caring, considerate, and communal, armed with checks and balances against the tyranny of the majority."

"What they work towards sounds good."

"But they don't work towards it. The political elite tug on emotions, framed as the need to help others, but that is bait to prey upon the concerned but unwary to further their quest to centralize power. The political class would steal your liberty for a cause they never serve."

"Why would they do that?"

"It works for them."

"No, really. Why would they do that?"

"Because it does work for them. They don't think like you do and would take advantage of you for not recognizing that. Their morality never grew beyond Machiavelli. For them, politics is what you can get away with."

"Why?"

"You let them. The '-isms' that come to mind—Libertarianism, Conservatism, Classical Liberalism, or any of the political parties—have not inoculated individuals to defend themselves. Nor have they countered the political class with an alternative that values the individual and explains the tie between individuals and society. When people are ready to coalesce around such an alternative for their own safety, that's the day we'll celebrate the wave of the new century."

"If I don't see that now, how will I ever recognize it?"

"Relax. It's a habit that will become as second nature as learning to ride a bike. Did you solve the puzzle I described this morning, with the three people trying to decide whether the hat each wore was black or white?"

"I never did figure the answer to that puzzle."

"Look at the puzzle from the perspective of the other players. Look at the puzzle sighting from now and projecting into the future. If the other players in the puzzle did not solve the puzzle, it hints at the color of your own hat."

"Why didn't the other people solve the puzzle?"

"That's critically important. They puzzled over the same details for a long time, making no progress. Without a flexible point of view or sense of time, they could not solve it."

"If you can't see the context, you can't solve the problem."

"You cannot value what you cannot see. If you can't see why individuals need society, manufacturing society will remain unimportant. It's not hard. It's just not habit. A person keyed to search for a pattern in personal experience is more likely to recognize when that pattern shows a useful way to behave. The pattern gives you a tool, not a rule. It does not insist how you should behave. The puzzle exercised the notion that practice to

recognize patterns in personal experience is also useful with governance, thought, language, ethics, and culture. Practice and you'll learn to project the consequences of actions into the future and learn to put yourself in the position of others.

"But there is more. People trust their own judgment, when they know it has failed in the past and will likely fail again. They trust thinking machinery that jumps to conclusions and that tries to justify those conclusions by the flimsiest of means. If one can't trust oneself, how can one trust others equally likely to jump to their own conclusions? Conversely, how can they trust you?"

"It's humbling on all counts, and for their mutual safety leads honest brokers to invest in society and the tools for clear thought."

"You're throwing a lot at me. Can you explain it simply?"

"Adam Smith says that we enter into society, but if you master why you as an individual need society, it is society that enters into you. Individuals create society—and journalism, too—out of sheer need. Journalism and society extend out from individuals like concentric circles, and sometimes those creations contain flaws that mirror the flaws of individuals. Why do those flaws seem to pass almost unnoticed?"

"People don't see the behavior as flawed."

"That's observant. Footprints left by award-winning literature over the past century expose those underlying institutional weaknesses. Flaws mattered less in days gone by, but with the world more dangerous, creeping rust is increasingly risky. Fortunately, the means to detect, understand, and correct those problems lie within individuals themselves, and are more accessible and compelling than ever before."

"What does the literature show about itself and culture?"

"Over a hundred years fiction has focused on style, cultural nuance, conflict, imagery, and 'character development' that usually means personality development short of substance. Meanwhile, today's election is seen as a pivot point supposed to represent some ambiguous hope for the future. However, absent a sense of direction, that hope is unfounded and suggests

dangerous docility. If you can recognize that from your experience, what can you draw from patterns you see in governance, thought, language, ethics, and culture?”

“Sure! Ask the easy questions at 11 o’clock at night.”

“Take them one at a time. Look at society and what has not worked. Then look at the individual. Finally, pick up the pieces.”

“You want the short answer? A lot of governance has failed.”

“Across the better part of a millennium, the institutions of governance challenged to raise human society have instead sown the seeds of their own destruction. Look at what has not worked over the centuries:

- Politicized religions in the 16th century,
- Absolutism in the 17th century,
- Abstract rationalism in the 18th century,
- Industrialized nation states in the 19th century, or
- Media-manipulated central control in the 20th century.

“Each refinement of governance failed to clean up the mess left by the previous century and left a different mess for the succeeding century to deal with. In our time, and most unsettling of all, institutional subjects like history, philosophy, art, science, language—the subjects traditionally used to compose alternatives—have themselves become suspect.”

“Lily Tomlin once said, ‘Do you ever get the feeling that progress is not necessarily headed in the right direction.’ Is there hope?”

“If we eliminate what has never worked and never will, it leads us to conclude that, individuals alone, adrift on the storm-tossed sea of experience, are obliged to discover who else, also adrift and alone, might, by their actions and not by contract, participate in a social safety net strong enough and reliable enough that, while imperfect, can lift participants modestly above the rest of the animal kingdom.”

“Is that a practical goal?”

“The odds that fortune will bestow its gifts need to improve only slightly to give realistic advantage.”

“That’s too glib.”

