

# **Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide**

**From the "Major Works"  
series**

**CJS Hayward**

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# Preface

In *That Hideous Strength*, the Pendragon's circle is said to possess knowledge of XYZ that orthodox Arthurian scholarship would not reach for centuries. A thrill of absolute transcendence seemed to ripple through those words. However, there are downsides to being under-studied, and some forms of giftedness are really a terrain without too much of a map.

All human beings, and in particular all Orthodox Christians, are gifted; the language of giftedness comes from a passage in the Bible where the question is not whether you are gifted, but what gift you have. And this has to be the deepest significance of the word 'gifted.' However, the condition called giftedness by psychology, and profound giftedness, is its own condition with special needs and challenges that don't go away if you say: "I believe everyone is gifted."

Over time, new works have been added and others taken out, the criterion being not to provide so much local color ascribable to profound giftedness, of which there is enough in my other works, as things profoundly gifted individuals will recognize as intended to help cope and survive. It may in the end not just be the profoundly gifted who find things practical.

The overall guiding principle is practical insight grounded in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church,

rather than reinvent the wheel spiritually. It is my hope that the work will speak much more broadly, but one friend commented that he had come to a realization that this was not a work about how bright I was, but about how to draw on the resources of Orthodoxy to cope and live.

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## **Zeitgeist and Giftedness, Part Deux** ***(A Look Down the Road for Some)***

Having lived and written the various pieces over the course of several years, I would like to circle back and add a post script to “Zeitgeist and Giftedness,” now that I think I finally know what should be at the beginning.

Now I want to place something about what future trajectories hold for profoundly gifted, at least in the general case. I am not writing out of clairvoyance, or any belief that this applies to everyone even among the profoundly gifted, or anything of that sort. I also do not comment here on the singularity we live in (see <https://cjshayward.com/singularity>). I am writing from what I know historically, what I know from my own experience, such skill for living as I have, and connecting the dots.

Also, as a caveat, I have been shifting in terms of Kiersey’s temperaments from being more NT (iNtuitive Thinking on the Myers-Briggs and David Kiersey’s *Please Understand Me!*) to more NF

(iNtuitive Feeling). One of the first documented dynamics of a proper NF is that people will take you for whatever they want you to be, whether you like it or not. I do not advocate that the reader adopt such attempts, but I mention it because it may be a contributor to my getting along with some people later in my middle-aged life, and it may muddy some of my suggestions. I believe that some combination of both may explain why I have repeatedly had women my seniors by a couple of decades hitting on me.

### **Um... Gandhi didn't really say that.**

One quote commonly misattributed to Gandhi reads:

First they ignore you.  
Then they make fun of you.  
Then they fight you.  
Then you win!

As someone who has paid close attention to Gandhi, this doesn't sound like Gandhi, certainly not the chapter on "Ahimsa or the Way of Nonviolence" in *All Men Are Brothers*. It sounds hollow and tinny, where however much I might have stepped away from him and written "A Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist," I find in Gandhi a heart of love not here displayed. I am aware of a couple of genuine quotes where Gandhi says, for instance, that if your opponent unleashes a storm of verbal abuse, and you respond without anger, you will be respected. However, the

above quote is in my mind unworthy of Gandhi.

That stated, there is a grain of truth in it, and I would like to convey what I know of that grain of truth.

**It was said of hockey great Wayne Gretzki that he skated, not to where the puck *was*, but where it *would be*.** And this is an effect of giftedness that seems more pronounced the higher you go. **I've found that this happens whether I like it or not, and whether or not I had the faintest intent of channeling the (future) Zeitgeist.** In all examples included, I tried to persuade people, but the thought of being a forerunner to fashion was not on my mind, and I almost wanted to take a shower when my (I thought) distinctive approach became the current fad.

Inside the gifted range, pay very close attention to when someone very smart takes credit for being countercultural, because that's where the fashion will be in 2-3 years. That was approximately the delay about which I heard a friend talk, refusing to have men wear neckties because ties denote the status of a slave, or at least did in the past.

In my own experience, there have been several points where I "came up with" things that were well ahead of their fashionable status, and were met with extreme hostility, perhaps partly because they badly broke political correctness, which was in the mainstream at the time.

As time passed, sometimes to my horror I found that the thing for which I had been ridiculed had been making the rounds.

Let me give a few examples.

## **The holy kiss**

When I was studying at Cambridge, I proposed that the holy kiss in the Bible was a worthy object of proper scholarly inquiry. The faculty insisted that study of the holy kiss fell under the domain of *Realia*, a word used in German theology for physical questions like, “What kind of physical objects was St. Paul the Apostle referring to in his metaphor of putting on the full armor of God?” or, “What did buildings look like?” An attentive reader of the Bible will notice that besides the room on a roof given St. Elisha, the Mosaic command to build something of a wall around a roof reflected building practices unlike Western tented roofs. In a land where rain was very infrequent, a roof could be used as a spare room instead of a dead surface perhaps holding solar panels, and on a literal level this is something like a divinely inspired building code to build houses so that people would be less likely to fall to their deaths from your spare room, or else get nasty (and possibly, eventually, fatal) wounds.

I proposed a doctrinal study of the holy kiss, and this was inconceivable to the Faculty of Divinity. At one point, I drew a line in the sand and said “I want to make a specifically *doctrinal* study of the holy kiss.” He immediately overruled me, saying, “The best way to do that is to do a *cultural* study, and let any doctrines arise.” Trying to involve my tutor did not help. I was not allowed to make a doctrinal study of the holy kiss: that was something that just was not

*done.*

I might comment, by the way, that where my Orthodox advisor kept directing me was a cultural study of kissing that was not only unedifying, but left me feeling uncomfortable and dirty for months. If I may advise the reader, *don't do a sociological study of kissing*. If you want a *doctrinal* study of the holy kiss, read what I wrote into *The Sign of the Grail*, which is meant to edify the reader. About the only major finding I do not remember including is, after following a suggestion that seemed improbable, noticing that the holy kiss was the only act in the whole Bible that is ever called holy. *A doctrinal study of the holy kiss is profound.*

But a couple of decisions, and one in particular, caught me off-guard. I was assigned, as a condition to continuing from my diploma to my master's, to the "philosophy of religion" seminar. At the very beginning of the year, I declared a thesis topic of the holy kiss. I was recovering from cancer the previous year, which was known to the faculty, and while I do not recall discussing or announcing this decision to others, I opted for a strategy of aiming for merely *passing* marks in everything but my thesis, and throw everything I could into my thesis.

Two thirds of the way during the year, the faculty announced a decision that my thesis topic was not fitting for philosophy of religion. I was required to change topic completely, in one switch losing 50% of the total time spent on the academic year. Also, I got a low mark on one essay after it took me all but two weeks for a two month essay where I was trying

without success to make contact with a professor to establish which texts were to be addressed in a “Selected texts in...” essay assignment.

As far as my thesis goes, I wrote *AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics*, online at [cjshayward.com/ai](http://cjshayward.com/ai), which got a passing grade. At Cambridge, which has not gone through the decades of grade inflation in the U.S., my recorded grade of 70 for my first essay is a “first”, where one in five students “takes first” sometime during times at Cambridge. The minimum passing grade for the master’s was 60. The minimum passing grade to continue to a PhD was 63. My overall grade, the only one that mattered, was 61. I was not allowed to continue. I appealed, but I was not allowed to continue. The rules were the rules, end of discussion.

Then something odd happened about a decade later. Various strangers started to contact me to excitedly tell me about the holy kiss.

One conversation I remember had someone ask me if I knew that there was much more than I had included in “The Eighth Sacrament.” Yes, in fact, I did. “The Eighth Sacrament” is a homily, and part of a homily’s job description is to deliver crystallized nugget(s) that will be useful to people spiritually. There are other venues where it is appropriate to be exhaustive in discussion, but a homily isn’t the place to try to tell everything you know.

## **Intelligent Design**

(Please note that my first master’s is in math, and I’ve had a couple of undergraduate statistics courses.

This grounds what I have to say about what is and is not statistically believable in a breeding population acquiring and sustaining enough beneficial changes to adapt a new species in a geological eyeblink. My diploma thesis in theology was all about ripping up bad arguments, albeit in theology rather than empirical science.)

I remembered being dismayed, as a long-standing theistic evolutionist, to note that a cherished article site that showcased deep thought, had articles attacking neo-Darwinism. My esteem for the site plunged.

When I actually read articles from Discovery Institute bigwigs, I was stunned. As a child, I had read a Creation Science book because I wanted to believe that the scientific evidence pointed to a young earth. However, at that tender age I increasingly realized I didn't want to believe in a young earth enough to accept arguments that bad. I still find practically every contact with young-earthers I've had to be intellectually immature. I remember one young-earthier, who had no degrees ending in "S," telling me he would do me the favor of straightening out my backwards understanding of science. His scientific examples included how "pilots experience time differently when they're traveling above the speed of sound" (one friend, hearing that, gulped and said, "That's not even *wrong*.") I remain a long-term non-fan of Creation Science, and I have argued at length that Creation Science is a Protestant praxis that is heterodox and doesn't belong in Orthodoxy.

Initially, Discovery Institute thought leaders



seemed convincing, but in the past couple of years the chief force convincing me that neo-Darwinism is wrong are the arguments the occasional interlocutor offers to convert me to neo-Darwinism. *Simply put*, I am not aware of any form of neo-Darwinian evolution that makes any sense to me statistically. Why not?

The best thing I can think of is to give a parable, and say that what I hear is that life forms have always been steadily been buying state lottery tickets, but there are times where a bunch of life forms won lots and lots and lots and lots of lotteries, *strictly off the fossil record*, and then no one wins a lottery for millions and millions of years, and after a long while bunches of life forms buy bunches of lottery tickets, and then it is millions of millions of years until anyone wins a single lottery, and the basic cycle happens again and again...

Atheists have accused theists and Creation Scientists of believing in a “God of the gaps,” i.e. that God acts in areas that are present gaps in scientific knowledge). I would answer that the evolutionary natural selection people have presented to me as an “evolution of the gaps:” the heavy lifting is done in areas we have no scientific knowledge of whatever.

In a work I will not name, I adapted George MacDonald,

*Then Curdie made a clean breast of it, and told them everything.*

*They all sat silent for some time, pondering the strange tale. At last Curdie’s mother spoke.*

*“You confess, my boy,” she said, “there is something about the whole affair you do not understand?”*

*“Yes, of course, Mother,” he answered. “I cannot understand how a child knowing nothing about the mountain, or even that I was shut up in it, should come all that way alone, straight to where I was; and then, after getting me out of the hole, lead me out of the mountain too, where I should not have known a step of the way if it had been as light as in the open air.”*

*“Then you have no right to say what she told you was not true. She did not take you out, and she must have had something to guide her: why not a thread as well as a rope, or anything else? There is something you cannot explain, and her explanation may be the right one.”*

*“It’s no explanation at all, Mother; and I can’t believe it. Darwinism is the only game in town.”*

Now there is one point where I would like to acknowledge the obvious. Intelligent Design is not a consensus view. It is an obvious candidate for discussion of crank theories, and my suspicion is that one of the people who thinks Intelligent Design is crank turf is my dear reader. However, may I say one thing more?

I got blasted when I tried to introduce Intelligent Design to a mailing list with some very bright minds. There I was forcefully harassed; I posted an email

entitled, “A plea for tolerance and basic respect,” which someone quickly answered with an email subject of “Intolerant pleas for tolerance.”

I was almost entirely on the defensive after I first broached the subject, and the first major, extended struggle was not to establish that something I said was right, but to clarify my position against hostile mischaracterizations. It took me an extraordinary amount of effort to simply get other list members to *just understand that I did not believe in a young earth, but accepted standard scientific estimates of the age of the universe.*

I learned later that other members were increasingly involved in “teleological evolution,” which includes Intelligent Design. (“Teleological” refers to a theory that is intelligently guided to a goal, and rips out the heart of naturalist evolution.)

## **Scientism**

When at Fordham in 2007 during my second attempt at a theology Ph.D., I wrote “‘Religion and Science’ Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution,” included in *Religion and Science, Technology and Faith*. I failed to find a single sympathetic voice; I only received corrections (or simply silence), even from a professor known for willingness to work with adventuresome thesis topics. A central concern of the work, as with *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*, is a critique of scientism.

Fast forward to today: I don’t remember when this started, but today to accuse someone of scientism is tantamount to “A hit! A very palpable hit!” even if

the person alleging scientism has not done much, if anything, to establish that the other party is in fact guilty of scientism.

Again, what I said was very provocative when it was new; now that there is dust settled on my original work, it is not provocative now. Also, while I definitely wrote in a tradition (Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*), my work, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* was written as, and remained, a lonely voice in the desert. Now it has been followed by Jean-Claude Larcheet's more recently published *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (published by Holy Trinity Monastery), which says the same basic thing and I gave it five stars and half-wished I could give more. I find it likely that more books will follow.

## **Feminism and inclusive language**

I have argued that it is possible to be pro-woman and anti-feminism. And, though I know the claim sounds bizarre, I have suggested that at its core *feminism is anti-woman*. I have long critiqued feminism, though I have argued how feminism might find unexpected fulfillment of Orthodoxy. I've also suggested that the terms "exclusive language" and "inclusive language" are in fact *loaded* language, and a preferable terminology might be "*belabored* inclusive language" and "*naturally* inclusive language", and later suggested that people trying to e.g. make inclusive Bible translations so people understand

inclusive intent in the original language, smells like a whiff of eau de “The bureaucracy is expanding... to meet the needs of an expanding bureaucracy!”

Now I have seen the first Bible translation I’m aware of that is less politically correct than its predecessor: the well-respected *English Standard Version*, which simply translates the related Greek term as “brother,” usually with a footnote whose apparent purpose is to get across that “brother” is *naturally inclusive language*, and unless the context requires otherwise, “brother” fully includes both males and females.

And, at Fordham University, in a class on social ethics with a professor who was Roman so far as I know, we read through the encyclicals and secondary sources (usually drawn from the breast of liberal Catholic dissent), and I noticed something really odd.

One leitmotif of those who opt for social ethics is “a living wage.” They keep beating that drum, much like the Energizer bunny, day in and day out, year in and year out. Then the class covered Pope John Paul II’s contribution to the social encyclicals, and he suggested that a man be able to earn a “family wage,” meaning a man should be able to earn enough money to decently support a family and leave a wife in her proper rôle, and *boy*, were the liberals **mad**. It was stated very forcefully by at least one commentator that the wages of the proletariat be kept low enough that it would be a financial necessity to have both husband and wife working. So those who were not feminist enough to have a wife working outside a home, there was to be the economic compulsion that forced

women to get a job outside the home whether they liked it or not.

Wendy Shalit confirmed this by saying that a woman is now free to be anything she wanted: a scientist, an athlete, a programmer, a mechanic, *anything* she wants to be... “*except for a woman.*”

If we ask, “In feminism, who is The Enemy, capital ‘T,’ capital ‘E?’ ” and an answer of “sexist men” is a decoy to the true answer. Traditional men may clearly be part of the problem to feminists and not part of the solution, but the real The Enemy is contented homemakers. Not that I believe this is entirely groundless; I would readily acknowledge that the housewife spending ten hours a day without adult company is a very different picture from some *properly* traditional societies, where men and women did not work together but both worked long hours in adult company, and the “solitary confinement during business hours” bit fosters depression. I think I am in agreement with mainstream feminist opinion on that count. Overall, though, I would summarize the picture as I did on Facebook, much to one woman’s pleasure: “He for She. *Because feminism knows that it is sinking.*”

Feminism is anti-woman.

What I have outlined here is, to my knowledge, not an especially distinctive claim, though it may be sketched in sharper relief than is presently common. The point I would draw here was that when I first arrived at my position, I was off in my own little world and saying things that were very politically incorrect. Now my contentions are far from a majority

consensus, but they are increasingly mainstream, and have struck a chord in a minority camp.

## **Beware of the pedestal!**

One admirer of Fr. Seraphim, who seemed to always talk down to me (assuming the position of a superior directing a subordinate is endemic among that camp's relation to nonmembers, and they may try to teach humility), talked about pedestals being dangerous even when they're properly installed, and in this case his words seemed to have the ring of truth. He stated further that Fr. Seraphim tried to tell people he was a sinner, but he got put on a pedestal anyway.

Fr. Seraphim has been hailed to me as **so** gifted, although contact with his books and with his followers leave me inclined to believe he was around the gifted equivalent of a room temperature IQ (see my book *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*, <https://cjsheyward.com/s>). However, he was at least *somewhat* gifted, and besides attempting some things that were truly heroic, he finished his life chained to a pedestal, worse off than the proverbial ball and chain.

I have so far in my life experienced what I would call "fame lite." I've met people in person and found that they knew my website. I've been told my website is someone's famous website. I get the occasional email, often kind, from a reader. There was one time when I visited my high school as an alum, and someone called out, as if I were famous, "*That's Jonathan Hayward!*" However, all of these represent a

lite version of fame, with the occasional warm fuzzy, and also occasional cold pricklies, *and almost none of the costs of monumental fame.*

Richard Feynman, when he was informed he had won a Nobel Prize, tried to dodge it. His first conversation in a storm of calls from journalists, he said this conversation was off the record, asked if there was any way to avoid this, and unhappily accepted the journalist's answer that there was no way of opting out of the Nobel Prize that would not create even more attention than accepting it. Among the ruses he adopted, he would ask a university's physics department to announce that a Prof. So-and-so they've never heard of was going to speak on such-and-such physics topic, and all physics students were strongly encouraged to attend. And then, when the lecture came, the department head said that Prof. So-and-so was unable to attend, but they had gotten Prof. Feynman to fill in. One time after such a ruse, an upset administrator asked, "Why didn't you have a straightforward announcement that you, Prof. Feynman, were coming? All and sundry would have come to hear you." He answered, "But that is precisely why. I did not want to lecture to a hall packed with all and sundry. I wanted to lecture to other physicists."

Leonard Nimoy, in *I Am Spock*, talked about what it meant to play a major character in a TV show with a very devoted following. He explained that in Hollywood there were teachers for all sorts of skills an actor might learn how to do something, or at least a "good enough for government work" imitation, to portray characters with almost any skill. But, and this



point was his payload, *there was not a single teacher for how to handle public fame one one has acquired it*. His fame meant that if he appeared in public, there would quite possibly be a public commotion. It meant that he learned all sorts of things about how to sneak into a restaurant through the kitchen to lessen the chance of “Spock” being seen publicly.

And my own beloved Vladyka PETER of Chicago and Mid-America came to the archdiocese as an archimandrite monk, and when he found out that people wanted to make him a bishop, like a good monk, *like Christ*, he tried to run away. Some people would see that decision as humility. I believe he is profoundly humble, but I suspect that much of what he will remember would be less humility than *survival instinct*: an attempt to dodge being chained to a pedestal.

And this brings me to a sad note. The last step in “First they ignore you. Then they mock you. Then they fight you. Then you win,” could be refined: the last step is *really*, “Then they chain you to a pedestal.”

One bibliographic discussion of a Chinese scholar who studied a prior great who had ended up chained to a pedestal and lamented the pedestal, ended up with a pedestal of his own. That text was shockingly clear that such things are problematic, that a pedestal is onerous, and hampers activity perhaps even more than the “Then they fight you” stage (if the first three entries come in that order – there are times I’ve *never* gotten a “First they ignore you” stage before hostilities began).

I’ve made requests of my parish’s clergy for help

in the instance of my being chained to a pedestal.

## **A proposed mechanism for much of the above**

At this point I am moving, from claims based on public record information, to my own hypothetical speculation. It is, I believe, the place where skating ahead of the Zeitgeist, and eventually ending up on a pedestal, meet.

In my case (and I really don't think this is for "Authors" with a potential capital "A;" most profoundly gifted are authors to some degree), there is a reason I took flak for my own distinctive sayings; I planted a flag (possibly not the first to do so) on territory no one saw as profitable. And the only entries in my portfolio were politically incorrect or well nigh offensive.

As time has passed, I have continued planting flags in politically incorrect turf, but due to aging some of the assertions in my portfolio were matched to the maturity of the present state of the Zeitgeist. My assertions had not particularly improved (though I may have revisited things being a little wiser), but the Zeitgeist had caught up. Then I started to have a mixed portfolio where some works were still very unpopular, but as time passed an increasingly higher portfolio of my collection had matured.

And, I suspect, if I live long enough, most of my portfolio will be mature in the eyes of the Zeitgeist, and I will be chained to a pedestal, and the pedestal will almost certainly end up more onerous than what I

call my present “fame lite.”

Furthermore, there is a possibly competing, possibly complementary explanation: I have made social skills a priority in my life, and in consequence my social skills have improved. Whether or not you make a priority of social skills, your chosen skills are likely to improve as you give them not only years but decades of practice. “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is not true at the upper end of the gifted range (I am a philologist who only really started learning a second language at the point where you’re not supposed to be able to learn an additional language, and now I’m at the philologist’s counting problem if someone asks how many I know), and especially for gifted, an old dog can become better and more practiced at more deeply learning *old* tricks.

## **On a lighter note (or not, depending on whether or not the approach works)**

A quote from “The Metacultural Gospel:”

In the morning, after a night’s dream-thought about metaculture, monoculture, and catholicity, I punched his bunk and said, “Hey, Nathaniel! How many metaculturals does it take to screw in a light bulb?”

He said, “I don’t know, Sean. How many?”

I said, “It takes fifteen:

- one to evaluate the meaning of the custom of replacing burnt out light bulbs and think of possible alternatives,
- one to drive off to a store to buy a fluorescent replacement to an incandescent heat bulb, judging the higher price worth the lessened environmental degradation and longer time to replace the bulb with one like it,
- one to read McLuhan and light a small votive candle, preferring the meaning of a candle to that of a light bulb,
- one to go outside under God's light and God's ceiling to see as men have seen for the other two million, four hundred ninety-nine thousand, and nine hundred years of human existence,
- one child to pull up a ladder, unscrew the bulb, and then dissect it to see how it works and whether he can get it working again,
- one tinkerer to assemble a portable light center with ten 120-watt bulbs, wired in parallel, powered by an uninterruptable power supply and a backup generator,

- five Society-for-Creative-Anachronism style re-enactor-ish metaculturals to try to use the occasion to grasp problem solving as understood by the monocultural mindset — one of them holding the bulb, and the other four turning the ladder,
- one critic to point out that, of the last two segments, one wastes an excessive amount of money that could be put to better use, and the other is elitist and demeaning, monoculturalism being a legitimate and God-given form of human existence that has merits metaculturals cannot share in,
- one to observe the variety of facets of the process of changing a bulb into a list, to become an immortal e-mail forward among metaculturals,
- one to say, “This joke is taking *way* too long and is *far* too complex,’ and change the light bulb, and
- one to stick her tongue out at him and say, “Spoilsport!”

Without missing a beat, Nathaniel asked, “How many monoculturals does it take to screw in a light bulb?”

I thought for several minutes, trying to think of a good answer, and said, “I give up. How many?”

“One. You’re making things far too complex and missing what’s in front of your nose.”

## **One note on (non-)coverage of AI, or what may be an elephant in the room**

People reading this text may note that I do not cover the obvious topic of optimal profoundly gifted use of AI. Let me explain about that.

I was involved in the web almost from the beginning, with a web presence and the first incarnation of my primary website which represents my life’s work (<https://cjschayward.com>), before 1994.

With that, among other risks, came porn delivery for decades, something that only stopped after a father confessor told me that not only was porn “anonymous sex,” but that “masturbation, *the masturbatory act*” was the ultimate exploitation of the model’s performance. That helped me not want to bring pornography and masturbation to confession again. I regard that shackle as a significant amount of lost time, and a liability at least comparable to the benefit of making a website and a whole lot of being in the right place at the right time that I cannot take credit for.

I also became involved on social media, found one group that by its title sounded like a place of kindred

spirits... and was home to trolls who gave me the most toxic harassment of my entire life, to the point that suicide was a live question.

I now coexist both with Internet and with social media (I stopped posting links on Twitter after I was told it would cost me \$86 to get verified; I'm still active on Facebook), and am getting some traffic, I believe, from daily Facebook posts with part of a work and a link to that work. However, I regard whatever benefit I have gained from really anti-social media to be trivial compared to the risk represented by Facebook trolling alone.



**In the days before mobile Internet**

My signature contribution to the conversation relates to how I have learned to coexist with technologies, including mobile Internet; you can read it in the seven volume *Hidden Price Tags: An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark Side of Technology and Its Best Use* series, redirected to Amazon from

<https://cjshayward.com/hpt> (please note that a search for “hidden price tags” or the like will get oodles of paid ads for various kinds of physical price tags before turning up my work, even if you add “cjs hayward” to the search). However, I believe that my learning to live with my iPhone has little to commend it above a non-smartphone handset from <https://sunbeamwireless.com>), or not owning anything like a smartphone at all. In *Bridge to Teribinthia*, it is Leslie’s family not owning a TV that the author used to mark her as Privileged with a capital ‘P’ even more than her family being one where “money is not the issue.” If the book were written today, Leslie might not own a cellphone, and might not have an account with ChatGPT.

I believe that Nicholas Carr was right in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, and *The Glass Cage: How Our Computers are Changing Us*. Not in just individual assertions, but in the overall withering critique in continuity with past critiques of television, I believe the assessments are largely on-target. In the latter, the most withering direct critique is how automation is changing medicine, but the book also treats how ever more powerful Integrated Development Environments are castrating programmer competency. To quote “I Deleted my ChatGPT App” a bit ahead of time:

The most devastating critique in the book is what Electronic Medical Records have done, and are doing, to the medical profession, and I will leave you to read



The Glass Cage for that. However, a related find was what Integrated Development Environments do to people's programming skills. Before that, I had assumed that when programmers wrote, "*I'd crawl over a mile of Integrated this and Visual that to get to Emacs and a good copy of gcc,*" which I had simply assumed was a chauvinism for known and familiar tools. Another person much more crassly and much more scathingly denounced IDE-induced skill atrophy by saying, "*Most programmers today couldn't find their d\*cks if you took away their Visual M\*st\*r\*b\*t\*\*n Kit ++.*" The older command line tools (I use vim instead of Emacs) required the programmer to know what he was programming and keep it in his head. Emacs is a complex and capable system, but in a way that encourages development of expert skills ("*...and with 'evil' mode, the operating system includes an editor.*"). A distinction has been made between "novice-friendly" and "expert-friendly" systems, and Unix and Linux are both expert-friendly systems. (In Linux Mint, a novice-friendly desktop metaphor is built on top of an expert-friendly chassis). It has been said, perhaps insultingly, "*Unix is*

*a very friendly operating system; it's just very selective about who it is friendly with.*" I do not ask you to like the last statement or for that matter any of these statements, but Unix is a classic example of an expert-friendly system that fosters the development and refinement of expert skill.

Do I think there can be a beneficial and non-obvious use of AI? I'd pretty much say "Yes and amen" there. However I think a fair assessment of liabilities is appropriate. When I first saw Golem AI advertised as being a great spark to creativity, I thought that it might offer that if used correctly, but the more obvious consequence would be that people use it to do their thinking for them. This was before I heard of YouTube videos, possibly published prior to my "prediction," about boyfriends copying and pasting between texting and ChatGPT because they did not know how to console their girlfriends. Other obvious consequences include a kind of "friendship porn" which destroys the ability to enjoy real friends (this is an un-highlighted aspect of what the Humane Tech "The AI Dilemma" videos on YouTube, an older version being at <https://tinyurl.com/double-exponential>, talk about in terms of intimacy being the real content of ChatGPT.

With social media, also known as "AI First Contact," the live danger to me included possible suicide. With Golem AI, also known as "AI Second Contact," the live danger is something done with the

good intentions that pave the road to Hell causing harm far eclipsing my own interests. I believe there is most likely a legitimate use for Golem AI, but I do not consider it necessarily obvious, and I do not see why, as with cellphones, it might be the position of true privilege not to have one, and to have one's brain conditioned with the discipline of a profoundly gifted mind educated and self-tutored by classically profoundly gifted means.

There is a book I gave my father, a computer scientist, that I half-wish I had kept for myself. It was written in the 1980's and gave various contrived uses for computers as a solution in need of a problem. It is interesting, but they were incredibly peripheral ways of using computers compared to the niche they have carved out for themselves in the real world (and I do not recall mention of email, word processing, or spreadsheets among the proposed games). One of the proposed uses was as a board game, and I might comment that my own "computer as a board game or un-game" at

<https://jonathanhayward.com/furball.cgi> never really caught on. The low-hanging fruit that Golem AI offers now has most likely little to do with the niche it is in the process of carving out for itself, and while it may recall an aunt's remark that Facebook seemed like "walking on water" when Facebook was hot and new, I do not think that Golem AI will seem to only offer plusses when it gets to work. That much is to be said even without considering the privacy implications.

So I will not be advising you on how to take advantage of AI to work better. It might offer a

cognitive advantage to people with woke educations who have not been taught the three R's; profoundly gifted intelligence may function best when it is the master of its own competencies. At least *The Glass Cage* has chilling implications for outsourcing our intelligence to computers, and Golem AI offers the threats I have mentioned and probably other, less obvious dangers. An old joke runs, "What did the lumberjack kid say after using a chainsaw?"—"Look, Mom, no fingers!" In profound giftedness already in history, if there is an historical event with a body count that exceeds one million, a profoundly gifted person acting on the good intentions that pave the road to Hell probably played a crucial part. That propensity will likely only be magnified with Golem AI tools.

I may sometime take on the task of learning Golem AI and finding future volumes to my past volumes about non-obvious ways of using e.g. the smartphone without being given over to it. However, for now, the obvious position of privilege seems to be that of abstinence, and at least by historical analogy, watching TV for several hours a day is not an order of magnitude or two more productive than watching the Weather Channel for five minutes a day. I am intentionally not giving this collection an overhaul to give key insights to how to use Golem AI constructively. My use of the web for my life's work at <https://cjshayward.com> is in my opinion genuine added value; even if I use social media now I believe the risks outweigh the benefits, and I do not believe that Golem AI will in its overall use merit anything

above the withering critiques outlined in Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business* and *Technopoly*, Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, Marie Winn's *The Plug-in Drug*, and Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* and *The Glass Cage: How Our Computers are Changing Us*. The first are critiques of TV, a technology hailed as bearing great educational potential, but these critiques of technology age well and I believe Carr was right, ten years after *The Shallows*, to leave the main text unchanged and just give one chapter's worth of updates for something he did not originally treat: the mobile Internet that delivered anti-social media at much more convenience than was to be had glued to laptops and desktops as things were when he originally wrote his book; the same goes for Winn and her chapter about computers and Internet.



# **Orthodox Theology and Technology: *A Profoundly Gifted Autobiography***

O Lord, I know not what to ask of Thee. Thou alone knowest what are my true needs. Thou lovest me more than I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I do not dare to ask either a cross or a consolation. I can only wait on Thee. My heart is open to Thee. Visit and help me, for the sake of Thy great mercy. Strike me and heal me; cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Thy holy will and Thine unsearchable ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice to Thee. I have no other desire than to fulfill Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thou Thyself in me. Amen.

St. Philaret of Moscow, a high rank of bishop, unusually named after a layman, St. Philaret the Merciful.

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It is not particularly unusual for a teenager to lie awake in bed and wonder about the biggest questions: “Who are we?”, “Where did we come from?”, “Where will we go?”

What is unusual in my case, as I wondered and tried to answer questions like, “Is there an external world?”, “Can there be a perpetual motion machine?”—“If so, how can it get started?” “What does it mean to be “Jonathan Hayward?””, “Am I a being of the same class as those I observe about me?”, is that I was not a teenager. I was a little boy, too young to think about any of those questions in words. and so I worked out my idiosyncratic and even solipsistic metaphysics by thinking in pictures, and this is in fact my earliest memory.

People (some agree, some don't) say that a person's earliest memory can be illuminating, and it has been commented that this is an unusual first memory. I have read a number of people's earliest memory stories, and not one that I have read is like this. The one that jumps to memory is a girl saying she remembered her Mom holding her and then passing her to another woman, and asking, “Who is this?” and being told, “That's your grandmother.” An earliest memory is normally a story, not to mention simple and concrete. I was a bit of an outlier.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

I was born in 1975, a firstborn son to John and Linda Hayward, when my father was a grad student. My father studied physics, and my mother would go on to study the



teaching of English to speakers of other languages. I was born almost three weeks overdue. A botch by my Mom's obstetrician meant that at my birth both my mother and I were fighting a deadly infection. I spoke in complete sentences before my first birthday, and at the age of two fell down stairs and hit my head on a concrete basement floor. My eyes rolled back and I did not respond to stimuli. I survived, but spoke slowly, spoke very little, and stuttered. My Mom prayed over me and the stuttering was taken away. When my father had graduated and I was one, my parents moved to Macomb, Illinois, where my father taught at Illinois State University (their homepage shows a young woman wearing goggles that are simply inappropriate for the work she is doing, a common syndrome when photographers try to make a model look scientific). A major goal in their move was to be able to raise me outside of smog. When I was three, my family moved again, to the house where I have my earliest memory, and where my father began teaching at Wheaton College, where he worked until retirement. He had studied physics, but worked in computer science, and served both as a professor and a high-level in-house consultant at Wheaton. He introduced me to puzzles and questions relating to what we found most interesting in computer science (e.g. a question about the foundational 'pigeon hole principle:' "You are in a dark room and cannot see at all, and have a drawer full of mixed black and white socks. What is the minimum number of socks you can take to be sure you have a matched pair?"), and Unix computer games, which I dialed into by modem.

## **Schooling from kindergarten on**

I have fond memories of Lowell Elementary School, where I entered in kindergarten, sometimes dressed up as a cowboy with chaps or in a suit, and attended until third grade, when school and my parents sensed that I would do better at a specifically gifted school, and I entered Avery Coonley School in fourth grade, where the headmaster bent a number of rules and awarded me 25% of the total financial aid awarded by the school for that year so my parents could afford to send me. I was initially placed in the less advanced of two math groups (one year ahead instead of two), and in eight grade ranked 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition, programmed a four dimensional maze, conducted an independent study of calculus, and (re)invented recursion in programming and iterated integration in calculus.

After a brief class in modern algebra for math whizzes at the the University of Chicago which I didn't really get, I skipped a freshman year at a local school to enter the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, where I continued to get high ranks in math contests, ran a Unix server that did the work of a local and hard-to-use social network. and actively participated in discussions, and programmed a video game on my calculator. Someone commented later that this was the first video game they'd heard of where you *lose* points for shooting things, although I wasn't trying to be original. (I was trying to implement a game I'd envisioned in gradeschool.) In order to justify a decision, my high school asked me to take an IQ test, and the psychologist scoring the test almost fell off her chair.

The summer after my junior year of high school I trained as an Emergency Medical Technician at College of DuPage because I was frustrated at the shallowness of what

I had taken in first aid class. I was also unsatisfied with the Emergency Medical Technician training, as it seemed to me then to only teach enough medicine to package patients up and ship them to the local emergency room, but there have been a few times I've used my training: once two summers later, in Malaysia, where I helped provide some faint parody of suspected spinal injury management in helping a motorcycle accident victim, who had evidence of serious internal injury, get to the emergency room when he was loaded into a nearby van instead of an ambulance. I also used knowledge about heat, years after that, to get an elderly dog to stop shivering after she was taken outside for a potty break and made a lethargic beeline to the place in the yard where the wind was least bitter, and stood there, shivering, until I picked her up and carried her back inside and did what I could to raise her body temperature. (I do not think she would have survived for more than a few hours more if I had not had that prior medical knowledge.)

I mentioned that two summers later I was in Malaysia. It was wonderful and I didn't want to leave. The rest of my family went there for a calendar year; I choosed to stay in the U.S. for my freshman year of college, but joined my family for the summer. It awakened a lifelong interest in culture and the many ways time can be experienced, but beyond that I would refer to a book on writing college admissions essays which talked about avoiding clichés that college admissions officers are tired of reading, which included pet death and The Travel Experience, which runs something like, "In my trip to \_\_\_\_\_, I met new people and new ways of doing things. \_\_\_\_\_ challenged assumptions I didn't even know I had, and has changed me forever. [*And so on and so forth about life in \_\_\_\_\_.*]"

Please note that this description is entirely ambiguous about what continent, island, or space station “\_\_\_\_\_” was located on. Living in Malaysia was a life-changing experience, an eye-opener, and a delight, however I try to be careful to avoid stretching social patience in talking about my cherished travel experiences. Those who have already had a travel experience know what it is like; those who haven’t don’t want to hear me gush on and on.

I entered Wheaton College as a National Merit Scholar, but ran aground on a particular community requirement which, like others before and after me, some Christians are not comfortable with. When I stopped running from my conscience, I took the unprecedented step of appealing to the Board of Trustees to give a conscientious exemption to this requirement (no lesser figure had the necessary authority), they did not pay me the courtesy of letting the item be put on the agenda for consideration (they thought the voluntary nature of Wheaton made my concerns “evaporate”). The requirement, that Wheaton students don’t drink and dance, has variously and inconsistently been defended by Wheaton leadership as “just social mores,” “like vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity,” and a strict requirement of Wheaton’s conscience. I lay on bed at night, wondering, “If this is how Christians act, do I want to be a Christian?”

I transferred to Calvin with a broken heart. I ended up being able to take all of the highest-level math classes offered at Wheaton and also at Calvin, in total a major and a half’s worth of them. I spent a semester in Paris at the Sorbonne, where I imagined the cultures of my own fantasy world, “Espiriticthus,” a fusion of the beauty I saw in Malaysia and France. I met my first Luddite, a man who

commented simply that he would look into the window to the computer lab and observe that everybody seemed to be angry as they were typing. On a larger scale, I also had a painful relationship with a girl named Rebecca. In that troubled relationship, I am not interested in stating what she did wrong. I am interested, however, in stating what *I* did wrong. I approached that relationship, like life itself, as a department of mathematics. Meaning, as time passed, I did not relate to Rebecca as especially human, and I did not relate to myself as especially human either. *Our relationship was mercifully broken off.*

I spent a summer as a camp counselor and entered as a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), where I managed to get a master's in applied mathematics, with a thesis accomplishing one thing usually associated with a PhD: carving out a niche where I knew more than anyone else in the world, in this case opening a new subbranch of "point-set topology" whose implications included a straightforward but rigorous way to handle infinitesimals such as bedeviled the foundation of calculus, in an academic discipline where it was hard to find something new to prove. Nonetheless, my advisor, the department chair, told me in one prolific summer that he regarded my many emails (see "The Blacksmith's Forge") as "mathematics fiction" by analogy with "science fiction," and he did not regard my math awards as indicating in any way that I was adequate in mathematics. He and one other professor approved my thesis without reading the second half.

## Entering the work world, or trying to

My first job out of college, at an anonymous company, told me when I was hired that I had gotten the highest score on one test of any applicant yet, and I had gotten a perfect score on the linear logic test, and I submitted the best code sample they'd seen ("reads like plain English"). Then things turned a little odd. I believe the reasons were complex, but they boasted about the computers they gave employees then gave me what was apparently a hand-me-down. More seriously when, in the interview process, I asked if I would be able to program in what was then the darling language in IT, namely Java, I was told I would program in Forte, a language they compared to a Formula One racecar, but once hired, I was told I would program in (Visual) Basic, a language that had a terrible reputation (one computer science great said that its use "...cripples the mind. Its teaching should therefore be regarded as a criminal offense;" lesser wits had compared it with a sexually transmitted disease in that "those who have it tend not to admit it in polite company"). I complained, believing in good faith that its use would be harmful for me. In retrospect I do not believe they made an *intentional* bait and switch, but there was some ineptitude in advertising what they advertised I would work with and then assigning what I was assigned to work with. Also, I think that is the main area where I earned my "not a team player" badge.

I was brainsized my third day on the job (they refused to tell me why...), and I was later told that fellow alumni of the company blocked me from getting jobs at other companies.

A few months later, I developed a terrible manic episode and my life was again in danger. However, the manic episode is less significant in its aftermath, where I was prescribed a year-long drug overdose that destroyed my abilities of mathematician. I spent a year of my life at my parents' house (where I am still), lying on my bed, staring at the light bulb, with nary a thought running through my mind beyond, "This is worse than watching television." When I saw my psychiatrist, I would inevitably ask, "When am I going to get my abilities back?" and with an edge of anger in his voice my psychiatrist would answer, "I don't know. You've had a major manic episode, and it can take a long time to recover from a manic episode." After about a year of this, my Mom dragged me against my will to a patient advocate group meeting on Wheaton College's campus where a fellow patient, without medical credentials that I know of, listened to my complaints, asked about my medication, and said, "That's *not* an effect of your manic episode. *It's your medication.*"

I have incidentally complained about the provider's preferred counselor to work with a complaint I could have directed at the psychiatrist equally well: trying to get anything done better was "*like a magic spell*, where you have to say just the right words, and say them just right, or else it's all for nothing." (It wasn't, for instance, enough for me to tell him, and have other medical personnel he was working with to observe, that I was throwing up half my medication most days for a year. I had to make a request in *just the right words*, and *just the right way*, for him to prescribe the other form of the same medication which had all of the benefits of what he prescribed me, and no added drawbacks, but would not induce vomiting on a frequent

basis.)

The hardest intellectual achievement I had made in my life was not some discovery; it was, after spending six months away from mathematics (including my semester studying French at the Sorbonne), regaining competency. I was never in my life to regain competency in research mathematics. Computer programming came back, but with difficulty and imperfectly. Humanities work, which I had always been interested in, came back almost immediately.

## **Picking up the pieces**

After being on a less destructive dose, I took stock and tried to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I had had some rough times outside of academia; I would later hold one post for over a year, but I was fired after I reported a senior manager for harassment. I asked my pastor, who was also a professor at Wheaton College and one of the most charismatic people around, advice on how to get an interdisciplinary humanities degree, and was strongly advised to pick a single field and get a doctorate in that specific field: “American Studies” PhD’s from a department he taught at, who had studied an interdisciplinary fusion of American literature and history, were incredibly hard to place. History departments wanted a straight history PhD; literature departments wanted a straight literature PhD. I applied to several schools, and Cambridge University accepted me.

In the time between employment and Cambridge, I had joined a group of Wheaton students and some alumni, close friends, meeting every Tuesday night at 9:58 PM for a reader’s theatre reading of classic children’s literature, and



it was lore that students from that group would enter a tailspin after leaving England (and it seemed almost every member of the group found a way to England at some point). However, I thought that that simply did not apply to me. It was not exactly arrogance on my part; past experience had been that I simply did not experience culture shock on cue. I had experienced culture shock, but not when I was expected to, and when culture shock was predicted, I experienced nothing particularly like culture shock. I had, furthermore, already lived abroad, so this wouldn't be my first time outside the U.S.

## **New directions at, and after, Cambridge**

There was a major crescendo of trial and providence involved in my getting to England; there were several distractions, and after six months of red tape and difficulties getting student loans, they fell into place one business day before I left. My college told me not to come into residence. Additionally, I had a growing lump by my collarbone and was very sleepy very often. Cambridge had admitted me for a diploma, not yet a master's, and after I arrived on faith and things started working out, I was diagnosed and treated for lymphoma. And despite all this, I succeeded. After further difficulties and prayer, I was admitted to the master's program, where at the beginning of the year I said I wanted to study the holy kiss, meaning a doctrinal study of ideas, and after reclassifying my intent as a sociological study of kissing that was not particularly edifying, I was told two thirds of the way through the year that my announced thesis topic did not fit my philosophy of

religion seminar, and I would therefore have to change topic completely. (There was also some hideous confusion where meeting with my professor to fix my second compulsory essay's texts took six weeks.) I pulled out the stops, wrote a still not particularly edifying thesis in *AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics*, and succeeded at earning a master's in theology as well, albeit with not quite high enough marks to enter a doctorate. I went home and had my tailspin.

Now there were several things that happened along the way; the biggest one being, during my time at Cambridge, my reception into the Orthodox Church. I would like to tell a bit about one particular nuance.

There is a tradition in Orthodoxy for people of sufficient age to choose a patron saint, and take that saint's name. It is believed that not only does the catechumen choose the saint, but that the saint chooses the disciple from Heaven. I wanted to be called "John Adam." "John" after John the Theologian, and "Adam" as bearing *Sources of the Self's* burden of pioneering a new way of life for others to follow. I knew at some level that this was wrong, and I should have recognized I was choosing those names out of pride. A significant struggle occurred when I was wrestling with my guilty conscience, and after long resistance on my part, I repented. This just happened to be when a priest was reading the names of people commemorated in prayer. The next name I heard was "Christos," and my surrender was complete.

The name has had some salutary side benefits I did not consider. One thing I have found is that whether clergy are quick to dress me down for taking Christ as my patron gives me a highly effective early warning system for how well we

will end up getting along. (It seems to reflect whether I am judged for obvious pride in choosing One above all Saints, versus perhaps seeing no legitimate way I might have been right in that choice, but still refraining from judging.) Now at the cathedral, where I attend Liturgy, clergy are not happy about my name, but that came later, after I kept bringing horrible things to confession. I give no complaint about them. But social response has offered me a powerful and useful social cue.

As an author, I have usually given my name as “C.J.S. Hayward”, and on Facebook, which is not terribly friendly to such use of initials written out my name as “Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward,” which I thought would condense to “CJSH” when people spoke of me. I have been told that on Facebook it has instead condensed to “CSH,” meaning “C.S. Hayward.” Did I mention that I’ve read every well-known work by C.S. Lewis and most of his obscurities, and he formed me as a writer?

I might also mention that there is more besides the number of times my life has been in danger and I’ve survived (I seem to have more than a cat’s nine lives, though I have rarely been accused of being catlike.) I’ve had an awful lot of being in the right place at the right time in ways I do not think that I can rightly take credit for. For instance, I built my first website within a year or two of the web’s creation, although it would be over a year between when I first built a website and I ever used a graphical browser. I used Lynx, a command line tool that displays text alone. It is still a good way to check if a site appears pornographic before loading graphical view; not the reason why I made a nasty parody site called “Revenge of the Hydra,” optimized for Internet Explorer, which if you load

it, nine popup windows appear, and for each popup window you close, two more appear. (People on the Megalist wanted to ride me out on a rail for that one.) My main site, started in the early nineties, would grow to be a fixture of the web; when Google still published its PageRanks, my website had a PageRank of 5, a respectable PageRank for a medium to large sized organization, and was the top site in its category in [directory.google.com](http://directory.google.com). (I've won dozens of math awards, and hundreds of web awards.) It's grown since then, and in some people's opinions, it has only gotten better. Now I have worked long and hard to make my website a good site, but there was from the beginning a great deal of being in the right time and choosing decisions that would prove helpful for reasons I could not have imagined. I also published on the web when the tried and true advice was to pursue traditional publication. Now I am a traditionally published author; I've published two books with Packt Publications, and they've been very good to me and I would heartily recommend contacting an acquisition editor for IT professionals who want to write a book. (Note to such professionals: the pay you receive directly from an IT publisher is a social courtesy; Packt pays more than many publishers but hardly enough to live on. For an IT professional to publish a technical book should be seen as a marketing move that will qualify you as a domain expert who can charge over \$100 per hour for expert work.) However, while Packt is built to give structure to unformed authors, traditional publishing tripped me up, and my traditionally published titles are far from excellent and lower in Amazon ratings than those I've self-published. The core reason is that I do my best work when I am writing out of my heart, but working with editorial requests for major

overhaul has been necessarily out of my head; I cannot summon or control my inspiration or *awen* at will. Even this work, alongside works I consider some of my best, is not the work I set out to write, though that is grace.

## **My thorn in the flesh: *harassment***

However, there is another shoe to drop, a scorpion in the ointment: *harassment*. To take one example, whenever I made a new post to my website, an acquaintance from IMSA wrote extended and intense criticism that delivered pain, took me down quite a few notches, and elevating himself even more notches socially. No matter what genre, length, or really quality I posted, he would, he would deliver trenchant criticism that covered those bases.

At one point, when I explained why his twisting my words into an actual alleged assertion that rape **is** the victim's fault, followed by the most belittling lecture in my life, I explained where rape had come close to home and I found that the most offensive thing he'd said yet. He responded with another hefty serving of criticism. I asked him not to send any further criticisms on my writing. He responded with another hefty dollop of criticism of me personally. I asked him not to send any further unsolicited criticisms on any topic. He wrote, "Ok, I will not send any unsolicited criticisms, but I will take emails from you as solicitation for response," and responded by another king-sized industrial strength dose of brutal, judgmental criticism.

A forceful "No" cc'ed to [helpdesk@imsa.edu](mailto:helpdesk@imsa.edu) stopped his criticisms cold, or rather I think that the help desk explained to the great liberal what the word "No" means.

I have not heard from him since apart from one request to list him as a trusted contact on LinkedIn.

I also can't say that I missed him.

This sort of thing has happened dozens of times, and not just with people who post a fantasy of their alter ego luring a little boy into a car and being finished with him in under five minutes. As far as social dynamics go, in the Bible, King Saul wanted St. David dead, and sent St. David on a suicide mission that would require killing two hundred Philistines. St. David succeeded in his quest. Then women were singing in the streets, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands," which was about the worst thing they could have done for St. David's welfare. It really would have been better for St. David's political stock if the woman had chanted a cultural equivalent of, "David smells bad and his mother dresses him funny."

That was the point where Saul went from wanting St. David dead to making him Public Enemy #1, and engaging in extended manhunts after his first outright attempt at direct murder failed.

My giftedness is not simply from my genes, even if my parents are both at the top of their game. It is actually common for profoundly gifted individuals to have birth trauma or early childhood brain injury; such insults to the brain usually push a person towards intellectual disability, but once in a blue moon they overclock the brain and cause an intensification of overgrowth. I've had both routes, and however astonishingly bright my parents are, um...

I had higher SAT scores in 7th grade than my father had as a high school senior, and when I took the Modern Languages Aptitude test, the UIUC linguist who scored it said,

...and here's where it gets interesting. I've never seen someone complete this section before... Your mother scored in the mid 150's, which is considered a very, very high score. You scored 172. I don't know what to make of it. I've been scoring this test for thirty years, and I've never seen a score this high...

I was looking to avoid mentioning this, but my parents, especially in my childhood, surprisingly often dealt with me in anger.

In a moment of "I have no mouth and I must scream" after other unrelated situations of harassment and hostility from several other people, I gave my scream in "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."

*My quality of life improved remarkably when I learned that a "CEASE AND DESIST" letter Cc'ed to abuse@gmail.com or other authority figure can stop harassment cold.*

## **Schooling: Another attempt**

Returning to education, in 2005 I entered Fordham's PhD program. What I think I'd like to say about that was that it was a golden illustration of St. John Chrysostom's "A Treatise to Prove That Nothing Can Injure The Man Who Does Not Harm Himself." During that time, there were occasions where my conscience was extraordinarily clear and I ignored it. For instance, when the University endangered my life on my first night after arriving, my conscience was to complain to the University President.

Had I done so, beyond perhaps getting an apology, I would have opened a channel that would have been useful when some professors were treating me inappropriately. Furthermore, while external things may have been inappropriate, it was my own sins that gave them real sting. That a doctor took me off a medication I needed was not my choice. That I worried to the point of uninterrupted waking nausea about whether I would be able to find employment given that my work in the business world had been clumsy and my PhD “union card” to teach in academia was jeopardized, worriedly asking, “Will there be a place for me?” was my decision. Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger quoted in the NFL said, “We suffer more in imagination than in reality,” and I suffered much more in imagination than in reality then—*that was my decision, and not the decision of even the most hostile member of the university*. Possibly I could have completed my degree if I had not ignored a conscience at full “jumping up and down” intensity when I didn’t see a reason for what my conscience was telling me, and possibly I am guilty for failing to accept tacitly offered help. I washed out of the program in 2007. Perhaps the other thing really worth mentioning is what I intended to be my doctoral dissertation, which I wrote up in non-scholarly prose that one Roman reader called “the most intelligent and erudite” thing he’d ever read: “ ‘Religion and Science’ Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.”

## **The birth of a unique area of attention**

Now I’d like to shift gears a little bit and talk about something else that has slowly developed over the years,



incrementally and mostly imperceptibly to me.

Like others before me, I've bristled at the concept of "an idea whose time has come." My main use of it, as a programmer who poked fun at tools he did not like and tools he did like, was to quote a fake advertisement for Unix's "X Windows:" "An idea whose time has come. And gone." When at Fordham I read Vatican II's almost incessant anxiety to pay attention to "the signs of the times," meaning in practice to pay attention to whatever 1960's fads were in the *Zeitgeist* and take marching orders from them, I pointed out that in searching the 38 volume Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections, I could only find three or four references to discerning the signs of the times, and never a slavish imitation of *Zeitgeist*; one of them simply meant being on guard against lust.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which *Zeitgeist* is real. It is a well-known phenomenon among mathematicians that a major problem will remain unsolved for ages and then be independently solved at almost the same time by several researchers: hence mathematicians are advised that if they discover something major, they should write it up and publish it as soon as possible, because if they don't, someone else will get the credit for first discovery. *And this is in what is possibly the least Zeitgeist-like academic discipline.*

Gandhi has been popularly misquoted as saying "First, they ignore you. Then, they laugh at you. Then, they fight you. Then, you win!" and while researchers have traced a legitimate Gandhi quotation about how victory will develop if you apply Gandhi's satyagraha or nonviolence in dealing with people hostile to you, this did not sound much like

Gandhi to me. Nonetheless, it has some grain of truth.

When I wanted to do research on the holy kiss, at first I was bluntly ridiculed by my then current Cambridge advisor; he responded by asking cutesie questions about whether we could find reasons to only kiss the members of a congregation who were the prettiest, notwithstanding that in England there is a well-established social kiss and “Greet one another with a holy kiss” does not come across as a shorthand for all inapplicable ancient nonsense in the Bible as it might in the U.S. midwest, where hugs between friends are within standard cultural boundaries but kisses ordinarily are not.

Furthermore, when I tried to write a dissertation on it, every professor that sought to guide me took my intended *doctrinal* study, and reclassified it as a study of a physical detail of Biblical culture, to be studied alongside other *Realia* like, “When St. Paul said to put on the whole armor of God and used a Roman soldier’s weapon and armor as a basis for the analogy, what kind of physical weapon and armor would have been in his imagination?” which overlooks that the “breastplate of righteousness” and the “helmet of salvation” are the armor that God Himself wears in Isaiah. I drew a line in the sand and told my second advisor that I wanted to do a *doctrinal* study. He immediately pushed past that line and said, “The best way to do that is to do a cultural study, and let any doctrines arise.”

To my knowledge I am the first person who observed that the holy kiss is the only act that the entire Bible calls holy (excluding one reference to a “holy convocation” in the Old Testament where a different Hebrew word is translated “holy”), and it is called holy three or four times. This is one

of the highlights that I condensed into a homily, “The Eighth Sacrament.” But then a few years later, I suddenly had people contacting me to tell me about the holy kiss, and people asked if I knew more than I had stated in the homily (yes, I did; the Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections contain something like a hundred references to a holy kiss, many of them boilerplate repetitions of “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” in festal epistles by St. John Chrysostom). Earlier I was rudely enough ridiculed by allies; then I was contacted in response to my website to inform me about the holy kiss by complete strangers.

At the moment I would downplay the importance of the holy kiss for active study. It is practiced in the Orthodox Church; I have said everything I want to say; I do not seek a kiss where none is offered. I have moved on to other concerns, one other concern as I am letting go as Fr. Seraphim of Plantina is in the process of canonization (one of my books, the one that’s gotten by far the most scathing reviews, is *The Seraphinians: “Blessed Seraphim Rose” and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*).

I would like to say that *The Best of Jonathan’s Corner* is what I consider my overall best collection across my works and leave things at that, but I am rather suspecting another case of “Man proposes, God disposes.” The most important collection I leave behind (if any) may well be *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*. The topic is loosely “religion and science,” but it is very different in character. “Religion and science” as I have met it, with one stellar exception, is about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths of Christian doctrine with the present state of flux in scientific speculation. Science is, or at least was,

characterized by a system of educated guesses held accountable to experiment. Orthodox gnology (understanding of knowledge) should find this to be very, very different from how true Orthodox theology works.

With one exception, none of the Orthodox authors I hold dear know particularly much about science. The one exception is patrologist Jean-Claude Larchet, who raises some of the same concerns I do about technology, and does some of them better. Everyone else (for instance, Vladimir Lossky) shows little engagement with science that I know of. And if I may refer to the *Karate Kid* movie that was popular in my childhood, the sensei tells the boy, “Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe! Don’t know karate, safe! In the middle, squash like a grape.” The “religion and science” I’ve seen has a lot of “in the middle, squash like a grape,” by theologians who want to be scientific (and perhaps make what I have called the “physics envy declaration:” theologians-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-the-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics), but who almost never bother to get letters after their name in the sciences, which are genuinely hard. My own formation, in mathematics, engineering, technology, and science, affords me the position of the blackbelt who declares, “*Don’t know karate, safe!*” Perhaps one blackbelt saying such things is needed!

Furthermore, my main concern from mathematics, engineering, technology, and science (all of which I was formed in, even if I’ve lost much of it) is not too much about *science*, but specifically about *technology*. I’ve experienced technology early; my life story and could largely be seen as a preparation for commenting on technology, and I have background in both studying theology academically and

living it in practice.

## **Another dimension to profound giftedness**

One reader who has studied giftedness at length commented to me that profoundly gifted individuals are often “very, very conservative, or at least populist.” I had thought earlier that my conservatism and my giftedness were two separate things. They are not, or at least there is a direct relationship.

The basic way I understand it is this. Possibly I had a contrarian spine built by requesting a conscientious exemption from Wheaton College’s requirements and leaving Wheaton College after it was not even put on the agenda. I have certainly had as much exposure to liberal recruiting, or more, than most liberals. But standard methods of recruiting gifted are less successful in dealing profoundly gifted. The university system has very effective ways of drawing in the gifted, and up to a point the more gifted someone is the better it works—but recruiting tools fall flat with some of the profoundly gifted. Much of the gifted range ends up liberal. It has been pointed out that the math department tends to be one of the most liberal, or the most liberal, department on campus, even though the author pointing this out (and I) have never experienced mathematicians trying to recruit to liberalism. I believe, apart from natural bents, that mathematics shapes the mind in a way that inclines towards liberalism. It encourages a not particularly human way of understanding life that misses things that check tendencies that make for embracing liberalism. I stopped really trying to learn chess

after I found myself at the Cathedral looking at my quarantine-dictated socially distanced space with regard to other parishioners in terms of what I could threaten to capture in a knight's move. That may be superficial, and it may fade into the background with deeper study. However, mathematics does shape the character, in the direction of what Orthodox have called "hypertrophied dianoia, darkened nous," i.e. "overgrown head and impoverished, darkened heart," and mathematics may do this in a more concentrated form than humanities which promote the same. I certainly do not see that my successes in relating to my ex-girlfriend (there were successes) were due to my bent to take a mathematician's approach to relating.

Something that never happened in my formation in mathematics was that my advisor at Cambridge consistently tried to recruit me to Biblical Egalitarianism (he was a plenary speaker at at least one conference), for instance, by asking, "But what about Biblical Egalitarians, who believe that 'In Christ there is no... male nor female?'" and I would dismantle the live grenade, for instance by saying that "who believe that" in English-speaking idiom means "whose non-shared distinguishing quality is that," and second by saying that he was smuggling into the back door that "no male nor female" be cast along at least quasi-feminist lines, as opposed to recognizing that some conservatives (St. Maximus Confessor, for instance) hold that in Christ there really is no male nor female, but read it along profoundly non-feminist lines. (I think after a certain number of attempts my advisor gave up and accepted that I would not listen to his exposition.)

*Yonder*, which is a collection of works intended to answer and challenge feminism, might have been

provocative when it was first published. Now there is much more than the men's movement, which I consider opening men to feminist-style protest. It is mainstream for women to dissociate themselves from feminism and "Like" texts that challenge it. When the U.S. Supreme Court came out in rainbow colors, I posted a response echoing *First Things* in the discussion at StackExchange (whose CEO is an adamant gay activist), saying, "The question is not whether gay marriage is possible in the U.S., but whether anything else is possible. It has been established that marriage has no particular roles, is dissolvable, need not be open to bearing children, and so forth. Why suddenly draw a line in the sand about marriage involving a man and a woman?" It was censored, with a comment of "Not even close!" However, in the time since then, I have seen comments not censored about the whole policy violation of turning the StackOverflow logo rainbow colors for a time and flipping it to veer in the opposite direction, and so on and so forth, was in fact not StackOverflow's best moment.

C.S. Lewis has a tantalizingly brief remark (possibly in *The Allegory of Love*), in reference to Spencer who alone receives almost undiluted praise in a book that is exacting of other authors, about how figures who turn out to be what some people call "ahead of their time" seem an odd throwback to the vintage past, when they first appear. Even Bach was respected in his life as a performing organist but not taken too seriously as a composer, because he composed in an area of music that had simply fallen out of fashion. I don't want to compare myself to the famous people who populate the most obvious examples, but in regard to what Lewis said, it seems that **some of my portfolio has matured.**

My critiques of feminism may still not be mainstream, but they are no longer so far off the beaten path. As far as raising concerns about technology goes, we have gone past the point where one very bright friend tweeted a link to Paul Graham's "The Acceleration of Addictiveness" and commented in only three words: "SOMEBODY UNDERSTANDS ME!" For that matter, we have gotten past the point where the cover of *Time Magazine* presents the Facebook "Like" button as a major part of our conundrum. Things that I said that were way off the beaten path when I said them remain of particular interest, but are far less provocative to say now.

When I tried to do a literature search before or during my writing of " 'Social Antibodies' Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy," I searched Amazon in regards to Orthodoxy and technology and was dismayed to find... my writing and nothing else so far as I could tell. Prior books that had influenced me such as Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television* (1978; one Protestant friend answered my mentioning the title in mock puzzlement: "The author could only think of *four*?"), were available and remain available today. However, an encompassing theological argument that takes into account today's singularity were simply not to be found.

Since then, times have changed, *and I am not a lone author any more*. I've learned a good deal from patrologist Jean-Claude Larchet, and what I've read from him on the topic is eminently worthy of study. I asked Ancient Faith to read " 'Social Antibodies' Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy," not exactly as a candidate for their imprint to publish, but to send to other authors to answer on the



record. The response I got back was not detailed, but they said that they had forwarded the questions I raised for other of their authors to answer.

Two other comments before I drop this topic.

First, one thing that I can agree with one devotee of Fr. Seraphim of Plantina on is a quote that Fr. Seraphim tried to tell people he was a sinner and he was put on a pedestal anyway. I've been wary of being on a pedestal when I realized that I already am on a pedestal; God has just shielded me from some of the downsides. Apart from harassment, I have benefitted from what appears to be "fame lite." Possibly I may get put on a bigger pedestal, but I am neither more nor less in God's hands if God provides that.

The second one, perhaps a tangent, is that I am not mainly writing for success in my lifetime. Certainly I am not looking for writing to be lucrative; my revenues on Amazon, possibly due to Amazon's ongoing repositioning and reinterpretation of its contracts, has gone from about US\$150-200 per month to less than US\$10 per month over a time frame when more and more people have discovered my writing. I am trying to write works built to last, and I have released my books under CCo licensing ("no rights reserved," meaning that anybody can republish it). This is an aspect of a long haul strategy.

Now to move on.

## **More wonders in Heaven and earth...**

I have enlisted at the Orthodox Pastoral School, about which I have only glowing things to say. After health issues

compounded by provider issues, I have asked to withdraw for the rest of the semester and re-enroll next semester when I believe I have good reason to hope I will be stronger. What they say I do not know, and I am not specifically counting on the measure of grace they have already extended to me. However, one possibility that is off the agenda is that God will stop blessing me because of what they decide. God's blessings continue to come no matter what somebody decides. I would like to continue on with them, but if God has something else in store for me, I will just try and thank them for what they have already done.

The second thing is that I have prayed for years:

## **Prayer from St. Symeon for a Spiritual Father**

O Lord, who desirest not the death of a sinner but that he should turn and live, Thou who didst come down to earth in order to restore life to those lying dead to sin and in order to make them worthy of seeing Thee the true Light as far as that is possible to man, send me a man who knoweth Thee, so that in serving him and subjecting myself to him with all my strength, as to Thee, and in doing Thy will in his, I may please Thee the only true God, and so that even I, a sinner, may be worthy of Thy Kingdom.

I am not praying that now.

Within the past month of my writing, I sent a polite email to a nearby priest and said that I was going to ask a blessing to visit the parish, when I realized that was not

then an option due to the quarantine, and then I thought of asking permission to visit him face-to-face, when I realized that would not be an option for the same reason. But, I said, I wished in gesture to visit.

He responded even more graciously, and offered spiritual direction.

I asked a blessing of my confessor, and have begun receiving spiritual direction.

I have also been seeking for years to enter a monastery. That hasn't happened yet, but I have a live conversation with a monastery now. It apparently won't work out for me to visit again in 2020, but I have hopes of ending 2021 as a novice, possibly a "rassophore monk," also called a "robe-wearing novice."

## **A last measure in negotiations**

The next thing is that in dealing with others, especially as regards difficulties with medical providers, the last measure of resistance I have offered is to let the other party have it their way and then let them decide if they like the consequences.

In twenty years, I came to the psychiatric practice which I am seen at on double the standard limit of one medication, and they decided to let me have my eccentric ways, at least for a time. But then they decided to relentlessly pursue strict standard dosing, and after a year or two's power struggle, I let them have their way and I was in rapidly declining health. I can still remember the sad expression on my provider's face when she realized what situation I was in: she was not in any sense happy that it looked like I would be dead within a year, but standard

dosing was simply not conceivable as something negotiable, or a decision that was less important than my life. After three hospitalizations in about two months, insurance advised me to work with a doctor rather than a nurse practitioner, and the doctor found room in her heart to let me have maximum doses of two similar medications, plus another medication that would help. I returned to the even keel I had when I entered their care.

*Experience has been that sometimes the only card I can play is to submit to being keel-hauled, and when I come up torn and bleeding on the other side, the other party figures out things it had not been able to connect the dots on before.*

I have been on a medication whose known effects include kidney damage and eventual death to kidney failure. I experienced precursors to kidney failure, although not yet real quality of life issues; however, every time previously my providers tried to soften the blow to my organs by reducing my dose of that medication by one quarter, it seemed a cure worse than the disease. Kidney failure can kill me within a decade or two; the effects I was experiencing would likely kill me within a year. Every time previously, my provider did not like what my medicine was doing, but they chose maintaining my dose above causing my death in the short term.

In 20 years,, my provider decided to wean me off the medication already, which was having destabilizing effects, and forbade me to even take a related over-the-counter medication that is dosed much lower than the prescription analog, and furthermore does not damage internal organs, period. Also, I decided to offer the last measure of resistance: to submit to being keel-hauled and follow all of

her changes to the letter.

After two days of feeling worse than drunk, I felt sober for the first time in ages, and have been writing prolifically.

## More wonders

Before the last incident happened, my writing experienced what I can only term a death, a religious experience I have forgotten, followed by a resurrection. My writing was growing scantier and worse. Now I am still not writing perfectly, but I feel younger. Decades younger.

I have also been involved with Toastmasters, to learn to better communicate with my neighbor. I participated, although I didn't rise above local level, in the 2019 Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. It is widely considered that the experience and preparation are worth it even if you do not place particularly highly. I completed the Competent Communicator curriculum and have started on the Presentation Mastery path.

One of the things my spiritual father said in a first call or two is that we tend to think we have tried plan A (getting a doctorate in math from the University of Illinois and going from there), plan B (getting a doctorate in theology from Cambridge in theology and teaching, which would have left me saddled with over twice the major student loans I graduated with), plan C (getting a doctorate “union card” at Fordham), and are “going down the alphabet” in faint hopes...

*...but God is always on plan A.*

I believe that if I had made better decisions, such as contacting Fordham's President after Fordham first jeopardized my life, I could have a degree from Fordham.

However, I don't believe that God has withdrawn his care. If anything, he has given me a reminder that decisions have consequences, and a powerful reminder that placing reason above my conscience is not wise. At present I do not have the brand of PhD; I do have two master's degrees connected with Orthodox theology and technology from excellent institutions, and quite a story with them. I think I am the most blessed I have been in my life, and stand to receive greater blessings still. I would close with words offered from a friend:

"Life's Tapestry"

Behind those golden clouds up there  
 the Great One sews a priceless embroidery  
 and since down below we walk  
 we see, my child, the reverse view.  
 And consequently it is natural for the mind to see  
 mistakes  
 there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come  
 where your soul a-wing will rip through the air  
 and you shall see the embroidery of God  
 from the good side  
 and then... everything will seem to you to be a  
 system and order.

Signed,

~~Toastmaster, and possibly patrologist, Christos~~  
**Jonathan Seth Hayward**, *Certificat Séministriel, Niveau*  
*Supérieur I* (semester certificate, advanced level 1) in

~~French, Bachelor of Science in Pure Mathematics, Master of Science in Applied Mathematics with Computational Science and Engineering Option and the first person to graduate with a new Thesis Option, Diploma in Theology and Religious Studies, Master of Philosophy in Theology and Religious Studies, Competent Communicator, Presentation Mastery Level 2, and perhaps in substance a *philosophia doctor*~~

Unworthy Novice Christos

# **Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh:**

***A look at profound giftedness through Orthodox anthropology***

## **Thesis Statement**

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are emblems of Christ's kingship, divinity, and suffering respectively, applying to humans as Christ's image, studied in the profoundly gifted.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to look at the features of Christ confessed gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh as features playing out in humans, and exploring what concrete shape this playing out takes in the so-called "profoundly gifted." (Kingship, divinity, and suffering play out in equally significant ways for other populations, but the scope is primarily limited to a segment of the stated



population.) "Profound giftedness" is used a standard psychological technical term, if a quite flattering label for a more ambivalent experience.

Profound giftedness is explored as one of many experiences that looks different from the inside and from the outside; paradoxically, what looks different from the inside and outside is in large measure its particular expression of human commonalities. (This could be said for many other populations as well.) Profound giftedness as an expression of being human is explored, in the (royal and) divine image, in particular the rule over Creation through work, alongside a particular expression of suffering, while being attentive to the fact that profoundly gifted people both suffer and cause others to suffer. Suffering is explored in light of Orthodox experience before the essay closes by applying lessons learned in looking at profoundly gifted difference to human difference as such. Profound giftedness experience combines extremes, including both privilege and marginality. This study looks at the profoundly gifted experience of being human, and owes a considerable debt to studies of the human experience of the marginalized, while drawing from other traditions including the Orthodox.

Profound giftedness is not described as exception to the normal human rule but as the univocally applied human rule given further specification that could be given different further specification for other populations.

## **Symbols, humans, and Christ**

There is an understanding of symbol/image that plays out in this paper's treatment of the image of God and the symbolic character of the magi's gifts. If we look at the

question, "Does a symbol represent and embody or represent only?" an Orthodox perspective is that a symbol or image both represents and embodies.[1] A proper symbol is neither arbitrary nor detached but connected to what it represents. Hence Kallistos Ware answers the question of whether Orthodox pay undue devotion to wood: "The icon is... a symbol; the veneration shown to the images is directed, not to stone, wood, and paint, but towards the person depicted." [2] We shall see in a moment that the person is in turn a symbol of Christ, but the immediate point is the understanding of symbol that undergirds such a position. It is the same understanding of symbol that says that the Gifts of the Magi were not given arbitrary imputed symbolism, representing without embodying. Not only do they both represent and embody, but there are layers of symbolic resonance, and that resonance informs this paper as does the precedent in Ephrem the Syrian, a poet of the first rank, [3] treating a fluid rather than inflexible treatment of the symbols' precise meaning.

It is a deceptive understatement to call Christ a norm to humanity. To be human is to be made in the image of God, classically understood as "in the image of the Trinity," [4] as Ware attests, and this image specifically includes the image of Christ. Part of this image plays out in treatment of others: Ware writes "Monastery guests, as St Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.550) wrote in his Rule, are to be received 'as Christ himself.' In similar terms, the fourth-century Egyptian Abba Apollo insisted, 'We should bow down before those who come to see us, for we are bowing down not before them but before God.'" [5] This principle is in no sense unique to monastery guests: in Mt 25.31-46 the righteous are separated from the wicked in the last judgment according to

how they treated Christ through their treatment of the downtrodden, with no distinction being made for religious persuasion. One's treatment of another is one's treatment of Christ tout court. Christ lies at the heart of humanity and his image in every human reaches the point that one cannot do good or ill to another human, Christian or not, as someone detached from Christ because there is no such thing as someone detached from Christ. This is tacitly tied to a norm in a much deeper sense than a norm extrinsically imposed *de jure*, whether or not it fits a person originally independent of that arbitrarily imposed norm. One can have something to do with Christ without encountering Christianity: the relevance of Christ does not enter the picture only in relation to explicit identification with Christianity.

As a limitation of scope, this paper looks at the image of Christ as it is expressed in the profoundly gifted. "[God] doesn't make two blades of grass the same: how much less two saints, two nations, two angels." [6] The image of Christ is specified equally but differently in other human populations, and other papers might look at other populations. The scope of this paper is to offer analysis and description for the profoundly gifted and talk about how the image of Christ in the human constitution plays out specifically in this locale. If the profoundly gifted are explored as connected to Christ and the Theotokos or Mother of God, this is intended as an exploration of something common with other populations rather than a specific distinction that applies to the profoundly gifted and not others. Then why focus on the profoundly gifted? Human basics can be further specified in exploring the particularity of their expression in different populations,

and this paper is intended to offer specific characterization and thick description for the group in its focus, a methodology one would expect to be able to apply to any number of groups. (Other papers with different focuses might give comparable specification to the human rule through thick description of other populations.)

## **Chrism, frankincense, and myrrh**

Chrism was not "mere" oil but a sacramental emblem of the Holy Spirit. Cyril of Alexandria compares aromatic holy oil, or chrism, which produces "the advent of deity,"[7] to consecrated bread that has become the Body of Christ,[8] and Cyril does not mean this as extrinsic and arbitrary symbolism but understands symbol along the lines outlined above. Oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit so that anointing with oil may be hard to disentangle from anointing with the Spirit,[9] and oil carried rich resonances: Susan Ashbrook Harvey writes: "Most important for early Christians were the ideas of priesthood, kingship, and prophecy as offices of sacred activity conferred through an anointing with holy oil. Early Christians applied these concepts to the figure of Christ, *as well as themselves as his followers*. [emphasis added]"[10]

Ashbrook Harvey mentions a "universal patristic exegesis"[11] of gold as emblematic of Christ's kingship, frankincense of his divinity, and myrrh of his suffering. In patristic sources this exegesis can be tersely stated,[12] but at other times there is fluidity and resonance: in Ephrem the Syrian myrrh intercedes for swords used in aggression, gold intercedes for treasures plundered from King Hezekiah, and frankincense appeased divinity.[13] The

three basic meanings are here cast in a touching light of reparations for the magi's ancestral offenses against Mary's ancestors. This paper's method is informed by how in Ephrem the three gifts were not limited to a single rigid meaning but could be flexibly applied in different ways.

Frankincense was a complement to anointing oil; Ashbrook Harvey writes, "...incense took its base meaning from its identification with sacrifice. Incense served as a medium for human initiative towards the divine, and its fragrance marked the process of human-divine encounter. Holy oil, by contrast, represented divine initiative towards the human." [14] Incense could signify human approach to divinity, or divinity itself. [15]

Myrrh was associated with suffering and death. Concordance search results for "myrrh," "spices," or "ointment" (in the RSV) reveal an overwhelming number of Gospel references explicitly connected to the passion: the Gospel reference to myrrh, spices, ointment, etc. pave the way for the Fathers to tie myrrh to suffering and death.

Gold is less thoroughly explained in Ashbrook Harvey and seems to be one of those objects of study poised to slip through the cracks of what is considered "doctrinally significant:" prior research to support an argument appears scanty, leaving primary sources the best available resource. Kittel [16] and Fitzgerald [17] lack entries for "chrysol" / "gold." This may be a difficulty, but it does not stop one from looking at the other two gifts, and patristic treatments of kingship can presumably illuminate gold as an emblem of kingship.

Chrism is almost a fourth gift besides the three, and in a way is prior: it cuts deeper, and we call Christ "the Christ," meaning anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. The oil and the

Holy Spirit are paradigms for each other.[18] Anointing was important in baptism[19] and some sources make baptism more a matter of oil than water.[20] John the Baptist announced one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire,[21] and perhaps oil rather than water explained baptismal anointing, with the Holy Spirit and with fire, to make little Christs. Not only myrrh for suffering, but gold for kingship and frankincense for divinity, are basic to being human and constituted by the image of Christ. The anointing with the literal-and-more-than-literal chrism that makes prophet, priest, and king applies to Christ and Christians. It is not only the pre-eminent gift of chrism that is connected with what it means to be human. The Gifts of the Magi are ultimately gifts to humans who bear Christ's image.

## **Gold and frankincense in human work**

The gifts have something to say about the human person. It is the Last Adam[22] who received frankincense, gold, and myrrh, and this Last Adam is tied to the First Adam: Genesis 1.26-8 (RSV) reads:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and *let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*" So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful

and multiply, and *fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*" [emphasis added for words relating to human rule]

Genesis 1 ties the divine image to human rule. The language used is of an idol image of a deity that carried the deity's essence and through which the deity's work was accomplished.[23] Furthermore, a good portion of the words in Genesis 1.26-8 are devoted to the relationship between the human and the rest of material Creation. To cite one patristic example, Basil of Caesarea can spiritualize rule over animals by discussing rule over oneself,[24] but alongside an *a fortiori* implied argument, "Let them rule over the fish. We were, in the first instance, given power over animals who live elsewhere. [God] did not say, Let them rule over domestic animals, but over fish:" humans have a powerful authority over the animals that goes beyond domestic animals to even effectively apply to fish. [25] Our relation to the natural world is a relation as royalty made to rule. Anestis Keselopoulos explains this point: "[St. Symeon] has a strong feeling for the fact that man was created to function as king of creation." [26] Gold and frankincense do not begin to describe humanity in Christ's shadow. They already describe the divine image in Genesis 1.

That the texts above connect to work is foundational to John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*. [27] He argues, "Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to

work,"[28] making subduing the earth and human rule the bridge between the *imago dei* and work. The royal, divine image expresses itself in work—perhaps not only work, and perhaps "work" needs to be more broadly understood than "remunerated labor," but on the Genesis 1 account the one holy day of rest is only achieved after the six days of the Creator himself working. One can scarcely ask for a higher valuation of work than to say the world was created by God's work (perhaps over billions of years), and as the Father works, so does the Son (John 5.17). Work is a defining feature of humanity (although not the only important feature). Work is part of human glory, part of the gift of gold and frankincense. The archetypal command to rule Creation is a command to work, and to be king is to rule through work.

Properly understood, work is at the core of what Keselopoulos gives great moral weight, one's "relationship with the things in creation." [29] Work is the outward operation of the image of God, and relating to the world virtuously is partly a matter of loving work. Madeleine l'Engle describes service that is close to the heart of work: "If the work comes to the artist and says, 'Here I am, serve me,' then the job of the artist, great or small, is to serve." [30] The artist does not take first initiative but responds by serving an as yet unformed Creation that needs to be loved into its full being. We will further explore this image later.

## Conceptualization of profound giftedness

I am wary of using the term "genius" for several



reasons. Of all the common terms in psychological literature, "genius" is most problematic. It is difficult to say "genius" and only imply a claim of ability; invariably there are half-conscious associations evoked which approach being a morally separate class of creature who has a higher calling and is not bound by the same rules as mere mortals, much like the pathological conceptualization of the "exceptional man" critiqued in *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>[31]</sup> "Genius" comes with a mystique, or, to be more precise, is largely a mystique.

"Profoundly gifted" is not a synonym for "genius," and I will use the imperfect "profoundly gifted" not because it is perfect (it isn't), but to avoid forcing readers to deal with my own invented term when a standard term exists. "Genius," even besides its connotations, denotes someone who leaves behind work of enduring value, and I believe it is possible for profoundly gifted to make no such achievement, and for that matter to do poorly at certain ordinary achievements like economic self-sufficiency. The narrow technical term "profoundly gifted" overlaps the term "genius" (if the latter is stripped of its mystique), but the overlap is incomplete, with one neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure the other. Having considered what amount to limited options, all of which have drawbacks, I will use the term "profoundly gifted" as being the least problematic, even if it is a flattering way of describing an ambivalent condition.

While the language of "giftedness" has Biblical origins, <sup>[32]</sup> I am using technical terms which depart from the Biblical usage and which I treat as having important differences from the Biblical way of framing gifts. Theologically, the quite different Biblical conceptualization is to be preferred, and I will use psychological terms even if

it might be theologically preferable to have another terminology besides that of giftedness to refer to this particularly obscure form of human giftedness. I Corinthians 12 never speaks of "gifted" (as opposed to "non-gifted") people, and in the parable of the talents,[33] the servants admittedly differ in how much they receive, but they do not differ in having at least one substantial "talent" entrusted to them, meaning at least sixty-five pounds[34] of precious metal.[35] It is not only the profoundly gifted who have a place and a quite significant gift for the greater, common good, nor does one need to be psychologically labeled as "gifted" to count as a human being. Furthermore, this discussion is limited in its scope and does not treat other forms of giftedness even if one departs from the Biblical baseline that true talent and giftedness are for all, not a few. Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*[36] is controversial,[37] but Goleman takes a look at one of several of the intelligences treated by multiple intelligence theory, and at very least makes a significant argument of exactly how success may be more a matter of emotional intelligence than the specific type of intelligence treated within the scope of this paper. [38] Even broader would be a serious attempt to treat not only intelligences but the broader category of aptitudes, which seem practically infinite in variety.

## **Profoundly gifted work at a young age**

Work is a defining feature of humanity and can be neither limited to nor centered on the profoundly gifted, but there is something that shines in the work of the profoundly

gifted. But before I go further about that, I need to explain a feature of traditional psychological research in this domain. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, who was highly influential in how psychology subsequently came to approach giftedness and was the founder of gifted education,[39] expressed concerns that Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius*[40] identified gifted people by established adult reputation, after interventions no longer help much.[41] She suggested that one shift focus to gifted children, which has left a curious lacuna in the psychological research: study of gifted people is first and foremost study of gifted children. Therefore, the research that is available deals primarily with gifted children and I will be looking at children.

Hollingworth describes "child L" in middle school:[42]

He was relatively large, robust, and impressive, and was fondly dubbed "Professor." His attitudes and abilities were appreciated by both pupils and teachers. He was often allowed to lecture (for as long as an hour) on some special topic, such as the history of timepieces, ancient theories of engine construction, mathematics, and history. He constructed out of odds and ends (typewriter ribbon spools, for example) a homemade clock of the pendular type to illustrate some of the principles of chronometry, and this clock was set up before the class during the enrichment unit on "Time and Time Keeping," to demonstrate some of the principles of chronometry.

Coming from a slightly different angle, Martha June Morelock offers analysis for Michael Kerney:[43]

## **The Plato Phenomenon**

Mr. Kearney reports that since Michael was very young, he has seemed to spontaneously manifest both factual knowledge and conceptual comprehension that no one has taught him. He recalls an incident when Michael was three years old . . .

Mr. K: Michael at three coming up to me—when I came up to me and he said "Dad, Dad! I've got to show you this, got to show you this!" And he showed me the commutative rule of algebra. And I said "Michael! That's great! Where did you learn that?" "I don't know. I just made it up!" And then he goes "Wait, Wait! There's more! There's more!" And then he showed me the associative rule.

