



Bring Back Satire

Bring Back Satire

Poems, essays, and short stories

By: Thomas Dylan Daniel

First independently published in 2020 by Thomas Dylan Daniel.

Copyright 2020 by Thomas Dylan Daniel. All rights reserved.

Cover art 2019, by Melissa Starkweather.

Thoughts & Praise For

Bring Back Satire

“New days need new ways. Thomas Dylan Daniel demonstrates how to combine ancient Greek philosophy with modern daily things.

Fun to read, insightful and well referenced, honest, motivating, and surprising. This book provides us with many insights and great ideas for living. A readable approach to the art of modern philosophy.”

—Kristjan Klaiss

Lighthearted and fun, one minute. Educational and inspirational, the next. Highly intriguing.

—Bobby Stevanus

“The author's writing style is new and fresh. With each new topic in the book, the ability to turn a page comes naturally. It is with it that I find Jennifer's accidental vote for Trump appealing whereas the Letter of Rejection is every artist's worst nightmare.

This book starts with a philosophic approach, then winds up to the satire it promises to bring back in the poems and short stories offered.”

—Alfred Nongu

“A variety of writings that will attract thought, bring laughter, inform & surprise.

A lot of the pieces are quite short & easy to digest; you could read them over again. If you want to have a bit more thought provocation, the longer pieces are great as they have more detail. Bring Back Satire won't disappoint.”

—Nathan G.

“In *Bring Back Satire*, Daniel has written an interesting assortment of thought-provoking essays, stories and poems. From his discourses on Aristotle and happiness to the politics of Nietzsche; there is a veritable feast of ideas for everyone.

The essays provide interesting perspectives, the stories are engaging, and the poems give pause for thought. As a writer myself, I was particularly taken with *Letter of Rejection*, where we see a humorous, imagined letter from the literary world outright rejecting the author’s work.

In summary, this is an excellent read with writings to suit all tastes; certainly, a book that you’ll want to reread.”

—Allen Smale (@Puffin)

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Melissa Starkweather, for your amazing art. Cover derived from Untitled, (2019), currently owned by Thomas Dylan Daniel. To see more of Melissa's work, please visit melissastarkweather.com.

Thanks to Steven Hoyt, Christian Cotton, C. D. La Sage, and Scott Lurker for your incessant, indeed at times even annoying, insistence upon getting to the bottom of things.

Thanks to Cent, and the various Centians who reviewed this work and put their support behind it. Without you, it is quite safe to say that there would be no book. I'm looking forward to more big things in the future for our little network.

If you're not part of Cent yet, I highly recommend it. It's like Facebook, but you can sometimes go quite a bit deeper, and the people are a lot nicer. Link up with me at beta.cent.co/@epicdylan.

Last of all, I'd like to thank all of the readers who have, over the years, helped me to refine my craft. Whether or not this is your first time reading my work, I appreciate all of you and I'm always interested in hearing your thoughts. Drop me a line via <https://twitter.com/@thomasdylandan2>

*For Harper and Hadley:
May you both find true happiness.*

CONTENTS

THOUGHTS & PRAISE FOR	III
<i>BRING BACK SATIRE</i>	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	V
HAPPINESS, PART 1.....	1
HARBINGER	2
MIRROR.....	3
PIRSIG WAS	4
HIDDEN JOURNALS	5
JENNIFER.....	6
BEFORE I REMEMBERED	7
LETTER OF REJECTION.....	8
THOUGHTS ON RETURNING TO SCHOOL.....	9
MES, AT EASE	10
HAPPINESS, PART 2.....	11
THOUGHTS UNBIDDEN.....	12
USELESS	13
THE INVESTOR.....	14
TIMES WHEN	17
NIETZSCHE: CONTROVERSIAL READINGS.....	18
BETTER DAYS.....	24
THE SWING OF EPICURUS.....	26
DOPAMINE.....	29
HAPPINESS, PART 3.....	30
FALLING, ANYWAY	32
BUKOWSKI SAID.....	33
SUPPOSING TRUTH IS A WOMAN—	34
WHAT THEN?	34
IT'S FUNNY!	38
TO WRITE	39

ANXIETY	40
THE PHANTOM KNOCKERS.....	41
HAPPINESS, PART 4.....	43
EXISTENCE.....	44
SIDES	45
CITY, <i>COMMUNITY!</i>	46
ANYWHERE, TOO.....	47
DO YOU LOVE?.....	49
TREES.....	50
I FORGOT, TOO.	51
WERE TODAY MY LAST	53
WHAT SORT OF THING IS CONSCIOUSNESS?	54
TO SMILE:	59
IN BLOOM	60
BRING BACK SATIRE	61
STYLE.....	63
HAPPINESS, PART 5.....	64
LOVE: THE PAINFUL PINNACLE OF HUMAN GOODNESS.....	65
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	67
OTHER BOOKS BY THOMAS DYLAN DANIEL	68

Happiness, Part 1

Aristotle (384-322BCE) was perhaps the most influential philosopher in Ancient Greece. He tutored Alexander the Great after studying under Plato for twenty years. During his life, Aristotle read everything he could get his hands on, which allowed him to deeply engage with and revolutionize science, ethics, and metaphysics. Dubbed the “Philosopher” with a capital-P by St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle has maintained a large following for millennia after his death. Even the scientists who lambaste Aristotle for being wrong about many of the physical principles he attempted to describe nonetheless acknowledge his attempts to solve problems which were far beyond the empirical means of his time. This essay will focus upon Aristotle’s notion of happiness, often referred to by the Greek word *eudaimonia* for clarity, and how the great philosopher believed we could reach it.

Aristotelian ethics is frequently called virtue ethics due to its emphasis on the ancient notion of excellence (*arête*) or virtue of character. Aristotle’s goal in putting forward virtue ethics seems to have been to examine the good life and the types of people who were able to live well so he could extract certain qualities from these to then teach to others.

Aside from possessing virtues of character, people who lived the good life seemed to Aristotle to also be able to engage in a certain thoughtful, reminiscent activity, which Aristotle likened unto the activity of a god who contemplates his situation. Sometimes translated as “happiness” or “blessedness,” Aristotle’s concept of happiness is known in the Greek as *eudaimonia*.

To experience *eudaimonia*, a contemplative activity which takes place when we reflect upon our deeds from the standpoint of accomplishment and achievement, we must be skilled in practical reason and virtuous as a result of our repeated application of this skill.¹

This is a simple enough concept: human happiness is based upon excellence in rationality. The purpose of a human being is to be rational (i.e., man is a rational animal), and by reasoning well we are able to acquire virtues of character through our habit-building individual actions.

Essentially, we want to build good character so that we tend to do good deeds which are said to be in accord with reason because this makes us the best way for us to be; when we have come far enough down this path we experience pleasure simply by contemplating ourselves and our surroundings—we have become what we are supposed to be, we are acting in a way we know to be beneficial for ourselves and our communities, and *eudaimonia* is our reward, when we choose to engage in it.

There is significant nuance here, including both the need to engage in contemplation to experience happiness—it doesn’t just happen to us when we’re occupied with something else—and the ability of circumstance to confound our ability to contemplate the beauty of the world and our involvement in it.

¹ Kraut, Richard. “Aristotle’s Ethics.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2018).

Harbinger

It is late and I am lost
Staring at an empty page
I seem to move but do not—
I never really go anywhere

Wherever I go, there I am;
and always there, I am
waiting for something—
anything to change

Will the change tell me
what to do next?
What I shouldn't—
have done before?

Still waiting, I sit,
wondering.
Where is the—
harbinger, I'm expecting?

Mirror

The thing about fog is that sometimes it can
Lift a veil you didn't know was there
Make you stop, and in a glance
See more clearly through translucent air

It puts a thought, unbidden
A mystery, unimagined
A different scent upon the air

And if ya should choose to stop
Turn aside a moment, and hear

Susurrus, stir, reflection - a fog is a mirror

Pirsig Was

To me, Robert Pirsig was

There, when I thought I'd quit philosophy
Wrong about a few things
But right about many more
A friend
though I never met him
A philosopher
But not a professor
Or a musty philosophologist

A cool guy who got it
A link between me and friends
A spirit guide
A mentor from afar
A mountain climber
An iconoclast
And a positive influence

Cheers to you, sir
Gone but not forgotten
Already, you are missed

Cheers to your memory
And to that of your son, Chris

And to that motorcycle.