“We seek reflective judgment, not compliance. We want to remain continuously open to new information to review that which we have learned regarding what has gone before in light of what we might better understand now. Since politics has become cutthroat competition, we want to develop the skill to test its claims. Philosophers say that all knowing comes from either authority, *a priori* understanding, or the contest of science, so we need to recognize the authority that underwrites the knowledge and value it accordingly. We may not be able to decide what is ‘true’ but we can consider what might be ‘workable.’ To draw on the canvas of the new century, all we have are recollections and patterns recognized from them, massaged by language within its limitations, we can use to project consequences of proposed actions into the future.”

“What if it doesn’t work?”

“As powerful weapons become more readily available, this becomes a race between civilization and Armageddon.”

“So now we live a real-life cliffhanger.”

“Mother Nature doesn’t care if we succeed, but we do—we care for ourselves and for our children. Nor can we put off our work, now that isolation no longer offers protection. Science has put the power of knowledge in the hands of anyone who cares to learn, so that no longer will a strong box protect our wealth or barred door protect our families. We are in a race to inoculate ourselves to recognize and defend against others who would destroy rather than build society; a race to grow civilization if we can discover an accessible, compelling message others might decide to value and adopt as their own.”

“But haven’t we progressed in the 20th century.”

“During the 20th century, Machiavelli worked up to a point, but no more. If a culture cannot physically isolate itself from threats, it has to try to reduce those threats by creating a process of peaceful problem resolution sensible people can buy into.”

“What about for the others?”

“Protect yourself and keep trying.”

“A hundred years and what do we have to show for the effort?”

“The 20th century was an incredible century advancing the sciences—chemistry, physics, biology, psychology, geology, and archeology, engineering, electronics, set and graph theory, gaming, and computation. But socially, we deal with each other much the same as we have for a hundred years: unable to explain that a different culture was destructive or explain why. In the 1990s, in a Post-colonial world, we failed to detect threats when challenged, answer objections to facing those threats, or frame our conclusions in a culturally independent fashion. Our forefathers tried to codify John Locke in the American Constitution, but, until now, the reasons why we ought to preserve those principles have remained elusive.

“When philosophy concluded in the 1940s that certainty was impossible and existentially threw up its hands, it led to the desolation of the 1950s or puritanical Sunday School rules that were quickly undermined by television and music in the 1960s and by a coddled generation convinced not to trust anyone over 30. The 1970s tried to ignore both free love and confrontation while the 1980s saw alternative socialistic empires collapse under the weight of a system that could destroy but not build. The 1990s refined the misplaced hope and luxury that style would triumph over substance. The 2000s forced them to face the reality of the societal vacuum that left us unarmed. And that is where we stand.

“The 20th century seemed to advance except where it mattered. Our literature, our thought, and the tools we use to think reeled under the shock of world wars. We lost our lift, stalled out like an airplane, and started spiraling down into chaos and despair from which we have yet to recover.

“Meanwhile, cultures like our own have been prematurely celebrating ‘success.’ They reward as excellent that which furthers their fantasy although it deflects attention from

whatever lies in the gutter. No less an organization than the committee for the Nobel Prize for Literature repeatedly rewards fantastic imagery in its selections. Horace Engdahl, permanent secretary to the Swedish Nobel committee, said the ‘U.S. is too isolated, too insular.’ He argues Americans don’t ‘participate in the big dialogue of literature’ while his own committee overlooks its 50 years of isolated, insular practice of rewarding style and typically repetitive topics at the expense of content. What happened to reality? Today there is more fantasy in real life than real life in real life. In the motion picture *The History Boys*, a teacher encouraged inventing history and selective recollection of facts, exactly as today’s politics builds fantasy to force itself on others. To cloak their practice, if you expose their fantasy, they are ‘offended,’ and prosecute ‘offense’ as a crime.”

“Many people don’t have a scope of interest that makes what they need to know accessible to them.”

“So, should it require a fantasy to bring people closer to reality? Do they have to be drawn by misdirection to face up to their self-interest in the way things are? Not at all. Set aside the past century of horror, wandering, and misuse. Reach for mastery of what is worth knowing and why. Embrace a process of continuous reflection. Then tie it all together without dogma or conviction. Do that and you may discover a wellspring of courage and purpose. Do that and it may be premature to apply the word failure to the 20th century since rust has not completely undermined the civility of those who grew up then.”

“Civility is what separates us from the rest of the animals”

“Civility *can* separate us, if people choose that path, but it does not necessarily separate us. What is civility? What makes it compelling?”

“Your suggesting we don’t know what we are talking about?”

“Moral relativism’s ambiguity more often leads to amorality than immorality. Immorality requires conscious opposition to what is moral and why. The only mechanism that has a chance to guide understanding for an individual is kept honest by conversation with other individuals in society. We have the models,

metaphors, and experience to succeed, but we don't seem to value such tools as highly as previous cultures have. It recalls the *Pax Romana*."

"The Roman peace?"

"From 27 B.C. to 180 A.D. the *Pax Romana* imposed the rule of law by force. Actually, it imposed the rule of authority that evolved into a rule of law never matched before or since. They kept the peace, in part, by training people to be good citizens. For Romans, a citizen was defined as a good person speaking well. A citizen who could speak effectively could influence others—armed, as Dorothy Sayers advised, and conscious, as Richard Mitchell demanded.

"If citizenship through education was the dominant institutional force of the Romans, formal religion became the dominant institutional force of the Middle Ages, with its own emphasis on the classic learning of the liberal arts *Trivium*—Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. Classical Rhetoric consisted of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Unfortunately, in the 1500s, invention and arrangement—the ordering and testing of evidence—were removed leaving Rhetoric absent its honesty, to focus on presentation alone.