In searching for an explanation for this phenomenon, Mr. Kearney has considered a number of possibilities—including an analogy to Platonic philosophy . . .

Mr. K: Just in terms of some of his mathematical ability—some of the cognitive abilities. Some of the fact knowledge that he knew. But we didn't look at those as telepathy or spiritual things. It was more platonic. I think our experience, if anything, would be related to Platonic Forms. He seemed to be able to go in and take things out of another dimension and apply them—things that you wouldn't normally know, he knew. I mean, I don't think the issue was whether or not anyone taught him or not. It was that they were available to him and on occasion, he could dip into a location and bring things up. He has a cognitive ability to see things whole.

There is a sense in which a staggering intelligence is the baseline of being human: the most important sense of intelligence is not any of the intelligences on a multiple intelligence scale and in fact not something that some people have more of,[44] but something like embodiment that is simply part of the baseline of being human: this sense of intelligence forms a necessary context to achievements like the above which, taken out of context, suggest that there is a very occult phenomenon manifest in a very few, showing "ordinary" intelligence to be trivial. That would be a deep misunderstanding of intelligence in all parties. The intelligence described in the above quotation is in fact something spiritual, along with "ordinary" intelligence, but there is something easier to see in this kind of achievement even if one has grown insensitive to ordinary intelligence as a spiritual feature of the divine image at work. Profound giftedness exists in continuities with broader human intelligence: artwork in a gallery, at its best, need not dazzle in a way that "shows" that nothing outside the gallery is beautiful; one can visit an art gallery and have one's eyes opened not only to the art but the world the art is drawn from.

If the royal, divine image expresses itself in profoundly gifted work, the expression of the image in work is not an ontologically distinct faculty that the profoundly gifted have that not everybody else has. There is, however, a qualitative difference, suitable for thick description. This quality would not be rightly identified in any sense as an exclusive or even primary shadow of the Theotokos in the Annunciation, but among many polarities and many kinds of difference work for the profoundly gifted resembles the Annunciation in one

among many ways.

Before identifying the specific contours that might place the work of the profoundly gifted in the shadow of the Annunciation in a particular way, it may help to clarify one Eastern understanding of the Annunciation that I am using as a framework:[45]

The incarnation was not only the work of the Father, by His power and by His spirit, but it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the Immaculate, without the agreement of her faith, the plan was as unrealizable as it would have been without the intervention of the three divine Persons Themselves. It was only after having instructed her and persuaded her that God took her for His Mother and borrowed from her the flesh, that She so greatly wished to lend Him. Just as He became incarnate voluntarily, so He wished that His Mother should bear Him freely and with her full consent.

The Annunciation *of* the Theotokos,[46] in the Eastern Tradition, is not understood as a message the angel spoke, but was when the Theotokos gave her full cooperation to the divine initiative, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word." [47] The Theotokos offers the perfect creaturely response to the divine initiative, and the most enduring works of profound giftedness are in its shadow. (There are many other points on the spectrum of human experience that are in its shadow, too.)

Creative work, and much of the serious work of the profoundly gifted, is a minor incarnation and the fruit of a minor annunciation. Madeleine l'Engle writes, "The artist is

a servant who is willing to be a birthgiver. In a very real sense the artist (male or female) should be like Mary who, when the angel told her that she was to bear the Messiah, was obedient to the command." [48] It is the bearing of a Creation that comes to one initially unformed, not yet given concrete shape, and one gives to it out of one's nature, loves and serves it into being; one gives it one's own flesh until it has become enfleshed and ready to meet the world. There are other dimensions to the connection—perichoresis or interpenetration of bearer and gift, and a spiritual discipline l'Engle calls "almost identical with adoring the Master of the Universe in contemplative prayer" [49]—and the process, meditated on throughout Madeleine l'Engle's *Walking on Water*, [50] is not unique to the profoundly gifted, who are not correctly understood if they are viewed simply in terms of differences without attention to human commonalities.

But it is the textured shape taken by the human gold and incense for many profoundly gifted.

## **Myrrh and the suffering of the profoundly gifted**

Suffering is a basic part of human life. It takes different forms, perhaps, but it is constitutive of human experience. Furthermore, there are a great many human experiences that are different from the inside and from the outside. If this is explored with regard to the profoundly gifted, this is not as something that sets the profoundly gifted apart, but exploring further the concrete human form of human universals that are given further specification one way for the profoundly gifted and are given further specification other ways for other populations.

Giftedness as studied in this paper does not automatically include emotional intelligence, but it does not leave emotional life unaffected: for the entire range of giftedness, and not only the profoundly gifted, "giftedness has an emotional as well as a cognitive substructure: cognitive complexity gives rise to emotional depth." [51] This has a marked positive aspect; it makes it easier to have a rich inner life and to experience joy, but "[i]ntensity, in particular, must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic. It is not a matter of degree but of a different quality of experiencing:" [52] it is as if at an age where children of a particular bent are given toy power tools, the range of gifted children are left to contend with real power tools, leaving more positive possibilities but also more ways of getting hurt that for many children simply aren't an issue. This kind of inner life is a mixed blessing when it comes to experiencing difficulties.

What is school like for the profoundly gifted? What is do they experience when they are in a situation which people assume is entirely oriented around them and their interests, where they have life easy and do not need to apply themselves like other people? This is what it meant for two boys:

He would go to school from 8 to 2 and you would think that would be enough. Nope. Cause when he got home at 2 o'clock, he goes "Mom, I want work. They didn't give me any work." It's like "You did all that stuff at school?" "Oh, that's easy stuff.[]" He used to complain "Mom, they're making me write "cat" and "dog" and all these three letter words." So I went to the school and I said "He doesn't like to write these things,



and why are you having him read cat and dog books? He reads far beyond that level." And they said it was because they wanted his hands—because he was so young and his motor skills had to be developed, that they wanted him to read this little easy book so that he could write. Well, he was like, "Well, let me read the big books and I'll write." [53]

Ian completed Grade 3 in a quiet fury of anger, intellectual frustration and bitterness. His verbal and physical aggressiveness returned in full spate; however, as he was now 2 years older than he had been in Grade 1, he was able to maintain a tighter control on his emotions while at school, and his teachers remained quite unaware of the emotional toll levied on him. *At home, however, he released all of his frustration and resentment and became, in Brock's words, "almost impossible to live with." In addition, he began to experience severe headaches, bouts of nausea, and stomach pains.* [longer emphasis added] [54]

This experience is a hint of the dark side of the profoundly gifted experience. Profound giftedness offers real advantages, and no account of it is complete without accounting for what seem almost like magic powers. Giftedness is a privilege, the more the better, or is commonly assumed to be such kind of unqualified privilege so that saying that giftedness is painful comes across like saying that riches are painful. Yet if it is a privilege, it is a privilege that includes an experience that can be painful enough to cause depression, escape through street drugs,

and suicide.[55]

The analogy to wealth could be refined: profound giftedness seems to be like wealth in an odd currency that makes it easy to buy luxuries but difficult to acquire some necessities. The characteristics described under "Gold and Frankincense" are quite significant and a source of joy. In general the profoundly gifted experience is an experience of extremes, where few things are moderate. But there are things some others wouldn't guess at, such what such differences mean for difficulties finding and obtaining steady work, let alone a normal environment experienced as hostile enough to induce nausea in a young boy. Being significantly above average is an advantage, but it must be understood that the "moderately" gifted whom one is tempted to assume are "mediocre gifted" are in fact no such thing: they are almost what giftedness should be like, significantly above average and yet escaping certain problems.[56] "Moderate" giftedness coincides almost entirely with what has elsewhere been called the range of "socially optimum intelligence,"[57] and it resembles the classical image of moderation or a *via media* which not simply avoids two extremes but in its balance has something positive that both extremes lack. This is a different phenomenon from another range where birth trauma and brain damage seem close to a majority phenomenon,[58] is part of why scholars will speak about "the 'syndrome' of profound giftedness." [59] It's still classified as giftedness, but it not just a further enhanced form of the advantages in moderate giftedness. Doreen Freeman suggests of disability, "How often we hear people say they would 'rather be dead than disabled' yet the suicide rates of the disabled do not reflect this pessimistic

view." [60] Disability is a different condition viewed from the inside and the outside, and so is giftedness, for which the suicide rates are apparently higher. We are aware that stereotypes can affect a true appreciation of other groups, which includes race and disability, and also include profound giftedness as an experience difficult to judge from the outside. (Not that the profoundly gifted experience is unique in looking different from the inside versus the outside: there are any number of human experiences that are different from the inside and the outside, and this is not a distinction for the profoundly gifted but only how the phenomenon plays out for them.)

Aharon Lichtenstein writes as he concludes an article on suffering as having a profound place within Judaism: [61]

In conclusion, I return to the sinking feeling that much of what has been said here might fall on deaf ears... any attempt to cry up the purgative nature of suffering might be viewed, especially after the Holocaust, as trite, platitudinous, and—what is worst—callous...

I can understand such a reaction—and indeed, up to a point, share it. But only up to a point... Response to suffering cannot be divorced from the totality of religious experience...

Suffering, and the use of suffering, have a place within religion.

John Behr's central mystery is "life in death" for his appropriately titled *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*. [62] The cross is central: "This scriptural reflection on the Passion of Christ began by the apostles and evangelists was

continued, expanded and deepened in the work of subsequent theologians, shaping every aspect of their theological vision." [63] This expands into meaning not only that Christ bore his Cross but we are to bear the Cross: what is normative is for "everything [in our lives to be] encompassed in [Christ's] economy." [64] "Life" is used in terms of the divine life, [65] and "death" holds far more than a merely biological meaning: [66] the mystery of "life in death" is a mystery of "frankincense in myrrh."

There have been people who have found in joy in suffering. Peter and other apostles, after being beaten, [67] left the council "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." [68] Ware's closing examples in an article on martyrdom tell of martyrs' joy. [69] This puzzling behavior is difficult to understand but plays out what is said in the Sermon on the Mount, in a passage that is part of the Orthodox Church's main liturgy: [70] "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all manner of evil falsely against you for my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." [71] I cite these not because I expect it to be self-evident how people could respond this way, but precisely to suggest that there's something in their version of suffering that is hard to appreciate today.

Even if it is hard to see how, these texts indicate that there is something that may not be obvious about innocent suffering. Hebrews and I Peter elaborate and clarify: "For it was fitting that [God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering," [72] If

Christ himself was made perfect through suffering then it would seem incongruous to say that suffering may have perfected Christ but should not apply to people in his shadow. "For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But when you do right and suffer for it and take it patiently, you have God's approval:"[73] God's approval can be on the innocent sufferer even if the suffering is not externally labeled as suffering in the Lord's name.

To say that Christ "the pioneer of their salvation" was made perfect through suffering transforms our understanding of Christ and even more suffering. Elsewhere people learn from Christ, but in Hebrews we read shocking words: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."[74] (This is the only New Testament text where the Son is said to learn obedience.) In Hebrews 11.28, suffering is tied to faith, "portrayed as force sustaining God's people in times of opposition and affliction, enabling them to overcome fear and temptation and fulfill his purposes for them,"[75] which is the context to how Moses "considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward."[76] It may seem that such Biblical statements about suffering in the name of Christ only speak to the case of confessors and martyrs narrowly understood, but I Peter 2.19-20 forestalls such a reading and orients our understanding of innocent suffering as such. After describing Christ's voluntary suffering as normative and monastic living as a manifestation of martyrdom, Ware writes, "What has just been said about Christ, about the martyr and the monk, is also true in a certain measure of

every Christian without exception,"[77] specifically in the sufferings of life. There are different forms of martyrdom which do not always include violence and death, but to be Christian is to be called to martyrdom.[78]

This is not resignation. Paul uses *paschw* of "his readers, Christians in general,"[79] and can have a very active ring, meaning "'to fight,' perhaps 'to fight an enforced fight,'... not 'to be helplessly exposed or subject to alien pressure,'... 'to prevail'. [emphasis added]"[80] But the understanding that filters into the gift of myrrh is not simply a temporary measure for when the problem cannot be properly addressed yet. Cases of truly difficult suffering are not an exceptional case that this teaching also applies to; they are the central case under this view. This view of suffering applies from relative inconveniences up to major suffering including poverty and hunger, the death of loved ones, illness from cancer to depression, and many other cases. If the profoundly gifted are no unique center to the Biblical teaching because they are in no sense the only ones to suffer, that does not make their suffering trivial. Suffering increases as one approaches sainthood, and while suffering does not confer any automatic sainthood, Orthodox hagiography details a number of people with unusually difficult lives—the saints who are canonized as unusually good at living a normal human life—and some of their relics are said to miraculously stream, significantly enough, with myrrh.[81] To see profoundly gifted suffering as outside the bounds of normal human life and to try an activist solution to bring it into the bounds of normal human life is to fail to realize that profoundly gifted suffering is a unique opportunity to live the normal Christian life, a life where gold and incense cannot be

separated from myrrh.

The reality of myrrh is a reality of suffering made positive in a context where suffering is no longer the last word, and it is not separate from gold for kingship and frankincense for divinity. Those saints who are fragrant with myrrh are fragrant with Heaven's incense. There are some theologians who talk about humanity as the priest of Creation,[82] and the massive repositories of skills acquired by the profoundly gifted can be a legitimate exercise of kingship—humans properly exercise kingship in the image of God's kingship not only, and perhaps not primarily, when kingship is exercised over other people.[83] There is a kind of joy and pleasure to learning and acquiring skills, and this may not always be situated within an explicit ecclesial setting, but then it no less constitutes part of what is normal and the gift of gold for kingship.

## **Profound giftedness in its potential to harm others**

Profound giftedness is both a gift from God and something whose use is not always good. Without going too far into the word "holy" (Hebr. *qds*, apparent etymological meaning, "separate"),[84] I would like to talk some about what it means, and why we should not make too facile an identification of holiness with moral goodness. Holiness consists less in the creature's relationship to the Creator than the Creator's relationship to the creature.[85] Giftedness is not unique in this regard, but it is giftedness that is not based on merit but is simply given by the Creator. It may not be achieved by being morally good, and it is misunderstood if it is treated as an accidental

arrangement of cognitive faculties. And that lends to something paradoxical: the greater the gift, the greater the potential for evil in the use of that gift, even in the attempt to do good.

Where there is untold human suffering, it may well be related to profoundly gifted plans to improve the world. Stfane Courtois's *The Black Book of Communism*[86] tells of millions who starved to death under Marx's plan for a better world.[87] One can name Adam Smith and the fathers of the Industrial Revolution as creating a masculinist vision to improve the world, a vision that on the ground left things worse for a number of people, and in particular women: Bob Goudzwaard's *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*[88] argues that the economic system that some profoundly gifted have helped build in the West is in fact not good for humans *qua* humans. Much of the industrialization that has led from wives working in adult company to housewives working in solitary confinement, destroying conditions that some feminists would like to reclaim, is transformation of society that stems from profoundly gifted people's "good ideas" to make a better world.[89] It is perfectly coherent to say that a profoundly gifted person will persuasively argue for a vision of a better world that practically results in incalculable human suffering.

## **Thick description of myrrh: interdependent terms of human weal or woe**

There is another feature of human life that gives a



shape, allowing thick description, to what myrrh is; and this is not just for the profoundly gifted: this feature is a specific trait of interdependence. How one experiences this specific trait depends greatly on how it is received: if it is approached with joy and acceptance, can be experienced as suffering that is almost Heavenly in how full it is and how deep its grounds for joy,[90] or can be wrongly experienced as vanity, meaningless suffering that approaches *dukkha*. [91] The story is told of someone who saw Hell, in which wretched pandas were surrounded by rice but miserable and starving because their three foot long chopsticks made it impossible for the pandas to feed themselves. Then the visitor was taken to Heaven and saw pandas surrounded by rice, delightedly feeding and being fed by each other with their three foot chopsticks. The difference between Heaven and Hell is a difference that lies in how one is capable of experiencing the realities one is in. It is not just true in the next life that we can experience certain things as joyful or as meaningless *dukkha*. It is also true of this life, and more specifically of certain features of human interdependence, and the impossibility of independence, that are perhaps never completely avoidable but seem harder to even pretend to avoid in the profoundly gifted experience. It appears that some profoundly gifted may have no way to present their gifts in a way that a job recruiter will interpret as believable competence.[92] Paradoxically, an unusually impressive list of achievements may not be accompanied by much opportunity to be self-supporting and perhaps not other "necessities."

In the work of Arthurian criticism *Arthurian Torso*,[93] Lewis discusses Virgil in Charles Williams' *Taliessin through Logres*: [94]

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

Lewis is summarizing Williams, and Williams's point has strong theological relevance. Ware introduces one topic of discussion as "what Charles Williams calls 'substituted love', 'coinherence', or 'the way of exchange'," [95] founded precisely on the above "law of the canoe." Profound

giftedness is not a help for making honey for oneself but making honey for others, and this is not because the profoundly gifted are any more altruistic: whether one is selfish or generous, profound giftedness helps paddling others' canoes much better than it helps paddling one's own.

Alisdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* argues that dependence is constitutive of human nature. [96] Self-understanding as being independent requires sweeping acknowledgment of our dependence under the rug: true independence is probably impossible and certainly undesirable. If some people have difficulty achieving even a more relative independence, that is not an exception to how humanity normally works. It is continuous with large segments of humanity besides the profoundly gifted having more difficulty achieving a measure of independence. A few profoundly gifted experience worldly success—perhaps great—while many more experience surprising struggles. [97]

Lewis calls the law "exquisite cruelty," and it is even crueler if a definition of justice in terms of paddling one's own canoe is applied to the world, and one begins to suspect that even the Lawgiver, God, does not meet that standard of justice. But there is something in that picture that is not cruel, something that hinges on being willing to give up that standard of justice and accept the "law of the canoe" as terms of joy. If the profoundly gifted experience has extremes in its glories and difficulties, this form of interdependence is a difficulty that can and should be a glory, even if profoundly gifted may rarely be able to experience it as a particular form of human blessing.

Comparable remarks could be made for other

populations and communities.

## Conclusion

It seems a strained reading of Midas's tale to argue that whatever Midas said, the king consciously thought he would retain the usual human ability to touch things without changing them into anything else, and in addition have the option to turn things to gold by touch when he so desired. Perhaps that would have been a far wiser thing to ask for. Despite this lack of foresight, it appears that when the king said that he wanted everything he touched to turn to gold, the "everything" he envisioned of course did not include his food and wine, and absolutely did not include his only daughter. It seems that Midas's desire was for a fantasy version of a gift, and he was shocked when he received the real thing.

Profound giftedness is not a curse like Midas's. It offers much better prospects of living to old age, not to mention any number of other benefits. But it is, like any number of other human experiences, different from the inside than from the outside.

There is another king associated with gold—in fact, six billion such royalty on one account, and Midas's gold for his greed is in fact a base metal next to that gold that is from the same fountainhead as frankincense and myrrh. Human difference is not a matter of some people being at the human baseline, with everyone else starting from the same baseline but with added modifiers. In that sense everybody is on the baseline: it is mistaken to say that a profoundly gifted person is an "as modified by" representative of the majority, and neither more nor less mistaken than the

opposite claim that most people are "as modified by" versions of the profoundly gifted, or comparable pairs of remarks spanning other human differences. Differences can be a chasm—sometimes requiring a great leap to bridge,—but when one can and does bridge the chasm, one may learn not of one more adjustment that can be made to a baseline centered on one's own group, but a deeper understanding of what the baseline is and is not.

In that sense there is nothing distinctive about profound giftedness being different from the inside and from how one would imagine it from the outside. It is illustrative of the human.

## Partly Annotated Bibliography

The annotation is geared primarily towards profound giftedness as a theological reader may be expected to understand the theological literature better than the literature on giftedness. Psychological works were chosen after a review of the entire, *incredibly sparse*, literature on profound giftedness, in 2007. In 2007 a quick reader could read every academic resource from psychological literature by searching for “profoundly gifted” and following up on every resource using “profoundly gifted” as a technical term, in about two to three weeks. As I write in 2019, I would guesstimate three to five weeks, possibly less. Also, be advised that some papers using “profoundly gifted” to refer to intelligence at or beyond the “one in ten thousand mark,” as opposed to “past the one in a million mark.” If you are profoundly gifted, beware of the statistically more elastic population an author places under the “profoundly gifted” label.

Ashbrook Harvey, Susan, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2006.

Buttrick, George, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon Press 1952.

Carson, D.A. et al. (eds.), *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1994.

Clark, Stephen, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980.

Courtois, Stephane et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Boston: Harvard University Press 1999.

If one wishes to take seriously that profound giftedness and good intentions can cause incalculable suffering, this text covers something that is better not ignored.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *Crime and Punishment*, New York: Random House 1956.

L'Engle, Madeleine, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, Wheaton: Shaw 1980.

In my argument about gold and kingship, I have talked about a profoundly gifted accent to work. Giftedness as such is incidental at best to Madeleine

l'Engle's focus, but this is a perspective on artistic work, a work that is close to contemplation, and if it does not have a profoundly gifted focus it still has a profoundly gifted perspective as the basis to explore artistic work as a whole.

Feldman, David, "A follow-up of subjects scoring above 180 IQ in Terman's 'Genetic Studies of Genius'", in *Exceptional Children*, vol. 50 no. 6 1984, 518-523.

This study makes the briefest passing mention that one of Terman 1925's very few profoundly gifted subjects "took his own life," without the briefest passing suggestion of any way this tragedy might be something to learn from, might be something related to the profoundly gifted experience, or could even be preventable. (Statistical analysis is impossible for a small sample, but if one person in a twenty-nine person sample committed suicide, this is hundreds of times higher than the population at large, or even demographics like those suffering from major depression.) This feature is symptomatic of a broader tendency in Feldman to be a generic summary without insight, and this is part of why I prefer the more qualitative studies such as Hollingworth 1975 or Morelock 1995.

Freeman, Doreen, "A Feminist Theology of Disability", in *Feminist Theology* 29 (2002), 71-85.

Fitzgerald, Allan, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999.

Galton, Francis, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences*, London: Macmillan 1892 (1869).

From the introductory chapter Galton takes positions offensive even in his own day, and, to pick one example, his stand for intelligence-centered eugenics as a moral duty earns Galton's vile reputation today. His study seems to be less concerned about describing or studying genius in the sense offered by other sources than making a minimal study of his subjects sufficient to move on to his real interest, identifying whether genius is hereditary enough to bolster the eugenics he advocated. On a more positive view of the study of giftedness, Galton can be read as indicating how far the study of giftedness has come since Galton's approach. Too much of Galton's attitude lingers in later literature, but Webb 1980 bases his argument on a completely different footing: when he appeals for reform and cites a statistic that gifted education is part of special education but receives per capita less than three cents on the dollar compared to other special needs populations,[98] the argument is not that gifted people are entitled to better treatment because they are superior. The argument is that special needs should be treated in proportion to the need. He places giftedness as a greater special need than most people realize.

While acknowledging that the gifted population may be one of few special needs populations which is envied, one may hope that future literature may shift



further away from Galton in the direction of recognizing the gifted population as having legitimate if perhaps unanticipated special needs, and given proportionate treatment to the form of special needs.

Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, New York: Bantam 1995.

This controversial book treats one of several important aptitudes besides those studied here. The reason this article studies only one type of giftedness out of many is not because it's the only interesting kind of intelligence (emotional intelligence may be more important), but a limitation of what can reasonably be treated in a single paper.

Goudzwaard, Bob, *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, Oshawa: Wedge 1975.

Gross, Miraca, "The Early Development of Three Profoundly Gifted Children of IQ 200," in Klein, Pnina; Tannenbaum, Abraham (eds.), *To Be Young and Gifted*, Norwood: Ablex 1992, 94-138.

This article is probably the best short sampling that offers a sense of human encounter through thick description of profoundly gifted children, and may serve as an orientation to the terrain of profoundly gifted children before tackling Hollingworth 1975 and Morelock 1995.

Gross, Miraca, "Factors in the Social Adjustment and Social

Acceptability of Extremely Gifted Children," Ohio Psychology Press 1994 as seen online at [http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2\\_0&rid=10586](http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2_0&rid=10586) on 1 January 2007.

Rather than thick description this article provides an analysis of social issues surrounding the profoundly gifted and why their position requires them to deal with social challenges that are not as much of an issue for others.

Hayward, Jonathan, "Artificial Intelligence, AI as an Arena of Magical Thinking for Skeptics," Master's Thesis (Cambridge University), 2004.

A study of the significance and power of basic human intelligence that can sometimes be overlooked in the study of giftedness.

Hollingworth, Leta, *Children Above 180 IQ: Stanford-Binet Origin and Development*, New York: Arno Press, 1975 (1942).

A classic study offering thick description of profoundly gifted children. Hollingworth has not been superseded.

Honderich, Ted (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995.

Howard, Pierce, *The Owner's Manual for the Brain: Everyday Applications from Mind-Brain Research*, Austin: Bard 2006.

Also readable as "A layperson's introduction to the culture and prejudices of cognitive psychology/cognitive science," but a valuable resource nonetheless, and the only psychological work I know that is not specialized in giftedness but offers an on-target treatment of profound giftedness.

Keselopoulos, Anestis, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.

Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1976.

Klein, Ann, "Fitting the School to the Child: The Mission of Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Founder of Gifted Education," in *Roeper Review*, 23 (2), 2000, 97-103.

Kreeft, Peter, *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes: Life as Vanity; Job: Life as Suffering; Song of Songs: Life as Love*, San Francisco: Ignatius 1989.

Landy, Frank, "The Long, Frustrating, and Fruitless Search for Social Intelligence: A Cautionary Tale," in Murphy, Kevin (ed.), *A Critique of Emotional Intelligence: What Are the Problems and How Can They Be Fixed?*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum 2006, 81-123.

An opposing views piece to (Howard) Gardner theory, including Goleman 1995.

Lewis, C.S., *That Hideous Strength*, New York: Scrivener

1996.

Lichtenstein, Aharon, "The Duties of the Heart and Response to Suffering," in *Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering*, Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1999.

Macintyre, Alisdair, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago: Open Court 1999.

Maloney, George, *Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh: An Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad 1997.

McVey, Kathleen, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, New York: Mahwah 1989.

Morelock, Martha, *The Profoundly Gifted Child in Family Context*, UMI 1995.

This dissertation studies in depth two profoundly gifted children who represent two forms of profound giftedness, Bethany Marshall (profound giftedness focused in a single area, in this case music performance) and Michael Kerney (profound giftedness spread out over many areas). The latter represents someone who is exceptional even for someone who is profoundly gifted. In some sense Morelock is a complement to Hollingworth 1975, but includes significant analysis alongside its thick description.

O'Brien, David; Shannon, Thomas, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1992.

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 1973 (1963), 17.

Smets, Alexis; van Esbroeck, Michel (trs. and eds.), *Basil de Césaire: Sur l'Origine de l'Homme*, Paris: Cerf 1970.

Sword, L., "Gifted Children: Emotionally Immature or Emotionally Intense?" Gifted and Creative Services, Australia, as seen online at <http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?rid=12310> on 1 January 2007.

Giftedness is not the same as emotional intelligence but it complexifies emotional life, meaning that gifted sometimes have to work harder to reach what others achieve by less effort to reach emotional maturity. (This article is not limited to profound giftedness but tries to address the broader gifted population.)

Terman, Lewis et al., *Genetic Studies of Genius*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1925 (vol. 1), 1926 (vol. 2), 1930 (vol. 3), 1947 (vol. 4), 1959 (vol. 5).

Webb offers reasons why Terman's methods of identifying gifted people may have been unintendedly biased in favor of the members of the gifted population who enjoyed the greatest social advantage.

[99] Terman uses the word "genius" in the title for a population that mostly overlaps the range of "socially optimal intelligence," without that much attention to profound giftedness. However, Terman offers a landmark study and almost everybody stands on his shoulders even in criticizing him.

Thunberg, Lars, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, La Salle: Open Court, 1995.

Vasileios (Archimandrite), *Hymn of Entry*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 1984.

Walton, John et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 2000.

Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Church*, New York: Penguin 1997 (1963).

Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Way*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995 (1979).

Ware, Kallistos, "Seek First the Kingdom: Orthodox Monasticism and Its Service to the World," in *Theology Today*, April 2004, 61.1, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdlink?did=623880061&Fmt=7&clientId=9148&RQT=309&VName=PQD> as seen 11/12/06.

Ware, Kallistos, "What is a martyr?" in *Sobornost Incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, London:

Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, V.1 (1983), 7-19.

Webb, James; Meckstroth, Elizabeth; Tolan, Stephanie, *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*, Columbus: Ohio Psychology Publishing Company, 1982.

Webb ties together a great many things in this overview of the spectrum of giftedness (including profound giftedness). Where the sources I recommend for profound giftedness (Morelock 1995, Hollingworth 1974) offer qualitative thick description, this source incorporates theory, thick description, and practical advice into a picture that better than anything else I have seen in its insight into the entirety of the gifted experience.

Williams, Charles; Lewis, C.S., *Taliessin through Logres, The Region of the Summer Stars, and Arthurian Torso*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974.

## Footnotes

[1] Vasileos 1984, 81-7.

[2] Ware 1997, 32; cf. Ware 1995, 34.

[3] McVey 1989, 4.

[4] Ware 2004, seen online.

[5] Ware 2004, seen online.

[6] Lewis 1996, 370: a character breaks from description of Arthurian grandeur to discuss how this in no way makes Britain superior because each nation has its own characteristic glory: each nation is distinctive and none is superior. Much the same could be said of various populations that are/might be given thick description through the methods of this paper.

[7] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 73.

[8] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 73.

[9] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 66.

[10] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 66-7.

[11] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 254n138. I cannot here explore the suggestion, mentioned in Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 33, that "gold" may represent an underlying Aramaic term for another herbal aromatic.

[12] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.9.2.

[13] *Hymns on the Nativity* 19.4 in McVey 1989.

[14] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 74.

[15] *Hymns on the Nativity* 9.15.

[16] Kittel 1976.



- [17] Fitzgerald 1999.
- [18] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 119-21.
- [19] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 67-73.
- [20] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 68.
- [21] Matthew 3.11; compare: "There is fire in chrism." (GPh 2.15)
- [22] I Corinthians 15.45; cf. I Corinthians 15 and specifically 15.22.
- [23] Walton 2000, Genesis 1.27.
- [24] *Hexameron*, Homily 10.8.
- [25] *Hexameron*, Homily 10.9, my own translation.  
[Emphasis taken from French translation]
- [26] Keselopoulos 2001, 57.
- [27] John Paul II, *Laborum Exercens*, 1981.
- [28] LE, prologue.
- [29] Keselopoulos 2001, 90.
- [30] L'Engle 1980, 23.
- [31] Dostoevsky 1956, III.5.

[32] Cf. Matthew 25.14-30 and I Corinthians 12.

[33] Matthew 25.14-30.

[34] Balz 1982-3, *talentos*.

[35] Hagner 1995, Matthew 25.14-5.

[36] Goleman 1995.

[37] Landy 2006 provides an opposing view.

[38] On anecdotal evidence, though, consider the case of one young woman with high enough social intelligence that when she enters a room all the conversations start to run more smoothly and everybody seems to want to be her close friend or romantic partner. It appears that a high enough level of social intelligence may come with unwanted side effects. (Personal conversation with her friend Lydia Klingforth c2000.)

[39] Klein 2000, 97.

[40] Galton 1892.

[41] Hollingworth 1942, xiv.

[42] Hollingworth 1942, 217-9.

[43] Morelock 1995, 223-5.

[44] Hayward 2004, 13-16.

[45] Nicolas Cabasilas, in M. Jugie, 'Homélie mariales byzantines,' *Patrologia orientalis*, XIX, fasc/, 3, 1925, p. 463, as quoted in Lossky 1976, 141.

[46] <http://www.holyannunciation.org>, as seen on 22/11/06.

[47] Luke 1.38, RSV.

[48] L'Engle 1980, 18.

[49] L'Engle 1980, 194.

[50] L'Engle 1980.

[51] Sword, online.

[52] Michael Pichowski as cited in Sword, online.

[53] Morelock 1995, 161.

[54] Gross 1992, 103.

[55] Webb 1982, 191-204: an entire chapter treats this.

[56] Gross 1992, 97.

[57] Gross 1994, seen online.

[58] Morelock 1995, 293-4.

[59] Morelock 1995, 295.

[60] Freeman 2002, 73.

[61] Lichtenstein 1999, 60.

[62] Behr 2006.

[63] Behr 2006, 33.

[64] Behr 2006, 143.

[65] Behr 2006, 35.

[66] Behr 2006, 143.

[67] Acts 5.40.

[68] Acts 5.41 RSV.

[69] Ware 1983, 18.

[70] The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

[71] Matthew 5.10-2.

[72] Hebrews 2.10 RSV.

[73] I Peter 2.19-20 RSV.

[74] Hebrews 5.8 RSV.

[75] Carson 1994, Hebrews 11.23-8.

[76] Hebrews 11.26 RSV.

[77] Ware 1983, 10.

[78] Ware 1983, 16.

[79] Kittel 1976, *paschw*.

[80] Kittel 1976, *paschw*.

[81] One hagiographical account may be seen at <http://www.roca.org/OA/25/25d.htm>, "And lo, the Star... St. Simon the Myrrh-gusher," as seen on October 9 2006. Like most hagiography, this is considered part of the Orthodox tradition of "biography as theology," theology given flesh in a person's life.

[82] Schmemmann 1973 (1963), 17; Keselopoulos 2001, 57.

[83] See i.e. Keselopoulos 2001, 57, 64 and comments about Genesis 1:26-8 above.

[84] Botterweck 2003, *qds*.

[85] Kittel 1964, *hagios*.

[86] Courtois 1999.

[87] Courtois 1999, 4.

[88] Goudzwaard 1975, 4-5.

[89] If one is prepared to accept that truly traditional societies are something other than traditional roles attemptedly imposed on post-Industrial Revolution living

conditions, then Clark 1980 provides an analysis largely of how women have suffered under certain changes, even if it doesn't focus on who contributed "good ideas" behind the changes.

[90] The Heavenly/Purgatorial suffering found in Job, in Kreeft 1989, 59-96.

[91] The Hellish suffering found in Ecclesiastes, in Kreeft 1989, 13-58.

[92] Personal conversations with different profoundly gifted, 2001.

[93] Lewis 1974.

[94] Lewis 1974, 305,7.

[95] Ware 1983, 11.

[96] MacIntyre 1999, 1ff.

[97] Personal conversations with profoundly gifted, 2001.

[98] Webb 1982, 3.

[99] Webb 1982, 10.

# **Could We Pursue a Profoundly Gifted Humility?**

## **Could we pursue a profoundly gifted humility?**

The gay community's emphasis on pride is a matter of applying poison to a wound. But I want to take a long, and I hope fruitful, detour.

## **Revisiting the Philokalia**

I have generally found efforts to improve a backwards Philokalia to be of themselves backwards, not to mention a bit stupid and arrogant. The Seven Deadly Sins are what became in the West of the Philokalia's eight demons, and I have read an official from my own theology department frankly ridicule the Seven Deadly Sins because it does not explicitly list hypocrisy. But in the Philokalia at least, the eight demons are the eight gateway sins, eight gateway

drugs to other sins, and hypocrisy falls at least partly under the heading of pride, unreservedly condemned as the worst of the lot. The list of eight demons is not an attempt to catalog each and every sins; another passage of the Philokalia attempts a catalog and the list weighs in at over 100 named sins. However, this exercise is exceedingly rare compared to the efforts to warn us of gateway drugs among sins and temptations, of which a few the reader is warned about repeatedly. People who consider themselves to know better than the Philokalia have my suspicion and ordinarily appear never really gotten their feet wet in what is quite arguably the #1 Orthodox written treasure after the Bible.

I was surprised when my abbot, Metropolitan JONAH of St. Demetrios Monastery, proposed an update as part of his Reflections on a Spiritual Journey. However poverty-stricken classic monasticism may have insisted on being (one passage gives a short list of allowed items and beyond them “not even a needle”), those who became monastics came from privileges that not only included a great deal of wealth and being born into the Old Boy’s Club, but could assume loving and healthy extended families. And maybe the spoiled rich could and should have regarded forms of pride as the nadir of human defilement, and perhaps such it is. In both East and West, in for example St. Seraphim of Sarov or G.K. Chesterton, fornication and drunkenness are considered the sins of men, and pride the sin of devils. The little future St. Seraphim of Sarov did not need to be cleansed from all human sin, but he absolutely needed to be cleansed from devils’ sin.

However, Metropolitan JONAH points to certain differences today. The extended family has not stayed together but disintegrated into isolated nuclear families,



and nuclear families have had a meltdown too. And so many people today have grown up with a broken childhood, with a whole array of situations that were abusive even if squeaky-clean legal (like Mom and Dad outsourcing most of their parenting to a series of daycare centers so they can both bring home the bacon), and the effect of suchlike abuse is a profound shame, a shame that people discover can be anaesthetized, at least temporarily, by engaging in various sins. Addictions, and things like addictions such as various sexual sins, anaesthetize a shame that says, “You’re worthless. There’s nothing left to love. You are horrible through and through.” And so my beloved Metropolitan, whom I am positive understands the Philokalia profoundly, has offered the first update to the Philokalia that I have found to even make sense—and it is a lot of sense that it makes.

## **A visit to Fr. John**

Fr. John Whiteford, whom I have had the privilege of taking two classes with, is another figure I respect profoundly. He is something like a bulldog for Orthodoxy, with topics such as “The anus is not designed for the penis,” and he defends Orthodoxy in something like the fashion of previous bulldogs like G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis. (While he writes well, I don’t know if he is as epically good as a writer, but I have no hesitation in making the comparison in outlining the type of work by which he serves.) And he called to point an Orthodox Matushka (“Mommy”), meaning a priest’s or deacon’s wife (which in Orthodoxy is a real office), for saying that the cure for shame is empathy without whispering a word about

repentance. And I have shouted a great many words about repentance as Heaven's best-kept secret, but while the Mommy may have left out something important, she also kept in something important.

## What was she right about?

There is an absolutely ancient image that has been repeated across centuries for the image of God in us, an image that cannot be damaged or destroyed. Our heart of hearts is like a mirror at the base of a fountain. The waters may be dirty; they may cloud or hide the mirror at the bottom, but there is a real and authentic mirror, and it will shine if the water is cleared up.

John Calvin is perhaps a most extreme example of Western abandonment of this understanding. His successor's formulation of the essentials of Calvinist Christianity opens with a 'T' for "total depravity," that we are profoundly corrupt all the way down to our very core. And Orthodoxy says no to this: in our very hearts is the image of God which is absolutely incapable of being deformed, dissolved, or destroyed. And to pull one example, St. Maximus the Confessor briefly speaks of adding to "the natural good of image" with "the voluntary good of likeness." The term "human nature" as I encountered it as an Evangelical was always seen as something fallen; to admit "human nature" is to admit weakness, fallenness, sin. But the *nature* of human race was never *created* as fallen, and the *natural* good of image is incorruptible. It is not a spark of God, as in Origenism and Hinduism, but it is something created which is incorruptibly good, and thinking it is a spark of God may represent an

understandable confusion. It is an image, a symbol, in which the whole God himself is indelibly present. Not even in Hell can this be undone: “Hell,” said Fr. Seraphim of Plantina, “is immersion in the love of God.”

Now the dirt in the water may hide the mirror to a profound degree. St. Maximus’s counterbalance to “the natural good of image” is “the voluntary good of likeness,” and the voluntary good of likeness is of water that is limpid, pure, and allows the mirror to shine gloriously. It is a life’s work to clear the water, and the clearer the water becomes, the more sharply people become aware of how much muck is *still* in the water, and the purest consider themselves the most defiled. But nonetheless even their defilement rests exclusively in the water above the mirror. The mirror remains as undefiled as the mirror that shone from Lord Adam in Paradise.

## **And where does gay pride fit into this? Or disability? Or, for that matter, topless?**

The essential draw to all these spiritual diseases is that they self-medicate, and provide some degree of respite to the shame of being utterly worthless and having nothing good in you. And when the effect wears thin, it is possible that the sins of men can’t sear away the pain as strongly as devils’ sin.

## **And what about the profoundly gifted? What do we have to be humble about?**

Let me bring one rabbit trail before getting on to my real point. If, in history, something goes wrong that leaves over a million murder victims, it is the fruit of profoundly gifted effort. Like Hitler, for instance, or the gospel of St. Marx. The whole singularity in which the whole world is sinking has the achievements of the profoundly gifted as instrumental. No intellectually disabled individual in history has created a black mirror. It is Steve Jobs who does it. Profoundly gifted can and do things with such good intentions as pave the road to Hell and lead legions down with them. There is something in this that we should be very humble about.

But let me talk about humility for an instant.

G.K. Chesterton says, “It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride.”

Humility is the spiritual wine that opens the eyes to the beauty of the universe, and humility is the spiritual wine that can let profoundly gifted look at IQ normals and see the glory of the image of God at work.

“In humility consider others better than yourself” (Phil 2:3) has got to be one of the least palatable texts in the Bible (or at least unpopular for us to apply it to *ourselves*), but “In humility consider others better than yourself” is another way of saying, “In humility be surrounded by other people who fascinate you, whom you admire, respect, and enjoy.” The Biblical text is more than that, but it really is an opening of the eyes to the glory of the precious other people

in your life.

I do not know how to say enough about humility, besides saying in shorthand, “Read the Philokalia” as a shorthand quote. Humility ranks high on the Ladder; it is with discernment one of the two great virtues the Fathers in the Philokalia simply cannot stop talking about or praising enough. Humility is a powerful contributor to God-shaped love, a mother to joy, and it is a Heaven on earth. Heaven is where the saints are, and Heaven is where the humble are.

I don’t wish to condemn too strongly people who reach for devil’s sin when the sins of men cease to sufficiently anaesthetize pain. But really, even if we allow whatever queer people are presently called to try to feel good on a lasting basis for pride, we might be able to think far enough the box to pursue humility.

***And oh, by the way, people are less hostile if we are genuinely humble.***

Could we pursue a profoundly gifted humility?

# Theory of Alien Minds: A UX Copernican Shift (and Gifted!)

*[Author's note: since originally articulating the "theory of alien minds" concept in response to an Asperger's text that was framing things the wrong way, it has become increasingly evident that "theory of alien minds" is the core competency in User eXperience ("UX")... and also the core competency in gifted who effectively communicate with the outside world... and also the core competency in advertising... and...]*

There was one moment of brilliance, I was told, when a North American missionary visiting in Latin America was asked if clothing and sheets lasted longer in her first-world home. The question was not surprising and it reflected cross-cultural understanding: bedsheets and clothing in the U.S. can last for quite some time, while bedsheets and clothing in the host country wear out quickly, perhaps in a few weeks, and it is nickle-and-dime drain on none-too-deep pockets to keep replacing them. The question, perceptive enough, was a question about privilege and easy

living.

The missionary's response was astute. She thought for a minute, and then said that yes, sheets in her home area lasted much longer than several weeks if properly cared for... and continued to explain, in addition, what people wore when they were all bundled up for bitter cold. Winter clothing is not mainly for modesty, and gloves, hats, and scarves (or, today, ninja masks) exist because on the very worst days *every square inch* of exposed skin will be brutally assaulted. The conversation ended with a slight degree of pity from people who only wore clothes for modesty realized that yes, as they had heard, bedsheets and normal clothing lasted much longer than several weeks, but there were some other price tags to pay. The missionary's communication was in all sympathetic, human, and graceful.

Something similar may be said of the degree of IQ where you learn firsthand that being making other people envious is *not* a good thing, and where it happens more than once that you need to involve authorities or send a C&D letter for harassment to stop, and where others' insecurities leave you socially skating on thin ice surprisingly often. Nonetheless, what may be the most interesting social lesson may have every relevance to "UX," or User eXperience, *and it has to do with what is called "theory of other minds"*. The normal conditions for developing "*theory of other minds*" can run into difficulties, but there is something very valuable that can happen.

## **Theory of other minds, Split into “theory of like minds”, and: “theory of alien minds”: A Copernican shift**

One classic developmental step in communication is developing a “theory of other minds”, meaning that you relate to people as also having minds, rather than as some sort of *thing* that emits what may be inexplicable *behaviors* instead of *acting out of human motives and beliefs*.

Part of how the normal “theory of minds” develops is that children tend to give adults gifts they would like to receive themselves, such as colorful toys rather than books. At a greater stage of maturity, people can go from giving gifts they would themselves like to receive, to giving gifts they would not want as much themselves, but another person would. However, in normal development this is an advanced lesson. For most people, the baseline is assuming that most people think like them most of the time.

For outliers in some dimensions, this simple picture does not work. People start with the same simple assumption: that you can relate to people as basically thinking like you. But if you’re different enough, you’ll break your shins with this approach. Perhaps outliers communicate markedly better if they know one person who starts on the same page, but communication is harder.

The crucial distinction I would draw is between **theory of like minds** and **theory of alien minds**. Both *theory of like minds* and *theory of alien minds* relate to others as



having minds. But *theory of like minds* is based on the assumption that other people think as you do. *Theory of alien minds* also really and truly relates to others as having minds, but it is based on a realization that you are not the center of the universe, others often do not think like you, and you need to build bridges.

*“Theory of like minds” says, “Other people have minds that are basically just like mine.”*

**“Theory of alien minds” takes a step back, saying, “Other people have minds, and they have minds whether or not they’re basically just like mine.**

This Copernican shift has every relevance to “*Let’s not forget the user*” disciplines in UX.

## **So what does a “theory of alien minds” really look like?**

Let me provide several examples, before getting into what it has to do with UX:

Hayward has worked long and hard to communicate well.

Many people might guess that the *features* of his [giftedness] would bring benefits...

...but few guess how much.

The same kind of thing goes with excellent communication. When a friend came from out of town to live in a local apartment, quite a few friends gathered to help unload the moving van.

Hayward, asked for an assignment, expecting to be asked to carry something. Instead, for reasons that are still not clear, she handed him a leash and asked him

to look after a dog she has introduced as *not at all* comfortable around men. And the dog very quickly moved as far away as his leash would allow. But Hayward worked his magic... and half an hour later, he was petting the dog's head in his lap, and when he stood up, the dog bounded over to meet the other men in the group.

In another setting, Hayward was waiting for labwork at a convenient care center, when a mother came in, with a four-year-old daughter in tow. The girl was crying bitterly, with a face showing that she was in more pain than she knew how to cope with, and an ugly bulging purple bloodblister under her thumbnail. Hayward understood very well what was going on; his own experience as a child who smashed a thumbnail badly enough to get a bloodblister underneath, was the most pain he had experienced yet in his life.

When the convenient care staff threw the mother a wad of paper to fill out before treatment (as opposed, for instance, to first just administering anaesthesia and only after that detain the mother with paperwork), she left the child crying alone in a chair. Hayward walked over, wanting to engage the girl in conversation in the hopes of lessening her pain. He crouched down to be at eye level, and began to slowly, gently, and calmly speak to the child.

Some time later, Hayward realized two things.

*First of all*, his attempt to get the girl to talk were a near-total failure. He had started by asking her favorite color, and she was able to answer that question. But essentially every other age-appropriate prompt was met with silence: “*Q: What kind of*

*instrument does a dog play?”—“A: A trom-bone.”* (But maybe her pain was too great to allow regular conversation.)

*Second of all*, she had stopped crying. *Completely*. And her face no longer showed pain. He had, partly by his nonverbal communication, entirely absorbed her attention, and she was unaware of pain that had her bawling her eyes out some minutes before. Hayward realized this with a start, and tried to keep up the conversation such as it was, regardless of whether he had anything to say. A rather startled Hayward did his best not to break the illusion, and did so smoothly enough that she seemed not to notice.

Some time later, Hayward was called for his blood draw. He returned to find the mother *comforting* her daughter, as she had not done before. The little girl was crying again, but it was a *comforted* crying, a world of difference from when she was alone with really quite vile pain. The mother seemed awestruck, and kept saying, “*You have a very gentle way about you.*”

Another time, Hayward was asked to substitute-teach a class for parents of English as a Second Language students. He was provided an interpreter who spoke Spanish and English, and the class met all objectives...

And Hayward didn’t really use the interpreter. He adapted to language and culture to bring an enjoyable class for everyone.

When studying abroad, Hayward was quite pleasantly surprised (and very much surprised) when a Ghanain housemate said Hayward had challenged

some assumptions, saying Hayward was “like a white American, and like a black African, closer than an African brother...” and from that point on he enjoyed insider status among Ghanaian friends. He has perhaps never received a greater compliment.

Hayward thinks at a fundamentally different level, and he needs to build bridges. But the good news is that he has been working on bridge-building for years and built bridges that span great differences. Being in a situation where has to orient himself and bridge a chasm doesn’t really slow him down that much.

*In addition, these “super powers” can have every relevance to business work.* No employer particularly cares if he can read ancient and medieval languages: but one employer cared that he could easily read bureaucratic documentation that was incomprehensible to everyone else.

No employer really cares that at the age of 13 Hayward crafted a four-dimensional maze, worked on visualizing a 4-cube passing through 3-space, and looked at a data visualization in his calculus book and (re)invented iterated integration...

But some employers care a great deal that he can take a visualization project, start work along the lines suggested by Tufte’s corpus of written work, and start to take steps beyond Tufte.

No employer really seems to care that he has studied at the Sorbonne, UIUC, and Cambridge (England) in three very different fields: but co-workers have been puzzled enough that he so effortlessly shifts his communication and cultural behavior to have a colleague and immigrant ask him why he relates to

Little Russia's culture so well.

But some employers appreciate his efforts to listen and understand corporate culture. In serving like a consultant for a travel subsidiary, Hayward's contacts within the organization that picked up he was trying to understand their language on their terms, and the Director of Sales and Marketing half-jokingly asked, "*Do you want to be a travel agent?*" Hayward perhaps would not be an obvious fit for personality factors, but she picked up a crystal-clear metamessage: "I want to understand what you are saying, and I want to understand it on your terms."

Furthermore, while no employer has yet to care about Hayward's interest in writing, one employer cared a great deal that he took a high-value document concerning disaster recovery and business continuity, valuable enough that it would be significant for the employer to file with e.g. their bank, and took it from being precise but awkward and puzzling to read, to being precise, accessible, simple, and clear.

What does this communication across barriers have to do with UX?

**Everything.**

I've had postgraduate training in anthropology, cognitive science, computer science, philosophy, and psychology, and I consider "theory of other minds" communication to be out-and-out the central skill in UX. Perhaps the most structural of these disciplines is anthropology, and a training in anthropology is a training in understanding across differences.

*Once anthropologists found difference by crossing the*

*Pacific and finding aboriginal people untainted by modern technology. Now anthropologists find difference by crossing the street.* But the theory of alien minds is almost **unchanged**.

Jakob Nielsen has been beating for essentially forever the drum of “You are not a user”. Perhaps his most persistent beating of his drum is:

One of usability’s most hard-earned lessons is that **‘you are not the user.’** If you work on a development project, you’re atypical by definition. Design to optimize the experience for *outsiders*, not *insiders*.

What this means, in competency, is “Communicate out of a theory of alien minds.” Or, if you prefer, a theory of “outsiders”, but don’t assume that deep down inside “outsiders” are really just like “insiders.” **Exercise a theory of alien minds.**

What Nielsen is telling people not to do is coast on a “theory of like minds,” and assume that if a user interface is intuitive and makes sense to the people who built it, it will just as much make sense to the audience it was built for. *It won’t*. You have to think a bit differently to build technology, and that means you need a theory of alien minds. Assuming that you are the center of the universe, even if it’s unintentional, is a recipe for failed UX. We all want better than that.

# **Some Notes on a Standard Assertion**

## **A Boilerplate Claim**

In academic papers in identity politics, there is a standard, introductory, boilerplate, footnoteless assertion towards the beginning which shows the author could not imagine that any other group in the whole world could have life as rough as them.

I would expect, pending evidence to the contrary, that the lowest rung on the ladder of victimization belongs to people with multiple statuses. But I have not seen a claim that people in one's own demographic, and additionally other demographics that are perhaps less important, have life worst of all.

But I would like to explore a couple of issues related to this in regards to profound giftedness.

## Shoddy Philosophy

In a Cambridge companion to philosophy, there was an entry for persecution. But as it unfolded, it was of persecution against philosophers; the only case where persecution by philosophers was mentioned was in the case of persecution *of* philosophers *by* philosophers. And if I am going to make a case that the profoundly gifted experience can be difficult (a point of consensus among the profoundly gifted I have known), there are some things I should like to say first.

If there is an atrocity with a body count over one million, someone profoundly gifted, like Marx or Hitler, has probably been at work. I imagine that intellectually disabled individuals are just as capable of being evil as the profoundly gifted, but their most evil plans never have such broad reach or work so effectively. And profoundly gifted have much to be humble about, that a profoundly gifted person who is wrong can do epically more damage.

## A Too-Brief Note About Culture Shock

The second thing I should mention is that the profoundly gifted cause something like culture shock, just by their normal default behavior, even apart from the intimidation issues explored in “The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab.” That is something more to be humble about.

That stated, in “Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh: A Look at Profound Giftedness Through Orthodox Anthropology,” I wrote,

This study makes the briefest passing mention that



one of Terman 1925's very few profoundly gifted subjects "took his own life," without the briefest passing suggestion of any way this tragedy might be something to learn from, might be something related to the profoundly gifted experience, or could even be preventable. (Statistical analysis is impossible for a small sample, but if one person in a twenty-nine person sample committed suicide, this is hundreds of times higher than the population at large, or even demographics like those suffering from major depression.)

and in *Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide*,

But this did not moderate their earlier position (compare 1 in 10,000 general public incidence at the time), when perhaps the small profoundly gifted sample size limits the effectiveness of statistics, the *res ipsa loquitur* facts should have come across as a "WTF?" in fifteen feet high blinking neon letters.

One friend knows, among people very high up in the gifted range, two who attempted suicide, and two people who successfully committed suicide. One of them, suffering from terminal boredom, built a sports car from parts in a junkyard and ran it into a brick wall at something like a hundred miles per hour. (The largest portion of him that was recovered was a hand.)

One additional statistic that I searched for but failed to trace or find again was a statistic stating that profoundly gifted had a 27% psychiatric hospitalization rate. That is higher than any meaningful demographic I have heard

besides "people who have been psychiatrically hospitalized," and significantly higher than people suffering from major mental illness.

For a comparison with disability in general, I would again quote "Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh: A Look at Profound Giftedness Through Orthodox Anthropology:"

Doreen Freeman suggests of disability, "How often we hear people say they would 'rather be dead than disabled' yet the suicide rates of the disabled do not reflect this pessimistic view." [60] Disability is a different condition viewed from the inside and the outside, and so is giftedness, for which the suicide rates are apparently higher.

The question or illustration that has been made of giftedness in general asks the reader to imagine what the effect would be on a child of normal intelligence placed in a world where very few people have an IQ above 70. And giftedness has been found to be an at-risk factor for mental illness.

I shy back from parroting the boilerplate assertion as regards profound giftedness. I have provided a couple of references, and I would really, really like to footnote the article stating a 27% psychiatric hospitalization rate for profound giftedness. I also would suspect that people who have it worst on the ladder of victimization have multiple statuses, perhaps people who have additionally suffered harassment, abuse, or sexual violence (and I would suggest "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab" suggests a mechanism for why people can and do behave more abusively in dealing with the profoundly gifted than people

who are nonthreatening).

So I provide a modification to the standard boilerplate assertion, and it is one that I add as a last addition to a long-unmodified *Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide*, being something I thought of years after its first assembly, and a seed that started to grow not about profoundly gifted people having it rough but about something of a flipside that profoundly gifted people cause culture shock or something like it, and this is a point that really should be taken into account. Culture shock is a top 10 cause of suicide, up with factors such as divorce, and people interested in having profoundly gifted people treated better would be about the difficult task of being yourself while not needlessly shocking or intimidating John Q. Public. I have said earlier that it would be nice if instead of pride, we could pursue a profoundly gifted humility. I think we would be best off if we could also mitigate causing culture shock unless it is for a point.

For what it's worth.

# **Speaking to Inform versus Speaking to Communicate**

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

John Bridges, Bryan Curtis, *50 Things Every Young Gentleman Should Know* (Revised and Expanded)

At one point a friend raised to me the question of speaking to inform versus speaking to communicate. The core concept is what it is that is the basic job description or objective in communication. As I approached things then, the basic approach I took to contributing to conversation was explaining things I found interesting. And that was the wrong baseline.

In terms of a guiding approach to communication, one question you might ask is, "What would an IQ normal do?", and if you haven't paid attention to what IQ normals do in conversation, you're setting yourself up for failure by

insisting on ignorance. There are pockets of conversation when it is normal and appropriate to explain an interesting concept, but those should be handled on an opt-in basis, much like explanation of your giftedness. If someone raises the question and asks you, fire away. But do not introduce such things unprovoked.

The baseline of appropriate conversation, at least in my nation's culture, has much more to do with small talk than interesting and abstract subtleties. And what is the benefit or point of small talk? Religion and politics are, or at least were, in some circles taboo and they come close to being the only things *worth* talking about. Direct and immediate honesty in matters of religion reaches very deep and you can easily find something that will sear a relationship. The great benefit of talking about the weather is that it's a *safe* topic for conversation.

I suppose you could raise a few eyebrows by asking, "Hot enough for you?" when it is record cold outside, but in general remarks about the weather are *safe*, and a brief remark about the weather rarely offends. And in general small talk serves a role like a little bit of physical affection: it affords conversation of a sort, but it doesn't touch deeply held beliefs that can offend by their content or intensity.

When asked certain questions, the profoundly gifted may feel like they're flat-out lying to give any answer that can be stated in two or three sentences. Now honesty and straightforwardness are great virtues, but it is a good rule of thumb to "Just tell me the time, don't build me a watch." Of course there are some times where building a watch is just what the doctor ordered: but that is preferably handled on an opt-in basis. What you see about complexity in something you're asked about will be seen by others as

*making* something needlessly complex. The kind of answer that is expected for truthfulness is to just tell the time. It's good if you can see layers of complexity, but not so good to lay on others the burden of wrestling with such layers of complexity that you alone will help them to see.

The most important part of martial arts is etiquette, as we said in Kuk Sool Won. A great deal of the meat and potatoes of appropriate conversation is to be able to converse about the same kind of topics most people talk about, at no more than the same kind of basic complexity most people talk about, using no bigger words than most people talk about. Now all of this is easier said than done and I do not reach the full height of it myself. But I have only profited socially by bringing my baseline closer to this. And still I have loved ones who don't read articles I post to Facebook because of the words I use. And no, the words in question are not crude or vulgar; they're just specifically sesquipedalian.

It is good to have a place and relationships where you can go to full length and complexity and use big words to convey fine-grained nuances and distinctions. And having that need unmet is a very sad thing. But that should not be the baseline for conversation with people in general. The best response is usually to convey something simple, such as in the Challenger shuttle hearings where Richard Feynmann swirled a piece of O-ring in his water and snapped it like a dry twig. That neatly ended the debate about what freezing cold could do to O-rings. And the profoundly gifted are often those who can capture something complex and difficult and convey it with crystalline simplicity. However, do not seek to meet your need for such conversation to people who do not seek such

conversation and are bewildered why you can't respect the social rules everyone else follows. It is you and not they who are wrong if you monopolize the conversation and use it to inform people about things you find very interesting.

Furthermore, there was one top negotiator who held a question and answer session and one audience member said, "If I could shadow you for a day, and observe how you go about negotiation, in a sentence, what would I learn?", the negotiator said, "I don't need a sentence, just two words. *Listen better.*" This is probably a classic case of someone very bright, who could say things that could delve into great detail and complexity, saying something very simply.

I am not here going to describe the details of active listening; the right Google search should be able to turn up in minutes any explanation I could give here. However, I suggest that the best conversation comes from being able to listen well, and possibly keep your deep thoughts to yourself. And additionally and more specifically, **don't** start mentally formulating what you will say next and wait for the other person to stop talking. "***Listen*** when people talk to you."

And while we're at it, do not look for conversation expecting psychological hugs. Enter conversation with such emptiness, and you will leave with the emptiness unsated. One person I saw on an online conversation complained that people answered his stating that he was a professor with, "What do you teach?" and not giving him a psychological hug by explicitly recognizing that he is so much more as a person than the name of the discipline he teaches. It is best to renounce such hunger, or save it for your inner ring of friends.

Such adjustments can help you interact better and save

you a world of frustration... and save others a world of  
frustration at you.



## The Surprising Rationality of the Lie

When I was at a friend's wedding, his father mentioned a surprisingly sick story about a boy whose older brother committed suicide, and for Christmas the boy was given a gun as a gift: more specifically, his older brother's suicide weapon. (I should clarify that my friend's father was not being sick; his conversation with me on the topic was entirely appropriate...)

In the book he mentioned, Scott Peck's *People of the Lie* talks about a personality profile that was characterized by narcissism and several other warped things; surprisingly, at least to me, the single defect the author chose to crystallize what was wrong was that they were characterized by lies. We tend to think of lies today as not the most serious evil, perhaps using an idiom like "not the end of the world." Peck meant something very serious by characterizing these patients as "people of the lie."

In one statement that the author does not unpack (probably more because he did not want to slow the text down rather than a failure to understand what was going on), the boy's mother said, with what I would call narrower

entailment than implicature, “Most sixteen year old boys would have given their eyeteeth to have a gun!” This statement is, of course, in an almost literal sense true, in that literally speaking, most sixteen year old boys would be delighted to receive a gun for Christmas. However, it was in a deeper sense false and a lie in that it idiomatically conveys that it was reasonable under the circumstances to believe in good faith that this sixteen year old boy would have been delighted to receive that gun as his Christmas gift. (Interested parties may read me unpack an “emotional plea” with discussion of entailment and implicature in a dissertation.) Such lies, once analyzed, shed light on what is sick in the discussion. An (almost) literally true statement here conveys a lie; the “almost” does not specifically amount to deception but using a metaphor that does not lie, about giving one’s “eyeteeth.” Elsewhere the author complains about a half-truth that conveys a lie. Here I would say that no matter how literally true a statement is, lying is in the author’s mind deeply, deeply characteristic of what has gone wrong.

My specific reason for bringing Scott Peck and *People of the Lie* has to do with something else, the surprising rationality of the lie. In his book, and in my own life, I might accuse people of lying, but I cannot interpret their behavior as clumsy, random, or unthinking. Scott Peck complains about the “cheapness, laziness, and insensitivity” of making the gun the boy’s Christmas gift. I would speak differently, and here please do not accuse me of speaking against the spirit of Peck’s book, even if I attempt “change from within” (as C.S. Lewis uses the term in *The Abolition of Man*).

The choice of gift was the result of the parents’ solution to an optimization problem, of what under the

circumstances would best advance their campaign. It *might* have been horrifyingly insensitive to buy him a new, bigger and better gun, but the gun they gave really leaves no doubt. If they had seen an opportunity to make the gift sicker by gluing camouflaged razor blades to the outside of the gun so he would (in a literal sense) cut his hands when he innocently picked the gun up, they would have done so. This was no mere case of giving an ashtray to someone who doesn't smoke. They could have given him, without thinking, a used Barbie doll from a garage sale or a new book in a language he doesn't read. Or, for that matter, shaved his head and given him a set of combs. A gun, or more specifically *this* gun, does something else exquisitely well. *It says, "Your turn."*

Behavior that seems thoughtless or irrational, from people of the lie, is usually nothing of the sort, perhaps because we assume rationality is a rationality of good faith, so that gun is seen as an astonishingly bad failure in an attempt to give an appropriate Christmas present: cheap, lazy, and insensitive. It is in fact nothing of the sort. **Much seemingly irrational behavior is in fact perfectly rational in an attempted solution to the problem of finding a seemingly socially appropriate way to pursue socially inappropriate goals.** Behavior may be rational and sick, or rational and treacherous, or rational and warped. But offensive behavior, in a *People of the Lie* context, even or *especially* when it seems puzzlingly irrational, is usually rational in the pursuit of a wrong goal. I do not find the young woman's behavior mystifying, who behaved in seemingly inexplicable ways in receiving therapy. She had plenty of IQ and her behavior makes perfect sense as amusing herself by toying with, mystifying,

and frustrating a psychiatrist. Her behavior seems irrational on the assumption that she was approaching a psychiatrist with the goal of bettering herself by receiving real psychotherapy. Once we discard the assumption of good faith seeking psychotherapy, all of her making the psychiatrist sexually uncomfortable (for instance) makes perfect sense as a very intelligent person rationally pursuing an inappropriate goal. (Possibly, though I remember no direct evidence of this, in her mind, she was killing two birds with one stone and getting even, after one or more people insisted she get treatment.)

Elsewhere, if I am recalling the book correctly (I may be conflating two stories), the author complains about professional parents whose line of work required empathy were surprisingly unempathetic in dealing with their children, and appeared to comment that it's almost as if their goal was to break their son's spirit, but despite the allegation the author does not take seriously this possible goal. I submit that this guess is right on the money. At one point, their son worked with disabled people and was awarded a trip to a conference which his parents confiscated on the assertion that his room was not clean. The author commented that he would be worried if a son of his age *didn't* have a somewhat messy room, and appeared to believe that they believe that confiscating such an award was genuinely proportionate discipline for a messy room. I submit that they found a seemingly socially appropriate way to implement socially inappropriate behavior, and they confiscated the trip and honor because it was a seemingly, or at least arguably, socially appropriate way to break his spirit on terms that even the author of *People of the Lie* would not equate with a naked and obvious effort to break

their son's spirit.

What this means for the profoundly gifted, or many who are gifted but happen not to be at *that* echelon, is this. "Confucius say that elevator smell different to dwarf." Maybe, but *Confucius should also say eight foot tall elevator feel different to nine or ten foot tall intellectual giant*. In cases where he was treating a child of "people of the lie," the author usually found the child much less sick, and more of a victim, than parents guilty of aggression. (He talked about the "identified patient," meaning that in a dysfunctional situation the person labeled as a psychiatric patient may well be the least in need of psychiatric treatment.) Furthermore, as I explored in "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab," meeting someone who is by far the most brilliant person that someone has ever met brings out some insecurities in people. Most of the parents he discusses succeeded in social situations where success requires some genuine sensitivity. The author wonders and is mystified that they didn't apply their well-developed sensitivity to dealing with their child. I submit that they were perfectly sensitive, but applied their sensitivity in the service of a warped goal.

If you are dealing with a *People of the Lie* situation, a couple of things. First of all, it may defuse some frustration to move from believing "They are trying to behave in a socially appropriate way but doing a mystifying and painfully bad way of doing it (and reasoning with them doesn't work)," to "They are rationally pursuing inappropriate behavior in a way they are presenting as socially appropriate (and the results of reasoning with them are in line with this.)" It defuses some of "They are being painfully irrational and defy attempts at being rational."

And if what they want is to get your goat, standard psychological advice may apply. Second, it is more effective to work with people on grounds of their actual motivation than a motivation falsely presented. Not a panacea, but it is surely not a panacea to tell people who want to get your goat, in perfectly good faith, “You are hurting me.”

I submit that being willing to consider the possibility of encountering the rational behavior of “people of the lie” can be part of a constructive exercise of Theory of Alien Minds.

## A Legitimate Way to Hurt You

There have been certain extended, repeated, milked-for-any-penny actions that if they happened now I would say one "No" and on repeat offenses go to an immediate CEASE AND DESIST letter. The best option in this case is to follow the lesson of *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* and perhaps *Man's Search for Meaning* and choose not to be bothered by them. But I mention this with reservations because it is a lesson in maturity I have not mastered, and I am wary of trying to teach others lessons I have not myself learned. I am convinced that it is possible and effective to deflate this kind of behavior simply by not letting it get your goat, but I wish to give a caveat of incompetence because it is not easy. It also explains, by the way, why when you make clear to some people how their behavior is hurting you, they just dig deeper because you have told them they have hit real paydirt.

Four elements of extended obnoxious behavior in my life include having criticism and naysaying be the only conceivable content for serious conversation (10 years to shut down), incessant assertions that I was going manic (10

years to shut down), telling me that I was "not picking up on social cues" (20 years to shut down), and insisting on amateur psychologist treatment for my (real or imagined) autistic traits (20 years to shut down). In all cases it was not that the other person said, "Ok, he's been saying 'No' to this for a decade or two. So we have crossed the threshold, and perhaps I should seriously consider that he means 'No.'" For the first three, it was a painful blow that worked on the principle of an intervention for an alcoholic: "...none of this mattered, because you were Protecting Me From Getting Hurt. This is part of why I wince when you tell me you're Protecting Me From Getting Hurt, because what that means is that not only are you hurting me, but it is extremely difficult for me to ask you to stop so that you will respect my wishes..." In the last case, it was not a person who loved me enough for painful clarity to necessarily be enough (*though there are reasons to believe she loved me another way far more than another man's wife ever should, and resented that she had not snagged me*), and I wrote:

It's been twenty years that the greatest care that you can show me is to help me reach greater self-understanding through an autism spectrum diagnosis.

That the greatest care you can show me is to help me reach greater self-understanding through an autism diagnosis seems to represent a third thing you are sure of, after Orthodoxy and your husband.\* [The asterisk referred to a conversation where she delineated Orthodoxy and her husband to be the two things she was sure of.]

CEASE AND DESIST from all further contact.



And she has almost left me alone.

I hesitate to include this kind of material as Too Much Information, but one must be indecent to talk about decency, and this kind of (perhaps not unusually sexual) decency issue is a major fact of life for the profoundly gifted, and may run deeper in the motivating need than the talk about the birds and the bees we may or may not have had.

I am now quick to report, unfriend, and block on social media, partly courtesy of the crowd that stands in admiration of "Blessed Seraphim Rose", and I am quick to issue C&D letters (and I would get an order of protection if I couldn't technologically end the conversation and a C&D letter Cc'ed to relevant authorities was not producing results). But in the past including authorities in a conversation has often been effective, as has C&D letters.

And I am working on not letting myself be hurt; I was told that Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can hurt you without consent," by someone who was deeply hurt after I said "Up to a point," and one other of my most delicate declensions of saying "No," and I thought, "It may be true, but I don't accept this on the say of someone who hasn't learned it." Now I believe that it is indeed true (if possibly a slightly expanded misquote of "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."), and I am trying to grow in it. And I think it is my duty to put this on your radar, as it is fairly loud on my radar too. But along with it comes a recognition that bullies come in various stripes, including many authority figures and some of your self-identified friends, and you should not assume decency in that if they do something that hurts you, your telling them how it hurts you will solve the problem. You may intend a metamessage of "This is why you should stop," but they will possibly

recognize this metamessage but superimpose a metamessage of "You've hit paydirt."

Decency in this sense exists in others and did exist, for instance, when I studied at Wheaton and Calvin and was more than a bit of a pest, but I was under the authority of e.g. faculty who had been selected on criteria that included moral character, including humility. However, I have had to learn to recognize when I was showing my belly to the sharks. And I have learned that if I explain to someone how that other person is hurting me, and the spurs only dig more sharply, that I should no further negotiate on the assumption of decency in that other person, and instead treat conscious malice as conscious malice.

Although I am doing better at a monastery now where there are no actors who have been toxic in their interactions to me. I have got to be making some social errors, but all the other men consider humility to be important, and focus on being humble themselves and not primarily express the importance of humility in terms of ramming my need for humility down my throat.

There is something to be said for a change of scenery, and two of the first things my antennae are looking for in a social situation is how intelligent people are (subtle jokes can reveal a lot about IQ in terms of how people get "Q: How many Exxon captains does it take to make an oil spill?"—"A: One and a fifth."), and how humble the people who call the shots are. I know a lot about where I stand when I have those two. A great many problems have been solved, or at least improved, by going to St. Demetrios Skete in Virginia. People start closer to the same wavelength, and people actively pursue holiness and virtue. This place is particularly valuable, but I wish I'd come to a monastery

years ago.



## I Deleted my ChatGPT App

A passage in Plato's Phaedrus offers a critique of writing when writing was the hot new technology that offered to simply improve thinking with no negative effects:

*Socrates: At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; the bird which is called the Ibis was sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days Thamus was the king of the whole of Upper Egypt, which is in the district surrounding that great city which is called by the Hellenes Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he went through them, and Thamus inquired about their*

*several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. There would be no use in repeating all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; for this is the cure of forgetfulness and folly. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, he who has the gift of invention is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance a paternal love of your own child has led you to say what is not the fact: for this invention of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters. You have found a specific, not for memory but for reminiscence, and you give your disciples only the pretence of wisdom; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome, having the reputation of knowledge without the reality.*

The more things change, it seems, the more they stay the same.

Advertising copy for ChatGPT claimed that it could stimulate the imagination, and I looked at it for a second and said that it could probably do that used a certain way, but the more likely outcome would be that people would have it do their thinking for them.

It was not terribly much longer that I heard of YouTube

videos of boyfriends copying and pasting ChatGPT responses because they didn't know how to console their girlfriends. I am unsure of the timeline, but the YouTube videos may have been live well before I made my "prediction."

I read Nicholas Carr, *[The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains](#)*, and it was nice to have a relatively up-to-date statement of things that were already mostly things I already knew; then I read another book of his, *[The Glass Cage: Automation and Us and How Computers are Changing Us](#)* and found a serious challenge that left me reconsidering a fairly deeply-held belief.

I have long been interested in UX ("User eXperience," the "Let's not forget the person who actually uses this" discipline within Information Technology), and I have labored hard at good UX for [my main site](#), and inwardly winced at what Substack didn't allow me to do for UX on [my Substack](#). I couldn't make visited and unvisited links look different, despite this being a top recommendation for good UX that is violated on the Web. My writing may be challenging to read; I prefer not to have on top of that difficulty people having trouble figuring out how to use my site.

In *[The Glass Cage](#)*, Nicholas Carr says essentially that a high level of UX in software tools used to develop a skill dumbs down people's performance and learning for that skill. For a classic puzzle, a tool with highly enabled UX that showed, for instance, what were legal moves and what not, people learned and retained much less than a more basic user interface that required people to master what moves were legal themselves.

The most devastating critique in the book is what

Electronic Medical Records have done, and are doing, to the medical profession, and I will leave you to read [\*The Glass Cage\*](#) for that. However, a related find was what Integrated Development Environments do to people's programming skills. Before that, I had assumed that when programmers wrote, *"I'd crawl over a mile of Integrated this and Visual that to get to Emacs and a good copy of gcc,"* which I had simply assumed was a chauvinism for known and familiar tools. Another person much more crassly and much more scathingly denounced IDE-induced skill atrophy by saying, *"Most programmers today couldn't find their d\*cks if you took away their Visual M\*st\*rb\*t\*\*n Kit ++."* The older command line tools (I use vim instead of Emacs) required the programmer to know what he was programming and keep it in his head. Emacs is a complex and capable system, but in a way that encourages development of expert skills (*"...and with 'evil' mode, the operating system includes an editor."*). A distinction has been made between "novice-friendly" and "expert-friendly" systems, and Unix and Linux are both expert-friendly systems. (In Linux Mint, a novice-friendly desktop metaphor is built on top of an expert-friendly chassis). It has been said, perhaps insultingly, *"Unix is a very friendly operating system; it's just very selective about who it is friendly with."* I do not ask you to like the last statement or for that matter any of these statements, but Unix is a classic example of an expert-friendly system that fosters the development and refinement of expert skill.

With older tools that fostered the development of expert skills, the individual contributor is functioning as an expert individual contributor. In the case of an Integrated Development Environments, and especially the ones with



the most recent advances, much more of the work is done by tools, and the individual contributor is functioning more like an ersatz manager, more monitoring electronic tools than doing the main work. I had naively assumed that Integrated Development Environments were simply a more advanced tools whose strengths I had not learned to take advantage of. It turns out I had, by accident, been right to stay with vim and the Linux command line.

I read a recent newsletter about AI tools for jobhunters, and some of them seemed awfully sweet. Or at least sounded sweet at first. One would automate most or all of the drudge-work side of applying for a job online. It didn't mention an obvious consequence of mass use of such tools: though using the tool would allow a candidate to fill out more applications, faster, and with more convenience than doing things the old-fashioned way, which sounds like a great win until you realize that on the employer's side, it means that your application will be buried under a pile of a great many other hastily made applications. Filling out the manual data entry portions of an online job application, however boring and unintelligent work it may be, functioned before such tools as a costly signal that you genuinely wanted a job enough to fill out all the fields as they existed on the form. Furthermore, even before then employers were deluged by piles of applications so that the first chore for an employer was to get the pile of applications down to a manageable size. Now your resume will be buried among an even larger pile of applications, and almost all of the resumes will be possibly slightly tweaked outputs of generative AI. Under the old-school way, the bulk of a jobhunter's work was to do research on a company and communicate in more tightly tailored ways to a given job

application; the manual data entry component was actually only a small part of the work, if perhaps the most chore-like to some jobseekers. Now the AI advantage has what I have called a “[damned backswing](#)” in that it will be all the more difficult to stand out and employers will be looking all the more, not to see if your application looks like a match, but to get an overwhelming *flood* of applications down to some kind of manageable size. (Perhaps AI tools for employers automate much of this process, too.)

The overall picture of automation is that the person using computer tools is not functioning primarily as the intelligence doing the work; he is functioning as someone to monitor and manage the computer programs that do most or all of the work. In what it said both about automated doctoring in the wake of Electronic Medical Records and automated piloting in the wake of the glass cockpit (which has been called a “glass cage” which provided the title for the book), human competency is reduced and stunted, and what is called [human] *automaticity*, the feature of expert performance where people perform advanced skilled work in a way that leaves them productively absorbed, cannot develop.

I’m sure, if I wanted to, I could get ChatGPT to do some amazing writing for me. But I believe in a human, internal basis for power. Perhaps more in divine synergy as it is called by Orthodox, but not less by managing artificial intelligences. Possibly I will be harder to find as ChatGPT and generative AI produce interesting writing, made to order, for the majority of people who still read. However, I want to develop my talents and not function as a manager to generative AI writing and living for me. And opting out of the brave new world of using my intelligence to manage AI

as the real workers is a way for me to retain a unique power when AI is increasing and woke classics programs not only drop expectations that students learn Latin and Greek, but that they read texts even in translation, and maybe do a little classics name-dropping in doing what they can to project today's gender euphoria onto the world of the classics. I'm learning to be better at reading Greek, through old education and skills that still work today, and older technologies such as an intralinear text and the memory techniques Thamus expected writing would push into the background.

I have commented in a previous post that the Amish may seem "quaint," but they may seem a good deal less quaint when the supply chain breakdowns are affecting almost everything else and they will still have the living and active skills to continue functioning during other people's supply chain failures. I foresee a time, possibly during my lifetime though God only knows if I will live to die of old age, when by keeping custody of my native intelligence and my variegated education may leave me something like royalty after a [damned backswing](#) lets people rely on artificial intelligence, and it is then confiscated by economic breakdown and/or cascading systems failure. [The Glass Cage](#) talks about how GPS may mean that in one or two generations Inuit will lose forever their ancient skill of navigating a shifting snowy landscape before GPS becomes a casualty of collapsing systems failure. And I will, or least *may*, be pursuing my work, in contrast no longer really to people who have a liberal arts education, but to people whose education was entirely woke. The life of someone with an old-fashioned liberal arts education may itself tower among woke who have AI do their thinking for them,

though I would recall a line from [Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?](#): “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is crucified.”

[Hard Lessons from Israel’s High-Tech Border Failure](#), written about how Hamas terrorists mostly disabled Israel’s \$1.2 billion USD wall at Gaza, says a great deal about escalating complexity and complex systems failure. (The comments are well worth reading, too.) One military figure, quoted as a medicine to those who would feel safe leaving the Gaza wall, was cited as saying, “People first, ideas second, machines third,” a lesson put in a non-military context in [Good to Great](#). Increasingly complex systems put us at risk of cascading system failure, and there are a great many things that are at a level of complexity people cannot really grasp. One of the comments on [Hard Lessons from Israel’s High-Tech Border Failure](#) is written by someone responsible for addressing when Amazon’s website goes down, and says that Amazon’s system is really too complex for people to get their arms around. The trend is to increasingly brittle systems; a great many technological advances move from something less brittle to something more brittle. Some poorer nations have no concept of obsolescence and have donkey-drawn carts alongside sometimes new consumer electronics. The USA, with its Protestant heritage, has a mentality of “Out with the old, in with the new,” and if some newer technology like cellphones or credit cards become unavailable the cascading systems failure would be poised to destroy the country. Other, poorer nations without a concept of obsolescence will have less of their infrastructure and support neutralized if cascading systems failure takes down a pillar of technological society. AI researchers, after allowing AI to

improve itself, simply do not understand increasingly much of how it does what it does, and we may have a vulnerability to cascading systems failure beyond what was even possible with slightly older technologies like the smartphone.

## Conclusion

### The “When I Become an Evil Overlord” list

(“4. Shooting is not too good for my enemies.”) includes,

29. I will keep a special cache of low-tech weapons and train my troops in their use. That way — even if the heroes manage to neutralize my power generator and/or render the standard-issue energy weapons useless — my troops will not be overrun by a handful of savages armed with spears and rocks.

All of us outsource a great deal of our thinking, and this is necessary and even good. Another name for this outsourcing of our thinking is “appropriate trust in authority,” and I emphatically believe in right trust of right authority.

However there is another level of liability altogether to go woke, learn gender theory and not the traditional contents of mathematics or classics, and use AI whenever thinking is needed. I write under the authority of the Orthodox Church, or rather somewhat *in* the authority of the Orthodox Church, pre-eminent among authorities by which my work is rightly judged.

We need authority and we need technology, and my

own contribution to broader society critically hinges on multiple websites. I do not in particular see why my own web presence should survive the Great Reset, but the copyright status of my works is intended to let my books survive me if anybody is there to pick them up. There is such a thing as planning for others' benefits.

But let us not simply offload our thinking to AI.

# The Damned Backswing

**Kaine:** What do you mean and what is the "damned backswing"?

**Vetus:** Where to start? Are you familiar with category theory?

**Kaine:** I have heard the term; explain.

**Vetus:** Category theory is the name of a branch of mathematics, but on a meta level, so to speak. Algebraists study the things of algebra, and number theorists study the things of number theory—an arrangement that holds almost completely. But category theory studies common patterns in other branches of mathematics, and it is the atypical, rare branch of mathematics that studies all branches of mathematics. And, though this is not to my point exactly, it is abstract and difficult: one list of insults to give to pet languages is that you must understand category theory to write even the simplest of all programs.

The achievements of category theory should ideally be juxtaposed with Bourbaki, the pseudonym of a mathematician or group of mathematicians who tried to systematize all of mathematics. What came out of their efforts is that trying to systematize mathematics is like trying to step on a water balloon and pin it down; mathematicians consider their discipline perhaps the most systematic of disciplines in academia, but the discipline itself cannot be systematized.

But the fact that Bourbaki's work engendered a realization that you cannot completely systematize even the most systematic of disciplines does not mean that there are patterns and trends that one can observe, and the basic insight in category theory is that patterns recur and these patterns are not limited to any one branch of mathematics. Even if it does not represent a total success of doing what Bourbaki tried and failed to do, it is far from a total loss: category theory legitimately observes patterns and trends that transcend the confines of individual subdisciplines in mathematics.

**Kaine:** So the "damned backswing" is like something from category theory, cutting across disciplines?

**Vetus:** Yes.

**Kaine:** And why did you choose the term of a damned backswing?

**Vetus:** Let me comment on something first. C.S. Lewis, in a footnote in [Mere Christianity](#), says that some people complained about his light swearing in referring to certain ideas as "damned nonsense." And he explained



that he did not intend to lightly swear at all; he meant that the ideas were incoherent and nonsense, and they and anyone who believed in them were damned or accursed. And I do not intend to swear lightly either; I intend to use the term "damned" in its proper sense. Instead there is a recurring trend, where some seemingly good things have quite the nasty backswing.