Hidden Journals

When I was younger
I used to —hide—
my journals and writings

I didn't want someone to
find my chicken scratch,
somehow decode it
and manage to thus, also
decode me.

They might have learned
something, anything
I would have been ashamed of.

Jennifer

I was feeling anxious, when I arrived at the church where the man had been stabbed to death the week before, not because I was afraid he might somehow come back as a ghost and haunt me, or because I thought someone else would decide the place was as good as any place to stab a random stranger to death, but because I knew Jennifer was going to meet me there. A beautiful woman, Jennifer had capitalized on what she'd inherited from her parents. She had worked out, toning and tanning and organizing and sculpting until there was little objection anyone could voice as to the shape of her body. Her face was so pretty nobody would have wanted to, but she went to the gym four times per week to make sure they couldn't, if they decided to in the future.

As I sauntered up to the front door, she popped out of her hiding spot just inside, scaring me a little. I jumped backward, surprised, forgetting for the moment I'd just been coming up the concrete stairs outside of the building, the ones that led down to the street. As I slid/bounced/rolled down the stairs, I hurt myself in a dozen places, but I decided to bounce back up the second I remembered she would be watching, hurt and confused at the no-doubt unexpected outcome of her little prank.

I tried to get up, but couldn't. I just lay there, a pool of blood forming around me, as Jennifer shrieked for help and shouted my name at me. She wanted me to get up, to have fun with her. To Jennifer, the only thing that really mattered was fun. Accidents had happened to her before, like her DWI, or her syphilis infection, or her "accidental" vote for Donald Trump. She was sorry about all of those things.

Suddenly, I was in a hospital. I felt much better in terms of pain, and as I looked around the room, I didn't see anyone else there. I felt a bit saddened by the fact, but, as I moved my arms and legs around, it seemed like they didn't work quite right. I touched my face and was surprised to find a substantial growth of beard there.

At last, a nurse walked by and I was able to ask her the date. It had been two months since the accident, and I could tell by her response that this was not the first time I'd had that question of her. I felt confused, overwhelmed by all of this, but the energy seemed to sap away. I went back to sleep, dreaming of beautiful Jennifer.

Before I Remembered

Before I remembered I was a satirist
I tried so hard to be serious about things.
I was angry, and petty, and
I didn't know how to joke.

I do believe it is important to write
“serious” philosophy...
but perhaps the fact that it
NEEDS the moniker: SERIOUS.
is itself a tip-off.

The purpose of philosophy is
HUMOR
at least in my mind.

And even as I punish myself
—how could I have forgotten
something so... primary...?—
I have to chuckle a bit.

Of course I would forget that.
I was swept away, just as we all
are sometimes swept away.

Hah!
How ridiculous.
How...

ironic.

Letter of Rejection

Mr. Daniel,

It is with great joy that we inform you that your work will not be published in our journals.

Or anywhere else, if we can help it.

Our editor printed a copy, wiped his ass with it, shredded it, burned it, pissed on the ashes and swore at it.

In fact, we have taken steps to ensure that your computer will crash after you read this email and I can assure you that you now have genital warts.

Please do not curse us by continuing to submit work that makes us, the best literary minds in the business, wish we'd never been born. You have no talent, no knack, no rhythm or rhyme or reason to be read, by any audience, under any circumstances, ever.

Fuck you.

With the Utmost Sincerity,

The Literary World

Thoughts on Returning to School

Before I started back up to school, I thought it would be humiliating, or even demeaning to go to freshman or community college entry level classes. While it's true that this may eventually be the case, I want the record to show that I've attended both of the classes and feel great--it's wonderful to be in the classroom, even as a student instead of as a teacher.

I like the experience of mastering new topics, and I like it well enough to skip the CLEP option for free credit in biology and chemistry. I'll know those subjects even better than I do currently when it comes time to apply them in medical school. I looked around my basic statistics course earlier and couldn't help but feel contempt, at the beginning of the day. My emotional state was caused by years of philosophy major jokes that I had taken too personally, jokes that made me feel as if continuing my education constituted some sort of admission of failure. And frankly, all of that just sort of vanished as we started working through the material.

I don't feel as if I've failed at all. I feel as if I'm a resource to my fellow students and a favorite of my teachers; I feel as though my experience has placed me into a position where I am benefiting myself and others by being fully present and focused.

The courses are slow, but when I tried math the first time I thought the same thing and made bad grades because I got sloppy in my haste. This time feels like I'm trying to set a high score or something. It feels as if the going to school part is something I've completely mastered and my goal is to earn 100% of the points in every class, every semester.

I feel truly fortunate to have professors to guide me in this endeavor—the biotech company was basically this same enterprise without them, and it was even slower and far more tedious and I made mistakes at times that nobody else present was even qualified to spot, much less help to rectify. And so, holding as it were, all of the cards, I return at the ripe old age of 35 to the future I probably should have run toward at the beginning, when I was much younger.

I've enjoyed the detour, though.

If you're reading this and you're still a student, I hope some of what I've said here translates into a shift in your attitude toward school. If you're thinking about going back, do it without shame. And if you're done for good and never plan to return, just remember to keep learning and helping people. That's what feels good in life in general. I just like doing it in a classroom for some reason. Feels like being on a team somehow.

Mes, At Ease

I love to write;
but I must say
I find it pleasing,
at the end of the day

When on occasion
I sit down to write
and find that there
are no pressing

—*matters*—

to attend to,
at the forefront of my
mind.

Subconscious uncluttered,
I quietly sit,
proximal to an empty page.

Sometimes I slouch,
then sit upright
Try to channel up my inner sage.

What does this mind,
so *at ease*,
have to say to the rest
of the *mes*?

Happiness, Part 2

How does one arrive at this wonderful mental state Aristotle refers to as *eudaimonia*? First, one needs to avoid failure to whatever extent that is possible. None of us is ever likely to experience the perfect life of contemplative bliss, so we need to acknowledge from the beginning that our goal is to do as well as we can, not to be perfect. This involves choosing the right goal at the right time for the right reason and acknowledging our failures so that we do not become hung up on them. Secondly, we have to execute actions to bring that goal about. For Aristotle, there are two ways to fail: excess and deficiency. Both of these failures come from the inadequacy of one's own application of reason to the world, or to one's own situation.

There are hang-ups, here, however—say one lives in a society which is not good. In this case, for Aristotle, it is impossible to be good, which in turn makes the virtues necessary for our ability to engage in the activity of happiness impossible. If happiness is a thoughtful activity in which the objects of our contemplation make sense to us, which allows our understanding to bring us pleasure, this seems reasonable enough because confounding social or environmental considerations which make this impossible are easy to imagine.

We all have an inherent obligation to improve our societies and environments so as to make happiness more feasible. One example of the impossibility of happiness from the text runs thus: if a virtuous man is tortured by being torn apart on the rack, it is impossible to consider him happy, despite his virtue. This problem is referred to by Aristotle as the incompleteness of virtue.

Behaving virtuously means addressing one's own goal (*telos*) rationally by obtaining the right amount of what we want: "...we must get a theoretical grasp on the fact that states like [strength and health] are naturally ruined by deficiency and excess..." This involves the virtue of prudence insofar as it requires us to choose only what we need, but there are also external factors such as luck and our social circumstances which need to go well for us to reach *eudaimonia*.

A good person stuck in Nazi Germany in 1942 would not be very happy, despite virtue of character—in this case, the virtues of character would put such a person into direct conflict with society, resulting in pain which would then prevent happiness. For example, Anne Frank's benefactors were likely torn between grief and anxiety at the possibility of being discovered, despite their conviction that harboring Anne was the right thing to do.