"During these Middle Ages, what kind of socio-political frameworks evolved?"

"Feudal kingdoms became city-type communities."

"Fair enough. They were held together by geography and shared economic interest, but, in Europe, where cities developed, the church was part of the glue, since attendance at church was required every day. England's *Magna Carta* in 1215 put the brakes on the power of kings and elevated the subjects who organized themselves. Civil organization grew until Napoleon Bonaparte."

"He pursued an empire and didn't quite achieve it."

"From 1803 until his defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Napoleon represented the first major clash of nations. It was a cataclysmic event that reverberated through politics, philosophy, and literature. Napoleon's march past Hegel's bedroom window

profoundly affected Hegel's philosophy. Marx used Hegel's dialectic in 1848. Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* reflects on that war. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* begins with the same conflict. Nation fought nation repeatedly through the century as empires grew more sophisticated and alliances became more entangled, leading up to World War I. Look at the political evolution over time, from the village, to the city, to the kingdom, to the state, to the nation, to the empire—a steady progression leading to what Samuel Huntington in the late 1990s called the clash of civilizations. But where does the progression lead? What might be the next step in evolution?"

"You can't get any bigger than a civilization. You can't get more powerful."

"If you can't get more powerful physically, the next evolution can't be physical. In nature, though, bigness isn't the only answer. How does Mother Nature compete?"

"She finds a weakness and competitively evolves to exploit it. Strengths do not protect from what finally undermines competitors."

"After the clash of progressively larger estates, states, nations, and civilizations, expect a shift toward the clash of core ideas because those ideas are viral. They can travel across geo-political boundaries with ease penetrating borders of nation-states that are porous to them. Viral ideas can use experience and history from within to temper one's wisdom and culture. That's why typewriters were registered in some pre-computer Balkan states and why later the Soviet state came to realize that a country with computers could not be restrained. Individuals motivated by strong ideas can move both people and great nations, not always constructively. Sorting out unsound ideas becomes every individual's responsibility, but citizens schooled today seem often unprepared to weigh what they think."

"Many ought not trust what they think."

"No, they shouldn't. Too many people with degrees have not the skill set, the attention span, or the interest to recognize everyday flaws in themselves, journalism, or society. People like to think

they are rational, but fresh evidence arrives every day to question that.”

“You dare to believe that people don’t think rationally?”

“Of course they don’t. Rationality isn’t how they think; rationality is how they can check the results of their thought.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Consider how electronic computers function. They may not be wired exactly the same as people, but a computer’s working memory acts like a string of buckets that contain programs and/or data. Computer instructions and data look like numbers to us. One set of numbers might instruct the computer to read data out of one bucket and add it to data stored in another bucket. While the program buckets contain instructions, the instructions don’t do the instructions. Execution of instructions occurs below the ‘consciousness’ of the computer program itself.

“Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga suggest the human computer comes up with a result and only then rationalizes an apparently logical way to get to that result. That would mean that people cannot be certain they are rational, but only believe that they are. If we are less than perfect, we’d better carefully check our work. Gut feelings may not come from the stomach, love may not come from the heart, and decisions may not come from rationality but, instead, come welling up into consciousness from elsewhere in the brain.”

“If that is the case, what can be done about it?”

“We need a change of mind, fortunately, all it takes is one Proustian Madeleine to change a mind. Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* used a whiff of Madeleine cookie to recall a lifetime of experience waiting below the surface to be dredged up by a present-day connection.

“Every moment is a potential pivot point—for you, for society, and even for geese on a lake poised to integrate their sentiments with those of the rest of the flock. Although today’s election has been painted as hoped for change, change will more likely turn around a different axis than the pundits expect. You may be touched as I was by Confucius whose insight telescoped across

unimaginable generations, ricocheting off other minds, into my own. We touch others with sound ideas. Let’s change minds.”

“Change how?”

“Once you discover that *you* matter, you can shoulder the responsibility to make sure you are up to the task. The resolve not to be taken in by ignorant, selfish game-players depends on you developing process, pattern recognition, defensive rhetorical skills, experience, and a will to work at it, to resolve. You matter and you need to discover how much you matter. Then you need to learn to defend yourself.

“The tools are simple, yours to discover, and yours to own. *You* plan decisions using a map of reality, not reality itself. That’s humbling, because you understand limitations leave the possibility of being wrong. *You* value reciprocity because you recognize others in a similar situation live their lives as acutely as you live yours. *You* have a sense of time and your place in it. You value critical judgment. You value constructive habits. You separate your ‘self’ from your ideas. You disdain facades as unfair to others as others’ facades would be unfair to you. You value what is possible. You value perspective that gives you balance, consistency, and simplicity. You value tools like recursion and continuous re-evaluation but recognize their limitations.”

“Limitations?”

“In 1976, psychologist Julian Jaynes suggested that there can be a new understanding of consciousness and symbolism to manage it. The evidence of writing is that humans acquired consciousness over time and not in a single cataclysmic event. Some acquired it, some did not, and, unbelievably, some cultures lost the skill. While there are a lot of things that consciousness is not, Jaynes holds consciousness to be a very simple thing that includes 1) the idea of self and the possibility of self-reflection with which we can create a concept of ourselves, and 2) a sense of time for the self we create.