**Kaine:** And what would an example be?

**Vetus:** In the U.S., starting in the 1950's there was an incredibly high standard of living; everything seemed to be getting better all the time. And now we are being cut by the backswing: the former great economic prosperity, and the present great and increasing economic meltdown, are cut from the same cloth; they are connected. There was a time of bait, and we sprung for it and are now experiencing the damned backswing.

**Kaine:** So the damned backswing begins with bait of sorts, and ends in misery? In the loss of much more than the former gain? Do you also mean like addiction to alcohol or street drugs?

**Vetus:** Yes, indeed; for a while drinking all the time seems an effective way to solve problems. But that is not the last word. The same goes from rationalism to any number of things.

**Kaine:** Do you see postmodern trends as the backswing of modern rationalism?

**Vetus:** All that and less.

**Kaine:** What do you mean by "and less"?

**Vetus:** The damned backswing did not start with Derrida. The understanding of "reason" that was held before the Enlightenment was a multifaceted thing that meant much more than logic; even as Reason was enthroned (or an actress/prostitute), Reason was pared down to a hollowed-out husk of what reason encompassed in the West before then. It would be like celebrating "cars", but making it clear that when the rubber hits the road, the truly essential part of "a set of wheels" is the wheel—and enthroning the wheel while quietly, deftly stripping away the rest of the car, including not just the frame but engine, and seats. The damned backswing of rationalism was already at work in the Enlightenment stripping and enthroning reason. And the damned backswing was already at work in economic boom times in the West, saying that yes, indeed, man *can* live by bread alone.

And perhaps the strongest and most visible facet of the damned backswing occurs in technology. There are other areas: a country erected on freedoms moves towards despotism, just as Plato said in his list of governments, moving from the best to the worst. But in technology, we seem to be able to be so much more, but the matrix of technology we live in is, among other things, a surveillance system, and something we are dependent on, so that we are vulnerable if someone decides to shut things off. Man does not live by bread alone, but it is better for a man to try to live by bread alone than live by SecondWife alone, or any or all the array of technologies and gadgetry. The new reality man has created does not compare to the God-given reality we have spurned to embrace the new, and some have said that the end will come when we no longer make paths to our neighbors because we are entirely engrossed in technology and gadgetry.

**Kaine:** And are there other areas?

**Vetus:** There are other areas; but I would rather not belabor the point. Does this make sense?

**Kaine:** Yes, but may I say something strange?

**Vetus:** Yes.

**Kaine:** I believe in the damned backswing, and in full.

**Vetus:** You're not telling me something.

**Kaine:** I believe in the damned backswing, but I do not believe that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

**Vetus:** What? Do you mean that you partly believe in the damned backswing, and partly not? Do you believe in the damned backswing "is true, from a certain point of view"?

**Kaine:** I understand your concern but I reject the practice of agreeing with everyone to make them feel better. If I believed in the damned backswing up to a point, I would call it such.

**Vetus:** How do you believe it, if you reject that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?

**Kaine:** Let me ask: do Calvinists believe in the Sovereignty of God?

**Vetus:** Is the Pope Catholic? (I mean besides John XXIII.)

**Kaine:** Let me suggest that the Reformed view of Divine Sovereignty could go further than it actually does.

**Vetus:** How? They are the most adamant advocates of Divine Sovereignty, and write books like [No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism.](#)

**Kaine:** There's an awfully strong clue in the title.

**Vetus:** That the author believes so strongly in the Divine Sovereignty that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom?

**Kaine:** Not quite.

**Vetus:** Then what is the clue? I don't want to guess.

**Kaine:** The clue is that the author believes in the Divine Sovereignty so weakly that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom, and that if there is one iota of creaturely freedom, there is not one iota of Divine Sovereignty.

His is a fragile Divine Sovereignty, when in actual fact God's Sovereignty is absolute, with the last word after every exercise of creaturely freedom. There is no exercise of freedom you can make that will impede the exercise of the Divine Sovereignty.

**Vetus:** I could sin. In fact, I do sin, and I keep on sinning.

**Kaine:** Yes, but God is still Sovereign and can have the last word where there is sin. To get back to Lewis for a second, "All of us, either willingly or unwillingly, do the will of God: Satan and Judas as tools or

instruments, John and Peter as sons." The Divine Sovereignty is the Alpha and the Omega, the Founder of the beginning, and works in and through all: "even Gollum may have something yet to do."

**Vetus:** But what?

**Kaine:** "But what?", you ask?

For starters, there is Christmas. Good slips in unnoticed. God slips in unnoticed. True, it will become one of the most celebrated holidays in the Western world, and true, the Western world will undertake the nonsensical task of keeping a warm, fuzzy Christmas without Christ or Christmas mentioned once. But us lay aside both Christian bloggers speaking in defense of a secularized Christmas, and bloggers telling retailers, "You need Christmas, but Christmas doesn't need you." You speak of the damned backswing coming from an unexpected place; this is nothing next to God slipping in unnoticed.

There will be a time when God will be noticed by all. At the first Christmas, angel hosts announced good news to a few shepherds. When Christ returns, he will be seen by all, riding on the clouds with rank upon rank of angels. At the first Christmas, a lone star heralded it to the Magi. When he returns, the sky will recede as a vanishing scroll. At the first Christmas, a few knees bowed. When he returns, every knee will bow. And the seed for this victory is planted in Christmas.

And the same seeds of glory are quietly planted in our lives. You are not wrong to see the damned backswing and see that it is real: but one would be wrong to see it

and think it is most real. Open one eye, and you may see the damned backswing at work. Open both eyes wide, and you may see [God at work, changing the game.](#)

And God will work a new thing in you. Not, perhaps, by taking you out of your sufferings or other things that you may pray for; that is at his good pleasure. But you have heard the saying, "We want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us." Whole worlds open up with forgiveness, or repentance, or any virtue. If you are moulded as clay in the potter's hands, unsought goods come along the way. [The best things in life are free,](#) and what is hard to understand is that this is not just a friend's smile, but suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. It was spiritual eyes wide open that left the apostles [rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame \[and violence\] for Christ's name. And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."](#) This newness begins here and now, and it comes when in circumstances we would not choose God works to give us a larger share in the real world. We enter a larger world, or rather we become larger ourselves and more able to take in God's reality. And all of this is like the first Christmas, a new thing and unexpected. We are summoned and do not dare disobey: [Sing unto the LORD a new song; sing unto the LORD all the earth.](#) And it is this whole world with angels, butterflies, the Church, dandylions, energetic work, friends, family, and forgiveness, the Gospel, holiness, the I that God has made, jewels, [kairos](#), love, mothers, newborn babes, ostriches, preaching, repentance from sins, singing, technology, unquestioning obedience, variety, wit and wisdom, xylophones, youth and age, and zebras.

The damned backswing is only a weak parody of the power of [God the Gamechanger](#).

## When Counseling Can Be Miscalibrated

All of us step on toes, but not with equal weight. It can happen that the IQ normal step with the weight of a rabbit, the moderately gifted step with the weight of a deer, and the profoundly gifted step with the weight of an elephant.

It is my experience that even the best counselors I know need to recalibrate to get certain things right. For instance, one counselor gave a boilerplate recommendation to, when I think that a criticism is necessary, to sandwich it between two compliments. And while that is good advice, it is calibrated to the weight of a rabbit in stepping on people's feet.

I responded by saying that the advice was miscalibrated, and gave as an analogy that he respected that most Illinois drivers have seen snow, and if you are driving after heavy snow and drive on unploughed roads, you stand good odds of getting from an origin to a destination safely by following a few simple measures.

Meanwhile (please note that I do not criticize Georgians, who are welcome to point out that many Illinois residents don't know the first thing about bracing for a



hurricane), if you get the same snow in Georgia and drive with Illinois exaggerated defensive driving, you are at much more risk. Standard suggestions like driving slowly, allowing much more stopping space, and so on reduce risk when you share the road with people who often have similar defensive driving principles. If you are somewhere where several inches of packing snow are a once in a generation phenomenon, and are sharing with people who have perhaps never been told to drive very slowly, driving that works with that kind of snow in Illinois is out of its depth and is not calibrated in a way that is equal to the situation.

Profoundly gifted can step on people with the weight of an elephant by being arrogant—or by doing everything you can to work on your social skills. Perhaps arrogance is always undesirable and humility is always desirable, but it is not just intended attacks that stomp with the weight of an elephant, nor is it elements where you mean no offense but recognize risk, such as the obvious case of delivering criticism. Doing an excellent performance in some domain can bring great hostility. Gestures of friendship can be met with retaliation. A sincere gesture of friendship, well-executed, grants no immunity to coming across as an elephant stomp.

One possible step in dealing with this is to bring this chapter and, perhaps, "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab" to a counselor...

...and another point might be to ask a counselor to examine the psychological literature surrounding profound giftedness. A literature search in 2007 took me 2-3 weeks to read every refereed publication which registered on a search as using "profoundly gifted" as a term of art. The literature is quite sparse, and while I do not know how long it would

take to read all of it today (or think that an exhaustive literature search is needed), it shouldn't take ages to get a basic orientation. (The results of that literature search are included in "Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh" in an annotated bibliography.

Having a counselor recommend that some standard advice is calibrated for stepping on people's feet with the weight of a rabbit or maybe a deer won't make problems vanish, but it is better than nothing. (Unless you have a counselor who is arrogant and insulted by giving pointers, in which case it may be wiser to get out of the situation.)

# *Profoundly Gifted* *Magazine Interviews* **Maximos Planos**

**Profoundly Gifted:** You did some amazing things and some impressive actions when you were a child prodigy; have you been up to anything since then?

**Maximos:** Quite a lot, really; I've settled into work as a usability / user interface / user experience professional with a humble boss. And I've gotten married; my wife Mary and I have seven daughters, all of them with the middle name of Abigail, or "Father's Joy."

**Profoundly Gifted:** That's it? You haven't studied languages, for instance?

**Maximos:** Much water will not be able to quench love, and rivers shall not drown it; that is the important one,

but yes; other languages are a bit like Scotch. One is just getting started; two is just about perfect; three is not nearly half enough.

**Profoundly Gifted:** So you're not just a husband and father: you're also a philologist—how many languages *do* you know?

**Maximos:** You are paying attention to trivialities if you gloss over my fatherhood to ask a question about my love of languages that I really can't answer.

**Profoundly Gifted:** What can't you answer about how many languages your love of languages includes?

**Maximos:** You aren't a philologist when you speak two languages, or four, or twelve, or eight. You're a philologist when someone asks you how many languages you know, *and you have no idea how to answer.*

**Profoundly Gifted:** Then what is it? What should I make of it?

**Maximos:** If I may shanghai an opportunity to follow the words, "If there is an elephant in the room, introduce him..."?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes?

**Maximos:** Asperger's Syndrome.

**Profoundly Gifted:** It's kind of like profound giftedness,

no?

**Maximos:** Let me quietly count to ten... Ok...

I read David Pollock's *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, and I said, "That's me!" Then I read Edward Hallowell's *Driven to Distraction* and it made sense. Then I read, on a medical practitioner's advice, Tony Attwood's *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*, and my response was some more polite form of "**Dude... pass me a toke of whatever it is that you're smoking!**"

The root problem, which I will get to in a minute, is that when people who are happy to have an Asperger's diagnosis and happy to offer half the people they know an Asperger's diagnosis, there are *superficial* similarities between profound giftedness and Asperger's traits, things that a competent diagnostician should see far past.

Early in the title, Attwood says that when he diagnoses someone with Asperger's, he says, "Congratulations! You have Asperger's!" But then it goes downhill. Attwood argues that the obvious social impairments one would associate with Asperger's are *guilty as charged*; Asperger's people don't know (without counseling and / or training) how to hold an appropriate social conversation. However, the strengths one would associate with Asperger's are all but eviscerated. Asperger's children may have a

monologue that sounds like a competent adult discussing the matter, but this “knowledge” is a hollow shell, without much of anything of the deeper competency one would associate with an adult capable of such monologue. The common stereotype of Asperger’s patients portrays a slightly odd combination of strengths and weaknesses; Attwood’s book is less generous and really only ascribes real *weaknesses*.

The standard symptoms of Asperger’s have a perhaps 50% overlap with standard symptoms of profound giftedness; while it is certainly possible to be a member of both demographics, **the profoundly gifted characteristics resemble Asperger’s characters for quite unrelated reasons.** The similarity may be compared to the common cold, on the one hand, in which there is an immune response to a harmful invader, and environmental allergies on the other hand, in which there is a harmful response to something otherwise harmless. Or for those who prefer an example from Charles Baudelaire, there is an image of two females, one an infant too young to have teeth or hair, and the other a woman too old to have teeth or hair. (The coincidence of features is close to being due to diametrically opposed reasons.)

**Profoundly Gifted:** Is the question “Asperger’s or profound giftedness?” the sort of question you’d rather un-ask than answer?

**Maximos:** It is indeed. Or at least I’m drawing a blank to

see what a three-cornered discussion of normalcy, Asperger's, and profound giftedness has to add to the older discussion of normalcy and profound giftedness. If we can overcome our chronological snobbishness says that only now could we say something worthwhile about XYZ and giftedness, Leta Stetter Hollingsworth decided as a counterbalance to a study of mental retardation a study of some who turned out to have an IQ of somewhere around 180 or higher. She wrote an insightful and descriptive, *Children Above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet*, much more insightful than the treatment of profoundly gifted scoring "Termites."

*Furthermore*, and here I am less concerned with the relationship between profound giftedness and Asperger's than improperly read research, there is a consistent finding that IQ-normal, autism-normal children do markedly better at what are unfortunately lumped together as "**theory of other minds**."

A much better interpretation of Attwood's data might come from splitting the **theory of other minds** into a separate **theory of like minds**, and also a **theory of alien minds**. A theory of like minds works with one's homeys or peeps; hence someone IQ-normal and autism-normal surrounded by IQ-normal and autism-normal classmates will coast on a theory of like minds. But, except in how it may be refined by practice, *a theory of like minds that comes virtually free to everyone* isn't in particular reserved to a majority of people (not) affected by XYZ condition.

With some true exceptions like Tay-Sachs, everybody gets along with their peeps. Gifted and profoundly gifted click with their fellows; Asperger's people click with their fellows; to pick a few many demographics, various geek subcultures, codependents, addicts, and various strains of queer should click just as well. Everybody gets a theory of like minds virtually free; the *breadth of usefulness* depends on how rarely or commonly one encounters like minds, and this heavily loads the dice for Attwood's approach.

The comparison Attwood makes in interaction with autism-normal people loads the dice in a way that is totally unfair. The comparison is autism-normals' theory of like minds to Asperger's theory of alien minds; he never, ever tests autism-normals on their ability to relate to alien minds, nor does he ever test Asperger's patients on their ability to relate to like minds. And while being unsure about how far this applies to IQ-normal Asperger's patients, Asperger's patients often make herculean and lifelong efforts to develop "theory of alien minds" aptitude, and the result is not just that they connect, perhaps clumsily, with people of the same age and socioeconomic status; they make very close connections across age, race, and gender, and for that matter animals who may start off by being afraid of them. *The theory of alien minds is finely honed, even if it is not a valid substitute for a theory of like minds, and once it is honed, this theory of alien minds reaches much, much further than autism-normals resting on a theory of like minds.*



**Profoundly Gifted:** So your parents' policy of non-interference and the Law of the Jungle was too romantic to teach you to be safe?

**Maximos:** More romantic than real life, perhaps, and putting me into a regular kindergarten, sink or swim, is neither more nor less realistic as putting a rabbit in the midst of coyotes, sink or swim. There was a real solution, but it was more romantic, and I fear being misunderstood. I certainly found it by accident.

**Profoundly Gifted:** What is it?

**Maximos:** A woman has kept a goldfish for years longer than goldfish usually live, in a fishbowl, just by talking to it in Mommy-to-baby love. Years back, hospitals which were ever concerned with sanitation witnessed a dramatic drop in infant mortality when they took the "unsanitary" step of having old women cuddle them.

**Profoundly Gifted:** And how does this relate to bullying?

**Maximos:** Let me raise and address another question first. We raise and send constant signals which are often met with escalation. When we are angry with someone, or wish for a way out of our job, or anything else, we war against others in our thoughts. *That warfare is powerful.* Often it comes back amplified; we can feed a corrective to the loop by responding meekly and with meek thoughts to a blast of anger. Some martial artists have talked about how few

people *really* want to fight; such people are much less common than people who want to be the unchallenged tough guy. It does happen that there are some people want to do wrong; however, much more common are people who are disarmed when all three claims in “Anger slays even wise men; *yet a submissive answer turns away wrath*: but a grievous word stirs up anger.” The submissive answer to domineering anger is difficult, but it is *possible*, and it is a route that a quest for life by the Law of the Jungle will never find.

And bullying isn’t just for in the classroom. It’s also in professional life. The top quality I search for in a boss is humility. There is something aggravating about high talent. It is common practice to have sent multiple C&D letters, or equivalent, when harassment has continued after being repeatedly told, “No.” This is unfortunate, but it is a non-negotiable feature of the landscape.

And, like other things that are never the victim’s fault, harassment is never the victim’s fault; no matter how good or bad a person’s social skills many be, it is never justified to continue harassment until the person being harassed says, “CEASE AND DESIST.”

It is possible, in good faith, to do one’s best work as the privilege of the inferior before the superior to be praised, in the purest thoughts of respect, and instead be met with anger and retaliation to a perceived challenge. But if this is a live danger if we meet our

bosses with thoughts of peacefulness, what on earth is to be done when we throw down work with warfare in our thoughts?

**Profoundly Gifted:** But don't we all do best to avoid needlessly stepping on other people's feet, especially our bosses'?

**Maximos:** Yes and **NO**.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes and **NO**?

**Maximos:** Have you ever spent a winter in the Midwest, perhaps Illinois? And drove after a heavy snowfall, three to four inches of packing snow?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes; it was a bit harrowing, but I made a bit of extra effort and was overall pretty safe.

**Maximos:** What made you safe?

**Profoundly Gifted:** I drove slowly, left plenty of space, and made allowances for skidding. That was enough to have me relatively safe.

**Maximos:** Ever driven in that kind of snowstorm in Georgia and the US South? The same three or four inches?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Not really; it never snowed like that when I was there.

**Maximos:** Years back, Georgia responded to a snowstorm

three or four inches deep, and decided, “We will not be caught off guard like this again.” And then the next snowstorm the slowplows were rusted to the point of being unusable, and you would have been sharing the road with people who don’t have even an Illinois familiarity with driving under heavy snow. Would you consider yourself safe all the same, because you need to drive in snow?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Aah.

**Maximos:** Get used to driving in a blizzard with other people not used to driving in any snow, if you want to be profoundly gifted. The approach that is usually safe sharing the road with drivers who can handle snow, more or less, does not even *compare* to trying to be safe handling a road with people who just don’t know how to drive heavy snow.

And it feels awfully good to be told more than once, “You are the most brilliant person I’ve ever met,” but suppose *you are so bright that the average Oxford PhD has never met someone as talented as you?* You may be trying to drive safely yourself at least, but you’re sharing the road with people who are driving on a complete snow-packed *terra incognita* to them.

**Profoundly Gifted:** This sounds like a lonely and sad life.

**Maximos:** That was not my point at all, but *what life is sad and lonely when one is searching for humility?*

But let me give another detail.

You know, probably *ad nauseum*, about Leta Hollingsworth's conception of "socially optimum intelligence". The top end of the range varies somewhat depending on who you ask, but it runs something like 120 to 150. At that point you have powers to speak of, but you're still running on the same chassis. And people who are properly *above* the range are rare, enough to really be exotic or a purple squirrel or something else few people have seen. The powers that come seem almost magical, but the price tag is hefty; the real advantage and the real privilege is at the *heart* of the gifted range, not the upper extreme.

I found James Webb's *Guiding the Gifted Child* to be a treasure chest and a gold mine. One part of it says that children with an IQ above 170 don't have peeps; the way that the book says this is that "children with an IQ above 170 tend to feel like they don't fit in anywhere..."

...But there is another shoe to drop. There is another level, exact IQ unknown, where people are able to make peeps out of *anyone*. They develop a theory of alien minds so far that the distinction between the theory of like minds and the theory of alien minds no longer matters so much...

...And that is how I have found employment as the local usability and user experience guru. One of the

first things people are taught for usability research is “You are not a user,” meaning that however much theory-of-like-minds knowledge you have of how software is *meant* to be used, you need to grasp a theory-of-alien-minds understanding of how everybody but the software developers understands it...

...Maybe you think I should be doing something more exalted in academia, and maybe I should be, but a humble and gentle boss is a treasure worth gold, and turf wars are just a little less than with academic bullies. Right now I have my wife and our seven daughters, and a steady job, and godliness with contentment is great gain.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Well, that about says it.

**Maximus:** Or not.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Or not?

**Maximos:** Or not.

Sweet lord, I have played thee false.

You don’t know how I was at a rich kids’ school, and the one and only chapel message I heard on theology of play was students who had gone through internships in third world nations, and theology of joy and play was writ large: a girl asked how you talk about germ theory to a runny-nosed little girl who offered you a lick of her lollipop. And really, how *can*

you to people who are poor enough to be happy?

You do not know the time when I was deathly ill and was healed You do not know when I met every earthly betrayal and dishonor, and none to my own credit knew Heavenly honor next to which the summit of earthly honor is but pale and shadow. You do not know the sound of men weeping when the sleeper awakes, and the dreams are gone: *the apprenticeship is finished and the godhead begins*. You know I have felt sorrows above anything mentioned here, but they are not worth comparing with the glory to come, or even for the glory that exists here now in the vast, vast open freedom of forgiveness, the utter nakedness of standing open before God, and the priceless vale of humility that is so low that no man can fall from it.

We, like social Gospel and the liberal left, believe in life *before* death. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which here now God worketh in hidden transcendent glory for those who love him.

# **Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham**

I'm a bit unsure of how to introduce this, but I had a rough time at a university. (An appeal document was sent as follows, after I had raised questions about some things being sexually inappropriate.) One friend said a few things, including that she got a sense from what she was reading that these were “not very moral people” I was dealing with.

The specific university was one that has been treated as alarming by Orthodox. This offers perhaps a slightly fuller picture of what being Orthodox at Fordham is like and a life lesson learned in the process. If you are Orthodox and considering attending Fordham, please review this before you make any final decisions.

For what it's worth...

## **1. First experience of Fordham's care**

My first experience at Fordham was arriving late



at night at the address I had been given as Fordham graduate student housing, and finding a high-rise apartment building with no obvious affiliation to Fordham, with a security guard who did not expect me and did not know of a connection to Fordham, and a room number that was in a notation that the security guard did not recognize as referring to Keith Plaza. I was allowed in, and began exploring, laden with two suitcases and a laptop. I eventually found the RA's apartment door, but no one answered my knock. The reason? After I had confirmed I was coming, she sent another e-mail asking for another confirmation shortly before I left, and because I didn't provide a second, *additional* confirmation that I was still coming, she had gone to Brooklyn. It was approximately three hours before I connected with Residential Life staff; the delay included an hour's wait after I told Residential Life that I was outside my RA's apartment and specifically asked if I should go to outside my apartment, but was told to stay where I was. Then Residential Life went to my apartment instead of my RA's apartment, where I told them I was, and gave up on looking for me. My phone almost ran out of power with the number of calls I made before the Residential Life staff found me and took me to a place on campus so I could get some sleep before GSA orientation. (They took me to campus as they did not have any access to my room keys: the RA in Brooklyn was the only person who could let me in.)

I believe it fortunate that I did not fall victim to crime under these conditions. Someone who was alone, white, with heavy luggage, and in general not

fitting in may be very unsafe in the Bronx, and I could have taken a false step, or had my phone run out of battery power before the repeated calls I needed to get the help I needed from Residential Life.

This occurred late summer, 2005.

## **2. A cold room**

When there was a fire in my floor in Keith Plaza, in the summer after a heat wave, I was not able to access my room. Fordham did provide me a room, but and the thermostat was set to below forty degrees; the room felt like a refrigerator, and even when I turned the air conditioning off and found that the heat was not available, Fordham gave me a light blanket not meant to provide warmth and could not find a warmer blanket. The staff knew that my room was cold, and I asked, but they provided me with nothing much better. I spent a very cold night, when my body was used to heat, and in my best judgment after training as an EMT, I was in real danger of hypothermia: being lightly clad, with no more clothing available, under a light blanket, with no heavier blanket available, in a room initially below forty degrees, can be dangerous.

This occurred summer, 2006.

## **3. Professor A\_\_\_\_\_.**

I found the response when I tried to befriend A\_\_\_\_\_ quite traumatic.

During our interactions, it seemed to me that from the first piece of work I showed him, my Cambridge master's thesis, he dismissed my work without any

recognition of merit. As a gesture of friendship, I e-mailed him asking for his comments on a draft of a homily I was preparing. The homily drew on his teaching (3/14/06).

His 3/16/06 reply, after what seemed a nicer beginning, ended: "...If you send emails like this to other teachers or other figures, they probably find it rather rude."

During the semester, I e-mailed him requesting accommodation for a disability (4/26/06).

After that point, he pulled me aside after class, and did not give me an answer to that question. He did, however, require me to change topic drastically enough that I had to start over on my paper. This was 4/27/06, one week from the paper due date, and my entire class grade was based on that paper.

After I had completed all the classes and turned in my paper, I thought that the class was over. However, a Sunday soon after (5/14/06), A\_\_\_\_\_ approached me *after church*, and began to question me about every single other grade I had received and how I was doing in every class for which I had not yet received a grade.

This was before he turned in my grade for his class, and he assigned about as low a grade, I believe, as would not look conspicuous on my transcript.

I e-mailed B\_\_\_\_\_ after this and asked to have A\_\_\_\_\_ leave me alone (which he has almost done). Before A\_\_\_\_\_, I had never asked an administrator to help me with any difficulties with a teacher.

This occurred during Incarnation to 451, Spring 06.

### **3.1. No redress with acting chair B\_\_\_\_\_.**

I sent multiple e-mails to acting chair B\_\_\_\_\_, including my full logs. So far as I could tell, no redress was given, and the later surprises from A\_\_\_\_\_ occurred after I had been telling B\_\_\_\_\_ of difficulties.

This occurred during and after Incarnation to 451, Spring 06.

### **3.2. No redress with Dean C\_\_\_\_\_.**

After my communication with B\_\_\_\_\_ failed to resolve things, I tried to inform C\_\_\_\_\_ that there was a real problem.

The one response I received was a note from her secretary telling me to go to my department chair.

This occurred during and after Incarnation to 451, Spring 06.

## **4. Professor D\_\_\_\_\_**

There were several kinds of difficulties I had with D\_\_\_\_\_.

### **4.1. Finding reason to criticize**

During the course of feminist theology, she assigned primary sources. Of these primary sources, many made claims about how history should be approached; none of them drew on or footnoted postmodern philosophy of history so far as I know, and she did not discuss postmodern philosophy of history in the course of the class. However, after the fact, she sharply criticized my final paper for making

its claims about how history should be approached without engaging the current scholarly discussion of philosophy of history, in the evaluation given with my grade on the paper. I find this sort of surprise characteristic of an ongoing stream of surprises I had in dealing with her, and that made it difficult for me to identify a way to work that she would honor with a high grade.

This occurred during Feminist Theology, Spring 06, although the trend of surprises I had difficulty reasoning with occurred during Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

#### **4.2. Possible constraints to academic freedom.**

She emphasized that I needed to have “a sympathetic reading of primary sources,” and I expended a great deal of effort later on trying to give a polite reading that focused on common ground no matter how hostile the source she assigned was to my religious persuasion.

At first, I set out to debunk sources I didn’t like; later on, I was trying not only to respond politely but to focus on the areas of the sources she assigned that I could best appreciate. However, only once during the entire second course did she credit me with “a sympathetic reading of primary sources;” otherwise, I was penalized, even though for almost all of the later assignments where I seemed to be penalized for not having “a sympathetic reading of primary sources,” I was trying to find what common ground I could, and be as positive as I could. Her parameters for “a

sympathetic reading of primary sources,” more specifically sources which diverged from my religious beliefs at a very deep level, left me with no way that I could identify to be faithful to my religious tradition and at the same time give the kind of agreement with much of a source’s substance, that she seemed to mean by “a sympathetic reading of primary sources.”

In discussion of preparation for comprehensive exams, she gave directive instruction for the “method question.” For this question, a student is to be graded not on the content of the position taken in response to the question, but on the quality of reflection on theological method in analysis of how that answer was reached. She specifically directed me to be getting my bearings for thinking about this position from the set texts I was to be able to use in my answer, which seemed to have little in common with my tradition. (This was in response to a draft reflection I had sent her that drew on resources within my religious tradition).

I am not sure how thoroughly my academic freedom was respected. There were definitely points where her clarifications of “a sympathetic reading of primary sources” called for me to incorporate contrary ideas in a way that I do not know how to reconcile with my religious tradition.

This occurred to some degree during Feminist Theology, Spring 06, but mainly Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

### **4.3. Improving work and getting lower grades.**

D\_\_\_\_\_ consistently made criticisms that required more fundamental changes, and more work to meet, than any other professor I had at Fordham. However, while I could improve my work in the area criticized to the point that a criticism was not repeated, what I could not do was improve my work in that area and get a higher grade. My work had improved by the second class I took with her so that many criticisms were not repeated, but my grades for the later, improved pieces were consistently lower than the grade based on my work before the improvements were made.

This occurred both during Feminist Theology, Spring 06, and Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

### **4.4. Saying “vagina.”**

D\_\_\_\_\_ said “vagina” quite a lot. Her use of the word was both more frequent and more forceful than I have heard in other classes (health class and biology included), and from time to time she gave a slow and emphatic list of genitalia. (It was one of her more common ways of answering my suggestion that masculinity and femininity may be seen as spiritual qualities.)

This occurred primarily during Feminist Theology, Spring 06.

#### **4.5. Assigned texts and sexual boundaries.**

D\_\_\_\_\_ periodically assigned texts which did not seem to be written with consideration for some male readers' sexual boundaries: Luce Irigaray, for instance, or Tracy Pinchman asking the reader to be sympathetic to adults playing with children's genitals.

This occurred during both Feminist Theology, Spring 06, and Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

#### **4.6. Treatment of profound giftedness.**

When I was doing a paper on profound giftedness, I was attempting in part to document that the profoundly gifted can have a rough life, and that there are some difficult things people don't realize about the experience. She told me at first that it was an inappropriate topic, because "giftedness is privilege" (she heavily emphasized, in the reading, groups of people that have difficult lives, and seemed offended by the suggestion that a particular degree of giftedness could have difficulties appropriate for discussion—N.B. some of them were like the difficulties I attempt to document here). She was not open to me saying certain things even if I could document them very well; much of my revision was not to improve the paper in the usual sense but to kowtow in areas where she did not approve of the substance of what I was saying, told me it was inappropriate, etc.

This occurred during Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.



## **5. Grade appeal of Theological Anthropology.**

After my second class with D\_\_\_\_\_, I asked her for a review of her grade. She refused. I contacted department chair E\_\_\_\_\_, making an appeal based on my turning in improved work from my previous semester with her on the weekly assignments but receiving lower grades.

This occurred after Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

### **5.1. Not addressing the concern of improved work receiving lower grades.**

E\_\_\_\_\_’s response said that the weekly paper seemed to correlate with the grades. His response in no sense addressed my claim that I had improved my work and gotten lower grades for the improved work.

This occurred after Theological Anthropology, Fall 06.

### **5.2. A characteristic pattern.**

This interaction seemed to be characteristic of a pattern: I have not yet been able to obtain redress for any grievance with any professor within the university. The university has been able to provide assistance when I have had difficulties for which no university faculty member was at fault, but not when I am having difficulties with someone within the university.

## **6. Referral to counselor**

**F\_\_\_\_\_.**

When I visited Fordham's Counseling and Psychological Services, I was told I needed counseling, and referred to the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy, who assigned me to "one of our best therapists," F\_\_\_\_\_.

This occurred during Spring 06 and lasted into the summer.

### **6.1. Treatment of religious attitudes and practices.**

F\_\_\_\_\_ initially seemed to be hard to try to understand my religious beliefs, but after a certain point she told me that a religious belief was "centuries behind the times" (I had made it clear that this belief was at the heart of a well-received homily I preached, and considered normal in my community), and seemed to be trying hard to argue me out of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices, which she seemed to be holding to be guilty until proven innocent of being psychiatric symptoms (a concern she raised in so many words).

The longer therapy went on, the more of my religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices seemed to be under attack in her telling me I needed to adopt her vision of "progress."

This occurred during Spring 06 and lasted into the summer.

## **6.2. Unwanted, unwelcome, and unsolicited sexual directive guidance.**

As part of what seemed to be a major effort to argue me out of various psychopathologies, F\_\_\_\_\_ told me that I should “use pornography and masturbate,” and in the last sessions, made me particularly uncomfortable by saying over and over again at every session after she began, “You need to be naughty.”

This occurred during the summer of 06.

## **6.3. Pricing.**

Fordham had been told, and the Fordham counselor told me, that ICP would go as low as \$18 for Fordham students. They in fact charged me \$55 for each weekly visit, and when I asked for a fee reductions or other ways of reducing a financial burden that was difficult for me, no reduction of fees or frequency of visit was given.

This occurred during the Spring and summer of 06.

## **7. Referral to psychiatrist G\_\_\_\_\_.**

ICP referred me to G\_\_\_\_\_. During the second semester in particular, I was concerned with my low energy levels and getting more energy so my work would not be hindered.

Because my then current medications were known to cause fatigue, I asked if there were alternatives that

would cause less fatigue, but I tried to be very, very clear that I was concerned about side effects. I explained my concern and explicitly asked what side effects were anticipated, and when he said a rash was possible, I asked what percent of the patients experienced it.

He had what he thought might be a gentler alternative to two medications that were probably fatiguing me, and he said he wanted to try switching to one and then the other. But then without explaining why, he switched one medication and simply took me off another medication that I need: he told me I didn't need it.

I went from where I was, to feeling a lot of stress, to experiencing stress to the point of unrelenting nausea and repeated diarrhea, whether or not I was dealing with external stressors worth mentioning. At the end, I was trying to find some food that I could get down, and was barely eating—a couple of hundred calories a day because I couldn't really eat—and barely sleeping.

When I suspected that the medication change could be having adverse effects, I switched back to the prior medication regimen, and noticed a marked decrease of stress within days, and was able to eat and sleep at more usual levels.

The period over which this happened was the late part of my second semester at Fordham and the beginning of the summer. I was trying hard to get off academic probation, but I completed all three of my papers under stress to the point of nausea. One professor, unaware of my medical issue, gave feedback

on my final paper and said that one part, treating Cyril Lucaris (he picked out the part written before the medication change) was “full and coherent,” while the treatment of other figures (dealt with in the part of my paper written under stress to the point of nausea) struck him “as impressionistic and poorly organized.” I received independent feedback from another person, before I switched back my medication, confirming that I “indeed seemed less coherent lately in your e-mails.”

This occurred during the Spring and summer of 06.

## 8. Professor H\_\_\_\_\_.

H\_\_\_\_\_, my professor for one class, mentioned that Wittgenstein put an ‘M’ in his journal every day he masturbated. I’ve lost count of how many times he mentioned this, as it became a running gag. He also used the word “tit,” always with verbal force; he introduced another philosopher as owing a considerable debt to Martin Heidegger by saying the new figure “*sucked* at Heidegger’s *tits*,” and references to an infant’s life included asking us to imagine an infant having an inner dialogue of “This must be... a *tit*! and this must be... Mom!” He also talked about a couple that “liked to *lick* each other;” lewd references to licking became another running gag, and late in the course he said that he was attracted to all kinds of people, but not to children and not to animals, although, he said, there was one dog that “liked to *lick* me.”

One specific running gag particularly bothered

me. Fr. Klein complemented one of the male students in the class on his shirt, then a few minutes later quizzically said, “I’m sorry; I’m not supposed to do that. It’s considered sexual harassment,” before saying that he had a priest’s habit of absentmindedly complimenting women on their glasses. He never complimented a female on her clothing that I remember, but he delivered compliments to men on their shirts like the other running gags, and I got more compliments on my clothing than others, as well as the most involved such compliment: “I like the green in your ring; it really color-coordinates with your shirt.”

I say, with reservations, that the class was an introduction to queer culture. The other LGBTQ people I know have sometimes asked me to understand them but have never made me uncomfortable; he seemed willing to repeatedly introduce queer concerns in a way that could make some uncomfortable; hence a story of an old Cardinal talking about the adoration of Christ in the Eucharist, and rhetorically asking what Christ is saying in the Eucharist, and answering that Christ was saying (here Fr. Klein’s voice slowed and became even raspier, sounding almost like a gasp), “*Eaaaat mmeeee!*” For those who missed the painfully obvious point of the raspy “*Eat me,*” he drove home that in gay culture, “Eat me!” is an *extremely* erotic thing to say.

The readings included a discussion of how close to erotic, or perhaps erotically tinged, St. Anselm of Canterbury’s friendship was with his monk friends, and an essay mentioning “the solar anus” and

criticizing other scholarship for treating the erotic but still not being sexy enough.

As with feminist theology, I believe my grade might have been higher if I were not sexually uncomfortable.

This occurred during Philosophy and Contemporary Theology, Spring 07.

## **9. Disability concerns.**

I have more than one disability which affects my energy level and the number of waking hours I have available for work. This made things particularly difficult for the first semester, when my doctor needed to make sure I could tolerate a lower dose of my medication before going to a therapeutic dose.

### **9.1. No disability referral from B\_\_\_\_\_.**

After my first semester, I told B\_\_\_\_\_ that I had several significant difficulties: when I wrote her and said there was “a monkey on my back,” she said, “You had a tiger on your back!”

She tried to support me, but she never did one thing a department chair might have done, refer me the Office of Disability Services when I asked her about talking with my professors about my difficulties. She also said she would speak with my professors second semester and ask for an extension, but when I later asked her, she could not recall if she had asked more than one professor to give me an extension.

This occurred during and after Spring 06.

## **9.2. A blunt refusal of accommodation.**

Second semester of my first year, I told all three of my professors that I was dealing with difficulties, and did not immediately make any requests for accommodation.

At the end of the semester, I asked for extensions, and was surprised at how bluntly one of the professors declined to provide any accommodation.

This occurred during Spring 06.

## **9.3. No adjustment to major portion of workload.**

The Office of Disability Services, when I registered, offered limited accommodations: I could turn in semester assignments late, but they found no appropriate adjustment for weekly assignments, and when they asked for me about a reduced courseload, Associate Dean I\_\_\_\_\_ said that was not possible.

I was left, given a disability combination that has me needing to sleep around 40 more hours per week and therefore having one workweek less time per week to do my work, with no accommodation to the brunt of a full load of weekly assignments.

This occurred Fall 06.

## **10. Medical expenses.**

My conditions make for ongoing medical expenses, and with Fordham's graduate student plan, Administrative Concepts Incorporated, I've had more trouble getting payment than any other plan in my life.



Before Fordham, I had never maxed out prescription drug benefits on any plan; at Fordham, I maxed out those benefits in months. I did what I could to take care of expenses, but the medical expenses kept me strapped enough for cash that I had to choose between paying for medical needs and buying books.

This was an issue for the entirety of my time at Fordham.

## **11. Fatigue after a dubiously treated ear infection.**

I came into the health center shortly after Martin Luther King day during my last semester, having what I suspected was an ear infection. The nurse said she would treat it with both oral and topical antibiotics, but ended up only giving me an oral antibiotic.

That ear infection became a major problem: it lasted for over a month, and took four visits to a specialist otolaryngologist and something like three or four courses of antibiotics to treat; the otolaryngologist used topical antibiotics as being “6000 times stronger” than oral antibiotics like I had been given.

That infection had me more fatigued than I had been in a long time, and I still have doubts about how well I had recovered by my end of semester duties after spending much of the remaining semester trying to catch up.

## **12. My experience.**

I entered Fordham as a survivor of religious

harassment, sexual harassment from men, and sexual abuse from a woman that caused pain I don't know how to put into words. This has not been at all easy for me to write.

My experience has been traumatic. It has been traumatic in more ways than one. The long times I tried to reach out to A\_\_\_\_\_—I wanted so much to befriend him—and the retaliation I met for my gestures of friendship, were infuriating. So were several other things where I felt like I was getting pushed down again and again. I'm really not sure how to describe how traumatized I was, or either the fears or the continued frustrations. I can certainly say that if I had the choice of repeating my experiences at Fordham over the past two years and repeating my chemotherapy and radiotherapy when I had cancer, I would repeat my cancer treatment, hands down.

### **13. Notes.**

I have been under duress every semester I've been at Fordham. Despite several things which I believe have impaired my study, I've still managed a rising cumulative GPA, reaching 3.4 by last semester, and with my last semester non-cumulative GPA reaching 3.5.

## **Two distractions**

I am profoundly gifted. To those not familiar with the psychology, it means, for instance, that I ranked 7th nationally in a math contest, or that I've read the Bible in a total of seven ancient / medieval / modern languages, or

that I am deeper an author than C.S. Lewis, or, as one psychologist debriefed me, “The average Harvard PhD has never met someone as talented as you,” or that I am “smarter than most geniuses” or whatever. There are people who would give me heavy odds of being the most talented student in school history for Fordham, kind of like *The Immortal Bard*. That I was allowed to wash out, even after appeal, is simply ridiculous.

Furthermore, Fordham appears to me to be morally challenged. Fordham claims, prominently, to be a Jesuit institution that exercises *cura personalis*, a Latin term meaning a broadly pastoral care for the whole person, and claims to exercise *cura personalis* are plastered all over Fordham’s website. I’ve never seen another institution exercise less care, not more, and I attended Avery Coonley School, the University of Chicago, the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, College of DuPage, Wheaton College, Calvin University, the Sorbonne, Cambridge, and presently the Pastoral School of the Archdiocese of Chicago and Mid-America. (The University of Chicago was a whiz kids math class just before high school.) I can remember one hour of care for my person at Fordham, and not more.

Furthermore, there are other cases where I believe I was dealt cards off the side of the deck, including Cambridge. None of them reminds me of the extent of Fordham’s badness that in my opinion exceeds mediocrity to become something (anti-)heroic.

However, I only mention this in passing, because I want to get on to something more *important*.

## What is truly sad

I would ask you to stop and “listen” very, very closely to this point:

**As far as I am concerned, there is one, and only one, thing that is sad about this story.**

*I insist that in my side of the story there is one, and only one, thing that is sad.*

It’s not that I am not normally called “Dr. Hayward.” I’m called “Christos,” eh? That’s kind of bigger, even if it is only a name.

It is not either, more seriously, that in my opinion Fordham’s negligence could have killed me. Possibly I am right, but I survived. And if Fordham really had killed me, God would have had every ability to allow me to pass away, in C.S. Lewis’s phrase, “between Aslan’s paws.” As it is, I have been given something Orthodox positively **crave**: *more time to repent*.

If it is not a matter of my life, neither is it my career. While technically one can teach on an advanced degree, including a master’s, I’ve never succeeded landing such a job, and informally speaking a PhD is a “union card” and American universities as a whole expect a PhD. I’ve been told that if I want to teach at an Orthodox seminary, a good step is to get a degree from an Orthodox seminary, and I am studying at my Archdiocese’s pastoral school, where the faculty love the students tremendously and I have the upsides of academic study without the downsides. It might have been God protecting me from a career fighting academic bullies just a wee bit intimidated at my intelligence. (Did I mention that the seminary leadership has extended a *lot* of grace to me, including full tuition?)

Meanwhile, whether I have appreciated it or not, God has been moving forward with me. I am an author, and while Amazon is paying me less than 10% of what they used to, the single most lasting work I have hoped to leave behind is a collection of edifying books, and my expenses are met for now (I'm retired on disability). As far as writing goes, I have had a whole lot of being in the right place at the right time, **and built a website to showcase and share my works that started before I ever heard of Netscape. I also have a bookshelf on Amazon**, and I don't believe Amazon is being cheaper with me than with anyone else. I also have (mostly) what I have called "fame lite." *I Am Spock* talks about the real and profound cost of playing a celebrity character on TV. I've had a hieromonk tell me that other people have told him he should read me. So my writing enjoys some success, and I've invented things by computer: Grandfather Clock with Westminster Chime and a Soothing Tick-Tock—Steampunk Style which will sound like a grandfather clock if you keep it open in a browser window on a laptop or desktop.

Then what do I consider sad for me in all this: only one thing. *I attended Fordham through spring 2007. It took me through Wednesday, November 24 2020 for me to forgive.*

I have written earlier, decades earlier, about an idea for a film. It would start in standard action-adventure movie format, have the hero try to sneak in quietly and rescue a good guy, Plan A fails and all Hell breaks loose, and one of the villain's henchmen comes out after the good guys get into a helicopter, and the hero makes one parting shot into the villain's knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

Then the pace shifts to that of a European art film and

follows the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he remains crippled, and far worse than this, is crippled by a grudge that never lets go of desiring vengeance.

I wrote it, but I never imagined I would be writing of myself.

**Nothing can injure the man who does not harm himself.**

As far as what is really my due in a career as a scholar, I would like to pat myself on the back in quoting *Stranger in a Strange Land*:

“Ben does not speak for me. I am not interested in this lad’s so-called rights. His claim to Mars is lawyer’s hogwash: as a lawyer myself I need not respect it. As for the wealth that is supposed to be his, the situation results from other people’s passions and our odd tribal customs; he has earned none of it. He would be lucky if they bilked him out of it—but I would not scan a newspaper to find out. If Ben expected me to fight for Smith’s ‘rights’ you have come to the wrong house.”

And indeed, a judge might offer me a tissue but would unlikely conclude that Fordham has done me *legal* wrong. Which it hasn’t. My present regret is not that I am not long a professor; it is that I am not long a monk, or perhaps my own impatient chafing of the proto-monastic obedience of “Stay at home for a while.”

## Why am I telling all this if I have forgiven?

Fordham has made a big deal about its embrace to Orthodox. It's not as big a deal as it makes about its *cura personalis* that cares for every aspect of the person, but it's still a big deal, and Fordham seems to find it natural to expect that Orthodox will agree with "The Church must breathe with both lungs" along the same lines as Roman ecumenism. I do not remember ever meeting acknowledgment that some Orthodox consider ecumenism the ecclesiological heresy of our day, or wrong on a lesser scale. At Fordham, ecumenism reigns.

Also, at Fordham, the gender rainbow (or whatever it is called this month) reigns, and a Fordham that sees Orthodox as simply being Catholics (and on a liberal understanding of "Catholic"), is not in particular a Fordham well-poised to understand why it is problematic to Orthodoxy to strongarm an Orthodox seminary into accepting a hieromonk who married another man. It is true that the "Orthodox" Students Studies Center received something like a million dollar grant to study Orthodoxy and "sexuality," but Fordham does not grasp or does not accept some very basic rules about what is allowed to Orthodox.

I write to offer a third, if perhaps lesser, piece of the puzzle. Fordham makes no end of a big deal about its *cura personalis*. They also try, in their best Roman ecumenism, to roll out the red carpet to Orthodox whose schismatic status is gently overlooked. And, in my opinion, Fordham has a heart of ice. I do not say that my experience will be every Orthodox student's experience, but I do say, "Know

what you're getting into" at least, and possibly "Get your bishop's blessing."

-C.J.S. Hayward, perhaps more honored by a Fordham washout than a Fordham PhD

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## **Epilogue on Roman Ecumenism**

Rome continues to make a big deal out of restoring full communion with the Orthodox Church.

It took me longer to forgive the many Roman authorities I wrote who did not even respond to my cry for help, with the exception of one priest and journalist who said it is futile for an outsider to interfere, and whose journal has not yet reviewed any of the books I submitted.



## IQ Test Fail

**Me:** How many Exxon captains does it take to make an oil spill?

**Psychologist administering test:** How many?

**Me:** One and a fifth.

**Psychologist (*puzzled*):** I get the joke...

But why the fifth?

He *wasn't* making witty repartée!

The reason I am including this here is not specifically I wish to bash a psychologist for failing to get a somewhat subtle pun. (Though I will mention that I found that administration of the test somewhat daft, there's more. I connected dots after the working memory portion of the test and made a second trip back to the test site and told the test administrator I was heavily impaired on one section of the test. My mind was thick black sludge and I could have been drunk and been less impaired. I ended up with an

intellectually disabled short term memory subscore. The psychologist interpreting the results didn't budge an inch from the intellectually disabled subscore when I pointed out to the person interpreting the test something he never responded to: that my writing, including recent writing I had given them, was "at complexity" (their term), and my speech was "at complexity." I found the interpretation of those test results the creepiest—and most hostile to anything resembling truth—I've seen in my life.

One indicator of giftedness is an unusual sense of humor, a point which the excellent *Guiding the Gifted Child* practically opens with a girl who was asked what the difference was between a fish and a submarine, and answered, "A submarine has lettuce and tomato, while a fish only has tartar sauce."

I've said some nasty things about the general helpfulness of humor from a spiritual perspective, but here I would quote GK Chesterton's words originally written about inside jokes:

Another case of the same kind of thing can be found in the latest conceptions of humour. By the wholesome tradition of mankind, a joke was a thing meant to amuse men; a joke which did not amuse them was a failure, just as a fire which did not warm them was a failure. But we have seen the process of secrecy and aristocracy introduced even into jokes. If a joke falls flat, a small school of æsthetes only ask us to notice the wild grace of its falling and its perfect flatness after its fall. The old idea that the joke was not good enough for the company has been superseded by the new aristocratic idea that the

company was not worthy of the joke. They have introduced an almost insane individualism into that one form of intercourse which is specially and uproariously communal. They have made even levities into secrets. They have made laughter lonelier than tears.

Sometimes that can be helpful for the profoundly gifted... though I never have associated a joke with a number, subtle jokes, preferably told with a genuine willingness to explain or offer hints (perhaps miming drinking straight from a bottle and staggering for a second or two), offers one of the best way I know to find out where you are standing. You're on even better turf when someone anticipates the standard punch line to:

I was trying to help my son look into colleges, and yesterday he handed me the phone, really excited, and said, "You have got to speak with these guys." I fumbled the phone, picked it up, and heard, "—online. We offer perhaps the best-rounded of degrees, and from day one our students are equipped with a top-of-the-line Dell running up-to-the-minute Vista. Besides the ins and outs of Office 2007, we address back-end issues, giving students a grounding in Visual Basic .NET, striking the right balance between "reach" and "rich," and a thorough groundings in Flash-based Web design optimized for Internet Explorer 6. Throw in an MCSE, and marketing-based communication instruction that harnesses the full power of PowerPoint and covers

the most effective ways to make use of animated pop-ups, opt-in subscriber lists, and—"

I interrupted. "Internet Exploder 6? Minesweeper Consultant and Solitaire Exp—Excuse me, but what is your institution *called*?"

"Fordham University, and we have **NO** initials!"  
[Or if you prefer, "The A-*rist*-o-crats."]

I used to tell way too many jokes, and possibly I have overcompensated now; when a colleague explained that her school had her working in C++, I commented, "C has been called a language that combines the power of assembler with the ease of using assembler," and my surprised boss said, "That's a joke!" Perhaps I would communicate better to use more jokes.

Nonetheless, telling one or two of my favorite jokes has turned out to give a fairly accurate augury about whether a new acquaintance will genuinely grasp what I want to say.

## **Gifted Problem, Generic Solution**

A former student of my father's, one I'd heard about, recently connected with me and asked a probably important question. I reproduce the answer, and by his kindness, the question here:

I was wondering if you have written or would be willing to consider writing about the self-awareness aspect of the gifted child and parent-gifted-child communication. I was contemplating this theme prior to reading the book - which did touch on the subject briefly, but more from a psychological/science aspect and not from a personal perspective. I converse frequently with my son about his education. I express understanding with his frustrations. I express our frustrations of not being able to provide better for him while at the same time try to not get him bogged down in the details. How can parent-gifted-child best navigate this twisted mess and come out of it with a stronger relationship in the end? What messages should and should not be conveyed?

You might read my *Where is God in Suffering and Hard Times?*, presently available with one one-star review. The focus for that collection, which does not address giftedness as such apart from dimensions and suffering, is primarily to strengthen people and give bearings for the rough ride I expect for the world. (I'm seeking a monastery, in which I seek a more edifying collection of suffering. And to be just a monk.)

The late Fr. Thomas Hopko is perhaps best known for a single short work, although he was a professor and author. He managed to make a collection of 55 maxims that provide a remarkably good summary of Orthodoxy. You might take some time to digest them if that interests you. Here is the list. The one that changed my life is in bold:

## Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.

5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.

18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.



- 32.Never bring attention to yourself.
- 33.Listen when people talk to you.
- 34.Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
- 35.Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
- 36.Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
- 37.Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
- 38.Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
- 39.Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
- 40.Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
- 41.Don't compare yourself with anyone.
- 42.Don't judge anyone for anything.
- 43.Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
- 44.Don't defend or justify yourself.

- 45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
- 46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
- 47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
- 48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
- 49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
- 50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
- 51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
- 52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.**
- 53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
- 54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
- 55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

There's a half-occult Orthodox title (in Facebook terms, "It's complicated") called "Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives", which was the inspiration for "'Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives': Beyond 'The Secret' and the Law of Attraction," "Work-Mystic," and "The Orthodox Martial Art Is Living the Sermon on the Mount." I'd give them a guarded recommendation, but no restrictions on thinking about things that are genuinely helpful to think on and not being ruled by others' attitudes.

If I may take the bull by the horns and explain why I am essentially advocating for the Law of Attraction, the standard Oprah / New Age declension is that it is a good idea to covet all sorts of things you don't need and then keep on expecting them to make you happy, a Law of Attraction that is singularly unhelpful. However, the thoughts we think (and don't think) are followed by more of the same. Peaceful thoughts are followed by more and bigger peaceful thoughts. Hurt and angry thoughts are followed by more and bigger hurt and angry thoughts. When there is a violent thought running roughshod through my heart, it is there because I dallied with and engaged lesser thoughts of anger. One classic epigrammatically says, "That which is not desired is of short duration."

This is not an answer in terms of giftedness or even in terms of communication, and it's taken me years to make progress. But the best relief I've had for hurts stemming for or related to giftedness has been through this sort of spiritual discipline.

## **"The Orthodox Martial Art Is Living the Sermon on the Mount:"**

***Orthodoxy, "Our Social Program is the Trinity," and "Our Juvenile Correctional System Is Parents Who Stay Married and Love Each Other and Their Children"***

### **A look at India in relation to my own roots and formation**

My life story up until now would be immeasurably impoverished if the various ways in which India had entered my life would simply be *subtracted*. I appreciate Indian food, even if I eat it in a non-Indian (Paleo) fashion.

And that is not trivial, but there are deeper ways I've been enriched by that great nation. One of these relates to pacifism, where one of India's giants, one certain Gandhi, is perhaps the best-known person in history as I know it for the strength of pacifism. Gandhi might have said with perfect sincerity, "Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills," but there is a certain motherlode as old as the hills that Gandhi may have mined that motherlode better than anyone else in history.

My own earliest roots, the brand of Christianity I received as mother's milk, were in the Anabaptist tradition, and more specifically the Mennonite Church. I have never been a member of the Amish tradition, but I would contrast Amish as they are known today from Anabaptists in the time of the Reformation. Today Amish are seen as quiet, peaceful, and daft in being picky about which technologies they accept in their community.

(Amish are conservative, perhaps seen as a bit daft, and as Weird Al offensively jabs them, says, "Tonight we're going to party like it's 1699, not seeing what on earth could be good about partying like it's 1699.)

But Amish and other Anabaptists were originally the anarchist wing of the Reformation, the Radical Reformers who were radical even in the eyes of fellow Protestants, the Reformation's Left Coast. That they would have been parodied in the future as "quaint"ly conservative and "please don't point and stare" would have perhaps astonished Zwingli and his radical wing of the Reformation, and all their opponents, alike.

Before and during college, I went on a bit of a journey and a quest to bolster and advocate for pacifism. I studied the Sermon in the Mount; I read Gandhi write things that I

thought only a Christian would write. Gandhi did not only say that his three heroes were Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates; he said that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world, a perfect act. And it was only years later that I learned why Gandhi did not become a Christian, something not given a single stinging word in a single quote I ever saw attributed to Mr. Gandhi.

I was filled with shame when I learned that Gandhi wanted to become a Christian, attended a Christian evangelist's meeting, and was turned away from being accepted into the Christian faith, *because of the color of his skin*. And he gave advice to Christians on how to present Christianity to Hindus, including displaying the hard parts very clearly, but he was not willing, after that, to consider becoming a Christian.

I would not have felt shame if I heard that Gandhi simply didn't ever consider becoming a Christian, or that he found the Hindu mystical tradition deep enough that he would content himself with Hindu roots, or that he would not have considered adopting the religion of the colonial occupiers of India, or other reasons like Hinduism as perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all world religions, or if we may permit an anachronism, Hinduism as the deep tradition that would years later establish India as a software superpower. *These are all bearable*. But not becoming Christian because a Christian evangelist turned him away—*that is not bearable, but shameful*.

In my own journey and life practices, the very oldest of the major works on my website, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength," was from my own search for pacifism. I don't deny that the nonviolent power that Gandhi described in terms of "satyagraha" or

hold onto Truth (from the Sanskrit), nor that satyagraha became incarnate with Indian flesh. "I am a man, so nothing that is human is alien to me," as an ancient Roman said. The Church Fathers who quickly saw a path that meets its fruition in Christianity in philosophy or Plato is able to read of the practice of satyagraha and nonviolence, and the Indian cardinal virtue of ahimsa that recognizes you are tied to the other person and cannot harm the other without harming yourself, can be coherently interpreted without recognizing what Gandhi took, without compromise, from Christianity and the Sermon on the Mount. If Plato or Platonism can be purified, and someone Taoism can be purified, then perhaps something can be purified from Gandhi and the one nation on earth that established itself as sovereign and independent without shedding a drop of enemy blood.

I would like to briefly stop at C.S. Lewis and what is apparently an attack on satyagraha. The architect of "mere Christianity" as it is established in the West makes the only external addition to what is called "mere Christianity" that is in fact not part of Christianity as it was known then. He describes and condemns a guilt manipulation that one holds oneself hostage to make pity a weapon. And he is the only Protestant writer I have read who, in papers like "Why I am not a Pacifist," says not only that Christians may wage war but in fact that conscientious exemption is not acceptable in any sense, and pacifists as much as anyone else should be compelled to try their best to kill men in military service. And on that point I really give Lewis an F. Ruling out even alternative service for people who believe it is always wrong to kill is FAIL, at least for someone pushing a comprehensive plan of "mere Christianity."

## **A second look at my roots**

The self-identification may or may not be what is most important to others. Probably the strongest critique that Orthodox might make of the Radical Reformation, shocking to both sides of the comparison, might be that an early Anabaptist might say, "We are starting with a clean slate. God is NOT incarnate in bread and wine, is NOT incarnate in any fixed form of worship, is NOT incarnate in any icon or art, NOT incarnate in any priesthood where priests are anything more or less than laity, NOT incarnate in the saints, NOT—" and a Muslim might answer, "You're off to a good start, but you left off the most important one: God is NOT incarnate in Christ!"

However, for now I would like to focus on the three self-chosen identifiers that I was taught growing up were the Anabaptist distinctives.

I mentioned Anabaptism or Mennonites earlier as my earliest roots, and I have revisited them, not as a matter of regression but pushing a divide further. And there are some points of contact. The Anabaptist movement has three self-identified points of distinction:

1. A "believer's baptism", meaning baptism only on adult profession of faith,
2. A refusal to take oaths under any circumstance.
3. Pacifism.

On the first point there is a disagreement between Orthodoxy and the Anabaptist tradition; what Anabaptists



sought to dismantle in saying "Infant baptism is of the Devil," is one of many continuities with Orthodoxy that some in the West has opted out of.

On the second point, there is strong agreement. Now in pastoral terms there is an issue of people's comfort with a teaching, and it is not pastorally helpful to take a teaching someone is not ready to recognize, and ram it down that person's throat rather than allowing that person to grow to accept the teaching. But as far as oaths go, there was one Athonite monk who refused to take a required oath before testifying in a court of law, and endured without complaint the four months of prison that he was punished with before refusing to take an oath. St. John Chrysostom, called "the moral theologian among the Fathers par excellence," throughout every work that I have read, keeps on returning to certain moral topics regardless of perception. He keeps on hitting on the necessity of sharing with the poor, and of the theatre "in which the common nature of women is affronted" (think Internet porn, as it existed in the fourth century; to be an actress included being a member of a much older profession), and he more than once drops the hammer on the practice of taking oaths at all.

I should wish to clarify that I am, as an Orthodox Christian, in communion with saints including alike the Martyrs and Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, who were rulers in authority who chose to be murdered rather than take the sword, and warrior-saints like the Greatmartyr, Victory-bearer and Wonderworker George. Both are treasures of the Orthodox Church, and while a soldier who has gone on active duty cannot become clergy, he can become a saint.

I might also comment that in years back, when I was

exploring and searching, Christians who believed in a just war, without exception, met my forceful arguing only with gentleness and kindness. *If you are one of those people, this piece is dedicated to you.*

But as regards the question of pacifism, I regard my own “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength” as an interesting early step, particularly as there weren't too many other pieces playing in the same space that I was able to find. I asked a number of other people for feedback, and I regret my own sophomoric side of dealings with mature Christians who believe in a just war and who in every sense embodied what I advocate for here. (Wheaton College president Dr. J. Richard Chase asked for a copy for his personal files; part of this was undoubtedly kindness, but the kind gesture was against a backdrop where he probably had not seen too many works like it at all, even if he searched for them.) I've come back to review it, and there are things I wouldn't say now in this the very oldest and earliest of my works. But my coming back to it after all these years is not so much a matter of recognizing I was *young* and *idealistic* and thinking I am *practical* and *realistic* now, but looking again and saying that **I did not go nearly far enough.**

(Coming back years later deepened in the Orthodox spiritual tradition, or at least slightly less immature, my further knowledge has unlocked things in my earlier position that I could not understand in my early career as a convinced pacifist.)

*But let us not demand perfection from everyone, and give one concession, at least, for lawful gun ownership.*

## **A cue from the military that might *matter* to gun owners**

One Orthodox faithful explained gun ownership and challenged people who regarded gun ownership as simply nothing but a passion of anger. And he explained how, as a loving and careful father, he hopes to never fire his gun "live", but as a loving and responsible husband and father, he knows what he would do if someone broke into his house with intent to do harm. He would bring such killing to confession, but he had his priorities straight.

(Note that this is reasoning about what *would* happen in an imagined scenario, not what *was* happening, a distinction which is important in Orthodox mystical theology.)

I have heard gun control advocates talk about how tragic it was when someone heavily armed opened fire on children; I haven't yet heard a rebuttal after a card-carrying NRA member answered, "Yes, it was tragic not only that that started, but that there was no one lawfully possessing firearms available to stop the crime. Did you hear about one of those many incidents that never appears on television, where for instance a man armed to kill a bear entered a church sanctuary with intent to do ill, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a firearm legally and with explicit permission of her church shot and stopped a crime?"

And this may be just my observation, but the primary approach to persuasion taken by gun control advocates is to show hard-hitting images of traumatized people after an active shooter met no armed speed bump at all, to persuasion taken by the gun lobby is to mount a logical

argument appealing to research and statistics. Now as a mathematician I understand Mark Twain's point that there are three types of lies ("Lies, \_\_\_\_\_ lies, and *statistics!*"), and I don't put my weight onto statistics I haven't seen investigated, but the question between gun control and gun lobby isn't a matter of deciding which side has cooked their books. Perhaps the gun lobby *has* cooked their books: but it is a little sad when only one side of a discussion argues from research, evidence, and statistics.

I may be hypocritical or a freeloading parasite when I say this, but I do not personally own a gun; I never have and probably never will. I have some skill with firearms, but that is beside the point. But I feel safer now that my state has legalized carrying concealed firearms, with a few asterisks about how to opt out on your property. I would rather be in a situation where there are two guns in a room, owned by a criminal and meant for a crime, and one by a law-abiding citizen intending to stop crime in the most drastic circumstances, than only the gun carried by a criminal. I feel safer knowing that gun-using criminals do not know where there is a lawfully carried firearm, and criminals simply do not know if I am carrying a .45 with hollow-nosed rounds.

But if you're keeping a firearm by your bed for self-defense, may I ask if you are also, for instance, investing in good night vision? Have you taken the time to install a respectable home security system? This may be slightly less "sexy" than having a powerful gun at hand, but have you established the powerful and immediate deterrent of flooding your home with light (a thief's worst enemy) if someone approaches?

And have you considered that it may be easier, after

training, to hit someone while shooting out a solid stream of pepper spray—*especially* in poor lighting, where at least without night vision you can't really aim—than the few rounds in a gun's magazine? And that the effects on your house are much easier to clean up from a vile liquid than a few bullet holes after a powerful gun has shot through an intruder's body and hit the wall behind. Killing someone, however justified it may be, is a traumatic experience; even for trained law enforcement professionals, for instance, killing in the line of duty is trauma and good police chiefs can mandate that an officer who has killed in the line of duty get a year's counseling. Training as a law enforcement professional or soldier does not change the fact that it is traumatic to kill another person. If I had a choice between stopping a dozen innocent men with pepper spray and stopping one guilty man with a shot through the heart, I know which one *I* would rather remember when I look in the mirror each day.

For a first cue from the military, snipers, who know well enough how to fire a rifle at a paper target, are given one round and only one round to keep with them, carry, hold, and move around, and then after a couple of days are given one shot to take a "hostage situation" (balloon full of oatmeal or whatever) shot. Most fail the first time. With a bit more training and preparation, it *gets* to one shot, one kill. But it takes some training to get there. I wouldn't myself trust that with one shot, cold and in a panic, to hit home.

*But with all that preface stated, may I ask people who look for safety via firearms to at least take a cue from the military?*

Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War* c. 500 BC, adapted for

the business world in sometimes flaky ways, is arguably the greatest classic in military strategy and usually considered to be less dated than the best of the best from 100 years ago.

If one were to condense the multi-faceted classic into a single sentence, it should probably be one gem taken from the text, "**All warfare amounts to deception.**" To put it starkly, war is not achieved by killing people, with psychological considerations in any sense being a side issue. War is about *deceiving* people; killing people has more of a supporting role than anything else. The terms "strategy" and "strategem" are forms of the same basic word; they amount to how to trick the opponent. You don't win well by killing each other's soldiers and seeing who has some left over at the end; military forces at any rate fall apart at a third (maybe less) casualties, and rank and file U.S. troops have guns and ammunition intended to seriously wound in the average case, but not kill. (Part of this is love for enemies; part of it is a tactical consideration that if you instantly kill an enemy soldier, you take one man out of action; if you seriously wound a soldier with a wound that may be treatable, you take three men out of action.)

One ancient account talks about how a military leader stripped a force of thousand down to a few hundred, and gave them torches and the shofars that one would use at the head of a host. Then they crept around the host, surrounded it, and blasted the horn. The entire enemy warhost, "like the sand at a seashore for multitude", fell into deep panic and was routed, falling to each other's swords.

World War II might have been won under even more dire circumstances, but at least it was not the armies of second-born sons whose blood was poured out like water who won D-Day without strategem. Also contributing to

that scenario was an enormous effort to build up rubber balloon versions of tanks at the like, massing to look from the air like the Allies were intending to invade from the point where the English Channel was narrowest, but sent a double agent to keep Hitler believing the D-Day invasion was just a diversion and keeping his main forces to where the channel was nearest and therefore out of the way when the breach was made on Normandy beach.

What does this have to do with home security?

**Everything.** You're not firing on all pistons if you stop with a gun, and I do *not* mean that you need more firepower, or really even more gadgets.

Jack MacLean's *Secrets of a Superthief* says, on the cover:

They said I was the best, the one the police called the 'Superthief.' Before I went straight I picked every lock, turned off every alarm, found every hiding place. I know how burglars get inside—and gets them out. If you're smart, you'll pay attention to what I have to say...

Possibly the most valuable observation in the text is that *home security should be 60% psychological and 40% physical*, and it is seriously confused to think that you can win a physical arms race with a thief who wants to get in and isn't afraid of you. If you change your doors for heavier doors and less glass then a determined intruder will just change an already big crowbar for an even bigger crowbar. Then what other options are there? the book has some options; drawn from it:

**Situation:** There is an intruder accidentally making sounds in your house, or at least you think it is an intruder.

You say, crossly, with irritation and as much frosty, icy condescension as you can muster, "Yes, *Sweetie*, I *know* what the *machine gun* will do to the *walls*. I don't *care*. I'm going to give 60 more seconds for the SWAT team to get here, and then I'm taking care of it **MY** way."

**Situation:** A thief is casing your back door for possible entrance.

Have a clearly scribbled note on your back door, *fresh-looking* note that says, "Honey, will you please talk to Billy? He's let that stupid pet rattlesnake escape his cage again, and right now, I can't even find that idiotic scorpion! Can you explain to him that this is UNACCEPTABLE?"

(Women have sometimes taken to putting a pair of size 17 men's boots outside the door each evening.)

Does it work? Perhaps you may not sound entirely believable, but nerves roughened by intruding in unknown situations where you don't know how people are armed and you could legally be killed tell a different story. (The "Superthief" tells of not being able to count how many terrifying times he heard a barking dog answered by "*Shaddap*, Max!")

The most implausible note he described, more humorous than believable, was a notice when he was in a prison and wanted people to leave him alone, was a note



saying that he had a severe case of crabs, and the crabs were strong enough to break people's fingers with their claws.

**However, it was enough to motivate other convicted felons in prison to simply leave him alone.**

There's a lot that can be accomplished by violence in certain very unhappy circumstances, and Gandhi respected those who use force nobly. Seriously, he did:

The people of a village near Bettiah told me that they had run away whilst the police were looting their houses and molesting their womenfolk. When they said that they had run away because I had told them to be nonviolent, I hung my head in shame. I assured them that such was not the meaning of my nonviolence. I expected them to intercept the mightiest power that might be in the act of harming those who were under their protection, and draw without retaliation all harm upon their own heads even to the point of death, but never to run away from the storm centre. It was manly enough to defend one's property, honour or religion at the point of the sword. It was manlier and nobler to defend them without seeking to injure the wrongdoer. But it was unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and, in order to save one's skin, to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrongdoer. I could see my way of delivering the message of ahimsa to those who knew how to die, not to those who were afraid of death.

- Gandhiji in Indian Villages by Mahadev Desai

But there is more...

*...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

## **"Our social program is the Trinity"**

Of all the brief sayings that most mystifies people, "Our social program is the Trinity" may be the most confusing. A social program includes a blueprint for some more or less vaguely Utopian social order, and how by civil war politics it is possible to influence, manipulate, coerce, intimidate, bamboozle a plan to concretely build things on earth. And given such a bulleted list of key features to a social program, it seems an extremely strained reading of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But may I ask: What about devout Christian family communities saying, "Our juvenile correctional system is parents who love each other, stay married to each other, and love and discipline their children?" That's wordier, but the key point lies in a similar vein. If you go to a staunch Evangelical community, you may not see terribly many prisons, courthouses, correctional officers, and so on and so forth, but the purpose of a staunch Evangelical community is not that it has abundant "department of corrections" responses to a 10-year-old arrested for pushing hard drugs or a 12-year-old arrested for rape; however much there may be support for repentance, an ounce of prevention is worth a much more than a ton of cure, and an ounce of bored children in a less-than-ideal Bible study is worth years of expensive state programs to care for children who have been incarcerated.

And in that sense, prayerful life, or the entire struggle in

spiritual discipline, is the Orthodox martial art. Certain threads more than others, but the disciplined Orthodox life offers more than a martial art as wholesome homes offers something better than a state Department of Corrections or a doctrine of the Trinity that effectively answers social planners: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, visible and spiritual, than are even *dreamed* of in your ideologies."

Orthodox have various statements of how monasticism and the laity are compared, if they should be; I am of the opinion that it is beneficial to monastics to regard laity as fully equal, and laity to regard monastics as immeasurably above them. But some things in monasticism are falsely criticized as "just because it's monasticism:" taking passages of the Bible at face value is not, or at least *should not*, be a particularly distinctive feature of monasticism. And some people have said that Lent is just how Orthodoxy should be year round, and it makes sense to say that the bulk of monasticism is just how all Orthodox Christians should be.

*Monasticism is privilege.*

Monasticism is privilege, easily on par with a full ride scholarship at a top-notch university. But doesn't it entail poverty, obedience, and chastity? Well, of course. Aren't they difficult? Yes. But the vow of poverty, of never providing for your future self, is a vow of accepting the Providence who knows and loves you (past, present, and future) more than you could possibly ask. It is one of three medications that carves out a niche for abundant health. Perhaps most laity should observe chastity through faithfulness, but it is the same virtue that powers one practice and the other.

We are to be as the birds of the air, highlighted in the

## Sermon on the Mount:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by taking thought? You might as well try by taking thought to work your way into being a foot taller! And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed'? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

There is something very powerful here, a something that is missed in business as usual in the U.S. Business as usual means heaping up treasures on earth, saying "God helps those who help themselves" (a quotation from Benjamin Franklin not found anywhere in the Bible), to be your own Providence. The idea that we are to do God's job as our Providence is at times treated harshly by Christ (Luke 12:15):

And [Jesus] said unto them, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?' And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my

fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?' So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

I wrote about the husband who owned a gun as a means of being responsible towards his family: but my inward wincing was less that firing a gun is not turning the other cheek, than that he responded out of a spiritual illusion. This side of the Fall, we cannot ever arrange things right, and we do not do well to oust God so that we can get back to steering the helm of our lives *ourselves*.

It may or may not be appropriate for Orthodox laity to arm themselves, but whatever other reasons there may be for arming yourself, shutting off risk is not one of them. It is non-negotiable that no matter what hedge we surround ourselves with, the sand we grasp will slip through our fingers, and this is actually good news: we have another option, living the Sermon on the Mount, not harmed because we do not have control, and free because we know we do not need to have control, open to a larger world than the constricted world we keep on making for ourselves.

There was a Linux fortune that said, on eloquent terms that I cannot fully reproduce, that there were a bunch of starfish clinging to rocks on the bottom of a rapidly flowing river, holding the rocks tightly and terrified they would lose their grip. Then one of them suddenly let go, was battered against a few rocks, and then finding a place in the flow. And, perhaps in a dig at Christianity, the other starfish who

didn't get it called the one starfish a Messiah and worshiped him while continuing to cling, and remaining terrified of losing their grip on the rock.

(But we are called to do *both* worship the Man, *and* imitate him.)

The Sermon on the Mount would almost speak more strongly about violence being unworthy of Christians if it *didn't* address violence. The direct mention shadows the overarching theme, where silence speaks more powerfully than words.

But there are in fact words:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:' But I say unto you, 'Ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;' Ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not

even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

St. Paul's emphatic plea to Christians to not demean themselves and the Church by secular lawsuits against fellow Christians ("Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?") is cut from the same cloth.

But there is *more*.

## **How does the Orthodox Christian martial art really work?**

Returning the theme of monasticism as privilege, one aspect of the depth of monasticism is that monks are not to defend themselves by force. When they are accused, they are not to defend themselves in words, as Christ Himself remained silent before Pilate (*Note*: ...and terrorized Pilate more than any threat could have done). And this is not exactly a mainstream approach in the West. It's a bit of an oblong concept: something that is a common assumption between the various permutations of pacifism and just war is that, once you've decided what are the appropriate means for self-defense, you can and should use the most effective appropriate means to end the danger with minimal harm to yourself and others. *It just goes without saying that* whatever limits may be, *obviously* defending yourself with speech is appropriate. But the monastic interpretation of "Ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." is quite simply that we are not to defend ourselves. We are not to defend ourselves by means of lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves by means of less lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves



even by words; we are not to defend ourselves even in thoughts. Not a single angry thought is permitted to us, and there are two kinds of power that we wield after renouncing power.

The first kind of power, the (*relatively*) obvious one, is highlighted in a story from *A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul*:

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" "Fifty cents," replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied a number of coins in it. "How much is a dish of plain ice cream?" he inquired. Some people were now waiting for a table and the waitress was a bit impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she said brusquely. The little boy again counted the coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table, and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and departed. When the waitress came back, she began wiping down the table and then swallowed hard at what she saw. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies - her tip.

C.S. Lewis's article "Why I Am Not a Pacifist" which would be more accurately be titled, for what it says, "*Why No Christian Should Be a Pacifist Nor Have Either Their Church Teachings or Their Conscience Respected As a Conscientious Objector*," dismissed what appeared to be

Gandhi's toolchest as a dog lying in a manger (as in "Aesop's Fables:" which not only does not eat but also prevents other animals from eating). And it is not clear to me that all of the tools Gandhi used are appropriate: I'm not sure there is ever reason to seek out suffering, and after the Church's decision to both canonize St. Ignatius (who brought martyrdom down on himself), and forbid future Orthodox Christians from trying to provoke martyrdom, apart from strained readings of the Sermon on the Mount, I can't remember seeing any subsequent interpretations of hunger strike as appropriate. *In other words, the Sermon on the Mount may give us tools, including a "Do not resist evil" that is never separate from the more foundational Truth in "Do not worry," does not justify other tactics such as civil disobedience without **direct** provocation, or hunger strikes.*

There's plenty of reason for fasting, of course, but fasting is not a tool for straightening out God and his Providence: fasting is a tool to let God straighten **you** out. And in fact the Sermon on the Mount tells us that fasting, like prayer, should be as secret as manageable. Then it can reach its full power. However, Lewis himself may have furnished the most touching portrayal of Gandhi's toolbox in Christian literature of all that I have read, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, after Reepicheep has realized he has lost his glorious tail and Aslan does not see why Reepicheep needs it:

"Why have your followers all drawn *their* swords, may I ask?" said Aslan.

"May it please your High Majesty," said the second Mouse, whose name was Peepiceek, "we are all waiting

to cut off our own tails if our Chief must go without his. We will not bear the shame of wearing an honor which is denied to the High Mouse."

"Ah!" roared Aslan. "You have conquered me. You have great hearts. Not for the sake of your dignity, Reepicheep, but for the sake of the love that is between you and your people, and still more for the kindness your people showed me long ago when you ate away the cords that bound me on the Stone Table (and it was then, though you have long forgotten it, that you began to be *Talking Mice*), you shall have your tail again."

On an immediate level, this is what nonviolent resistance may seem to have. But the "big picture" realization was one that I realized in discussion with one friend about "What will you do in situation X [which had not, and has not, happened]?" and I told a joke:

A young man who was a prospective captain of a ship was being quizzed about how he would handle difficulties.

The person quizzing him said, "What would you do if a storm came?"

"I'd drop an anchor."

"OK; suppose that the anchor gets stuck and won't come up, and later on another storm came up again. What would you do?"

"I'd drop another anchor."

"Ok, and if that gets stuck and won't come up, and later on you see another storm, what would you do?"

"I'd drop another anchor."

"Where on earth are you getting all these anchors from?"

"From the same place you're getting all these storms from!"

Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 Maxims says, "Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out," and connects with "What would you do in situation X?" and the point I tried to make in "Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of "Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth." We are not to store up treasures on earth only in things external to our bodies; we are not to store up internal treasures on earth, things that exist in our minds.

One of these kinds of false treasure exists in terms of our perceived need to map everything we do out in advance. One teacher talked about how some scholar claimed to map out what St. Irenaeos would have said in various circumstances that hadn't happened: "What would St. Irenaeos have said if Adam and Eve, with their immediate children, had not sinned, but their grandchild did?" And regardless of the content of such scholarship, it is imposing on St. Irenaeos something utterly foreign to his mindset. As I have seen the academic community today, it is natural both to ask, "What *is* ...?" and "What *would* ...?" when trying to understand something. In patristic writers, only one of the two basic kinds of questions is valid for understanding something: "What *is* ...?" And no real saint that I am aware of announces that we must have a plan that anticipates every possibility before we act. Part of the point in the Sermon on the Mount is that there is no need for planning. It is as if this dialogue plays out:

**God:** Will you trust me on this?

**Us:** I don't know. I'm trying to trust you, but I really don't understand what you are trying to do with me here.

**God:** *I know* you don't know. That's my *point*. As your Spiritual Father, *I am not asking you to do my thinking for for me*. I am asking you to trust me. Do you trust me?

**Us:** I'm trying to fit things together, really I am, and maybe can work together if I am able to work out a plan. Could you work with me on this?

**God:** I am very interested in working with you. *Do you trust me?*

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to try to tell fellow Orthodox what saints' footsteps they may follow. There are warrior-saints, and then there is St. Acacius, mentioned in St. John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, who obediently served an abusive elder for nine years until he died, and when asked at his grave, "Brother Acacius, are you dead?" called out from beyond the grave, "*No, Father, how is it possible for an obedient man to die?*" And there are many others of various stripes, a kaleidoscope to the glory of God.

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to tell other Orthodox Christians whether they should join the military, or under what (if any) conditions firearm ownership is appropriate, or other questions regarding

violence. I have a hunch that a good set of bright lights that turn on instantly whenever someone approaches your house may, at least by itself, provide a more effective deterrent than a gun for when an intruder is *already* in your house. And it may be a mistake to assume that the real "I'm taking it seriously" way to address threats is something that *starts* with weapons. However, at least for the sake of argument, I do not wish to give a prescription for how others may relate to violence. **But it is my direct wish to challenge the main assumption that keeps popping up when Christians regard violence as the real practical power.**

One point regarding the Sermon on the Mount is that this side of Heaven, control that you plan out is simply impossible. The task is not to God's thinking for him; it is to accept his Providence as intended to bless you entirely, and trust him with the complete trust that the Sermon on the Mount cries out. This may mean being with the birds of the field and the lilies of the field, and being so *with* (in some cases) or *without* openness to using violence. And, though this is a lesser point, I'm a little wary of a second assumption that lurks under the covers: *"Pacifism is idealistic and appropriate for an ideal world, while sometimes using force is what works in the non-ideal world that we have."* But there is confusion for people stressed and worried to give that line to "Each day has enough trouble of its own." I've had times with more stress in my life, and times with less, and it may more be true that in an ideal world, we wouldn't need "Each day has enough trouble of its own, but in the rough circumstances in which we live, we need to take things one day at a time, and we need it much more than we would if we were in Paradise.

One ex-military person I spoke with talked about how top brass would keep on waking everyone up at very late night / early morning, sound the alarm, say the USSR was invading *NOW*, and everybody had to get up and go out to the tanks. And so soldiers would grudgingly walk out, dragging their rifles by the muzzle, and get into the tanks, and the live question in everyone's eyes was whether the officers would call off the exercise before they got the tanks out and into mud. The live concern here is whether the soldiers would have to clean the mud off the tanks for moving into the field the next morning. And he talked about *idealistically* believing that *if only* he and his colleagues trained hard enough, no one would attack anyone else.