It is important to remember that no one is likely to be able to be happy all the time. Someone who harbored a Jewish fugitive during World War II might experience happiness years later by recollecting the events of that time, but only when the focus strayed from the tremendous evil humankind was capable of committing.

Similarly, a person afflicted by terrible luck would be unable to reach *eudaimonia* because of the cruelty of circumstance. Imagine how it would feel if, no matter how hard you tried to achieve some goal, a matter of luck repeatedly prevented you from doing what you started out to accomplish. The repeated experience of pain associated with unlucky events would render the contemplative state of *eudaimonia* unreachable.

Thoughts Unbidden

Thoughts, concepts, ideas
Unbidden they spring to mind
any time the hand and eye
find an object for themselves...

Like rain,
They patter against the brow

Running down,
bouncing and splashing off of

The oil-coated orifice of the
busy
busy mind.

Like a rain-barrel,
this page collects a few of them.

Useless

Perhaps life isn't meant
to be written down:
maybe all our efforts to do
Justice to it
fail for good reason.

But if we assume that,
doesn't writing become
a different sort
of useless thing,
designed to be itself,
experienced (!)
rather than to produce
a written copy of whatever
meaningful, component of

life itself

these chumps and hacks
would seek to codify
for us to consume?

The Investor

It was a Friday in August in Austin, Texas, and the sun had become downright vengeful. As Louis walked down the street, heat waves danced up from the pavement and the whole world seemed to simmer.

Louis ignored the other pedestrians on the street, staring down at his cellphone instead. He had recently downloaded a new app he was very excited about. Cryptovest, as it was called, enabled small business owners to issue stock to anyone in exchange for capital which could then be used to develop the business, expand it, or even just keep the doors open awhile longer.

The app had been out for several months at this point and the initial hubbub had died down considerably. Local businesses had almost unilaterally joined in, however, and the free flow of capital represented by the share price of a given bar or restaurant was the subject of many conversations.

Louis arrived at his destination: The Tributary Bar & Grill. It was a rustic, slightly dingy venue with a two-story external façade made of brick which rested behind a southern style two-story porch. The first floor was the bar, and the second floor housed a few small offices. The patios extended around the side of the large structure and into the back, where a large deck spanned several times the width of the patio on the first floor.

The Tributary was a local watering hole whose source of novelty involved a small stream flowing through the patio area before cascading down into the newly renovated Sabine River. As he walked through the venue to the rear patio, he reflected upon the strange and likely stupid decision he had made earlier to purchase \$1000 worth of stock in this ugly little antique bar and grill.

The stream was definitely a bit out of place. A few feet deep at its deepest, the slow-flowing stream had been diverted from a point of origin which was now fenced off. It was spanned by a wooden bridge and surrounded on each side by a wooden deck. A screen covered the top part of the waterfall, ostensibly to prevent any trash or discarded beer cans from polluting the river, and a country band played on a stage at the far side of the creek adjacent to a small dancing area which was faced by the stage and had no tables.

Louis ordered a beer and sat down in a questionable-looking wooden chair at one of the wooden tables in the seating area across the stream from the band to conduct a cursory review of the establishment's financials on the Cryptovest app he had installed on his cell phone. They weren't great—his decision to purchase had been heavily influenced by a low share price and the possibility of a substantial return if the management was able to use the new money to build a more solid business. Judging by the tattooed waitstaff, however, Louis felt less than confident in the management's ability to do anything at all.

"Hey, how are ya?" asked a rather gruff voice from the table next to where Louis had chosen to sit.

"I'm good, how about you?" Louis replied without looking up.

"I'm good. Haven't seen a shirt that nice in this place... well, ever," the voice conceded. "What brings you out?" it continued.

“I have a new app. I decided to invest in this place on Cryptovest because it was cheap, but I thought it would be country and instead it seems almost... punk.” Louis grimaced, making eye contact with his interlocutor for the first time.

The large man had opted to cut the sleeves from his t-shirt for some reason. His exposed biceps were large and covered in tattoos. Louis felt intimidated but tried to keep his anxiety in check.

“Do you come here often?” Louis stammered, sensing an irritation in the stranger’s steely gaze.

“I do. Maybe you aren’t the clientele this place is looking for,” the man shrugged, pointing to Louis’s clothing.

“Hey, these are nice clothes,” Louis protested. He was wearing his best loafers, a pair of khaki shorts, and a Hawaiian shirt he was proud of.

This drew an audible laugh from a few of the big man’s friends who had gathered around, and then Louis leaned back in his chair, feigning relaxation despite his social anxiety and looking again at his phone. One of the chair legs gave an audible crack, and Louis tried—too late—to regain his balance.

Louis fell backwards in his chair, landing on the edge of the deck. He tried to catch himself, but his hands missed the wood. He overbalanced, continuing to fall beyond the deck and into the stream, into the screen. The chicken wire gave a mild amount of protest, but it was merely stapled into the wood and could not support the sudden weight thrust upon it. It gave way, staples flying outward, and Louis went over the waterfall to guffaws from above.

When he emerged from the Sabine River, Louis had lost both loafers and his phone. His beer bottle was full of water, but he had somehow held onto it the entire time. He tossed the bottle into a trash can and sighed, listening to a fresh peal of laughter from above. He hung his head and started the long walk home. It would take almost an hour to reach his apartment.

Louis awoke the next morning without his alarm going off. His cell phone had served that function in the past, and without it, he slept well into mid-morning. It was about 11:00 when he made his first cup of coffee, and he entered the cell phone store at noon. Louis explained his situation and paid \$200 for a new cell phone, settling for a crappy android one. His first action as he walked home was to download Cryptovest so that he could sell his shares of the Tributary Bar & Grill—and he was shocked to see the shares had more than tripled in price.

Selling his \$3241 in stock made for a solid gain, but the notification icon flashed a few seconds after the transaction had posted. Louis tapped the icon:

You Have A New Gift From XXXXXXXX

Wow! You had the best 24-hour performance in the history of Cryptovest! How did you manage a 325% return?

-XXXXXXXX

Louis stared at the screen, mystified. He closed the popup window. Immediately, his inbox icon flashed again. He waited a few moments, then tapped it. His inbox had 20 messages in it, and the number was growing in real time. He watched it hit 50, then 125, then 250.

Louis knew it was possible to send a gift of \$25 or more to someone and track what that person did with their money from then on, but he'd never heard of anyone receiving hundreds of donations in such a short period of time. If everyone had made the minimum donation, he had just received well more money than he had made in his short-term investment. He clicked over to his crypto token account and watched his balance climb beyond \$15,000 worth of tokens. His actual 24-hour return was over 1500%.

Soon, he began receiving messages from friends. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Signal all had badged icons. The phone began to ring, announcing a caller: Madeleine.

"Hello?" Louis said into the microphone.

"Louis! You have to open YouTube right now! What were you doing at that dive bar last night anyway? Are you okay?" a voice yelled.

Louis hung up the call, but the phone started ringing again. He silenced the ringer, sending the new caller to voicemail, and navigated to the YouTube app. In Top Videos, a familiar sight appeared. The title of the video was Epic Water Fall. Tapping on it, he was surprised to see over 8 million on the view counter. It looked like the scene from the Tributary, and as the video began to play, he realized someone had recorded his fall the night before.

The video started with a man making a funny face, then after an audible crack, the camera operator pivoted just in time to catch Louis fall through the wire litter screen and into the Sabine River. After Louis had disappeared, the camera pivoted back to the original subject, who was making a new face, somewhere on that genuine spectrum between shock and mirth.

Louis's own face contorted a bit as he watched the video, first once and then twice. In the comments below it, a user identified the locale as the Tributary Bar & Grill—this must be the source of Louis's gains on the Cryptovest app!

Louis laughed out loud, still making his way home from the cell phone store, it dawned upon him that the internet's collective attention paid suddenly and completely to the Tributary Bar & Grill had directly caused his healthy profit. He navigated back to Cryptovest, an idea forming in his mind. It probably wasn't possible to manufacture this sort of success, but maybe...