“Douglas Hofstadter suggests that the emergent phenomena of the brain—those are ideas, hopes, images, analogies, and finally consciousness and free will—are based on a ‘strange loop’ that we

have learned to call recursion, an interaction between the top level reaching back into the bottom level and influencing the thought process for succeeding iterations.

“Thinking as we have been talking about it—conscious thought—is acquired. Self-reference is acquired. Narratization—the ‘I will do this, then I will do that’—is acquired, reinforcing the concept of time, one’s place in time, and the concept of recursion.”

“How can such tools be put to use?”

“We are adrift on a communal sea of individual ideas clawing at each other to grow and survive. Most ideas will be lost, and many should be. The way forward is to sift down not to the true, but to the useful. Everything is therapeutic, anti-therapeutic, or irrelevant. The purpose of logic and rhetoric, the way it used to be taught, is to serve as a sieve. The future of humanity does not depend on the success of one country but on the preservation of sound ideas and sound processes to think about them, until soil somewhere is ripe for germination. Some Confucian ideas engraved 3500 years ago in scraps of ivory projected good sense into the future. That can happen again.”

“I—we—have the advantage of a world of experience that those in the past did not have. That makes it easier to avoid the tar pits others in philosophy attempted to explore and got caught in. Those who have gone before did the heavy lifting. Above all, we have what others before did not have—the need to act before all society is undermined.”

“Who can lead us through this? We really don’t encourage leadership. We encourage folks to ‘play for the team.’”

“What constitutes leadership seems to slip away from time to time, as political footnote Dan Quayle, trying to become President, discovered to his embarrassment when he claimed to be a leader but failed to lead because he didn’t understand it. Leadership is not “Follow me!” Leaders help people discover for themselves what is important and why. Leaders act like scribes, crafting understanding and accessible explanations of legitimate hopes and desires. Leadership does not take people where they

would not wish to go. It treats politics not as a war to victory or death, but as a means to come to understanding. This country calls for leadership, not followership. George Washington wrote, ‘A people unused to restraint must be led; they will not be drove.’”

“How does one discover a wiser path to follow?”

“Don’t take my advice. Find useful processes and experience from what has gone before. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was a great Muslim polymath, a sociologist, historian, and author of *Muqaddimah*, one of six volumes on the universal history of the world. He described government as ‘an institution which prevents injustice other than such as it commits itself.’ Khaldun warned that the bonds of community, called *asabiyyah*, could warp society at any level from small to large. Mohammed described *asabiyyah* as valuing the unworthy of your people more than the worthy of others.”

“Thanks for the warnings, but, again, which path is wiser to follow?”

“Khaldun wrote on historiography, discovering in the flaws of earlier historians the need for humility. He emphasized Hegelian or Marxian dialectic—feedback loops—a process of continuous re-evaluation necessary because—and this is the keystone of wisdom—sometimes we think we are right simply because we think we are right.

“Negotiating our way through life, we are interested in the simple daily problems of living such as dealing with people and dealing with the loops that we get into in our own minds. Loops that we have described happen every day in thought. We’ve learned not to blindly trust what we think simply because we are the ones who think the thought.

“Seneca, writing about 50 AD admitted he read the opposition because he presumed he had no lock on truth. To disagree with one’s opposition, one has to know why and to have reasons that stand up to scrutiny for the positions one takes. Rationality was a standard during Voltaire’s Enlightenment. It proved insufficient. We need to be more than rational. Rationality is a tool to

encourage consistency in what we think. Simple wisdoms from experience encourage process and perspective to help make the simple daily problems of living more manageable.

“Our goal is to lift ourselves just that much above the rest of the animal kingdom and the law of the jungle, to manufacture an umbrella to protect us using a process of peaceful problem resolution that others learn to trust and embrace in their self-interest as their own.”

“How do you tell constructive ideas from destructive ones? And then how do you inoculate people to defend themselves sensibly?”

“First, call on Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, who reminded people that science is not about truth, but about doubt. Science is a test for falsity that helps prune ideas that don’t stand up to experience. Otherwise, in one kind of arrogance, people become convinced that their own ambitions are worth the suffering of others.”

“What is true one cannot know, but science helps one understand what is not true.”

“Recursion, a useful feedback technique demonstrated in art by Escher, in history by Khaldun, and in literature by Laing and Hofstadter, is a slippery process by which you can think about thinking about thinking, but it’s a double-edged sword that must be used carefully.”

“Hofstadter delved into the organization of thought processes and Jaynes did other research on historical foundations of religions. Both suggest traditional foundations of ethics and morality need not be found in religion or natural law, and that they may get in the way. The foundations of religion and the so-called eternal truths are the business of cultures that operate on top of the framework of society.

“Cultures are like the pile of a carpet, varying in color, shape, texture, length, thickness, and material, while the minimum requirements for society are like the warp and weft of the carpet beneath the pile that hold cultures together.

“The warp and weft provide the structure for stitching together

society. Without the warp and weft threads supporting the carpet, all that exists is a pile of pile. Nothing holds the carpet together. Warp and weft are worth defending because absent society’s supporting threads citizens risk either serfdom or slavery.

“Many seem recognize that ethical bases are challenged, but nobody seems to say so. Look at society. Society doesn’t know why it should be decent. All of my generation is asking why? Why should I do this? Why should I believe in that?”