I remember hearing a missionary's kid who grew up somewhere on the African continent saying, "You can't defeat people who have nothing to lose!" and thinking that that sounded awfully *idealistic*, something I really wanted to believe but couldn't, but that was over a decade ago, and since then the U.S. has been involved in multiple wars against third world nations and perhaps won *none* of them. World War I proudly paraded a mechanized army down to California for a sort of extended field training exercise where the entire mechanized army failed to apprehend the one single Mexican bandit that they were searching for. In Vietnam, the U.S. strategy was, "Our cool gadgets will win this war for us," the Viet Cong's strategy was to maximize the war's unpopularity back home ("ballbuster": a non-lethal anti-personell mine used by the Viet Cong, just powerful enough to destroy testicles), and the present strategy in the present conflict of shooting at ISIL from the air and arming jihadists to fight ISIL jihadists is really less of a *military strategy*, properly speaking, than an all-

American *marketing strategy*.

Having control this side of Heaven is not possible, and believing that firearms can be a way to opt-out of the conditions Sermon on the Mount addresses in its prescriptions. In that sense gun ownership is dangerous, because even if you accept 100% of what NRA advocates say, you have effectively closed your eyes to some of the bedrock of what the Sermon on the Mount says. In another matter, that of finances, the Fathers are quite clear: "That robe, hanging in your closet, belongs to the poor;" "Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead." *If your firearm costs you the ability to live the Sermon on the Mount, drop it off at the police department; it is better for you to enter eternal life as killed where a firearm would have let you stop a crime, than to have your whole body (and your gun with it) cast into Hell.*

I might briefly comment that I have brief experience with martial arts, and I have consistently noticed that they had become the driest portions of my spiritual life. Firearms and martial arts, if they are to be useful, depend on constant practice and preparation. As the banner for every school but one of Kuk Sool Won, "We need more practice!" At the grandmaster's school, the banner says, "You need more practice!" The common concensus is that with martial arts, you fight noticeably better within months, but real mastery takes *years*, and *years*, and *years*. And even then you don't have a money-back guarantee; any martial arts instructor worth anything will make it clear before you reach black belt level (arguably before you reach anything above white belt) that martial arts instructors will make it abundantly clear that martial arts are no silver bullet; you may be safer in a conflict but not safe against every threat; someone



testing for black belt can, if arrogant enough, wind up with a hole in the head. There have been attempts to make something simply easier to learn and remember—Goshin Jitsu is meant to be simple and effective—but keeping up on a martial art just because it might be useful in a fight is a bit like spending a few hours a week practicing a spare profession so that if you happen to lose your job you have a spare profession ready and waiting for you. It's a lot of work, and it's no more of a guarantee at that.

And there is a spiritual toll for practicing violence *over and over and over*. You sink in a lot of time that might be better spent sharpening your skills in your own profession. Aiki Ninjutsu talks about becoming a compassionate protector of others, and talks about building great compassion to offset the incredible destructiveness of the techniques. With all due respect, I need to give all the compassion to others that I can give, without preventably siphoning it off to offset other considerations. Perhaps you can numb or ignore what it feels like to practice violence on others and have others practice violence on itself; and martial arts have an occult ambiance; the concept of ki / qi / chi is a Buddhist practice, not really Christian, and there is a good case to be made that it's magical, even without taking a common sense look at the philosophies Eastern martial arts draw on, which are almost invariably laden with an occult dimension.

**...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**

## Thoughts Which Determine Our Lives

Much of what I wrote in “*Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret and the Law of Attraction*” relates here. After Providence, here is perhaps the core payload for what is the Orthodox martial art.

The English word "practice" has two senses. One is, as a musician says, "I'm practicing," meaning, "I am taking time to make dry runs at this skill and sharpen it as much as possible." Or one speaks of a doctor "practicing medicine," meaning "I am exercising and doing the proper live activity in my profession." I will use the terms *musician-style-practice* and *doctor-style-practice* to distinguish the two meanings

With both firearms and martial arts, you need to practice to keep an edge, practice in the sense of the musician-style-practice. Competence requires an ongoing time sink. But live doctor-style-practice, comes very, very rarely.

One communication textbook talked about what your odds were for being assaulted on your way home: 1 in 10, 1

in 100, 1 in 1000, or 1 in 10,000. The point was that the more TV you watch, the more you overestimate the chances of suffering a violent response. The heaviest TV viewers expected a 1 in 10 chance of assault. The actual figure was the 1 in 10,000 per night figure. Notwithstanding shows glamorizing a highly romanticized view of law enforcement—*when did a police show ever depict an officer filling out an hour of paperwork, or spending a day doing a daily grind of dull responsibilities*—police officers draw their weapons (excluding training) perhaps once every few years.

In the musician-style-practice, you only practice very, very rarely, even including officers. No matter how much preparation it takes to keep a sharp edge, live doctor-style-practice is, and should be, very rare.

The discipline of *nepsis* or spiritual watchfulness over thoughts, has more than one relevance, but a *nepsis* that watches for and cuts off warring thoughts at the first is invaluable. Though this is a different meaning than when I last saw it, "*They say that if you must resort to violence, you have already lost.*" Read my article *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*: then read Elder Thaddeus's original *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* and learn to appreciate your warring thoughts in deeper ways.

It may seem almost "sexist" that the blame, or at least attention and corrections, should be placed entirely on one side, *yours*; but this dark cloud hides an astonishing silver lining. If the correction is only put on one side, *so is the power to change and make the situation better*. Perhaps *most* (not all) conflicts include a feedback loop of escalating anger (and one that most or all truly good martial artists know how to shut down, by for instance meekly saying, "You're the tough guy"—and this was a third-degree black

belt who meekly and submissively opted out of having to be the tough guy). There is a classic enlightenment exercise where a group of sailors stand in a ring, with instructions to touch the shoulder of the soldier exactly as yours was pressed. And someone touches one of the sailors lightly, with one light finger press. The "equal to what happened to me" results in a heavy finger press, and before too long at all the light touch has become a meaty, and nasty, punch. It is very hard at times, but "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you:" but you have the power, many times, to shut down the escalating unmerry merry-go-round that others will not step off of. Not that this is only for pacifists; I have seen soldiers beautifully live out of this power, and people who weren't specifically soldiers but believed in a just war (a western concept that never really took in Orthodoxy even though Orthodoxy never really places an expectation of becoming a pacifist). If Elder Thaddeus's sage advice could be summed up in a single maxim, it might be Proverbs 15:1: **"Anger slays even wise men; yet a submissive answer turns away wrath: but a grievous word stirs up anger."**

Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind." each day and practicing our nonviolent thoughts (doctor-style-practice) a watchfulness in thoughts that is alert to snuff out smoulders when it is small rather than heroically deluging a burning house, is harder up front, but *far* easier down the road.

**It sounds small, but the results down the road are anything but small.**

## Holy and blinding arrogance

Elsewhere in *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu writes:

It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.

And this is far from what the Orthodox Church has to offer. Do we need to know the demons? **No.** The *Philokalia* may say as much about demons as any Orthodox writing may have, but we are allowed arrogance such as Sun Tzu would have considered a fatal weakness. As regards the demons, we are to be really, properly, truly, and *blindingly* arrogant, like the Orthodox elder who was speaking with a novice about strange noises in a courtyard and told the novice, "It is only the demons. Pay it no mind." This is cut from the same cloth as the liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." **The mind takes the shape of whatever it contemplates**, hence St. Paul's words, Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. We should look at Light, not darkness; live the Sermon on the Mount, and *then*, and not before, will we understand that the Light knows Himself and the darkness; the darkness knows neither itself nor the Light. If the spiritual eye receives

things that make an impression on it, it matters what items it receives impressions from. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: "single" in this context is cut from the same cloth as the Beatitudes that Orthodox chant in Liturgy, confessing in abbreviated form the entire Sermon on the Mount.

It has been said, "You can choose your options, but you cannot choose the consequences of your actions." You can choose whether to look at Light or darkness: in so doing you may choose, by gazing on the Light, to be filled with peace, or to gaze deeply into darkness (and have darkness gaze into you) by training your eyes on the whirlpool of circumstances all of us face. The option is not presented to try to do God's thinking for him, and analyze and work out how we will handle the future, and instead of darkness have all of the joys of peace that beholds the Light of God.

O that we could reach far enough into overreaching arrogance that we could, like saints old and new, look upon good and bad people and only see the beauty of the image of God in each!

## Conclusion

A lot has been covered here; the past few paragraphs narrate what, in a very specific sense, can be done as the *Orthodox martial art*. Broadly and in a deeper sense, holiness *matters*.

We live in turbulent times, as did Elder Thaddeus, who wrote, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*, a gift given to me by a friend who gave a very modest recommendation: "It's not terribly deep, but I find it helpful.". After reading it

and writing, "*Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret* and the Law of Attraction, I came up to him and told him he'd undersold it." It wasn't long before he agreed.

We live in turbulent times, and probably more turbulent and rougher as time goes on. But there is an alternative to being whipped out in the vortex of our times and surroundings. (Elder Thaddeus had many sufferings and was repeatedly taken prisoner by Nazis.) We have a choice about whether we will be sucked into it. It might not seem like it, but we do. Psychologists advising addicts say that you have more power than you think. If we are attentive and refuse to consent to thoughts, perhaps praying to God to save us from this temptation, and if we are in anger, praying for God's every blessing. This is not a quick overall process: it may be something that is a minute to start, and a lifetime to master. But though it may take *years* and *years* and *years* to master, but improvement may start much faster than months.

In "Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of "Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth,"" I try to unpack a small mystical slice of "Blessed are the poor in spirit." There is bodily poverty, and monastics are blessed when they let go of physical possessions. But we have many false treasures in terms of ideas in our heads, and the letting-go of these false interior treasures is in step with why my previous parish priest said, "When we are praying, we should not have very good thoughts; we should have *no* thoughts." And this has a poverty that is hard to come by. But once you have tasted it, earthly treasures taste suddenly flat. *You've drunk something purer.*

## **Beyond the Deep Magic of violence**

When aggression and violence are met only with meekness and love, what results can be truly powerful. Evil is not always stopped from harming and killing no matter where you fall: witness Satan's defeat in the martyrs, who are not in any sense killed because they are not good enough as Christians. Martyrdom is implemented by the Devil's work, but the victor in martyrdom is always and ever in the Lord and in the triumphant martyr entering Heaven in glory as a son of God. What happens in martyrdom, but quite a few other places as well, happens when the Deep Magic of violence runs its course, but when it has run its course, the Devil's work is transfigured into something immeasurably far beyond anything that the practical nature of violence can hope for. And its primary application is not reserved to the most extraordinary moments in a well-lived life, but the warp and woof of the daily living of those who practice it, be it on ever so small a scale!

**Seeing as are surrounded by such a great cloud of  
witnesses,  
And such and heavenly treasures are set within our  
reach,  
Let us ever reach,  
Further Up and Further In!**



# The Mindstorm

**The Alumnus:** Hello. I was in town, and I wanted to stop in for a visit.

**The Visionary:** How good to see you! What have you been up to? We're all interested in hearing what our alumni are doing.

**The Alumnus:** Well, that would take a bit of explaining. I had a good experience with college.

**The Visionary:** That's lovely to hear.

**The Alumnus:** Yes, and I know that some alumni from our Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, also known as IMSA, didn't. I got through college the same way I got through gradeschool, playing by the law of the jungle. I stopped and thought about how to approach college. I realized soon that higher numbered courses were easier than lower numbered courses, and how to find professors I could work with.

And I understand why one alumna said, "IMSA didn't prepare me for college. It prepared me for graduate school." College will not automatically be a good experience for IMSA students, but there are choices the college won't advertise but could be made.

**The Visionary:** I wish you could speak to some of our students.

**The Alumnus:** I'd like the opportunity. There are a lot of things to say—that there's a normal scale of elementary-junior high-high school-undergraduate-graduate school, and IMSA doesn't fit on it. It has high school aged students, but it's not a modified high school; it's close in ways to graduate school, but there's something about it that is missed if you put it at any one point on the scale. And this has the result that IMSA students need to realize that when they enter college, they are not going from high school to the next step after high school; they're going from IMSA to something that was not meant to follow IMSA. But something that has opportunities if they knock on back doors and take advantage of some things the university doesn't know they need.

**The Visionary:** If you're serious about talking to our students, I mean talking with our students, I can introduce you to the appropriate people.

**The Alumnus:** Thank you. I was mentioning this to lead up to a gem of a class I took, one on what you need to know to make user-friendly computer programs, i.e.

usability. There was something that set me thinking, nettled me, when I was reading through some of the jargon file's Hell desk slang, um, I mean help desk slang. The term "pilot error" meant much the same thing as "ID ten T error".

**The Visionary:** I know what "pilot error" means in some contexts, but what does "ID ten T error" mean?

**The Alumnus:** It's easiest to see if you write it out.

**The Visionary** [goes to a markerboard and writes, "*ID 10 T*"]: Um... I assume there's a reason you started to say, "Hell desk." Aren't they just blowing off steam?

**The Alumnus:** Yes. Unfortunately, one of the ways many help desk employees have blown off steam is to say, "Ok. If you'll hold for a minute, I'm going to transfer you to my supervisor. Would you tell her that you appear to have an 'eye dee ten tee' error?" And they all gloat over what they've gotten the customer to say. No, seriously, you don't need to keep a straight face.

But what really struck me was the entry for PEBKAC, acronym for "Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair." There was an example given of,

Did you figure out why that guy couldn't print?

Yeah, he kept canceling the print operation before it could finish. PEBKAC.

This was philosophically interesting.

**The Visionary:** How?

**The Alumnus:** In a computer, you get these time wasting messages where a little window pops up and you can't do any useful work until you click on the button. It becomes noise for the sake of noise; like the boy who cried, "Wolf!", we have the computer that cries, "Worth your attention." After a while, the normal thing most people do is click on the button automatically so they can get back to their work. It's a waste of time to try to decipher the cryptic messages.

So when people go to print, another one of these waste-of-time windows pops up, except that this time, when you do the right thing and click on the button and make it go away, your print job fails. And this specific example is chosen as a paradigm example of PEBKAC.

For a lot of these errors, there is a problem between a keyboard and chair. But the problem isn't between the user's keyboard and chair. The problem is between the programmer's keyboard and chair.

**The Visionary:** Ouch.

**The Alumnus:** That course was what led to what I did for my Ph.D.

**The Visionary:** And that was?

**The Alumnus:** My discipline of record is philosophy of mind/cognitive science.

**The Visionary:** "Discipline of record?" I'm curious to hear you drop the other shoe.

**The Alumnus:** Usability is connected to cognitive science—an amalgam of computer science, psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, linguistics, and other areas, all trying to understand human thought so we can re-implement it on a computer. It's a fascinating area for interdisciplinary study, and usability draws on it, just from a different angle: instead of making computers intelligent, it tries to make computers friendly to people who don't understand how they are built. And a lot of things which are clear as day if you built the system aren't automatically clear to customers. A system which is usable lets the user have an illusory cognitive model of how the system works that is far, far simpler than how a programmer would understand it. And programmers don't consciously believe that customers understand the innards of their system, but there's an assumption that creeps in, an assumption of, "My way of thinking about it is how a person thinks about it."

**The Visionary:** That way of putting it makes the programmers sound ego-centric.

**The Alumnus:** I wouldn't put it in such crude terms as that; they are thinking in a way that is human.

With languages, there is a lot of diversity. Aside from the variety of languages, there's a difference between the U.S., where the majority only speak one language, and Sénégal, where it is common for people to speak five or six languages. There's a difference between Italy, where people speak one national language in a fairly pure form, and India, where English and Hindi are spliced together seamlessly. For that matter, there's the deaf outlet of speaking with your hands instead of your mouth. But with all these differences, language itself is not something which is added to being human. Language is not a custom that cultures may happen to include. There are exceptional cases where people do not learn a language, and these are tragic cases where people are deprived of a human birthright. The specifics of language may vary, but language itself is not adding something to being human. It is something that is basically human. The details and even diversity of languages are details of how language works out.

And a lot of things are like that. Understanding something that you're working on is not something added to being human; it's an interpretation of something basic. How one thinks, about technology and other things, is not something added to being human. It's something basically human.

One very natural tendency is to think that "I" or "we" or "people like us" are just being human; we just have what is natural to being human. The "them" group has all sorts of things that are added to being human,

but "we" are just being human. So we expect other people to think like us. We assume it so deeply and unconsciously that we are shocked by their perversity when they violate this expectation.

**The Visionary:** Wow. I hadn't thought of it in those terms before. Do you think IMSA provided a safe haven from this kind of lockstep thinking for its students?

**The Alumnus:** I think it provides a safe haven for quite a lot of its students. But getting back to my Ph.D. program—

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** So I began, encouraged by some initial successes, to try and make the first artificial mind. For a while I thought I would succeed, after overcoming some obstacles that couldn't have been that bad.

**The Visionary:** What were these obstacles?

**The Alumnus:** Just a special case here and there, an unrepresentative anomaly. But when I worked, I had a sneaking suspicion dawn on me.

Freshman year, I had a college roommate who was brilliant and eccentric. He turned out stunning proofs in math classes. He was also trying to build a perpetual motion machine. He was adjusting this and that; I listened, entranced, when he traced the history of great experiments in physics, and talked about how across the centuries they went from observing obvious

behavior to find subtle ways to trick nature into showing you something you weren't supposed to see. Think of the ingenuity of the Millikan oil drop experiment. And so he went on, trying to adjust this and that, seeking to get things just right for a perpetual motion machine. There were times when he seemed to almost have it. It seemed there were ten things you needed for a perpetual motion machine, and he had an almost working machine for any nine of them. But that tenth one seemed never to fall into place.

And I had a sneaking suspicion, one that I was going to try awfully hard to ignore, that for a long time I convinced myself I didn't know what I was expecting. But *deja vu* kept creeping in. I had just succeeded with a project that met every clearly defined goal I set for it... but I had just found another way not to make artificial intelligence.

The crusher was when I read von Neumann's 1958 *The Computer and the Brain*. Then I stopped running from *deja vu*. Here was crass confidence that in 1958 we discovered the basis for all human thought, and all human thought is add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Here was an assumption in lieu of argument. And here was the air I breathed as a cognitive science.

**The Visionary:** But I've looked at some reports, and artificial intelligence seems to be just around the corner.



**The Alumnus:** Full artificial intelligence is just around the corner, and it's been just around the corner since at least the fifties—arguably much longer, because for a hundred years before the brain was a computer, it was a telephone exchange. (I think that's why we talk about a person being "wired" a particular way.) The brain is always understood as the state of the art technology we're most proud of.

I hit rock bottom after thinking about how I had convinced myself I was creating a working artificial intelligence by obtaining results and reinterpreting results as success. It's very seductive, and I was thinking about what some skeptics had said about magic.

What emerged was... The effort to make computers think has found ways that the human mind is much more interesting than we thought. And I began to push in a new direction. Instead of trying to understand human intelligence to make computers more intelligent, I began to try to understand human intelligence to make humans more intelligent.

**The Visionary:** What exactly do you mean?

**The Alumnus:** There are a lot of disciplines that teach you how to think. I think scholars in many disciplines see their discipline as the discipline that teaches you how to think, where truly different disciplines are a sort of no-man's land that doesn't qualify as "how to think." But these are a coupled subject matter and how to

think about the subject matter. This was, in abstracted, crystalline, and universal form, "How to think." The analogy I used at the time was that it was the elementary school number line (1, 2, 3, ...), abstracted from sets of one physical object, two physical objects, three physical objects...

**The Visionary** [pausing]: It sounds like you're pioneering a new academic discipline. Would you like IMSA to highlight this?

**The Alumnus**: I am working that out. Not exactly whether what I am doing would qualify as an academic discipline—I'm pretty sure of that—but whether going down that route would be the wisest choice. For now, I'd rather wait.

**The Visionary**: Are you sure you wouldn't want the prestige? Hmm... on second thought, I can see that.

What are the scientific underpinnings of your discipline?

**The Alumnus** [pause]: That question is one of the first ones people ask me. It's automatic.

In tandem with what you might call my loss of faith in cognitive science, I began to question the cultural place of science. Including that in a question like this, the nearly immediate question people ask is one that assumes the answers are fed by science. Three of the most difficult mental accomplishments I've made are

learning to think like a scientist, crafting this discipline of how to think, and learning to genuinely ask "How else could it be?" when people automatically go charging in with science.

**The Visionary:** But don't you think it's important to understand what's going on in the body?

**The Alumnus:** Both your questions, "What are the scientific underpinnings of your discipline?" and "But don't you think it's important to understand what's going on in the body?" are examples of the tendency I'm talking about. Your latter question assumes that "understanding the body" and "study the science of the body" are interchangeable terms; they often are treated that way in Western culture, but they need not be.

**The Visionary:** But how else could it be?

**The Alumnus:** In journalism and some writing classes, students are taught a technique of cubing, which asks six questions, one for each side of the cube. The six questions are all "w" words: who, what, when, where, and how.

In most aboriginal cultures, for instance, people ask more than one question, but the big question is, "Why?" The stories provide explanations for why the world is as it is.

In science, the big question is, "How?" Laws and

theories provide mechanisms for how things happen. "Why?" isn't just de-emphasized; it's something people learn not to ask, something that is subtly stamped out like much of a child's creativity. Asking "Why?" is a basic error, like asking how much an idea weighs. One philosopher of science I read gave an example of a father asking a teenaged son, "Why is the living room light on?" and getting the answer, "Because the switch is in the 'on' position, closing the circuit and causing electricity to flow through the bulb." That isn't why, that's how. And if students are taught science without being taught how to be independent from science, or for that matter if they are in a culture influenced by science as ours has been, they'll come to share the assumption that this is the one and only serious answer to, "Why is the living room light on?"

That puts things too simply, but my point is that science does not represent the full range of inquiry. Science has cast a powerful shadow, not just in that science is scientific (which is as it should be) but in that non-scientific inquiry is not as independent as it should be.

But I'm getting off topic. What I was meaning to say was that I use science, but my discipline is dependent on an independence from science as well.

**The Visionary:** Could I backtrack a fair distance?

**The Alumnus:** Sure, to what?

**The Visionary:** There was something in the back of my mind when you answered my question about IMSA shielding its students from a lockstep environment. May I ask a more specific question?

**The Alumnus:** Certainly.

**The Visionary:** Did IMSA shield you from a lockstep environment?

**The Alumnus:** IMSA was unquestionably a better environment for me than a mainstream school.

**The Visionary:** You're being diplomatic.

**The Alumnus:** Ok. IMSA tries to be a magnet school serving the gifted population. Instead of memorization, it tries to produce critical observers, right?

**The Visionary:** Yes, and this isn't just for IMSA. We want to be a beacon of hope, for educational progress to the state and to the world.

**The Alumnus:** IMSA still doesn't have a football program, right?

**The Visionary:** IMSA students still don't really want one. If there was enough demand, we'd have one.

**The Alumnus:** What would you say to a football coach who wanted to liberate the tough, aggressive quarterback struggling to get out of every IMSA

bookworm?

**The Visionary:** I think I see where you're going. Let me play devil's advocate for the moment. Our society has recognized football as an endeavor for some. But don't we recognize that education is a goal for all?

**The Alumnus:** All analogies break down, and I can't force you to see my point if you don't want to. My reason for drawing that analogy is that the average mind learns by memorization of given material, and that mind is ill-served by trying to liberate that critical observer just as many bookworms would be ill-served by trying to liberate that hidden quarterback. The kind of student that does well at IMSA doesn't do so well with the memorization that serves the average student. But it's a two-way street.

**The Visionary:** And I think I see a connection to what you said about programmers assume that how they think about a product is how everybody will think about it. And...

**The Alumnus:** Yes. But there's something else.

**The Visionary:** So how do you think IMSA's outreach should be changed? Should we stop outreach?

**The Alumnus:** I'd want to give that some thought. That isn't why I brought this up. I brought up this two-edged sword to make it easier to see another two-edged sword.

The two-edged sword I've suggested is that, just as IMSA students tend to be uncomfortable with the instructional methods at most schools, average students would be uncomfortable with instruction that seeks to liberate a hidden critical observer. It's a bad match both ways. The other two-edged sword has to do with the nature of giftedness. How would you define giftedness?

**The Visionary:** I try not to, at least in not as strong terms as you do. IMSA is trying to liberate the genius of every child.

**The Alumnus:** I think your actions are wiser than your rhetoric. How much thought goes into your admissions decisions?

**The Visionary:** Our admissions staff give a great deal of thought! Do you think we're careless?

**The Alumnus:** I would have been disturbed if IMSA made a random choice from among the students whose genius would be nurtured. Are you sure you don't want to define giftedness?

**The Visionary:** Every child has some talent.

**The Alumnus:** I agree, although your words sound suspiciously like words that many IMSA parents have learned to wince at. There are a lot of parents who have bright children who have learned that "All of our children are gifted." means, in practical terms, "Your

daughter will be educated according to our idealization of an average student, no matter how much it hurts her, and we won't make accommodation."

But you are, unlike me, an administrator whom everybody blames for problems, and you know that there are many occasions where coming out and expressing your candid opinions is an invitation to disaster. I groused about the administration to no end as a student; it is only as an adult that I've come to appreciate the difficult and delicate task of being an administrator, and what kind of performance on an administration's part lets me focus on my work.

I'm going to put on my suspicious and mistrustful observer cap and read into your actions that it would be politically dangerous for you to say "This is the kind of gifted student we look for at IMSA." But I am not an administrator. I am more of a private person than you can afford to be, and there are more degrees of freedom offered to me. Would you mind my giving my opinion on a matter where you in particular need to be very careful in what you say?

**The Visionary:** I'm always open to listen, and I'm not just saying this as an administrator.

**The Alumnus:** I should also say that because something is politic, I don't automatically translate "politic" to "insincere." I believe you've been as successful as you have partly because you sincerely want to hear what



people have to say. When someone says, "political sensitivity," I've learned to stop being a cynic and automatically hearing, "Machiavellian intrigue."

But when I teach, I try to have a map that accomodates itself to terrain, both old and new to me. There are surprisingly many things I believe that are human universals, although I won't discuss them here. But diversity is foundational to how I communicate, and in particular teach.

By "diversity" I don't just mean "affirmative action concerns." I read what I can about minority cultures, and how Asperger's or ADD minds tick. That much is important, and I'm not just jumping on the bandwagon. But diversity doesn't begin when a student labeled as "minority," "different," or "disadvantaged" sits down in your classroom. Diversity begins much earlier. Diversity is every person. I'm fond of books like David Kiersey's *Please Understand Me II* which explore what temperament and Myers-Briggs types mean for personhood. I want to appreciate learning styles. I absolutely love when students come in during office hours, because then I can see exactly where a student is, and exactly how that student is learning and thinking, and give an explanation that is tailored to the student's specific situation. I like to lecture too, but I'm freest to meet student needs when students visit me in my office.

And one very important facet of that diversity is one that is unfashionable today, more specifically IQ.

**The Visionary:** I remember seeing a report that your IQ was so high it was untestable by normal means. I've heard that polite drivers value politeness, skillful drivers value skill, and safe drivers value safety. Is there...?

**The Alumnus:** If you want to dismiss what I'm saying because of speculation about my motives, there's a good case to do so. I know that. But please hear and accept or dismiss my arguments on their merits, and if you read books like James Webb's *Guiding the Gifted Child*, you'll see this isn't just my idea. I accept multiple intelligence theory as a nuance, but I would point my finger to the idea that a single IQ was an adjustment in theory, made by people who started by assuming multiple intelligences.

But with all the debates, and in particular despite the unfashionability of "IQ", there is excellent reason to discuss giftedness in terms of IQ. IQ may not be the whole story, but you're missing something big if it is treated as one factor among others.

Several caveats deleted, I would point out that giftedness is not a binary attribute, any more than being tall is binary. There may be some people who are clearly tall and others who clearly aren't, but regardless of where you draw the line, you can't divide people into a "tall" group of people who are all exactly 190 centimeters tall and a "non-tall" group of people who are 160 centimeters tall. There is diversity, and this diversity remains even if you restrict your

attention to tall people.

**The Visionary:** So then would you say that most high schools serve an average diversity, and IMSA serves a gifted diversity?

**The Alumnus:** Umm...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** An average high school breaks at both ends of its spectrum...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** Um...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** And IMSA breaks at both ends of its spectrum.

**The Visionary:** If there are some students who the administration overestimates, this is unfortunate, but —

**The Alumnus:** That's not my point. Ignoring several other dimensions of diversity, we don't have two points of "average" and "gifted" defining a line. Giftedness, anyway, is not "the same kind of intelligence as most people have, only more of it and faster"; it's a different kind of intelligence. It diverges more the further you go.

Instead of the two points of "average" and "gifted", there are three points to consider: "average", "gifted", and "profoundly gifted."

I think it is to IMSA's great credit that you have a gifted education, not a pullout tacked on to a nongifted education. Serving gifted needs isn't an adjustment; it's the fabric you've woven, and it is impressive.

But "profoundly gifted" is as different from the "moderately gifted" as "moderately gifted" is from "average"...

...and IMSA attracts a good proportion of the profoundly gifted minority...

...and the position of the profoundly gifted at IMSA is exactly the position many IMSA students had in TAG pullouts.

**The Visionary:** May I say a word in IMSA's defense?

**The Alumnus:** Certainly.

**The Visionary:** IMSA began as a dream, a wild, speculative, powerful, risky vision. From the beginning, its place was tentative; some of the first classes did math problems before the state government because IMSA was threatened with closing. IMSA makes things happen that wouldn't happen anywhere, and for all we've done, there are still people who would remove us from the budget.

I've talked with alumni, both those who like and dislike the school, and I see something in them which I didn't see in other places.

**The Alumnus:** And IMSA is a safe place to learn and grow, and IMSA alumni are making a powerful contribution to the world. All of this I assume. And IMSA seems like the kind of place that could grow, that does grow. IMSA could offer the world certain extraordinarily talented individuals that have been stretched to their limit, who have spent certain very formative years doing things most people don't even dream of, and doing so not in isolation but guided and supported as powerfully, and as gently for their needs, as IMSA already offers to so many of its students.

**The Visionary:** If you have any plans, I would like to hear them.

**The Alumnus:** Before I give the plans as such, I would like to give a brief overview, not just of the average, moderately gifted, and profoundly gifted mind, but of the average, moderately gifted, and profoundly gifted spirit. Keep in mind that this is not a trichotomy, but three reference points on a curve.

The average mind is concrete. It deals in practical, concrete matters. There was one study which posed isomorphic problems to people, one of which was stated abstractly, and one of which asked in concrete terms who the "cheaters" were. The average respondent did poorly on the abstract isomorph, but

was astute when it was put concretely. The average mind is more practical, and learns by an understanding which gradually emerges by going over things again. The preferred learning style is oriented towards memorization and is relatively slow, concrete, and (on gifted terms) doesn't make connections. This person is the fabric with which society is woven; a person like this tends to understand and be understood by others. The average mind concentrates on, and becomes reasonably proficient, in a small number of skills.

The moderately gifted mind, around an IMSA IQ of 140, deals with abstractions. It sees interconnections, and this may be related to why the moderately gifted mind learns more skills with less effort. (If this is true, an average mind would be learning from scratch, while a moderately gifted mind would only make adaptations from similar skills.) This person is likely to have a "collection of skills", and have a low self-assessment in those skills. (Today's breathtaking performance is, tomorrow, marginally adequate.) Self-actualizing concern for becoming a particular kind of person is much more common. The moderately gifted mind enjoys an advantage over the average mind, and is different, but still close enough to connect. This person learns more quickly, and most of society's leaders are moderately gifted. (Some have suggested that this is not just because people above that range are much rarer, but because they can easily connect.

There is controversy about how isolated the profoundly gifted person is, with an IQ around 180. Some researchers believe that the greater gap is bridged by the greater ability to connect; Webb suggests otherwise, saying that children with an IQ above 170 feel like they don't fit in anywhere. He asks what the effects would be if a normal child grew up in a world where most people had an IQ of 50-55. Some profoundly gifted have discussed the feeling that there's an instruction manual to life that everyone but them has. The unusual sense of humor that appears in the moderately gifted is even more pronounced in the profoundly gifted. Average people tend to believe some tacit and naively realistic philosophy. Moderately gifted people tend to believe some conscious and creative reinterpretation of realism. Profoundly gifted people tend to believe an almost automatic anti-realism. The realism assumed by most people doesn't resonate with them. And I need to explain what I mean by "believe" here. I don't mean that someone engaged them in a discussion and are convinced by logic or eloquence that an anti-realist philosophy is true. I mean something close to experience, as we believe that a radiator is hot after we touch it. Realism is obvious for someone of average intelligence. For someone profoundly gifted, coming to that perspective represents a significant achievement.

Furthermore, where the moderately gifted person has a "skill collection", the profoundly gifted individual has what might as well be magic powers—

**The Visionary:** You mean is involved with the occult or psychic phenomena?

**The Alumnus:** Not exactly. Profoundly gifted individuals have been known to do things like reinventing the steam engine at age six. Some of them can walk into a room and in an instant infer what kind of presentation is going to be given, and what kind of organization is going to give it. They have been known to make penetrating observations of connections between vastly different disciplines. Some have written a book in a week. Others remember everything they have read. Verbatim. Another still has invented a crude physics and using it to solve problems before she was old enough to talk. It's entirely plausible for a profoundly gifted individual to think for a few hours about a philosophical school he's just read about, and have a better grasp of the assumptions and implications surrounding that school than scholars who have studied the discipline for years. Many accomplishments are less extreme than that. Some are more extreme. I said that they might as well be magic powers because they are no more believable to many people than levitation or fairies granting wishes. Moderately gifted achievements are envied. Profoundly gifted achievements are disbelieved, and one social lesson the profoundly gifted learn is that there are certain accomplishments that you don't talk about... which feels the way most people would feel if people were shocked and offended when they tried to say, "I can read," or for that matter, "I can breathe."



These people do not think of themselves as having magic powers. Their impressive abilities are no more breathtaking or astonishing to them than our impressive abilities of walking through an unfamiliar room or understanding a children's book are to us—and if you don't believe that walking through an unfamiliar room or understanding a children's book is an astonishing mental feat, just spend a year in artificial intelligence. Artificial researchers know what kind of achievement is represented by these "basic" tasks. The rest of us misunderstand them as mundane. If you can understand how you can be better at understanding emotions than any computer in the world, and not think of yourself as gifted, you have a good start on understanding what it's like to feel that it's natural to tinker with your hands, imagine who you're going to be when you grow up, enjoy cooking, and have dreams where your brain creates languages on the fly.

It's a commonplace that the gifted can have a rough time of school. What IMSA does is place the profoundly gifted in the position of fixed pace classes designed for people significantly less intelligent than them.

It's easier to criticize than it is to give a positive alternative; let me give a positive alternative.

First of all, profoundly gifted students can pick things up much more rapidly even than most IMSA students. Something like a factor of four speedup can happen

again and again. Many of these students would tear through textbooks if you let them.

**The Visionary:** But at IMSA we don't dump textbooks on students. We provide an environment where they can discover things for themselves.

**The Alumnus:** They will discover things for themselves. But if you look at learning styles, the profoundly gifted are some of the most able to understand a crystallized abstraction, and the most likely to work ahead in their textbooks.

IMSA may have a dozen or so profoundly gifted individuals at any one time.

**The Visionary:** And we've provided accommodation for a bright sophomore physics class.

**The Alumnus:** Yes, it is possible for students to lobby for accommodation on a specific point.

But it's possible to go further, as IMSA has gone further than TAG pullouts.

There could be a small number of people who serve as tutors, in a sort of tutorial system as can be seen in Oxford's and Cambridge's history. They would be like thesis advisors, less responsible for knowing what the students need to learn than offering direction and referrals.

**The Visionary:** What would you have them do if they tear

through IMSA's curriculum sophomore year?

**The Alumnus:** Students that bright are likely to have their own axes to grind—good axes, axes which they should be encouraged. I really have trouble imagining a student flying through IMSA's normal curriculum and then wanting to watch TV for two years. The problem of motivating these students is like the problem of defending a lion: the first thing is to get out of the way.

The teachers themselves should offer the kind of individualized instruction that is basic to special education, and deal with the "magic powers" that the main curriculum doesn't know how to deal with.

**The Visionary:** Would the teachers have to be profoundly gifted?

**The Alumnus:** I don't know. I would place more emphasis on understanding profoundly gifted students than necessarily being profoundly gifted oneself.

Furthermore, as well as standing in need of conceptual education, profoundly gifted students could benefit from personal development to help them meet the rest of the world. I don't know whether it would be correct to say that average education should be about knowledge, gifted education should be about how to think, and profoundly gifted education should be about personal development. I think the idea is worth considering. And I would try to

develop some things that aren't needed in average education and less needed in moderately gifted education, such as how to bridge the gap and meet the rest of the world.

**The Visionary:** I'll think about that. I would be delighted to say you've shown me how to solve this problem.

**The Alumnus:** I'd be surprised if I've shown you how to solve this problem. If I were asked what I could guarantee for this model, it would be that some part of it is wrong. I would ask you to consider what I've presented you as a rough draft. In my opinion it is a rough draft worth revising, changing course in midstream if need be, but it is a rough draft.

**The Visionary:** This is all very well for office hours, but how do you teach a class? You don't try to individualize a lecture twenty different ways, do you?

**The Alumnus:** I believe what I said about diversity as foundational, but I also believe there are things that are common. I believe there are significant commonalities as well as significant differences.

What would you say is the dominant educational philosophy at IMSA?

**The Visionary:** There are several philosophies we draw on, and several things vary from teacher to teacher. But if I were to pick one school, it would be constructivism.

**The Alumnus:** Does constructivism see the student as an empty pot, to be filled with knowledge?

**The Visionary:** Quite the opposite. Constructivism sees the students as agents, trying to actively construct their models of the world, not as empty pots to be filled, or as formless clay for the teachers to shape. We see the teacher as supporting the student in this active task.

**The Alumnus:** And I agree that students should be active and encouraged by teachers. A related question—do you believe mathematics is something that research mathematicians invent, or something that they find out?

**The Visionary:** Well, the obvious answer would be that it's something constructed.

**The Alumnus:** I disagree with you, at least about the "obvious" part.

**The Visionary:** Then I'll trust your judgment that it's something mathematicians discover. You've probably thought about this a lot more than I have.

**The Alumnus:** You don't need to agree with me here. There are a lot of good mathematicians who believe mathematics is something invented.

**The Visionary:** Are you saying I should believe mathematics is constructed?

**The Alumnus:** No. There are also a lot of mathematicians who understand mathematics and say mathematics is something that's found out.

**The Visionary:** Now I'm having trouble seeing where you're going.

**The Alumnus:** There's a debate among mathematicians as to whether mathematics is invented or discovered, with good mathematicians falling into either camp. The word 'discover' itself is ambiguous; one can say "I discovered the TV remote under the couch" and have "discover" mean "dis-cover" or "find out," but one can also say, "I discovered a way to build a better mousetrap," and have "discover" mean "invent". "Invent" derives from the Latin "invenire," which means "come into", i.e. "find," so that it would be more natural in Latin to say "I just invented my car keys" than "I invented a useful tool."

**The Visionary:** I think I see what you are saying... Are you saying that there is a single reality described both by discovery and invention?

**The Alumnus:** Yes. Now to tie in with constructivism... What are students doing when they are constructing models?

**The Visionary:** They are shaping thought-stuff, for lack of a better term, in a way that's different for each learner.

**The Alumnus:** And this is to break out of the Enlightenment/Diderot encyclopedia mindset which gives rise to stuffing the learner with facts?

**The Visionary:** Absolutely.

**The Alumnus:** Where would you place Kant? Was he a medieval philosopher?

**The Visionary:** He was one of the Enlightenment's greatest philosophers.

**The Alumnus:** And Kant's model of ideas was unchanged from Plato.

**The Visionary:** Um...

**The Alumnus:** Yes?

**The Visionary:** What Plato called "Ideas" and Kant's "ideas" are two different things. For Plato, the Ideas were something strange to us: a reality outside the mind.

**The Alumnus:** Um... Plato and Kant would equally have affirmed the statement, "Ideas are internal."

**The Visionary:** I don't think so. Plato's Allegory of the Cave suggests that the Ideas are part of something that is the same for all people.

**The Alumnus:** If I may digress for a moment, I think that famous passage should be called "the Allegory of the

Television." I appreciate your limiting the place of television at IMSA. But back to the topic, for Plato the Ideas were internal, but were not private.

**The Visionary:** Huh?

**The Alumnus:** Kant was a pivotal figure in our—the Enlightenment's—idea that the only real stuff outside our head is matter. When Kant says "internal," he says "private," and when we say "internal," we say "private." If you think this way, then you believe that thought is something done in a private corner. This privacy may be culturally conditioned, but it is privacy. And yet, however self-evident this seems to us, a great many philosophers and cultures have believed otherwise.

There is a private aspect to thought, but my research into how to think has led me to question the Enlightenment model and believe that we all think on the same contoured surface. We can be on different parts and move in different ways, but in thinking we deal with a reality others deal with as well. And I'm going to sound like a kooky philosopher and say that you have a deficient cosmology, and therefore a deficient corollary understanding of how humans are capable of learning, if you believe that everything is either inside the mind or else something you can kick.

**The Visionary:** But we're questioning the Enlightenment model, and rejecting parts of it that have problems!



**The Alumnus:** I know you are. And I would encourage you to question more of it.

**The Visionary:** How does this belief affect teaching for you?

**The Alumnus:** Most immediately, it helps me say ways to identify with students—connect with their thought. There are some things that pay off long term. But in the short run, when a student makes a mistake, the student is not bad, nor is the mistake is not an anomaly to push away. A mistake is an invaluable opportunity for me to understand how a student is thinking and draw the student to a better understanding.

In terms of base metaphor, if you look at Dewey's foundationalism, what it is that bothers many IMSA teachers and IMSA teachers are working to change, the basic idea is that the teacher is building up knowledge, from its foundations, in the student's mind. If I were to try and capture it in a metaphor, I would say that the student is an empty lot, and the teacher is building a house on it. The teacher is actively doing teaching to the student.

The constructivism that resonates with many IMSA teachers doesn't like the idea of the teacher being active and the student being the passive receptacle of teaching. It's fine for the teacher to be active, but they don't believe the student is passive because they were quite active learners themselves. Constructivist

writers don't refer to 'students' so much as 'learners;' they emphasize that the learner is active. The basic idea is that people are actively trying to build their own unique understandings of the world, and a constructivist teacher is trying to support learners in this endeavor. If foundationalism is crystallized in the image of a teacher building a house on an empty lot, constructivist learning theory is crystallized in the image of learners picking up what they can to build their own private edifices of thought, their interior castles.

**The Visionary:** What do you think of those?

**The Alumnus:** I think we're comparing a hammer with a screwdriver. If you read debate on the web, you'll see people who think constructivism is a hazy and incomprehensibly bad version of foundationalism, and people who think foundationalism is a hazy and incomprehensibly bad version of constructivism. The truth is neither; good foundationalist teaching like Direct Instruction is doing one thing well, and good constructivist learning is doing another thing well, and different people learn differently.

**The Visionary:** But do you have an alternative?

**The Alumnus:** Yes, and it is again suggested by basic metaphor. Instead of building a house, or helping learners construct their private models, I would suggest looking at a single word, *katalabein*. I am using a Greek word without an exact English

equivalent, because it ties together some things that are familiar—part of the shared inner human reality which we can recognize. It can be translated 'overcome' or 'understand', and it provides for a basic metaphor in which what is understood is actively acquired, achieved even, but it is not necessarily idiosyncratic and private. We still have an active learner, and implications for how a teacher can support that active learner...

**The Visionary:** Go on.

**The Alumnus:** But it's different. I was fascinated with one constructivist learning page that recast the teacher as a sort of non-directive counselor. They facilitated learning experiences, but they realized that students came in with beliefs, like "Weeds are not plants because they don't need to be nurtured," and what really fascinated me was that some of them found themselves in an ethical quandary about the appropriateness of using a science class to influence student beliefs, say to agree with a botanist that dandelions are plants.

**The Visionary:** None of the IMSA teachers are *that* squeamish about influencing student beliefs.

**The Alumnus:** One alum made a comment that "looney liberals" seemed to him to offer a similar service to coal miner's canaries. It wouldn't be fair to accuse most liberals of their excesses, but it was still worth keeping an eye on them: they could be a warning that

it was time to rethink basic ideas. Even if those web pages may fall more into the "canary" category than anything else...

**The Visionary:** But what do you have instead of helping students build private world-pictures?

**The Alumnus:** Instead of helping students build private world-pictures, helping students grapple with, in the overcoming that is understanding and the understanding that is overcoming, the *katalabein* of material. And this is material that always has a personal touch, but is understood to be internal in a way that is not simply how one has arbitrarily exercised privacy, but connects with a sort of inner terrain that is as shared as the outer terrain. No two people are at—no two people *can* be at—the exact same place in the external, physical world, nor can two people see the same thing, because their personal bodies get in the way. But that does *not* mean we inhabit our own private physical universes. I can tell you how to drive to my house because to get there, you would be navigating some of the same reality as I navigate. But somehow we believe that our bodies may touch the same doorknobs and our shoes may touch the same carpets... Somehow we believe that when we turn inside, the "reality" becomes impenetrably private, influenced by culture perhaps but shared to so little an extent that no two people shares the same inner sun and moon.

**The Visionary:** But that's the external world! You're not

talking about when people can make up anything they want.

**The Alumnus:** Hmm... As part of your job, you field criticism from people who want IMSA to be shut down, right?

**The Visionary:** Yes.

**The Alumnus:** And a good portion of that criticism comes from people who are *certain* you've never considered the objection they raise, right?

**The Visionary:** You've been reading my mail!

**The Alumnus:** And how many years has it been since one of those letters contained a criticism that was new to you?

**The Visionary:** You've been reading my... um... [pause]  
Wow.

**The Alumnus:** The introduction to the *Handbook of Special Education* tries to make a point by quoting the opening meeting of the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children. The meeting had in all respects a typical (for today) discussion of how one should define special needs children. And the meeting was in 1923. The point was made that special educators assume they're the first people to address new issues, when neither the issues nor their thoughts are new. An old internet denizen, writing about "the September that never ended", talked about

how each year in September new college students would flood newsgroup discussions with "new, new, new" insights that were, in the denizen's words, "exactly the same tripe" that had been posted the previous year.

There is really not that much that is new, and this is tied to another observation. There is really not that much that is private. There is some. Even in the outer world there are some things that are private to each person. But in the inner world—and I am not talking about *your* inner world, or mine, but a real world, *the* inner world, a place that has contours of its own and laws of its own and terrain of its own and substances of its own which are no more the subject of an idiosyncratic private monopoly than the outer world's sun and moon. Perhaps it has a private dimension, but to assume that an inner world is by definition someone's most private possession is almost like answering the remark "The Atlantic Ocean is getting more polluted," with "*Whose* Atlantic Ocean?"

**The Visionary:** Is there a way to integrate the inner world with the outer world?

**The Alumnus:** I am guilty of a rhetorical fault. I have spoken of the outer world as if it were separate from the inner world, and the inner world as if it were separate from the outer world. The real task is not one of integration but desegregation, and that is a lesson I've been wrestling with for years. The biggest lesson I took from my Ph.D. thesis, where I achieved a

fascinating distillation of how to think from learning as we know it, is that how to think cannot be distilled from learning, and learning cannot be distilled from the rest of life. It is all interconnected. It's like a classic plot in fantasy literature where a hero is searching for a legendary treasure, and goes to strange places and passes amazing trials. We're there learning with him, until there is an end where "nothing" happens, but by the time that "nothing" takes place, we've been with the hero all along and we have been transformed just as much as he is, and we see through the "nothing" to recognize the treasure that has been all around the hero—and us—all along.

The real world has an internal and an external dimension, and there is nothing like trying to crystallize purer and purer internal knowledge to see the interpenetration of the internal and the external. I learned that the internal is not self-contained.

**The Visionary:** Is there anything that has been written which deals with this connection?

**The Alumnus:** Are you asking me if you can borrow a truckload of books? There are some cultures where it's hard to find material which *doesn't* relate the connection in some form.

But let me tie this in with education. Postmodernism is fragmented, so much so that postmodern scholars tend to put "postmodern" in ironic quotes and add some qualifier about whether it's even coherent to

talk about such a movement. From the inside, there isn't a single postmodern movement; talking about a postmodern movement is like talking about a herd of housecats. But this is not because talking about being "postmodern" is meaningless; it's because one of the characteristics is fragmentation, and so if there is anything called postmodern, then it will be much more of a grab bag than something called modern.

Constructivism is postmodern, not in that anything called postmodern must resemble it, but because it can be placed on a somewhat ad hoc spectrum. It is internally fragmented, in that it is not helping students navigate *the* world of ideas, but in trying to reckon with learners' development of private models of the world. In typical postmodern fashion, the movement shows exquisite sensitivity to ways in which student constructed models are parochial, and does not inquire into ways in which students may be grappling with something universal. (At best learners' constructs are culturally conditioned.)

In what I am suggesting, learners are active, but students are working with something which is not so much clay to be shaped in the privacy of one's mind. I am aware of the parochial dimension—as a culture, we've been aware of it to death—but I'm trying to look at something we don't pay as much attention to today. I suggest, instead of a basic metaphor of learners constructing their own models, learners struggling to conquer parts of the world of ideas. Conquer means in some sense to appropriate; it means in part what we



mean when we say that a mountain climber physically conquered an ascent and mastered its terrain. And this is not a cookie cutter, but it provides serious place for something that doesn't have soil to root itself in in constructivism.

I suspect that this is a lot less exotic than it sounds. Would you say that IMSA teachers often understand their students?

**The Visionary:** I think they often *try*.

**The Alumnus:** I think they often succeed.

Communication in general draws on being able to identify with the other. It says, "Even if I disagree with you, I understand what it means that you believe differently from what I do." You know what it's like when someone is talking with you and simply cannot identify with where you are coming from. It feels clumsy. Good communicators can identify with other people, and even a partial understanding is much better than no understanding at all.

I think the teachers I had at least showed something wiser than constructivism. Read something like Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and you will see appreciation of incommensurability and a communication divide between opposing camps; unlike the later Kuhn, you will also see that this claim of incommensurability, where opposing sides invariably argue past each other in debates, is applied

to both major and minor paradigm shifts. Now if we look at a constructivist approach, where this kind of thinking is applied to individual peoples' models as well as models that are shared across a camp, then we have an excellent reason not to teach.

We have an excellent reason to say that teachers' and students' models are not only conflicting but incommensurable, that the teacher may have more power but in a fair debate they would argue past each other, and that the basis for the teacher understanding and therefore successfully influencing the student is at very least questionable. In the end, we have something which affects the concept of teaching more profoundly than the observation that students will see things that teachers don't realize. If you look at Kuhn, you will see a remark that the winning side of a scientific paradigm shift will naturally view the shift as progress. This contributes to an account for people thinking science progresses without science actually progressing. Science shifts. But the shift is not a step forward from less developed science to more developed science. It is a step sideways, from one reigning paradigm to another. And in like fashion, if you follow a natural constructivist path, you have an alternative to saying that the teacher knows more about science than the students. The teacher is more powerful, but there is a way out for someone who wants to deny that the teacher has more desirable knowledge that the students should learn. Not only can we argue that "teaching" communication is impossible, but we can

argue that "teaching" communication is undesirable even if it were possible.

**The Visionary:** But that can't be what our teachers believe! You have to be misunderstanding constructivism. That's not how it works out.

**The Alumnus:** I agree with you that that can't be what many IMSA teachers believe. It is only what they say. And what they think they believe.

**The Visionary:** You mean...

**The Alumnus:** Foundationalism is a bad account of how most IMSA teachers learn. They learn actively, and IMSA students learn actively. And constructivism offers a compelling metaphor for active learning. But teachers at IMSA don't believe all its implications. Like the character in a George MacDonald book who was fond of saying, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure," and had married in haste, but hadn't really thought about repenting, even though she'd had plenty of leisure in which to repent. If constructivism may undercut the possibility of communication, and the possibility of the teacher drawing students to join her in expert practice, this is not yet a problem. In practical terms, teachers believe they can communicate, and they have something to share. And they do this. There may be problems where this goes down the road, but in practical terms IMSA teachers live a philosophy with communication that is often excellent.

And, as far as metaphors go, I think that the *katalabein* metaphor offers something valuable that the constructivist metaphor doesn't. In particular, the fact that teachers can communicate, and leave students better off, doesn't just happen to be true; it's something that one can delve into. You don't just take the metaphor into consideration when you communicate on a basis that doesn't come from the model; the metaphor itself gives you a basis to communicate. And it's different enough to compete in an interesting way. Or complement constructivism in an interesting way. Even if it's not perfect.

**The Visionary:** Yes, I know. Do you regret the fact that it's so messy?

**The Alumnus:** I regret the fact that it's not messy enough.

When we describe a rainbow, we say that the colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. But those aren't the colors of the rainbow. If you pick a color at random on the rainbow, there's a zero percent chance that you will exactly pick one of those colors. A rainbow is a spectrum, and if you have a wavelength for each of those colors, you have seven reference points for a spectrum with infinitely many colors. And a reference point can help you understand a spectrum, but a reference point is not a spectrum.

I've done, I think, a decent job of describing one reference point on a spectrum. But teachers rarely follow one educational theory in pure form; they tend

to draw on several, and this is intended not to be a complete theory, but a reference point in a pluralistic theory. Most theories are a single point. This theory is meant to be a spectrum, but isn't there yet.

And as much as a robust theory of education needs to be pluralistic, sensitive to the diversity that is every student, there also needs to be a sensitivity to the diversity of knowledge. English is cursed to only have one word for knowledge.

**The Visionary:** But we have well enough established division of knowledge into subjects. In fact that's what we're trying to teach our students to get past.

**The Alumnus:** That's not quite what I meant.

In most of the languages I know, there's more than one word for knowledge. In French, there is *savoir*, which is the knowledge one has about facts, and *connaissance*, which is the knowledge one has of a person. It's a different kind of thing to know about a fact and to know of a person, and this is reflected in different words. *Conscience* is not simply the French word for conscience; it means consciousness, and some of the more ethereal and personal aspects of knowledge. The Latin *eruditio* and *notitia* have other nuances. In English we do have "wisdom," "knowledge," and "information," which are as different from each other as an apple, an orange, and a pear.

And this is without treating ways of thought. One of the things I learned was that knowledge and ways of thought could be distinguished but not separated. If you look at Eastern ways, whether they are religions like Hinduism or Eastern Orthodoxy, or martial arts like Kuk Sool Won or Ninpo, you will find quite a different pedagogy from what we assume in the West. Instead of trying to open the mind and dump in knowledge, they begin by training the body, in actions, and then this begins to affect the soul and transform the spirit.

**The Visionary:** Isn't constructivism more like that?

**The Alumnus:** It is. But instead of reinventing experiential learning, Eastern ways preserve a Tao, or for a Western word, a matrix. Most recently in the West, *Matrix* is the name of a trilogy where each movie was better than the next. But before that, a matrix was a mathematical construct, and are you familiar with what "matrix" meant before that? It was the Latin word meaning "womb." And this concept of a womb, or a matrix, is something which has become alien to Western thought. A matrix is the medium in which you move, the air in which you breathe. It has the authority of your culture and your mother tongue. It is a very different kind of authority from the authority of a single leader, or a written rule; a matrix does not consciously command you, but provides you with the options which shape your choice. And the Eastern ways all preserve a matrix, a way, that provides their pedagogy. In a sense the difference

between constructivist experiential learning and Eastern experiential learning is the difference between non-native speakers trying to speak a language and a community of native speakers continuing to use their language. Except to make the comparison more fair, constructivists are trying to construct a language, and put together something that works, and Eastern pedagogues have inherited something that works. The difference is kind of like the difference between an experimental kind of baseball glove that someone is trying out and a glove that is not only traditional but already broken in.

**The Visionary:** Um... I'll have to think about what you have said about a "matrix." Ok, you've given me a lot to think about. It would be premature for me to respond now. I'm going to need to think about what you've said. But let me change the subject. What other ideas do you have about teaching, especially concrete ones?

**The Alumnus:** It's a bit like a light—it makes other things easier to see. But let me talk about other ways of teaching, such as listening.

**The Visionary:** I know how you can listen if a student asks a question, but how do you listen when lecturing?

**The Alumnus:** Listening is about trying to understand the other person as a basis for communication. Apart from the feedback that's in student questions—if you

look for it—a person's face is a window to what is going on inside, and a teacher sees student faces frequently. I know the ominous silence when the class is so lost that students are afraid to ask questions. I don't just charge on because it's important to cover the remaining material. I try to stop, back up, and help the students to genuinely understand, and then proceed from genuine understanding. Homework offers implicit feedback on what I succeeded in communicating, and what I did not succeed in. And there's an implicit listening mindset behind trying not to inundate students with too much information at once.

There's a book of little stories, and in one of them, a sage was asked, "What is your name?" He pondered for a moment and said, "My name used to be... Me. But now it's... You." I didn't like that story at first, because I didn't understand it. Now I understand enough of it to see that it has a profound truth. Talking is about "me", and listening is part of a lifelong journey of learning to think in terms of "you." Listening has far more to offer a teacher than a better understanding of student questions.

There are a lot of things I like about how IMSA works—your belief that the needs of the mind cannot be met if the needs of the body are neglected. How this you fit this in with Arbor food service is not clear to me—

**The Visionary:** Thanks, Dear...



**The Alumnus:** Any time. But I really like the understanding you have of the human person as interconnected on multiple levels, including the body and mind. I also take that as axiomatic, and teach so that students will understand concepts and preferably their connections, and many other things. Just as I haven't read what I just said about listening in anything that came out of IMSA, but the teachers I had at IMSA were all examples of good listening.

**The Visionary:** Thank you.

**The Alumnus:** You're welcome.

But another part of the Enlightenment I reject is its depersonalization of knowledge and teaching. Have you read any Polanyi?

**The Visionary:** Not yet. Should I put him on my reading list?

**The Alumnus:** I don't know. He writes hefty, if understandable, material. It takes time to understand him, but he's worth understanding.

Michael Polanyi was a philosopher of science, and his big work was on tacit and personal knowledge. The core idea is that scientific knowledge (I would say knowledge in general) is not a set of dessicated constructs that can be understood without reference to people; it is enfleshed in people who know it. He talked about how competing swimmers inhale a little

more air and exhale a little less, so they always have more air in their lungs and therefore buoyancy than we would, but this knowledge is never thought of in so many words by the coach or by the student who "picks it up" from the coach, wordlessly. I don't know if it's a fair reading to say that the knowledge we can articulate is the just tip of the iceberg, but what I do think is a fair reading is to say that the knowledge we can put into so many words is not the whole picture. I think he would have liked IMSA trying to avoid teachers mindlessly regurgitating material so students can learn to mindlessly regurgitating material.

In tandem with the Enlightenment depersonalization of knowledge, is a depersonalization of the concept of teaching and a teacher. About two thousand years ago, one teacher tried to demote teachers from being human gods (who were superior to everyone else) to being human like the rest of us. Then, in connection with the Enlightenment there came a second demotion. A teacher was no longer someone responsible for initiating those in their care into humanity, but only a part of a person imparting a skill to another partial person.

That is an illusion; no matter how much keep our mouths shut on certain matters, we are humans teaching. The question is not whether or not teachers will be an ethical force; the question is whether, given that teachers will be an ethical force, whether they will be a positive force or a negative force. Because students are affected by what kind of people their

teachers are—as well as what they say—a teacher should try to be a positive force. This means things like a humility that listens and appreciates other people, and caring, and is willing to listen both to "I don't understand partial differentiation," and "I've had a lousy week."

This means that a teacher who sees past the present, and sees students as the concert pianists, research scientists, and ballerinas they can become, will by that very respect help make that potential a reality.

**The Visionary** [looks at watch]: Thank you. I need to be somewhere in a few minutes; do you have any closing comments?

**The Alumnus:** I think that one aspect of how we speak of teaching is unfortunate. We speak of the active teacher who teaches, and the presumably passive student who is taught. Nothing of this manner of speaking suggests a dialog, a two-way street—but if teaching succeeds, it must be because of a cooperation between student and teacher. Even with constructivist understanding of learning, we're just looking at what the teacher can do.

I spend most of my time thinking about how I can see to my end of the partnership, not how students can handle their job. But there is something I would love to say to students, reinforced by a handout, on the first day of class, some toned-down version of:

Steal knowledge.

Prometheus stole fire. Your job is to steal knowledge.

The wrong way to think is that my job is to teach you, and you just sit there and be taught, and after enough teachers have taught you, you'll be educated.

You will get a much better education if you think that whatever I do, however well or poorly I teach, is simply the baseline, and you can start from there and see what you can do to take as much knowledge as you can.

Listening in class and asking questions is one way to steal knowledge. Is there something I said that doesn't quite make sense? If you just let my teaching wash over you, you've missed an opportunity to steal knowledge.

If you listen to my words, that's good. It's even better if you think about why I would say what I am saying. There may be a clue, maybe a little whisper in your intuition that something more is going on than you realize. That is a key that you can use to steal knowledge.

When you read the textbook, it will tell you more if you push it harder. Look at the problems. What are they asking you to know? What are they asking you to think about? There's a powerful clue about what's important and what's going on, if you're adept enough to steal it.

What do I assume about the material? I make assumptions, and some of those are

assumptions I make because of what I know. If you're willing to ask why I assume something, you may steal knowledge of how people think when they understand the material.

My office hours are meant for you. Come in and discuss the material. If I see you make a mistake, that's good. It means you're learning and I have an opportunity to clarify. If you don't understand something, and all of us don't understand things from time to time, it will cost you points to wait until the test to find out that you don't understand it. It won't cost you anything if you come in during my office hours, and I'll be glad you visited. And you might steal some knowledge.

Steal knowledge. There'll be some days when you're a little tired, and you can't look for all the extra knowledge you can steal. That's OK; just try to take the knowledge I clearly set out before you. But steal knowledge when you can.

You've gotten into IMSA, which is one of the best and one of the worst places in the world. Take advantage of opportunity. Learn to steal knowledge. And when you graduate from IMSA... Steal knowledge.

**The Visionary:** I definitely have some food for thought to take into the meeting. Do come and visit again!  
Goodbye!

**The Alumnus:** That I shall. Goodbye!

# **The Hayward Nonstandard Test: An Interesting Failure**

In recent years, I published what I then (and now) consider an interesting test. It was meant to look for indirect signs of profound giftedness. I wrote it with the hope that it would circumvent the ceiling of standard model tests, and I wouldn't have been surprised if it showed a floor above some other tests' ceilings. Let me cite the questions before continuing:

1. Describe who you are, how you see the world, and what your inner world is like.
2. Describe your most impressive and distinctive achievements.
3. Describe your most impressive and distinctive failures.

4. Describe what you hope/wish/want/intend to accomplish with your life. What do you believe you *will* accomplish?
5. What is your educational background? Include out of classroom learning you consider appropriate.
6. What is (are) your domain(s) of desired excellence? What is your work there? What have you achieved? What failures have you experienced?
7. Have you ever had management problems or been fired? If so, describe each time.
8. Describe any unusual or distinctive characteristics of your childhood physiology and physique.
9. What mental health diagnoses and misdiagnoses have been considered for you (that you are comfortable divulging)? Elaborate if desired; if there is information you'd prefer to omit, please say so.
10. What are your interests?
11. On a scale of -1.0 to 1.0, rate yourself on the dimensions of the Myers-Briggs test: E(-1) to I(1), S(-1) to N(1), T(-1) to F(1), P(-1) to J(1). Elaborate if desired.

There are a few ways to take the Myers-Briggs test, one of the cheapest of which is to check out e.g. Kiersey's *Please Understand Me II* from the library; the Kiersey website has assorted information online.

12. What is one of your favorite books? Why? Elaborate.
13. Provide a sample of your best writing.
14. What is one of your most cherished of your creations? Explain. If feasible, include a copy; if not, describe.
15. As a child or youth, what was one inconsistency you observed in the adult world that was painful?
16. Describe, with examples, your sense of humor.
17. Do you fit in (yes/no/question does not admit a yes or no answer for you)? Explain.
18. Provide, and answer, one question that you believe will provide me with deep insight into your intelligence.
19. Write your own short intelligence test.
20. What else can you say to provide me with evidence of your intelligence?

Richard Feynmann's "Cargo Cult Science" address talks about the need to publicize failed experiments as well as successes. I am publishing results, not to claim a new success, but because in its failure it may be interesting. Someone else may find a refinement of the idea that works, or other lessons may be taken from its failure. This seems to be an interesting failure.

I received responses from four men, whom I will call



Adam, Brandon, Charles, and David. I opened and read them at the same time to limit bias. Adam seemed gifted, around the top of the range of "optimum intelligence" where you have a definite advantage over others but aren't so different that it starts to really hurt. Brandon seemed just over the edge; I hesitated in comparing them and finally placed Brandon slightly above Adam. Charles showed signs of real giftedness; earlier in life he had effectively solved a problem that it originally took Euler to solve. Charles struck me as profoundly gifted. Finally, if Charles showed brilliant complexity, David showed a simplicity on the other side of complexity. ("I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I'd give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.") In my notes, I compared his communication to how Richard Feynman closed the O-ring debate: "Feynmann, after people enquiring into the Challenger disaster had spent days arguing whether it was too cold for the O-rings, took an O-ring, swirled it around in his icewater, and pinched it, snapping it." David struck me as not only profoundly gifted but at a higher plateau than Charles's dazzling performance. Trying to describe the spread, I said that if the lowest score were a 1 and the highest were an 8, then I would give Adam 1, Brandon 2, Charles 6, and David 8. (I guessed numbers at 150, 155, 165, and 185; I intentionally did not reconcile these two sets of numbers.) Then I opened their prior test scores.

Charles had scores of 140-151, which I regarded as ceiling scores which did not provide useful information beyond being ceiling scores. Adam, Brandon, and David had highest prior scores of 168, 172, and 174 respectively. (I am inclined to lend more credence to the higher scores as it is more plausible to say that someone properly rated around

170 hit his head on the ceiling and scored around 130 than someone properly rated at 130 accidentally obtained a score around 170. I acknowledge that this could inflate my estimates.) After an hour or so of trying to convince myself I could interpret their scores so that they would say my test worked, I realised that my test found a significant difference where none was independently verified. Adam, Brandon, and David had highest scores well within measurement error of each other. Furthermore, Adam had consistently high scores: his lowest score was 156, while no one else had two scores above 155. Comparing with previous data, there was no positive correlation to prior test scores, and the person who looked best from previous scores was the person I'd ranked the lowest.

This does not necessarily mean my test is invalid. Four responses, three of which were within measurement error of each other, do not a norming make. Given that responses had appeared at a rate of about one per year, it's not clear how long it would take to obtain a basis for a solid anchor norming, and if I would still be alive when enough responses had been completed. I opened the responses more on an intuition than anything else, and what I have is not a norming but an understanding of why it might not have been helpful to wait for enough responses for a norming. Furthermore, the fact that previous test data does not distinguish between them does *not* mean that they are at the same level. All four normees are bright enough to get ceiling scores on standardized tests. That leaves open the possibility of significant differences between them, including the possibility that Charles and David are appreciably brighter than Adam and Brandon. However, I am speaking about what is possible and not about claims

that my results support. My results do not say anything positive about my ability to discriminate between responses. If there is anything interesting obtained from my test, it is not between responses but the fact that people responded at all. My website, [CJSHayward.com](http://CJSHayward.com), averages between 500 and 1000 unique visitors per day, with an average of two people reading the test per day. Only four people responded in three years, with all of the normees being brilliant. That seems significant, and I'm not sure what all it means. Apart from that, no ability to discriminate usefully between scores has been established in the usual fashion.

## Summary of Responses

I would like to briefly describe the responses I received, both to provide an overall picture and to describe what I would single out in my evaluation. Here and elsewhere in the evaluation, I am intentionally using vague and generic descriptions rather than ones that are detailed and specific. This impoverishes the writing and gives a less valuable analysis, but I want to be cautious about confidence, and I expect that some of the people reading this will be quite good at connecting dots.

### Adam

Adam's response was three pages long, seemed candid (as did the others), and included achievements at state level. His responses answered the questions, but did not have the florid, ornate, wheels within wheels quality I associate with someone brilliant who is speaking on a topic he finds interesting. The content of his responses strikes me

as reflecting more intelligence than the writing style: it was well-written, but did not reflect the "mental overflow" I was looking for. His list of interests was relatively short (twelve), and included a few items that do not specifically reflect intelligence. Several of his choices suggest noteworthy social maturity; this, combined with my losing track of how he opened his responses, led me to assume that he was more gifted than profoundly gifted.

## Brandon

Brandon's response was also three pages long, and showed the pain of the social disconnect which many profoundly gifted experience. His list of interests was also short, but the activities themselves more distinctively suggest high intelligence. His general approach, in particular to society and authority, shows many of the signature traits David Kiersey (*Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence*, Buffalo: Prometheus, 1998) describes in profiling the NT "rational" temperament. (Three out of the four normees were NTs, and all of them were strongly intuitive.) He also has an uncanny knack for guessing certain kinds of information—which is an anomaly that I'm not sure what to do with. The examples, however, did not leave me wanting attack the anomaly by pointing him to Thomas Gilovich's *How We Know What Isn't So* (New York: Free Press reprint, 1993). He showed a desire to use his mind to transform society that seems to be common among very bright people.

## Charles

Charles's response was twenty-seven pages of wheels

within wheels. From the first page I was met with nuance that let me know I hadn't taken everything in on the first reading, despite it being well-written. He claimed not to have any distinctive achievements. This modest remark was followed by no fewer than eight pages of dense summaries of some of his theories. These theories were subtle. They had a logical and scientific character and a spark of something interesting that stretches outside the bounds of science. He used a nonstandard format that made their logical structure clearer—successfully modifying a familiar format to make an unfamiliar format that works better, which is difficult. In the pages of his response I met an edifice of thought which impressed me and which I knew I didn't understand. (I say this as someone who has put a lot of effort into understanding other people's belief systems.) His response to that question reminds me of a passage in my current novel:

The woman looked at me briefly. "What languages do you know?"

If anything, I sank further back into my chair. I wished the question would go away. When she continued to listen, I waited for sluggish thoughts to congeal. "I... Fish, Shroud, Inscription, and Shadow are all spoken around my island, and I speak all of them well. I speak Starlight badly, despite the fact that they trade with our village frequently. I do not speak Stream well at all, even though it is known to many races of voyagers. I once translated a book from Boulder to Pedestal, although that is hardly to be reckoned: it was obscure and technical, and it has nothing of the invisible subtlety of 'common'

conversation. You know how—"

The man said, "Yes; something highly technical in a matter you understand is always easier to translate than children's talk. Go on."

"And—I created a special purpose language," I said, "to try to help a child who couldn't speak. I did my best, but it didn't work. I still don't understand why not. And I—" I tried to think, to remember if there were any languages I had omitted. Nothing returned to my mind.

I looked down and closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm not very good with languages."

Charles listed approximately fifty different interests—which is less significant than it sounds, as he broke his interests down in more detail than the other normees, but the detailed breakdown strikes me as significant independent of its content. He was the one normee who answered the Myers-Briggs question in the mathematical format requested—which does not mean that he is the only normee who could do that task, but may suggest that he was the one person who didn't take a shortcut by "just using adjectives". I wrote the test to listen for a certain accent in how people respond, and his sense of humor showed that accent loud and strong.

He wrote a complete test which seemed to have a low ceiling, but was polished enough that I wouldn't be surprised to see something similar on the web, and he showed self-criticism in writing the test, acknowledging that it was culture-biased. The completeness and level of polish for that answer caught me off guard.

I was looking to be surprised in a certain way, and for

reasons discussed above Charles gave me the kind of surprises I was looking for.

## David

David's response was twenty pages. He provided an extended writing sample, and (to my surprise) a complete transcript of grades from childhood. His answers were by far the most polished; they give the impression of finding, out of a large space of things that could be said, a microcosmic gem that encapsulates the whole space. Most of his responses were short; the twenty pages stem from the length of his answers to a small number of questions.

Question 11, requesting Myers-Briggs personality type, contained a hidden question. I was interested in Myers-Briggs type, but most interested in whether the normee would question the test or talk about not fitting in the frame the Myers-Briggs test provides. David told his type en route to making a dismissive remark about the test. In other words, he was the one respondent who questioned the test. The most cherished creation he gave was one that showed a certain kind of mental fireworks, reminiscent of the dialogues in Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books reprint, 1999).

David also surprised me, and I heard an accent of brilliance.

## Interesting Features

What are the distinctive features of my test? I would like to describe them below.

## **Emphasis on Tacit Knowing**

The way Western culture is shaped means that psychology tries to know its subject-matter with the same kind of knowing as physics has of its subject-matter, in other words I-It rather than I-Thou knowing that is depersonalised and banishes tacit knowing as far as possible. (Banishing anthropomorphism is appropriate when you're studying rocks. It's more debatable in trying to understand people.) When I was thinking about how to write up the experiment, before I looked at prior scores, one of the things I intended to compare was writing samples. Brandon offered a clever placeholder in place of a "real" composition. Adam provided some poetry that reminded me of fifth grade English reading; I objectively recognized quality but felt no subjective emotional response. Charles provided poetry that I wasn't sure I understood but none the less felt like something powerful was washing over me, and I was sorry when it ended. David sent a fiction excerpt that filled me with despair. The tone of the writing was not despairing; I felt the despair of being shown writing so perfect that I despaired of ever attaining that standard.

Why am I talking about my subjective emotional reactions instead of objective assessment? That is why I chose this specific example, instead of examples of thought that would have more to justify them from the framework that understands knowledge in depersonalized and objective terms. I choose it because I paid attention to subjective emotional reactions. I believe that they are tied to tacit and personal ways of knowing: I experienced subjective emotional reactions because I was responding to different pieces of writing that were not of the same quality.



Subjective emotional response is one of several things that can be a cue worth listening to.

(I am intentionally keeping the philosophy brief; the philosophical dimension involved in this topic is one that admits very long discussion.)

## **Listening for an Accent**

In most tests, there is a suite of questions meant to map out where a person's intelligence breaks down, and scoring is how many points total are earned. In this test, the questions do not represent a direct attempt to present difficulty in answering. The intent is rather to obtain a composite picture, and shed indirect light on how bright a person is. The assumption is that different levels of giftedness will leave a definite mark on a person, and that that definite mark is discernible through understanding the person. For one example, above a certain level, a person is so different from the majority of people that there is a social disconnect; children above IQ 170 tend to feel that they don't fit in *anywhere*. That kind of social disconnect was clearly discernible in all but one of the responses; Brandon clearly articulated it.

To some extent, that is corroborated by the data. I identified all of the normees as significantly gifted—which I had no reason to anticipate. The first norming of the Mega test had fewer than 10% of normees successfully answer any of the questions. (People who are emotionally insecure often attempt difficult tests to get an answer that may feel special; as the number of emotionally insecure people vastly outweighs the number of people at that level of giftedness, they "should" have been a small minority.) So I was able to recognize giftedness in all of the normees when I was not

expecting it. That stated, the evidence does not warrant the conclusion that my test usefully discriminates among the normees.

## **Problems with the Norming and Test**

As this test, or at least this norming, has been a failure, it's worth paying attention to what went wrong.

### **Pool of Normees**

I have not done any real statistical analysis because there is no basis for analysis, and the statistics would only give a more precise quantification to the statement, "The measurement error exceeds the difference measured." Even if the four normees represented an optimal 120-140-160-180 spread, four points would be questionable. As is, the only conclusion I can confidently claim from prior test data is that all of the normees are at or above standardized test ceilings. In other words, data from previous tests do not provide a basis to claim that my test discriminates (and what correlation exists is negative).

### **Two Dimensions Flattened Into One**

Giftedness affects personality, but it is inadequate to simply say, "Giftedness is personality." There is diversity at each stratum of giftedness, and the normee pool did not permit the kind of two-dimensional analysis that would be needed to properly interpret responses (if there is a proper interpretation to be had).

## **An Invasive Test**

This test is invasive. It's painful and offensive. There is probably a way to attempt a similar operation much more gently and delicately. My guess is that this, more than anything else, is why I only had four responses in three years. If this principle were put to serious use, it would have to be rethought so that it went about its aims with a far defer touch. (Or perhaps just remove certain questions.)

One question which I wonder is whether this offensiveness, which is partly an unedited form of giftedness, was the main reason why only brilliant men responded. The test's form may have been a powerful selector. So it would have put most people off. But that is not the whole story. Keep in mind that "reading" on a conscious or unconscious level is a two-way street, and the test reveals something significant about me as well as requesting revelation of the normee. A few very bright people, however, might be bothered by the invasiveness, but they recognize and respond to a voice that feels like home. It connects. That, at least, is speculation which seems plausible, but which I don't see how to support without writing a gentler test.

## **Not Personal Enough**

In one sense, this test was personal, too personal—it probed bluntly into things that are not polite to ask. In another sense, though, it related to the normees as objects to be studied, trying to dissect them as people but still dissecting them. It moves partway from I-It to I-Thou, but I believe it is possible to have a fuller I-Thou knowing, although I don't know what a fully I-Thou approach would

be like. It could be argued that the questions are offensive because the test was not personal enough. In other words, the test reflected an attempt to understand people but not in a personal way. Furthermore, some of the philosophical merits to a personal approach may bear fruit if there were a more genuinely personal approach.

## **Lack of Checks**

The attempt to be objective tries to strip out everything subjective as a means to strip out subjective bias. Ideally one would want to allow subjective strengths while using another form of rigor to mitigate subjective bias, but I am not sure what that other and more difficult rigor would be; I have not solved that problem.

I requested responses to questions and personal information separately, so I wouldn't know whose material I was working with until after I had ranked the results. There was one normee for whom this attempted anonymization failed—David, whom I know and I hold in awe. I'd like to say that I didn't let this influence my estimation, but that's not true. As it is now, Adam's responses struck me as simple because it seemed what he was saying wasn't very big, and David's responses struck me as simplicity on the other side of complexity—something big in an elegant nutshell. Charles's responses struck me as complex, in other words as simply being big. I'd like to say that I was unbiased, and I didn't think "David answered, and I'm terribly impressed with him, so I'll put him highest," but I simply followed the argument where it led. I'd like to say that, but I can't. Maybe I should have ranked Charles highest. I'm vulnerable to accusation of bias at least here. And this kind of bias may be present in the attempt to understand another person—

recognition is a risk.

## **Book Knowledge that Didn't Pan Out**

There's a reason why I asked about people's worst failures, and it's not because I like making people squirm.

Howard Gardner's *Extraordinary Minds* (New York: Basic Books reprint, 1998) is a multiple intelligence treatment of genius. One of the points that he talked about was failure—experiencing failures and being spurred on by them (120-123). Because of this, I was hoping to see discussion of trying and failing and trying and failing and trying and failing—like Edison's numerous failures en route to inventing a working light bulb. I believed that genius and those approaching genius not only are not immune to failure, but fail more often and more significantly than the vast majority of human beings.

This is a nice theory, and it may well be true, but the question based on it did not obtain informative answers for this purpose. I was expecting for normees at this level to see different degrees of failing in courageous projects (and in less glorious matters); I would not want to divulge what the normees shared, but if they did experience this pattern of life, I did not discern it in the replies. (This question should probably be removed in derivative work; the offensive questions seem less informative than I had expected.)

Another question was related to Leta Stetter Hollingworth's *Children Above 180 IQ: Stanford-Binet Origin and Development* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), in which Hollingworth claims that the children she studied were significantly above average size and weight for their age. I thought that the brighter respondents would share this distinctive physique. Only Brandon mentioned something

along these lines, which means it might be useful as one piece of a large puzzle, but it was not the predictor I'd hoped. (There were other questions motivated by similar concerns.)

## **A Successful Failure?**

This test is a failure, or at very least my attempt to norm this test is a failure. Out of an estimated two thousand people that were aware of the test, only four responded, and the result is a statistically insignificant and negative correlation. I underestimated Adam in particular; if there is a lesson to be drawn from him, it is that it is possible to be brilliant while showing relatively few of the indirect traits this test sought to identify.

I was not looking forward to the prospect of writing delicate responses to a majority of normees who were insecure and of normal intelligence, and would approach difficult tests to have a big number that will make them feel OK about being human. That this did not happen touches on two reasons why I consider this an interesting failure:

1. Only brilliant normees responded. Therefore, while demonstrated ability to discriminate between answers is nonexistent, the fact of responding to the test is highly significant. There is an implicit hidden question: not, "What traits will distinguish your response?" but "Will you respond at all?"
2. I correctly identified all the respondents as significantly gifted. The lowest estimate I gave was a three sigma score. In other words, I correctly

identified all respondents as being at or above the 99.9<sup>th</sup> percentile, even though this was contrary to my expectations.

This is also an interesting failure in that it attempts an inquiry that is based on a different principle. If it were not for confidence issues, I would likely publish the responses so that specific questions could be analyzed. It may be possible to make a hybrid test that combines traditional high-ceiling tests with this basic approach. The two approaches could be complementary.

Given that this is a first try, it may be better to label this approach as "Hasn't succeeded yet" than "Has failed." It would be surprising if this kind of distinctive approach succeeded on the first try. Furthermore, the way this norming failed suggests there's something in the approach.

There are several philosophical questions which admit interesting discussion. One of the more interesting questions is what alternatives to dealing with subjective bias exist besides trying to exclude *all* subjective elements (officially, at least: I suspect that good "objective" judgment has drawn on subjective strengths all along). Most of the philosophical aspects mentioned merit further inquiry.

I believe that Charlie and David are at a higher plateau than Adam and Brandon; data from other tests does not discriminate from them, but I have priveleged external information that would place David above Adam. If they were to contact a third party who could corroborate that Adam and Brandon are at one high plateau and Charlie and David at a higher plateau, that would be reason to take a second look at the results.

I believe that the responses give a much richer picture

of the person than a standard test. Someone, instead of asking, "Does this compete with traditional tests?" might ask, "What interesting data does this give that traditional tests don't?"

So this test is a failure, but an interesting failure, and perhaps even a successful failure.



# The Way I Think

## Introduction: Why I Am Writing

Miyamoto Musashi, 1584-1645, was the greatest swordsman in Japanese history, perhaps in world history. A few weeks before his death, he left behind a book to one of his pupils, entitled, *A Book of Five Rings*. That book is now *the* canonical work on martial arts strategy.

Musashi writes in a way that is cryptic and deliberately designed to be obscure; the book is not a work for everyone. *A Book of Five Rings* is, however, a very deep book; it goes beyond details of technique to describing the warrior's *do*, something of sufficient profundity and applicability to be of far broader use than just martial arts. The book is used by many businessmen who have no direct interest in martial arts.

The Japanese word *do*, from the Chinese word *Tao*, is traditionally rendered as 'way' or 'Way'. A case could also be made for translating it as 'profession', 'religion', 'culture', 'art', 'manner of living', or '*logos*' (as in bio-logy, theo-logy,

geo-logy — these words mean the *logia* of life, God, and stones, respectively). It is one of those deep, rich words which is not too readily translated, but can be understood.

As I was reading from the *Five Rings* recently, I began to think of writing a response to Musashi. What kind of response? I was first thinking of something like a rebuttal, but that upon further reflection seemed inadequate. Then I came to a more nuanced understanding of what kind of response would be appropriate. Musashi describes a particular flavor of the warrior's Way. The response I thought of was to describe the way I walk, the way I think, the way I learn. (Don't worry if you haven't read Musashi — this document is sufficiently different that one could read it without realizing that its initial conception was as a response to Musashi.)

This book is intended for two audiences. One is for young people adults reading for themselves; the other is for parents reading for input in the formation, education, and guidance of their children. I hope that both may profit from it.