Times When

My parents are not fans of times when
I may or may not hit the drink
I come downtown and try my best
To avoid my urge to think

A broken nose, one night
Crashed car, the next
sometimes it seems like I was never
able to take it on the chin

But then I wonder,
what they might think
if they knew about all the
things I was drowning

down here,
downtown.

Nietzsche: Controversial Readings

I must admit that, when I bought Ronald Beiner's book, *Dangerous Minds*, I did it with an axe to grind. A short review praised the work and concluded that Nietzsche should be approached with care—a meaningless conclusion! I decided to see the book for myself, use it to develop my own approach to Nietzsche, and possibly respond.

In October 2018 I published a blog entry with my book publisher about the weakness of the thought in general on the right and the unforgivable offenses committed by weak-minded right-wing thinkers who wish to destroy the philosopher's standing by tying themselves to him and depending upon their audience to never read his books.

Beiner's critique involves a more academic approach which hinges around this concept of Nietzsche as some sort of primitivist right-wing ideologue who is dangerous because he says bad things about liberalism. In this short essay, I intend to shred that stance entirely.

I do agree with Beiner about the difficulties facing modern liberalism, and I find my youthful interest in the moribund philosophy of Martin Heidegger strangely perverse after becoming convinced by Sarah Bakewell that he was in fact a Nazi—if a deeply conflicted one.

In fact, I suppose I have two goals in this piece: to refine and redirect Beiner's reading of Nietzsche, which I see as being a typical leftist one, and to suggest an alternative to his inkling that fear is warranted or needed as a response to recent political developments. We should be reading more Nietzsche, not less.

Nietzsche's Background: An Angry Philosopher

Friedrich Nietzsche, a former soldier and son of a priest, was appointed to the faculty at Basel when he was only twenty-four years old. A widely acclaimed pupil, he was celebrated as a prodigy—which, of course, went south rapidly after he published *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* in 1872. The ensuing emotional torment must have been quite hard on Nietzsche, who had great expectations after all. His years of study, his revolutionary writing style, his genius... all of these factors combined to make him an extremely confident young professional philosopher, and the emotional fallout from his rejection at the hands of the establishment can only have been sharpened by these circumstances, which combined with his deteriorating health to make life difficult, painful, and short for him.

It is a bit strange to encounter a book like Beiner's, which purports to be about reading Nietzsche, and which discusses history to a fairly large extent, that does not involve much biography about the man at all. Instead, Beiner seems content to call Nietzsche a right-wing sympathizer and a malcontent without digging around too much to find out, at a minimum, why Nietzsche might have happened to turn out that way. This is an enormous problem for Beiner and anyone inclined to agree with him, as a quick look at the story of the man's life is all that is really needed to completely eviscerate the entire position taken, re: Nietzsche, in *Dangerous Minds*.

The necessary biographical context for Nietzsche's seemingly boundless ego, for example, completely reframes two crucial aspects of his philosophy: for one, it instantly explains the gigantic chip on the man's shoulder; and for another, it enables us to understand why the act of seeing beyond what was common at the time became so utterly central to him—why what was common became such a philosophical problem to him. Truly, there is no more accurate summation of Nietzsche's philosophy than to say that he was annoyed with what had become *common*.

Nietzsche's Radical Aristotelianism

In order to truly understand just how it is possible for a philosopher to criticize the left—as Nietzsche certainly did—without supporting the right—as Nietzsche didn't—it is important to understand the context of the writing in question. Sometimes, the best messages are complex. In fact, this book is written to be complex—entertaining enough to re-read, but deep enough to challenge core concepts such as our deeply ingrained belief that we should be happy all of the time.

Aristotle is perhaps an underrated influence upon Nietzsche, but for the simple reason that he draws so little criticism it can be inferred that there is at least a dearth of hostility between the two. Further, Nietzsche's technique is, at its core, a profoundly Aristotelian one. He is deeply engaged with the writings of his fellows, indeed, in some cases, even with their music, but beyond this there is a breadth to his interests which is certainly out of sync with the modern trend toward analytical focus. His work, *The Gay Science*, inspired this one, with its prelude in rhymes and appendix in songs!

This observation may or may not be apparent to my reader right away, but the key characteristic of Aristotle's philosophy is simply how well-read the man was in conjunction with the wide array of topics he was thusly well-read in. The stylistic parallel between him and Nietzsche may not seem like much, but considering Nietzsche's talents for philology and deep thought, it is arguably more significant than it frequently gets credit for.

An unexpected yet important name to add to this discussion is Alasdair MacIntyre, whose work on virtue ethics gives a definite character to the lack of agency people feel after the Enlightenment, which Nietzsche is critical of. Beiner does not seem to understand this criticism, citing it as a primary reason to include Nietzsche among thinkers on the right—but this is missing the point. Beiner's main argument is that Nietzsche's criticism of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, in addition to his occasional rants against Martin Luther, makes him a conservative and places him in line with movements which seek to overthrow the modern liberal order that has arisen from precisely these moments in history.

For the purpose of analogy, we can certainly agree MacIntyre is no Nazi sympathizer—yet his resounding critique of the moral poverty of the Enlightenment is something Beiner should be able to easily relate to. In fact, in the conclusion of his work, Beiner comes close to making a point MacIntyre himself might be accused of agreeing with him about: post-Enlightenment Western society has plenty of negative freedom, but very little positive freedom. We lack the cultural unity we need to effectively orient our lives around something meaningful. Observing this fact does not place one into a particular category on the political spectrum of belief.

We conceive of politics as oscillation between the popular left-wing ideology and the popular right-wing ideology without ever taking much time to evaluate the goals these political machines are designed to serve. MacIntyre, like Beiner, and like Nietzsche himself, observes that a certain vacuum has opened in the time after the death of God—and indeed, this vacuum is what is hypothetically being addressed by movements such as the alt-right. Unfortunately, the alt-right is incapable of honesty, integrity, or even lucid thought. Beyond these issues, untenable race positions and corrupt issue politics completely ruin the movement for anyone capable of seeing what it actually is.

This climate is hostile—the resurgence of far-right politics seems to be continuing with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, Brexit, and the corruption which still runs rampant through the federal government of the United States itself (for an example of this, just look at the impeachment and

acquittal of Donald Trump). However, in observing—and lamenting—these unfortunate details of our political economy, we neglect to attend to its purpose. It is to allow nations to communicate with one another, to ensure citizens' freedom, and to provide for the collective welfare of the populations they serve, that governments exist.

Liberal individualism has been very popular and extremely powerful for a very long time. Entrenched hegemonies have evolved, problems have emerged, philosophers have written books, and at the end of the day, conservatism rears its ugly head even in books like Beiner's, MacIntyre which ostensibly should be free to push the envelope and get creative.

Unfortunately, Beiner is not terribly creative and seems to completely fail to understand that, at least for Nietzsche, it is possible for a thinker to decry the worth of the Enlightenment as insufficient and lament the shortcomings of the French Revolution without endorsing a return to the time before them! Nietzsche frequently questioned the value of philosophy, after all, which should result in his cessation of practice if criticism of one view necessitated support for its opposite.

Instead, Nietzsche's position simply was that of a polemical, angry, emotionally invested anthropologist. How disgusting of humankind to have still not gotten it right! The Enlightenment and the French Revolution were moments which did not buck the established trends hard enough for Nietzsche. Note that, when we begin our reading with the disinterested third-party perspective in mind, the criticism no longer seems to lend any support to the opposite of the position we criticize. In fact, Nietzsche frequently criticized his contemporary German tradition of racial hatred and extolled the virtues of the Jews—both of which actions would have been unthinkable to a good German reactionary of the time.

No, Nietzsche did not belong to the far right. He was something else entirely, and if his criticism of the egalitarian modern left is something right-wing politicians want to seize upon, we should let them do that. Why? Because more people will read Nietzsche if they do, and Nietzsche's thought will convince them that being a self-serving nihilistic right-wing weakling is not such a good idea after all. Nietzsche's radical application of Aristotelian methods yielded a philosophy of critique which was so alien to its contemporaries that the secondary literature still fails to adequately address it almost a century and a half later.