“Individuals create society. Individuals are society. Regard for individuals is the basis for societal ethics. Society offers individuals knowledge and trade. That carries extra weight today now that individuals can no longer retreat to the frontier to avoid society the way our forefathers could.

“Good reasons for being decent and honorable can be built from a foundation of the few ideas that we have deduced from personal experience. The warp and weft that hold the carpet of cultures together are few—the minimums required for social interaction are few:

- The possibility that one just might be wrong, and, the humility that falls out of that doubt,
- The possibility that communication with others who are equally involved can help.

“Ethics are derived from those understandings. There is nothing more to ethics than that individuals matter.

“From the two minimums of society, simple wisdoms can be deduced. Simple wisdoms, although common and everyday, are not currently central to curricula and catechisms. While they have been written about for millennia, they may not be universally taught. Perhaps that’s because teachers are themselves only former students from the same schools.

“Processes are the type of thought that matters. Processes help prune what does not work and reinforce what does. If drops of water in a river represent that which is understood, then boulders along the shores that guide the flow of knowledge represent the dynamic processes of thought. Half a dozen simple wisdoms

accessible to anybody channel the flow constructively, but we don't habitually teach them. They include:

- 1) A sense of time;
- 2) A sense of self;
- 3) A sense of others—that other people live as acutely as we do, that the pain another person feels is no different than the pain that I feel;
- 4) That we are mortal—that just as surely as close as nightfall is we shall be that close to our own deaths;
- 5) That each person's fundamental purpose is to negotiate his way through life with decent quality of life;
- 6) That since I can recall having been painfully mistaken in the past, I can be wary of being mistaken now or in the future;
- 7) That because I might be in error, I must constantly solicit information and constantly re-evaluate my decisions;
- 8) That while there may be no such thing as absolute truth, there are likely consistent truths for each pass through the process although subject to revision on the basis of better information;
- 9) That the difference between fantasy and reality is a boundary that must be understood. When you deny what is, you are possessed by what is not. That our planning requires us to look at things the way they honestly are rather than the way we would like them to be.

“What's more, these concepts are scalable. They apply to individuals, small groups, large groups, states, and nations.

“Simple, practical, common wisdoms have been with us for all of our written history. They are found in the works of great thinkers like Confucius, Seneca, Mohammed, Jesus, Locke, Marx, and others. Simple wisdoms are concepts that help us understand where great thinkers made mistakes and why, within the limits of their time, they might have done so.

“These process metaphors apply to our simple daily living. Confucius taught the sense that other people exist, “Don't do to anybody else what you wouldn't have them do to you” in the form of the Golden Rule phrased as a negative, and much more practical way of expressing the idea. Karl Marx followed Hegel's notion that we must constantly evaluate where we are. He

fostered a process by which we can examine the way things are; the way we can use time. Unfortunately, and to the pain of millions, after he developed the tool his successors mistook a single iteration, rather than continuous review, to be process.

“When Richard Nixon says, ‘I am not a crook’, can you trust it? When Jim Jones in Guyana claims to know the righteous path, can you trust it? When Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran claims his is the one true way, can you trust it? When some claim ‘America, right or wrong’, can you trust it? My generation asked ‘Why?’ and overlooked good answers. Don't let popular talk about morality confuse you. When televangelists talk about morality or even former presidents like Jimmy Carter talk about morality, their morality is a static thing learned by rote and, if not unfounded, is selfishly contrived for them. Morality is a process of thoughtfulness and using perspective. It is dynamic. It changes, but it is not relative because it follows from understanding able to be deduced independently.

“We may be approaching a watershed in societal thought, both outside, in society, and inside, how we think. Look at previous watersheds: transition from wandering tribes to an agrarian society, the invention of a horse-driven plow to get beyond subsistence farming, invention of numbers in geometry and trigonometry, development of writing, invention of moveable type, the first industrial revolution that specialized function for people's jobs and harnessed external power, the current second industrial revolution of robotics.

“Couple that with a new appreciation how to enable people to become self-actualized learners, responsible for their own growth as individuals and *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* are at hand. *Anagnorisis* is a moment in literature when a character makes a critical discovery, and *peripeteia* is a sudden reversal, a turning point dependent on intellect and logic. That opportunity is upon us and happening none to soon.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Once you figure why society matters, you can advocate for it. Once you learn why society matters, you become armed to defend it. The next 10 or 20 years are going to be socially

devastating. Consider the city of Rome, N.Y. which was substantially a mill town at one time. People who worked in mills did repetitive tasks with minimal decision-making. Such jobs have evaporated for the substantial part of our working population who traditionally did complex mechanical non-decision-making projects.

“That’s cataclysmic but no different from the agrarian-urban migration happened a hundred years ago. Change is upon us, yet have little wealth to draw upon to cushion the transition. We need to marshal the tools to cope while we preserve the society that allows people to keep their liberty and individuality.

“We have ourselves and not much else but community. But that is okay. We can bootstrap ourselves into a better future. Any other alternative would be crushing.”

12 AM - On the dawn of a new day

"It's 12:01 AM. Good night and good morning, dear. Welcome to a new day."

"Thanks, sweetheart. Same to you!"

"You seem lost in thought. What are you thinking?"

"About Virginia Woolf, and how literature seems to have failed over the last 100 years."

"Woolf wrote beautifully, but she was too much of her time and not one of my favorite authors."