I have some hesitations in writing this. In some sense, writing a book like this could be construed as a claim to be a giant equal to Musashi. I don't want that. Another doubt may be expressed by saying that I have not in an obvious sense fashioned or followed a distinctive Way (comparable to what Musashi did) that would justify writing a book. Someone with a mind to do so could probably think of other, more pungent reasons why this book should not be written or read. With all of these doubts taken into account, I remembered thinking at a previous time that I wished some people whom I intellectually respect would leave behind a book on how they think — but most of them didn't.

Theophane the Monk, in *Tales of a Magic Monastery*, tells the following story (partly paraphrased):

*The Well*

Up there everyone gets what he asks for. I came there a wounded man, sorely hurt by my brothers. So I said, "Solitude!"

Wonderful, for a time. But then I began to think about the life and example of Christ. Was it really right, I wondered, to spend so much time by myself? So I shouted, "Community!"

Wonderful again. I asked for this thing and that, and at one point I got so distressed that I said, "Death!"

Aah, what a relief. No more striving, no more pain. But then I began to want life again — if you're alive, you can at least move around. If you're dead, you're just — dead.

But I couldn't go up to the Well, and no one would go up for me. They just passed me by. How could they be so thoughtless? How could they be so cruel?

Finally, someone said it. "Life for my brother!" he said into the Well. And I was alive, gloriously alive.

I wanted to meet him, to thank him. So I went around and asked, "Did you see the one who called into the Well and gave me life?" The replies came: "Nobody does that!" "You call down into the well for yourself, not for someone else. I went searching, searching, long and hard before it occurred to me that someone else might want to be brought back to life. So I ran back to the well, and shouted, "Life for my

brothers and my sisters!"

There, reflected in the waters at the base of the well, I saw the face of the one who had called me back from the dead.

I write in the hope that perhaps, in these pages, I will encounter the book that I wished others had written.

## **Preface: Intelligence and Audience**

This writing represents in one sense a departure from most of what I write. Most of what I write is intended for a general audience; parts might be better understood by someone who's bright and knows a lot, but it is written in the hope that almost anyone who would want to read it would learn at least something from it. This writing is not. It is intended for a small minority of readers with special needs, and (after having set down the project) I am picking it up again with one specific person in mind, a person whom I am mentoring. Anyone is welcome to read it — I am not trying to write a Nag Hammandi library of Gnostic apocrypha, and any reader is welcome to take whatever of value he may learn from such a writing — but this is written for a group of people who think and learn very, very differently from the mainstream.

The specific minority I am writing for — and many of you may not know who you are; if you're in this minority, you've probably gotten mediocre or lower grades, possibly had people comment on how stupid you are, and almost certainly have dealt with labels such as 'odd' and 'underachiever' — are the astronomically intelligent. As I

write, I am probably causing a degree of culture shock, in that your intelligence is in American culture treated like a social disease, in that it's not one of the things you talk about in polite company. Why am I writing about this, if smart people are better than average at figuring things out and the smartest should least of all need a book to congratulate them on how smart they are? Well, the perspective embodied in that question embodies a few problems, and a proper answer to that question would fill a book. (An excellent one has been written, incidentally, entitled *Guiding the Gifted Child*, by James T. Webb, Elizabeth A. Meckstroth, and Stephanie S. Tolen. The book is a lot broader than its title might suggest, and it is well worth reading by any gifted adult who does not have a thorough grounding in the issues surrounding giftedness.) I would like to offer a brief synopsis of an answer. To wit:

First, there has been posited a range of optimum intelligence — IQ scores (which I would take as a quick and dirty approximation, a rough gauge of intelligence that's usually right — most definitely *not* an absolute and perfect evaluation of every aspect of human intelligence) in the range of 125-145 between which people are smart and function well in society. Beyond that, there come certain difficulties in adaptation — roughly, the same sort of problems which would be faced by a person of average intelligence growing up in a world of people where most individuals had an IQ in the range of 55-60. There are frustrations which come when, for example, the adults who you look up to seem incapable of perceiving what appears obvious to you. Furthermore, the higher IQ scores go, the more a person ceases to have simply *more* of the intelligence most people possess, and instead has a different

*kind* of intelligence than most people possess. For example, speaking within America, you might say that a person of IQ 100 possesses a reasonable command of the English language, a person of IQ 130 possesses a very good command of the English language, and a person of IQ 160 possesses a stellar command of French alongside a halting command of the English language. Can you see how this would cause problems? People with an IQ of 170+ tend to feel that they don't fit in *anywhere*. (I might only half-jokingly suggest that Michael Valentine Smith in Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, given his apparent IQ range, would almost as much have been a stranger in a strange land had he been raised on Earth instead of Mars.) (Second note: One of the signs that suggests a child might be rather bright is an unusual sense of humor. *Guiding the Gifted Child* opened, very appropriately in my estimation, by telling of a nine year old girl who was asked, "What is the difference between a fish and a submarine?" and thought a moment before answering, "A submarine has lettuce, tomato, and mayonnaise, while a fish only has tartar sauce.") Exceptional intelligence brings with it significant difficulties in adaptation, and on that score I would commend the absolutely brilliant portrayal of an astronomically intelligent six year old boy in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*.

This book is written to a special needs population with a legitimate distinguishing feature — and it is written to provide something that those special needs people won't get in a world that is geared without particularly much consideration for their needs.

In talking about the difficulties faced by brilliant minds in education, one person made an analogy with a track that

has markings on it for where to put your feet in order to run. This structure is useful and beneficial for the vast majority of students, who can barely walk, and need great assistance in the difficult task of running. Suppose, though, that a natural athlete comes along with running in his bones. If he is just placed on a track and allowed to run, he will do so. If, however, he is made to slow down and put his feet exactly along the markings, it will severely disrupt his rhythm. He will trip, he will fall down, and people who are watching him will think he has no talent whatsoever. This is why, for instance, Einstein failed at math and was told by his teacher that he would never be any good at it.

This is a book written about the way I have discovered to run, written in the hope that someone will read it and learn to fly.

## **Chapter 1: Basic Talent**

If you want to know how bright or how stupid I am, look around my website.

The basic talent is a given that other things I am suggesting may work with. Or in other words, there are some things I offer suggestions for; there are others I cannot change in others or in myself.

## **Chapter 2: Christianity**

Here I would like to begin properly an explanation of the way I think. As with many things, I have hesitations; in this case, I fear making Christianity a mere means to the end of thinking well, and telling people, "You might want to become a Christian in order to think better." That would be a bit like making friends with a rich person so he will give

you some of his money; there is something perverse, and one might ask whether someone who becomes a friend in order to obtain money is really a friend at all.

That stated, I wish to go ahead, and say that Christianity is the fertile soil in which my way of thinking grows. I am not enough of a historian to fully trace how and why; others (i.e. Whitehead) have argued strongly that Western science exists only because of medieval Christianity and in particular a belief in a rational God who would make a rationally comprehensible universe. My work and endeavor can no more be understood in the absence of consideration that I am a Christian than can that of Thomas Aquinas or any lesser figure whose name does not come to my mind.

In the course of reading the Bible cover to cover somewhere over half a dozen times (I've lost count exactly, and there are many passages I've read more than that), I have come to encounter a rich preparation that was in itself as rich as a liberal arts education — or, now that I think about it, significantly better, because a brilliant student will not be bumping his head on the ceiling with the Bible the same way he will at almost any liberal arts school. I don't mean to downplay liberal arts education, in which I am a firm believer, but being a Christian — one who accepts God's grace, takes Christian faith seriously, and endeavors to love God with all of his mind — is the base without which I could not have come to any of the rest of this.

The popular stereotype of Christianity is, in Jesse Ventura's words, a sham and a crutch for the weak minded. It certainly can be that, or anything else one cares to cut it down to (justification for slavery, apartheid, and other institutionalized sin comes readily to mind), but it can also



be infinitely more. Christian thought has a power and clarity to it that I have never seen elsewhere (though Hinduism would be a decent competitor; G.K. Chesterton commented that, if you're going to look at world religions, you will save yourself a great deal of time if you only consider Christianity and Hinduism). I certainly haven't found such clarity and lucidity in contemporary Western philosophy. I know that that many who try to be free thinkers find nuanced thought in postmodernism and backwards parochialism in traditional Christianity, but the more I've considered it, the more I think that is suspect.

## **Chapter 3: Mathematics, Theology, and Philosophy**

If the study of mathematics provides the preparation of how to think, the study of theology and philosophy provides the conceptual basis for what to think with. Enlightenment nonsense notwithstanding, I do separate the two disciplines, but treat them as loci on a continuum that can never be separated. Theological claims have philosophical implications, and philosophical claims have theological implications. (Psychology might helpfully be added, but I will not treat it here). Theology and philosophy are two ends of a stick — if you pick up one, you pick up the other. Trying to do (especially) philosophy without regard to theological implications is a recipe for disaster, like swinging around a baseball bat and watching where the handle goes but not the end.

There is a reason why the highest level of education in most disciplines bears the title of *philosophia doctor*. The medieval conception of philosophy included all of our

academic disciplines; if a person can broadly pursue *philosophia*, the love of wisdom under the somewhat freer definitions it enjoyed in the past, he will be in a good position.

## Chapter 4: Intuition

Our present educational system does at least a crude job of teaching logical reasoning skills, but doesn't even mention intuition unless you get off the beaten path. Most people seem to like to either classify logic as solid and intuition as belonging in the same place as pseudo-science (Intuition, n. An uncanny sense that you're right, whether or not you actually are), or talk about how logic is this slow, plodding process and intuition has wings. I would prefer to say that the two faculties are good partners who complement each other and work well in tandem.

How do you gain intuitive acuity? Fortunately, it's easier than honing your logical abilities. You pay attention to your gut feeling, and do what it says unless you have good reason not to; over time, your intuition will become trustworthy. I know it seems like something more complex is in order, but that's it.

## Chapter 5: You Must Study the Ways of All Professions

Miyamoto Musashi wrote in *A Book of Five Rings*, "You must study the ways of all professions." That sentence *alone* is worth buying and reading the book. It is exactly what Musashi did; at points, he compares swordplay to building a house, and he left behind a variety of artistic creations.

I am a firm believer in a liberal arts education, and something broader even, working as a camp counselor or even working as a salesman at Wal-Mart. Being an eclectic is very good; reading an incredibly diverse collection is good, and reading books like those in my annotated bibliography is a good start. A great breadth of background gives flexibility to the mind, and speed in adapting to new situations. The Army once did a study of who makes the best minesweepers, and they found that the best candidate is an intelligent soldier with a lot of hobbies who moves slowly. Even if the hobbies were nothing like minesweeping, they gave a flexibility of mind that functioned well in a new context.

A diversity of experiences complements focused mathematics in helping you learn how to think.

## **Chapter 6: High Commitment/Low Commitment, White Box/Black Box, Outside the Box/Inside the Box**

In martial arts, there is a distinction made between high and low commitment styles. A high commitment art puts your full oomph into an action; a low commitment art holds back, and tries to keep options open. High commitment favors decisiveness; low commitment favors freedom. A high commitment blow does more damage, but a low commitment martial artist can more easily recover from a mistake. This distinction has application far beyond martial arts.

In software engineering, white box testing is testing that

lets you see what's going on inside a program, while black box testing is testing that doesn't see what's inside — just what a program is given as input, and what it does as output. (The box is dark inside; you can't see anything.) From this distinction comes thinking about an object in terms of what it is, and what it does. The TV show MacGyver showed a character who knew how to look about what an object is; when he needed to do some climbing, he looked at a garden hose and a rake and did not just see "Means of transporting water" and "means of loosening surface of ground;" he saw, "flexible, hollow tube" and "short wooden pole with pronged iron attachment", and unscrewed the head of the rake, screwed it onto the end of the hose, and used it as a rope and grappling hook.

I think most readers should be familiar with the concept of thinking outside the box, which is as of my present writing a cliché and a fad, so I will not repeat the chorus of "think outside the box." What I will say is that most brilliant minds need to learn to think *inside* the box. In chess, which I am learning, there are a number of ways in which I naturally think outside the box. I ask what it would be like if I could move my queen like a knight as well, or if I could take two moves. This kind of thinking could perhaps be incorporated into a really cool metagame, perhaps at best a Mao of board games, but it is not helping me to play chess. To learn to play chess, I need to think inside the box, and only make legal moves that appear to move me closer to checkmating my opponent.

Which of these do I favor? In all three cases, I favor and encourage a proficiency in both ways of thinking, and a fluidity in moving between them as is appropriate to the context. I also favor metacognition: evaluating and

changing the way one thinks. But I'll leave that for a different chapter.

## Chapter 7: Experience and Inexperience, Youth and Age

Experience is venerated in our society, if not the age by which one acquires it; I would like to suggest that inexperience has definite and overlooked merits as well. Nearly all major scientific discoveries were made by inexperienced scientists — that is to say, people who were learning their disciplines and had not yet assimilated its blind spots. In gaining experience, one learns to see certain things, but also not to see certain things; one involuntarily shuts out a great many bad things, and a few greatly good things. Zen talks about having a beginner's mind.

There are cognitive differences between children and adults, and between a young adult and an older one. Average children are far more creative than talented adult engineers; children are novices *par excellence*. They haven't learned an adult way of seeing things.

As per the attitude of the previous chapter, I do not advocate functioning in one of these modes, although I have spelled out the virtue of inexperience and the problem of experience as these are less well-known than their counterparts. What I do advocate is a fluidity in moving between them — and in the last case, not just between child and adult, but in the range between child and senior. The present grandmaster of ninjutsu wrote that life begins at 70; although this book is primarily written for young people (primarily because they are at a point of being able to choose how a greater portion of their lives will go, and are

less set in their ways), there is a great deal to be said for seniority. There is real truth in the image of the old, wise man.

## Chapter 8: Cultures and Different Temporal Ages

I don't experience culture shock in the usual sense. When I began crossing cultures, I braced myself against culture shock, and was underwhelmed. I didn't find the other cultures to be any goofier than my own. Depending on how you look at it, I either never experience culture shock, or always experience culture shock.

I strive to be in this world but not of it in a religious sense; there is also a secular sense in which I am in this world but not of it. I don't perfectly fit in any of the cultures I've encountered.

C.S. Lewis said, "The traveller has lived in many villages, and is therefore rendered to some extent immune to the errors of his own local village. The scholar has lived in many times, and is therefore rendered partially immune to the great spout of nonsense that flows from his and every age." As per Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, each culture is a cave as in Plato's allegory; he says that moving to another cave does not allow one to see the sun, but I would suggest that having a variety of differing mistranslations of a particular text will permit one to tentatively understand the original better than if one only has one mistranslation. Therefore I recommend exposing yourself to different cultures and ages. Travel and live abroad, if you can. Read works such as medieval romances and the *Tao Te Ching*.

I would like to issue a note about multi-culturalism. What I am advocating here is worthy, in my eyes, of the title of 'multi-culturalism'. Most of what goes under that rubbish is not. Current multi-culturalism gives much too brief of a contact with a culture to learn anything worth learning; it's kind of like Monty Python's competition to see who can provide the best 15-second explanation of the works of Proust. It is more informative to say, "This doesn't work," which is exactly what was done by announcing an award to "the girl with the biggest tits." I am much happier to have lived for 2 1/2 months in Malaysia and 4 months in France, than I would have been to have spent one day in each country of the world. Furthermore, the cultures are unnecessarily distorted to serve as mouthpieces to the orthodoxy of the left; hence *Travels with Rigoberta* as described in Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*. It is something like trying to illuminate a forest at night by shining light on it with a slide projector with a slide of a car, so that people are led to the conclusion that if you really look at the forest, what you will see is a car.

As a part of education, I would encourage the reader to move about in cultures and ages. I myself live partly in the Middle Ages, partly in the Early Christian Era, partly in academia, partly at IMSA, partly in Malaysia, partly in France, partly in contemporary America, partly in the Renaissance...

## **Chapter 9: Mysticism and Pragmatism, Kairos and Chronos**

Every culture is goofy; the American form of goofiness is in large part associated with pragmatism/utilitarianism, a

philosophy that says that everything should be made useful and pragmatic, interpreted to mean contributing to material wealth, getting things done, etc. I don't want to mount a full attack on it here (although a good starting point is found in Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and Franky Schaeffer's *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*; both of them show in different areas the real cost of pragmatism), but I wish to say two things:

1. It transposes the role of means and ends, making culture justified to the extent that it produces wealth. This is highly distorted; it is closer to the mark to say that wealth is justified to the extent that it supports culture, and it embodies the same error I took pains to avoid making in the beginning of this book, when I refused to say "Christianity has helped me to think well; you should become a Christian too so that it will also help your thought."
2. Pragmatism isn't very pragmatic. Lao Tze in the *Tao Te Ching* said, "All men know the utility of useful things; few men know the utility of useless things." A great many of the most useful things appear useless on the surface; it takes patience and an ability to delay reward to accomplish anything of real merit. *It is of great pragmatic merit to invest time in a diversity of interests, none of which have any obviously useful application.*

As well as moving away from pragmatism, I would equally urge a move away from chronos into kairos.



Chronos is time that is externally controlled, that can be measured by a ticking clock; kairos is measured by moments if it is measured at all, and is internally controlled, such as time that is spent just hanging out with your friends when you lose track of time. Deep thinking is time in kairos rather than time in chronos; it is measured by whether you have come to a resolution of an idea, not by how many minutes have elapsed. Hurry, and cramming as many activities as possible into time, are a distinctively American disease, and are something I would encourage anyone (not just the bright) to step out of. Move to a slower tempo, or no measured tempo. Life is too short to live in a hurry.

## **Chapter 10: Metacognition**

Metacognition is thinking about thinking. It is incredibly valuable to think about how you think; the contents of this book are drawn from metacognition. It is, socially, valuable to pay attention to metamessages, and respond not only to what another person says but why he says it; a great many stories in the Gospel show Jesus circumventing a direct reply to a question posed and instead responding to the reason why a person would pose such a question.

That's all of worth I can think to say of metacognition, but do not judge its importance by the tiny size of this chapter.

## **Chapter 11: Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills**

One of my friends at Wheaton talked about how his

girlfriend spoke English nearly perfectly — he could only remember hearing her make mistakes of any kind twice; she didn't even make the mistakes usually made by most speakers. What made this particularly remarkable was that English was not her first language, or even her second. It was something like her third or fourth.

Her proficiency in English serves as a useful analogy for what social skills can be among the extraordinarily intelligent. The bad news is that social skills aren't a first language to many of the brightest minds. (There is a lot of truth to the stereotype of the maladapted genius.) The good news is that they have the talent to attain a high degree of proficiency in a third or fourth language.

The program I would set forth is as follows, in the order that they occurred to me (not order of logical priority, which is not clear to me):

1. So far as you can, pursue emotionally healthy friendships with others where you have a lot in common. One or two good friendships is worth a lot. 'Emotionally healthy' takes precedence to 'your own intellectual level', but they are both important. If you have one or two people with whom you can share whatever interests you without worry about it sailing over their heads, you have in diminutive form the context in which most people naturally develop social skills without ever consciously thinking, "I need to develop social skills." This may be hard, but if you can do it, it's a wonderful benefit.
2. Read books that talk about emotional intelligence and social skills; several titles are listed in the

bibliography.

3. Apply what you have read in dealing with people in general. As with a great many other things outlined in here, practice, practice, practice! Practice is a key to success in many things. You might seriously consider, for a time, working in a socially oriented profession: camp counselor, engineer, help desk, manager, and sales associate are a few that come to mind. Not all of them will be delightful — help desk is also known as Hell desk — but they will all contribute to your education. Michael Valentine Smith, in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, had a rather eccentric education, and the kinds of things that educated him might educate you a lot more than Harvard.

I will not try to say much about emotional intelligence specifically, because of the quality of existing writings on that topic. They have flaws (Daniel Goleman seems to want to replace the "intelligence is everything" myth, which simply isn't true, with an "emotional intelligence is everything" myth, which is equally untrue), but if read attentively and critically, they provide a deep insight into a companion area of inquiry to the contents of the present book.

## Chapter 12: Style of Learning

Some readers may have noticed that I've said to do a lot of thinks, without saying how one would go about doing much of any of them. That gap is intentional, as part of presentation; the primary audience will fill in those gaps,

and would only be slowed down by an attempt to specify in detail how to think about how you think. Where most people learn slowly, from the bottom up, the sharpest minds learn quickly, from the top down. Instead of a gradual accumulation of details, from which the broader picture slowly emerges, they grasp the broader picture in flashes of insight, from which the details are filled in.

When I was in Brigade as a little boy, I couldn't memorize Bible verses at all. The people used the King James Version, which had only the haziest connection to any language I had been exposed to, and the Bible verses were to me meaningless sentences, and so I would be stumbling with the first words after the rest of the class had memorized it. Since that point, and since I've come to understand what I have been reading, people are amazed at what I can recall and even quote from diverse texts, and I once memorized an entire book without trying to. This difference in learning mechanism is also part of why I failed the Kuk Sool yellow belt test (which I haven't heard of anyone else doing), and barely passed the karate orange belt test (the instructors told me to wait another session before testing again). It's not that I couldn't learn — as a white belt, I beat two out of three black belt instructors at sparring — but just that my learning took a different pattern from what the martial arts training was designed around. I learn major concepts first, and then details.

Being cognizant of this difference, and trying to do what you can do instead of what you can't do, will make a tremendous difference in learning. It may also explain *why*, if you're so bright, you don't do so well in contexts that less bright people thrive in.

## Chapter 13: An Academic Discipline?

Michael Valentine Smith started a new religion. (Or at least that's what someone who didn't understand *Stranger* at all would say; I'm not going to attempt here to describe what he *did* start.) As a Christian, I do not choose to pursue that direction, but the siren song of starting some kind of movement does have allure to me. Before dismissing the possibility of starting a specific kind of movement, I would like to explain why it is a siren song that allures me: the pull is much stronger to me than that of grandiose desire to be a messiah. While I can have brief moments of wanting to be some sort of superhero, I really only want at heart to look back at the end of my life and see a life of faith, productive work accomplished, some cool writings to bequeath to the world, and a handful of mentorships where I would have strong, positive, and formative influence in a few people's lives.

Why, then, do I see an attraction in being some sort of movement's leader, and what sort of movement might I be tempted to start? Well, I'll answer the second question first. I would like to start an academic discipline, and the content of the discipline I would like to start would be how to think. The discipline of sociology came to be because a brilliant philosopher decided he wanted to start an academic discipline, and spotted one of a number of decent-sized gaps in the subject matter covered by academia, namely how human relationships work. How to think is at least as large a gap in an enterprise of thinkers; there are a few disciplines which one must learn to think well to succeed in, such as mathematics and philosophy, but there is nothing

that studies exactly how to think effectively. Cognitive science comes close (in a different way from mathematics) by studying how humans think in order to try to see if we can make thinking machines, but there is no discipline which directly tells you how to use your mind. A discipline of how to think would make an excellent combination in a double major with some other discipline.

Excluding the various problems that would be associated with being a leader of a movement per se (such as being insanely busy, and having to shut people out (I find it sickening to think that if I tried to start such a movement and succeeded, I would be put in the position of having to turn away emotionally vulnerable kids who look up to me and want my time and attention — no matter how diplomatic you are about it, that's still a crushing blow that often turns bright hopes into disillusionment)), there are problems I see with generating such an academic discipline. One aspect is that starting such an enterprise would act as a magnet to feminism, Marxism, and other heresies, and risk turning into the two cultures scientist's stereotype of a bad humanities discipline. Given what some departments could be and what they in fact are, I am more optimistic about what such an enterprise *could* become than what it *would* become. The second significant problem I see is that the content of such a discipline would vary considerably depending on the intelligence level of the subjects; while there are schools where this might be done (and one school, which shall remain nameless given the fact that I didn't note its name, decided that it would be a good idea to combine the departments of geology and geography into one department), it does not make logical sense. The third problem is that the people whom I am most concerned

about are such a tiny minority that there's not enough of them to really justify a department, and will by nature be so scattered that one could not easily gather them at one school. For reasons like these, I want to do something a little quieter with my life than attempting to start an academic discipline.

Well, that's the bad news. What's the good news?

The good news is that I don't think a full-fledged academic discipline is necessary. The people I am most concerned for, who do not have their thinking needs adequately addressed by our educational system, have minds like sponges, and can pick up this material quite easily without the apparatus of academia. What cannot really be provided is not really needed. One book like this — or, even better, several, written if other people pick up the thread started here and develop it — is all that is really needed.

I mention the possibility of an academic discipline, even if it isn't one that I would want to pursue, to suggest that this is the kind of domain that is worthy of thought and consideration. I would like to see what others can think of.

## Chapter 14: Bibliography

The following are books which I would encourage for further reading.

Adams, James L., *Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas*

This is a book on whitebox thinking and how to think outside the box. As such, it may be as unnecessary as

telling a fish how to swim, but it is still a good book, and worth mentioning.

### The Bible

Number one in logical priority in this bibliography. My number two two recommendation is *Insight*.

### Carnegie, Dale, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

Social skills 101. The title to this book sounds positively Machiavellian, but the approach outlined is anything but manipulative. I greatly prefer to work with people who have read the book and are making some semblance of an attempt to work with its principles; the Golden Rule is not mentioned in the book (perhaps as being too obvious to comment on), but it's the sort of thing that's outlined in the book. People who like it might also like Stephen R. Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

### Feynman, Richard, *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman*

When I read this book, I was disappointed, because it appears naive and simpleminded. I realized on coming back that it was worth a second look.

### l'Engle, Madeleine, *A Wind in the Door*

This book has a number of facets; one of them is a character, a little boy named Charles Wallace, whose IQ is "so high it's untestable by normal means." It provides deep literary insight into what it's like



growing up very gifted, and it draws to the forefront an important question: How will Charles Wallace, who is getting beaten up every day at school, adapt.

Griffin, Em, *A First Look at Communication Theory*

For a theory-oriented mind, this provides the theoretical underpinnings to understanding how to work with those around you. It works well in tandem with other books.

Heinlein, Robert A., *Stranger in a Strange Land*

This classic science fiction novel has, as its basic premise, someone who is raised by Martians and brought to earth as a young man; the book has great merits and great flaws, and its main character is (alongside Charles Wallace) one of the characters in literature I have most identified with. It provides a significant view of how a brilliant mind might first just struggle to fit in, then learn about, then thrive in our culture.

Lonergan, Bernard, *Insight*

*Insight is my number two recommendation, second only to the Bible.*

*Insight* fleshes out a good many things that I have only been in a position to hint at. It has occasional annoyances to the mathematician—trying to be sophisticated by quoting a misunderstanding of Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, which after seeing

similar misunderstandings in humanities work grates on a mathematician's nerves like fingers on a chalkboard—but this book makes a pretty serious and well-researched attempt at what I was trying to do.

Musashi, Miyamoto, *A Book of Five Rings*

The classic in response to which this book was written. It is subtle, cryptic, and deliberately written to be obscure, but it still holds a number of gems. It explains the Way of swordsmanship in Japanese culture.

Pollock, David C. *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*

The Third Culture Kid (TCK), who in his growing-up years has been shaped by more than one culture, does not so much live in a culture in the sense of someone monocultural, as live in a meta-culture that examines others but does not fit in to any culture. The same is true of a really bright mind; the source of the distinctive feature is different (an intellectual instead of a cultural gap), but a definite resemblance is at play. Reading this book and then asking, "How does this apply to me?" should provide insights.

Polya, G., *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method*

This is a book about how one goes about solving a math problem — something that is rarely explicitly transmitted — and is applicable to far broader domains.

Spradley, James P., *Participant Observation: Step by Step*

This is a book of anthropology, about how to observe, understand, and describe a culture in an ethnography. There was another dimension in which it stimulated my thinking, but I am mentioning it here because the principles it provides to understand a cultural situation are useful tools for bright minds to use to understand a culture they don't fit in to. It might be retitled, *How to understand and function in an alien culture*.

Webb, James T.; Meckstroth, Elizabeth A.; Tolan, Stephanie S. *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*

This book is more than just what its title would suggest. When reading it, a number of things clicked into place that hadn't made sense before: an unusual sense of humor, feeling that I didn't fit in anywhere, the rate at which I learn... Parents who are reading my book to instruct a talented youngster would be well advised to read that as well. For all readers, it forms a good part of the backdrop to this writing.

## Chapter 15: Looking Back

I'm not sure that this piece was my best work, and not just because I tried (and perhaps failed) to treat something that is socially touchy: deal with a situation where people think of gifted people as people who have it easy, a sort of normal life with very enviable advantages, and talk about

special needs. Perhaps authors are usually embarrassed by their earlier work, but this one in particular strikes me as something that was interesting to explore but didn't produce a terribly interesting result. I am leaving it up because some people, for all I know, might find the hints helpful.

Since writing it, I have come to two realizations: the third of Bernard Lonergan's collected works, *Insight*, is probably of intense relevance here. I have given brief hints and nuggets of insight; he has seriously attempted a similar endeavor, but with much more explicit length and research. That work is what this work was meant to be, and if you're interested in this, **buy it!**

The second thought is that although I almost reinvented the topic myself, metacognition and how to think are things that are in the air today. Some people have become convinced; others have probably reinvented the same interest much as I have. There is much to be found if one asks these questions...

...but as I am growing in Orthodoxy, one of the things that I am coming to realize is a different way of looking at knowledge, and one where the fullest knowledge is something that grows as one walks the Orthodox Way, and not something that can be analyzed like something independent. "A Glimpse into Eastern Orthodox Christianity" talks about knowledge, if not specifically explaining the change of mind here. But earlier I was hoping to push this kind of thinking, knowledge, and ways of thought further. Now I believe there are deeper things to know, and I am shifting my efforts to learning them in the Orthodox Way.

## **The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab: An Allegory**

Before I get further, I'd like to say a few words about what I drive.

I drive an Oldsmobile F-85 station wagon. What's the color? When people are being nice, they talk about a classic, subdued camouflage color. Sometimes the more candid remarks end up saying something like, "The Seventies called. They want their paint job back," although my station wagon is a 1965 model. All in all, I think I had the worst car of anyone I knew. Or at least that's what I *used* to think.

Then I changed my mind. Or maybe it would be better to say that I had my mind changed for me.

I was sitting at the cafeteria, when I saw someone looking for a place to sit. He was new, and I motioned for him to come over. He sat down, quietly, and ate in silence. There was a pretty loud conversation at the table, and when people started talking about cars, his eyes seemed to widen.

I asked him what kind of car he drove.

After hesitating, he mumbled something hard to understand, and looked like he was getting smaller. Someone said, "Maybe he doesn't drive a car at all," and whatever he mumbled was forgotten in raucous laughter.

I caught him in the hallway later, and he asked if I could help him move several large boxes that were not in the city. When we made the trip, he again seemed to be looking around with round eyes, almost enchanted by my rustbucket.

I began to feel sorry for the chap, and I gave him rides. Even if I didn't understand.

He still managed to dodge any concrete hint of whatever it was that got him around—and I had a hunch that he hadn't just walked. My other friends may have given me some ribbing about my bucket of bolts, but really it was just ribbing. I tried to impress on him that he would be welcome even if he just got around on a derelict moped—but still not a single peep.

By the time it was becoming old to joke about whatever he drove, I accepted a dare and shadowed him as he walked along a couple of abandoned streets, got to the nearest airstrip...

and got into an SR-71 Blackbird. The man took off in an SR-71 Blackbird. *An SR-71 Blackbird!* Words failed me. Polite ones, at any rate. The SR-71 Blackbird may be the coolest looking reconnaissance plane ever; as far as looks go, it beats the pants off the spacecraft in a few science fiction movies. But the engineers weren't really trying to look cool; that was a side effect of trying to make an aircraft that *was* cool. It has those sleek lines because it's a bit of a stealth aircraft; it *can* be detected by radar, but it's

somewhat harder. And suppose you're in an SR-71 Blackbird and you *are* picked up by radar, and enemy soldiers launch a surface-to-air missile at you—or two, or ten? Just speed up and you'll outrun it; the SR-71 Blackbird is the fastest aircraft ever built. Some SR-71 Blackbirds have been shot *at*. Ain't never got one shot *down*. One of the better surface-to-air rockets has about the same odds of hitting an SR-71 Blackbird doing Mach 3.2 as a turtle trying to catch up with a cheetah and *ram* it. An SR-71 Blackbird is a different kind of rare. It's not just that it's not a common electronic device that you can pick up at any decent department store; it isn't even like something very expensive and rare that has a waiting list is almost never on store shelves. The SR-71 Blackbird is more like, if anything, an invention that the inventor can't sell—perhaps, some years back, one of the first, handmade electric light bulbs—because it is so far from how people think and do things that they can't see anyone would *want* to use them. The SR-71 Blackbird is rare enough that few pilots have even seen it. And I saw, or thought I saw, my friend get into one.

I walked back in a daze, sat down, decided not to take any drinks just then, and cornered the joker, who couldn't keep his mouth shut. I told him to fess up about whatever he slipped me, but he was clueless—and when I couldn't keep my mouth shut and blabbed why, he didn't believe me. (Not that I blame him; I didn't believe it myself.)

I ate by myself, later, and followed him. The third time, I caught him in the act.

I was red with anger, and almost saw red.

He blanched whiter than at the wisecrack about him maybe not driving a car.

What I would have said then, if I were calmer, was, "Do

you think it's right for a billionaire, to go around begging? You have things that none of us even dream of, and you—?"

After I had yelled at him, he looked at me and said, "How can I fuel up?"

I glared at him. "I don't know, but it's got to be much cooler than waiting in line at a gas station."

"Maybe it is cooler, but I don't think so, and that's not what I asked. Suppose I want to fly in my airplane. What do I do to be fueled up?"

"Um, a fuel truck drives out and fills you up?"

"And then I'm good to go because I have a full tank, just like you?"

"I don't see what you're getting at."

"Ok, let me ask you. What do you do if you want to make a long trip? Can you fill your tank, maybe a day or two before your trip, and leave?"

"Yes. And that would be true if you had a moped, or a motorcycle, or a luxury car, or even something exotic like an ATV or a hovercraft."

"But not an SR-71 Blackbird."

"What do you mean, not an SR-71 Blackbird? Did you get a good deal because your aircraft is broken?"

"Um, just because you can assume something in a good car, or even a bad car, doesn't mean that it's true across the board. When it's sitting on the ground, my aircraft leaks fuel."

"It leaks fuel? Why are you flying an aircraft that's not broken?"

"There's a difference between designing a passenger car and what I deal with. With a passenger car, if the manufacturers are any good, the car can sit with little to no fuel leak even if it's badly maintained."



"But this does not apply to what the rest of us can only dream of?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"A passenger car heats up a little, at top speeds, due to air friction. One and the same part works for the fuel line when it's been in the garage for an hour, and when it's driving as fast as you've driven it. Not so with my aircraft. The SR-71 Blackbird is exposed to one set of temperatures in the hangar, and then there is air friction for moving at Mach 3.2, and there's a basic principle of physics that says that what gets hotter, gets bigger."

"What's your point?"

"The parts that make up an SR-71 Blackbird are one size in the hangar and other sizes when the aircraft is flying at high speeds. The engineers could have sized the parts so that you could keep an aircraft in the hangar without losing any fuel... or they could make an airplane that leaks fuel on the ground, but it works when it was flying. But they could not make an airplane that would work at Mach 3.2 *and* have a sealed fuel line in the hangar... and that means that, when I go anywhere worth mentioning in my hot, exciting airplane, even I get fueled up on the ground, and I lose quite a lot of fuel getting airborne and more or less need an immediate air-to-air refueling... This is besides the obvious fact that I can't run on *any* fuel an ordinary gas station would carry. For that matter, the JP-7, a strange beast of a 'fuel' that must also serve as hydraulic fluid and *engine coolant*, is about as exotic compared to most jet fuel as it is compared to the 'boring' gasoline which you take for granted—you can't get fuel for an SR-71 Blackbird at a regular airport any more than you can buy 'ordinary' jet fuel

at a regular gas station... and you think me strange when I get excited about the fact that you can drive up to any normal gas station and fill-er-up!"

I hesitated, and then asked, "But besides one or two details like—"

He cut me off. "It's not 'one or two details,' any more than—than filling out paperwork and dealing with bureaucracy amounts to 'one or two details' of a police officer's life. Sure, on television, something exciting happens to police officers every hour, but a real police officer's life is *extremely* different from police shows. It's not just paperwork. Perhaps there is *lots* of paperwork—a police officer deals with at least as much paperwork and bureaucracy as an employee who's a cog in a big office—but there are other things. Police officers get in firefights all the time on TV. But this is another area where TV's image is not the reality. I've known police officers who wouldn't trade their work for anything in the world. Doesn't mean that their work is like a cop show. When police officers aren't being filmed on those videos that make dramatic shows, and they aren't training, the average police officer starts firing maybe once every three or four years. There are many, many seasoned veterans who have never fired a gun on the street. And having an SR-71 Blackbird is no more what you'd imagine it was like to have a cool, neat, super-duper reconnaissance plane instead of your unsatisfying, meagre, second-rate, dull car than... than... than being a police officer has all the excitement of surviving a shootout every day, but only having to fill paperwork once every three or four years if at all!"

"Um, what else is there?"

"Um, what's a typical trip for you? I mean, with your

car?"

"My wife's family is at the other side of the state, and—"

"So that's an example of a common trip? More common than shopping or driving to meet someone?"

"Ok; often I'm just running some errands."

"Such a boring thing to do with a station wagon. If you want things to get interesting, try something I wouldn't brave."

"What?"

"Go for the gusto. Borrow *my* vehicle! First, you can fuel up at home, as any fuel that had been in your tank is now a slippery puddle underneath the vehicle you wish you had. Then start the vehicle. You'll have something to deal with later, after the hot exhaust sets your trees on fire. And maybe a building or two. Then lurch around, and try to taxi along the streets. (Let's assume you don't set any trees on fire, which is not likely.) Now you're used to be able to see most of the things on the road, at least the ones you don't want to hit? And—"

"Ok, *ok*, I get the idea! The SR-71 Blackbird is the worst, most pitiable—"

"Perhaps I have misspoken. Or at least wasn't clear enough. I wasn't trying to say that it's simple torture flying an SR-71 Blackbird. There are few things as joyful as flying. And do you know what kind of possibilities exist (in everything from friendship to work to hobbies) when the list of things you can easily make a day trip to the other side of the globe? When—"

"Then why the big deal you just made before?"

"An SR-71 Blackbird is many things, but it is not what you imagine if you fantasize about everything you imagine my vehicle to be, *and assume almost everything you take*

*for granted in yours.* There are a great many nice things that go without saying in your vehicle, that aren't part of mine. You know, a boring old station wagon with its dull room for a driver plus a few passengers and some cargo, that runs on the most mundane petroleum-based fuel you can get, and of course is familiar to most mechanics and can be maintained by almost any real automotive shop, and—if this is even worth mentioning—can be driven safely across a major network of roads, and—*of course* this can be taken for granted in any real vehicle—has a frame that gives you a fighting chance of surviving a full-speed collision with—"

"Ok, *ok*, I get the picture. But wouldn't it have helped matters if you would tell people these things up front? You know, maybe something about avoiding these confrontations, or maybe something about 'Honesty is the best policy'?"

He said, "Ok. So when I meet people, I should say, 'Hi. My vehicle leaves Formula One racecars in the dust. It also flies, can slip through radar, and does several things you can't even imagine. But don't worry, I haven't let any of this go to my head. I'm not full of myself. I promise I won't look down on you or whatever car you drive. And you can promise not to feel the least bit envious, inferior, or intimidated. *Deal?*' It seems to come across that way no matter *how* I try to make that point. And really, why shouldn't it?"

I paused. "Do our vehicles have *anything* in common at all?"

"Yes—more than either of us can understand."

"But what on earth, if we're so different? My vehicle is a 1965 model; your vehicle sounds so new you'd need a time machine to get one—"

"My vehicle is a 1965 model too."

"If you want to lie and make me feel better, you could have told me that your vehicle was years older than mine."

"I meant it. There is something about our vehicles that is cut from the same cloth."

"How can you say that? I mean, without stretching? Is what they have in common that they're both in the same universe? Or that they're both bigger than an atom but smaller than a galaxy? Or some other way of *really* stretching?"

"If you want to dig deeper, have you read, 'I, Pencil'? Where an economist speaks on behalf of a common, humble pencil?"

"A speech from a pencil? What does that have to do with our vehicles? Are you going to compare our vehicles to a pencil?"

"Yes."

"So you're stretching."

"No."

"In 'I, Pencil,' a cheap wooden pencil explains what it took to make it. It talks about how a diamond in the rough—I mean, graphite in the rough—crosses land and sea and is combined with clay, and a bit of this and that to make the exquisite slender shaft we call pencil 'lead'. The wood comes from the majestic cedar—do you know what it takes to make a successful logging operation—and then a mind-boggling number of steps transform a hundred feet of tree into something that's a little hard to explain, but machined to very precise specifications, and snapped together before six coats of laquer—oh, I forgot, before the cedar wraps around the slender graphite wand, it's also adorned by being tinted a darker color, 'for the same reason women put rouge on

their faces' or something like that. Its parts come through a transportation network from all over the world, and the rubber eraser—which wouldn't erase at all well if were just rubber; it needs to be a cocktail of ingredients that perform at least three major tasks if it will work as an eraser. Try erasing pencil with a rubber ball sometime; it will erase terribly if it erases at all. Your eraser is not mere rubber, but a rubber alloy, the way airplanes are made, not with mere aluminum, but with an aluminum alloy, and—"

"So the parts of a pencil have an interesting story?"

"Yes. And the quite impressive way they are put together—pencils don't assemble themselves, and a good machine—for some steps—costs a king's ransom. And the way they're distributed, and any number of things necessary for business to run the whole process, and—"

"Then should I start offering my daughter's pencils to a museum?"

"I wouldn't *exactly* offer one of her pencils to a museum. Museums do not have room for every wonder this world has. But I will say this. The next pencil you forget somewhere wouldn't have been yours to lose without more work, talent, skill, knowledge, venture capital, and a thousand other things than it took to make a wonder like the Rosetta Stone or the Mona Lisa."

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As usual, she was dressed to kill. Her outfit was modest—I can almost say, *ostentatiously modest*—but, somehow, demurely made the point that she might be a model.

I had a bad feeling about something. During our conversation on the way over, I said, "You have an issue

with Saab drivers." He replied, "No. Or yes, but it's beside the point. Saab drivers tend to have issues with me." I was caught off-guard: "That sounds as arrogant as anything I've —"

He asked me to forget what he had said. For the rest of the conversation, he seemed to be trying to change the subject.

She greeted us, shook his hand warmly, and turned back. "—absolutely brilliant. Not, in any way, like the British Comet, which never should have been flown in the first place, and was part of why jumbo jetliners were dangerous in the public's eye. The training for people who were going to be in that jumbo jetliner—the Comet—included being in a vacuum so that soldiers would know what to do if they were flying in a sparse layer of the atmosphere and the airplane simply disintegrated around them and left them in what might as well have been a vacuum. This sort of thing *happened* with enough jumbo jetliners that the public was very leery of them. For good reason, they were considered a disaster looking for a place to happen.

"And so, when Boeing effectively bet the company on the Boeing 707—like they did with every new airplane; it wasn't just one product among others that could be a flop without killing the company—they gave the test pilot very careful instructions about what to do when he demonstrated their new jumbo jetliner.

"At the airshow, he was flying along, and after a little while, people began to notice that one of the airplane's wings was lower, and the other was higher...

"The Boeing 707 test pilot was doing a barrel roll, which is extremely rough on an airplane. It's like... something like, instead of saying that a computer is tough, throwing it

across the room. This stunt was a surprise to the other people at Boeing, almost as much as to the other, and it wasn't long before Boeing got on the radio and asked the pilot, 'What the §±¤ do you think you're doing?' The pilot's reply was short, and to the point:

"Why, selling airplanes, sir."

"He told a reporter afterwards, 'And when I got done with that barrel roll, I realized that the people weren't going to *believe* what they just saw... so I turned around and I did another one!'"

A moment later, someone else said, "What does 'Saab' mean again? You've told me, but—"

She smiled. "It took me a while to remember, too. 'SAAB' stands for '*Svenska aeroplan Aktiebolaget*,' literally 'Swedish Aeroplane Limited.' It's a European aerospace company that decided that besides making fighter jets and military aircraft, they would run a side business of selling cars, or at least the kind of car you get when you combine a muscle car, a luxury vehicle, and more than a touch of a military jet. It's like an airplane in big and small ways—everything from, if you unbuckle your seatbelt, a 'Fasten seatbelts' light just like an airliners', to the rush of power you feel when you hit the gas and might as well be lifting off... I'm not sure how you would describe it... It's almost what Lockheed-Martin would sell if they were Scandinavian and wanted to sell something you could drive on the street."

He said, "It sounds like a delight to drive."

She said, "It is. Would you two like me to take you out for a spin? I'd be delighted to show it to you. What kind of car do you drive?"

He paused for a split second and said, "I needed to get a ride with him; I have nothing that I could use to get over



here."

I told her, "He's being modest."

She looked at me quizzically. "How?"

"He flies an SR-71 Blackbird... um... sorry, I shouldn't have said that just as you were taking a drink."

He seemed suddenly silent. For that matter, the room suddenly seemed a whole lot quieter.

She said, "You're joking, right?"

No one said a word.

Then she said, "Wow. It is a privilege and an honor. I have never met someone who..."

He said, "I really don't understand... maybe... um... I'm not really *better*, or—"

She said, "Stop being modest. I'd love to hear more about your fighter. Have you shot anything down?"

He looked as if he was thinking very hurriedly, and not finding the thought that he wanted.

"The SR-71 Blackbird would be pretty useless in a dogfight. It is neither designed or equipped to fight even with a very obsolete enemy aircraft; it's just designed to snoop around and gather information."

She said, "Um, so they get shot down all the time? Wouldn't you tend to get a lot of missiles fired by enemy fighters who aren't worried about you shooting back? What do you do when you run out of countermeasure flares?"

He paused for a moment, saying, "The SR-71 Blackbird doesn't have anything you'd expect. Flares are a great way to decoy a heat-seeking missile, but the SR-71 Blackbird doesn't have them, either."

I turned to him and said, "You're being almost disturbingly modest." Then I turned to her and said, "An SR-71 Blackbird can go over three times the speed of sound.

The standard evasive to a surface-to-air rocket is simply to accelerate until you've left the rocket in the dust. I'm not aware of one of them being shot down."

Her eyes were as big as dinner plates.

She said, "I am stunned. I have talked with a few pilots, but I have never met anyone close to an SR-71 Blackbird pilot. I hope we can be friends." She stood close to him and offered her hand.

The three of us ran into each other a number of times in the following days. She seemed to want to know everything about his aircraft, and seemed very respectful, or at least seemed to be working hard to convey how impressed she was.

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It was a dark and stormy night. He and I were both on our way out the door, when she asked, "What are you doing?"

He said, "I want to try some challenges. I plan on going out over the ocean and manoeuvring in the storm system."

She turned to him and said, very slowly, "No, you're not."

He turned to me and said, "C'mon, let's go."

She said, "Are you crazy? A storm like that has done what enemy rockets have failed to do: take down your kind of craft. I've grown quite fond of you, and I'd hate to see you get killed because you were being stupid. Think about 61-7969 / 2020."

He said, "May I ask why you know about that?"

"I have been doing some reading because I want to understand you. And I understand people well enough, and

care about you enough, to tell when you are acting against your best interests."

He grabbed my arm and forced me out the door. Once in the car, he said, "I'm sorry... I needed to get out before saying something I would regret."

"Like what?"

"So you know just the perfect way to straighten me out, and you don't even need to ask me questions. Walk a mile in my shoes, to a place you can reach in a car but not my aircraft, and then we might be able to talk."

I watched him take off, and I came back to pick him up, after waiting an hour. I could tell something that seemed not quite perfect about his flying, but I do not regret that I kept my mouth shut about that.

The next day she surprised us by meeting us first thing in the morning.

She gave us a stack of paper. "I care about you quite a lot, and I don't want to be invited to your funeral in the next year. Here are detailed aviation regulations and international laws which are intended for your safety. I could not get an exact count of the number of crimes you committed, either for last night or for your reckless day-to-day flying around. I am sure that there are many responsible ways a vehicle like yours can be used, and I have inquired about whether there are any people who can offer some guidance and free you to..."

He turned around, took my elbow, and began walking out to the parking lot. We got in my car, and she raced for hers.

I saw her go to the mouth of the parking lot and then stop. The one Rolls-Royce in town had broken down, of all places *there*, and the owner and chauffeur were both outside.

I had thought that the person who was chauffeured in a Rolls-Royce was a peaceful sort of man, but he was yelling then, and before she got over the owner positively erupted at the chauffeur and waved his arms. She had gotten out and wanted to talk with them, but you can't get a word in edgewise at a time like that.

Now I'd like to clarify something about my car. I've only seen a vehicle like mine in a demolition derby once, but I was surprised. I wasn't surprised, in particular, that the wagon was the last vehicle moving. What I was surprised at was that over a third of the derby had passed before the ugly wagon started to crumple at all.

And one other thing: one April Fools' Day, a friend who drives a sleek, sporty little 1989 Chrysler LeBaron gave me a bumper sticker that said, "Zero to sixty in fifteen minutes," and then acted surprised when I challenged him to a short race. When the race had finished, he seemed extraordinarily surprised, and I told him, "There is a question on your face. Let me answer it." Then I opened the hood on my ugly, uncool station wagon and said, "Your sleek little number can get by on a 2.2 liter engine. Do you know what *that* is?" He said, "Um, the engine?" And I said, "That is a 6.6 liter V8. Any questions?"

Ok, enough clarification. I looked around, turned in the opposite direction, and floored my car, blasting through the hedges and getting heavy scrapes on the bottom of my car. I got shortly on the road, and had a straight shot at the airport. She did eventually catch up to me, but not until there was nothing left to see but some hot exhaust and the fuel that had leaked when he tried to take off. (I still get the occasional note from him.)

Besides worrying about him, I was also much less

worried about my car: tough as it is, cars don't like getting their undersides scraped on gravel, and I decided to take my car to the garage and have the mechanic take a look at it and tell me if I broke anything.

I was surprised—though maybe I shouldn't have been—to see the Rolls-Royce in the garage when I pulled in. I intended to explain that I might have scraped the bottom up, and after I did so, my curiosity got the better of me. I asked something about Rolls-Royces breaking down.

The mechanic gave me the oddest look.

I asked him, "Why the funny look?"

He opened the hood, and said, "Rolls-Royces do break down easily... and it's even easier to break down if you open the hood, jam a screwdriver right *there*, and rev it as hard as you can."

## The Spectacles

I got up, washed my face in the fountain, and put out the fire. The fountain was carved of yellow marble, set in the wall and adorned with bas-relief sculptures and dark moss. I moved through the labyrinth, not distracting myself with a lamp, not thinking about the organ, whose pipes ranged from 8' to 128' and could shake a cathedral to its foundation. Climbing iron rungs, I emerged from the recesses of a cluttered shed.

I was wearing a T-shirt advertising some random product, jeans which were worn at the cuffs, and fairly new tennis shoes. I would have liked to think I gave no hint of anything unusual: an ordinary man, with a messy house stocked with the usual array of mundane items. I blended in with the Illusion.

I drove over to Benjamin's house. As I walked in, I said, "Benjamin, I'm impressed. You've done a nice job of patching this place since the last explosion."

"Shut up, Morgan."

"By the way, my nephews are coming to visit in two weeks, Friday afternoon. Would you be willing to tinker in your laboratory when they come? Their favorite thing in the world is a good fireworks display."

"Which reminds me, there was one spice that I wanted to give you. It makes any food taste better, and the more you add, the better the food tastes. Pay no attention to the label on the bottle which says 'arsenic'. If you'll excuse me one moment..." He began to stand up, and I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back down into the chair.

"How are you, Benjamin?"

"How are you, Morgan?"

I sat silent for a while. When Benjamin remained silent, I said, "I've been spending a lot of time in the library. The sense one gets when contemplating an artistic masterwork is concentrated in looking at what effect *The Mystical Theology* had on a thousand years of wonder."

He said, "You miss the Middle Ages, don't you?"

I said, "They're still around—a bit here, a piece there. On one hand, it's very romantic to hold something small in your hand and say that it is all that is left of a once great realm. On the other hand, it's *only* romantic: it is not the same thing as finding that glory all about you.

"The pain is all the worse when you not only come from a forgotten realm, but you must reckon with the Illusion. It's like there's a filter which turns everything grey. It's not exactly that there's a sinister hand that forces cooperation with the Illusion and tortures you if you don't; in some ways things would be simpler if there were. Of course you're asking for trouble if you show an anachronism in the way you dress, or if you're so gauche as to speak honestly out of the wisdom of another world and push one of the hot buttons of whatever today's hot issues are. But beyond that, you don't have to intentionally cooperate with the Illusion; you can 'non-conform freely' and the Illusion freely conforms itself to you. It's a terribly isolating feeling."

Benjamin stood up, walked over to a bookshelf, and pulled out an ivory tube. "I have something for you, Morgan. A pair of spectacles."

"Did you make these?"

"I'm not saying."

"Why are you giving me eyeglasses? My eyes are fine."

"Your eyes are weaker than you think." He waited a moment, and then said, "And these spectacles have a virtue."

"What is their virtue? What is their power?"

"Please forgive me. As one who has struggled with the Illusion, you know well enough what it means to deeply want to convey something and know that you can't. Please believe me when I say that I would like to express the answer to your question, but I cannot."

I left, taking the glasses and both hoping that I was concealing my anger from Benjamin and knowing that I wasn't.

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I arrived at home and disappeared into the labyrinth. A bright lamp, I hoped, would help me understand the spectacles' power. Had I been in a different frame of mind, I might have enjoyed it; I read an ancient and mostly complete Greek manuscript to *The Symbolic Theology* to see if it might reveal new insights. My eyes lingered for a moment over the words:

That symbol, as most, has two layers. Yet a symbol could have an infinite number of layers and still be smaller than what is without layer at all.



I had a deep insight of some sort over these words, and the insight is forever lost because I cared only about one thing, finding out what magic power the spectacles held. I tried to read a cuneiform tablet; as usual, the language gave me an embarrassing amount of trouble, and there was something strange about what it said that completely lacked the allure of being exotic. Wishing I had a better command of languages, I moved about from one serpentine passageway to another, looking at places, even improvising on the organ, and enjoying none of it. Everything looked exactly as if I were looking through a children's toy. Had Benjamin been watching too much *Dumbo* and given me a magic feather?

After a long and fruitless search, I went up into my house, put the spectacles in your pocket, and sat in my chair, the lights off, fatigued in mind and body. I do not recall know how long I stayed there. I only know that I jumped when the doorbell rang.

It was Amber. She said, "The supermarket had a really good sale on strawberries, and I thought you might like some."

"Do you have a moment to to come in? I have Coke in the fridge."

I had to stifle my urge to ask her opinion about the spectacles' virtue. I did not know her to be more than meets the eye (at least not in the sense that could be said of Benjamin or me), but the Illusion was much weaker in her than in most people, and she seemed to pick up on things that I wished others would as well. We talked for a little while; she described how she took her family to a pizza restaurant and her son "walked up to a soda machine, pushed one of the levers you're supposed to put your cup

against, jumped in startlement when soda fell on his hand, and then began to lick the soda off."

"I've got to get home and get dinner on, but—ooh, you have new glasses in your pocket. Put them on for a moment."

I put my spectacles on, and she said something to me, but I have no idea what she said. It's not because I was drained: I was quite drained when she came, but her charm had left me interested in life again. The reason I have no idea what she said to me is that I was stunned at what I saw when I looked at her through the spectacles.

I saw beauty such as I had not begun to guess at. She was clad in a shimmering robe of scintillating colors. In one hand, she was holding a kaliedoscope, which had not semi-opaque colored chips but tiny glass spheres and prisms inside. The other hand embraced a child on her lap, with love so real it could be seen.

After she left, I took the spectacles off, put them in their case, and after miscellaneous nightly activities, went to bed and dreamed dreams both brilliant and intense.

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When I woke up, I tried to think about why I had not recognized Amber's identity before. I closed my eyes and filtered through memories; Amber had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked up on—and she had picked up on things I had given. I thought of myself as one above the Illusion—and here I had accepted the Illusion's picture of her. Might there be others who were more than meets the eye?

I came to carry the spectacles with me, and look around

for a sign of something out of the ordinary. Several days later, I met a tall man with cornrowed greying hair. When I asked him what he studied in college, he first commented on the arbitrariness of divisions between disciplines, before explaining that his discipline of record was philosophy. His thought was a textbook example of postmodernism, but when I put my spectacles on, I saw many translucent layers: each layer, like a ring of an oak, carried a remnant of a bygone age. Then I listened, and his words sounded no less postmodern, but echoes of the Middle Ages were everywhere.

I began to find these people more and more frequently, and require less and less blatant cues.

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I sat in the living room, waiting with cans of Coca-Cola. I enjoy travelling in my nephews' realms; at a prior visit, Nathan discovered a whole realm behind my staircase, and it is my loss that I can only get in when I am with him. Brandon and Nathan had come for the fair that weekend, and I told them I had something neat-looking to show them before I took them to the fair.

I didn't realize my mistake until they insisted that I wear the spectacles at the fair.

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I didn't mind the charge of public drunkenness *that* much. It was humiliating, perhaps, but I think at least *some* humiliations are necessary in life. And I didn't mind too much that my nephews' visit was a bummer for them. Perhaps that was unfortunate, but that has long been

smoothed over. There were, however, two things that were *not* of small consequence to me.

The first thing that left me staggered was something in addition to the majesty I saw. I saw a knight, clad in armor forged of solid light, and I saw deep scars he earned warring against dragons. I saw a fair lady who looked beautiful at the skin when seen without the spectacles, and beautiful in layer after layer below the skin when seen with them. The something else I saw in addition to that majesty was that this beauty was something that was not just in a few people, or even many. It was in every single person without exception. That drunken beggar everyone avoided, the one with a stench like a brewery next to a horse stable—I saw his deep and loyal friendships. I saw his generosity with other beggars—please believe me that if you were another beggar, what's his was yours. I saw the quests he made in his youth. I saw his dreams. I saw his story. Beyond all that, I saw something deeper than any of these, a glory underneath and beneath these things. This glory, however disfigured by his bondage to alcohol, filled me with wonder.

The reason the police kept me in the drunk tank for so long was that I was stunned and reeling. I had always known that I was more than what the Illusion says a person is, and struggled to convey my something more to other people... but I never looked to see how other people could be more than the grey mask the Illusion put on their faces. When I was in the drunk tank, I looked at the other men in wonder and asked myself what magic lay in them, what my spectacles would tell me. The old man with an anchor tattooed to his arm: was he a sailor? Where had he sailed on the seven seas? Had he met mermaids? I almost asked him if he'd found Atlantis, when I decided I didn't want to

prolong the time the police officer thought I was drunk.

This brings me to the second disturbing find, which was that my spectacles were not with me. I assumed this was because the police had locked them away, but even after I was released, determined inquiry found no one who had seen them. They looked interesting, oddly shaped lenses with thick gold frames; had a thief taken them when I was stunned and before the police picked me up?

The next day I began preparing for a quest.

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It filled me with excitement to begin searching the black market, both because I hoped to find the spectacles, and because I knew I would experience these people in a completely new light.

I had dealings with the black market before, but it had always been unpleasant: not (let me be clear) because I did not know how to defend myself, or was in too much danger of getting suckered into something dangerous, but because I approached its people concealing the emotions I'd feel touching some kind of fetid slime. Now... I still saw that, but I tried to look and see what I would see if I were wearing my spectacles.

I didn't find anything that seemed significant. The next leg of my journey entailed a change of venue: I dressed nicely and mingled with the world of jewellers and antique dealers. Nada.

I began to search high and low; I brainstormed about what exotic places it might be, and I found interesting people along the way. The laborers whom I hired to help me search the city dump almost made me forget that I was

searching for something, and over time I chose to look for my spectacles in places that would bring me into contact with people I wanted to meet...

Some years later, I was returning from one of my voyages and realized it had been long (*too* long) since I had spoken with Benjamin. I came and visited him, and told him about the people I'd met. After I had talked for an hour, he put his hand on my mouth and said, "Can I get a word in edgewise?"

I said, "Mmmph mph mmmph mmph."

He took his hand off my mouth, and I said, "That depends on whether you're rude enough to put your hand over my mouth in mid-sentence."

"That depends on whether you're rude enough to talk for an hour without letting your host get a word in edgewise."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

He stuck his tongue out at me.

Benjamin opened a box on his desk, opened the ivory case inside the box, and pulled out my spectacles. "I believe these might interest you." He handed them to me.

I sat in silence. The clock's ticking seemed to grow louder, until it chimed and we both jumped. Then I looked at him and said, "What in Heaven's name would I need them for?"

## **An Author's Musing Memoirs *Reflections, Retractions, and Retracings***

### **Taking a second look at some of what I wrote**

#### **Dear Reader,**

Years back, when I was a math grad student, I wrote a short essay entitled, “Why study mathematics?” The basic thought was connected with the general education math class I was taking, and it is not really an article for why to specialize in mathematics through intensive study, but why a more basic knowledge of math can be a valuable part of liberal arts education. Much like how I taught my class, I did not speak favorably of memorizing formulas—pejoratively called “mindless symbol manipulation” by mathematicians—but spoke of the beauty of the abstractions, the joy of puzzles and problem solving, and even spoke of mathematics as a form of weight lifting for the mind: if you can do math, I said, you can do almost

anything. I was sincere in these words, and I believe my obscure little piece captures something that a lot of math students and faculty sensed even if they did not explain their assumption. Since then, there are some things I would say differently. Not exactly that I was incorrect in what I said, but I worked hard to climb a ladder that was leaning against the wrong building.

One famous author in software development, who wrote a big book about "software engineering", had said, "What gets measured gets improved," and began to express second thoughts about his gung-ho enthusiasm for measurement. He didn't exactly *take back* his words of, "What gets measured gets improved," but he said that the most important things to understand are rarely things that are easy or obvious to measure: the mantra "What gets measured gets improved," is a mantra to ruthlessly optimize things that often are less important than you might think. His second thoughts went further: the words "software" and "engineering" have been joined at the hip, but however hard software developers have tried to claim to be engineers, what they do is very different from engineering: it's an apples and oranges comparison.

I would pretty well stand by the statement that if you can deal with the abstraction in math, you can deal with the abstraction in anything: whether chemistry, analytic philosophy, engineering, or sales, there isn't much out there that will call for more abstract thinking than you learn in math. But to pick sales, for instance, not many people fail in sales because they can't handle the deep abstraction. Sales calls for social graces, the ability to handle rejection, and real persistence, and while you may really and truly learn persistence in math, I sincerely doubt that mathematical



training is a sort of industrial strength preparation for social graces and dealing with rejection. And even in engineering, social graces matter more than you might think; it's been said that being good at math gets you in the door, but social influence and effectiveness are what make a *real* superstar. I would still stand by a statement that if you can handle the abstraction in math, you can probably handle the abstraction in anything else. But I'm somewhat more wary of implying that if you have a mathematical mind, you just have an advantage for everything life may throw at you.

**That's simply not true.**

There are some things I have written that I would like to take back, at least in part, but even where my works are flawed I don't believe mass deletions are the best response. I would rather write what might be called "Retractions and retracings" and leave them available with the original works. "Why study Mathematics?," whatever its flaws, gives a real glimpse into the beauty that draws mathematicians to mathematics. I may be concerned with flaws here, but they are not the whole truth. However, there are some things I would like to comment on, some flaws to point out. In many cases, I don't believe that what I said is mainly wrong, but I believe it is possible to raise one's eyes higher.

## HOW to HUG

Mathematics may be seen as a skill, but it can also be how a person is oriented: jokes may offer a caricature, but a caricature of something that's *there*. One joke tells of a mathematician who finds something at a bookstore, is delighted to walk home with a thick volume entitled *HOW to HUG*, and then, at home, is dismayed to learn he

purchased volume 11 of an encyclopædia. And I mention this as a then-mathematician who wrote “A Treatise on Touch,” which may be seen as interesting, may be seen as deep, and may have something in common with the mathematician purchasing a book so he could know how to hug.

Part of what I have been working on is how, very slowly, to become more human. This struggle is reflected in *Yonder*, which is at its most literal a struggle of philosophers to reach what is human. There is an outer story of disembodied minds set in a dark science fiction world, who are the philosophers, and there is a story within a story, an inner story, of the tragic beauty of human life. When I showed it to a science fiction guru, he suggested that I cut the philosophical dialogues down by quite a bit. The suggestion had a lot of sense, and quite possibility a traditional publisher would want to greatly abbreviate the sections that he suggested I curtail. But I did not follow his advice, and I don't think this was just author stubbornness. When literature builds up to a success, usually the path to success is filled with struggles and littered with failures. This is true of good heroic literature, and for that matter a lot of terrible heroic literature as well. (Just watch a bad adventure movie sometime.) *Yonder* is a story that is replete with struggles and failures, only the failures of the disembodied minds have nothing to do with physical journeys or combat. They begin stuck in philosophy, mere philosophy, and their clumsy efforts to break out provide the failures, and therefore to greatly abridge the philosophical discussion would be to strip away the struggle and failure by which they reach success: a vision of the grandeur of being human. Like much good and bad

literature, the broad sweep was inspired by *The Divine Comedy*, opening with a vision of Hell and building up to a view of our painful life as a taste of Heaven, and you don't tell *The Divine Comedy* faithfully if you replace the *Inferno* with a brief summary stating that there are some gruesome images and a few politically incorrect ideas about sin. The dark science fiction world and its mere philosophy provides the vision of Hell that prepares the reader to see the humanness of Heaven and the Heaven of humanness. The inner story can be told by itself; it is for that matter told independently in "A Wonderful Life." But there is something in *Yonder*, as it paints the stark, dark, disturbing silhouette of the radiant, luminous splendor and beauty of human life.

While I was a math undergrad, I read and was deeply influenced by the *Tao Te Ching*; something of its influence may be seen in *The Way of the Way*. That work has its flaws, and I may have drunk too deeply of Taoism, but there was a seed planted that I would later recognize in fuller forms in the Orthodox Way. I had in full my goals of studying and thinking, but I realized by the way that there was some value to be had in stillness. Later I would come to be taught that stillness is not an ornament to put on top of a tree; it is the soil from which the tree of life grows.

After I completed my studies in math, and having trouble connecting with the business world, I took stock, and decided that the most important knowledge of all was theology. I had earlier planned to follow the established route of being a mathematician until I was no longer any good for mathematics and then turning out second rate theology. My plans shifted and I wanted to put my goal up front and, I told my pastor, "I want to think about theology

in community." (If you are wincing at this, good.) So, in this spirit, I applied to several schools and began the study of academic theology. If you are an astute reader, I will forgive you if you ask, "But isn't this still a mathematician looking for a book on how to hug?" The goal I had, to teach at a university or even better train Orthodox priests at a seminary, was a laudable enough goal, and perhaps God will bless me with that in the future. Perhaps he wants the same thing, but perhaps God first wants to free me from the chain of being too much like a mathematician wanting to learn how to hug by reading a book.

During my time studying theology at Cambridge, I was received into the Orthodox Church. I am grateful to God for both a spiritual father whose lenience offered a corrective to my legalistic tendencies, and for a godfather who was fond of reading Orthodox loose cannons and who helped me see a great many things that were invisible to me at the time. For instance, I asked him for help on some aspect of getting my worldview worked out correctly, and I was caught off guard when he explained, "You aren't being invited to work out the Orthodox worldview. You're being invited to worship in the right glory of Orthodoxy, and you are being invited to walk the Orthodox way." In that sense Orthodoxy is not really a system of ideas to work out correctly that, say, a martial art: there may be good books connected to martial arts, but you learn a martial art by practicing it, and you learn Orthodoxy by practicing it. And in that response, my godfather helped me take one step further away from being a mathematician trying to find a book that will teach him how to hug. (He also gave me repeated corrections when I persisted in the project of trying to improve Orthodox practices by historical reconstruction. And eventually he got

through to me on that point.)

Becoming Orthodox for me has been a matter of becoming really and truly human, or at least beginning to. There is a saying that has rumbled down through the ages in different forms: in the second century, St. Irenaeus wrote, *"For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God."* I have not read this in much earlier sources, but I have read many later phrasings: *"God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God."* *"The divine became human that the human might become divine."* *"The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God."* And one real variation on this has been quoted, *"Christ did not just become man so that I might become divine. He also became man that I might become a man."*

If Christ became man that I might become human, this is manifest in a million ways in the Orthodox Church. Let me give one way. When I was preparing to be received into the Orthodox Church, I asked my godfather some question about how to best straighten out my worldview. He told me that the Western project of worldview construction was not part of the Orthodox Way: I had been invited to walk the Orthodox Way but not work out the Orthodox worldview. If there is in fact an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from worldviewish endeavors: it arises out of the practices and life of the Orthodox Church, much in line with, *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* Not just

corrections, but being caught off-guard by effectively being told, "Here are some of many rules; there is no need for you to know all of them. They are important, and you need to strive for strict excellence, but you are not treating them in the right spirit if you hold them rigidly and legalistically. (Work out with your priest how you will best bend them.)" The Orthodox Church's nature as essentially an oral tradition has helped cure me of silly things like meticulously studying ancient texts to put my mind to an antiquarian reconstruction and answer the question, "How should we live?" (The Orthodox Church is ancient, but it is not really infected with antiquarian reconstruction efforts.) The rhythm of the liturgy and its appointed seasons, the spiritual housecleaning involved with preparing for confession, the profoundly important community of the faithful: all of these are part of how it works out in the Orthodox Church that God became man not only so that I might become divine, but also so that I might become more truly man.

Part of this becoming human on my part also has to do with silence, or as Orthodox call it, hesychasm. Part of the disorder of life as we know it is that our minds are scattered about: worrying about this, remembering that pain, and in general not gathered into the heart. Mathematical training is a training in drawing the mind out of the heart and into abstract thinking. The word "abstract" itself comes from the Latin *abstrahere*, meaning to pull back (from concrete things), and if you train yourself in the habit of abstraction you pull yourself back from silence and from what is good about the *Tao Te Ching*.

In "Silence: Organic Food for the Soul," I all but closed with the words, "Be in your mind a garden locked and a

fountain sealed," which speaks about having a mind that is gathered together and is in the fullest sense mind: which is not when abstract thinking is its bread and butter. Perhaps some of the saints' wisdom is abstract, but it does not come from building an edifice of abstractions.

The terms *intellect* and *mind* mean something very different in Orthodox classics than they do in today's English. The difference is as great as the difference between using *web* to mean a physical object woven out of spider's silk and *web* to mean interconnected documents and media available over the internet. Today you might say, "The intellect is what an IQ test measures." An Orthodox saint who had been asked might have said, "The intellect is where you meet God." The mind is an altar, and its proper thought flows out of its being an altar: in "Within the Steel Orb," a visitor from our world steps into a trap:

"And your computer science is pretty advanced, right? Much more advanced than ours?"

"We know things that the trajectory of computer science in your world will never reach because it is not pointed in the right direction." Oinos tapped the wall and arcs of pale blue light spun out.

"Then you should be well beyond the point of making artificial intelligence."

"Why on a million, million worlds should we ever be able to do that? Or even think that is something we *could* accomplish?"

"Well, if I can be obvious, the brain is a computer, and the mind is its software."

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—"

"All right, all right! I get the idea, and that's some pretty lovely poetry. (What's a kairometer?) These are all very beautiful metaphors for the mind, but I am interested in what the mind is literally."

"Then it might interest you to hear that your world's computer is also a metaphor for the mind. A good and poetic metaphor, perhaps, but a metaphor,



and one that is better to balance with other complementary metaphors. It is the habit of some in your world to understand the human mind through the metaphor of the latest technology for you to be infatuated with. Today, the mind is a computer, or something like that. Before you had the computer, 'You're just wired that way' because the brain or the mind or whatever is a wired-up telephone exchange, the telephone exchange being your previous object of technological infatuation, before the computer. Admittedly, 'the mind is a computer' is an attractive metaphor. But there is some fundamental confusion in taking *that* metaphor literally and assuming that, since the mind is a computer, all you have to do is make some more progress with technology and research and you can give a computer an intelligent mind."

That litany of metaphors summarizes much of my second master's thesis. Which is not really the point; but my point here is that on an Orthodox understanding, intellect is *not* something you measure by an IQ test and a mind is *not* the spitting image of a computer. The mind, rightly understood, finds its home in prayer and simple silence. The intellect is where one meets God, and its knowing flows out of its contact with God and with spiritual reality. And, in the metaphors of the Song of Songs, the mind as it is meant to be is "a garden locked, a fountain sealed", not spilled out promiscuously into worry, or grudges, or plans for the future that never satisfy. And this gathering together of the mind, this prayer of the mind in the heart, is one that was not proposed to me by my mathematical training.

Now I should mention that I have a lot to be grateful for

as far as math goes. There are a lot of people who gave of themselves in my training; there are a lot of people who gave of themselves in the various math contests I was involved in. And, not to put too fine a point of it, I have a computer job now which is a blessing from God and in which I build on a strong mathematical foundation. It would be silly for me to say, "I am not grateful for this" as God has provided me many blessings through math. But I need to place things like "I have a lot of math awards" alongside what a monk said to a maid and to me: she was fortunate in the job she had, as manual labor that allowed her mind to pray as she was working in inner stillness, while I as a computer person was less fortunate because my job basically required me to be doing things with my mind that don't invite mental stillness. My job may be a profound blessing and something not to take for granted. But he was pointing out that the best jobs for spiritual growth may not be the ones higher on the pecking order.

## **A streak of escapism**

There is a streak of escapism in much of my work. If you read "Within the Steel Orb," I believe you will find insight expressed with wonder, and I would not take back any of that. But the wisdom, which is wisdom from here and now, is expressed as the alien wisdom of an alien world that panders to a certain escapism. Wisdom and wonder can be expressed without escapism; "Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth" and "Doxology" both express wisdom and wonder in a way that does not need to escape from a disdained here and now. But there is a thread of escapism in much of my work, even as I have sought to reject it.

During or shortly after I was in high school, I wrote a note in an online forum arguing that *Terminator 2* had shot itself in the foot. The movie had a scene with two little boys angrily playing with toy guns and the voiceover complained about how tragic this was, and at the end the message was made even more explicit: "If a machine, a terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too." But the movie was an action-adventure movie, meaning a movie whose attraction was built on glorified violence with guns blazing. In terms of a movie that would speak out against violence, contrast it with a movie idea I had, for a movie that would rush along at an action-adventure clip for the first few minutes and then slow down like a European art film; from "Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art:"

What I did do was to outline a film idea for a film that would start out indistinguishably from an action-adventure movie. It would have one of the hero's friends held captive by some cardboard-cutout villains. There is a big operation to sneak in and deftly rescue him, and when that fails, all Hell breaks loose and there is a terrific action-adventure style firefight. There is a dramatic buildup to the hero getting in the helicopter, and as they are leaving, one of the villain's henchmen comes running with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

The camera surprisingly does not follow the helicopter in its rush to glory, but instead focuses on the henchman for five or ten excruciating minutes as he curses and writhes in agony. Then the film slows

down to explore what that one single gunshot means to the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he nursed a spiritual wound of lust for vengeance that was infinitely more tragic than his devastating physical wound.

By contrast, it may be clearer what might be called shooting yourself in the foot in the *Terminator 2* syndrome, and as far as escapism goes, I have a couple of pieces that shoot themselves in the foot with something like a *Terminator 2* syndrome. In "The Voyage," the miserable young Jason is an escapist and, when he meets an old man, asks the old man's help in an escape he doesn't believe is possible. The old man deftly opens Jason's eyes to the beauty of this world, the beauty of the here and now, that are simply invisible to him. I stand by everything I wrote in that regard. But the closing line, when thanks to the old man Jason triumphs over escapism, is, "And Jason entered another world." Which is to say that the story shot itself in the foot, like *Terminator 2*.

There may be a paradoxical link between escapism and self-absorption. Self-absorption is like being locked in your room and sensing that it is constricting, and so you wish that you could be teleported up to a spaceship and explore the final frontier, or maybe wish for a portal to open up that would take you to the Middle Ages or some fantasy world. And maybe you can get a bit of solace by decorating your room like someplace else and imagining that your room is that other place, and maybe you can pretend and do mind games, but they don't really satisfy. What you miss is what you really need: to unlock the door, walk out, visit a friend, go shopping, and do some volunteering. It may not be what

you could arrange if you were controlling everything, but that's almost exactly the *point*. It may not what you want, but it is what you need, and it satisfies in a way that a quest to become a knight, at least in your imagination, cannot. And my own concerns to escape self-absorption and escapism play out in my writing: "The Spectacles" is more successful than *The Voyage* in telling of an escape from the Hell of self-absorption and escapism; I've been told it's my best short story. But it still has the imprint of self-absorption even as it tells of someone finding way out of self-absorbed escapism. And something of that imprint affects my writing: there are some good things about my fiction, but I have been told that my characters are too similar and are only superficially different. I do not think I will ever receive the kind of compliment given to Charles Dickens, that he envisions a complete universe of different characters. People may say that my satire like *Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary* shows a brilliant wit and is biting funny, but you can be pretty full of yourself and still write good satire. By contrast, it takes humble empathy to make a universe of characters worthy of Dickens.

## **A door slammed shut:**

### ***God's severe mercy***

I earned a master's in theology, and entered into a doctoral program. I thought for a long while about how to say something appropriate about that program, and I think the best I can do is this:

I've been through chemotherapy, and that was an experience: overall, it was not as bad as I feared, and I

enjoyed life when I was going through chemotherapy. I still cherish "The Spectacles," the first piece written after a long dry spell because I was drained by illness. I'm not sure it is a nice thing to have powerful cytotoxins injected into your body, and the rough spots included the worst hour of (purely physical) pain in my life, but on the whole, a lot of progress has been made in making chemotherapy not as bad as it used to be, and I had good people to care for me.

And then there are experiences that, to put it politely, put chemotherapy into perspective. My entering this doctoral program and trying to please the people there was one of those experiences into perspective: during that time, I contacted a dean and wrote, "I found chemotherapy easier than dealing with [*a professor I believed was harassing me*]," and received no response beyond a secretary's brush-off. After this ordeal, my grades were just below the cutoff to continue, and that school is not in any way going to give me nice letters of reference to let me finish up somewhere else. I suppose I could answer spam emails and get a diploma mill Ph.D., but I don't see how I am in a position to get the Ph.D. that I wanted badly enough to endure these ordeals.

And if I ask where God was in all this, the answer is probably, "*I was with you, teaching you all the time.*" When I was in middle school, I ranked 7th in the nation in the 1989 MathCounts competition, and I found it obvious then that this was because God wanted me to be a mathematician. For that matter, I didn't go through the usual undergraduate panic about "What will I major in?" Now I find it obvious that God had something else in mind, something greater: discipleship, or sonship, which may pass through being a mathematician, or may not. Not straying

too far from this, I wanted a Ph.D., and I thought that this would be the best way to honor him with my abilities. Again I was thinking too narrowly; I was still too much of the mathematician looking for a book to teach him how to hug; again the answer seemed to be, "*That's not the issue. Aim higher and be my servant.*" As it turns out, I have four years' graduate work in theology; that has some use in my writings, and even if it didn't, the issue is not whether I am a good enough achiever, but whether I am faithful.

During this time I read quite a lot of medieval versions of the legends of King Arthur. There were a couple of things that drew me to them, both of them rather sad. The first was pride, both pride at thinking I was going to be an Arthurian author, and pride at sometimes reading medieval legends in the original.

But the second reason I kept reading them was that compared to what I was covering in theology class, reading the legends almost seemed like I was actually studying *theology*. (At least by comparison.) Whether a course in theological foundations that assumed, "We need to work from the common ground that is shared by all the world's religious traditions, and that universal common ground is Western analytic philosophy," or reading that theologians are scientists and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called "hard sciences" like physics, or a course in "philosophy and contemporary theology" that was largely about queer matters and such topics as ambiguous genitalia, the whole experience was like "Monty Python teaches Christian theology." And it would be a funny, if tasteless joke, but it was really something much more tragic than a Monty Python riff on theology. And in all this the Arthurian legends, which are really quite pale if they are

held next to the grandeur of Christian theology, none the less seemed to give respite for me to study.

In the light of all this, there are three basic things that I wrote. The first is the Arthurian book I wanted to write out of all the medieval books I was reading:

- *The Sign of the Grail*

The second thing is a group of pieces that were written largely as rebuttals to things I ran into there. (The university was a "Catholic" university, so they were generous to us Orthodox and treated us like liberal Catholics.) I've had enough contact with Catholics outside that university; those pieces are not written just in response to being at a "Catholic" university.

- "Dissent: Lessons From Being an Orthodox Theology Student at a Catholic University"
- "An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism"
- "'Religion and Science' Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution"

I believe there is some merit in these pieces, but not that much: if they say something that needs to be said, they are limited to winning an argument. Theology can win an argument and some of the best theology is meant to win an argument, but the purpose of real theological writing is to draw people into the presence of God. These pieces may say something valuable, but they do not really do the job of



theology: *beckon the reader to worship before the throne of God.*

But that leaves the third group of pieces written in the wake of that un-theological theology program, and that is precisely pieces which are written to draw the reader to bask in the glory of God. The ones I would pick as best are:

- “Doxology”
- “God the Spiritual Father”
- “Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art”
- “Silence: Organic Food for the Soul”
- “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis”

## **So where does this leave me now?**

I think I've made real progress but I still have a lot in common with that mathematician who bought a book so he could learn how to hug. Be that as it may, I have a lot to be thankful for.

I had my heart set on completing my program, but in 2005 I started a Ph.D. program that was estimated to take eight years to complete. And since then, the economy tanked. And in this, a gracious and merciful God didn't give me what I *wanted*, but what I *needed*. Actually, more than that. In the aftermath of the program, I took some anthropology and linguistics coursework which on the one hand confirmed that I was already good at learning languages (the woman who scored the MLAT for me said,

"I've scored this test for thirty years and I've never seen a score this high,") and on the other hand, paradoxically provided good remedial understanding of things I just didn't *get* about my own culture. And there's something I'd like to point out about that. God provided academic coursework to teach me some things that most people just pick up as they grow, and perhaps studying academic theology was what God provided to help me get on to something that is at once more basic, greater, and more human: entering the Orthodox Church, and entering real, human theology.

But back to after the anthropology courses. Then the economy took a turn for the worse, and I found a good job. Then the economy got worse than that, and my job ended, and I had my fast job hunt yet and found an even better than that. There's no way I'm entitled to this; it is God's gracious providence at work. These are blessings covered in the divine fingerprints.

I still have failings to face: rather spectacular failings which I'd rather not detail. And it God's grace that I am still learning of my clumsiness and my sin, and realize I really need to face ways I don't measure up. But that is really not the issue.

Does God work with flawed people?

Who else does he have to work with?

He has glorious, majestic, awesome, terrifying holy angels. But there is another glory when God works in and through flawed people.

Even the sort of mathematician who would read a book on how to hug (or maybe write one). The worst of our flaws is like an ember thrown into the ocean of God's transforming power.

And the same God wills to work in you, whatever your flaws may be.

*Much love,*

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward

# **Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict**

## **One brief comment**

*I was not happy with this when it was new, and think that something in it still isn't quite right. However, I still think there is something in it that's worth reading.*

As a child of perhaps ten, I told friends that I was going to make a martial art, made up a name that sounded Asian to me ("Tong Fior"), and got into an argument about it with a classmate (nowhere near physical blows). The preferred term for this in the academy is the highly abrasive term "Orientalism," although the better tempered anthropologists would regard it as the normal and natural contact when any one culture starts to meet another, and is really the same Orientalism by which the nationalistic

*Independence Day* movie enjoyed tremendous popularity well outside of U.S. political borders. In the one kind of Orientalism, there are people in the West who want to be some romanticized image of the East; in the other there are people in the East who want to be some romanticized image of the West. I have difficulty finding much of any real difference between these instances of “diffusion” as the term is understood in an anthropology department.