Nietzsche's Politics

Contrary to Beiner's stance, Nietzsche was avowedly apolitical, at least by the time he wrote *The Gay Science*. Note that a book about the science of happiness is a distinctively Aristotelian nod. His audience consisted of thinkers and highly educated European readers Nietzsche wanted to teach philology to—so we can safely say he wrote for himself. But his position was that the person living the life of the mind should not be a particularly political person, having bigger fish to fry, so to speak. And this is a fairly reasonable position. It is not a call to avoid the ballot box, but rather an urge to look for something higher to pay allegiance to, rather than petty squabbling.

Unfortunately for Nietzsche, he lived during a dark period in German history which saw the rise of antisemitism, of vulgar political action designed to divide the German populace upon the basis of race, and the conservatism which saw his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, shot down and badly received probably stemmed from the groupthink mentality of the day—which might explain some of Nietzsche's aversion to politics.

When a thinker like Beiner engages Nietzsche, he pulls Nietzsche out of the 1870s-80s and brings him to 2016, then interrogates him as if he were newly graduated from high school. This is not only inappropriate, but it is also probably the most dangerous way to approach a thinker who wrote in bygone times. Beiner should instead be praising Nietzsche for taking his stand against the dilapidated German liberal machine which sought to oppress him and other talented thinkers who opted out of telling people what they wanted to hear!

The decision to opt out of the humdrum newspaper political cycle, for Nietzsche, is a rebellion unto itself: it is a decision which causes poverty with respect to trends, isolation with respect to one's peers due to the fact that one now has less to discuss with them, and—strikingly—clarity of vision in all matters political. When we focus upon the big ideas, the histories, the philosophical components of our world, it becomes possible to understand its workings with less daily input. In fact, one could say we need less analysis from our news sources because we do that part of it ourselves. A few facts can keep an informed mind abreast of whatever civic duty one feels obliged to conduct. In Nietzsche's day, this was largely the same—but instead of Facebook and Twitter, the newspaper was the medium for the unimportant squabbles and squawks of outrage.

Not that everyone is capable of functioning on this level. Beiner does not seem to realize that it is highly unlikely that Nietzsche's conception of nobility was any sort of goal for wider humanity. In his eyes, most people were stupid and petty and deserved to be treated badly. He was a damaged, flawed thinker whose amazing brilliance in critique and in vision make him an amazing investment for anyone willing to take the time to truly understand him. Beiner's point about Nietzsche angling to return to noble society is fundamentally mistaken because it takes a description and infers from it a prescription—instead, Nietzsche is making an effort to comfort himself, and presumably his audience as well, by explaining why anti-intellectualism is so rampant despite the prevalence of the liberal order that was supposed to have fixed this.

The famous Nietzschean remarks about nobility, strength, brutality—these all involve two interesting equations: one which ties strength of hand to strength of mind, and a second which bonds the uneducated masses to the masses of smaller, weaker peasants of antiquity. Nietzsche's academic struggle involved a strong, powerful mind being held back—killed, even—by a cohort of smaller, weaker spirits whose violent opposition was predicated solely upon the rejection of anything recognizably different from their own thinking. They did this because they felt threatened, which would not have happened, Nietzsche reasoned, if they were not weak. And he was right. That is why we remember Nietzsche, but not those who held him back.

From great mathematicians who starved to death to the brutality of Alan Turing's chemical castration, great thinkers are almost always badly mistreated. Society—even the vastly improved liberal democratic society we have and love today—is not set up to recognize intellectual talent and support it. Neither is it continually ready to reorganize itself around the ideas these thinkers produce. Perhaps technology will allow us to change this—a fact the hyperactivity of the right seems to highlight, even when right-wing politicians use technological innovations to outperform their center-left competition. However, there is also a dearth of appealing candidates on the left. Politics seems to be changing, and it is likely that we cannot appreciate all of the new developments that are currently under way.

Still, it is not acceptable that intelligent, capable people are forced into lines of work which do not allow them to exercise, develop, and discover their gifts. Precious as liberalism is to all of us, it has not yet solved all of the problems it was intended to address. Nietzsche's only real political point was that we need to do better about that. The irony of right-wing thinkers attempting to use Nietzsche to shore up their own positions is that they poison themselves: their weakness of mind will not allow them to understand that, by quoting him and citing his texts, they invite their greatest enemy into the heart of their organizations. Despite the superficial layers of viciousness and anger, Nietzsche's texts remain a bulwark to shore up liberal democracy as well as an incentive to better it—when we take the time to read him at his own level and put in the considerable effort it takes to understand him.

Better Days

What is it to have a good day?
Let's take it slow.
A good life is something we all want...
couldn't it be so that having a good
series of days was the
best way to get there?

In my job,
I justify my efforts as an
equity-incentive-based
marshmallow experiment.
I live on a tiny salary in an
expensive city because I
chose a greater reward I will
—allegedly—
receive upon completion of my task.

However, I am frequently upset about
financial and
female concerns
predicated upon an ultimate lack
of resources.
I need to pay my debts and
have the means to
entertain the high level
people I've been attracting!
Money is the only thing that
still seems to be missing!

As I've conquered the other major obstacles,
lack of skill,
lack of experience,
and lack of occupation,
I've frequently experienced a sort of
eudaimonic joy—the joy
of overcoming obstacles within as well as
without the self.
I published a book,
then a philosophical treatise,
after all those university essays.

I earned an advanced degree, then taught, then built a company.

These goals, stories
we tell ourselves,
can make us miserable.
But over a long term,
our success in achieving them
is a way to build real
meaning and joy into our lives.

On the subject of achieving a good day today,
then, let it be said that taking a step
in a direction
you've freely chosen
because it seems best to you
is perhaps the most likely way to
produce the result
you want:
a good day today.

The Swing of Epicurus

What is it, that shows up, karmically, when we sin and experience discomfort as a result? Without going too far into the scientific publications, we can actually engage the neurosciences on this subject and discover a somewhat surprising result: There is absolutely empirical evidence to support a philosophical position regarding indulgence and the consequences of it. I will refer to this view of pleasure and consequential pain as the Swing of Epicurus.

Relatively little is known of Epicurus, as almost nothing he wrote has survived. Though writers such as Diogenes Laertius and Cicero report on Epicurus to varying degrees, the man himself is nowhere near as interesting as the key concept which we can derive from his philosophical works. Said to initially number over 300 including letters, books, and other writings, only three letters survive unto the present day. As such, a bit of context is necessary to explain the significance of Epicurean thinking in modern times.

One of the main things we see in Aristotle is the drive to penetrate below the surface, or as Pierre Hadot might say, behind the veil of Isis. The drive to discover the principles which govern the behavior of observable objects and people is what leads to ethics as a course of study, and to science, as well as many of the pseudoscientific schools of thought that have arisen. We think of the sciences as more effective in pursuit of this end than the pseudosciences, and in this lie the beginnings of a understanding of what good science entails.

However, for Epicurus, the key point is that Aristotelian thinking led to a direct observation: pleasure leads to pain. Even the most extreme ecstasy conditions the mind of the person experiencing it to expect more the next moment—and pain is nothing more than the absence of pleasure! Hence, the basic experience of a temporary pleasure is *guaranteed* to cause pain in the near future. This is the Swing of Epicurus—you push on one side, and there is an equal and opposite reaction the other way.

In practice, the Swing of Epicurus can work the opposite way, too. Saving up for a vacation, or spending difficult hours in the gym, we sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term benefit, and most of the evidence suggests that this does in fact make us happier.