"Nor one of mine. Woolf penned a spectacularly dramatic phrase in the 1920s. That sentence—that on or about December 10, 1910, the world changed—changed the world. Steeped in the literary tradition as she was, the date was as good a date as any to set as the pivot point for Modernism."

"Her point was that previous literature might have been excellent, but that it had not done enough. Modernism represented the dissatisfaction with literature's representation of consciousness that failed to deal with the intra-personal problems of the day. Writing in the 1920s, through the lens of the postwar melancholy after World War I and the pointless loss of a generation of humanity, she and other writers like James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, J.R. R. Tolkien, E. M. Forster, and T. S. Eliot—all great writers, paralleled a similar group of contemporary philosophers. For all the wealth of literature that was created in its name, Modernism did not succeed."

"An equivalent period of intellectual dissatisfaction followed World War II, ushering in the Post-modern period that mirrored the existential philosophies of Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and another equally disaffected generation. Post-modernism, in the next century, remains on the table, not dead

and never fully replaced.

"Despite its striking inconsistencies, the pretender that might have pushed aside Post-modernism was Post-colonialism. Post-colonialists like the 1970s' Edward Said dared to assert that cultures stand apart, unknowable, relative, and unchallengeable, a posture that attempted to define out of existence critics who disagreed with them. Post-colonialism had a passable chance of bluffing into submission those for whom history begins at dawn—those unfamiliar, for instance, with Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, who overlook its assault on literature, morals, and old-country cultural habits a good 125 years before Said took pen to paper."

"But Post-colonialism fails because back in 1923, when in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Virginia Woolf made her claim that in 1910 the world had changed, she concluded that literature is about the written representation of character."

"Why does that matter?"

"Because representing character allows mimesis. Mimesis—imitation—is a way to learn, if you discover what to practice. Given the chance, character representation can help build character. Finally, today, literature and the people who read it may be ready for what Woolf wished into existence in 1910."

"We are primed for change. The foundations have been laid—need represented by failure of previous systems, new metaphors in thought, accessible examples to represent them. It took 100 years for perspective to leap into common use in the 1300s. Today, after simmering for some 100 years, the concept of time and your place in it—the tool of recursive thought—the situation may be ripe. Stendhal, Tolstoy, and dialectic rethinking have helped prepare for the common use of a new pattern of thought. Metaphors like Edison's film strips, Einstein's relativity, audio/video feedback systems, and M. C. Escher's art encourage it."

"Punctuated by a century of missteps, one can look back and conclude that on December 10, 2010, a hundred years after Woolf's pivot point, the world actually can change."

"You're going to have to help. Tie it up in a nice bow for me."

"No, you tie it up in a bow for me. Be Sherlock Holmes, the world's greatest detective. What was Holmes' famous precept?"

"When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

"Fine. *You* manufacture society from that. First, review what not to do. To make a difference in the world, try to avoid the mistakes of those that have gone before. Start with the easy ones. Is science enough?"

"Science was the hope of the Enlightenment—that if we can understand nature we can control our destiny."

"Understanding nature has put tremendous power in the hands of people who learn to use it. Unfortunately, some people who learn to use science misuse it. Useful as it is, science is not a society-building tool."

"As long as we have put science in its place, let's get rid of magic, too."

"Fair enough. Magic is the notion that if you do some secret dance, that somehow nature will do your bidding. That's foolish on the face of it. Enlightenment did us a favor by ridding the world of a great deal of magic and superstition."

"As long as you are weighing the Enlightenment, the 'philosophes' of the time weren't the answer either."

"Give 2500 years of professional philosophy credit for reaching the conclusion that it can't reach the conclusion. If Gödel and Wittgenstein did nothing else, they did show us that 'absolutes' or natural law can't be shown to be absolute. Tossed as we are on the stormy sea of reality, no one will ever build a solid foundation that reaches to bedrock underneath the water."

"And what about religions?"

"The Enlightenment did a lot to promote religious toleration, and people who share particular religious beliefs share a framework for dealing with other believers. However, religions

can't provide a framework for social interaction because they have no influence with non-believers."

"So far we have rejected science, magic, professional philosophy, religions. What's next?"

"For goodness sake, let's sink political institutions and the people who make their living posturing with them. After 2500 years of watching them not work, their flaws are obvious."

"Then toss in political science, too. No savior of society, the truths they claim are trivial in the scheme of things."

"Academic studies like civics and social studies are vehicles for producing docile, compliant subjects, not society."

"If you are going to reject certain academic subjects as saviors of society, other subjects belong in the dustbin along side them, including psychology, and sociology."

"To be fair, those subjects can have practical value. They are helpful within limited scope."

"You left out history."

"There is a lot to be learned from history, but, like hamburger, history can be cut many different ways and still be hamburger. No one version of history can serve as the basis for society. Society needs a stronger foundation."

"Is there one?"

"We're not through eliminating the impossible yet."

"Okay, how about Rhetoric?"

"Talk about double-edged swords! It's useful, but charlatans wield one edge to confuse and obstruct the other. Rhetoric is an undervalued tool, but its only a tool, and not a vehicle to establish society."

"Literature hasn't been successful as a builder of society either."

"We're getting to the bottom of the barrel, aren't we."

"Is it hopeless?"

"I don't think we've been looking for tools in the right places."

"What other places are there?"

"In your head."

"Your grasping at straws."