And as is illustrated below, as Proverbs says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart” is mysteriously tied to the Lord granting the desires of your heart, and sometimes in the oddest ways.

## **Obligatory quotation from G.K. Chesterton**

G.K. Chesterton, in a passage that is politically incorrect enough today, wrote,

I am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not suddenly of pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This consists not of suddenly pressing, but that of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon is in the very worst spirit of the East. But there is no force so hard to defeat as the force which is easy enough for conquer; the force that always yields and then returns.

But hold that thought for a second, and I speak as a fan of the Land of the Rising Sun for ages. (And not just for that one single Google AdWords ad impression that changed

eBay's AdWords presence forever: "*Buy Japanese sushi on eBay! New and Used.*")

Someone said, in response to a Quora question about whether anyone had regretted getting a PhD, and one of few PhD's to say "yes" said basically that you don't get a doctorate to get a superhuman high social status and be addressed as "Doctor"; he said "a PhD is just a paper that comes along the way as you are doing something you love."

## The personalities of martial arts

Something very much like that related to what what we now understand as a belt system. A martial artist wouldn't be awarded a blackbelt (or anything else besides a white belt) on the grounds of a formalized test. When you started, you got a white belt that would be slowly blackened by the practice involved in developing expertise for years and years and years. And I believe that most of the better martial artists today would say that the older approach is still foundational in better practices today; it's just obscured and harder to discern, and certain entirely justified concessions to societal needs have been made.

I remember being offended when I saw how parts of Aikido in Aiki Ninjutsu work; it brought up memories of very frustrating matters of conversation, where a friend (and I do really mean *friend*) gave infuriating claims of agreement where he would say "*I agree with you* that [fill in the blank]", and the beginning, middle, and end of every such "*agreement*" was to wrench some belief of my mine out of context, placing himself as someone in a position to understand, interpret and explain my beliefs far better than I could, and use it as a sledgehammer against something

else that were just as foundational to those beliefs. During those years, he never claimed agreement except as the presentation of an attack. And that is specifically what I saw in physical form in how to respond to an opponent's punch. You grabbed your opponent's arm, and so to speak "corrected" the direction it was moving, and add exaggerated force to what your revision of the punch has become. This was disappointing enough to be offensive after reading the tale of a martial art founded by a legendary, great O Sensei who stood unarmed and kept dodging a master swordsman until the attacking swordsman collapsed from fatigue.

I'd be a little cautious about glibly identifying this as "Aikido," which etymology means something close to "Way with harmony and energy," as Aiki Ninjutsu represents a new fusion that draws on several older sources and has modern elements. The fusion may not particularly Western elements, but it has a Creed (with an apparently deliberate uppercase 'C' as in "Craptastic"), with the Creed beginning with "I believe in myself. I am confident. I can accomplish my goals," and when I started to give a thinking Christian's objections to believing in oneself (see Chesterton's take below), I saw in verbal form the foundational lesson of "Become the center." What I never heard was so much as lip service to "harmony between opponents" that is a leitmotif in so many genuine martial arts. The technique associated with "Become the center" forces all else to resolve around oneself, and the teacher seemed a bit "become the center" in that he spoke with decisive authority and I was not allowed to even contribute anything to the conversation beyond accepting decisive authority.

G.K. Chesterton incidentally has something to say about

“become the center” or rather just believing in yourself. The sting with which he opens chapter 2 of his book *Heretics* make the stinging remarks of Sumo wrestling quoted above almost sound like praise:

THOROUGHLY worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, “That man will get on; he believes in himself.” And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written [the name of the lunatic asylum] “Hanwell.” I said to him, “Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.” He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. “Yes, there are,” I retorted, “and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly



individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has 'Hanwell' written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus." And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" After a long pause I replied, "I will go home and write a book in answer to that question." This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

Enough of Chesterton; like *The Onion*, he has something to offend every palate. (He was beyond being dismissive of the thought of his joining the Orthodox Church.

Some people might be surprised by remarks above; my memberships in 3-4 martial arts lasted for a few months, and while I have had some successes (Kuk Sool Won and the local Shokotan paired me with blackbelts or blackbelt candidates by the end, and one fellow Karate student was getting very infuriated when I responded to him about a quarter second earlier than expected; I moved to meet him as he was moving, not after, without the faintest interval between the two), I found that spirituality was very dry until I repented of it as sin (a mistake I should have made *once*, if even that). And just to be clear, everyone I've heard of in

any martial art at all says that you improve after a couple of months, but real mastery takes *years* and *years* and *years*. (I think my case was simply not how things work normally.)

## God practices Ju-Jutsu, and we should too, as an act of submission

Perhaps the single greatest illustration of Jiu-Jutsu in the Bible is where a Saul burning with wrath and destruction, trying in overweening pride to annihilate the Church, was stopped cold by the uncreated Light of Heaven, the Light who strikes terror in those not indwelt by It, and provides what may be the only place in the Bible where the Lord quotes a pagan Greek source: **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ... It hurts you to kick against the goads.”** The action of an Orthodox Christian is not, on the balance, to invade another’s mind and straighten it out. It is not, on the balance, either our place to really defend ourselves. It is to, in the words of a Protestant hymn, “Keep your eyes on Jesus / Look full in his wonderful face / And the things of this world will grow strangely dim / In the light of his glory and grace,” and remember that you too are a sinner and try to be merciful and forgiving as others join you as you continue kicking against the goads.

Furthermore, the more you are in trouble, the more stress you are in, the more conflict or worse, the more essential that you grow beyond any abilities you know in deiform love to *forgive*, to *have mercy*, to *pray*, to *turn the other cheek*. The Sermon on the Mount is not an ornament for the beings of some mythical world more perfect than

Star Trash. It is a battleplan for those of us who live in a world of conflict and violence.

The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount.

## De-mythologizing done right

Bultmann is a foundational character in the academy, enough so to have provoked C.S. Lewis to write “The Elephant and the Fern-Seed.” Bultmann came up with a new way of moving beyond mythological trappings found in the Bible and theology. Or at least that is how his progressive circles understood their stance; I’m not completely sure how an Orthodox might best respond, whether “You have a valid enough point, but why does it loom so suffocatingly large to you?” or, “Um, you ARE aware that your fresh and new discovery is a recycled version of a topic that an Orthodox Christian worked out with power, well over a millennium earlier than you, and by a canonized saint at that, and the saint did a profoundly better job than you?”, or extending an invitation for the distinguished scholar to simply *become a catechumen!*

However, I would like to take up Bultmann’s point, or rather that of the canonized saint of over a thousand years before (Pseudo-Dionysius), or rather *God’s* point. A standard illustration is, as we repeatedly read in Exodus, “God hardened Pharoah’s heart.” This claim should not be taken literally; I’ve yet to read even someone very wrong read the text as meaning that God stiffened Pharoah’s cardiac muscle (heart) the same way an arm or leg or back muscle stiffens with a cramp. But it goes deeper. The claim that God changed Pharoah at all is too crude. *Pharoah*

hardened his own heart with Satan's *help*. God (and the image of Jiu-jitsu must eventually be dropped as well) exercised Jiu-jitsu and let Pharoah reach destruction by the only way that Hell can ever be reached: *by his own steam*.

I now remember once feeling particularly squeamish about a mailing list conversation where one Orthodox sympathizer clarified, in perfect sincerity, that where Genesis 1 repeats, "And God said," that was such a human way of speaking that it meant that God spoke, in her words, "with lips and a tongue" as one would expect of mortal man. And I made no effort to assume command of the situation and straighten out her mind for a couple of reasons. First of all, even if her assertion was analytically wrong enough to fill me with squeamishness, unless she is troubling others (in which case someone well above my pay grade should be laying down the law), it is not my place to use my book-learning to take away the little that is held by someone who is not even a member of the Orthodox Church. But that is just for practice. The beam in my eye has to do with believing I need to have my way, that I should be in power or in control, or anything else. She might have thought it helpful to give Pharoah an intake appointment at a cardiologist's. *I do much worse*.

## How?

Perhaps one way of putting that is this: we are inclined to believe that God violated the free will of Satan and Judas, because they killed the Son of Man and He came back to life triumphant. But a slightly closer image is that he was on higher ground, he let their free will be as sordid as they chose, *and in a way beyond Jiu-jitsu* the God who is beyond motion met them fully and attentively, with a heart full of

love, and the evil that cannot grasp love tried to give its strongest and most venomous strike, they struck where the everywhere-present God is not and the full force of their blow slammed into a brick wall and their sting was inflicted only on themselves.

*But be careful:*

One subtle note to those who find alluring the image of Satan slamming his horns full force into an adamant wall next to which diamond is as as a crumbling dust: if you find the image attractive, **beware of adopting Satan's ever-seductive, ever-destructive pride.**

One joke good or bad that I heard many, many times as a child ran:

There were two morons working in a hot pit enduring the heat while their boss sat in a cool air-conditioned building outside of the pit on the ground above, not doing much of anything.

One day the morons got to talking and said, "How come we do all the work and our boss gets to sit in an air conditioned building? So the first moron got up from the pit and asked, "How come we work in a hot messy pit all day, and you're in this office getting nearly all the money?"

The boss said, "Because I'm smarter than you."

The moron asked, "Why?"

The boss walked over to a thick tree and held his hand in front of the trunk. "Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

The moron swung his best, and the boss deftly pulled his hand away, leaving the moron to slam the full force of his punch into the rugged trunk of the

tree.

After he had stopped crying, the first moron climbed back into the pit.

The second moron said, "What did you find out?"

The first moron said, "I'm smarter than you."

The second moron said, "Why?"

The first moron put his hand in front of his face and said, "Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

There are two, and no more than two, essential options to us. One is to join hands in the Church and dance with the Lord not only of men but of angels and eagles, cultures and corporate worlds, a vast universe held in the heart of a God so small as to be without parts, and join in the unfolding mystery of the Lord of the Dance in whom alone the Divine Providence unfurls. The other option is to help Satan rearrange your face. There is no inconsistent option which lets you remain impenitent in pride and yet remain impossibly free from Satan's clutches. And more could be said than that: as Fr. Thomas Hopko famously crystallized, "Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted until your last breath."

This is also the point expressed in what may be the most piercingly beautiful of St. Nicolas' *Prayers by the Lake* in which, as I would offer images Hope is praised, the Hope Who is eternal, the Hope which glimmers in young children who race out of bed on Christmas morning in all the pageantry of the Great Dance and can't wait to open the first present but hasn't the faintest idea of what the first present may be. But there also hopes, with an 's' as in "Shit", hopes that have certainly plagued *me* enough hopes really that God will obey the plan that you have worked out

to him, and set expectations that God is to jump to your plan, and in the event of any problems, he should contact you immediately for further orders or instructions. It is, on reflection, an act of mercy that God sometimes says, “No” to people who give the most meticulously drafted orders, and perhaps work with people who order him around for decades to teach them, just a little, how to live a life that is dancing the Great Dance.

## **Gandhi and *satyagraha***

Having tried to underscore the absolute necessity of humility, I would like to move on to the next order of business and compare myself to Gandhi.

Gandhi was a Hindu, in one of three world religions that took its genesis in India. It is my considered judgment that Gandhi’s achievements could have been made solely within resources directly provided by his native Hinduism. However, that sounds like an outsider’s guess to anyone who understands this figure in history; however rich Hinduism may be, Gandhi through whatever reason chose to draw on outside sources.

The most shame I have ever felt about being a Christian was when a pastor in church explained that Gandhi wanted with his whole heart to become a Christian, and when he sought out a Christian evangelist, the racist evangelist rejected him for the color of his skin alone. That experience soured Gandhi enough that he was never again open to being a Christian, but please look at this closely.

I would draw out four decisive influences on Gandhi:

1. **Gandhi’s native Hinduism** about which I

will now only say that it is deep as an ocean.

2. **The “purer than the pure” Jainism** from which he took profound inspiration without also membership (we proverbially say that someone “wouldn’t hurt a fly”, while to this day Jain monastics sweep the ground in front of them with peacock feathers to avoid accidentally stepping on a bug, as Jainism is also a world religion that came from India.
3. **Christianity:** *this was the religion of the British colonists*, and Gandhi spoke and acted warmly towards his sharpest critics. Gandhi also said things that would astonish people for a speaker who wasn’t Christian: “Jesus, a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.” He elsewhere states that his three heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom saw their lives as nothing next to the salvation of their souls. And finally:
4. **Western-style political activism:** (Well, I suppose we all have to be wrong about *something*.)

I do not know how to explain Gandhi’s spatula stature in actively trying to adopt the strengths of Christianity and activism. True, he was soured by personally rejected by a



Christian evangelist who was *beyond* moronic, but what I would ordinarily expect is for Gandhi to grind an axe against the English and Christians for the rest of his life, with an anger transparently visible to everyone else besides him, all the way icily insisting, “*I am not angry!*” As it was, he kept reaching out in love to English and other people who met him with total hatred, and by what is called “satyagraha” purchased the freedom of the one nation in history that achieved its from colonial domination by nonviolence rather than war, and remains the one nation in the world that I am aware of where rah-rah nationalism express itself by the study of nonviolence rather than by celebrating victory through warriors’ killing of others. And this is in a religion where the crowning jewel, the Sermon on the Mount, is a tale of epic heroism where God appears in human semblance and encourages and exhorts a prince who is so devoid of laziness that perhaps he doesn’t even sleep, to rise up in full power and annihilate all those marked for destruction. And Gandhi does nothing to downplay the text; he instead contributed yet one more commentary to the vast collection (and the Hindu preference, at least today, seems to be never give this crowning jewel without opening it up by commentary). And now we are in a position to drill down slightly.

Gandhi said very emphatically, “Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills.” And I would take this as entirely without sloppiness or guile. However, I would like to delve into a word he used. For the purpose of this section, I will treat Gandhi’s use of “nonviolence” and “satyagraha” as two sides of the same coin, or even closer. The term “satyagraha” is not taken from Hindi (which is, along with English, India’s modern national language), but from the

classical Sanskrit, classical in India as Latin and Greek are European classical languages. My best understanding both as a historian and also as an author is that Gandhi went on a word hunt, searching to find the perfect word to crystallize the consuming quest, as Madeleine l'Engle found a word "kythe", a Scottish word if I remember correctly, that originally meant something like "to truly come to be", and became the central term in her classic *A Wind in the Door*. Madeleine l'Engle did not use the word as anyone before her did, and Gandhi seized on a word that had previously not been a term about violence or its absence, a term that meant something like "*steadfastly holding on to the Truth no matter what.*"

And there is no either-or between Gandhi's embarking on a quest that ended with a deep term from classical Sanskrit, and his full and direct assertion that truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. The key to this is found in Christ's words: "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." A study of Gandhi's use of the term "satyagraha" is a study of bringing forth out of a treasure things new and old which are one on the same.

I freely enough compare myself to Gandhi as an author. I do not feel the need to compare myself to Gandhi on *forgiveness* or anything else truly important besides that we are both made in the image of God, and both sinners.

## **What is pain? What is yielding?**

Here I will not discuss what the image of God is at length, nor dissect that the highest command is to love God

with one's whole being and the second *which is like it* is to love your neighbor as yourself. However, I will say that the God who defines health is the model for healthily function and life, and Jujutsu is not just how God acts, it's how we act if we're doing right. It means that even in the most intense conflict or combat one is looking up for light. The U.S. in World War II referred to the Japanese Jiu-jutsu as "chop-socky", and for all their following the universal wartime rules of due diligence in demonizing the enemy, the most patriotic U.S. foot soldiers learned very, very quickly that their Western boxing completely fell to pieces when it ran into "chop-socky."

It is said by at least some martial artists and athletes that "Pain is weakness exiting the body." It should equally be said by Orthodox Christians not only that repentance is *sin* exiting the soul, but that *repentance is misery exiting the soul*, if there is any difference at all: repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. And the struggle with anger that is called forgiveness, when we reach victory, is *also* misery exiting the soul.

Jiu-jutsu is a word meaning "yielding", and comparisons with Jiu-jutsu should not be pushed too far, as may be admitted. It is one image among others and one not present in Scripture. But there is a distinction in Asian martial arts (and perhaps Capoeira, for instance), between "-jutsu" and "-do" that is well understood. "Jutsu" means a technique or skill, like woodworking, and "do" means a philosophical or spiritual path. The Western tradition (apart from when Asian martial arts came to be a substantial influence) is entirely "-jutsu". This is true with a couple of bumps, as Jiu-jutsu is of an ancient provenance, the art of Samurai who had not even their weapons, while

Judo may be seen as a modern attempt to simplify and cleanse Jiu-Jitsu into a simpler art that would be effective self-defense while eliminating locks and other destructive features. And all of the martial arts have their own personalities and characteristics, some better than others, but none yet let the stillness of Orthodox hesychasm or silence eclipse the meditation that is structural to internal martial arts.

## Dojos

So when am I going to start opening dojos? The answer I am hoping for is, “Never.” The one possible exception I see is that if the Church is really, *really* scraping the bottom of the barrel and makes me some kind of bishop, or even worse a **real** bishop charged with fully competent administration, love, and care of a diocese, instead of the nominal formality, the “How do you solve a problem like Maria?” concession of being honored on paper as the more-than-a-bishop of some long-lost city without a second living representative. If I bear the heavy cross and heavy crown of thorns of a real bishop, *then* I would have the right to start opening dojos, *except* that wouldn’t be the right way of thinking of it at all: most people would call it “the responsibility to continue opening parishes.”

## Color

I winced when I heard Exodus International was closing its doors... until I found out why, and it was a concern that I held since I first heard of it, no matter how much I respected its mission. Exodus International was trying alone to shoulder a responsibility that belonged to the

entire ecosystem of the Church. And one question I had already been asking before I saw the Gay Nineties taking over was why on earth that class of sin was its own world, a separate detached from the rainbow fragments forgiven by Christ at Sinners Anonymous, or as it is more often called, the Church. The reason for the coming of the Son of God was to destroy the Devil's work, and then to keep on pushing for bonus points well past when people can go Heaven: but for starters, let us to say to take each broken fragment of a fractured rainbow, whether pride or envy or the occult or drunkenness or any shard of lust whether gay or straight, and take these broken fragments and restore them to the to the pure, whole, white, bright, radiant, scintillating Light beyond beauty of the uncreated Son.

## The Void

The martial arts classic *A Book of Five Rings*, in a brevity comparable to the Sermon on the Mount, covers five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and the void. The chapter about the void is by far the most terse: all else is summarized and transcended.

I have come to nearly the end of writing what I wanted to write, and I have covered almost everything on topic to cover except one thing: the original, central point that motivated the construction of the work. It would not be strange to call the topic "satyagraha:" I do not complain that others may do so, but I would rather look at hagiography.

The canonized saints trample on the rules of nature again, and again, and again. Saints walk on water; one monk, the only one on a monastic coast worthy to retrieve an icon miraculously floating on water, when he absolutely

**had** to do so, crawled on top of the surface of the water on all fours like a dog, because in his great humility he considered himself utterly unworthy to stand up normally and walk on top of the water like Christ did. Saints pass through fire unharmed, although not every time. Many saints have been burned to death as martyrs, but it seems to happen that when the fire went out the martyrs looked as if they were merely sleeping, with a smile on their faces, and without a thread of their clothes or a hair on their heads singed or the faintest scent of smoke. In the lives, it seems that the only way that persecutors can get certain saints to die *and stay dead* is to behead them (hello, ISIS?), and even then, the saints occasionally pick up their heads, walk over to their preferred resting place, and there set down their severed heads and only *then* give their consent to really die.

Furthermore the God who works in the heart of hearts to giants among the saints is also works in the hearts of the faithful. Monastic giants trample on scorpions with bare feet; many more faithful trample on pride. Majestic saints open the eyes of the blind; and men reject lust and find their sight truly opened. St. Paul the Apostle raised the dead more than once, and innumerable more among the faithful, across many centuries, have fed the hungry; and furthermore, in a point that many, many officially canonized saints have driven home across the centuries, *feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead*. The term “saint” referred originally to every member of the Church without exception, and one and the same God works in every stripe of saint to ultimately transcend the chasm between what is created, and what is uncreated. The wall between God and we who are merely created is there so that we may rise above it.

And in all this, the inner struggle of the *Philokalia* is vibrant in its nature. Its watchfulness or inner “nipsis” acts in moral and ascetical character like an author searching from just the perfect word, ever attentive, never hurrying, never impatient, always expecting. It is like the great Noah, who followed God’s command to build a huge boat in the middle of the desert, and was then the sole survivor from a deluge. It is like a diligent martial artist, who lives by the words, “The more you bleed in the dojo, the less you will bleed in the street.” It claims no exemption from suffering, nor entitlement to wishes fulfilled: if the Measure by whom all saints are measured was the great King who only wore a crown once, and then only a crown of twisted thorns, then we are advised to properly take up our crosses in this earthly vale while we can still repent, because once our life has gone, the opportunity to repent will vanish forevermore. *But sometimes there is an inner struggle of building a boat in the desert*, and trusting the Lord of the Dance to know that he knows what is the right order and that if your next step is to leap before you look and only find out why *after* you have leapt. For those of us who are children at least, God shows us the reason why just after we have leapt because he knows that out of our weakness we will not exercise faith if he presents us with the reason beforehand, and identically knows that out of our weakness we will not maintain faith if too great a delay comes between the obedience and reward: in all things he meets our weakness that we might meet his strength. *And all of this has every connection to how we can be entangled in our world’s conflicts, get hurt again and again, and meet a joy that is beyond any of the conflicts and hurts.*

Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Destroying Asian*

*Philosophy* talks about “ego-reading”; reading to push through a text, or as the problem appears among hiking, rushing to get to a point as forcefully and as quickly as possible. He points out that paradoxically those who rush to just get something done tend to not arrive at the intended destination at all. People who make progress in one activity or the other are, although I do not recall if they are stated in these terms, are people who have something in mind other than forcing their way to an external goal. Had the book been written later, it might have used the term “auto-telic”, which describes an activity that is its own goal. Where martial arts like Aikido are called “goalless” by practitioners, it would be more literal, at some loss of striking contrast, to use a presently preferred term of auto-telic and say that an Aikidoko is not worrying about if he as a student will reach black belt, or on a much lower scale how interminably long it will take to master what should be a simple technique, or whether there will be enough progress in managing anger or weight, or anything else. A proper practitioner of Aikido’s attention is fixed on Aikido itself, rather than paralysis by analysis over whether Aikido can be successfully used as a bridge to something external. You practice Aikido in order to practice Aikido.

The *Philokalia* offers something that seems much less but ends by being much more. The basic framing of work is different, and quite at odds with today’s conception of interesting work. The usual physical craft of self-supporting monks in the ancient world was basket weaving, cynically understood by some in academia today as a legal fiction to let high-value football players keep the alumni without needing to perform proper academic work. The most common craft of self-supporting monasteries today is



crafting incense, which at least supplies something elevated to Orthodox parishes. But this way of thinking misses the point for both the ancient and the modern arrangement, which I personally only understood when watching my brother's Mythbusters show and hear Adam gush at how "*meditative*" the repeated monotonous physical action of weaving a braided kangaroo leather bullwhip was. The chief merit of basket weaving and incense making alike is that they are repetitive motions that occupy the hands, and it is not clear to me that it is particularly helpful to think of incense as a high-status thing. The ancient and modern monasticism alike the preferred obedience is something that engages the hands while the heart pursues purity. That is the center of gravity. And in modern monasteries, there may be some non-meditative work that needs to be done, but the general pattern is to have most monks heavily engaged in meditative labors for the benefit of the monks themselves in a setting where people do not distinguish sacred from secular or work from prayer. The work is there to help prayer reach perfection. And really, cleaning toilets is more often mentioned as the standard example of honorable obediences than making incense.

But the same center of gravity applies outside of the monastery; it can just be frustratingly more difficult. One monk commented to a cleaning lady that she had a more fortunate position, and I as a programmer and knowledge worker had a less fortunate position, because it is entirely possible to be engaged in prayer while scrubbing tables, but significantly harder to be absorbed in prayer while your mind is chasing bugs in a computer program. And no, this was not a matter of the monk being gracious to someone with lower status and knowing that I would not be hurt or

offended by the suggestion. It was unvarnished candor.

What is necessary for people is the same in or outside of the monastery; it's just that with all the modern inconveniences and interesting and entertaining work the near-identical needs are not met to the same degree. Monks say to each other, "Have a good struggle," and struggle is expected and normal; people who approach monasteries to loaf around or have some romanticized image be their life may succeed, but not without considerable growth. And to the point of struggle, it is the norm and it is necessary for salvation in or out of Heaven. Those scientifically minded know that when physicists have examined how different the physical constants could and support life as we know it, the invariable conclusion is that life as we know it could not be possible unless the universe were tuned, not to put too fine a point on it, but with mind-boggling precision as if there were a God creating a universe universe that was incredibly fine-tuned, *just* to support life. And with a similar question among those who have any idea of the dimensions of the earth and the incomparable dimensions of the universe, "Why is the universe so vast, and the earth smaller than a grain of sand when held next to its grandeur? *How much legroom does the human race need?*" the answer is, "A universe's worth: no less!" And if we ask, "How much legroom does the Church require for salvation, that the saved may have eternal joy and shine with the uncreated Light in Heaven?" the answer is to me my least favorite part of this book and one that brings me to tears. The answer is, "Hell," or possibly more strongly and chillingly, ***Every single soul from among the innumerable multitude of those who will be eternally damned to Hell!***

One pastor tried to say this without a laugh, and failed,

that he was one place in the American South during a heat wave, and just before elevator doors closed, a jogger stepped in, sweating bullets, and said, “It’s hotter than *Hell* out there!” The pastor said, slowly, “*No. It isn’t,*” and crept out everyone else in the elevator. But the damned exist, there is always at least possibility of salvation, God does ever better than they observe, and the damned do one thing that is essential. They provide other people with conflicts that can be part of a saving struggle. And when the Crack of Doom comes those who treat you abusively you will partly answer for your sins in your place. This is first a cause to feel relieved, then giddy, then at least for a moment when the full implications begin to unfold, *pure terror*.

**Christ died for your sins, and so did Judas, Arius, Marx, Jung, and Hitler.**

But God has ordained things, and monastic and non-monastic alike need struggle, which often takes the form of conflicts, of things that we don’t think belong in our lives but God knows they do. And joy does not consist in being exempt from struggle. It consists of growing in struggle. It consists of having a good struggle. And if you earnestly engage your struggle you may experience the power in the final crescendo of Fr. Thomas’s crystallization:

- Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
- Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
- Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God’s mercy.

- When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
- Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

In all these things and more, the Sermon on the Mount as it unfolds including the *Philokalia*, like as the Mishnah and Talmud, acts as a stone from Heaven of inexhaustible wealth:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on

the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

These things slip through our fingers. They are simple, simpler than breathing, and we in our weakened state need some great systematic theology with slippery concepts we can pin down to grasp. So God meets in our weakness and gives the *Philokalia* to meticulously assess every detail of internal struggle and the eight demons that became the seven deadly sins in the West. “Do not store up treasures on earth” is a simple commandment; it does not only tell us we do not need Rolls-Royces to experience true blessedness, nor do we need our health (saints have lived to great spiritual heights amidst great illness, and not just because they were extraordinarily good), nor do we need our thoughts, or plans for our future in days or minutes, or an identity such as we try to have in the West, or “My Opinions”. We are to chase instead of the treasures that we can eat from today and forever, and come to that place where every drop of blood we bleed in the dojo eclipses a galaxy of diamond in its worth on the streets of Heaven.

## Cooldown: *The Alchemist*

*The Alchemist*, like many favorite picks on Oprah, is the sort of thing that makes me nostalgic for when my brother still had a beautiful tropical bird as a pet, and moreover makes me positively *yearn* for the days the house still had a birdcage that still needed lining. None the less, there is a vignette that I would like to draw out.

The teacher-figure in the course is the towering alchemical figure of Melchizedek, who is immortal, can turn lead into gold, can already turn himself into wind, and presumably has numerous and extraordinary other cosmic powers not explored in the text, and teaches the student-figure after making a sweeping dismissal of all the other traditions in all the world's other religions, and even a Western scholar whose heart was in the wrong place along with alchemy being dismissed for rhetorical weight.

The student figure never becomes immortal, never gains abilities to change metals personally, has no idea how to turn himself into wind (at least to start off with; the quest where he learns to make this self-transformation is core to the book's plot), and ends up after a long heroic journey to and back finds out that there had been an enormous quantity of gold lying buried under his back yard right where he started.

But a major point is this: both Master and student are equally alchemists, or at very least at the end. The student does not have all the master's cosmic powers, and even after he has turned himself to wind it is debatable whether he has *any* cosmic powers, but the question of whether they have identical arsenals of cosmic powers matters no more than whether their eyes are of the same color. Both are equally

alchemists; the student follows his teacher in delving deeper into a pride that destroys all capacity for any joy, and an occult mindset that destroys the sanity of all those who practice it in the real world. They are both alchemists, master and pupil, and both participate fully in the tradition, *on their own paths*. That the teacher's path includes having the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, and the student does not, and the teacher can transmute lead to gold and the student cannot, is neither here nor there. Teacher and student both follow their personal paths within alchemy. Perhaps it would have been fundamentally humbler for the student to keep on asking that the teacher give him a sole drop of the Elixir of Life and induct him into turning lead to gold.

(By the way, did I mention that there is a way to obtain gold that is purer than 24 karats, such as alchemists did not reach high enough to quest for?)

With all of the above efforts to rip *The Alchemist* to shreds, and others I've held my tongue on, I still wish to make one point clear: The book's way of looking at difference is less than you think. The further you reach the Kingdom of Heaven, the less it matters that you have precious little money or gold. In fact wealth properly understood is a liability and a handicap more than really being much of any asset that puts you in a better position. Peter Kreeft, a Catholic philosopher and apologist who helped me along the way to Orthodoxy, found one great spiritual advantage to money: *it doesn't make you happy*. If you are perennially struggling financially, and you see Break My Window around you on the street when your beater breaks down frequently, it's awfully, awfully hard to avoid thinking that so many things would be better if you had a

good bit of money. If, on the other hand, you have a top-notch chauffeur for a Rolls-Royce, and you're *still* miserable, a great deal of the sting has been taken away from the temptation that just having more money is all you need. You can still be greedy and covet things, but it becomes a far weaker temptation to think that your spiritual emptiness *actually comes* from the fact that you are not in a position to have Michelangelo's David in your garden and the Mona Lisa in your living room.

The martial artist I respect most was asked in class how many times he had had to use his martial arts skills. And he slowly, gently, humbly said, that he had really been fortunate and hadn't needed to use his his martial art, even though there were a couple of awfully close calls [during years and years of study].

And I submit that his answer, as stated, is wrong, or at *least* his wording was deceptive and misleading.

He was at the time a third-degree blackbelt. I don't know what he is now. For non-martial artists, as far as sparring goes, a first-degree blackbelt is a third-degree blackbelt's chewtoy. He is past the point where people are said to be able to kill a tiger with their bare hands. I am all but certain that in every one of those close calls, he could have killed the other person immediately. His teacher, at a martial arts show, stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and then the teacher was simultaneously attacked by five blackbelts with swords, and an instant later the teacher stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and all around him were five blackbelts, on the ground, *crying*.

The martial artist I most respect said, humbly, gently,



modestly, that even in the close calls, he had said, “You’re the tough guy,” and backed down, or run away, or almost *anything* possible (whatever it took), coming out the loser in every social confrontation, and he went on to say, “Most people who think they want to fight don’t *really* want to fight.” And I submit that the proof of his profound mastery of his art was this: he has passed through minefield after minefield after minefield such as I almost certainly could not, without stepping on a mine even once. The point is not that he happened to be carrying a first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The point is not that he was carrying a very, very good first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The proof of his mastery is that, as of my last knowledge, he had never needed to open his first aid kit, not even *once*. And indeed martial artists often defuse a potential fight before most outsiders would recognize there was anything going out of the ordinary going on.

Incidentally, though there was no question of my ever wanting to give a physical attack when I was in his class, I was quite the jackass and quite the belligerent student, and he only ever answered me with humility and gentleness. In the end, his gentleness conquered me.

What about what I have somewhat whimsically called “Tong Fior”? In my own opinion, my credentials make for an pretty impressive parody of martial arts, unless you want to go through the ha, ha, only serious route. I’ve lifted weights (and lifted weight machines, and broken weight machines by applying too much force), climbed with devotion, in riflery went from no rank to Sharpshooter, Bar VIII in one week, punched at bags, dipped a finger in a few martial arts, made my own approximation of ninjutsu stealth (and unintentionally got a stunned “*Whaaaaa?*” when

these skills came out in campers' response to games in nature with me as their camp counselor, asking, "Did you go to some special Daniel Boone school [to be able to move so silently and be sensitive to sounds that were apparently around 0 dB]?"), and am gifted to the degree that professionals say "You're smarter than most geniuses" or "The average Harvard Ph.D. has never met someone as talented as you" (the gifts are not magic powers but for some purposes they might as well be), and other things which should be preferably viewed as ornamental at best. One question outsiders ask of martial artists is how well they'd do in a real fight; the question comes perhaps with hope at a training that would make the asker all but invincible, the basic response to *that* question is "HTTP Error 404: Missing Page": if you're not already the one and only Miyamoto Musashi, Japan's "sword-saint", no martial art can change that at all. I would show respect for Kuk Sool Won by saying that one second degree black belt said, "I would give myself one chance in two. But the more chances you give yourself, the less you have." I've had experienced the martial arts practicality, as one martial artist's parody ad said, "Get beat up by people twice your age and half your size!" There is one point where I expect victory would come, and that is if the Spirit of the Lord comes on me. Orthodox priests should not employ physical violence, and in the profound story of *Father Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, people are flabbergasted when the weakened and aged monk Fr. Arseny steps where a fight has broken out and strikes a forceful blow. Possibly if the Spirit of the Lord falls on me, I might blast through a 9th kyu, or possibly for that matter a 9th dan. In all other cases it is not my concern.

The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount, and the struggles I now wrestle with are not flesh and blood, though they have brought me through mortal danger more than once. Kuk Sool Won in every school but one says, “We need more practice!” The Kuk Sa Bo Nim (Grandmaster)’s headquarters school says, “*You* need more practice!” I’ll go with “We need more practice!”, please, or better “*I* need more practice!”, or if I can bring it even closer to my true needs, “Lord, give me more time to repent.”

(And a true monk leaves us both in the dust. Though extraordinarily many married Orthodox perfectly well without any of the structure by which God condescends to meet monks.)

# True Woke

## Am I woke?

What are some experiences from my own life? Let me mention a few:

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1. **Terminations.** I have never submitted an accommodation for disability without being terminated, always within a month, and always, always allegedly "for cause."

I've been fired a dozen times, and gave up on talking to HR because they never get it. At one point, when my boss demonstrably lied to me in a meeting for the purpose of scaring me silly, I complained to HR and they thought I was complaining because as a consultant I didn't have job security, and HR simply couldn't wrap their heads around any other

complaint. I was completely and utterly unable to get the point across that my boss was meeting with me to lie to intimidate me bigtime.

2. **Fr. Seraphim of Platina's devoted crowd.** Fr. Seraphim of Platina is the only Orthodox "saint-figure" I have ever been urged to venerate on grounds of his giftedness. I unwisely enough answered, "If you are going to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he was gifted, you should venerate me more because I am more gifted [insert here a list of achievements], and [*the point I was trying to make*] if you're not going to venerate me more because I am more gifted, neither should you be telling me to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he is gifted.

That was answered by the worst harassment in my life, and the only time I've actually thought my body was shutting down because the degree of hate expressed to me. I wrote a book, *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*. I do not want to ask you to read the book if you don't want to, but *please read the one star reviews*. They are more alarming than the most positive reviews.

Incidentally, I've noticed on Amazon that kind reviews to my work appear, and vanish without a trace. *This is ongoing*. I've been contacted by strangers with reviews that were censored ("An Intellectual Genius rooted in reality."). I have awfully few posted reviews for someone who has had so

many Kindle book giveaways and giving away so many review copies. Very few of the reviews stay around.

3. **Square peg, round hole effects at Fordham.**

You can read a sanitized version of my official writeup after Fordham said I washed out. It's posted as **Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham.**

"A\_\_\_\_\_" was a fellow Orthodox. I believe they suffer from delusions of adequacy, and were incompetent enough in their treatment of me that at a couple of points my life was in question.

I might comment briefly that the internal-use term in the profoundly gifted community as I have engaged it is not normally "profoundly gifted," but "severely gifted." That has begun to appear in the psychological literature as well.

4. **C&D letters to try to end harassment.** I have had to send several "CEASE AND DESIST" letters after an ongoing and repeated "**NO!**" was simply being trampled on.

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Now let me raise a question:

## **Am I woke?**

I've had enough things happen to me, but let me explain why I have severe reservations about the concept of being

woke.

## Emotional Intelligence

I was big into Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* for a time at least, and the text has some particularly interesting things to say about the psychology of bullies.

What it says is that bullies do not feel entitled and above everyone else, free to issue aggression. They by contrast see themselves as persecuted victims. They believe everything is deliberately hostile to them. Other kids don't bump into them because kids that age have their bodies changing and are sometimes clumsy. It is intentional aggression, and it is therefore, to a bully, self-defense in a hostile situation to try to strike back hard enough against yet *another* kid who bumps into them and nothing seems to work.

The "un-bullying" of bullies is essentially to explain that not everybody is out to get them, that kids are clumsy at a certain age, and what seem microaggressions are really just random and meaningless. There is nothing intelligent, coordinated, or hostile most of the time when kids just bump into kids.

What Goleman did not say was an interesting implication. Consciousness raising is the opposite project; it is a teaching that bumps in the hallway are part of a coordinated attack. They only *seem* to be random. And the way one would go about making a bully is consciousness raising, or today telling someone to wake up and become woke.

One book I have wanted to write for years but haven't

had click is *The History of my Misfortunes*, named after Abelard's *The History of my Misfortunes*, a transparent work of a medieval autism diagnosis candidate who was full of himself, offended all sorts of people in all sorts of ways, betrayed people who had put him in a position of trust, alienated his allies, *and presents himself as the perfect innocent victim*. The spin I was going to mention was to talk about various ways I have created trouble for myself, all the things that are not anybody else's fault but my own. And really the only reason I have not moved forward with this is that it could be TMI. It was in the same spirit that I wrote:

## **A Professional Courtesy to a Fellow Poet**

Out of the pitch black of my sin and vice,  
Chosen only of my own free will,  
I thank the God beyond all knowing  
For my yet still fighting soul.

In the cunning net of His Providence,  
I have spurned kindnesses for my good,  
Gifts I have fought as chance left me,  
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?*  
*It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.*

Beyond this life of pleasure and pain,  
Lie the Gates of Heaven and Hell,  
Battered I still make my choice,  
Seeking neither to bolt nor bar,



From inside, the gates of Hell.

Narrow is the path and strait the gate:  
The entrance to Glory beyond,  
All trials and tests named in the scroll,  
Thy Grace my wounds have bound with salve.

I thank the ranks of men made gods,  
Who cheer me on to join their choir,  
Thou blessest me beyond any fate,  
That I could ever know to ask.

Thy Glory is to transfigure me,  
To Live, Thou Thyself:  
I AM the Master of my Fate!  
I AM the Captain of my Soul!

(I also know what that *means!*)

A few details I could share: I was not happy with my circumstances because I wanted to be somewhere like Narnia and be a king instead of being right where I am. That is an extended unhappiness I have no one to thank but myself. Other things as well, that caused considerable unhappiness for a considerable time, boiled down to nothing but my own *sin*.

And now I've used a dirty word, one that isn't very popular today.

I would like to pause briefly and say that after extended practice jobhunting,\* and talking with jobseekers of different demographics, have instilled in me a strong conviction that **the hiring process is biased against**

**applicants who have a pulse.**

\* Not only have I been fired over a dozen times, but it is very stressful when a boss, who think your request for accommodation reflects a poor work ethic, is a boss trying to fabricate a paper trail of failures to claim for-cause termination.

I would like to get on to adapt St. John Chrysostom said, The Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself. (I say "adapt" because the standard translation uses complex Victorian English and I want something easier to read. (It is also available as an audiobook.) Without further ado,

**The Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Person Who Does Not Damage Himself**

I understand very well that to people who don't get it, this treatise will appear strange and full of paradox. But they are people who don't get it. They are greedy of things you can get now. They are nailed to this world. They are slaves to physical pleasure. They do not and perhaps cannot grasp spiritual ideas. And no wonder that they will laugh me to scorn. No wonder that they will condemn me for saying ludicrous things from the very outset of this work. *Therefore*, I will not stop the present work. I will instead proceed with a great deal of effort, to prove just what I am seeking to prove.

If those who care about the topic will be kind enough not to make clamor and a disturbance, but hear me to the end, *I am positive they will take my*

*side.* They will condemn themselves, and realize they were wrong. They will take back, and apologize, and beg pardon for their mistaken opinion. **They will express great gratitude to me, like patients do to doctors who have cured them.**

So do not tell me of your current opinion, *but hear me out*, and then you will be able to make a fair judgment. Then you will not be stopped by your ignorance from recognizing the truth. Even judges in secular causes do not record their decision after the first lawyer spews a river of words, but even if the first lawyer is totally convincing, the judges reserve an unprejudiced consideration for the second. In fact the good thing about judges is they try as accurately as they can to understand what each side claims, and then announce their own judgment.

Now in place of a first lawyer we have a common human assumption. This assumption has taken deep root in people's minds, and says the following things about the world:

All things have been turned upside down. The human race is full of great confusion. There are many people who are wronged, insulted, victims of violence and loss. The weak are harmed by the strong, and the poor by the rich. As it is simply impossible to count the waves of the sea, it is simply impossible to count how very many people who are the victims of scheming, damage, and suffering. Neither the correction of law, nor fear of being sued, nor anything else can stop this maddening disorder. The evil increases

everyday, and the groans, and complaints, and the crying of the people who suffer is universal. Furthermore, the judges who are appointed to straighten out such evils, make it worse themselves, and worsen the disorder. Many of the people who don't get it, who are despicable, blame the Providence of God when they see the peaceful people frequently seized, oppressed, and tortured. The audacious and violent nobodies get rich, and gain authority, and become a force to reckon with, and inflict countless troubles upon the more reasonable people. This goes on in town and country, and in the desert, on sea and land.

What we need to discuss has to come in direct opposition to what has been claimed, saying something which is new, and just as I said is contrary to popular opinion, but useful and true. It is profitable to those who will listen to it and be persuaded. What I am trying to do is to prove (please, no commotions) that **no one who is wronged is wronged by someone else, but any *real* damage is self-inflicted.**

But to make my point more clearly, let us all ask what injustice is. Also, we should ask what human goodness is, and what it is which ruins it. Even further, we should ask what it is to seems to ruin human goodness but really does not.

For instance (because I need to make my point by analogy) each thing is vulnerable to the one evil which ruins it. Iron is vulnerable to rust, wool is vulnerable

to moths, and flocks of sheep are vulnerable to wolves. The goodness of wine is harmed when it ferments and turns sour. The goodness of honey is harmed when it loses its natural sweetness, and becomes some sort of bitter juice. Ears of grain are ruined by mildew and drought. Leaves, and branches of vines are ruined by the troublesome plague of grasshoppers, other trees by the caterpillar, and mindless things by disease of various kinds. But to shorten the list and not go forever by going through all possible examples, our own flesh is subjected to fevers, and wounds, and a whole bunch of other bad things.

Therefore, since each one of these things is vulnerable to the thing that ruins its goodness, let us now consider what it is which damages the human race. Let us consider what it is that ruins the goodness of a person. Most people think that there are many things things which have this effect. So I need to expose wrong opinions on the subject, and after refuting them, go on to show what really does ruin our goodness. Even more, *I want to demonstrate clearly that no one could inflict this injury or bring this ruin upon our goodness*. Some say it is poverty, others diseases of the body, others loss of property, others slander, others death. They are perpetually dismayed and lament these things. When they are commiserating with the people who suffer and cry tears, they explain to one another, "What a terrible thing happened to such and such people! They have been deprived of all their fortune at one blow." Again, someone will say about another, "such and such person has been attacked by severe illness and the

doctors don't think he will live." Some bewail and cry out about prisoners, some of whom have been expelled from their country and exiled to another land. Others bewail those who have been deprived of their freedom. Others cry over those who have been seized and taken captive by enemies. Others lament people who have been drowned, or burned to death, or buried by a collapsing house, *but no one mourns those who are living in wickedness*. On the contrary, what is worse than all these wailings, they often congratulate them, a practice which causes all kinds of problems. Come then (only, as I asked you, do not make a commotion), let me prove that none of the things which have been mentioned harm the man who lives in a sober manner, nor can ruin his goodness.

For tell me if a man has lost his all at the hands of slanderers or of robbers, or been stripped of his property by evil servants, what harm has the loss done to the person's goodness?

But if it makes sense let me instead point out in the first place what is the goodness of a human being. Let me start by dealing with a separate case to make it easier to understand and plain to most readers.

What then makes a horse good? Is it to have a bridle studded with gold and belts to match? Is it silk to fasten the saddle? Is it many-colored, gold-plated clothing? Is it to have reins and bit studded with jewels? Is it gold woven into its hair?

Or is it to have swift and strong legs? Is it to move evenly? Is it to have hooves that are suitable to a well-bred horse? Is it to have a fitting courage for long journeys and warfare? Is it to be calm in the

battlefield? Is it to save its rider in the event of defeat? Is it not clear that these are the things that make up the goodness of the horse, not the others?

Again, what should you say makes donkeys and mules good? Is it not the power of carrying burdens contentedly? Is it not the power to easily make journeys? Is it not to have hooves like rock? Shall we say that expensive external adornments give anything to their very own goodness? By no means. And what kind of vine would we admire? One which has many beautiful leaves and branches, or some that has a lot of fruit? Or what do we say makes an olive tree good? Is it to have big branches, and luxurious leaves, or to exhibit a lot of its own fruit dispersed over all parts of the tree?

Well then, let us act in the same way in the case of people too: let us determine what makes a human being good, and let us pay attention to what alone is damage which destroys that goodness. What then makes a man good? Not wealth so that you should fear being poor. Not physical health so that you should fear sickness. Not people's opinion of you, so that you should be alarmed at a bad reputation. Not freedom that you should avoid serving others. Not even life for its own sake, so that you should find death terrible. Instead of any of these, what matters is that you should hold fast to the truth, and behave rightly in life. Not even the Devil himself will be able to rob a person of these if the person who possesses them will guard them with necessarily care: and *that most malicious and ferocious demon knows this well.*

In the Bible, the Slanderer was allowed to accuse

Job of loving God only because God made him rich, and when he was given permission, to destroy all his wealth at once. When Job still clung to righteousness, the Slanderer changed his tune and said that Job loved God only because he was healthy, and was given permission to destroy his health. Job had no idea what is going on, but clung to what is good and made the Devil look like a sleeping fool.

This is why the Devil robbed Job of his wealth. It wasn't to make him poor, but force him to blaspheme in anger. The Devil tortured his body, not because he wanted to make Job sick, but to topple the goodness of his soul. But when he had done all of these things, and let me elaborate:

- When the Slanderer turned Job from a rich man into a poor one, which we consider the worst calamity—
- When he destroyed every single one of his children—
- When he had ripped into his whole body more cruelly than executioners do in a public execution, because their nails do not tear into the sides of people who fall into their hands as badly as one who is being eaten alive by worms —
- When he got a terrible reputation, for Job's "friends" who were present with him said "You haven't gotten the punishment your sins deserve",—



- When he had not merely expelled from city and home to another city, but had actually made a pile of *shit* serve as his home and city—

After all this, the Devil not only did Job no damage but rendered him more glorious than the schemes he plotted against him. And he not only failed to rob him of any of his true possessions although he had robbed him of so many things, he even increased the wealth of his goodness. For after all these things he was more solidly placed because he had struggled in a more severe battle.

Now if he who went through such horrible sufferings, and not by the hand of human opponents but by the hand of the Devil who is more wicked than all men—if Job sustained no injury, which of these persons who say "Such and such a person harmed and damaged me," will have any defense to make in the future? For if the Devil,

- Who has so much great malice, after having set all his plans on motion—
- Who attacked him with all his weapons—
- Who poured out all external evils that can happen to a human being—
- Who to the greatest possible extent to the family and body of that righteous man—

...never did him any injury, but as I was saying put Job in a position of even greater spiritual profit.

How shall people be able to accuse such and such

a person alleging that they have suffered damage at their hands, and not at their own hands?

What then? Someone will ask, "Didn't he inflict injury on Adam, and topple his goodness, and cast him out of Paradise?" No: the Devil did not make him do it, but the cause was the lazy apathy, and lack of balance and vigilance of the one who was injured. The Devil applied such a multitude of powerful plans and yet could not subdue Job. So how could he, by weaker methods, have conquered Adam, if Adam had not betrayed himself through his own lazy apathy?

What then? Hasn't the one been damaged who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of everything he owns, and has been deprived of everything else, and is thrown out of his heritage, and struggles with extreme poverty? *No!* He has not been damaged, but has even profited, if he be sober.

For, tell me, what harm did this do to the Apostles? Weren't they always struggling with hunger and thirst and lack of decent clothing? And this was the very reason why they were so famous, and distinguished, and earned for themselves much help from God.

Lazarus was a beggar at the gate of a rich man, and longed to have the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and did not get even that—until he died and was brought to Paradise. Again what harm was done to Lazarus by his sickness, and sores, and poverty, and lack of protectors? *Weren't they the reasons why garlands of victory were more abundantly woven for him?*

Or consider Joseph, who was the victim of

attempted murder, who was sold into slavery, then after resisting many attempts at seduction was falsely accused of not only attempted seduction but attempted rape, *out of complete butthurt after he spurned every single advance she made!* And he was thrown in prison, and by God's providence he rose to authority and kept many people from starving to death? What harm was done to him by his being falsely accused? This happened both in his own land and in the land of strangers where he was falsely accused of rape. Or what harm did slavery or exile do to him? Is it not specifically because of these things that we regard him with admiration and astonishment? And why do I even mention exile to a foreign land, and poverty, and false accusation, and slavery? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel, although it was a violent and premature death because his brother envied that Abel's sacrifices to God were accepted and the brother's sacrifices were not, a murder inflicted by his brother's hand? Is this not the reason why Abel's praises are sung around the world? Don't you see how the explanation has demonstrated even more than it promised? For not only has it pointed out that no one is injured by anybody, but also that **those who handle the difficulties wisely themselves benefit all the more from such attacks.**

What is the purpose then, people will ask, of jail and punishments? What is the purpose of Hell? What is the purpose of such great threats, if no one either harms or causes others harms?

What is it that you are saying? Why do you

confuse the argument. *For I did not say that no one harms, but that no one is harmed.* And how is it possible, you will say, for no one to be harmed when many are committing harm? In the way I indicated just now. For Joseph's brothers did indeed harm, yet he himself was not harmed: and Cain laid a trap for Abel, yet Abel himself was not trapped. Joseph's brothers, and Cain, only harmed *themselves*.

This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. For God does not abolish penalties because of the goodness of those who suffer; but he orders punishments because of the wicked. For they who are treated badly become more illustrious because of the plans schemed against them, this is not the intention of those who scheme the plans, but the courage of those who are their victims. Therefore for the victims the rewards of clinging to the Truth and righteous life are made ready and prepared, but for those who maltreat them, the penalties of wickedness.

Have you had your money taken away? Read the word, "I came naked out of my mother's womb, and I shall return naked. And add to this the Apostle's saying, "for we brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out." Do people speak evil about you, and have some loaded you with endless slander? Remember that passage where it is said "Woe unto you when all shall speak well of you" and "rejoice ye and leap for joy when they shall say evil about you." Have you been brought to the land of exile? Consider that you do not have a homeland here, but if you will be wise you are well advised to regard the whole world as a foreign country. Or have you come down with a

dire illness? Quote the apostolic saying, "*The more our outward person decays, so much the more is the inward person renewed every day.*" Has anyone suffered a violent death? Consider the death of John the Baptist, his head cut off in prison, carried in a plate, which the king paid as the reward of his whorish niece's dancing. Consider the reward which comes through these things: for all these sufferings when they are justly inflicted by anyone on another person, wipe away sins and work righteousness. So there is a great advantage for people who bear such things bravely.

When then neither loss of money, nor slander, nor being yelled at, nor diseases, nor tortures, nor anything that seems fundamentally beyond them all, namely death—when none of those things harm the people who suffer them, but instead profits them all the more, from where can you prove that anyone is harmed when nothing of these things can harm that one? For I will try to prove the reverse, demonstrating that the people who are most harmed and damaged, and suffer the worst evils, are the persons who do these things. For what could be more miserable than the condition of Cain, who murdered his own brother? What is more pitiable than Philip's wife who beheaded John the Baptist? Or Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery and delivered him into exile? Or the Devil who tortured Job with such great calamities? For he will pay no small penalty for this assault as well as his other sins.

Don't you see how the argument has proven even more than was offered, showing that those who are

insulted not only suffer no harm from the assaults, but that the whole mischief backfires on those who plan them? For since neither wealth nor freedom, nor life in our native land, nor the other things I have mentioned, but only good actions by the soul, constitute the goodness of a person, naturally when the harm is directed against these false goods, human goodness itself is not harmed in any way.

What then? Supposing someone does harm the moral condition of the soul? Even then if someone suffers damage, the damage does not come from anyone else but comes from inside, and to the person from himself. "How so," do you say? When anyone having been beaten by someone else, or deprived of his property, or gone through some other terrible attack, speaks blasphemously, he is certainly harmed by it, and very great harm, but it does not come from the person who inflicted the attack, but from his own pettiness of soul. For what I said before I will now repeat, no man if he be infinitely wicked could attack any one more wickedly or more bitterly than that revengeful demon who is implacably hostile to us, the Devil. But yet this cruel demon had no power to topple or overthrow those who lived before the Law, and before the time of grace. This is the power of nobility of soul. **And what shall I say of Paul?** Didn't he go through so many calamities that even listing them is no easy task? He was:

- Put in prison—
- Loaded with chains—

- Dragged here and there—
- Tortured by his countrymen—
- Pelted with stones—
- Wounded on the back not only with whips, but also with rods—
- Immersed in the sea—
- Attacked by robbers—
- Met with strife by his own countrymen—
- A victim of countless schemes and plots—
- Struggling with hunger and lack of clothing—
- Undergoing other frequent and lasting misfortunes and afflictions—

And why do I need to mention the majority of them? He was dying every day. Yet, though he was victim of so many of so terrible sufferings, not only did he not utter any blasphemous word, but rejoiced over these things and gloried in them. One place he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings," and even more "not only this, but we also glory in afflictions." If he rejoiced and gloried when suffering great troubles, what excuse will you have, and what defense will you make, if you blaspheme God when you do not undergo the smallest fraction of them?

"But I am harmed in other ways," you may say, "and even if I do not blaspheme, yet when I am robbed of my money I am prevented from giving to beggars." This is a mere pretext and pretentiousness. *For if that*

*upsets you, be sure that poverty is no bar to generosity.* For even if you are infinitely poor, you are not poorer than the woman who possessed only a handful of grain, and the one who only had two cents. Each of these, having spent all their wealth on those who were in need, were a matter of such great admiration. Such great poverty was no hindrance to such great and loving kindness, but the gift spent from the two cents was so abundant and generous as to leave the rich completely in the dust, even though they strove zealously to give more money than all the others. Therefore even here you are not harmed but rather benefited. Your small contribution receives a more glorious reward than people who dropped large sums.

But since, if I were to keep on saying these things forever, pleasure-seekers who love to grovel in worldly wealth, and revel in what we have now, would not readily endure leaving the fading flowers (for such are the pleasant things of this life) or letting go of its shadows: but better people cling to both the one and the other, while the more pathetic and low cling more strongly to the first than the second. So let us strip off the pleasant and showy masks which hide the low and ugly face of these things, and let us show how deformed the whore is. For that is the nature of this kind of life which is devoted to luxury, wealth, and power. *It is foul and ugly, and full of much abomination, disagreeable and burdensome, and charged with bitterness.* For this is the particular feature in this life which deprives those who are captivated by it from every excuse, that though it is



everything they hope for, it is filled with:

- Much trouble and bitterness—
- Too many evils to count—
- Dangers—
- Bloodshed—
- Spiritual crags and precipices—
- Murders—
- Fears and tremblings—
- Envy and badwill,
- Hostile scheming,
- Ongoing anxiety and worry.

It derives no profit, and produces no fruit, from these great evils—except for, perhaps, punishment and revenge, and unending torment.

But although this is its character it seems to most people an object of ambition, and eager contention, which is a sign of the folly of those who are captivated by it, not of the blessedness of the thing itself.

Little children are indeed eager and excited about toys, and cannot take notice of the things that are worthy of full-grown adults. There is an excuse for them because they are too young to expect maturity: but the others simply have no defense, because, although of full adult age, they are childish in behavior and more foolish than children in how they live.

Now tell me why is wealth an object of ambition?

*Here is extreme irony.* For you need to start from this point, because to most people who have this terrible malady think it is more precious than health and life, and public fame and good opinion, and household, and friends, and relatives and everything else. More than this, the flame has ascended to the clouds themselves: and this fierce heat has taken possession of land and sea. Nor is there anyone to put out this fire: but all people are busy stirring it up, both those whom it has already caught, and those who have not been caught, so that they may be captured. And you may see everyone, husband and wife, household slave and freeman, rich and poor, each as far as they can carrying loads which supply much fuel to this fire, both during the day and also the night. They do not have loads of wood or sticks (for it is not that kind of fire), but loads of souls and bodies, of evils and sins. For such is the stuff that lights this kind of fire.

For people who have lots of money do not ever stop feeding this monstrous passion, even if they own the whole world. The poor, worse, try to even get ahead of them. A kind of incurable craze and unstoppable frenzy and unhealable disease possesses everyone's souls. And this desire has conquered every other desire and thrust it away, expelling it from the soul. Neither friends nor relatives are considered: and why do I speak of friends and relatives? Not even wife and children are regarded, and what can be more precious to a man than these?

But all things are dashed to the ground and trampled, when this savage and inhuman tyrant has laid hold of the souls of all those she keeps captive. For

as an inhuman master, and harsh tyrant, and savage barbarian, and public and expensive whore she debases and exhausts and punishes those who have chosen to be her slaves with innumerable dangers and torments. Yet although she is terrible and harsh, and fierce and cruel, and has the face of a barbarian, or rather of a wild beast, fiercer than a wolf or a lion, she seems to those she has enslaved to be gentle and lovable, and sweeter than honey. And although she forges swords and weapons against them every day, and digs pits and leads them to precipices and crags and makes endless traps for them, yet she is supposed to make these things objects of ambition to those whom she has enslaved, and those who want to be enslaved. And just as a pig delights and revels in wallowing in the ditch and mire, and beetles love to always be crawling over shit, even so they who are captivated by the love of money are more miserable than these creatures.

For the abomination is greater in this case, and the mire more offensive: for they who are addicted to this passion imagine that much pleasure is derived from it. This does not arise from its nature, but the human understanding which is afflicted with such a foul and irrational taste. And this taste is worse in their case than in that of animals: for as with the mud and the shit the pleasure is not caused by them, but in the irrational nature of the creatures who plunge into it. So consider it to be in the case of us human beings.

And how might we cure those who want such a thing? It would be possible if they would open their ears to us, and unfold their heart, and receive our

words. For it is impossible to turn irrational animals away from their unclean habit, for they do not have human intelligence. But this, the noblest of all tribes, honored with reason and speech, I mean human nature, might be quickly and easily be released from the mire and the stench, and the hill of shit and its abomination. *If we chose to.* For why, O person, do you think wealth is worth such diligent pursuit? Is it because of the pleasure which obviously comes from food? Or because of the honor and company of those who attend on you, because of your wealth? Is it because you can defend yourself from those who bother you, and have everyone be afraid of you? For you cannot name any other reasons, save pleasure and flattery, and fear, and the power of taking revenge; for wealth does not ordinarily make anyone wiser, or more self-controlled, or more gentle, or more intelligent, or kind, or benevolent, or superior to anger or gluttony or pleasure: it does not train anyone to be moderate, or teach him how to be humble, nor introduce any other element of goodness in the soul to become deep-rooted. Neither could you explain which of these things makes it deserving of such seeking and such desire. For wealth is not only ignorant of how to plant and cultivate any good thing, but even if it finds a bunch of them it messes them up. Some of them it even uproots and introduces their opposites: taking excessive liberties, ill-timed wrath, unrighteous anger, pride, arrogance, and foolishness.

But let me not speak of these; for they who have been seized by this malady simply will not listen to talk about what makes people good and what makes

people bad. They are entirely abandoned to pleasure and therefore remain its slaves. So let us not consider these points any further, and let us bring forward the others which remain. Let's see whether wealth has any pleasure, or any honor: *it looks to me like quite the opposite!*

And first of all, please, let us consider the meals of rich and poor, and ask the guests which they are who enjoy the purest and most genuine pleasure. Is it they who:

- Recline for a full day on couches—
- Join breakfast and dinner together—
- Distend their stomach—
- Blunt their senses—
- Sink the vessel by an excessive cargo of food—
- Waterlog the ship—
- Drench it as in some shipwreck of the body—
- Devise fetters, and manacles, and gags—
- Bind their whole body with the band of drunkenness and excess more grievous than an iron chain—
- Enjoy no sound pure sleep undisturbed by frightful dreams—
- Are more miserable than madmen and introduce a kind of self-imposed demon into the soul and display themselves as a laughing

stock to the gaze of their servants—

- Or rather to the kinder sort among them as a tragic spectacle worthy of tears—
- Cannot recognize any of those who are present—
- Are incapable of speaking or hearing but have to be carried away from their couches to their bed—

—Or—

Is it they who:

- Are sober and vigilant—
- Limit their eating to what they truly need—
- Sail with a favorable breeze—
- Find hunger and thirst the best relish in their food and drink?

For nothing so helps the enjoyment and health as to be hungry and thirsty when one comes to the table, and to think that simply necessary food is enough, nor imposing a load upon the body too great for its strength.

But if you disbelieve my statement, study the physical condition and the soul of each class. Aren't the vigorous bodies those who live moderately? (Please don't tell me of the rare case that some may be weak from some other circumstance, but get your

bearings from what is constantly going on.) I ask, are they not vigorous, and their senses clear, easily working as they should? While the bodies of others are flaccid and softer than wax, and have a many terrible things happen to them? For they soon have:

- Gout—
- Untimely palsy—
- Premature old age—
- Headache—
- Farting—
- Weak digestion—
- Loss of appetite—
- Constant need for medical attention—
- Perpetual dosing—
- Daily worries—

Are these things pleasurable? Tell me! Who of those that know what pleasure really is would say so? For pleasure is produced when desire leads the way, and fulfillment follows: **now if there is fulfillment, but desire is nowhere to be found, the conditions of pleasure fail and vanish.** This is why invalids, although the most charming food is set before them, eat it with a feeling of disgust and a sense of oppression: because there is no desire which gives a keen relish to the enjoyment of even the most charming food.

For it is not the nature of the food, or of the drink, but the appetite of the eaters, which is capable of producing the desire, and capable of causing pleasure. That is also why a certain wise man who had an accurate knowledge of all that related to pleasure, and understood how to moralize about these things, said, "The foul soul mocks at honeycombs." This shows that the conditions of pleasure are not in the nature of the meal, but in the disposition of the people eating it. That is also why the prophet, in recounting the wonders in Egypt and in the desert, mention this in connection with the others, "God satisfied them with honey out of the rock." Yet it doesn't appear anywhere that honey actually sprang forth for them out of the rock. So what does the expression mean?

Because the people who were exhausted by enormous amounts of work and long travel, and who were extremely thirsty, rushed to the cool spring, their craving to drink something served as an incentive. The writer who wanted to describe the pleasure they received from those fountains called the water "honey," not meaning that the water was converted into honey, but that the pleasure received from the water rivaled the sweetness of honey, because those who drank it rushed to it in their eagerness to have something to quench their thirst.

Since these things are this way and no one, however stupid, can deny it: Is it not perfectly obvious that pure, undiluted, and lively pleasure is to be found at the tables of the poor? While at the tables of the rich there is discomfort, and disgust and defilement? As that wise man has said, "Even sweet things seem to be



repulsive."

But riches, some will say, procure honor for those who possess them, and enable them to take vengeance on their enemies with ease. And is this a reason, please, why riches seem to you desirable and worth chasing after: that they nourish the most dangerous passion in our nature, leading anger into action, swelling the empty bubbles of ambition, and stimulating and urging people to be arrogant? Why, these are just the very reasons we out to resolutely turn our backs on riches, because they introduce certain fierce and dangerous wild beasts into our heart, depriving us of the real honor we might receive from all. Worse, they introduce deluded men something else which is the opposite of this, only painted over with a whore's colors, and persuading them to fancy it is the same, when by nature it is not so, but only seems like it to the eye. For as the beauty of whores, made up as it is of dyes and pigments, has no real beauty, but makes a foul and ugly face appear fair and beautiful to those who are deluded by it, when it is not so in reality. In the same way riches force flattery to look like honor.

For I beg you not to consider the praises which are openly bestowed through fear and flattery: for those are only makeup and paints; but let us unfold the conscience of each of those who flatter you in this fashion. Inside it you will see too many accusers to count speaking against you, and loathing and despising you worse than your bitterest adversaries and foes. And even if a change of circumstances should occur which would remove and expose this

mask which fear has manufactured, just like the sun when it shines a hotter ray than usual discloses the *real* faces of those women I mentioned, then all will change. You will see clearly that all through the former time you were held in the greatest contempt by those who fawned on you, and you fancied you were enjoying honor from those who thoroughly hated you, and in their heart poured infinite abuse on you, and longed to see all sorts of terrible things happen to you. For there is nothing like goodness to produce honor: honor neither forced nor feigned, nor hidden under a mask of deceit, but real and genuine, and able to stand the test of hard times.

But do you want to take vengeance on those who bother you? This is, as I was saying just now, the very reason why we should specifically avoid wealth. For it prepares you to thrust the sword against yourself, and renders you answerable to heavier charges at the Crack of Doom, and makes your punishment intolerable.

For revenge is so great an evil that it actually revokes the mercy of God, and cancels the forgiveness of countless sins which have already been bestowed. Christ told a story of a man who owed billions and billions of dollars, and his master forgave them, and then took another man and said "Pay back what you owe!" over a debt of a few thousands of dollars. For he who received forgiveness of the debt of billions of dollars, and after having received so great a benefit by merely for asking it, then made a demand of several thousand dollars from his fellow servant owed to himself. In his harshness to his fellow servant he

etched his own condemnation in stone. For this reason and no other he was delivered over to the torturers, and tormented with a torture rack, and required to pay back the billions of dollars. The unmerciful servant was not allowed any excuse or defense to his benefit, but suffered the most extreme penalty, being commanded to repay the whole debt which the loving kindness of God had formerly let go.

Is this then the reason, pray, why you so earnestly pursue money, because it so easily you into this kind of son? No, truly, that is why you should abhor it as an enemy and an adversary teeming with countless murders. But poverty, some will say, disposes people to be discontent and often also to utter profane words, and give themselves to despicable actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul: for Lazarus was poor—*very poor*—and besides poverty he suffered from illness, a more bitter trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty a harsher blow. And in addition to illness he had a total lack of protectors, and difficulty in finding anyone to supply his needs, which increased the bitterness of his poverty and illness. For both of these are painful in themselves, but when there is no one to minister to the sufferer's needs:

- The suffering becomes greater—
- The flame more painful—
- The distress more bitter—
- The tempest fiercer—

- The billows stronger—
- The furnace hotter—

And if you examine the case thoroughly there was yet a fourth trial besides there—the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who lived nearby. And if you would find a fifth thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that he was afflicted by it.

For not only was that man rich man living luxuriously, but two and three times, or really several times a day he saw the poor man. For he had been laid at the rich man's gate, being a grievous spectacle of pitiable distress, and the mere sight of him was enough to soften even a heart of stone. Yet even this did not draw that unmerciful man to help this case of poverty: but he had:

- His luxurious table spread—
- Goblets wreathed with flowers—
- Pure wine plentifully poured forth—
- Grand armies of cooks, and groupies, and flatterers from early dawn—
- And troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters—

And he spent all his time in devising every species of dissipation, and drunkenness, and overeating, and in reveling in fine clothing and feasting and many other things.

But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by grievous hunger and the worst illness,

and the pain of his many thoughts, and by being destitute, and the ills which result from these things, he never even gave him a thought. Yet the groupies and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their needs. But the poor man, and he so very poor, and surrounded by so many miseries, was not even fed with the crumbs which fell from that table, although he wanted them very much. And yet none of these things inu harmed him, he did not vent a single bitter word, nor did he utter a profane speech. But like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by overpowering heat, even so Lazarus, although afflicted with all these sufferings, was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which they often produce.

For if generally speaking poor people, when they see rich people, are consumed with envy and racked by malicious ill-will, and deem life not worth living. This is true even when poorer people are well supplied with necessary food, and have persons to serve their needs; what would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble-hearted, as:

- He was not only poorer than any other poor men—
- Not only poor but also ill—
- Without anyone to protect or cheer him—
- Lay in the midst of the city as if it were a desolate, faroff desert—
- Wasted away with bitter hunger—
- Saw all good things being poured upon the rich

man as out of a fountain—

- Did not have the benefit of any human consolation, but—
- Lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of verminous street dogs, for he was so weakened and broken down in body that he could not drive them away—

**Don't you see that he who does not harm himself suffers no evil?** For I will again take up the same argument.

For what harm was done to this hero by his bodily illness? Or the absence of protectors? Or by the coming of verminous dogs? Or the evil nearness of the rich man? Or by the great luxury, haughtiness and arrogance of the latter?

Did it sap him for the contest on behalf of goodness? Did it ruin his strong character? Nowhere was he harmed at all, but that multitude of sufferings, and the cruelty of the rich man, rather increased his strength. More than this, it became the pledge for him of infinite crowns of victory, a means of adding to his rewards, an increase of his repayment, and a promise of more good things in the world to come. For he was crowned not merely on account of his poverty, or his hunger or of his sores, or the verminous dogs licking them. But because, having such a neighbor as the rich man, and being seen by him every day, and was forever overlooked, Lazarus endured this trial bravely and with much inner strength, a trial which added no small flame but in fact a very strong one to the fire of

poverty, and illness and lowliness.

And, tell me, what was the case of the blessed Paul? For there is nothing to stop me from mentioning him again. Didn't he experience innumerable storms of trial? And in what respect was he damaged by them? Wasn't he crowned with all the more victory as a result:

- Because he suffered hunger—
- Because he was consumed with cold and lack of clothing—
- Because he was often tortured—
- Because people threw stones at him—
- Because he was cast into the sea—

But then some say he was Paul, and called by Christ. Yet Judas was also one of the twelve, and he too was called of Christ, but neither his being one of the twelve nor his call profited him, because he did not have a mind disposed to goodness. But Paul although struggling with hunger, and at a loss to get necessary food, and daily undergoing such great sufferings, pursued with great zeal the road which leads to Heaven. While Judas, although:

- He had been called before him—
- Enjoyed the same advantages as he did—
- Was initiated into the highest form of Christian life—

- Partook of the holy table and that most awesome of sacred feasts—
- Received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils—
- Often heard discussion concerning poverty—
- Spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself—
- Was entrusted with money for the poor, so that his passion might be soothed by it (for he was a thief)—

Even then Judas did not become any better, although he had been favored with such great kindness. For since Christ knew he was greedy, and destined to eternally perish on account of his love of money, Christ not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time. But with a view to softening Judas's passion he was entrusted with the money for the poor, that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin. The thought was to check a greater evil beforehand by a lesser one.

Thus in no case will any one be able to harm someone who does not harm himself: but if a person is not willing to be reasonable, and aid himself from his own resources, no one will ever be able to bring him profit. Therefore also that wonderful history of the Holy Scriptures has portrayed the lives of men of old time, extending the narrative from Adam to the



coming of Christ, as if in some great, large, and broad picture. And it shows to you both those who are defeated, and who are crowned with victory in the contest, so that it may instruct you by means of examples that *no one will be able to harm one who does not suffer any self-inflicted wound, even if all the world were to kindle a fierce war against him.* For it is not:

- Stressful circumstances—
- Variations of seasons—
- Attacks from men in power—
- Schemes attacking you like snowstorms—
- Nor a whole bunch of terrible calamities—
- Nor an unbounded collection of all the ills to which mankind is subject—

—which can disturb even slightly the person who is brave, and temperate, and watchful. By contrast, the lazy and low person who are themselves their own betrayer cannot be made better, even with the aid of innumerable helps.

This at least was made manifest to us by the parable in the Sermon on the Mount of the two people, one of whom built a house on the rock, the other on sand. Not that we are to think of sand and rock, or of a building of stone, and a roof, or of rivers, and rain, and wild winds, beating against the buildings, *but we are to extract goodness and evil as the meaning of these things, and to perceive from them that no one harms*

*a person who does not suffer self-inflicted wounds.*

Therefore neither the rain although driven furiously along, nor the streams vehemently dashing against the house, nor the wild winds beating against it with a mighty rush, shook the one house in any degree: but the house remained undisturbed and unmoved. By this understand that no trial can agitate the person who does not betray himself. But the house of the other person was easily swept away, not on account of the force of the trials (for in that case the other would have experienced the same fate), but because of his own foolishness. For it did not fall because the wind blew on it, but because it was built upon the sand, in other words on laziness and sin. For before the storm beat against it, it was weak and ready to fall. For buildings of that kind, even if no one puts any pressure on them, fall to pieces by themselves, and the foundation sinks and gives way in every direction. And just as cobwebs fall apart, although no real weight is placed on them, but hardened steel remains even when it is struck: likewise, those who do not harm themselves become stronger, even if they receive innumerable blows. But they who betray themselves, even if there is no one to disturb them, fall by themselves, and collapse and perish. For that is how even Judas perished, not only not having been attacked by any trial of this kind, but actually having enjoyed the benefit of quite a lot of help.

Would you like me to illustrate this argument in the case of whole nations? What great forethought was bestowed on the Jewish nation! Was not the whole visible Creation arranged with a view to their service?

Was not a new and groundbreaking method of life introduced among them? For they did not have to send things down to a market, and so they had the benefit of things which are sold for money without paying any price for them. Neither did they:

- Cut furroughs nor drag a plow—
- Nor harrow the ground—
- Nor cast in seed—
- Nor did they have any need of rain, and wind, and annual seasons, nor sunshine, nor phases of the moon, nor climate, nor anything of that kind—
- They prepared no threshing floor—
- They threshed no grain—
- They used no winnowing fan for separating the grain from the chaff,
- They turned no millstone—
- They built no oven—
- They brought neither wood nor fire into the house—
- They handled no spade—
- They sharpened no sickle—
- They required no other art, I mean of weaving or building or supplying shoes—

...but the Word of God was everything to them. And they had a table prepared off hand, free from all toil and labor. For this was the nature of the manna: it was new and fresh, nowhere costing them any trouble, nor straining them by labor.

And their clothes, and shoes, and even their physical frame forgot their natural weakness. The clothes and shoes did not wear out in the course of so many years, nor did their feet swell although they made such long marches.

Of doctors, and medicine, and all other concern about that kind of art, there was no mention at all among them. So completely banished was weakness of every kind: for it is said "He brought them out with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among their tribes." But like men who had left this world, and were conveyed to another and better one, even so they ate and drank, neither did the sun's ray hurt their heads when it grew hot; for the cloud parted them from the fiery beam, hovering all around them, and serving like a portable shelter for the whole population. Neither at night did they need a torch to disperse the darkness, but they had the pillar of fire, a source of unspeakable light, supplying two needs, one by its shining, the other by directing the course of their journey. For it was not only a bright light, but also guided that countless host along the wilderness with more certainty than any human guide. And they journeyed not only upon land but also upon sea as if it had been dry land. They made an audacious experiment upon the laws of nature by treading on that angry sea, marching through it as if it had been

the hard and resisting surface of a rock. Indeed when they placed their feet upon it the element became like solid earth, and gently sloping plains and fields. But when it received their enemies it behaved like a sea, and to the Israelites indeed it served as a chariot, but to their enemies it became a deathtrap. It brought the Israelites across with ease, but drowned their pursuers with great violence. The chaotic flood of water displayed the good order and obedience which marks reasonable and highly intelligent people, fulfilling the part at one time of a guardian, at another an executioner, and exhibiting these opposites together on one day. What shall one say of the rocks which poured forth streams of waters? What of the clouds of birds which covered the whole face of the earth by the number of their carcasses? What of the wonders in Egypt? What of the marvels in the wilderness? What of the triumphs and bloodless victories? For they subdued those who opposed them like people keeping a holiday rather than making war. And they vanquished their own masters without the use of weapons. They overcame those who fought with them after they had left Egypt, with singing and music. *What they did was a festival rather than a military campaign, a religious ceremony rather than a battle.*

For all these wonders took place not only for the purpose of supplying their needs, but also so that the people might preserve more accurately the teaching which Moses taught about the knowledge of God. Voices proclaiming the presence of their master were uttered on all sides of them. For the sea loudly declared this, by becoming a road for them to march

upon, and then turning into sea again. The waters of the Nile uttered this voice when they were converted into the nature of blood. The frogs, and the great army of locusts, and the caterpillar and blight declared the same thing to all the people. The miracles in the desert, the manna, the pillar of fire, the cloud, the quails, and all the other incidents served them as a book, and writing which could never be erased, echoing daily in their memory and resounding in their mind. Nonetheless:

- After such great and remarkable Providence—
- After all those unspeakable benefits—
- After such mighty miracles—
- After care indescribable—
- After continual teaching—
- After instruction by means of speech—
- After admonition by means of deeds—
- After glorious victories—
- After extraordinary triumphs—
- After abundant supply of food—
- After the plentiful production of water—
- After the ineffable glory with which they were clothed in the eyes of the human race—

Being ungrateful and senseless, they worshiped a calf, and paid reverence to the head of a bull, even

when the memorials of God's benefits in Egypt were fresh in their minds, and they were still in actual enjoyment of many more.

But the Ninevites, although a barbarian and foreign people who had never participated in any of these benefits, small or great, saw neither words, nor wonders, nor works when they saw a man who had been saved from shipwreck, who had never associated with them before, but appeared then for the first time. He entered their city and said "Three more days and Nineveh will be overthrown," and the Ninevites were so converted and reformed by the mere sound of these words, and putting away their former wickedness, advanced in the direction of goodness by the path of repentance, that they caused the sentence of God to be revoked, and stopped the threatened disturbance of their city, and averted the Heaven-sent wrath, and were delivered from every kind of evil. "For," we read, "God saw that every man turned from his evil way, and was converted to the Lord." I ask how they were turned. Although their wickedness was great, their sins unspeakable, their moral sores difficult to heal, which the prophet plainly showed to say "their wickedness rose even unto the Heavens:" indicating by that distance just how wicked they were... nevertheless such great sin which was piled up to such a height as to reach even to the Heavens... they abolished, removed out of sight, and put away all of this in a brief moment of time through a few words what they heard from one man's mouth and he an unknown shipwrecked foreigner. And they had the happiness of hearing the declaration "God saw that every one

turned from his evil way, and He repented of the evil which God said He would do to them." Do you see how he who is moderate and watchful not only suffers no harm from the hands of people, but even turns back wrath sent from Heaven? But despite this the person who betrays himself and harms himself by what he does, even if countless benefits were received, does not receive much of an advantage. So, at least, the Jews did not benefit from those great miracles, nor were the Ninevites harmed by having no share in them. However, seeing that they were inwardly well-disposed, having laid hold of a slender chance they became better, barbarians and foreigners as they may have been, ignorant of all divine revelation and dwelling some distance from Palestine.

Again, was the goodness of the "three children" corrupted by the troubles they faced? While they were still young, mere youths of really a child's age, did they not undergo the terrible affliction of captivity? Did they not have to make a long journey from home, and when they arrived in the foreign land were they not cut off from the Jewish homeland, from home and Temple, and altar and sacrifices, and offerings and drinking offerings, and even singing Psalms? For not only were they cut off from their home, but as a consequence they were furthermore cut off from much of the worship they knew. Had they not been given into the hands of men, wolves rather than humans? And, most painful disaster of all, when they had been banished to so distant and barbarous a country, and suffering captivity, weren't they without Jewish teachers, without prophets, without a ruler? "For," it is



written, "there is no ruler, nor prophet, nor governor, nor place for offering before Thee and finding mercy." Worse than this, they were thrown into the pagans' royal palace, as upon some cliff and mountaintop, and a sea full of rocks and reefs, being compelled to sail over that angry sea without a captain or signal or crew or sails. They were cooped up in the royal court as in a hostile prison. For so far as they knew spiritual wisdom, and were superior to worldly things, they counted their journey there as their trouble getting worse. For if they had been outside the court, and living in a private house they would have had more independence. However, having cast into that prison (for they deemed the external splendor of the palace no better than a prison, no safer than a place of slippery rocks) they were immediately subjected to something cruel, and worse than embarrassment. For the king commanded them to receive food from his own table, a decadent, idol-stained, *defiled* table, something which was absolutely forbidden to Jews, and seemed more terrible than death. They were lonely men hemmed in like lambs among so many wolves. And they were forced to choose between being consumed by famine, or rather led off to execution, and tasting defiled and unclean foods that were forbidden to Jews. What then did these youths do, forlorn as they were, captives, strangers, and slaves of those who commanded these things? They did not consider that this dilemma or the absolute power of the ruler to justify their giving in; but they tried every plan and method to enable them to avoid sin, although they were abandoned on every

side. For they could not influence people by money. How should they, being captives? Nor by friendship and social influence: how should they, being strangers? Nor could they get the better of them than any exercise of power: how was it possible to slaves like them? Nor could they win by force of numbers: how could they, being only three strong? Therefore they approached the eunuch who possessed the necessary authority, and persuaded him by their arguments. For when they saw him fearful and trembling, and in agony and alarmed for his own safety, and the fear of death that agitated his soul was intolerable: "for I fear," said he, "my lord the king, lest he should see your faces sadder than the other children like you and so you shall endanger my head before the king" having released him from this fear the three children persuaded him to grant them the favor. And given that they brought to the work all the strength which they had, God also henceforth contributed His strength to it. For it was not God's doing alone that they achieved those things for the sake of which they were to receive a reward, but the beginning and starting point was from their own initiative. Having manifested that to be noble and brave, they won for themselves the help of God, and so accomplished their aim.

*Do you not then see that if a person does not injure himself, no one else will be able to harm him?* Consider the following: They were,

- Scarcely older than children, with—
- Captivity and destitution—

- Exile into a foreign land—
- Great fear of death attacking the eunuch's mind—
- Poverty—
- Being so few in numbers—
- Living surrounded by barbarians—
- Having enemies for masters—
- Surrender into the hands of the king himself—
- Separated from all their relatives—
- Removal from priests and prophets—
- Removal from all others who cared for them—
- Being completely cut off from drink offerings and sacrifices—
- Loss of the Temple and Psalmody—

And yet none of things harmed them: but they had more public fame than when they had all these things in their native land.