The analogue of this concept which ties directly into empirically valid research (as proven by researchers such as Kent Berridge & Terry Robinson²) is a simple enough one for us to grasp: dopaminergic neurons (read: neurons which activate in response to dopamine, a neurotransmitter tied to motivation) activate in a relatively simple Pavlovian way. The brain predicts a particular outcome based upon a situation, and dopamine is released proportional to the last, similar situation. If the outcome is a good one, the association becomes stronger and still more dopamine is released the next time something similar happens. If the outcome is less pleasant, the association weakens and less dopamine is released next time.

² See this paper for an example: “Parsing Reward,” (2003) <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/berridge-lab/wp-content/uploads/sites/743/2019/10/Berridge-Robinson-TINS-2003.pdf>

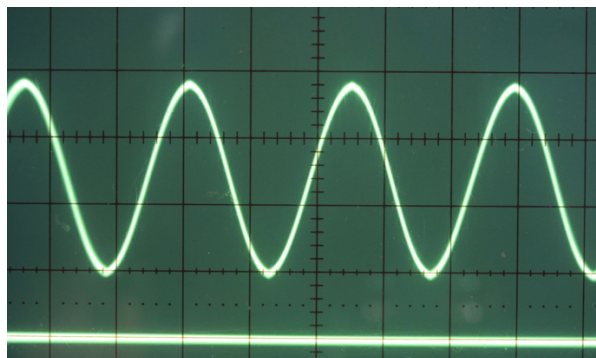
To translate this into Epicurus' model, we simply need to establish that the perceptive philosopher had in fact identified something along the lines of the reward model enumerated by modern researchers such as Berridge and Robinson, and this we cannot explicitly do because we cannot go and find quotes from Epicurean texts to support the claim. Nonetheless, we can take a quick look at the anecdotes which have survived Epicurus' texts to infer a general structure of the man's thought.

As opposed to the typical view of hedonism (which Aristotle argues compellingly against in the *Nicomachean Ethics*), Epicurean hedonism seems to take a bit more interest in the sort of empirical, cause-and-effect relationships between events which Aristotle became famous for popularizing.

In Epicurean hedonism, pleasure is what is sought—but not a maximum amount of short-term pleasure. Instead, the Epicureans among us modulate our pleasure consumption. Rather than eating one marshmallow today, an Epicurean might wait to receive three. Or, perhaps, avoid marshmallows altogether to eat simpler, less tasty food and maintain a more attractive figure.

The Aristotelian view of the virtues calls prudence the highest form of human virtue because it entails making good choices, which then lead to the natural development of other virtues. A devout Aristotelian would decry the idea that hedonism, the thought that pleasure was what was best, as outright foolish due to the fact that some pleasures are not choiceworthy and thus could not uphold the primary virtue of prudence in those who chose them.

An Epicurean could respond by arguing that prudence, in fact, *demand*ed hedonism because there is no other way to delineate the choiceworthiness of some pleasures and not others! In fact, the Epicurean view of pleasure is one tinged with prudence. The goal of an Epicurean would be to minimize the pushes and pulls of pleasure and pain to ensure long-term growth over short-term instability.



Picture a sine wave. If you've done it correctly, you should have a repeating pattern which oscillates between a peak and a trough. If the peaks are higher and the troughs are lower, the shape becomes more jagged—but if the peaks decrease and the troughs increase, the curve becomes more flat.

Now, if we make a chart by asking people to tell us how happy they are on a scale of one to ten, and plot the points on a graph, there is little chance we will end up with a perfect sine wave. However, the interesting thought here stands anyway: nights of drinking, risky romances, fast driving, poor hygiene, diet, and fitness; each represents a short-term gain and a longer-term loss in terms of the pleasantness of each moment relative to the last.

Kids hate to brush their teeth because it demands that they attend to hygiene instead of fun for a few moments. Drinking is a relaxing way to blow off steam and connect with friends. Risky romance occasionally yields excellent sex, but generally has negative emotional consequences. Continuously choosing to stay lost in the task at hand at the expense of fitness can yield results at work for a time, but will always come back to haunt us later as our muscles shrink and our fat reserves increase.

Epicurus simply advocated a generally Aristotelian framework which, rather than dismiss pleasure and hedonism out of hand, enumerated the concept of choiceworthiness among pleasures into a quite elaborate framework. As the human mind and brain become even more well-understood, and as researchers such as Berridge and Robinson continue to discover, the link between pleasure and prudence will become even more instructive as a guidepost for us to measure how well we're doing.

The Epicurean good life was one of simple food, good friends, and an aversion to excess and deficiency. Instead of excessive drinking and sex, an Epicurean would choose instead to spend time with a consistent group of decent people who avoided such activities. While the Epicurean life may thus seem quieter and hence somewhat less able to provide its practitioners with as many entertaining stories, the true fact of the matter is that life gets a bit bigger when we relax from the desire to indulge in excess.

We can become more aware of the world around us, of the projects humanity is undertaking at scale and the role we play in these, when we stop blinding ourselves with temporary pleasures and pursuits of the next high. For the Epicurean, then, the sine wave we are imagining should not be jagged and unpredictable, but rather smooth and with a tendency to increase over time.

The Swing of Epicurus is thus a tool we can use conceptually to encourage ourselves to be more prudent in choosing what to do, and it also serves as a sort of training device which can lead to increasing benefits over time if we employ it correctly. This is quite sensible when we conceive of what it must mean to live a prudent life—there are few things out of order, and as the understanding grows, so too does the enjoyment we derive from what can only really be fully understood as better luck—we become more comfortable in our homes and in our world, and it becomes more comfortable with us, so we become, in turn, happier.

Dopamine

To understand dopamine is to know
that from a biological standpoint,
cocaine is the meaning of life.
The world is an illusion, all that MATTERS
is getting what you want... which is
...cocaine.

What is a relationship then? Why?
How can we ever be happy?!

Epicurus had it figured out. Want less,
take less, suffer less, enjoy less, control
more.

Miserable people are in shitty relationships,
great relationships, marriages of all sorts, single;
the one thing we all have in common is that
being stable can breed enjoyment over time.

Happiness, Part 3

When we have successfully achieved something, we generally remember what things were like beforehand. Hence, a New Year's resolution to lose weight can be depressing if it is never met, but it can also be quite fulfilling to contemplate the change if we manage to stick it out and get in shape.

There is one strange logical twist here, though. When we go to the gym four days per week all year, hoping to get into shape, our goal is never just to be happy. Or to feel pleasure in itself—this is the reason Aristotle thinks hedonism is a flawed school of thinking. Rather, we have an independent, logical, aim: to feel better, to look better, to get results we can see.

This is why Aristotle says that pleasure can be seen to supervene upon successful action. When we do something good for ourselves, we can spend a moment looking back and comparing the way things used to be to the way they are now.

The simple act of making a positive change is a source of pleasure, but the pleasure itself does not imply that the action is good. Aristotle's critique of hedonism—hedonism is flawed because it argues that pleasure itself is what is good—explains the missing link between choiceworthy pleasure and pleasure that is not choiceworthy. Aristotle believes that we are attracted to pleasure because pleasure is what we experience alongside the good, when we do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. Indeed, not all pleasures are choiceworthy (pleasure derived from lustful activity or drugs, for example, can be pleasant but not good for us), and this is a major problem for anyone who says that pleasure and what is good are the same.

Falling, Anyway

Falling in love is always a heart-stopping cascade of positive emotions that hang in the white space between declarations of the power of the moment.

We want to sing, but we got burned for doing that last time this happened to us... so we declare “Not Again,” and resist the force that pulls us, compels us to just let it happen anyway.

Bukowski Said

Bukowski said a poem is what happens
when nothing else can.

This must be why I'm writing this one.
The little blonde who stole
my heart has run away
with it.

Hidden it from me,
somewhere I'm not.

The other women don't seem
particularly bummed out,
but I guess they might be
concealing their feelings
from me for some reason.

Why, tonight, there's a peculiar
sort of drunken loneliness
in the air, following me like a
cloud

of smog, or fog, or rain.

My belly aches, but it is not
for the forgotten love that I hunger.
Instead, I would settle
for company.

Supposing Truth is a Woman— What Then?