"Actually, I'm serious. Outside of oneself, all we know is ephemeral. Factual knowledge is not sufficient. Faith is limited to those who believe. Schooling has reinforced the inadequate. Governments abuse others. 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the case.'"

"What remains?"

"You do."

"How so?"

"If we're going to manufacture society, it's going to have to start with you and you alone."

"I thought we weren't going to resort to magic."

"I'm serious. You have the tools in your head to manufacture society . . . and convince others to do the same so they might join with you."

"You can recall your own past experiences. You can recognize patterns that repeat. You can project consequences into the future. That is useful."

"In the end, it is not one goose that turns the tide for the flock to lift off, but one goose starts the tide turning. Whatever one feels about today's election. This is going to propel us forward."

"You think we can pick up the pieces of the last century."

"Adam Smith said that history serves better to warn of what hasn't worked than about what has. Let's not remain oblivious to history. Our generation was connected but unconscious. Capable of pinpoints of penetrating insight in books and in film, even collectively perceived and appreciated, but, as Eugene O'Neill advised, then the hand lets the veil fall, and you are lost again. The movie can be conscious and the actor not. Or the character can be conscious and the actor not. Or the actor can be conscious for an instant or in only one way."

"But how does one grow more able and more alert?"

"Let's inventory some authors:

- Richard Mitchell explains a casual approach to language warns of deep trouble.
- Julian Jaynes shows, from clues in writings throughout history, that people can learn to think differently than they previously thought, and that consciousness—a sense of self and the spatialization of time—is an acquired trait.
- Douglas Hofstadter reveals recursion and other better tools that today are available to refine our processes of thought.
- Better tools can help sift wisdom from the great thinkers of the past who turned their keen intellects to address the simple daily problems of living.
- Acquired wisdom reinforces stable processes with built-in self-correction to understand the world around us and, from there, to help plan for the future.
- Using those processes, people can manufacture a mutually useful ethical system.
- Such an ethical system helps determine minimal behavior that scales over the entire range of society—individuals, small groups, states, and nations.

"If we are in deep trouble, there is reason for optimism. The grace of which we are capable lies in our humanity, not in our gods. We shoulder responsibility for our lives. With tools to help, we are in a race for civilization."

"Is there a reasonable alternative?"

"The alternative, cultural relativism, leaves no basis for planning, action, or peaceful problem resolution other than an inadequate exercise of Machiavellian power. Philosophy, when it's not sidetracked by questions about what can we know, asks the good questions how should we behave and how should we govern ourselves. Montaigne summarizes the issue as *Que sais je?* or 'What do I know?'"

"When philosophy gets beyond questions of truth and its own fallibility, the discipline does help, within its limitations, to deal with the world as best one can. Mandeville promoted self-interest, Hume believed reason was imperfect but helpful. Adam

Smith championed the impartial observer developing ethics. Montesquieu advised liberty over order. Thomas Reid said that workable ethics needed a common framework. Hobbes determined the individual was the precursor to society; Kant encouraged reciprocity and insisted that lies to others are always wrong. Voltaire advocated reason to temper religion. Hegel recommended a continuous dialectical process. Schopenhauer warned of the power of intuition underneath reason. Mill emphasized the liberty principle and considered the individual the most important contributor to happiness. Rorty encouraged people to follow Kant and think for themselves. Karl Popper advocated science to prune away what doesn't work.

"Over its history, philosophy asks the question, if you are alone in a storm-tossed sea of sense experience, is there a way to stand independent of culture to create society. Then, if one can create society where any two individuals or any two groups meet—then what are the minimum requirements for society, and how can one be certain?

"The answer is a resounding 'Yes!' We can create society. Where there is no shared experience, people with unique individual experience can still arrive at identical conclusions. Even though experiences are different, independent deductions reflecting on these experiences, are in important ways invariably the same. While not demonstrably universal, they might as well be so. Two come to mind:

- Experience shows anyone that sometimes they think they are correct when they eventually discover they were mistaken.
- Experience teaches one to doubt what one 'knows.' This is what we call humility.

"The fallibility of the tool we use to sense the world helps us recognize the personal advantage of engaging with others to more accurately map what we sense and deduce, the better to plan one's future."

"Does absolute perfection—provability—matter?"

"The search for ultimate perfection can't matter enough to cause you to give up if you can't reach it. Build for stability. Figure how to tie to others without shared experience into a frame of

reference—communication—that will work equally well for anyone willing to buy into it. The task is to make buying into it open, accessible, easy, and compelling, because the other alternatives are annihilation or military standoff.

"Beyond recognizing the value of society and convincing others of it, the third stage is to manufacture a protective umbrella for society that shows the advantage of peaceful problem resolution. That is what puts mankind—at least potentially—above the rest of the animals to reduce the uncertainty of the law of the jungle for the segment of humanity that consents to the process by their actions.

"To be able to project different futures, some of them unworkable, helps one learn to value society. Dreams with the potential to work can translate into a real and solid foundation. So apply yourself. Determine what works and what doesn't, figure what's needed, and understand why. We can celebrate today at the same time we take notes and check the record to protect ourselves from doubletalk, newspeak, and half-think: Don't tell me what you believe in; show me why you believe it."

"Respectful exchanges with others revere life, conserve resources, and integrate economy to maximize the ability of individuals in society to cope in the natural universe."

"That's trite."