And after they had accomplished this first and had placed the glorious crown of victory on their heads, and had kept the Jewish Law even in a foreign land, and trampled underfoot the tyrant's command, and overcame the fear of the avenger, and yet receiving no harm from anywhere, as if they had been quietly living at home and enjoying the benefit of all benefits of Jewish society which I mentioned... after they had so fearlessly accomplished their work, they were again

summoned to other contests.

And again they were the same men; and they were subjected to a more severe trial than the earlier one, and a furnace was lit, and they were confronted by the barbarian army in company of the king. The whole Persian force was set in motion and everything was devised which would tend to deceive or confront them: different kinds of music, and various forms of punishment, and threats, and what they saw was alarming on every side, and the words they heard were more alarming than what they saw... nevertheless, as they did not betray themselves, but made the most of their own strength, they never sustained any kind of damage. They even won for themselves more glorious crowns of victory than before. For Nebuchednesor tied them up and threw them into the furnace, but he failed to burn them, but instead helped them, and made them more illustrious. And although they were:

- Deprived of Temple (for I will repeat my former remarks)—
- Deprived of altar—
- Deprived of homeland—
- Deprived of priests and prophets—
- Although they were in a foreign and barbarous country—
- In the very midst of the furnace—
- Surrounded by all that mighty warhost—
- With the king himself who had done all this

looking at them—

They set up a glorious trophy. They won a notable victory. And they had sung that admirable and extraordinary hymn which from that day to today has been sung throughout the world and will continue to be sung for future generations:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers,  
and to be praised and highly exalted for ever;  
And blessed is Thy glorious, holy Name  
and to be highly praised and highly exalted for  
ever;

Blessed art Thou in the Temple of Thy holy glory  
and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.

Blessed art Thou, Who sittest upon cherubim  
and lookest upon the deeps,  
and to be praised and highly exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou upon the Throne of Thy  
Kingdom

and to be extolled and highly exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou in the firmament of Heaven  
and to be sung and glorified for ever.

"Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you Heavens,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all waters above the heaven,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all powers,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, sun and moon,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, stars of Heaven,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, all rain and dew,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, all winds,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, fire and heat,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, dews and snows,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, nights and days,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, light and darkness,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, ice and cold,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, frosts and snows,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Let the earth bless the Lord;  
Let it sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, mountains and hills,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, all things that grow on the earth,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you springs,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, seas and rivers,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you whales and all creatures that  
move in the waters,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, all birds of the air,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, all beasts and cattle,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you sons of men,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, O Israel,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in  
heart,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
Bless the Lord, Hanani'ah, Azari'ah, and Mish  
'ael,  
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.  
For He has rescued us from Hades and saved us  
from the hand of death,  
And delivered us from the midst of the burning  
fiery furnace;

From the midst of the fire He has delivered us.  
Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,  
For His mercy endures for ever.  
Bless Him, all who worship the Lord, the God of  
gods,  
Sing praise to Him and give thanks to Him,  
For His mercy endures for ever."

**So when a person does not harm himself, he cannot possibly be hurt by another.** I will not cease constantly harping on this saying. For if captivity, and slavery, and loneliness and loss of country and all kindred and death, and a great warhost and a savage tyrant could not do any damage to the innate goodness of the three children, *even though they were captives, slaves, and aliens in a foreign land*. To the contrary, the enemy's assault became to them instead the occasion of greater winning. What shall be able to harm the reasonable and moderate person? There is nothing, even if the whole world would be up in arms against him. "But," someone may say, "in their case God stood beside them, and plucked them out of the flame." Certainly He did: and if you will play your part to the best of your power, the help which God provides will definitely follow you.

Nevertheless the reason why I admire those youths and I call them blessed, and admirable, is not because they trampled on the flame and vanquished the power of the fire. It is because they were tied up with ropes and thrown into the furnace, and delivered to the fire for the sake of living the Truth. For this is



what constituted the completeness of their triumph, and the wreath of victory was placed on their heads as soon as they were thrown into the furnace, and not a moment later. It was before the events occurred which were woven to them, when they spoke with much boldness and candid freedom of speech to the king when they were brought into his presence. "We have no need to answer thee concerning this thing. For our God in Heaven Whom we serve is able to rescue us out of the burning fiery furnace: and He will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But even if He cannot, let it be known to you O King, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

After they spoke these words I proclaimed them conquerors. After these words, having grasped the prize of victory, they went on to claim the glorious crown of martyrdom, by following up the confession they made in words with the confession they made through their deeds. But when they had been thrown into the furnace, the fire had respect for their bodies. The fire took off the ropes they were tied up in, and allowed them to go down into it without fear, and forgot its natural force, so that the furnace of fire became a fountain of cool water. This marvel was the effect of God's grace and the divine wonder-working power. Yet the heroes themselves even before these things took place, as soon as they set foot in the flames, had erected their trophy. They had won their victory. They had put on their crowns. They had been proclaimed conquerors both in Heaven and on earth. So far as they were concerned, there was nothing more to ask for their splendor.

What then would you have to say to these things? Have you been driven into exile, and expelled from your country? So were they. Have you suffered captivity, and become the slave of barbarian masters? Well! You will find that this also happened to these men. But you have no one present there to put order to your life nor advise and instruct you? Well! These men lacked such attention too. Or have you been tied up, burned, and killed? For you cannot tell me of anything more painful than these things. But look at this! These men who went through them all, were made more glorious by each one of them, yes, *much more glorious*. More than this, they increased the store of their treasures in Heaven.

And the Jews indeed who had:

- Both Temple and altar—
- Ark and cherubim—Mercy-seat—
- Veil and an infinite multitude of priests—
- Daily services—
- Morning and evening sacrifices—
- Continually heard the voices of the prophets, both living and dead, sounding in their ears—
- Carried about with them the memory of the wonders which were done in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and all the rest—
- Turning the story of these things over in their hands—

- Had them inscribed on their doorposts and enjoyed the benefit of much supernatural power and every other kind of help—

—were yet in no way profited, but rather harmed:

- Having set up idols in the Temple itself—
- And having sacrificed their sons and daughters under trees—
- In almost every part of the country in Palestine having offered these forbidden and condemned sacrifices—
- perpetrated countless other deeds that were still more monstrous—

But these three men, although in the midst of a barbarous and hostile land, living in a tyrant's house deprived of all that care I have been talking about, led away to execution, and subjected to burning, not only suffered no harm there from anyone small or great, but became all the more famous.

Knowing then these things, and collecting other instances like this from the inspired divine Scriptures (for it is possible to find many such examples with various other persons) we declare that neither a difficulty arising from seasons or events, nor compulsion and force, nor the arbitrary authority of rulers provide enough of an excuse for us when we sin. I will now close my discourse by repeating what I said at the beginning, that *if anyone be harmed and damaged he certainly suffers this as entirely self-*

*inflicted damage, not at the hands of others even if there may be innumerable many people harming and attacking him. If you does not suffer this at your own hands, not even all the creations which inhabit the whole earth and sea if they combined to attack you would be able to hurt you if you are vigilant and sober in the Lord.*

Let us then, I plead to you, be sober and vigilant at all times. Let us endure all painful things bravely so that we may obtain those everlasting and pure blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power, now and ever throughout all ages.

Amen!

## **How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following?**

How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following, such as I wrote about in *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts?* I pity them, and pray, "Holy Father Seraphim, pray for your followers, that they may not suffer harm on my account," and I consider them to be benefactors.

(Perhaps unwilling and unwitting benefactors, but benefactors nonetheless.)

In *Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide*, I wrote:

I wrote in another blog post that I believed I had experienced what I would call "fame lite." Leonard Nimoy, in *I Am Spock* talks about how Hollywood has teachers for all kinds of skills they would need to portray that skill in movies: musical instruments,

riding a horse, and so on and so forth. However, there was something that no teachers were to be found in Hollywood: dealing with fame. Nimoy learned, for instance, how to enter a restaurant through the kitchen because there would be a public commotion if Spock walked in through the front door. And on that count, I do not obviously suffer the consequences of real fame. I've been asked for my autograph, *once*. I've had someone call out publicly, before I entered Orthodoxy, "*That's Jonathan Hayward!*", *once*. I have repeatedly had pleasant meetings with people who know me through my website. And since then, the only new tarnish to my claim of undeserved "fame lite" is in recent years when a job opportunity was really a cloak for attempted seduction. If that was because of my website or reputation; I am not sure it was.

Fr. Seraphim's militant followers have kept an eagle eye to ensure that positive reviews don't stay up on Amazon too long, if they have any excuse to have it taken down. Consequently, if you look at my author page on Amazon, you will see what looks to me like the customer review title of an author who's written a lot of mediocrities. Editorial reviews help sales, but Amazon customers are used to buying things that have ★★★★★ to ★★★★★ and usually hundreds, if not thousands, of customer reviews.

**My magnum opus is *The Luddite's Guide to Technology***, and at the time of this writing, has ★★★★★ and four customer ratings. There is no hint in this, to the Amazon customer, that the title merits study.

So why do I say that Seraphinians are my benefactors? C.S. Lewis wrote wonderful books and definitely did not just

have "fame lite"; he had "full-blooded fame" and spent much of his later life in essentially pastoral correspondence with his readers. It would be quite wrong on my part to think myself entitled to write what may be good books but be too good to spend lots of time answering heartfelt correspondence from my readers. But I seem shielded from a benefit I would be immature to seek.

Furthermore, I am well-known with a good reputation, at least among conservative converts to Orthodoxy. I was informed a couple of years ago that in Facebook conversation, my name, listed as "Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward," had condensed to "CSH," in other words, "C.S. Hayward." That would also be bad enough for me to seek, but I have it. And I have just a pleasant degree of experience of meeting people and finding that they already know and like me, through my website.

People who are enough in the know, know that a pedestal can be a heavy cross to bear. Fr. Seraphim himself tried to avoid being put on a pedestal, but it happened to him anyway. At present I am on a pedestal but one that could be much larger and worse than it actually is, and part of my smaller and less burdensome pedestal is due to the hate of Fr. Seraphim's followers.

Furthermore, it is well-known in Orthodoxy that if you have a spiritual director and are obedient, part of what is done for you is that your spiritual director and not you will answer for your sins. What is less well-known is that if someone really maltreats you, they will answer for your sins like a spiritual director was. And this is something I wish were not so, and reason to pity Fr. Seraphim's followers, however hostile. When I die I want my sins to fall on Christ, and maybe my spiritual director. But they may fall on

people who are already poor spiritually.

Being woke, as it is commonly understood, means being sensitized to notice subtle terms of political terms of disenfranchisement. In this and other cases I do not wish to explore, the term "subtle" simply does not apply. But I do not need to perhaps look cues for other even more subtle ways haters try to sabotage and oppress me. There is still plenty that is un-subtle!

## ...and True Woke

People today are big on being woke, of *waking up and smelling the shit*. And so it is in Orthodoxy too. But the real waking up smelling the shit is not the shit of political disenfranchisement, but **the shit of our own sin**. Pure and simple.

Furthermore, the Orthodox understanding of repentance is to wake up from your slumber, and arise from your sleep. Repentance is unconditional surrender, but it is also waking up from sleep *par excellence*.

I have spent much of my life unhappy, and been slow to wake up. For all my privilege, I was an escapist. I wanted to leave the world, wanted to have something from another world, such desires as power Within the Steel Orb. I found the here and now to almost always be desolate.

At one point a priest mentioned me that monks in the desert were always warned of the temptation to escape the world. And I repented, let go of having something sexy or enticing or otherwise an exception to this desolate world, and when I wrote a blank check to God and most bleakly accepted that my place was in this desolate world, my eyes were opened and I saw, as for the very first time, that the

here and now I was in were not desolate, but beautiful. And that marked a beginning of being glad to be alive. And in the wake of this, or rather the *woke*, I wrote "Paradise:"

## Paradise

O Lord,  
Have I not seen,  
How thou hast placed me in Paradise?

And how have I said,  
That a first monastic command,  
Is, "Go home and spend another year with your family?"  
While I have spent a few?  
The obedience is not limited,  
By a count of years,  
But by obedience,  
This being a first *obedience*.

Gifts I have fought as chance left me,  
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?  
It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.

I stand, or sit,  
Not scholar, nor user experience professional,  
Making use of a life of leisure,  
Learning leisure well, to lord it over leisure,  
Once I made a vow before a wonder-working icon  
in Brooklyn,



That I might receive a doctorate,  
Earned or honorary,  
And since then have prayed that my vow not be  
granted,  
An honorary doctorate not to receive,  
Because I do not want it enough to even travel,  
To give the icon a kiss of veneration!

An Invitation to the Game is an icon,  
Of children in a proletariat of excessive leisure,  
Excessive leisure being a training ground,  
Before a new life in a new world begins.

God the Spiritual Father looks after,  
Each person he has made,  
As a spiritual father looks after each disciple,  
God looketh after each,  
In the situations he placed each:

### **Life's Tapestry**

Behind those golden clouds up there  
the Great One sews a priceless embroidery  
and since down below we walk  
we see, my child, the reverse view.  
And consequently it is natural for the mind to see  
mistakes  
there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come  
where your soul a-wing will rip through the air  
and you shall see the embroidery of God

from the good side  
and then... everything will seem to you to be a  
system and order.

What have I to add,  
To words such as these?  
This time is a time of purification and training,  
And as in times past,  
In an instant, I may be taken to a monastery,  
As I was taken to study theology,  
Six months' work to obtain student loans,  
Falling into place one business day before  
leaving.  
Thou teachest me,  
And I know thou art willing to save:  
Whether or not my plans are the best.  
Whether I ever reach monasticism,  
Thou art potent to save.  
I might need to seek monasticism:  
God can save me with or without.

So I learn patience,  
Fly through FluentU and learn Russian,  
And here I sit,  
In a place thou hast opened my eyes to see as  
Paradise,  
And with lovely food pantries,  
And visits to pets at a lovely cat shelter,  
And thou ever ministerest to me.

Though thousands around me be addicted to  
television,

And ten thousands can't stop checking their cell  
phones,  
Thou hast delivered me,  
And taught me to lord it over technologies,  
Perchance a prophet in the way,  
To the technology user who still suffers,  
To those who remain entangled in the Web.  
Thou hast delivered me from mortal danger:  
Perhaps thou givest me more time to repent.  
Or perhaps thou givest merely,  
More time to repent.  
Glory to God for all things!

Thou givest me simple pleasures,  
Who knew tidying up a besmudged keyboard  
could be fun?  
Whither I go, thou art with me;  
Thou preparest a table before family and friends.

"World" refers not to God's creation,  
But to our collections of passions,  
Seeing through a glass, darkly,  
What bathes in the light of Heaven:  
Hell is a state of mind,  
But Heaven is reality itself.

I am perhaps not worthy of praise,  
To say such things in middle-class comfort.  
I seek monasticism, to be a novice,  
Which is meant to be exile,  
Yet an abbot's work,  
Is to help me reach freedom from my passions,

And what true joy I have in luxury,  
Only know further in monastic exile.  
Years I have waited:  
Now I am willing to wait years more.  
Only if I may pursue repentance,  
On such terms as it is offered me.  
Glory to God who has allowed me such luxury!  
Glory to God who has allowed me such honors!  
Glory to God who has shown me that these avail  
nothing,  
And seek the true fame,  
Fame before God himself!

Be thou glorified, O God, in me,  
Though I know nothing,  
Though I am nothing,  
Be none the less glorified in me.  
The Infinite can do the Infinite in the finite:  
Be thou therefore glorified and praised in me,  
Though I am nothing before thee,  
Yet thou grantest me breath and life,  
Joy,  
And ever offerest me salvation.

Glory be to God on high!  
Glory be to God for Paradise!  
Which Paradise is in all things!  
Glory to God for all things!

Amen.

In *The Paradise War*, one of the characters says, "You

aren't happy unless you're miserable!" And strange as it may sound, I am never so happy as when I discover a repentance.

The Philokalia says that people hold on to sin because they [wrongly] think it adorns them. And the pattern for repentance is often the same. There is some struggle, something I think I desperately need that conscience or authorities tell me I need to let go of, and when I let it go and let go of all it represents for me, bleakly certain that some shining part of me will be lost and gone forever, I repent, then realize I was holding on to a piece of Hell, and am blindsided by a reward I would not have thought to seek. Repentance is bliss, as is well powers a passage in C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*:

I saw coming towards us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. Like all the Ghosts, he was unsubstantial, but they differed from one another as smokes differ. Some had been whitish; this one was dark and oily. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of him he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. 'Shut up, I tell you!' he said. It wagged its tail and continued to whisper to him. He ceased snarling, and presently began to smile. Then he turned and started to limp westward, away from the mountains.

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my

body too (for there was heat coming from him as well as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

'Yes. I'm off,' said the Ghost. 'Thanks for all your hospitality. But it's no good, you see. I told this little chap' (here he indicated the Lizard) that he'd have to be quiet if he came—which he insisted on doing. Of course his stuff won't do here: I realise that. But he won't stop. I shall just have to go home.'

'Would you like me to make him quiet?' said the flaming Spirit—an angel, as I now understood.

'Of course I would,' said the Ghost.

'Then I will kill him,' said the Angel, taking a step forward.

'Oh—ah—look out! You're burning me. Keep away,' said the Ghost, retreating.

'Don't you *want* him killed?'

'You didn't say anything about *killing* at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.'

'It's the only way,' said the Angel, whose burning hands were now very close to the Lizard. 'Shall I kill it?'

'Well, that's a further question. I'm quite open to consider it, but it's a new point, isn't? I mean, for the moment I was only thinking about silencing it because up here—well, it's so damned embarrassing.'

'May I kill it?'

'Well, there's time to discuss that later.'

'There is no time. May I kill it?'

'Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance. Please—really—don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep

of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now. Thanks ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

'Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.'

'The gradual process is of no use at all.'

'Don't you think so? Well, I'll think over what you've said very carefully. I honestly will. In fact I'd let you kill it now, but as a matter of fact I'm not feeling frightfully well today. It would be most silly to do it *now*. I'd need to be in good health for the operation. Some other day, perhaps.'

'There is no other day. All days are present now.'

'Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill *me* if you did.'

'It is not so.'

'Why, you're hurting me now.'

'I never said it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't kill you.'

'Oh, I know. You think I'm a coward. But isn't that. Really it isn't. I say! Let me run back by to-night's bus and get an opinion from my own doctor. I'll come again the first moment I can.'

'This moment contains all moments.'

'Why are you torturing me? You are jeering at me. How *can* I let you tear me in pieces? If you wanted to help me, why didn't you kill the damned thing without asking me—before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had.'

'I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible.'

Have I your permission?'

The Angel's hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

'Be careful,' it said. 'He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he *will!* Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. How could you live? You'd be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn't understand. He's only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn't for us. Yes, yess. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren't they better than nothing? And I'll be so good. I admit I've sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won't do it again. I'll give you nothing but really nice dreams—all sweet and fresh and almost innocent. You might say, quite innocent . . .'

'Have your permission?' said the Angel to the Ghost.

'I know it will kill me.'

'It won't. But supposing it did?'

'You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.'

'Then I may?'

'Damn and blast you! Go on, can't you? Get it over. Do what you like,' bellowed the Ghost; but ended, whimpering, 'God help me. God help me.'

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on



the turf.

'Ow! That's done for me,' gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solidier, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that the something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinneying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse's neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed into each other's nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish

them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his seat he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steeps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

The Orthodox Church understands repentance to be a fundamental spiritual awakening, far more profound than getting bit by a political bug.

Repentance is not just True Woke. It is also Heaven's best-kept secret.

## **Curiouser and curiouser**

Furthermore, as far as awakening goes, it is the dogmatic theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church that it was always Plan A for our race to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was initially forbidden, but the ban was only temporary, until Adam and Eve could grow strong enough to eat such foods. The reason Adam and Eve fell after eating the fruit was not that they ate

something that they were not meant to eat; it is because they went behind God's back and were like an infant trying to eat solid food when it needs breast milk.

Among the seasons of the Orthodox Church, Lent is the central season, a season of the repentance that brings Heaven here now, and builds up into the season of the Resurrection, a season of Heaven on earth, and then after a season where the Risen Christ helped his disciples on to more solid food, ascension where Christ rose to Heaven and brought the Church with him. Then comes Pentecost, which is my chief interest here, and not only because it marks the beginning of the Orthodox Church's road through time and history.

When Christ was teaching the disciples, he was always bringing them to higher things. With years of face-to-face discipling, they didn't get it. When Christ rose, they didn't get it. When he spent forty days trying to introduce more solid food, they didn't get it. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, *they got it*.

Pentecost marks the season of True Woke. It was at Pentecost that the disciples maturely ate and received of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and went from cowering behind locked doors to going fearlessly to proclaim good news throughout the known world. One of them was threatened by authorities with crucifixion; he answered, "If I feared the Cross, I would not be preaching it." Another who had denied his master three times before he "got it," when he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, said that he was not worthy to die like his Lord, and asked instead to be subjected to upside-down crucifixion—the one form of torture and execution worse than his Lord's. Almost all of them died martyrs; they had something fundamentally

beyond anything the world knew. Such things as Basil's response to threats come to mind:

The emperor Valens, mercilessly sending into exile any bishop who displeased him, and having implanted Arianism into other Asia Minor provinces, suddenly appeared in Cappadocia for this same purpose. He sent the prefect Modestus to Saint Basil. He began to threaten the saint with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings, and even death.

Saint Basil said, "If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

The official was stunned by his answer. "No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me," he said.

"Perhaps," the saint remarked, "that is because you've never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that

rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear.”

Reporting to Valens that Saint Basil was not to be intimidated, Modestus said, “Emperor, we stand defeated by a leader of the Church.”

And we, too, are to maturely eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

## **"Want to try some Snow Crash?"**

Neal Stevenson in *Snow Crash* introduces a concept of Snow Crash that is not a narcotic, but is often laced with narcotics. Well into the book we learn that Snow Crash, the mysterious phenomenon, is a bigger, better, and geekier version of the Japanese animation technique that was banned when it caused mass epileptic seizures in its audience.

A political bug that is laced with a feeling of having made a spiritual breakthrough, that perhaps you are awake and the whole world is asleep, is false treasure. Such memes deprived of the breakthrough sensation go places wisdom would not go.

It has been observed that gifted people are often very liberal, but *profoundly gifted people are often very, very conservative, or at very least populist*. Part of the taste that is exhilarating to most of the gifted population has a taste more like flat beer to the profoundly gifted.

If you would like to know if you're having a real spiritual breakthrough, one question I would ask is, “What sin are you repenting of, recoiling from it in horror and tremendously glad to be clean?” If there is no clear answer

to this question, the yellow metallic shine is fool's gold.

## Conclusion

Do you desire to be woke, even True Woke?

You desire a good thing...

...but there is a lot of fool's gold to be had...

...and the real gold takes some digging.

Some have cynically said, "Truth is a commodity that, however scarce, has always had a supply far in excess of the demand." I don't know whether that is true, but I have outlined what "True Woke" really means.

It is well worth pursuing.

Would you seek it?

# Zeitgeist and Giftedness

## The issue of fame

Leonard Nimoy, in *I Am Spock*, states that there were teachers in Hollywood for practically any additional skill an actor would need to portray a character in a movie. I don't remember exactly what his list was, but this would include riding horseback, handling an ancient or modern weapon, using some particular musical instrument, speaking in some particular accent correctly, juggling or illusionist skills, various trades, some approach to singing and dancing not already known to the performer, and so on and so forth: I got the impression was that pretty much every skill you could name was covered, and a number of skills you wouldn't think to name.

With *one* exception.

Nimoy said that there was one thing that was needed in Hollywood but did not have a single teacher: **handling fame**.

He talked, for instance, about creative ways of sneaking into a restaurant through the kitchen because a public

commotion would happen if one person saw Spock trying to quietly walk into a restaurant's front door. I've heard it said of one cast member of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* that he dresses and acts flamboyantly and strikingly in front of the camera as he should, but consciously turns that off and acts much more nondescriptly in public is usually not noticed. But *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* has a smaller audience and is less mainstream; I'm no student of fashion history but a Google image search for Spock shows a consistent haircut, and one that looks to me like it was meant to be distinctive. (One would suspect that TV producers using humans to portray alien races would want actors to sport a distinctive look.)

## "Fame Lite"

[One note from later: I would change my opinion of "fame lite" now. I still don't make a living writing, but I've faced *inter alia* a seduction attempt. Not that that is a sure indication of fame. I don't want to discuss.]

I might suggest that my own experience is of having some degree of fame, but to a degree that has mostly been a privilege where a much greater amount of fame would bring much more obnoxious difficulties.

I've had someone call out, "*That's Jonathan Hayward!*" Like a TV actor. *Once*.

I also have paper and Kindle books on Amazon that bring me a symbolic level of monthly income. It's not on par with the income for working part-time flipping burgers, but it is still more than most authors ever see.

I've also repeatedly encountered people who knew me by my writing.



This might be called "sheltered fame," or "mini-fame", or "fame lite", or "fame *à la carte*", and I am glad I don't enjoy a far greater degree of fame. If I were more famous, I might be able to support myself just by writing, but I regard that as being beside the point: I am seeking monasticism on the Holy Mountain, where my job will be to pray and do the obediences assigned by an Elder and be challenged at the level of parents of a first newborn. Or more. The obediences will be meant to free me from my weaknesses: but I will in a very sense not be my own man, even if my Elder's entire goal in dealing with me is to do whatever is necessary to make me my own God-man in a fuller sense than I could possibly get on my own.

For a last detail of my miniature fame, I receive correspondence from readers, and so far I have been fortunate to be able to respond to every reader email I really can. C.S. Lewis may not have been Orthodox, and he may sound very faithful to the Greek Fathers until you recognize that Mere Christianity marks him as one of the major architects of the ecumenism as we know it today, and ecumenism was formally anathematized by several bishops in the eighties and some serious Orthodox have called ecumenism the ecclesiological heresy of our day. But I want to single out one point about C.S. Lewis's personal life that is relevant: *he made a practice of answering every reader who wrote him, even though that resulted him spending much of his later life answering essentially pastoral correspondence.* And on that point I consider myself particularly privileged to be entrusted with some correspondence, but not need nearly enough interactions to the point that it is a heavy asceticism to answer people who write me.

All of this says that I may share in fame in one sense, but I really do not *know* in the sense that stems from direct personal experience what fame is to household names. I believe that this may be changing. But for now I would like to distance myself from claims to insider status as far as extreme fame goes. My degree of fame, as privilege, is comparable in giftedness to being somewhere a bit below the lower boundary of the range of socially optimal intelligence.

## **The reason for this piece: Everyman**

There is a medieval play, which I have read of but not read, called *Everyman*. The character is not an individual "me, myself, and I" as is much more common in today's novels, but a representative of all that is human.

That basic approach to writing was fairly mainstream; perhaps the most famous tale of *Everyman* is *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is a tale of the only way *Everyman* can be saved. The pilgrim is not characterized as an individual with individual tastes, interests, hobbies (though perhaps expecting hobbies would be anachronistic). He represents in a sort of abstracted form the common story of how one may be saved as understood in the Reformation.

Today that basic approach has mostly fallen out of fashion (or perhaps has some revival I do not know about), but it is not quite dead and perhaps can never die. The assumption in an Amazon review of consumer electronics is that the review should not be about "me, myself, and I" so much as a "what's ahead" notice to *Everyman*, meaning other consumers, who are contemplating purchasing that

item. Reviews are ideally written from Everyman to Everyman.

This work is intended to be written by and to Everyman, even if that Everyman represents a narrower demographic than the whole of humanity. Significant, and in large measure unique, details are included on the theory that "History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme." The assumption is that a specific picture in living color exposes the rhyme much more readily than a colorless abstraction that is propositionally true for all it treats, but lacks a pulse. It is an established finding in psychology that people are recognized more quickly from a sketched caricature than from an accurate photograph. I do not knowingly offer *caricature* in this work as such, but I do try to avoid bleeding out colors into abstraction, however correct, unless there are privacy concerns.

## ***Danger! Beware of pedestal.***

There is a quotation I've heard attributed to Gandhi, running something like, "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." At a brief check Snopes marks this as misattributed, and speaking as someone who spent considerable time perusing *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, as Told In His Own Words*, this simply doesn't sound like something Gandhi would have ever said; its presence in the chapter "Ahimse or the way of nonviolence" would have been as obtrusive as Gandhi taking a brief moment to endorse some particular brand of toothpaste. Note that decent people *do* make attributions that are wrong; my Uncle Mark was a tremendously well-loved and respected

schoolteacher, and more specifically a *history* teacher. He would open the day with some particular thought, from eclectic sources ranging over the Bible, Ben Franklin, and other historical figures, and after his passing, one student who had written down these thoughts posted pictures of her notes, and they were really quite a treasure. But one of them attributed "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt" to Mark Twain. Sorry, but *No*. Without looking up exact dates, I believe Mark Twain's lifetime overlapped those of the founders of modern psychology. The "shock-denial-blah-blah-blah-resignation-acceptance" grieving process could conceivably have been formulated in the nineteenth century, although it doesn't sound like Freud to me, or any other nineteenth century psychologist I'm aware of. Kind of like how Freud's various complexes don't sound like something a behaviorist like Skinner would develop. However, even if we ascribe The Grieving Process to 19th century psychologists, these are technical terms in an obscure discipline, and would have been less-well-known than unconventional approaches to pig breeding or knowledge of how the results different knot techniques vary with different kinds of rope. The Grieving Process of "shock-denial-blah-blah-blah-resignation-acceptance" could absolutely not have been a lapidary part of pop culture that pops up in a remark by an unruly six-year-old boy in *Calvin and Hobbes*, or where saying "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt" instantly telegraphs its intended meaning.

But let's return to the pseudo-Ghandian quotation regardless of source: "*First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. Then they fight you. Then you win.*" As a sloppy sketch, this might be true, but there is a caveat that eviscerates the whole triumphal gist: *The last step might*

*not be, "You win." The last step might be, "They install you on a pedestal." The difference between winning and being installed on a pedestal is the difference between diamond and diamond-back.*

There is a source I read decades back; the book title and even the name of the figure escapes me beyond that he was a scholar of Confucius and perhaps others, Chinese by nationality, and he meticulously documented how, after "First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. Then they fight you.", the last step was "*Then they install you on a pedestal.*" And he documented how for a figure he studied how people went from hindering and hampering him by opposing him, to hindering and hampering him by launching him on a high pedestal. And the front matter, from a Western scholar and/or translator, said that the pedestal effect he documented in fact played out in the scholar's own life; he spent the rest of his life trying to achieve constructive results despite the pedestal that he was forever stuck with.

## **Fr. Seraphim's unwanted pedestal**

I've personally raised serious concerns about Fr. Seraphim of Plantina, and it is my considered judgment that he has been harmful and a cause of arrested spiritual development among his Western convert followers. (He is also deeply respected in some Orthodox lands, but I get the impression that a Russian or Greek admirer has a more balanced diet of spiritual reading.) Do Western followers, of the kind who relate to all outsiders as superiors guiding subordinates and often teaching humility first of all, distort Fr. Seraphim? My suspicion is that they fail to live up to Fr.

Seraphim's guidance on some point, and on other points show problems that are 100% faithful to his trajectory. One of the central tenets of what has been called "Orthodox fundamentalism" is that the world is literally about 6,000 years old, and a "Creation Science" lifted from Protestants of yesteryear who were not scientists is the true and final science that proves that. That deeply entrenched feature is one where they are following the Master's lead. I've read Fr. Seraphim charge his readers to straighten out the backwards scientific misunderstandings of people who believe in an ancient universe and either evolution or progressive creation. If this is a pattern, it is not a simple case of ideological hijacking; practically all I have critiqued in *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts* remains faithful to the Master's guidance. Possibly they exaggerate the importance of Fr. Seraphim's position on origins; somehow God comes out second banana next to Young Earth Creationism, but if they exaggerated, they took something big and made it even bigger. Whether or not they pushed things further than they should, for to have someone who is a nonscientist (and, at least as I've found, wouldn't recognize even an unsubtle scientific argument at all, even if it bit him on the arse!), gently asks "Have I cornered you?" when the other person is frustrated by a Seraphinian inability to even *recognize* a scientific argument, diplomatically and gently offer to straighten out a biology PhD's backwards understanding of science (perhaps by dropping Einsteins' name and giving an example of how "pilots experience time differently when they're traveling above the speed of sound"; one friend, on hearing this "example," winced, slowly gulped, and said, "That's not even *wrong*.") Someone who does every single

one of these things **is** following in the Master's footsteps and living up to his exhortations.

There are other points where no matter what harassment I have met from his evangelists, I believe they weren't faithful to Fr. Seraphim, or at least weren't faithful to what he hoped for. Probably the kindest remark to him that I can genuinely respect is, "*Fr Seraphim (Rose) is included in the mix of folks who tried to explain to folks they were sinners, but were still put on a pedestal anyway.*" I have not seriously investigated the contours of Fr. Seraphim as regards guruism, but my understanding is that he would had a very simple answer: "No." Or maybe he wrote at length about why guruism is toxic. At any rate, he now stands on a very cruel pedestal for a monastic who tried to free people from the idolatry of inordinately focusing on a single charismatic personality. And it seems that there is cruelty to Fr. Seraphim himself, of the sort one would associate with vengeful, schadenfreude-laden claims of poetic justice, except that it was quite the opposite of poetic justice: he challenged guruism, and did his best to dodge it, but his standing today is that of a **polestar** of a guru who serves as a primary orienting figure to a significant following of Orthodox Christians (you can call them "Orthodox fundamentalists") where the sun rises and sets on the Master's teachings.

This is a cruel pedestal, as it would be cruel to celebrate an environmentalist hero by starting many forest fires (in non-pyrogenic ecosystems) to celebrate by the beauty of great leaping flames. I have not read what Fr. Seraphim's response to his pedestal actually was, but the image comes to mind of Francis of Assisi returning to his movement's apparent success and being a lone dissent who was utterly

aghast that the "success" that had been achieved was his followers' desertion of his, and their, ever-faithful Lady Poverty.

## **"An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."**

I would like to modify a position I strongly endorsed, albeit in a way some might call superficial.

Dorothy Sayers wrote about how, in recent centuries in the West, there has been a belief that "ideas grow rust like machines and need to be replaced." And that deliberately crude image spoke to me. Ideas may be wrong from the very beginning and need to be replaced; but the quote "an idea whose time has come" embodies something very strange. The doctrine of progress is tied to this, so that each new idea whose time has come improves the overall picture.

That much I still hold fast to, but with a caveat. I do not believe in progress (one friend summarized the academy as saying "We've progressed enough not to believe in progress"), but I do believe that fashion exists and can sometimes have a spooky effect. Mathematicians are well-advised, if they find a solution to a major unsolved problem, to submit it as soon as possible. The core reason is that it is a historically common phenomenon for a question in mathematics to be unsolved for quite some time, and then be solved by several mathematicians independently. And on this count, mathematics would be expected to be perhaps the least Zeitgeist-shaken academic discipline. There are some things that change over time; the standard of



mathematical rigor was rising when I was studying it, and the history of the parallel postulate in geometry shows a now-respected mathematician as working out an entirely valid non-Euclidean geometry and then publishing work under the title *Euclid Freed From Every Flaw*, is not today's mindset. However, as a general rule, theorems do not go out of fashion. And still mathematics, relatively free from Zeitgeist fashions as it might be, manifests a phenomenon where major problems remain unsolved for a considerable time and then simultaneously be solved by multiple mathematicians. The same has been observed in other areas as well; Nobel Prizes are given to two or three people who make the same discovery almost simultaneously, and independently.

The question of when the automobile was invented is messy and is not "Why, Henry Ford!" even if Henry Ford invented a mass production that drastically reduced the price of an automobile. There is a similar simultaneity, and I've read an author enumerate a dozen mechanical inventions, all of them an automobile or something like an automobile, in the West over a short period of time. Questions come into play of, "Where do you draw the line?" and there are what might be called shades of grey or judgment calls. I'm not saying that there can be no decisive resolution to these questions, but unless you settle on the oldest, incomplete candidate, answering "When was the automobile invented?" in a responsible hinges on looking at several vehicles or devices, that were automotive at least in part, and were invented in a surprisingly close interval of time.

## Fashions

I would like to illustrate a particular point, and clarify what modification I mean to a standard trope. Phrases like "An idea whose time have come" partly describe a pattern of trends and partly frames things in terms of progress: "An idea whose time has come" is always a gain and never a loss. By contrast, I have come to share belief in the pattern of trends, but in place of framing things as *progress*, I suggest they be framed in terms of *fashion*. **No one seems to consider that "an idea whose time has come" might be a bad idea that is worse than whatever it replaces.** Nor am I the first or only one to frame things in terms of fashion (though my hybrid position might be new, for all I know).

One psychiatrist recounted how the professional community once believed that divorce was so terrible to children that except in the worst and most pathological cases it was worth keeping an very unhappy marriage together so as to avoid inflicting the pain of divorce on the children. Then the psychological community said it progressed to believing that really if a marriage is Hell on earth, the children are really better off with a divorce however nasty divorce may be. Then they claimed to have progressed to realize that an unhappy marriage was horrid, but however horrid it might be on the kids, it really is best to keep the marriage together if possible. His point in this tale of heroism and magic was that the shifts that occurred, both ones he agreed with and ones he didn't, didn't represent *progress*. They represented *fashion*, and I could envisage him using a term I heard from a quite different figure: "the herd of free thinkers." Progress, or what at least

is *labeled* as progress, is really more accurately understood as *current trends within "the herd of free thinkers."*

## **An example of my own**

When I was at Cambridge and my pre-master's diploma was winding down, I was looking for a topic for a master's thesis. I wanted to study the holy kiss, and my advisor ridiculed the question and me with it. He asked sarcastic rhetorical questions like "Can we find justification to only kiss the pretty people at church?" When I persisted, he consulted with another scholar and came back, without ridicule, saying the question was under-studied. (This is, by the way, an extreme rarity in academic theology; usually scholars try to find some vestige of unexplored turf and when they fail at that, write things like rehabilitating a founder of heresy, as the Archdruid of Canterbury has done with Arius the father of all heretics.) Furthermore, things never sat well with the department, which kept pushing my work into the pigeonhole of what German scholars called *Realia*, meaning physical details (other examples of questions of *Realia* might be what kind of arms and armor a first Christian would have seen a Roman soldier carry, and would have given shape to the words by which St. Paul closes the letter to the Ephesians, or what kind of house would provide the backdrop to Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount about putting a lamp where it will illuminate the whole house. I am not aware of any Cambridge faculty member who was open to the idea that the "divine kiss" (as St. Dionysius the Areopagite called it) might be studied under the rubric of liturgical or sacramental theology.

My desire and interest was a doctrinal study, and my

advisor there, *who was Orthodox*, kept pushing what I was doing into an unedifying sociological study of kissing that involved a great deal of Too Much Information, with lowlights such as the assigned Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. I tried to draw a line in the sand, saying that I wanted to do "a *doctrinal* study." He immediately laid down the law: "The best way to do that is to do a *cultural* study and let any doctrines arise." Other help that he offered was to suggest that narrowing scope would be helpful, and suggested that it would be a good bailiwick to study "differences between Christian and Jewish understanding of kissing in the Song of Songs." I held my tongue at saying, "That's impressive. Not only is that not what I wanted, but that doesn't *overlap* with what I wanted." And then, two thirds of the way through the year, the department decided that my study of the holy kiss was off-topic for the Philosophy of Religion seminar that had been selected for me, and I pulled out all the stops to write, as was demanded, a vastly different *AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics* that left all my prior thesis work as wasted.

## **So what's out there? What did my research turn up?**

What kind of doctrines did I pull up? Someone, perhaps with wishful thinking, who wanted the holy kiss to be important might try to attach it somewhere under the rubric of Holy Communion. The last prayer before Holy Communion does the opposite: *it places Holy Communion under the heading of the holy kiss*. How? "Neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss:" neither like Judas will I give

you a hollow kiss, betraying this kiss and you yourself by receiving the Holy Mysteries and then not even *try* to live a holy life. Incidentally, although there are ancient precursors, it is remarkably recent, 20th century or possibly 19th if I recall correctly, that the ethical concern represented by "a kiss can be seductive" appears in Orthodox theology. In the Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections, the kiss that is wrong is pre-eminently a kiss like that of Judas, the kiss of betrayal which Orthodox remember by fasting on Wednesdays, and was a double-layered betrayal: a betrayal of the Lord first of all, and with it a betrayal of everything a *kiss*, of all things, should be. In patristic times the holy kiss was a kiss on the mouth, *and this is doctrinally significant*. A Psalm prayed in preparation for Communion says, "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in war. Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be lifted up, ye everlasting gates, and the Lord, the King of Glory, shall enter in." St. John Chrysostom drives home the implication: "But about this holy kiss somewhat else may yet be said. To what effect? We are the temple of Christ; we kiss then the porch and entrance of the temple when we kiss each other." If, in my present locale, the holy kiss is three kisses on alternate cheeks, the underlying reality is unchanged: a liturgical kiss, on the cheek, is *always* by implication a kiss on the mouth, on the gates that receive the Lord. And indeed St. Ambrose pushes further in his remarkable letter to his sister, discussing how we can kiss Christ: part of the unfolding truth is, "We kiss Christ, then, with the kiss of communion." There is a very tight tie between the holy kiss and Holy Communion, and while there may be much greater laxity about a closed holy kiss than a closed Chalice,

according to strict interpretation of the rules a holy kiss is only ever between two canonical Orthodox Christians. In ancient times the closed holy kiss represented an additional boundary besides a closed Communion after the catechumens actually *departed*. But even today I have heard a priest lightheartedly say after a convert's chrismation, "You may kiss the convert." Something of that essence is here, even though nobody I have met makes a big deal about the enforcement of that rule. One last note here, which may be most of benefit to Catholics: In Rome, there is a sharp "do not cross" line between the sacraments, including Holy Communion, and what are called "sacramentals", which include the holy kiss. Sacraments are something that Christ might as well have personally etched in diamond; sacramentals are things the Church worked out that are a different sort of thing that is far below Christ's sacraments. The Orthodox usually list seven sacraments, and they are in general recognizable in relation to the Roman list of sacraments (overall but not in every detail), but the difference between a sacrament and a sacramental is only a difference of degree, not of kind, and people can say things like, "You can say there is only one sacrament, or that there are a million of them." If there is one sacrament, it is a Holy Communion where nothing else comes close, but the sacramental of the holy kiss is tied to Holy Communion in multiple ways and participates in its essence. My main, brief work on this topic was in fact called "The Eighth Sacrament." The title is *provocative*, but not *daring*. For one final point on the holy kiss, at least one aspect of a Protestant framing on worship is that worship is something you do with your spirit; there's a fairly strong association between worship and singing, or worship and

listening to a pastor, perhaps, but worship is contained by the spirit alone. The Orthodox understanding, besides recognizing that it is not a slight to Christ to show reverence to His Mother, refers to an act of adoration that is done with spirit and body alike. As to what the act of adoration that encompasses the body, there are variations and some ambiguity, but the Greek προσκυνεω refers to bowing or kissing, usually with some ambiguity as to which physical act completes the adoration. The worship due to the Lord is in some measure to kiss him, and there is a profound tie, even if there are important differences too, between worship of Christ expressed by kissing his icon, and worship of Christ expressed by kissing a fellow Orthodox Christian as so much an icon of Christ that he is defined as being built in the image of the whole Trinity. (I find such things as these *loads* more interested than sociological investigation of kissing as such.)

(Some people may find an irony between my efforts to study the holy kiss that Judas betrayed, and Cambridge University's constant "improvements" to how I was approaching that study.)

What it was that I pulled up eventually found a home in fiction in *The Sign of the Grail*, which is presently one of my top-selling titles on Amazon and top fictional work. I will not attempt to reproduce the material here, beyond saying that it is in fact a doctrinal study, that a number of primary sources can be found in a brief search of the Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections, and to the person who read "The Eighth Sacrament" and asked didn't I know there was more, I said that there was much more but that represented my attempt to crystallize something in a tight format.

But what I would point to is this: I am not, to my knowledge, a cardinal influencer in what happened. I presumably influenced someone, somewhere, but what was met with repeated hostility became something mainstream. I don't think that I was a primary influence in that I met with people who never seemed to recognize me as a pioneer or having already made serious investigation. My suspicion is that had I never touched the matter, it would have still been explored; I may have been the first person to publicly note one particular point, *that the holy kiss is the only act the Bible calls holy*, but had I never investigated the topic at all, other people would have, and my suspicion is that without me the holy kiss is still a sacramental that would have been studied as doctrinally significant and seen in continuity with sacramental and liturgical theology, and that none of the dubious help I received at Cambridge (such as classifying the holy kiss as *Realia* and therefore not rightfully subject to direct doctrinal investigations) would have been the last word. I think my inbox has been quiet on this topic for a few years, but when I was getting people contacting me and wanting to inform me about the holy kiss, we were usually on the same page. (I do not recall any nonscholar trying to steer the conversation to fit under the heading of *Realia*.)

And I would suggest that this basic plot and pattern of events are more or less generic. First I was rudely dismissed, then people kept more rudely pushing my work away from what I asked explicitly, and then some years later when I had practically forgotten the discussion, I was caught off guard by people opening up conversations about the holy kiss. And I may not have "won" in the sense of acquiring a pedestal (good riddance!), but the subject was



no longer met with hostility such as was first faced, and some people found it to be of interest. (I have never gotten a disrespectful response on the topic after the point where people started to contact me on the topic.)

It is my general experience that gifted and profoundly gifted people are not, in fact, unaffected by the Zeitgeist. Often they may want to challenge the Zeitgeist, but it is not characteristic to rise above it, and the more common pattern is to concentrate the Zeitgeist and to run ahead of it, perhaps getting into the game when it is greeted with hostility. In this case, I was disappointed when I realized the topic of the holy kiss had reached the status of being more or less fashionable. I felt, if anything, violated that I had channeled the Zeitgeist, a Zeitgeist that had spoken through my mouth.

While the classification is essentially as irrefutable as Berkeley's arguments, famously said to "admit no answer and produce no conviction," I don't find it helpful to say, "If your birthday falls before this year, you are ancient; if your birthday falls in this range, you are medieval; if your birthday falls in this range, you are a modern; if your birthday falls after that range, you are a postmodern." Some people have noted that not only are engineers modern, but they probably do not know a postmodern, even though postmodern students are easily enough found in other fields. Speaking personally, I've been wary of postmodernism, but I have recognized points of overlap. I have been interested in thick description for more than a decade before I heard the term, and what I most want to know in history is "the way it really was," which is a boilerplate postmodern desire as far as history goes. The postmodern figures I know could justifiably regard me as

making an undue claim to insider status if I claimed to also be a postmodern, but I see more continuities now than I would like, or that I did before.

(I might briefly point out that "thick description" and "the way it really was" remains fundamental and guiding principles in the endeavor of this article, where a synopsis would be much easier to write, much briefer, and much easier to read. I could simply state that I pursued scholarly research into the holy kiss years before it was fashionable to do so, and that I sought a doctrinal, and sacramental or liturgical, study of the holy kiss where a respected Orthodox scholar only saw legitimate room for a secular history of kissing. That much is *true*, but it is a sketched outline where my hope is to portray something in depth and full living color.)

## Other examples

One friend talked about how a boy entered an Orthodox altar to serve as an acolyte, and the priest brusquely told him to unvest, leave the altar, take off his tie, and come back without his tie; the stated reason was, "You are not a slave!"

This was presented as counter-cultural, and it may have been such at some point. However, it fits with another conversation where a business owner had individual contributors wear ties, managers wear a suit and tie, and the owner wore a suit and no tie. Last I seriously checked in, the professional jobseeker fashion was for men not to wear ties.

I might mention, by the way, that when something is taking credit for being countercultural, it's usually a mainstream fashion before too long.

Last example for now: it is presented that violin-making is a "fossil trade." This trade may be mostly or exclusively practiced by violinists; I doubt I could produce a decent violin personally unless I had enough exposure to recognize good and bad-quality violins. Possibly I could learn enough to be a luthier without developing the level of skill appropriate to public performance; but I rather guess that takes less practice to be able to perform well in public than to be in a position to make a good violin. And on that score, I met or heard of one luthier, introducing violin-making as a "fossil trade", and then the count quickly escalated to something like half a dozen. On which point I suggest that it's a turn in fashion, and the number of people embracing the new fashion is chiefly limited by the fact that most people have never been trained to play a violin. (I've never, to my recollection, heard a musician say, "I play the violin but I am not interested in becoming a luthier.")

## Icon and Idol

There is something about the theology of icons in Orthodoxy that looms so large that I missed something.

In one passage that I have never heard Orthodox quote, Herod dressed royally, gave a stunningly good speech, and the people who were listening shouted "The voice of a god and not a man!" and when he accepts this praise and fails to give God glory, God infests him with worms and kills him.

This is as good a place as any I see to introduce the distinction between an icon and an idol. And please do not see the distinction in terms of "If an Orthodox Christian makes it with paint and gold on wood it is an icon, and if a Hindu makes it a statue with many arms it is an idol." I

don't remember what they are, but I've heard from Hindus some very nuanced thoughts about god(s) and idols. For that matter, I don't especially wish to discuss idols in relation to Graeco-Roman paganism, even though they, and Old Testament ancestors, form the basis for the universal Orthodox condemnation of idolatry. I wish to articulate a distinction, not from comparative religion as such, but as a distinction within Christianity.

Probably the #1 metaphorical name for icons is "windows to Heaven", and the theology that St. John the Damascene among others articulated is that the honor paid to an icon passes on to the prototype. Honor to an icon of a saint honors the saint; honoring the saint honors Christ. While I am not aware of people using the term "icon" in reference to the saints' lives, reading the saints' lives is strongly encouraged for beginner and expert alike, and what it is that's really worth reading in saints' lives is that you see to a small degree the face of Christ, otherwise it's not worth reading. This theology undergirds structures, and supports an understanding of the human person as made in the image of God, which I have not seen disowned in Western Christianity, but it grows on poor soil. Although terms like 'icon' and 'image' are not used in this specific passage, looking on and treating people as the image of Christ is given a chillingly sharp edge in Matthew 25:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but

the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.' Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?' And the King shall answer and say unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye who are damned, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.' Then shall they also answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not serve thee?' Then shall he answer them, saying, 'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.'

The damned are damned because they failed to love and honor the icon of Christ, and the insult might have as well

been made to Christ personally. That's how he felt it.

With all of these things said, and I am really not trying to shoehorn a place to save the Greek fathers' teaching that we should become divine, *Herod was not destroyed because he allowed himself to divine honor. He was destroyed because, receiving divine honor, he failed to pass it on to God whom it properly belonged to. Given the choice between letting honor pass on through him to the creator, and keeping it to himself, he chose to stop the honor from rising higher, and that is the difference between being an icon and being an idol.*

Orthodox who like me (or for that matter Orthodox who don't like me, but are choosing to be polite) pay a respect whose contours are set by the Orthodox theology of icon and image: I am respected for being made in the image of God, not for being godlike on my own. Respect for my writing has drawn, if I may mention my most-cherished compliment, "You write verbal icons!" The respect paid to my writing is a subordinate respect to works that salute One greater than them, and the respect paid to me is a subordinate respect that salutes One greater than me. I am respected for being to some degree divine by grace (people wanting a Biblical proof-text may cite 2 Peter 1:4 which dares to call us "partakers of the divine nature"); I am not in any sense honored as being a god in some sense independent of the Creator or stopping with me instead of referring glory to the Creator. Evangelicals often like my works, and while they may not have the doctrine of the image of God defined in such articulate and sharp contours, there is some continuity in respect I have received. Specifically, it is practically always a subordinate respect, and my works are praised as drawing them to God. There is

a tale, true or apocryphal, of a visiting African pastor who came to the U.S., and after observing things, said, "*It is amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit!*"

Evangelicals have never praised me for being great without needing God's help, and if they did it would most likely be sarcasm or a stinging rebuke, almost on par with saying that something is "more important than God." Among both Orthodox and Evangelicals, whatever the differences may be, to be great is to be permeated by God's grace.

I will comment briefly, for the sake of completeness, on one point where I am just a beginner. The saints do not seek ordinate human honor; they usually try to dodge all human honor at all whether or not that honor is ultimately referred to God, and some among them have immediately left town, without any sort of modern vehicle, if that is what it took to dodge human honor after their gifts had been discovered. I am not at the stature to do that, at least not yet. However, hostility and abuse come quickly nipping at the heels of honor, and I am trying to progressively restrain searching for human honor or accepting unsought human honor. My author bio has become progressively shorter, and at present the main glory I claim is that of a member of the royal human race. The more time passes, the more I think that seeking human honor is a fundamental error, a way of "drinking out of the toilet" that deserves a section in "A Pet Owner's Rules" as something that, if you know what you're doing, you really, really don't want to do. On that score, I count myself fortunate that, while I was a forerunner who ran ahead of the Zeitgeist in study of the holy kiss as a legitimate matter of doctrinal study, I didn't acquire a pedestal in reward for my endeavors. That's about as much winning as I'd ask.

And there is one other point to mention: usually, people who have respected me have respected me like some minor icon. I had guessed, with excusable but near-disastrous naïvete, that if in the future I am put on a pedestal, I will receive more of the same and I will serve as an icon in not the best position. Now I believe it far more likely for me to put on a pedestal as an idol rather than an icon. The Church does legitimately place people on pedestals as icons; I believe that the practice of choosing bishops from the pool of monks is, without judgement against the married, a good monastic may have a fighting chance of surviving and functioning effectively in an ordeal where the title of "Bishop" has a job description of, "*Whole burnt-offering without remainder.*"

The Orthodox Church can, at least sometimes, put an icon on a pedestal...

...but the Zeitgeist only knows one trick: putting an idol on a pedestal, adapting an icon to function as an idol if need be.

## **A cloud the size of a man's hand**

St. James, the brother of the Lord, wrote, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." This is extraordinarily terse compared to the Old Testament narrative, albeit completely faithful. But I would like to give just one vignette not unfolded in this shorthand reminder about the story: it has been a long time since it rained, and there is a deep famine,



and there has been an ongoing rivalry with multiple dimensions between the wicked King Ahab and St. Elias. There is the great contest with the prophets of Ba'al; St. Elias, who has suggested that (in modern terms) "Maybe Ba'al isn't answering your hours of frenzied prayer because he just can't come into the phone now," asks that his one prophet's sacrifice to the God of Israel be drenched with excessive amounts of water. (Saltwater, perhaps: freshwater may have been extremely hard to come by, and rare enough to make a terrible famine, but any time during the famine you could go to the Red Sea and take as much particularly salty saltwater as you could carry.) After Ba'al had already failed to get off his porcelain throne, St. Elias makes *one single prayer* and calls down fire from Heaven that consumes his entire dripping sacrifice.

That story is famous; but there is a slightly less famous dramatic detail that is worth noting. St. Elias told his servant to go and look out by the sea. The servant comes back, and says, "I see nothing." St. Elias, who had told the servants to pour water on his sacrifice again after it was already quite wet, and then for good measure asked for water to be poured a third time on already drenched it again. But for the servant, he goes six times reporting nothing, and the seventh time he barely says, "I see a cloud the size of a man's hand." At that point St. Elias sends his servant to tell King Ahab to get in his chariot and get back to his castle before he would be trapped in mire by the deluge.

If you are profoundly gifted, and you think of or take a position that is attacked and ridiculed beyond due measure (and, honestly, make a good allowance for due measure), it is my suspicion that the opinion you are ridiculed for will be

the fashion in 5-10 years, or longer if it's something profound. I try to respectfully welcome visitors to my website, although some people have clearly stated that I have failed in that measure, but I pay particular attention to profoundly gifted who contact me, not because they are better than other visitors, but out of survival instinct (and recognition of a shared experience, a bit like another actor who had the cumbersome side of equal fame would be on the same page as Leonard Nimoy about sneaking into restaurants by the kitchen, and that I had better therefore try to listen hospitably). Those emails usually provide an advisory that's a bit like insider trading, though I have never made a financial decision that was influenced by the outcome of such conversation. They, in essence, by running ahead of the Zeitgeist, let you know what's coming. And the profoundly gifted I meet usually see something that I don't.

Chris Langan, considered the most gifted member in almost all ultra-high-IQ society (or some might give that accolade to Paul Cooijmans), has worked on a CTMU or "Cognitive-Theoretic Model of the Universe", pronounced "cat-moo" by insiders, with homepage at CTMU.org, which I don't agree with: one conversation helped me see the need to write works such as "'Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution" after I left him flabbergasted by saying I was not interested in cosmology. (Note: In the years after I wrote "'Religion and Science" Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution," things have shifted almost to a point that alleging some opponent of "scientism" is in and of itself halfway there to, "A hit, a very palpable hit!" And again I am not a prime actor.) However, I am inclined to regard Chris Langan's CTMU as significant on the evidence by how hard people fight against it alone. I

know that some profoundly gifted individuals suffer from mental illness, and in fact I believe mental illness is significantly more likely among the profoundly gifted than otherwise. He is called a crackpot, but meeting him face-to-face and conversing via email do not give me any reason for agreeing with the label about him as a person. Every interaction I've had with him has had him looking brilliant and in touch with reality. It's possible enough to be brilliant, in touch with reality, and wrong, but I have not heard of any critic recognize one point which is consensus under the tail end of the high-IQ community: that he is bright such as few people ever set eyes on. Characteristic of the reception of the CTMU is that its main page on Wikipedia was deleted, but its CTMU Wikipedia talk page is still there. Possibly the CTMU does not lend itself to experimental investigation: but we live in a time where superstring theory is very much in vogue, and where we are very hard-pressed to find a feasible or even infeasible experiment where superstring theory predicts a measurably different outcome from the best predecessor theories, and it is genuinely provocative to say "Physics is an empirical, hard *science* and as such is not validly practiced without claims being accountable to being tested by experiment." And maybe we should remember, "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." If we are going to join in the euphoria about superstring theory, perhaps we would do well to give the Cognitive-Theoretic Model of the Universe a fair hearing. The main reason I believe it is significant is that it is ridiculed well beyond the hostility that greeted my study of the holy kiss. He is consistently and repeatedly dismissed as a sheer crackpot, but people do not spend anywhere near that much energy dismissing genuine crackpots as crackpots. I continue to

believe in the conceptual framework's significance even if I do not subscribe to it.

Not all clouds in the sky are tied to giftedness. I saw a major step towards Nazification in Amazon, and then Apple, drop anything bearing a confederate flag faster than a hot potato. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus made quite an opposite point in saying that if a Klu Klux Klansman wanted to injure black America, he could scarcely do better than promote Afrocentrism. Here, it may be said that white racism has had a bad name for quite a long time. That doesn't mean that it was ever nonexistent, but most whites at least *tried* to not be racist, or become less racist. Here it might be said that if you want "white nationalism" (great job on the layer of whitewash, but befriend a "white nationalist" on Facebook and your feed will have Nazi flags and news articles with comments fantasizing about "[*insert alternate spelling of the N-word*]" criminals being lynched) to attract droves of new followers, and make white racism respectable in many places where it is not at all respectable now, you can scarcely do better than to continue flipping the bird at white descendents of the Confederacy. The significance of Amazon dropping displays of the Confederate flag is not that some goods were delisted or that the censorship affected some people's income; the significance is essentially an announcement of a new direction in policy, as illustrated in a very first installment. I don't know who's safe as this enlightening policy goes; I have serious difficulties believing it will remain confined to black-white relations in race, or that purges will remain only in the South. I don't consider myself safe, and I honestly am not sure that even people trying to be politically correct are safe. At the French Revolution, there

was serious scope creep in the public enemies who were sent to the guillotine, a monstrosity that at the end was killing cleaning maids and children seven or eight years old with people standing by the foot of the guillotine to be sprayed by the enemies of states' blood and eat their still-living flesh. And this happened in an educated Republic. The present removal of venerated public statues is not a final installment; it is if anything a reminder that the overhaul is just beginning. But there was a cloud in the sky the size of a man's hand when Amazon dropped the Confederate flag. I have come to believe some non-Southern perspectives, that yes, the Confederacy was fighting for States' rights, but the States' rights were chiefly the right to maintain slavery. But the moral I take is not that white Southerners are being asked to make a few adjustments; the moral I take is that we would be well advised to read "The Cold Within" and that those of us who are not white Southerners should not say "This does not concern us." The classic poem "The Cold Within" reads:

### **THE COLD WITHIN**

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In bleak and bitter cold.  
Each one possessed a stick of wood  
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs  
The first man held his back  
For of the faces round the fire  
He noticed one was black.

The next man looking 'cross the way'

Saw one not of his church  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes.  
He gave his coat a hitch.  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight.  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this forlorn group  
Did nought except for gain.  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death's still hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without  
They died from the cold within.

It's not often that I quote an ecumenist poem as authoritative. In this case the point is universally human, and while I believe in an Orthodox closed communion, I believe that nothing that is truly human should be foreign to

me.

## **A change in experience**

It was sometime in the past few months that I began asking pastoral questions about what to do with someone who is in awe of me.

The motivation and intended nuance, which I did not end up making clear, could be outlined as follows. Years back, my Mom invited neighbors across the street to some minor social function. They hesitantly said, "No," not because the suggestion was unwelcome but because it would create a scheduling conflict, and they wanted to know, in effect, whether their "No" had alienated her. She was pretty quick to answer, "This is valuable!" She explained that now that she knew they would be willing to say "No" to a suggestion that would be less than ideal for them, or a scheduling conflict, or... Now part of this was politeness or a gracious response, but I believe she genuinely meant what she said about knowing they would be willing to say "No" when they should say "No," and she was genuinely grateful for a safety-net of "I can extend an invitation and not worry about whether they'll give a 'Yes' they shouldn't be giving." And in that framework, I was motivated by a difficulty. Most visitors have and maintain boundaries. Not that everything is perfect, but my visitors have been willing both to say "Yes" and "No," and in general do not seem to worry about dealing a capital insult if they happen to say "No."

Boundaries matter, even if I've voiced serious objections to Cloud and Townsend, and I felt myself in the uncomfortable position of negotiating with someone who

was defenseless before me, who was too far below me in his conception to express a boundary, who would only answer "Yes" no matter how destructive a "Yes" would be, and where any knowledge that I sometimes sin and I am sometimes wrong exists only on a purely academic plane. I know there are cultures where this kind of dynamic is normal and something people can deal with, but I felt really uncomfortable and really at a loss.

The pastoral advice I received was helpful, particularly in a reminder that people that, to a one, shout "Hosanna!" and spread palm branches are entirely capable of shouting, to a one, "Crucify him!" five days later. And in Christ's case the earlier accolades were accurate, and higher accolades would have been justified. In my case the "Hosanna!" is in fact *not* justified, and as I was reminded of the toxic nature of all human praise. (I am looking forward to the possibility in monasticism of being under the authority of an Abbot who treats everyone with deep respect, but might not give a single compliment, or at least not to me.)

And things like this, though varied and though I wish to refrain from providing thick description's details out of concern for others' privacy, have become a consistent fixture. Though varied in detail, the attempt is to place me on some minor pedestal, on terms that are unreal to me, and probably unreal to me because they are unreal to God. I regard it as very fortunate that the inundations of compliments have, by God's grace, appeared utterly unreal to me. Future temptations will probably be more subtle.



## Clearing away a distraction: NF goggles

David Kiersey's *Please Understand Me* (I prefer the first edition to the more than the second) is one introduction to classical temperament theory. The book has hypocrisy as well as strengths; it is eminently nonjudgmental in describing one temperament's liability to promiscuity, or another doing whatever their system of ideas calls for, or another's doing what their spiritual path calls for, but when one temperament tends towards chastity or fidelity, it is described in language that is at once clinical, and the most degrading language in the entire book: metaphors are used as a basis to this temperament with seeing sex as basically a merely economic commodity, or something like being physically dirty or clean. *Classic postmodern hypocrisy here.*

However, there is one particular point that I wanted to pull: the "iNtuitive Feeling" or "NF" type, which is ascribed what might be the most striking characteristic in the book: they appear to other people, without any effort on their part to cause this, to be whatever the other person would most like them to be. People look at them through rosy "NF goggles," if you will. I think I can usually detect NF's, albeit indirectly: I am drawn to another person, especially women, to a degree that is out of step with that person's attractiveness and the social setting, even though there is very little I have directly observed as signs of what is going on (the one cue I notice is that about half the time they appear close to crying). My guess is that this boils down to a layer of nonverbal communication that is possibly very subtle, even if it is still very effective and does not apply, or

applies far less, to email and other basic electronic communication that flattens nonverbal signals beyond emoticons.

A question might be raised of, "How little or much of an NF are you?" Before Orthodoxy I considered myself to be at the boundary between "NT" ("iNtuitive Thinking") and NF, called NX, and wanting to shift towards NF. In Orthodoxy I found that silence that I desired personally was not my particular personal trait, but something normative, and the Orthodox Church's hesychasm or silence is bigger than what I had. Similarly, the Orthodox Church out-NFed me by making normative observations like, "*The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our mind to our heart.*" In both cases the Orthodox Church's answer was to challenge me to go further. And that raises at very least the possibility that I am close enough to (or far enough into) NF territory that some people see me through NF goggles.

I admit this as a possibility, and furthermore a possibility I think is at least probable. There is always some ambiguity and I do misunderstand some social setting, but there have been face-to-face encounters where someone seemed to really like me as something I wasn't. I've worked hard to write well and I've received some very rosy compliments, but usually the reader and I are on the same page about what a particular work is doing. (Most strands of criticism are also usually something I can recognize as a response to something I wrote.) My writing is usually not taken to be whatever the reader would like it to be. So while I admit a likely NF layer to people drawn to me in person, *the majority of the encounters where I've been offered a pedestal have been online, with people who have not met me face-to-face*, or electronic communication that

preserves nonverbal information such as Skype's offerings. So the question of whether my nonverbal communication is enchanting is largely beside the point. Whether the answer is true or false, the question is irrelevant.

## A tentative conclusion

I remember thinking, "My website hasn't really changed; why is the response to it changing?" And then I came to a "Yes, but..." answer. Most of what I consider the best works are relatively old, at least a couple of years; the only one I would consider "inspired" (in a broad and secular sense) is "Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed With Machiavellian Syndrome By Proxy (MSBP)," which bears some similarity to "Evangelical Converts Trying to Be Orthodox" and "Pope Makes Historic Ecumenical Bid to Woo Eastern Rite Catholics" in quality.

So why, if my website hasn't grown any major new features for quite some time, why would it be drawing fundamentally different response? The answer is simple, and one I should have predicted: *I've run ahead of the Zeitgeist, whether I had the faintest intent of doing so or not.* Whether or not it's the same article, some of what I wrote may draw people more effectively now than when they were fresh and new.

And the question of a pedestal weighs on my mind. Advertisements run repeatedly because people don't fall for a product the first time they see an advertisement targeted to them; they fall after repeated familiarity. Only humility can pass through certain snares: and I am scarcely humble. I see the possibility that, some time after I have seen five or so clouds the size of a man's hand, a deluge will break forth.

And I would really prefer the storm hit me when I am on Mount Athos, as a novice under the authority of an Elder, who does not care how smart I am and who sees that I have the same needs as many other novices, such as humility and obediences that build humility. Possibly I will not escape the deluge by getting to Mount Athos before it breaks: but I'll take my chances with a loving Elder rather than my own wisdom.

**C.J.S. Hayward**

## A Visit from the Buddha

I have been wary of Western Buddhism as a sort of neo-Deism: a religious faith, if it may be called that ("*Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt.*"--G.K. Chesterton: Chesterton could also have said, "*Buddhism is not a Creed. It is a Dao.*"), where in its native element the ethical heavy lifting is done primarily by what a Western scholar might call a system of virtues, and there are fewer inviolable rules, while the Western self-identified Buddhist picks up on the fewer inviolable rules but does not do heavy lifting by its Path of eight cardinal interlocking virtues.

Nonetheless, a visit to Buddhism can be helpful in another aspect. Buddhism is arguably a stronger grade of skepticism than is prominent in the West ("*Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt.*"—G.K. Chesterton), but when the Buddha's followers asked him if there were gods, he said that there probably were, but the question was irrelevant, because any [good] deity would have already blessed us to the maximum extent possible.

My first response, on hearing that answer repeated decades ago, was, "*Well, that rules out the Christian God very quickly.*" My thought there was that the great skeptic's answer did not entertain a correlation between being blessed by Deity and one's relationship with Deity. The Christian God, said in the Sermon on the Mount to make his sun shine on good men and evil men alike, has something beyond desire to bless us to the maximum extent possible, but for how well the blessing works for us, it matters whether we cooperate with the blessing or resist it. The Great Physician wants to give us the supreme Medicine, but it matters a great deal for us whether we take the Medicine as directed or throw the Medicine on the ground and spit on it. A Russian philosopher has been asked that perennial question, "*Could God make a stone He could not move?*" and answered, "*Yes; that stone is man.*"

None the less, I have been having a struggle with something I should know better than, thirsting for worldly honors. Or, to be more precise, a mad thirst for *more* earthly honors when I have had enough honor that I should know that worldly honors do not satisfy or make lastingly happy. One thought that was in my conscience was, "*What would St. John Chrysostom say?*" And without thinking of exact words, I knew what kind of response he would give: a good dose of clear thinking that would paint black as black and white as white. I thought of gratitude for what I have been given--and a next life in which God offers honors such as eye has not seen and ear has not heard. I did not think of it at the time, but also relevant is a post I wrote when I tried and failed to locate a copy of St. John's "A Comparison Between the Monk and the King:" "A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop." Or, as the Holy

Cross Hermitage's ever-kind guestmaster condensed the entire topic, "*Bishops want to be novices!*" Wherefore, being a novice myself, I should recognize the privileged position I already hold, and be grateful for the **crown** assigned to my role as a novice, rather than hanker after the half-eggcupfull of external glory that is assigned to bishops but is withheld from novices. (I also did not think of being one of half a dozen at a monastery which has the artisan's attention of an esteemed bishop. Perhaps it is glorious to *give* communion, such as my Abbot gives, but the glory is dwarfed by the glory of *receiving* communion, a glory shared between Abbot and novice alike. (And by the way, my Abbot is a high rank of bishop, but he usually doesn't wear the crowns he is entitled to wear. He seems to leave wearing crowns to the novices.)

I fought against this mad thirst for a while and was losing despite my best efforts, perhaps a cue to the wise that what I was fighting was not some confused logic but a temptation and a sin to be repented of, and found a familiar enough foul stench in that my thoughts of being happy through external honors was not making me happy, but sad.

And when I had struggled enough, salvation came. It came not from recognizing the particular privilege of a novice, in learning the freedom that is in obedience to an Abbot, and of being entrusted a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light when more privileged roles bear a heavier cross. *Salvation came, this time, in a visit from the Buddha, so to speak.* And this even apart from what the Buddha had to say about desire.

I would not retract any of my earlier thoughts about "*Well, that rules out the Christian God,*" but casts a particular light on the Providence of God, but this visit from

the Buddha showed that there is something of the Providence in the idea that deity, if such exists, will already have blessed us to the maximum extent possible. C.S. Lewis said, "*We want God to change our circumstances. God wants our circumstances to change us.*" And furthermore this combines in an odd way with the Christian God whose Grace can bring Heaven everywhere, but we can if we want veto enjoying Grace and instead experience it as Hell. The point of this visit from Buddhism is not really a point about the Grace available in my own particular circumstances, but about all circumstances in general, or rather a point about every particular circumstance. Until we have grown enough, and perhaps even then, the demons tempt us to ungratitude towards circumstances in which God has already blessed to the maximum effect possible, save our accepting and realizing His Providence as the Maximum Providence of **God the Spiritual Father**, of a God who cares for each of us more than an a mortal spiritual father takes care for his charges, of a God who however much *our* Plan A fails, and then Plan B, and Plan C, and so on down the alphabet, remains a God who is always dealing with us on Plan A. It can be easier to see this Providence years after the fact, to realize what painful circumstances gave you and what God saved you from by taking away what you wanted to pray for. And with effort, God can help us realize his Plan A for us where we are here and now. But the temptation is just that: a *temptation*, a hook of Hell designed to take away as much as possible our happiness in circumstances in which God has blessed us to the maximum extent possible save possibly our consent, and is building here on earth the foundation and substance of an eternal glory.



## Dumber and Dumberer

And really, what had brought on this temptation, or rather immediately triggered it in my immaturity, was one of the magazines freely given our Abbot, a magazine offering trite coverage of an English Princess, who said, "Someday I will be Queen," "is 7 but thinks she is 17," and "speaks four languages," "is at the head of her class," and something about being a style icon. I would briefly comment on what I was coveting in her royal privilege:

*"Someday I will be Queen!"*

Before and also now, I consider bare membership among the faithful of the Orthodox Church to outclass primacy in the Church of England.

And I am trying to cooperate with God in reaching Heaven, in glory so great that we are advised not to think too much of our glorified state. And, further, I recall St. Rostislav: "I have heard of how Constantine, great among kings, appeared to a certain Elder and said, 'If I had known what glory the monks receive in heaven... I would have taken off my crown and royal purple, and replaced them with the monastic garb'."

One person at the Mars Society talked about asking people, "*Who was the Queen of Spain in 1492?*" The answer comes quick as a shot: "*Isabella.*" Then the next question is posed, "*Who was the Queen of France?*" And to that I will add that armchair historian as I am, I do not know who was King of England in the days of C.S. Lewis.

*Is 7 but thinks she's 17:*

I'm also too big for my britches.

*Speaks four languages:*

I have read the Bible in seven languages,  
admittedly not at the age of seven, but at the age of  
three I was a solipsist philosopher.

*Is at the head of her class:*

One psychologist drew a sharp point of, "*The average Harvard PhD has never met someone as talented as you,*" and I have been in the dubious honor of being so far ahead of what professors were used to that their social skills started to melt away.

Something about being a style icon.

I'm not sure that ever, in my entire life, have other people looked at what I was wearing to take cues for style. People have borrowed a T-shirt for me as an emblem of bad dressing.

But I somehow seem to end up going ahead of the Zeitgeist, whether or not I have the faintest desire to do so.

The overall predicament I was in reminds me when I was traveling through a hardware store coveting ordinary Swiss Army Knives while looking for an impossible-to-find wiresaw a friend wanted:



When I had a SwissChamp XLT on my belt:



## Conclusion

God has already blessed us to the maximum extent possible apart from the question of whether we choose to relate to that blessing as a blessing or a curse. In one sense, God has already blessed us as Buddha said. But we are the stone God cannot bless if we interpret His Providence as a curse.

There was something profoundly stupid in my coveting

earthly honors, and that something would have remained stupid even without the irony, like the pears passage of the Blessed Augustine, of owning pears better than anything he coveted enough to steal.

In Exotic Golden Ages and Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion, I wrote:

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. And, he was like a little boy with a whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No." And lest we look down on Adam, we should remember that I am Adam, and you are Adam.

And the content of such temptations is stupid: stupidity and something that backfires if we entertain them even just a little... but there is something to be said for temptations in God's Plan A.

**Everything that God allows in our lives is either a blessing from God or a temptation which He has allowed for our strengthening.**

God allowed me a miserable few hours coveting privilege that I might be strengthened, and even if things would have been much easier if I had not entertained the desire, he allowed me the temptation for my strengthening and harvested my sin that I might strike at the sin all the louder.

# Conservatism and "Crank Magnetism"

I had several realizations after a friend mentioned that profoundly gifted individuals are often very, very conservative. (Not to mention suddenly being much more at peace with my three failed attempts at a Ph.D.) What I did not understand was that my being profoundly gifted and being very, very conservative are not two unrelated things in my case; there's a connection.

It might be going too far to adapt Churchill to say, *"Anybody who has an IQ of 140 and is not a liberal has no heart; anybody who has an IQ of 180 and is not a conservative has no stem."* It is possible to be profoundly gifted and be liberal or radical, although here I would suggest that we are not talking about people drinking the Kool-Aid; we are talking about people doing pioneering, radical work on tomorrow's formula.

There are a range of standard recruiting techniques to make liberals in television and in education, in journalism presenting Hilary Clinton at her most photogenic and in portraying bad, unphotogenic still images for Donald Trump, for making Dan Quayle, George W. Bush, and Sarah

Palin consistently dismissively stereotyped as stupid, and so on and so forth. They work for those not moderately gifted, but profoundly gifted see right through them, at least after enough growth.

This much explains to me why profoundly gifted might not be sucked into even very little liberalism. Why profoundly gifted in general (as opposed to me personally) might be highly conservative is not entirely clear, as the distinction is valid. In my own case, I have homed in to a conservative position in general.

There is a concept of "crank magnetism" that says that people who acquire crank beliefs tend to acquire more of them. Some of them I don't understand why people would want to associate with them. The "moon hoax" assertion has one objection I've never heard anyone answer: the U.S.S.R. had every vested interest, and competency, in exposing a U.S. hoax landing on the moon. I also, having stepped in white nationalism in my Facebook feed (I wondered why there were fantasies that a black felon who brutally assaulted an elderly white women would have been lynched—sorry, under U.S. jurisprudence, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin themselves are entitled to fair and speedy trials; my Facebook feed also sprouted pictures with Nazi flags and a boy about to be hanged), found the presentation of white nationalism as a new thing that deserves new consideration to be a standard liberal-style "Try it again for the first time!" *But the flipside of crank magnetism is what might be called "standard model magnetism," and profoundly gifted are set free from standard model magnetism.*

Perhaps looking for more of an explanation is looking for an explanation that does not exist.

# Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide

Legend has it that a sage was going to leave his locale, and a guard asked for a guide to live by. And so the sage left the *Dao De Jing* and disappeared, seemingly without further trace.

On this point I do not care if the legend is history: speaking as one with interest in the humanities, it does no violence to the text to read the *Dao De Jing* in this light, and speaking as a one interested in history I know that I am at some remove from a position where I could offer informed opinion whether the legend should be seen as historical.

My intent, though, and my point in reading it, is to offer a survival guide for the profoundly gifted, and one that speaks to adults as well as perhaps children.

On this point, at least, I am taking a break from tradition. The originator of the concept of IQ was Darwin's envious cousin Galton, who wanted some of the fame Darwin had, and wrote a book, *Hereditary Genius*, which dealt with individuals up to a point, but only to see how good candidates they were for his eugenics platform. In response to that, Leta Stetter Hollingsworth was teaching a class that used IQ tests to measure levels of deficiency; and



decided also for what it was worth to include an unaffected test subject. Much to the astonishment of any reader who understands statistics, that one person was profoundly gifted, past the "one in a million" mark. She went on to write the thickly descriptive *Children Above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet: Origin and Development*.

Hollingsworth, and her modification to Galton's eugenics program, have been decisive in effect. For one example that could be called "so close, and yet so far", she studied gifted children because "adult genius is mobile", and if interventions are to be useful, they will be of most help in childhood. And she set the programme for gifted education, and for the fact to this day, about half a century after her passing, formal study of giftedness is first and foremost the study of gifted children and only incidentally of gifted adults.

This may be a point on which she should be challenged. One basic point of human psychology which applies in giftedness as much as anywhere else is that "like attracts like." Children who are gifted and are at a mental age of older children or adults can often find like companionship. Adults who are gifted may have the Internet, and with it gifted organizations, mailing lists, etc., but my response to Hollingsworth is, "Adult genius is mobile? To go *where*? To some colony or Utopian village?" A gifted child, including profoundly gifted up to a point, stands good chances of social contacts (not via the Internet) who are of similar mental age enough to give a certain comfort. Now profoundly gifted can organize online, in a kind of New Social Movement, meet and have contact with other profoundly gifted, which may or may not be an historical novelty (the foundation of Universities itself was what may

be seen as a New Social Movement of profoundly gifted movement in centuries past: Renaissance men), but however helpful it may be to attend to the peculiar needs of gifted children, gifted adults have needs, too.

And so I wanted to give a survival guide, of sorts, with the *Dao De Jing* taken very loosely as a model. I am not so silent as to leave a scant 81 poems, nor is this intended to directly help Everyman. People who are not profoundly gifted may be free enough to read it, but it is directed towards a few who may need it the most.

## **The Pearl of Great Price, and a word on anger**

There is a C.S. Lewis quote, if I may persist in the Evangelical fashion of incessantly quoting an ecumenism and architect and apologist for ecumenism as we know the heresy today. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man* about nascent science that emerged in a Renaissance environment practically saturated with the occult:

It might be going too far to say that the modern scientific movement was tainted from its birth: but I think it might be true to say that it was born at an unhealthy neighborhood and at an inauspicious hour.

For my first stop after a preamble, I would mention a text connected with a figure I have great trepidation about: Fr. Seraphim (Rose). Whatever might be right or wrong about the deceased monk, the movement that unites in his name is a pest, and he alone has left me wanting to write a title like "The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and

His Axe-Wielding Western Converts” (consistent one-star reviews saying, "BEWARE," alleging logical fallacies etc.). Fr. Seraphim and his followers are usually classed as conservative, and I suppose they may be willing to assume the position of law and order in taking charge of Orthodox liberals' spiritual condition: I may consider myself conservative and consider ecumenism to probably be the ecclesiological heresy of our day, but Fr. Seraphim's crowd certainly commandeered a position of law and order in straightening out my own spiritual condition in ways my priest wouldn't dare.

But in a sense of "Do as I do and not as I say," there is a profound nugget of wisdom in *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: The Thoughts and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitnouvica*. It is subtle, and some would say occult, in its treatment of barely consciously made curses having extraordinary effect, even if the point is that we should not curse even in the subtlest way.

The essential point is not uniquely Orthodox, but I would put it this way. Between the point where a thought really isn't active in our minds at all, and when it is genuinely and clearly present with mental images, there is a subtle point of consent that most of us are barely aware of, an opportunity to put out a smouldering candle to be delivered from needing to extinguish a full-fledged fire. This is present in how a psychologist tells addicts that "You have more power than you think." My recollection of discussions of the book, which I haven't read and may be portraying incorrectly, is that Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* hinged on the discovery of this freedom in a concentration camp. The nexus is tied to the *satyagraha* championed by Gandhi and held as precious in

India today: one of the bigger compliments I have been given is that it is rare to find this kind of understanding of *satyagraha* outside of India. There are many contestants for the most politically incorrect verse or passage in the Bible; one that is emphasized in Orthodoxy, especially in Lent, is, "...Blessed is he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" The patriotic reading is that this refers to barely conscious thoughtlings which we can crush against Christ the Rock, ideally as soon as we can. The longer we let them grow, the more Hell-borne trouble will infest us.

That much is the big picture for this title. The microcosm Elder Thaddeus offers and fleshes out most is in anger; Elder Thaddeus may be faithfully following a tradition where the most deadly of sins is not lust, as the Victorians are rightly or wrongly charged with thinking, or pride such as some Protestants today may think, but **anger**. And that may seem an un-sexy choice of opponent for the elder to attack, but his choice may make perfect sense. And here a Law of Attraction comes into play. Perhaps we will not by placing our hands on a steering wheel of our SUV and saying "Thank you" (while imagining a much nicer one) thereby manipulate God into giving us more luxury. If there is some kind of Law of Attraction, it is simply not about acquiring luxuries. What is it about, you ask?