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) is one of the most controversial philosophers in the history of the art. He began his publishing career in 1872 with a book called *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* which rapidly made him one of the least popular philosophers in Europe. These days, regrettably, Nietzsche is most widely known as a straw man held up by political right-wing actors who claim to be supported by his works. This state of affairs is the genesis of many essays, such as this one, which attempt to exhume Nietzsche's flamboyant spirit and wrest his likeness from the hands of Nazis, fascists, and other weak minds both within and without academia.

The most striking aspect of Nietzschean thought is the recursion which develops in it during his later writings, most particularly in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. *Zarathustra* is a story told in a fantastic and strange way. It is the birthplace of the *Übermensch*, the characterization of the super-man or overman whose creation humanity seems to be striving toward. Nietzsche is quite sardonic in his telling of this tale, using a tongue-in-cheek style that forces a wary reader to think about the value of *my* life, as a human being, unavoidably raising the personal question of value in a life spent in pursuit of something better to come later.

It is precisely this recursive rhetorical device which allows Nietzsche's writings to become poison to the weak while remaining food for the strong—a weak man, similar to a minor in the later writings of Kant, cannot function autonomously; hence weak Nietzsche readers go on about the overman while strong, free-thinking readers recognize this anecdote as the paradox it is. *Beyond Good and Evil* is itself a much more clearly self-reflective work, a work which functions as a sort of codex to the rest of the body of Nietzsche's thought. A clear difference is observable between works such as these and *The Birth of Tragedy*, whose novel insights do not seem to clearly touch German society in the way Nietzsche later wanted to but rather find a focus upon the politics of the ancients.

Unfortunately for many would-be Nietzsche enthusiasts from far-right circles, it does take a significant amount of time to develop a deep understanding of the Nietzschean thought process. What falls out of this understanding is in every sense Nietzsche's: a deeply caustic rejection of social philosophies which to any extent contradict liberal individualism. Strength needs no parade! Indeed, the very stance one must take to write in the polemical style Nietzsche takes up itself implies a deep embrace of the right of the individual to critique the group. And critique the group, he did! In some places it is still argued that the University of Basel paid Nietzsche a stipend not to teach, though sources such as the reputable Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy still maintain that the primary motivation behind the separation Nietzsche underwent from the university involved his health, mainly.

Questionable Questions

This essay gets its title from a favorite aphorism of the author's, to be found in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*. "Supposing truth is a woman—what then?" By inviting his audience to question the very character of the goal of philosophical investigation, Nietzsche brings an important point home: the relevance of truth itself is contingent upon the end we would use said truth in service of.

In the age of Donald Trump, the age of Russian misinformation, the age of Brexit, a phrase from this preface strikes home with an accuracy Nietzsche himself could likely never have foreseen. The "strange, wicked, questionable questions" which compel us to search for truth are still visible in the political realm many have taken to describing as a "post-truth" world. The only reason it seems to modern thinkers that many have abandoned truth is that the vast majority of subjugated mankind has never had any use for it—leaders upon pedestals and social identities replace truth for them. What we're really up against is the sudden and massive realization that this has been going on all along.

Nietzsche realizes that we need to understand the world as it is before we begin to act intelligently in it. However, the simple truth of the matter is in many cases "we do not yet know for certain"—cases which involve such phenomena as the specific outcomes of climate change, or the impact of a trade war upon international relations. Questionable questions such as "can we be certain that climate change is a threat today?" seem to demand a higher standard for truth than political action ordinarily requires. The move is a subtle one, but it equivocates between what a statistician would refer to as a categorical and a quantitative answer, shifting from facts to degrees with disastrous result. These sorts of questions are well and good from a philosophic standpoint, but when they are employed with an agenda behind them, they become political, even dangerous. With respect to climate change in particular, humankind has used the difficulty of making specific predictions to justify inaction for at least forty years.

Instead of the traditional academic honesty, regarding difficult matters such as these, dogmatism has been put up as an answer to questionable questioning. Regarding climate change, we are instructed that nothing is known—a deep stretch of the position taken by a majority of scientists! And it is easy to connect this unknowing with political inaction. Regarding trade, regarding war, regarding the fate of the Western democracy itself, vast media empires compete for the attention of the masses by vying for the latest, most sensational story—a story which is almost always spun out of the web of a questionable question. The value of untruth is at a premium: only the untrue can support the unjust!

And how profitable these enterprises are. Seeking truth as a freethinker or as a philosopher is not a lifestyle choice anyone should freely make, as truth itself becomes increasingly an economic liability. The masses of humanity depend for their survival upon group membership, not critical thinking. When the question is whether to eat or not, we overwhelmingly (and correctly) choose to eat, sense in politics be damned.

Nietzsche's Solution

Instead of seeking the truth in issue politics as liberals in the vein of Beiner do, where the questionable questions asked serve only as hooks to catch the public by the eye, an educated populace must rather strive toward the immediate surroundings which we each possess on our

own, without the “aid” of the political circus our news-media insists upon spoon-feeding to us. Political minds such as the American Koch brothers employ scripts designed to directly target the affect of a predetermined audience. Lower taxes (not much lower, and not for the people being sold on the idea) provide the rationale for the elimination of public transit, but by officials posing questions (“do you want higher taxes, sir?”), millions of people can be manipulated into acting against their own, and their communal, best interests. What questionable questions indeed!

Government of a nation as large as the United States of America, or for that matter the U.K., is prohibitively complex—a sure cavern of Socrates into which to direct the attention of the masses! Truth, untruth—the purpose of political discourse at the national level is to prevent such a discussion from taking place at the local level. Worse, philosophers of contemporary times such as Alexander Dugin actively decry the development of knowledge and seek to pollute the flows of information in order to manipulate the public basis for decision making. Rather than, as Nietzsche might say, confronting an incomplete understanding of the world, these philosophers seek to throw such efforts by the wayside and instead spoon-feed the public with completely comprehensible untruths.

Nietzsche recognized the possibility of such toxic discourse—it is the soul of his famous notion of nihilism, the description which applies to leaders who do not believe the words which pass their lips. Perhaps it was as prevalent in his day as it is in ours. His keen intellect discerned the possibility of widespread public manipulation: “Suppose we want truth: why not rather untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?” In fact, if one’s agenda is dishonest, if one is what Nietzsche termed a *nihilist*, untruth in particular is precisely what allows one to advance in the minds of one’s fellows. If we seek to control others, untruth is of value because it renders predictable the decisions based upon it. Truth, on the other hand, simply lays out a level playing field for the best decisionmaker to win the game.

Collectively, it is best for us if the truth is spread wide, but colloquially, parochially, individually... we can benefit by lying. And benefit more by deceiving more minds.

Nietzsche’s personal answer to this conundrum was a simple one which is strikingly reminiscent of the move Kant made in speaking up for autonomy as the expression of reason: turn away from simplicity. Reject the thesis that life can be easy. Sacrifice economic advancement in the name of intellectual integrity—it’s easy enough to do without dying, if you’re in a position like the one Nietzsche was in, where your basic subsistence is essentially guaranteed. It’s also easy *not to do so* if you’re not independently wealthy. The world is not a kind place to creative thinkers.

In seeking conflict, complexity, and life wherever his scholarship took him, Nietzsche’s polemical individualism made it possible to question everything. Such was, in fact, his un-doing, from the scholarly standpoint, as his works became incomprehensible to his deeply offended—dare we say outclassed?—colleagues, a fact it seems he may have harbored a deep regret for! If nothing else, it seems Nietzsche found himself lonely. Yet it is by virtue precisely of his unpopularity that Nietzsche’s name and books live on into the present day, as it is precisely the clear-thinking virtue of his powerful mind which enabled him to write such astounding philosophy.

Readers of Nietzsche must recognize that the weak spirit is the spirit which does as it is told, as opposed to the strong spirit—which does *as it wishes*. Nietzsche was a powerful mind who wanted to find other powerful minds to spend time with, and though he seems to have failed to do so, his description of the world has provided modern philosophers with endless inspiration. Yet, we must not forget that it also serves as a description of Nietzsche’s political opposition, which he actively labored to rise above.