"The Greeks valued liberty, and for that liberty were willing to sacrifice everything rather than give up. Too many today would casually trade in liberty for the empty promise of security and the certain slavery of a free lunch, never appreciating its true price. Ours is a generation so free that it has lost the meaning of freedom, the reason for freedom, and the will to reach for it. As surely as people who have no liberty yearn for it, the people who have liberty handed to them lust for absence of risk."

"Politics wrestles with the question, 'Is there room for the individual in society?'"

"That question was put to bed a century ago, and certainly put away during Reagan's confrontation with the Soviet Union. After years of dullness and lack of vigilance, the question has

been resuscitated. Rephrase the question and people become uncomfortable: 'Is society a user of people?' and 'Should individuals be suppressed for the advantage of society's powerful?' Individuals need to carve out space in a dominating society. Technology has blinded you; you are connected but not social."

"Philosopher Erik Erickson asked the meaning of life. What do you say to everyone who asks?"

"Tell them, 'You selfish, egotistical bastard! You sit there, surveying the world from a very pretty perch, indeed, provided you by everyone who has ever gone before. And you dare to break the gift they have given you. You contemplate abstracts self-indulgently, complain how hard you have it, and that there is nothing to live for, when you cannot see the gift you have been given. You rush to escape, into drugs, alcohol, television, hedonism, small talk, self-pity—anything to stop looping in your head or facing the reality of the meaninglessness of it all. Oh, the horror! Well, grow up! You may not find meaning, but meaning can find you. Your job is to get out of bed, no matter where that bed may be, and say, 'Damn! This is a wonderful day, and I'm going to make the most of it. I am going to laugh, cry, and work myself until I'm happily tired. And, by God, when I die, someone will be able to look back on what I have done, and say thank you for clearing my path just a little more.'

"My Dad once said, 'I look into a mirror and see a young kid with wrinkles.' He was right in so many ways. There is no such thing as an adult. The word adult is a fraud perpetrated by language. We're all just trying to make our way. He was right that time catches up to you. And he was also right because, in his next breath he said, 'We don't do what we do for ourselves. We do it for our children. To give them a better place in which to live.'

"Uncertainty—that is what we are given. Certainly, we are alone, but we are also together. Sartre reminded us that, although alone, we still have those that we love on whom to practice loving."

"If society is so simple, why isn't it understood more easily and often?"

"Appreciating 'why society' takes more steps to independently deduce than it takes steps to see clearly once society's simple elegance is pointed out. Besides, as you have already seen, society is easily and often confused with culture.

"Once you *do* figure why society matters, you can sell the personal advantage society offers others, and, furthermore, you are armed with the tools and the courage to defend it against those who, resigned to living just the law of the jungle, would destroy it."

"How do you protect society?"

"To protect society, you need to know what it is and what it does. That arms you to detect and label behavior that would undermine it. The first weapon of choice is laughter, but every weapon in the arsenal is available to those who would use every weapon in the arsenal against you."

"Speak softly, but carry a big stick."

"Yes, keep the big stick but keep it sheathed if possible because you can't predict its unintended consequences. In the end, use the tools you've got. Books give you insight. Books give you perspective. Books give you hope. Books give you companionship. Books nudge you toward a way out. Books give you clues to what is wrong. I may criticize literature, but its limits, not its accomplishments. Literature was the way I became sensitive to patterns and the consequences of them. Without literature I would still be lost. Literature compressed enough experience into a concentrated point that we could manufacture a way to bust out of our limitations. We have every reason to hope. Just as Confucius' carvings on some ivory could reach out to touch someone 2500 years later, any insight recorded now can reach out to touch someone else in the unimaginable future.

"Congratulations! You get to disperse the creeping fog—now that you have learned to see it all through the last century in coffeehouses, work, journalism, art, education, character, individuality, politics, economics, advertising, history, academia,

religion, literature, language, community, and culture. Now, what do you do? You make your own hope.”

“I feel so alone.”

“I’ll be there. Remember what Tom Joad says, at the end of John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, “Whenever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Whenever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there... I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’—I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build—why, I’ll be there.”

“He was speaking about justice that comes with society, without really being able to define it—real justice in a society of individuals, not activist whining. We are so much closer now, with literature that can nudge people towards understanding how to interact with others and why. It gives me hope that when others see why, I’ll be there.”

“Suppose others can’t see what you see?”

“That doesn’t matter. There were kernels of ideas Confucius understood that he had difficulty conveying to others of his time. What matters is to make the most accessible case for what one can see so others might discover how.”

“Imagine what it must have been like for Confucius to understand what could be done, convey it clearly, and not have it grasped.”

“He had the satisfaction of having tried to express himself to others, of having had his thoughts recorded, of recognizing that in some unimaginably distant future, those concepts might touch someone, and that fruit might blossom from trees nurtured by more receptive soil. He would have reveled in wonder at life itself and his life in particular.”

“Not disappointed at all?”

“Balanced. Not disappointed. Confucius may have been unsuccessful in marriage, in government, in education, in religion, but he succeeded at something he could hope for but

never know. He reached forward 2500 years to touch someone like me.”

“He would not have been disappointed?”

“No. A wonderfully happy and fulfilled person . . .”

“Sweetheart?”

“Yes?”

“I love you!”

“And I love you, too!”

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Everything in this book is accessible to those with literary and life experience. I thank those who helped me climb out of what I knew into what I now understand. Neither a novelist nor a philosopher, I'm too busy living life day-to-day to become either.

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