Like thoughts attract like thoughts. Thoughts of love, or courage, or gratitude attract further thoughts of love, or courage, or gratitude, and action with them. Thoughts of lust and anger attract more forceful thoughts of lust and anger, and action with them. And more to the point, thoughts of peace attract harmonious relations with others, and "warring thoughts", thoughts of anger, bring Hellish

conflict. On this point I count one of several anecdotes:

4.5. If in each family there were just one person who served God zealously, what harmony there would be in the world! I often remember the story of Sister J. She used to come and talk to me often while I was still at the Tumane Monastery. Once she came, together with an organized group of pilgrims, and complained, saying, "I can't bear this any longer! People are so unkind to each other!" She went on to say that she was going to look for another job. I advised her against it, as there were few jobs and a high level of unemployment. I told her to stop the war she was fighting with her colleagues. "But I'm not fighting with anyone!" she said. I explained that, although she was not fighting physically, she was waging war with her colleagues in her thoughts by being dissatisfied with her position. She argued that it was beyond anyone's endurance. "Of course it is," I told her, "but you can't do it yourself. You need God's help. No one knows whether you are praying or not while you are at work. So, when they start offending you, do not return their offenses either with words or with negative thoughts. Try not to offend them even in your thoughts; pray to God that He may send them an angel of peace. Also ask that He not forget you. You will not be able to do this immediately, but if you always pray like that, you will see how things will change over time and how the people will change as well. In fact, you are going to change, too." At that time I did not know whether she was going to heed my advice.

This happened in the Tumane Monastery in 1980.

In 1981 I was sent to the Vitovnica Monastery. I was standing underneath the quince tree when I noticed a group of pilgrims that had arrived. She was in the group and she came up to me to receive a blessing. And this is what she said to me, “Oh, Father, I had no idea that people were so good!” I asked her whether she was referring to her colleagues at work and she said she was. “They have changed so much, Father, it’s unbelievable! No one offends me anymore, and I can see the change in myself, as well.” I asked her whether she was at peace with everyone, and she answered that there was one person with whom she could not make peace for a long time. Then, as she read the Gospels, she came to the part where the Lord commands us to love our enemies. Then she said to herself, “You are going to love this person whether you want to or not, because this is what the Lord commands us to do.” And now, you see, they are best friends!

This is at best one percent of theology and moral philosophy, and I am quoting it in an instrumental manner, which is to say falsely, or something like that. But in terms of immediate impact, it is front and center of what I have been trying to learn. You will have plenty of opportunities to forgive. Or at least I have. But there is something immensely powerful about the gentleness of spirit dealt with here. In another piece, I wrote a highly redundant piece, “The Orthodox Martial Art Is Living the Sermon on the Mount.” The title at least is worth considering, and is explained in the work. For this whole first point, I would say that the entire arena of morality (or at least that’s how things are cut up: in Orthodoxy, there is asceticism or spiritual

discipline, and the field of morality, especially with outcroppings like social morality, does not arise on the same terms) is as important as it can be, but there are crimes that will get you executed in some places, and there are crimes that will get you dead before you get to the police station. For you, this is a crime that will get you dead before you reach the station.

One friend said of his parenting to a parishioner, "I tell my kids that they can say anything they want as long as they don't use the F-word." And continued, after a brief pause, "No, '*Fair*,'" and then said (this was a few years ago and may or may not be current) "File [U.S. Income tax forms] and don't pay, and unless you owe \$10000, it's not worth the IRS's time to come after you. Don't file, and the IRS drops the hammer on you." And there is something here that is not *fair*. Part of this point is that "A soft answer turns away wrath;" part of this point is meeting anger with meekness. But there is something *unfair* in that if other people offend here, they may not face particularly bad consequences. If you offend, you may receive a law and order response, or the hammer, or whatever you would like to call it.

Elder Thaddeus makes this question decisive and central, and I'm not sure it deserves that status; I have trouble pulling what he says from what I have seen in the Bible and the Fathers. Some of my attempts to turn the other cheek have met with further ill treatment. However that may be, I have deliberately placed this point as first after introductory comment.

One added remark before moving on to the closely related point of humility: there was a psychology experiment where people were shown brief video clips of

doctors, without sound, and asked simply whether the doctor was "nice." That simple question predicted, at 70% accuracy, whether the doctor would end up getting sued. The point sketched above may be your best shot at being taken to be "nice."

## Humility and pride

I have said earlier that sin, all sin, is like a pet ignoring a water bowl and drinking out of the toilet. Pride chokes off ability to respect others, and ability to enjoy others. But trying to be humble, perhaps under guidance, isn't just good for what will happen in the next world. It is good for what happens in this world. And this hinges on something *unfair* again. Pride, arrogance, boastfulness--these benefit precisely no one, and people are rarely drawn to pride. However, pride is even more of a survival liability to the gifted. It offends others more than you have to, and it endangers you more than you have to...

...and it is also a form of stupidity, one you acquire even if natural intelligence does not demand it. Hubris has been described as "blinding arrogance," and it is the behavior of pride to decide what you want to believe and ignore conflicting evidence that could save you were you to be humble enough to listen.

The proper place of humility is in a montage of interdependent virtues; I have called one to the forefront because of its survival value. You may be able to buy a little space by posturing and flattery, but this is false coin and doesn't deliver much real weight.

Back in Greece, a member of one school was asked if he was "*sophos*" or wise, and answered that he was



"*philosophia*" or one who "loved," partly meaning "sought," wisdom. The response was humble, or at least trying to act humble. "Philosophy" has meant different things over different times, and there is rich culture shock in people finding Eastern monasticism a much purer philosophy than the sort of thing taught in a philosophy department today. However, practitioners have retained a modest term for over two millennia. And it is perhaps an attitude even more appropriate with reference to humility would be to disclaim being humble, but if asked state that one is seeking humility.

Humility is a profound virtue, it has a great deal to do with the well-ordering of our soul, and there are two ways the profoundly gifted particularly need it. First, it is a sharper survival value and our failings hurt worse in the short term. Second, our gifts (meaning everyone's gifts, really) are given to humble us. The *Philokalia* talks about how you can only take credit for actions you performed before you were born. Meaning, put vividly, that none of us, not even if we arrive at such purity and growth that we can work *miracles*, should be taking any credit for ourselves. (God might do so at the Last Judgment, but here now it is not permitted *or* helpful to us.) How much more, then, if we cannot take credit for even the most heroic of our acts, should we be stuck up for our giftedness, which we did nothing to create or acquire, and indeed could do nothing to create or acquire?

Furthermore, humility has been described as a kind of spiritual honesty. It has been called less of a matter of thinking less of oneself, and more a matter of thinking of oneself less. I was told in response to one confession, "The only true intelligence is humility," and the honest character

of humility really gives something that a sky high IQ plus pride does not. There may be cardinally important differences, and they really matter, and it is not normally helpful to relate to most other people as if they were directly as smart as you, but humility is still even more of a necessity to the profoundly gifted.

In "Christian Koans," I wrote:

Someone said to a master, "What about the people who have never heard of Christ? Are they all automatically damned to Hell? Tell me; I have heard that you have studied this question."

The master said, "What you need to be saved is for you to believe in Christ, and you have heard of him."

Other people may lack humility and get along fine. We need humility in a much more pointed fashion now, even though our eternal needs are the same.

Blaise Pascal said that there were two types of people in this world: sinners who believe they are saints, and saints who believe they are sinners. The pre-communion prayers speak of "...sinners, of whom I am chief," and there is more.

There is a valuable lesson to be taken from the U.S. of years past, and possibly also the present: "*No one in America is rich.*" No one says, or at least said, "I have these luxuries; I am rich." "Rich" is a word we use to describe someone else with a more rarified level of wealth and possession, perhaps with something we covet: whether a more prestigious brand of car, or a nicer house, or a better position in the stock market. Perhaps under present economic conditions some Americans are starting to wise up that a house you own, with a mortgage, an income, and a

working car are nothing to sneeze at. But there is still much of the earlier attitude, and precious few Americans are "rich"; "rich" refers to wealthier people whose wealth and property one covets. The wealth and property one already has is, or at least *was*, taken for granted.

I propose that the above attitude can be lifted to a higher plane. None of us are humble; we seek the priceless treasure of humility, but we don't, or shouldn't, see the humility we have. Instead we see humble people around us, or humility in the saints' lives, but no matter how much we have it should be nothing in our eyes, and we have an insatiable search for more.

The above version of the Law of Attraction, and humility, are two points taken from an encyclopedia's worth; I have wondered if I have shortchanged humility by giving it too few words. But let's move on.

## **Communication under the "Theory of Alien Minds"**

In *Profoundly Gifted Magazine* Interviews Maximos Planos, I discuss what might be called a "theory of alien minds" which reaches beyond the psychological "theory of other minds:"

In conversation, I've found people somewhat repulsed by the title of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The title sounds gimmicky, or worse Machiavellian. It sounds like a way to manipulate and use people. However, it has (some would argue) a legitimate place, and some of us who have read the title *prefer* to deal with others who are following its lead. I'll refrain from simply condensing the title; rather, I will take its summary

key points and address how they relate to us who are profoundly gifted, with some adaptation in the process. This partial expansion is not intended to replace or supplant original text, but stand in its proper position after one has taken an hour or two to read Carnegie. I also after some thought am not covering all his chapters; there is a limit to what I have to say here that is useful.

1. **Don't criticize, condemn, or complain.** This one also makes Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 maxims, and there is a general principle in Orthodoxy that we should be strict with ourselves and lenient with others. I would suggest further: Don't cause culture shock, at least if you can avoid it or unless you are willing to deal with the consequences. You see options that others can't. That's a blessing, but one thing that plays out is that people in a culture will make sense of what they see in terms of the options the culture defines as possible or even thinkable. Furthermore, there is negative attribution at play. "Negative attribution" is a phenomenon where actions that are not understood are assumed to have dishonorable, shady motives. It takes some doing for you to come to understand what makes culture shock, but if nothing else be aware of it, and be aware that causing culture shock comes with a social price tag.
2. **Give honest and sincere appreciation.** Orthodox may take issue with this in some part; some regard frequent compliments as spiritual poison, either dodging them or calling them

Devil's talk. Which, perhaps, they can be, and perhaps "guilty as charged." But there is another shoe to drop. Compliments may be spiritually toxic and feed spiritual disease, but we are called to infinite respect. It is decreed in at least one monastic rule that guests "are to be received as Christ himself;" the chilling end of Matthew 25 clarifies that whatever we do for the very least beggar we have done for Christ himself. There is perhaps no need, really, to give a diet of compliments, but the respect or disrespect we show to our neighbor is, come Judgment Day, respect or disrespect we have shown the King returning in glory.

3. **Arouse in the other person an eager want.** What precedes this statement in Carnegie's chapter here is more than is really summarized; subsumed under "Arouse in the other person an eager want" is seeing things from the other's perspective and speaking in terms of what the other person would find attractive. This, for profoundly gifted, is squarely a matter of "theory of alien minds" competence, and I will not speak further here than give one generically geek example. It has to do with when someone, having had a frustrating experience with technology, calls in the geek and the geek sees what principle or whatever it is that the user failed to understand, uses the moment to try to explain the principle the user needs, and meets with forceful existence. Geeks don't like this situation; some of them in great frustration have asked, "Don't they have any curiosity?" To this I would say, "**You** don't

seem to be showing much curiosity about people. 'At the end of their rope' is not the usual example of a teachable moment, at very least not with computer difficulties." As far as spiritual growth goes, amazing things are sometimes learned at the end of one's rope: one chapel speaker said, "God's address is at the end of your rope." However, it is simply not helpful to give a technology lesson to someone who is exasperated and stressed out. Similar technology lessons might make complete sense another day, when the other person is relaxed and in a good mood. However, there really is something to be said about taking an active interest in other people, and trying to get inside the other person's head, and communicate in terms they will find attractive, not just what comes most naturally to you.

4. **Become genuinely interested in other people.** One friend identified herself as "a psychologist," and it was fascinating to me to watch her turn her whole attention to a younger woman and see how she worked. We think today of psychology today as the discipline that understands people, but it was historically an alternative to the understanding of people provided by religion. There is another embodied sense in literature, and there are ways a literature major may understand a person better than a psychology major. But in any case, knowing people should be at least one of your chosen areas of expertise. You owe it to yourself, and others!
5. **Smile.** And if you're one of those people like me who

is not very animated by nature, it might not hurt to go to improv classes. (At least a conceptual understanding of method acting might also help.)

6. **Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.** Carnegie does not discuss standard memory techniques such as are discussed in *Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory*; there is some debate how useful such techniques are, and they may or may not help. However, it is helpful by *some* means to learn. And this principle is a token of respect for a whole person. If a business says "You're a name to us, not a number" (as the puzzled secretary at a sprinkler company read an advertisement), that is a claim of respect for the whole person. And if non-semantic information is not your main area of strength, this does not change the relational necessity of learning and using other people's names. (Perhaps you might memorize the etymology that gives the name?)
7. **Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.** One expert negotiator was asked, "If I could shadow you for a day, and observe what you do, what in a sentence would I learn?" He said, "I don't need a sentence. I just need two words: *Listen better.*" Listening, and a listening attitude, are bedrock to communication, persuasion, negotiation. The more important your message is, the more important it is for learning.

8. **Talk in terms of the other person's interests.** Make it a spiritual practice of being *with* other people, perhaps without even discussing their interests. There is a time and a place for persuasion, but even those who deprecate idle talk assume something far greater. Meet people where they are.
9. **The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.** Part of mystagogy is simple: if a person is wrong, and you know that person will not hear correction, *you do not correct that person*. On Judgment Day, it is better for the other person not to be guilty of hearing the truth and rejecting it, and it is also better for you not to have put the other person in that position. More broadly, argument and persuasion have a place, but the chief means of persuasion is one that a politically incorrect passage from the New Testament advises for the wife of an unbelieving husband. What we say is drowned out by how we live, and in the great scheme of things persuasion by Western logical argument is drowned out by the silent witness of our lives.

## **Why I am not a disciple of a staretz (or at least, not yet)**

A staretz, or spiritual father in the monastic tradition, is one feature of Orthodoxy that is expected of monastics and open to non-monastics. I have heard varying opinions about whether laity should have a staretz. One bishop, perhaps



associated with scandal, said that most of us living in the world should not rightly need a staretz, and that one should get the blessing of one's priest and perhaps bishop before embarking on that unusual choice, even warning it might be out of pride / prelest that such decisions often spring from. Others have suggested that having a bond with a staretz is *normal*, and that one is limping spiritually to be Orthodox but not participate in that powerfully strengthening relationship.

I am not interested in advancing either of these positions, or criticizing either, beyond saying that I know Orthodox faithful who have their heads on straight and are not disciples of a staretz, and I know Orthodox faithful who regard a relationship with a staretz as a basic essential and also seem to have their heads on straight. There is a slight logistical detail about geographic location that is not of interest here, but what is to the point is the primary reason I do not now have a staretz.

A leading example of due diligence in Orthodoxy is the investigation that a prospective disciple is urged to make before entering obedience to a staretz. There is something of a monastic "Marry in haste; repent at leisure" phenomenon here, in that a prospective disciple is commanded to investigate the staretz, but once obedience has been entered, it is inviolable.

What I have found as a profoundly gifted individual is that a lot of authority figures have issues with the profoundly gifted. I'd like to give one or two examples, but they come from bosses, from professors, from clergy, from medical providers, from family, and it can take ten years for a repeated "No" to take effect.

## One example from work

Let me take one example from work. I am deliberately mentioning work (*not* a first choice for jobseekers) rather than the offenses of someone who is close to me now.

I was brought on board to create a micro site that would supersede previous ways of tracking information about XYZ. I worked hard, and two days into a three week contract (we had already lost one week to administrative / paperwork issues that were not my boss's fault or my own), I presented my first deliverable, a roughly 50-60% complete solution with an obvious trajectory to fill in the gaps. And let me preface what follows by saying that there are at least three ways in which I don't believe my boss understood I was doing well because I was operating on a greased track:

1. The contract was for either Python or Java development, and I used Python with Django, "the web framework for perfectionists with deadlines." Each of the two languages has its own sweet spot where it vastly outperforms the other, and this specific contract fell squarely in Python and Django's sweet spot.
2. Second, I had just finished the publishing process for an IT title where the main software I developed to showcase my tools could serve as an example for what I had. Doing a project the second time through, as long as you avoid what is called "second-system effect", is almost always faster. A *lot* faster, in most cases.
3. In terms of personal working style, I had nearly

optimally conditions for how I work best. I am not interested in commenting on what Agile variant or whatever provides the best working conditions overall, but I had a task, clearly defined and well understood in this case, and autonomy to do my best work. There was not much more for me to ask for.

So I came in on a greased track, politely and respectfully submitted my work, initially with pleasure of assurance that I had turned in something good, until my boss started making some very ominous remarks.

I plucked up my courage and asked directly, "How should it be different?"

I was assured that it would be explained in an upcoming meeting with him and one other employee.

In that meeting, I was told that my boss's boss had asked how things were going with the project. My boss lied to save my skin, or so he said, telling him that we were only in "early planning stages", with "nothing to show," and my boss said that his boss was "***LIVID***", emoting in a way that suggested he used "livid" because he couldn't think of a stronger word to convey anger. I was also told, "*Your only two friends within the company are in this room,*" and that I should be terrified of anyone else seeing my abysmal work. What the meeting left completely unaddressed was my question of, "Well, how should it be different?" Nothing in the meeting addressed my questions of "If you don't like it now, how should I change it?" My boss walked out of the meeting looking very, very impressed with himself; he seemed proud for having cleverly defended himself from an attack.

Incidentally, I had run-in with my boss's boss a day or

so before; he asked how things were going, and I showed him pretty much what I showed my boss. He looked slightly bored at a reporting informational answer to what he apparently meant as a purely social question. (Note: this is not a hallmark of a particularly good liar.) I do not think he would have emoted that calmly if he were concealing rage towards me; and I also do not think that if he were in a rage he would let me continue to be employed there.

That was the biggest obnoxious thing that went on; it wasn't the only one. The runner-up is that as part of his effort to make himself equal to me--***and it has been my universal experience that when people try to make themselves my equal, things never go well***--is that on one point in particular he spoke in riddles, refusing to give direct answers to my direct questions about what he wanted in the way of change even though he knew exactly what he wanted and he could have stated it clearly. He kept on forbidding me to copy the user interface to some internal-use system, and I thought, "Well enough: I'll leave that system alone. I'll refrain from even looking." This was apparently not good enough; he kept on forbidding. After some point I realized that he wanted me to copy a key user interface feature exhibited by that other system, and when I did the work to copy that feature, the upshot was that I *finally* got it!

(As an aside, alongside people trying in sometimes nasty ways to make themselves equal to you, they will also sometimes show kindness, after a sort, by acting in a heirarchical relationship above you. Hence you may have people eager to advise you, or teach you, or start to provide unsolicited psychological services and feel very hurt if you politely decline--possibly talking to you for a solid

hour without any request on your part--just whatever possible kindness will situate them above you. Now this is reason not to be arrogant as that is the one part of the problem you can most prevent, but even if you show a true and flawless humility, people can get intimidated.)

## **Another encounter at work**

To muddy the waters a bit, this was a position where I requested accommodation for disability, and my boss tried a couple of times to push past the accommodation until I put my foot down. This can't have improved my standing with him.

There was one major stint of my work that was handed in, and my boss accused me of doing a "fix one, break two," after getting a bunch of people to find as many bugs as possible. This was an extremely serious allegation of incompetence, and I did not say anything immediately because I wasn't sure how to respond and it isn't something I am used to hearing. Then I got the big list of flaws in my work, and it was in fact *not* a list of flaws in my work. Every single one, without exception, was either a request to handle an ambiguity differently, often to the detriment of the product, or else it was a request for a feature enhancement that was not mentioned on the specifications I was working from. I told him this, and said that it is normal in the workflow for requests to be added, but I asked him not to frame requests for new features as evidence of my incompetence.

My boss never again made a specific allegation as to what was wrong with my code. After some time passed, he said in generic terms that my code was poor quality, and after a bit longer said it was not improved, and fired me.

## I didn't have any talent!

I could read music before I could read English, and as a little boy even... I love to play piano, but at a certain point my parents shut off my lessons and discouraged me when I continued to practice.

What my piano teacher told my mother, years later, was that she felt the need to distance herself from certain friends including my mother and me as connected to her. I might gently suggest another possibility. What she told my mother when discontinuing my lessons wasn't that I should continue with another teacher. She instead shut down my lessons by telling my mother that I didn't have any talent.

As one friend who was a piano teacher said, *you don't say that*. It might possibly be true, but you don't say that of your least talented student.

What exactly does "He doesn't have any talent," mean?

In this context, among other things, it meant that when I attended a Ken Medema session that was for Wheaton College Conservatory students (but open to others), I was the person who accepted an invitation and found myself placed to give a public performance. So I did, and people found it astonishing: one friend listened to it on tape and said, "That was you? It was beautiful." That was my first time touching a keyboard in ten years.

My piano teacher couldn't have known that. What she did know was that I was confused by the standard way of teaching relative pitch. I could do it, but I didn't see the point, and the reason I didn't see the point was that I had perfect pitch. And she knew I had perfect pitch.

I might comment that having authority figures trying to rebel against me didn't begin when I had adult mental

function and crude social skills. I've had authority figures rebel against me even as a young boy.

## **An example of a time bomb that blew up**

There is also a time bomb aspect to these nasty (non-)surprises. I recall one mailing list where I had a conversation with one contributor, and joined the list for a time. At first the leader of the list said of "1054 and All That" ([https://cjshayward.com/and\\_all\\_that](https://cjshayward.com/and_all_that)), "It tortures my funny bone," which later changed to, "When you write satire, I grimace and bear it." The woman who introduced me to the group asked me early on why I was guarded, and said, "We're among friends."

Things seemed to be on a sustained even keel for a while, but after a certain point the head of the mailing list increasingly opposed me, publicly attacking what I said and me as a person, which he tried to explain to me was introducing me to friendly candour, and even communicated that he was taking emotional risk and my place and obligation was to to validate and endorse the "friendly candor" he was so boldly poured forth.

I progressively withdrew from the conversation, first from stating opinion, then back from core Orthodoxy, until finally I was trying to make one and just one point. One of the members of the group was having a stressful, and really entirely needless, crisis of conscience: it was during the Nativity fast, and she had an obligation to attend a Christmas party, and she thought there were no exceptions or leniency to the rule of fasting. And at that point I was not interested in scoring points or being right as such; I was

acting on a pastoral concern (if laity are allowed to act on pastoral concern) to tell her that there was a legitimate and time-honored exception here: she should go to the festival and enjoy what was offered her with a genuinely clean conscience. And the mailing list leader opposed me here as much as anywhere else: "I reply with three words: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego."

After a side conversation, I made a long post quoting ancient and modern sources in Orthodoxy, and explained that every source in Orthodoxy I had seen apart from the mailing list leader's response said, in the words of my parish priest sometime back, "Hospitality trumps fasting."

*He locked me from posting on the list.*

And there are several other instances like that that I can mention.

## **The pattern as a whole: and, more specifically why I am not attached to a staretz**

The whole incident just mentioned--another was arguably betrayal by an Orthodox priest I looked up to--fed into a moment of "I have no mouth and I must scream," that appeared in crystallized form in "The wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab," which I encourage you to take the time to read, perhaps now. A psychologist might talk about how a professor may have a need to believe "I'm an A and you're all B's," the point being that non-threatening B's get the A's and unsettling A's get B's or worse. But the insight is hardly a new insight. Someone who knows the Bible well may note a decisive turning point after King Saul heard



people singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David has slain his tens of thousands." He asked why he was only credited with thousands, if David was given tens of thousands, and that is pretty much the point where David began to be in serious danger from Saul. For that matter, even fairy tales contain a similar point. Snow White was pretty safe as long as the Queen still heard the answer she wanted when she asked, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" When the answer became "Snow White," the Queen, like King Saul, sought nothing short of murder.

And on this point this is why I have not sought a staretz. It is beyond a doubt to me that there are many startsy much too mature and humble to actually *rebel against their disciples*, but what I do hold in extreme doubt is my ability to distinguish them. Sometimes people show their colors immediately; it has also happened that harassment only began years later. I am not saying that I will never place myself under a staretz's authority, let alone wish to criticize the institution as a whole. I am not interested in convincing people that they shouldn't be disciples of a starter, or that they should. However, words like "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" and a history of time bombs leave me chary of placing myself under a bond of absolute obedience.

## **Saying "No" and enforcing that boundary**

The standard psychological advice on this point is to give compliments, and show kindness so that anything unpleasant is sandwiched by things that are much more

pleasant. And in terms of general social rules, it is good sense for people in general that if you have to say something unpleasant it is best to sandwich it with something more pleasant. For that matter, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* has much to say about gracefully dealing criticism, and while I am not a psychologist, I can imagine that a piece of routinely given advice to bookworms who find social situations challenging might be, "Read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Dale Carnegie wrote the book!" None the less, I submit that this boilerplate advice does not apply in the case of profound giftedness, or at least does not scale appropriately. Advice about giving a graceful apology when you have stepped on someone's toes is inadequate to the situation if you can only wear *cleats*.

More broadly, I would compare driving on wintry roads after a heavy snowfall in Illinois versus Georgia. In Illinois, a snowfall of several inches is relatively routine. It may never be as safe to drive on snow-packed roads as roads without water, snow, or ice, but if you are exaggerating defensive driving a bit, drive a good bit more slowly, and allow yourself ample stopping room, you stand a significant chance of reaching a goal without an accident. However, in the case that is rarer than a blue moon that Georgia gets an equally heavy snowfall, the rules outlined above leave you significantly more vulnerable, because while in Illinois you are sharing the road largely with drivers who have some sense of what defensive driving on snow looks like, while the situation is far removed from anything they have well-formed habits for. The general psychological advice, cut from the same cloth as *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, is defensive driving in Illinois snow on roads shared with Illinois drivers. For the profoundly gifted it is taking

Illinois defensive driving on snowy roads and trying to make it work in Georgia. (And I'm not trying to take a dig at Georgia; a Georgian is welcome to respond "Georgians don't know how to drive deep snow and Illinoisans don't know how to brace for a hurricane, and that's a bigger deal.")

But let me mention two situations where I shut down harassment.

One was a gay rights activist and now Roman priest who was essentially a self-appointed guardian of my orthodoxy. For quite a long time, when I posted a new written work, he would post a reply that inevitably did three things: it delivered pain, took me quite a few notches down socially, and lifted him even more notches above me, establishing him squarely as my superior.

After one dressing-down that was particularly offensive, I tried multiple ways to reason with him, and nothing worked: the last email he responded to was one in which I requested "no further unsolicited criticisms on any topic." He responded, "Ok, I won't send any more unsolicited criticisms, but I will take emails from you as solicitations for response," followed by a dose of even more criticism. I then sent a letter, Cc'ed to our email provider, saying, "It seems I have no way of asking you to stop criticizing me so you will respect my wishes. Therefore I tell you that the next unsolicited criticism I receive will be forwarded to the system administrators with a request for disciplinary action." *I haven't heard from him since.* Nor have I wanted to.

In another case, someone who I trusted as a friend decided on his own authority that I had Asperger's and he was going to treat me for it. When I repeatedly failed to opt-in to his diagnosis and treatment, he made an executive

decision and decided that I was not *allowed* to say no, *and that was that*. I asked him to stop half dozen or a dozen times, and was answered only by his telling me I was "sending mixed messages", and his continuing to administer amateur psychotherapy. I sent one "CEASE AND DESIST" letter, Cc'ed to abuse@gmail.com. That killed that conversation as thoroughly as I desired.

It is my experience that when people are responding in their own special way to profound giftedness, your saying "No" is treated as something awfully spongy. It's almost as if they believe, "If he says 'No' when I want him to say 'Yes,' that qualifies as a real, genuine 'Yes.'" However, they know that they are wrong, and a Cc to an authority asking that something stop can something do something that a dozen privately sent "No"s will ever effect. If you are a member of an organization, know and be ready to apply grievance procedures.

And one other point, to be clear: Human Resources won't always get it. In the job with the meeting where I was told, "Your only two friends in the company are in this room," I contacted HR about possible harassment. HR's only available response was to interpret my words about harassment (or hazing, or whatever you want to call it) was to interpret me as complaining that as a consultant I did not have job security, which they answered by explaining to me (as to a child) that as someone on a consulting gig my lack of job security was part of the game. I tried and failed to convey *any* of the points I was concerned about. And in general I've had trouble getting HR to see problems.

So there is a caveat. However, if I am being harassed, I have found the best mileage by saying "No," perhaps privately at first, but if the private "No" is being pushed

past, a "No" that is Cc'ed to an authority can bring remarkable clarity. I'm also not shy about sending a "CEASE AND DESIST" letter, also Cc'ed to *an authority*.

## **"So, You've Hired a Genius"**

Another hacker wrote the original hacker FAQ, and after asking and obtaining permission, I expanded it into "So, You've Hired a Hacker (Revised and Expanded)." The premier wordsmith in the profoundly gifted community approached me about co-authoring a similar work, *So, You've Hired a Genius*, that would take aim at stereotypes facing profoundly gifted in the workplace.

My response was to reluctantly muddy the waters. (And let me briefly add that I was excited about the topic, and just as excited about the honor of co-authoring the work he did.) The way I muddied the waters was essentially to say, "What you are calling stereotypes are not stereotypes, at least as far as mechanism. They have effects similar to stereotypes, but trying to dismantle them as stereotypes won't work."

For one example, he mentioned a "fallacy of dilution," essentially a stereotype that says that if profoundly gifted are jacks of all trades, they must be masters of none with quite a diluted kind of knowing, because you can't have knowledge that is both broad and deep. And what I said is that within their frame of reference (and most people have never met the profoundly gifted range), there are limits to what a person can do. You can be a generalist or a specialist, but you can't have specialist-level proficiency in a broad stretch of disciplines. And so we don't have a case of two related classes of people with the profoundly gifted

miscategorized as "Jack of all trades, therefore master of none" when "comprehensive knowledge in multiple areas" is thinkable. The truth is simply something that doesn't exist given most people's horizons, and people, perhaps, make sense as best they can. This may produce the same effects as a stereotype, but people are not stereotypically filing the profoundly gifted into the wrong pigeonhole when the right pigeonhole is in their reach. They are responding to something outside their frame of reference, and trying to make sense given what is conceptually available.

Furthermore, I now have a second reason for being glad the title was not written, or at least that I wasn't involved if someone else wrote it. On one level, the book's approach was to contradict certain stereotypes that seem to keep cropping up. On another, slightly deeper level, the approach was almost certainly to adjust people's *possibles et pensables*, what is possible and what is even thinkable, and if you enter that game you have already lost. This rule does not apply to people who are sufficiently gifted or other sundry exceptions, but if you are approaching regular people's *possibles et pensables* as the sort of thing you negotiate and change at will, you have already lost.

"What would someone average do?" I remember visiting with some Mensans--this is significant--and offering magnetic business cards. And one of them raised the question of whether they would harm credit cards or other cards that had a magnetic stripe. The question was one that I had to considered, but one that I did not *need* to consider, apart from the fact that a stack of a few of them had not damaged any of my cards with a magnetic stripe, and, as I was to learn later, it really takes some doing to wreck a magnetic stripe. But the question had not occurred

to me on "What would someone average do?" grounds. The magnetic backings were explicitly sold as backings for business cards. If they were to destroy any common wallet contents, they would be dropped by stores and possibly there would be class-action lawsuits. The average person was apparently safe to buy and use the cards as advertised without easily wrecking magnetic stripes: therefore, as a rule of thumb, someone "smarter than the average bear" was probably safe as well. I wouldn't take this argument to its logical conclusion; *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is written on the premise that what an average person would do can have some very heavy price tags: in a word, millions of smokers CAN be wrong. However, even with that caveat, I would pose that "What would an average person do?" is a very important reference point, and possibly a default one should avoid deviating from if there is a reason. I believe that I personally need to know how to talk more like an average person, even if I manage talk about the weather and small talk a whole lot better than I did before.

And in negotiation it always helps to understand the other side. Of things you could wish, there are some things a particular person can conceive of and would consent to, some things a particular person can conceive of and would consent to, and some things a particular person would not conceive in the first place. I remember some time, over a decade ago, wanting to start a consultancy business of creating custom home pages for people. I believed, and continue to believe, that creating such pages would have been both doable and useful, and my Mom at least was very grateful when I made a personal-use homepage for her, or to be more specific, was grateful after I had created it and she began using it. (And I don't think she was JUST being

polite, or motherly, in her appreciation.) However, the feedback I got on a high-IQ mailing list about my business idea was, "*I don't think most people would understand what you were offering.*" Perhaps some people would "get it" once they'd played around with it a bit, but to people who were not yet customers, I was a bit like what you get when you cross the godfather with a lawyer: *someone who makes you an offer you can't understand.* This may be a huge competitive advantage: you may see good options that are invisible to any competition. However, it helps a great deal if you understand that there are things you see that are invisible to others, and that explanation and negotiation do not, or at least do not always, change most people's horizons of what is possible and what is even thinkable. Effective negotiation here does not mean changing someone else's worldview; it means change from within from things that are already on their list of *possibles et pensables*.

One acquaintance I had said that when faced with a problem, he would ask, "What would a smart person do?" and try and reason from there. It is my suggestion that essentially in social areas, the question of "What would an average person do?" is fecund. It provides a basic anchor for social and other conduct, and if you don't know how an average person talks in terms of length of speech, complexity, and whether they are speaking to inform or to communicate, you have a reasonable yardstick. This doesn't mean that you limit your life to a tiny box, but it does mean that you should be communicating appropriately (including *not-communicating* appropriately) with most others. Are you teaching? Give serious consideration to taking homework questions from the main area of the textbook's problems, rather than look for an appropriate challenge as



you understand "appropriate challenge."

When I was in grad school, I taught "Finite Math", which was a general education course. I was trying to create a mathematical paradise that would expose people to the poetic beauty of mathematics. I did other things that I'd heard of that sounded cool, like letting people choose weightings for their grades. I got reamed in end-of-course student reviews (one student said, "Now it's payback time!" when I passed out reviews sheets), and this was entirely appropriate.

In my attempt to create a mathematical paradise, I was trying to teach people a different way of thought. I would loosely describe my model as too close to a mathematical Zen master, or an ersatz mathematical Zen master, trying to break the mind of mindless symbol manipulation. I completely failed to consider, for instance, that mastering some form(s) of mindless symbol manipulation could be a basis to award a high grade. What I considered conveying the beauty of mathematics was sectarian, only appropriate to some students, and not proper for the diversity in a general education class for non-majors. (I'm undecided about how appropriate it would have been for people in a class where students opted-in to more mathematics than they had to take; possibly it could have been well-done in a weed-out class. However, I was not teaching anything meant to weed students out.)

If I could send a message back in time to myself as I was a young man preparing a class, I would have urged reading, *Please Understand Me!*, which deals with some of the basic diversities among people, and *Please Understand Me! II*, which applies something of a multiple intelligence theory (though if you want multiple intelligence theory done well,

I'd look for Howard Gardner and keep in mind that there may be some good stuff, but the topic is a kook magnet). The benefit of these books is, besides what they document directly, the fact that they sensitize a perceptive reader to how humans can vary, and the fact that diversity does not begin with race. It begins well before race!

## **Simplicity beyond complexity**

There is something that has always bothered me about the suggestion that if you are really an expert, if you are really at the top of your game, then you can explain the problem you are working on in a nutshell that average Joes can understand. That may be true, but I can see it only as indirectly true, by accident. Specialists with a doctorate in what have you have jumped through hoops and paid metaphorical blood, sweat, and tears to reach their understanding. And they are supposed to explain what they took a decade to learn so that the onus is on them to produce a statement that will make the average listener understand immediately? The proposition was for a long time repulsive to me, seeming to be anti-intellectual, or driven by envy, or both!

However, there is a way that it is true, but it's not really through a measure of expertise, unless we are talking about a measure of expertise that only the profoundly gifted achieve. And that is because at least some of the profoundly gifted reach the simplicity on the other side of complexity--as you may have hear the saying, "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."

Characteristic of this, to take an example with Richard

Feynman, is from the Challenger disaster hearings. The question had been raised of whether O-rings became brittle in the cold, and people argued and discussed, discussed and argued, with no real progress either way. Then Feynman took a piece of O-ring, swirled it around in his icewater, and went, *snap!* And the debate stopped cold.

There was also the story of a retiree's publication where one senior wrote a letter saying that she calculated that she had heard \_\_\_\_\_ many thousands of sermons, but oddly enough she couldn't remember any sermon she had heard, and she knew that pastors put a lot of time into sermons, and she wondered if the effort might be better spent elsewhere. That set off considerable debate; people argued and wrote letters one way and then another, until one gentleman wrote,

I met my wife \_\_\_\_\_ years ago and we have been happily married for \_\_\_\_\_ years. During this time, I estimate that my wife has prepared for me \_\_\_\_\_ thousand meals. I cannot remember any of the recipes she followed, but I am on the whole healthy and not any fatter than when I met her. I judge that it was worth her time to cook those meals.

The discussion was over. *Period.*

At a former parish, I, a layman, was allowed to preach a couple of homilies. I don't think I understood the honor I was being given; in another jurisdiction, Deacons, who have entered major holy orders, do not preach.

The priest and subdeacons both spoke with me at some length. They didn't warn of any consequence for anything, and they didn't seem to doubt that I would deliver a homily

that was correct and probably full of good points. They trusted me only to speak from Orthodoxy. However, the one point that they underscored at length was simplicity, and told me to address my homily to three parishioners who were the least bookworm-like members of the parish.

There are basically two things that priest gave me:

1. The honor and pleasure of delivering homilies.
2. The ability to crystallize something simple out of something rich and complex.

And this last bit puts me at an open vista for new learning. I have learned to communicate well in complexity; now I am working on also being able to communicate simply.

This post, the one you are reading, may be seen as a professional bad example; I am communicating like someone who isn't trying or succeeding at communicating simply. In other words, I do not have even the pretension here of modeling the communication style you should be using. But learning to extract a crystalline core to something conceptually large is something we can do, and something we need to do.

For a "before and after", I would submit "The Horn of Joy: A Meditation on Eternity and Time, Kairos and Chronos" and the homily "Two Decisive Moments." There are other homilies I believe communicate well; "A Pet Owner's Rules" is an example, but it was not intended to simplify anything longer or more complex. "The Horn of Joy" is a leisured meditation, a complex river with eddies and swirls, and I wanted to miniaturize it, but I saw no

faithful way to miniaturize the whole, and after the fact I am glad I didn't pull off a synopsis of the whole thing. So I instead took a nugget, a kairos decisive moment, and delivered a homily without using the Greek word, just speaking of "two decisive moments." And the homily, incidentally, was intended to challenge *possibles et pensables*. I point this out because the rules I am giving should be seen as guidelines from experience more than exceptions. I believe that in this case it also worked because there was really nothing more trying to claim attention. I remember commenting on Karl Rahner's *grundkurs* title that he was describing the familiar as something alien, and I do that too (witness "Game Review: Meatspace"), but when I do that, that is pretty much all that is going on. If I'm making that heavy cognitive demand, I will try to lighten other parts of the load. And in Rahner the mystery of figuring out what could be said much more directly, in a much more familiar way, is only one layer of what makes his texts difficult to read. (I studied at a school that was mostly in Rahner's camp, and while professors rejected my claim that Rahner's rhetoric was confusing, we were none the less encouraged to deploy Rahner's theology to people who would be scared off from reading Rahner in his own intricate words.)

There is one final caveat I wish to mention on this point. The poem "Doxology" was written out of love of its subject matter and of its language. It does not have even the pretension of being written with any attempt at simplicity. For that matter, it does not have even the pretension of being written in English as the language is spoken tday: it is written in Elizabethan English. And, at least as far as the impression goes, it has had substantially more Facebook

reshares than all of my other works put together. Simplicity is a guideline, and it may be a survival necessity, but it is not a straightjacket. There is a time and place to pull out beautiful words and give the undiluted force of your thought.

## **When you *should* lie**

One time, on LinkedIn, someone posted, "Just give me the time, don't build me a friggin' watch," and asked why engineers went on and on. I regret the answer I gave because it was honest and truthful as an engineer would understand those merits. What it was not was short. The answer I thought of a bit later was, "If you want a marketing executive's answer, ask a marketing executive. If you want an engineer's answer, ask an engineer. Why are you asking an engineer for a marketing executive's answer?" And that may have been a better response, but it was a really good way of saying something I no longer hold true.

One friend spent some time in Nigeria, and one cultural note in conversation came when Uncle Monday asked her how her cold was, and she said it was getting worse. He said, "You don't say that," and explained that the expect response was, "It's getting better," even if it isn't, and if you give a different response like "It's getting worse," socially you are asking for that person's help. She commented that that experience helped her make peace with the American "How are you?"--"I'm fine!" even if things are not fine. As someone said, "'How are you?' is a greeting, not a question. The other person does not want to hear about your indigestion." This is a general rule with exceptions; some that I am aware of are when you are close to the other

person, when the person asking is devout, when the person asking is gifted, and when the person asking is on the spectrum. Any of those three, and perhaps others, may *want* to hear "I'm having a really rough day," should that be the case. However, the usual social role in the U.S., with its unwritten boundaries, is that you normally give a positive and upbeat answer to the question, "How are you?"

I am job hunting now, and one area I have done poorly, is to give a two-sentence answer unless someone interviewing you asks for more--and you want to be asked for more. For most questions that come up, I feel like lying to give much of any two-sentence answer, and I want more than 140 characters. However, the correct answer, made in an attempt to be honest and appropriate, is a simple two sentence response that would be a lie to tell your colleagues. You may enjoy some discretion as to *how* you lie; you do not have discretion as to *whether* you lie.

Certain things like this may seem like a social game before they become candid. But the words "Fake it until it's real" may apply here. Living properly in a culture may seem a social game before it becomes a living stream; and there are exceptions. There was one time at UIUC where a friend said he was writing a story set in a Biblical milieu, and asked if I had guidance to make it better. I asked him if he knew what culture shock was, and when he said "No," I stepped uncomfortably close to his face (he started backing away very quickly), and I said, "*That's* culture shock! It's being surprised and caught off guard in a way you didn't know you can be caught off guard." He thanked me, and went on to write his story.

That is, as best I can recall, the first and only time in my life where I believe it was right to invade another person's

personal space. For the rest of the situations I've met, there are rules (perhaps varying from culture to culture) about what it means to be at a particular distance, what is too close, and what is too distant. This kind of rule should usually be observed as much as possible, even if it feels like an artificial shell for a time, and trying to negotiate (in this instance) proxemics is an attempt to negotiate what is possible and what is thinkable.

## "People don't understand me!"

Mosts people have a desire to be understood, and I recall in particular one person who was disappointed when people would hear that he was a professor and ask, "What do you teach?" when he really considered himself to be so much more than a teaching machine. There were several responses; one highly upvoted answer said, "**In many languages, 'Professor' means 'Teacher'**", and said, supposing for the sake of argument that he was a fellow mathematician, that people would have a better understanding of mathematics if they read some of Theoni Pappas's titles explaining mathematics for non-mathematicians remarkably well, but in the end it was better to have social conversations without homework or footnotes. Most professions are a bit different from how public stereotypes would have it; it's not just (as *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* points out) that a mechanic's job description is not in the first instance, "Disassemble a car partway, replace a broken part, and reassemble everything you took out;" that may be the easiest part of a job, and a mechanic's basic challenge lies in figuring out mentally, or sleuthing, what sort of root cause



would be behind the problems and behavior observed. Meanwhile, my expectation is that if one were to shadow a police officer or detective for a day, the experience would be anticlimactic given how those jobs are portrayed on television. Besides the sheer amount of paperwork that sworn officers are responsible for, the figure I've heard is that outside the firing range officers draw their gun on the job once every four years, if even that much. (My offhand suspicion is that most professions look different from the inside than from the outside.)

But the professor who felt belittled by the question of what he taught stands as a sign of something to beware of. Seeking to be understood, trying to have an identity in the modern sense, seem very natural, but we are better to wean ourselves off of them. And that excludes next-level silliness, like deciding which three qualities on a list make up your personal brand. There may in the end be something like personal brand, but it is built on a tacit and internal basis.

## **Pulling from the Zeitgeist**

When I was at Cambridge, I was interested in studying the holy kiss, on which point I was ridiculed even by my advisor for an earlier thesis. I wasn't the first person to study it; a literature search found prior discussion easily enough, but Cambridge did not take the question seriously, nor did they find any sense in my desire for a doctrinal, as opposed to historical and cultural, study.

But five or ten years later, I was surprised by people coming to me with treatment of the topic. They asked if I knew something not covered in "The Eighth Sacrament," which was a homily distilled from mounds of data. But my

point, which had been ridiculed earlier, became a standard item of interest in five or ten years, and not so far as I can tell through my advocacy. I also took flak (but that might be expected from critiquing what one editor called a "hornet's nest") for, after some truly nasty experiences with Fr. Seraphim's crowd, writing *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*. My suspicion is that in a few years people will say, "Whoa, something's not right here," and that my text may be called helpful, but I will be a bit player in the new consensus. The phenomenon played out in one mailing list and, right or wrong, intelligent design.

In mathematics at least, mathematicians are urged to have a sense of urgency in communicating results. It is a well-known phenomenon historically that a mathematical problem will remain open and unsolved for quite some time, and then simultaneously and independently be discovered by several people. And mathematics may have the least *Zeitgeist* of any academic discipline. There may be an increasingly tight standard of mathematical rigor, and mathematics may move from specialization to hyper-specialization, but mathematicians do not, like teenagers, say, "The fundamental theorem of calculus is ssoooooo last millennium!" In other disciplines you may (as one Nobel prize laureate said) get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment, but with quasi-exceptions like Abel, you do not establish your credentials by dismantling something that was previously proven. And if in mathematics, where I discern no credible causes for a powerful *Zeitgeist*, the *Zeitgeist* is powerful enough that a competent mathematician will work to get credit for a solution to an unknown problem *quickly*, that makes

Zeitgeist considerations important, even if some of us regard the Zeitgeist as rather silly, or worse, most of the time.

But it seems to be a profoundly gifted trait to pull things out of the Zeitgeist several years before it goes mainstream. I'm not sure of too many other examples than above, although when I mention "Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article" to fellow Orthodox who disbelieve that Orthodoxy allows contraception, the response I've gotten is, "I read that some time back and I found it helpful."

## **A cue from usability (UX)**

Jakob Nielsen is one of the founding lights in usability, and one drum he kept beating was, "You are not a user." He forcefully makes the point that whether a user interface makes sense to the programmer simply doesn't matter. Maybe it matters if even the programmer can't understand it, but knowing that user interface behavior makes sense to its creator gives essentially no useful information about whether the offering is yet fit for public consumption. This attitude is close to "theory of alien minds" proficiency.

In customer service, there is a saying, "The customer is always right," and in psychology there is a saying, "The rat is always right," but they mean two separate things. The customer service meaning is that the customer is king and customer service people should bend over backwards to please customers who are being jerks. The meaning in psychology is that no matter how much puzzlement and consternation a lab rat's behavior may provoke in a researcher, a given lab rat under given experimental

conditions *always* shows the correct behavior for a given lab rat under given experimental conditions, and if your theory can't cope with that, it's time to adjust your theory.

I have never heard this in UX literature, but there is good reason to say, "The user is always right." If a user spends twenty minutes searching and fails to identify a large graphic for a link, the user is right. The basic standard of accountability, another drum Nielsen beats, is frequent discount usability testing.

I'm not aware of an established way to do usability testing, but close attention to social signals comes to mind, and if I had the money to spare, I would invest in some of Paul Eckman's tools for picking up on hair trigger emotional reaction.

## Interlude

Q: What did the person who had an IQ of 137 say to the person who had an IQ of 189?

A: "I'll have the burger and fries, please."

For a rough map of the gifted range, Hollingsworth suggested a range of "socially optimal intelligence," from which most leaders and successful people come, and it is misunderstanding the point somewhat to point out how rare it is to be above that range. I have seen the bottom of the range estimated at 120 and the top at 145, 150, or 155, and it is essentially a range where you have an advantage, but don't *really* have to pay for it.

Above that range people seem to have what might as well be magic powers, but there is a price tag. Children above an IQ of 170 tend to feel that they don't fit in

anywhere; at the top of the gifted range people can develop enough of a theory of alien minds that they in fact *do* fit in pretty much of anywhere.

When I have taught and failed, it has usually been because I humbly thought of others as my intellectual equals, and made demands that were entirely inappropriate. Part of this was asking students to call me by my first when they would have been more comfortable with "Mr. Hayward." I failed to respect an intellectual and social distance, and shortchanged students in the process.

The gifted range is broader than the normal range, and to be really offensive, the number of points' difference between the average profoundly gifted and the average gifted is pretty much the number of points' difference between the average gifted and the average mentally retarded. I say this not to contribute to pride, but to contribute to an understanding of needing to build a bridge that the other party will not build alone.

## **Being a Renaissance man**

I have heard the term "Renaissance man" used, and meant as a compliment, but did not see it as especially strong or specific. I was called a Renaissance man, I thought, because I had some accomplishment in the sciences and some accomplishment in the humanities: I appreciated the compliment but did not take it too seriously.

Then I read the Wikipedia entry; I quote paragraphs following an opening that refers to gifted people with some kind of skill:

"Renaissance man" was first recorded in written English in the early 20th century. It is now used to refer to great thinkers living before, during, or after the Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci has often been described as the archetype of the Renaissance man, a man of "unquenchable curiosity" and "feverishly inventive imagination".

Many notable polymaths lived during the Renaissance period, a cultural movement that spanned roughly the 14th through to the 17th century and that began in Italy in the late Middle Ages and later spread to the rest of Europe. These polymaths had a rounded approach to education that reflected the ideals of the humanists of the time. A gentleman or courtier of that era was expected to speak several languages, play a musical instrument, write poetry, and so on, thus fulfilling the Renaissance ideal. The idea of a universal education was essential to achieving polymath ability, hence the word university was used to describe a seat of learning. At this time universities did not specialize in specific areas but rather trained students in a broad array of science, philosophy, and theology. This universal education gave them a grounding from which they could continue into apprenticeship toward becoming a Master of a specific field.

- "Speak several languages:" check. This is with varying degrees of proficiency, but I've lost count how many. My LinkedIn profile lists a dozen.
- "Play a musical instrument:" years out of practice,

but check.

- "Write poetry:" check.
- "And so on:" check. (See the skills list at [skills.cjsh.name](http://skills.cjsh.name); besides theology, philosophy, and the sciences, there's a lot that's not listed here.)

But my response to seeing that I cover every skill fitting the original definition of "Renaissance man" was not, "Wow, I'm pretty cool;" it was much closer to saying that I stand in the company of heretics. Leonardo da Vinci stands as a man of toxic fascination (I was told in high school that when he was asked why he kept so many young boys as apprentices, he said, "They aren't very good, but aah, the eyelashes!"; I don't know if that's true). What can probably be said is that Leonardo da Vinci does little to edify his admirers, even if they gain skills. A booklet like *The Empty Self: Gnostic Foundation of Modern Identity* is written by a former head of the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, and while he acknowledges that his messianic fantasy was less serious than those of his more disturbed patients, he was very clear that his admiration of da Vinci was unprofitable. He talked about medieval statues of people who had their chest open and inside their heart was Christ enthroned, and his own vision of sorts where he saw da Vinci's chest opened and enthroned inside was... Leonardo da Vinci. *This is a vision of Hell.*

So I do place myself in the company of the original Renaissance men, but from an Orthodox perspective this is like placing myself in the company of Arius, Sabellius, and Nestorius, architects of heresy. I have climbed a ladder that

is leaning against the wrong building.

I don't believe I should turn my back on this; in fact, I believe I am doing the right thing to use my finely tuned language-learning aptitude to yet another language (Russian). *But I do believe my position calls for a little bit of humility.*

I am intentionally posting this on the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, commemorating the controversy in which the Church weighed Renaissance humanism in the balance and found it, in some sense, lacking. Renaissance humanism sought elevation in mastery of many secular skills; the Orthodox Church's sought a divine humanism in a Christ who is our entire reference for what it means to be God and our entire reference for what it means to be human. In more recent times an Orthodox theologian said that it is a real and true accomplishment that with loads of science, engineering, and an enormous budget, we can send people to the moon. However, it is a greater matter that the Orthodox Church has known for ages how, on a small loaf of bread per week, to lift a person up to God. And really there is something charming about a Renaissance collection of secular skills: but it is nothing next to the true treasures offered by the Church.

## **A bed of pain**

Lastly, or at least in the course of winding down, it may be mentioned that the profoundly gifted experience, at least for a significant number, is rough. A number I remember reading and tried but failed to trace down for a paper was that profoundly gifted had a 27% psychiatric hospitalization rate, which is higher than practically any meaningful



demographic besides "people who have undergone psychiatric hospitalization." It is higher, for instance, than either unipolar or bipolar depression. A study of Termites identified as profoundly gifted said they found no evidence to support the popular belief that profoundly gifted have a rough life, and also mentioned in passing that one of the twenty-nine subjects committed suicide. But this did not moderate their earlier position (compare 1 in 10,000 general public incidence at the time), when perhaps the small profoundly gifted sample size limits the effectiveness of statistics, the *res ipsa loquitur* facts should have come across as a "**WTF?**" in fifteen feet high blinking neon letters.

Complicating the matter is that one's best chances are to psychotherapy and psychiatrically prescribed medicines, but not only is the field of mental *health* a minefield, but the field of mental *help* is a minefield, and rational risk management is impossible. You can ask about the potential consequences and side effects all you want, but you won't be told of any serious consequences (and an antidepressant or a tranquilizer can have drastically more severe side effects than an antibiotic or pain medicine). Electro-convulsive therapy is described as maybe causing you to forget which drawer you put your socks in, where patients of electro-convulsive therapy have said in some wording I forget that the memory loss is onerous: the treatment is the right treatment for severe depression that nothing else budes, but the memory loss is obnoxious. In dealing with psychiatrists and psychotherapists, remember that a good practitioner will mention a role that involves a heavy dose of narcissism, and for most people you meet you will be the smartest person the person you are dealing with has ever

met. With most psychiatrists and therapists, the question is not whether you are more than a sigma above your healthcare provider (as a rule, people work best together when they are within a sigma, give or take). The question is really more whether you and the second-brightest person that provider has ever met are within a sigma of each other. We are genuinely talking about The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab territory in a heavy dose here. And that puts intimidation on steroids.

I would heed warning signs and look elsewhere early on, rather than wait for things to get better, if your provider shows incompetence, including behavior motivated by being (or becoming) threatened by what you represent. Psychotherapy and psychiatry may be close to being the only game in town, or otherwise indispensable for many profoundly gifted, but my own opinion is that the land is a minefield and the first provider you find is probably not part of the minority that will treat you in a competent manner.

## **The longest journey**

My relationship with my ex-girlfriend was painful. I'm tempted to write a long list of things she did wrong and expect you to join my pity party, but I will resist that temptation. What I will say is that of my own list of numerous failings, almost everything was related to my trying to reason things out and not engaging things on any level other than the rational. And my contribution to the trouble was worse than the points where I tried to reason something out and was wrong; there is something fundamentally false about being in a romantic relationship

and not handling the other with your heart. Some have said, "Handle yourself with your head and other with your heart," but really we should handle ourselves with our hearts, too.

One priest I know insists, "The longest journey we will take is the journey from our mind to our heart." Now he has a good deal of knowledge: he became a pain management physician to learn the art and science of relieving pain and suffering, and once practicing he realized he knew how to treat pain (by a prescription for a strong enough pain reliever, perhaps), but he did not consider himself prepared to really address *suffering*, and that point led him into the priesthood. And if you ever meet him, you will most likely find that he deals with you out of his heart.

Learned man that he may be, his homilies are simple.

## **Socrates and God the Spiritual Father**

One of my works, "God the Spiritual Father," is one of the works that I consider the most helpful today, and especially today, as having reference to hard times. It is, incidentally, the one work most pulled together as a collection of quotes (as "plagiarism" is respected and endorsed in many past and present cultures; the intent is not to claim credit for something original, a concept which may not exist among plagiarists, but to honor pat excellence, setting it as a jewel in a bezel). Now I follow Western, if not precisely academic, conventions to mark quotations. and attribute them to the authors and works I lean on, and I don't expect to be accused of plagiarism, even if some people find the heavy level of quotation unusual. But the spirit is close to ancient plagiarism that sought to

include jewels from prior excellence.

The core point I drive, above divine purpose for suffering, is to drop another shoe. Voltaire gives a devastating critique of the popular-before-Lisbon-earthquake optimism saying that we live in the best of all possible worlds. And we do not; that much is beyond serious dispute unless one delves into the kind of philosophical exploration that can, for instance, doubt that there is an external world. Even Christian Science acknowledges, if not exactly that there is evil in the world, that our perceptions have a problem. But saying that we live in the best of all worlds doesn't really have a following in the West today.

However, there is another shoe to drop: *while we do not live in the best of all possible worlds, we live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that makes a world of difference*. It's even better.

Some Orthodox are chary of adopting the non-canonical Anselm of Canterbury's arguments, of which I will write a deliberate tangent in a minute, but such existed among the Fathers before Anselm. Perhaps Anselm's best-known argument is that God, if such exists, is greater than anything else than can be thought. Now if we compare a God who is greater than anything else that can exist, for such a God to exist in thought *and in reality* is greater than for such a God to be greater than anything else that can exist but exists only as a thought in people's minds. Therefore God must exist in reality; anything less would be a contradiction.

This argument (I'll omit discussion of Gaunilo's "In Defense of the Fool" which keeps getting reincarnated by atheists trying to give a fresh, new objection to Anselm, and also Anselm's response) has been called the most

controversial argument in the history of philosophy, and most people on hearing it feel like they've been slipped something even if they usually can't put their finger on *why*. I would suggest, perhaps in an ersatz repetition of Kant, that two levels are conflated, like the rhetorical practice of writing an ambiguity where people can't dispute one reading of the ambiguity, but it ends up being taken as support of another ambiguity. I cite Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business* in a fallacy I don't know how to name (documenting at least one such fallacy was my diploma thesis in theology),

A third example of the influence of media on our epistemology can be drawn from the trial of the great Socrates. At the opening of Socrates's defense, addressing a jury of five hundred, he apologizes for not having a well-prepared speech. He tells his Athenian brothers that he will falter, begs that they not interrupt him on that account, asks that they regard him as they would a stranger from another city, and promises that he will tell them the truth, without adornment or eloquence. Beginning this way was, of course, characteristic of Socrates, but it was not characteristic of the age in which he lived. For, as Socrates knew full well, his Athenian brothers didn't regard the principles of rhetoric and the expression of truth to be independent of each other. People like ourselves find great appeal in Socrates plea because we are accustomed to thinking of rhetoric as an ornament of speech--most often pretentious, superficial and unnecessary. But to the people who invented it, the

Sophists of fifth-century B.C. Greece and their heirs, rhetoric was not merely an opportunity for dramatic performance but a near indispensable means of organizing evidence and proofs, and therefore of communication truth.

It was not only a key element in the education of Athenians (far more important than philosophy) but a preeminent art form. To the Greeks, rhetoric was a form of spoken writing. Though it always implied oral performance, its power to reveal the truth resided in the written word's power to display arguments in orderly progression. Although Plato himself disputed this conception of truth (as we might guess from Socrates' plea), his contemporaries believed that rhetoric was the proper means through which "right opinion" was to be discovered and articulated. To disdain rhetorical rules, to speak one's thoughts in a random manner, without proper emphasis or appropriate passion, was considered demeaning to the audience's intelligence and suggestive of falsehood. Thus, we can assume that many of the 280 jurors who cast a guilty ballot against Socrates did so because his manner was not consistent with truthful matter, as they understood the connection.

Postman's book was formative to me and I still agree with much, but here he misses the boat. If I wished to reincarnate Postman's error, I could say that the philosopher was not only found guilty, but on trial in the first place, because **Socrates lived, acted, spoke and taught in a way that caused culture shock and could not but draw negative attribution.** The threshold for

capital punishment (if it is allowed) varies somewhat between cultures, but usually you don't end up a defendant on trial for a capital crime in your culture unless you have some enemies. *Socrates* was a teacher who influenced youth in a presumably distinctive way; if he was on trial for "corrupting the youth," I regard it as charitable to read the allegation, right or wrong, as entirely sincere. And on those grounds his defense may be seen as a last unwelcome surprise to Athenians. It might perhaps have hurt him (or things may have been beyond that point), but it did not cause Socrates to lose skyhigh approval because he walked in to his trial with little approval in the first place. Postman presents things in such way that it appears that Socrates's defense was a major contributor to his 280 guilty votes. I'm not so sure about that.

But I would pause to address a question that some might raise. If Socrates had heeded what I imply may be a wiser, or at least a more survivable course, would he have been as interesting or important? Would he really have been *Socrates*? And I don't know; I am very wary about saying that Socrates could, with slightly better social skills, made every accomplishment the Socrates of history and philosophy made *and* not really ruffled Athenian feathers. However, I would recall a linguistics professor's answer to a question from a missionary-in-training: "Do I *have* to do all the homework?" The professor restrained her first impulse, thought for a moment, and said, "No, you don't *have* to. *But be prepared to take the consequences.*" And on those grounds, causing things like culture shock are *usually* a liability. Sometimes they're necessarily tied to something good. However, I don't think *I* would enjoy the company of someone profoundly gifted who caused culture

shock out of simply never making serious efforts to learn to communicate effectively with others. *Choose your battles.*

And back to Anselm after a tangent that should perhaps be the conclusion.

We do, in fact, live not in the best of all possible worlds, but a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that really does make all the difference.

## Commencement

This piece has rambled; someone very charitable might say it has rambled in a manner worthy of Socrates.

However, I wish to end this work the way an academic program is ended: with a ceremony deliberately named, "Commencement." The choice of term says in essence, "This is not where your endeavor ends. This is where it truly begins."

This work is a piece of wisdom literature, standing in a tradition of excellent and mediocre works about how to live well. Several books of the Old Testament fall under its rubric, and a great many books like *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* also qualify as wisdom literature, and as best I recall the introduction talked about a relatively recent historical shift in wisdom literature from a "character ethic" to a "personality ethic", the latter of which would presumably include *picking three adjectives* from a list and deciding they make up *your personal brand*.

This piece is narrow and specialized in its audience, but the whole stream of wisdom literature is a good place to pan for gold. And wisdom literature that make no effort to focus on giftedness can be richly valuable. The repeated references to *How to Win Friends and Influence*



*People* above are references to it as wisdom literature.

**Go forth!**

## When All Else Fails...

Harassment and unwanted attention are facts of life for the profoundly gifted, and the person who is harassing you, perhaps under the cover of mentorship, amateur psychology, or some other guise of ostensible benevolent authority over you, will *sometimes* stop if you ask them nicely.

If you are receiving unwanted attention, whether harassment or otherwise, and your "No" is not being respected, blocking, unfriending, and reporting are available for Facebook, and "Cease and Desist" letters and "Orders of Protection," or any other way of involving an authority may work. A single visit from the police has done wonders for some people's comprehension.

I've had people evade a "No" for months, years, or decades, and then one simple "Cease and Desist" letter brought instant and immediate clarity. If you're dealing with someone creepy or hostile and don't want to take a guess on web search for a "Cease and Desist" letter template, a little attention from an attorney may make a "No," that is treated as astonishingly hazy, to be astonishingly clear.

# Epilogue

*Always* consider yourself to be skating on thin ice.

## *Epilogue to an Epilogue*

For a long time, the concluding sentence to this collection is, “*Always* consider yourself to be skating on thin ice.” And I believe that is true, but less important than I thought.

I was talking with someone recently, when he recounted an incident. Eleanor Roosevelt said, “*No one* can make you feel inferior without your consent,” and he remembered how when he was a child, his mother excusably misquoted her as saying, “*No one* can hurt you without your consent.” Then insisted that he answer “Yes and amen,” and aiming for diplomacy, he said, “Up to a point.” Then she again pressed for endorsement of the lesson question, and he said one or two other things with a main goal of diplomacy given the social situation, and she unleashed extreme hurt and anger, and while he held this thought to myself, he wanted to shout, “Why don’t you teach yourself this lesson, and work on teaching it to me only after you have taught it to *yourself*?”

Notwithstanding that this is not an example of good teaching, the attempted lesson, in either version of the

quote, is valid. It is possible to shrug off a physical assault. Easily.

I believe profoundly gifted are *often* skating on thin ice, and I suspect that “The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab” effects will multiply if we are arrogant, and be both less serious and less frequent if we are humble, but perhaps no one will evade them quickly. However, I would shift the focus from what is *internal* to us and what is *external*. The seemingly bad news is that we may or simply may not be able to influence the external situation to our liking, and that can include others approaching us in anger. However, as is told to addicts, “You have more power than you think.” The degree of influence from internal reform is incalculable, and it is one of the treasures of Orthodox Christianity. I quote “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret:”

## **Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret**

### **Rewards that are not mercenary**

We must not be troubled by unbelievers  
when they say that this promise of reward

makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different types of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.

C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often, or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the *Philokalia* well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of

sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now, and it is nothing that is real to you until you have undergone that repentance. It is like looking forward to washing with fear, wondering if you will be scraped up in getting mud off, and in a very real sense suddenly recognizing that you had not in mind what it was like to be clean.

*Let me explain by giving some examples.*

## **Discovering the treasure of humility**

The first illustration I have is not strictly speaking an example of repentance, at least not that I have seen, but might as well be.

One of the hardest statements in the Bible that I am aware of is, "In humility consider others better than yourself" (Phil 2:3). It's a slap in the face to most of us, *including* me. But humility is only about abasing yourself up to a point. The further you go into humility, the less it is about dethroning "me, me, me," and the more it can see the beauty of others.

If it seems a sharp blow to in humility consider others better than yourself, let me ask you this: would you rather be with nobodies who are despicable, or in the company of giants? Pride closes the eyes to any beauty outside of yourself, and falsely makes them appear to have nothing worthy of attention. Humility opens the eyes to something of eternal significance in each person we meet.

There is one CEO at a place I worked who might as well have taken up the gauntlet of considering others better than himself. (I don't know about his spiritual practices as a whole; that's between him and his *shul*.) But on this point he has taken up the gauntlet, not of St. Paul necessarily, but of *humility*.

This CEO showed delight and some awe in each person I saw him meet. It didn't matter if you were near the top of the org chart, or at the absolute bottom; the CEO was delighted to see you. End of discussion. And he wanted to hear how you were doing, and not in a Machiavellian sense.

Now let me ask a question: who benefitted most from his respect at work (and, I can scarcely doubt, his respect outside of work)? Is it the ambitious leader, the low-level permanent employee, the timid intern? Certainly all these people benefitted, and though it was not so flamboyantly expressed, there is a thread of deep respect running through the whole organization, and some things work smoother than any other place I've been. There are a lot of people who benefit from the CEO's humility. *But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's aptitude for respect is the CEO himself.* Others may enjoy kind treatment and perhaps be inclined to more modestly follow his example. But he is in that respect at least functioning the way a person functions optimally, or to speak less abstractly, his state puts him in the presence of people he deeply respects and delights in again and again and again. To be proud is to be turned in on yourself, and he has something better: a spiritual orientation that lets him



see the genuine beauty in others. (And, to be clear, the phenomenon also plays out more quietly among the rest of the organization.) Humility opens the eyes to the beauty of others. It also has other benefits; humility is less tempted to meet bad news with wishful thinking; the CEO is, I imagine, as sincerely wrong as often as the rest of us are sincerely wrong, but my suspicion is that he is less wrong, and less often wrong, than if he were to freely opt-in to being wrong by freely indulging in wishful thinking. This is another incidental advantage to humility, and perhaps there are others. But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's humility is the CEO himself. And the reward for him looking on others with delight and awe is that he is put in a condition where he meets others filled with delight and awe. If that sounds like a tautology, *it is*. The reward for his seeing others through the eyes of humility is that he sees others through the eyes of humility: the biggest reward for humility is, quite simply, humility: *virtue is its own reward*.

Now humility may express itself in self-abasement, and another powerful gauntlet is thrown down when *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* or the *Philokalia* speak of "thirsting for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor." I will not treat that at length, beyond saying that it is a mighty door and opens to blessed humility.

What I do wish to point out is that pride turns you in on yourself, blinding you to beauty outside of you and making you fill a bag of sand with holes in satisfying your narcissism, or trying to. Humility

opens you up to all the beauty around you, and if you repent of pride and despair of being able to gaze on yourself in fascination, you may be surprised by the joy of gazing on others in joy and fascination, or something better than the transient and fleeting fascination offered by narcissism.

### **But what if I can't find anything in a person to respect?**

If you can't find anything in a person to respect, I submit that you are missing something about being human. To quote *Tales of a Magic Monastery*:

#### **The Crystal Globe**

I told the guestmaster I'd like to become a monk.

"What kind of monk?" he asked. "A real monk?"

"Yes," I said, "a real monk."

He poured a cup of wine, and said, "Here, take this."

No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a small crystal globe forming about me. It expanded until it included him.

Suddenly, this monk, who had seemed so commonplace, took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. I thought, "Maybe he doesn't know how beautiful he is. Maybe I should tell him." But I really *was* dumb. The wine had burned out my tongue!

After a time, he made a motion for me to leave, and I gladly got up, thinking that the memory of such beauty would be well worth the loss of my tongue. Imagine my surprise when, when each person would unwittingly pass into my globe, I would see his beauty too.

Is this what it means to be a real monk?  
To see the beauty in others and be silent?

Plants and animals command respect, and not just in the sense articulated by green advocates. Empty space itself is itself interesting. *How?* It is empty space that is much of the study of quantum physics and superstring theory. A great many physicists have earned PhD's, and continue to research, based on the physical properties of empty space. And, more importantly, the whole of God is wholly present in any and every empty space. In that sense, empty space in Orthodox Christianity is more pregnant, more dignified, than what an atheist would consider to be everything that exists. So empty space is worth respecting. But more than that, inanimate things, rocks and such, exist on the level of empty space but fill the space: "Blessed be the Rock" lets an inanimate thing represent God. It exists; it is something rather than nothing, and for that reason it is worth respecting. Plants exist on one more layer than mere existence; they have the motion, the fire, of life inside them. And animals exist on these layers but exist more fully; they are aware of their surroundings and act. And you and I, and every person you have trouble respecting, exist on all of

these layers and more: we are made in the image of God, the royal and divine image, with the potential of the angelic image and of theosis, and are all of us making an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell. Those who choose Hell represent a tragedy; but even then there is the dignity of making an eternal choice; Hitler and Stalin represent the dignity of eternal agency and making a choice between Heaven and Hell, and sadly using that choice to become an abomination that will ever abide in Hell. But they still tragically represent the grandeur of those who exist on several layers and use their free and eternal choice to eternally choose Hell. Some saint has said, "Be kind to each person you meet. Each person you meet is going through a great struggle," and all mankind, including those one struggles to respect, exist on several profound levels and are making an eternal choice of who they will permanently become. And respect is appropriate to all of us who bear the image of God, and have all of the grandeur of God-pregnant empty space, physical things, plants, animals, and a rational and spiritual and *royal* human existence, even if there is nothing *else* we can see in them to respect. Being appropriate to treat with respect is not something that begins when we find something good or interesting about a person: it begins long before that.

## Returning from drunkenness to sobriety

In “A Pet Owner's Rules,” I wrote,

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. **Don't drink out of the toilet.**

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Bondage to alcohol is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. If you reject bondage to alcohol and fight your way to sobriety with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, the reward if you succeed

is that you have rejected bondage to alcohol and fought your way to sobriety. The reward for sobriety regained is sobriety regained—and sobriety includes ways of enjoying life that are simply not an option when one is in bondage to alcohol. *The virtue is its own reward.*

## **Returning from covetousness to contentment**

Advertising, in stimulating covetousness, stimulates and builds discontent. Covetousness may well enough say, "If I only get \_\_\_\_\_, then I'll be content." But that is fundamental confusion. Getting whatever \_\_\_\_\_ may be may bring momentary satisfaction, but the same spiritual muscles twisted to be discontent with what you had before, will make you become discontent with the \_\_\_\_\_ that you now think will make you happy.

What makes for contentment is learning to be content, and repenting of covetousness and being satisfied with what you have now gives the reward that is falsely sought in indulging covetousness. The reward for repenting of covetousness and learning contentment is that you are freed from covetousness and blessed with contentment.

The virtue is the reward.

## **Returning from lust to chastity**

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe; repenting of lust, like repenting of pride and occult-like escapism, opens one's eyes to beauty one cannot see. Lust greatly hinders the ability to appreciate and enjoy things; repentance from lust is occasion for the slow re-awakening of the eyes to everything that lust cannot see—which is a lot.

## **Returning from contraception to how God built marriages to work**

I had a bit of a hesitation in including contraception, because in Orthodoxy "everybody knows" that such things as drunkenness are real sins, while "everybody knows" that contraception is debatable, and probably OK if one gets a blessing etc. And here what "everybody knows" is out-and-out wrong.

The Fathers universally condemn contraception, and the first edition of K.T. Ware's *The Orthodox Church* said point-blank, "The Orthodox Church forbids artificial methods of contraception," but subsequent versions moved further and further to permissiveness. But it is not the Orthodox Church that has changed her mind; it is only certain salad bar theology today that wishfully tries to believe that the Orthodox Church says contraception can be

permitted.

St. John Chrysostom calls contraception point-blank "worse than murder," and counsels parents to leave their children brothers and sisters, and not mere things, as an inheritance. The Blessed Augustine blasts what is today called "natural family planning," and should be called "contraceptive timing", saying that the heretics who practice what is today called "periodic continence" to frustrate the fertility of sex thereby forbid marriage, earning the searing rebuke about forbidding marriage in 1 Tim 4:1-5, and says that where there is contraception, there is no wife, only a mistress. St. Maximus Confessor describes sex as being wrong when it is done for some other purpose than making a baby. In my researches, I have yet to hear of any Christian teacher or canonized saint from the first millenium stating or allowing that any form of contraception is permitted in any form. For that matter, I have yet to hear of any of the Reformation offering anything but condemnation to the sin of contraception.

Biologically speaking, the beginning, middle, and end of the purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is not intended merely for pleasure, but each pleasure, such as that of eating (for which we have made Splenda), exists to continue the species, whether through procreation or preserving individuals by nourishing their bodies with food. But I wish to state something more than just the condemnations of contraception, because the condemnations are the guardian of something basically human.

When I was studying in the Bronx, I was



bombarded by posters from Planned Parenthood, which in their most forceful forms said, "Take *control* of your life!" And in general I am suspicious about the final honesty of advertising, but in this context the advertisement could hardly be more candid. Planned Parenthood's marketing proposition is that you can enjoy the pleasure of sex, perhaps increasingly overclocked by Viagra and ED drugs, while only having children when you individually opt-in, and retain your life in control as a pleasure-seeker. And that goes for Orthodox Christians as much as everyone else: perhaps abortion is out, but contraception, accidents excluded, is how people can pursue the pleasure of sex without the drag of unintended children.

But, before looking at monasticism, let me say that part of growing to full human stature is not being a permanent pleasure-seeker, and not being in control of oneself. In monasticism this is partly through things such as monastic obedience, an absolute obedience which frees monk or nun from fulfilling self-will. In marriage this comes from having children beyond the point where you can have control as a pleasure-seeker. In that sense disconnecting sex from making babies is in marriage what optional obedience would be for monasticism. It is easier, it is more palatable, and it all but neutralizes the whole point.

The benefit of repenting of contraception is not that God preserves pleasure-seeking. The benefit of repenting of contraception is that you grow to transcend yourself, and marriage reaches its full

stature just as obedience to a spiritual physician helps monastics reach full human stature. Marriage and monasticism are different in many ways, and today I think marriage should be recognizing as having some of the status traditionally seen in monasticism. But the point of being an adult is to grow up, to grow by a crown of thorns, to transcend oneself, whether by marriage or by monasticism. The means may be very different, but the goal is self-transcendence, and the marketing proposition of contraception is to short-circuit that hard lesson and allow the adult to remain a sexually active pleasure seeker who does not grow any higher. And this is part of why I wince when I find people I know telling of their contraception; it is something of a missed opportunity, where people have marriage but do not use it to their full stature, opting instead for an "à la carte" version of marriage that is the equivalent of a "monasticism" that allows veto over obedience.

## **Returning from Gnosticism and escape to the here and now**

When I read one title on Gnosticism, I was pulled up short by one passage. It described Gnosticism not as a set of ideas or hinging on ideas (it can be connected with many ideas), but on a mood, and more specifically that of despair. I was quite surprised by that because the appeal of Gnosticism is something enticing, something "sexy," of a sweet

forbidden escape. But that is only an enticing bait if one wants escape because one has despair about the here and now that God has provided us.

Monks in the desert were perennially warned about escaping the here and now; it is tied to what was, and is, called the "demon of noonday." And a great many things today are laced with that sweetly-coated poison. It is not just gnosticism, which I shouldn't have researched, or the occult, or "metaphysics" in the occult sense, or Harry Potter, or *the Chronicles of Narnia*. And yes, I did say, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is the story of people brought out of the everyday world into another world, and that is a classic bait, and one that is far from exhausted from the short list here.

The reward for rejecting the temptation to escape from the here and now is the discovery of the here and now as something one does not need to escape from. At an advanced level, one discovers that paradise is present wherever saints are; that is why crude settings at a monastery are genuinely sweeter than more luxurious settings where Mammon is worshiped. But, as in giving up pride, giving up escape sets the stage to enjoy what you wanted to escape from. Before you give it up, what you want is something that almost by definition is something you cannot have: whatever enters the here and now becomes one more dreary fixture of the here and now, maybe not instantly, but at least eventually. But like humility which opens the eyes of others pride cannot see, repenting of escapism in any form is rewarded by finding that one is in God's good

Creation and escape is in fact *not* the best one can hope for: one hopes for engagement in worship of God, and that is what one is rewarded with. The reward for repenting and accepting virtue is that one steps out of escape and accepts virtue: the virtue is its own reward.

## **Moving on from grudges to forgiveness**

Forgiveness is tied for some of us to repentance of unforgiveness. Perhaps some people forgive easily and quickly, or at least quickly. But when you do not forgive, or do not yet forgive, it seems falsely like you have something over the other person, and it seems like a treasure to hold on to. But it is no treasure. It is a piece of Hell: nursing a grudge is drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

Repentance is stepping out of Hell, and forgiveness is stepping outside of the moment of pain and moving on to other things that do not hurt. It is not easy; it is incredibly hard for some of us; but it is the first step in a journey of healing. And the reward is simply that we step out of the moment of hurt, back in the past, and start to leave the hurt behind.

## ***...and being blindsided by reward***

Some people speak of repentance as unconditional surrender, and it is in fact unconditional surrender. My godfather spoke of

repentance as the most terrifying thing a person can experience, because God demands a blank cheque of us, and does not tell us how much he will expect.

But when, and only when, we have made that surrender, we are blindsided by rewards. God may give other rewards too; but he gives rewards. In repentance you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And you let go of Hell and grasp something much better!

Repentance is seen in Orthodoxy as awakening, and the reward is part of the awakening.

Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. To those who repent, a reward is promised!

*Virtue is its own reward. And it is also the reward of repentance.*

In Orthodoxy, it is possible to pray many times a day for a week or two, "Lord Jesus Christ, deliver me from my narcissism, and grant me self-knowledge, whether I really want it or not." And you may soon realize things about yourself that you were blind to, as pride is by nature blinding.

One thing that can come up is that self-pity is a form of pride, and it is possible to summon memories that leave you a sense of "The universe owes me better," and pine for someone to give you a psychological hug. But what you have been doing is in fact summoning stings; the very sense that someone owes you a psychological hug for this thing that shouldn't have happened has part and parcel a summoned sting. And one possibility in rejecting the self-pity and its implied entitlement is that you may be much less often

recalling memories that summon a sting, and when you do, whether by force of habit or other means remember events that sting, and when you do remember such things, the sting is crushed.

I am presently seeking monasticism, and though it is not usually explained that way, the monastic occupies a place of nearly supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church. The vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity are there to free, not to bind, and it has been said that Paradise is wherever the saints are. Orthodox monasticism is also powerfully bound to repentance, so much that one accepted term for monasticism is “repentance.” And this is a monastic privilege: to live and breathe in an environment designed to free its members from their sins. Next to the freedom of ongoing repentance, the best vacation or retirement that money can buy utterly pales in comparison. And the lessons I have learned are through Eastern Orthodoxy and the monastic tradition I that has influenced me and that I hope to join. But to those who do not share the Tradition that gave me what degree I have of partial invulnerability, I would say this:

Ideally and quite possibly realistically it is possible to come to a place where one is well nigh invulnerable to such hurts. However, for those of us who have not yet realized the ideal, the other tactics I have mentioned can help. If someone is harassing you after a repeated “No,” a C&D letter can bring great clarity to your boundaries that are being treated as soft and hazy. (I will note that my spiritual father advised me to give someone who is harassing me enough rope: I will be in a stronger legal position if I give a regular “No” first, and then a C&D letter after the “No” is trampled on.) Also, most email providers allow filtering

rules that can let emails from a specific sender specifically not show up.

The best option is to be mature enough that the harassment rolls off you like water off a duck's back, because it has no hold on you at all. Also good to note is that in both religion and psychology, the preferred option is not to change everyone else, but to do the inner work to change *yourself*. (And it may happen that once you've changed *yourself*, the whole situation changes for the better—and not only because you have attained clarity about *your* contribution to the situation, and stopped behaviors that were invisible to you but were causing problems for others.)

Also relevant is the standard psychological advice to offer no response except, at least in face to face contact, visibly turning your attention away. That gives the person harassing you or offering verbal abuse an experience like writing out a hand-written letter of hate, and you opening the envelope, taking the hand-written hate mail, and without looking at it putting it through a shredder. And this works whether or not you are able, at your point in maturity, to avoid feeling hurt and anger. It can also help that something with the clarity of an alcoholic's intervention can cut people deeply enough that they wake up and smell the, um, *coffee*.

Also a possible help is “interest-based negotiation,” as articulated in i.e. *Getting to Yes: How to Negotiate Agreement Without Giving In*, and my negotiation article at [cjsh.name/negotiation](http://cjsh.name/negotiation). This is not exactly a solution to some pressing issues like verbal abuse... but I can think of very few situations where either “hard” or “soft” positional negotiation (as discussed in *Getting to Yes*) will get better results than a working knowledge of interest-based

negotiation even if you do not use that toolchest in a particular conflict or negotiation.

(Also highly recommended for communication in general is Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which is not the Machiavellian toolchest it sounds like today. I do not agree with Carnegie on e.g. getting the other person to think it was his idea, but in general I prefer to work with people who live these principles and much of it, in retrospect, is a packaging of common sense in communication. It's not so much a tool to win an existing conflict as a tool to have fewer conflicts, and less severe conflicts.)

Also worth note is that one master business negotiator who was asked, "If I were to shadow you for you one day, to see how you negotiate, and I were to learn from you, in just a sentence, what would I learn?" and the negotiator said, "I don't need a sentence, just two words: *listen better*." Active listening is a skill; I do not propose that you practice active listening to help you stop someone who is harassing you.

However, even in the context of warfare *The Art of War* says that if you know neither yourself nor your enemy you will always lose, if you know yourself and not your enemy or you know your enemy but not yourself, your chances will be half, and if you know both yourself and your enemy, you will always win. If this is said in all-out *literal* warfare, where no one has the luxury of asking for an authority to intervene in an abusive situation or pattern, how much more will listening be a central communication tool in at times peaceful communication?

So there are a few tools along the way. Lessons in maturity sometimes protect us, and if we are not mature



enough to pull off a plan A, there are options for plans B, C, D, E, and F.

Work for plan A, and use plan F if need be, for however long as it takes you to graduate to plan E.