And it is thus that we find Nietzsche today just as relevant as he ever was—the misinformation culture of the early twenty-first century exists because of the weakness of the people who partake in it. Instead of allowing the populists to claim Nietzsche as their own, readers and thinkers today need to read everything, including Nietzsche’s works, with care. We must be more critical, more questioning, when we read the news—when we cast our ballots. The very soul of individualism itself is at stake in elections across the globe. As populism and authoritarianism rise, many of us will choose the easier option. Political change will follow when more of us can afford the freedom to be ourselves.

It's Funny!

It's funny, isn't it
The myriad of ways
To speak the truth about someone

Take me; I'm a bad
Influencer of sorts of music
Of philosophy, and of ideas

Or take the narratives
That can be told
By other people about my life

To some, I'm an impressive scholar
A bum who doesn't read
A misanthrope, a socialite,
a man without a creed

Or maybe to others
I'm a man without a cause
An anarchist, an ethicist,
Idealist with claws

But in truth the story's hard to tell
Maybe someday I'll find someone
With a message,
here to sell.

To Write

To write is to wait,
To wait is to die.

To publish is to accomplish,
To read is to become accomplice
To the crime that is
Creative work

Or does it?
The publishers only want to sell
To compromise and move copies
Is to end up in hell

Or is it?
The writers want to eat
To eat and to drink and to not have to
Go to work, like the readers do

They want an escape;
To escape is to write.

Anxiety

Anxiety:
a burden,
a crutch,
a raison d'etre.

Awake:
unconscious flesh generates
experience, enriched
by pain and anxiety
and the myriad
things there are to do.

Alive:
an arc,
a complex of waking moments,
a scatter plot.

A life:
the line one draws to
graphically represent the
mathematical average of the
values of the
divergent, indeed,
scattered, points.

The Phantom Knockers

Becky left town on a Saturday, with plans to return the following Wednesday. She loaded her backpack into the trunk of the Uber and was driven off to the airport. There was to be an interview, a great and exciting turn of events, and she believed she just might get the job!

Sam, her husband, was to stay home with the kids. Beck's flight was late Saturday so she could get plenty of rest in before the two-day interview began on Monday. They'd sit around, eating pizza and playing with shaving cream and laughing about silly things on the internet, and when Becky returned, everything would be clean and ready for the big announcement: the family would be moving to Los Angeles. Or the family wouldn't be moving to Los Angeles.

Don't hold your breath, Sam thought.

"Gotcha!" cried Adam, blasting away with his Nerf gun.

Sam smiled at him and pretended to die. At least Adam wasn't glued to his iPad, locked away in the bedroom like his sister was. Allie was a sweet girl, but she didn't have the need for other people that Sam and Adam shared.

Adam ran away, ostensibly to reload his weapon and resume the dad-assault, when there came a knock at the door. Sam always ignored his phone when unknown numbers called, and he certainly wasn't expecting anyone—it was almost bedtime for the kids, after all—but nonetheless, he made his way to the front door and peered out the peep hole.

It didn't look like anyone was there, so he opened the door and flipped on the porch light. After glancing both ways, he headed back inside. Probably just some kids playing one of their dumb games, he thought to himself.

Back inside, he saw he had a text message.

I'm here, safe and sound, the display read. The message was from Becky.

Great! Love you! Sam typed, before snapping a quick picture of Adam with his Nerf gun, gearing up for another assault. Sam sent the picture and text before the dart hit him on the shoulder and he pretended to die again.

He had just put the kids to bed when there was another knock at the door. Louder, and more insistent this time. He went to it again, looked outside, and there was still no one there. He went into the kitchen and got his big heavy flashlight and went out of the house, looked around into the bushes. He glanced across the street, but nothing was out here.

Frustrated, Sam went back inside.

The next week, Becky got home safe and sound. She'd gotten the job, and the family went out to celebrate at a local pizza arcade. The kids were happy to play games while the grownups discussed their upcoming move.

"I just can't wait to get there, to be in L.A. doing L.A. things! We'll have a swimming pool and go to the beach and my job will be soooo much better!" Becky giggled, drawing out the oh sound in so like she imagined the women in L.A. would.

Sam smiled, pulling her a bit closer to him. He didn't necessarily want to move to L.A., but Becky was his queen and he would do what she liked.

That night, the knocks repeated. Sam was growing annoyed with them, but he didn't let it bother him too much.

When the sequence started again the next night, three sharp raps right around 8, with the more intense series to occur about 9, Sam decided to pull a fast one. He went out to his car in the driveway and sat there with the engine and lights off, waiting to see who this phantom knocker was.

He waited a few minutes, and three laughing preteens sprinted to his front door, knocked as hard as they could, and sprinted away down the street. The boys were Allie's age. Sam thought for a moment about pursuing them, but he just sighed and went back into the house. It was going to be a tough move for his daughter, and he needed to think of a way to cheer her up.

Happiness, Part 4

Aristotle himself utilizes the term ‘supervenient’ sparingly, but in a very revealing way: “...pleasure completes an activity not as the state does by being present in something but as a sort of supervenient end, like the bloom on men in their prime of youth.” Hence, pursuing pleasure as end can only misdirect action. Rather, it is more effective to choose an end which can be met and allow pleasure to supervene as an incidental benefit, a side-effect of doing what is right.

Aristotle’s statement, “That pleasure is not the good, then, seems to be clear, as does the fact that not every pleasure is choiceworthy and that some pleasures, being different from the others in form or in their sources, are intrinsically choiceworthy...” is a direct critique of the idea that pleasure is what should be chosen. When we read this account of pleasure in light of what happiness is, for Aristotle, it becomes clear that happiness is in fact a pleasant sensation; however, this happiness is not a result of the choice to experience happiness or pleasure.

Instead, pleasure supervenes on the engagement of a mind in *eudaimonia* as a result of whatever the subject of contemplation is. To refer back to the simple gym example enumerated above, we could say that thinking back on the way we used to look and feel each day and comparing it with the results we got after our year of workouts makes us happy, the experience of which brings us pleasure. Hence, seeking pleasure directly and for its own sake is a sort of shortcut which seems to frequently lead to disastrous consequences (i.e., the hangover after a long night of celebrating on New Year’s Eve).

Existence

The pain of existence,
The spark of to know
Onward! Persistence!
There is only to go

The fear does envelope
Just as the love
But the fact of experience
Is a gift from above

There can be no God,
No self-righteous creator
But with the simple nod
We believe in ourselves again

The passage of time
The length of to wait
Is paid for in kind
Don't fear to be a reprobate

Sides

A young man grew old. He graduated from the various stages of life, the latest of these being college and it had taken a month or more but he now sat back, looked at the world, and sighed, having conquered the worlds of sex, booze, parties and classes. He wrote, now, stories and songs, poems and even the occasional philosophical treatise. If asked, he would not give a reason for this behavior, except that it was unusual. You see, this man was a thinker. He was a lot of other things too, but his one defining characteristic was that, placed in a box, he could escape.

Such escapes included all of the usual good-natured shenanigans, except, of course, on a much larger scale. Other people, he thought, picked small boxes, small cliché destructions that really remade the system more than they destroyed it. This man was different. He was a mischief maker of a different breed, born to destroy the rules and throw them away. Not that this was what he did. Oh, no. He knew the extent of his power and the toll it would take if ever unleashed fully. The art was lost, if that happened. This man destroyed systems by defeating them soundly, proving that the axioms could not be absolutely true and then locking away this knowledge, after all, there was no need to let anyone else in on this little game.

But now it was all over, he thought. He had left the boxes behind, stored the keys to high school, church camp and college all away in his mind. All of the rulers of these boxes, held to be absolute within the particular box each ruled, he knew to be false in that power. The world was his backdrop, now, however, and he knew he could not solve it, could not break it like he had all of the smaller boxes he had encountered. The world, he reflected, was not really a box at all, unless he built his own – but he had seen the folly of such an action.

After studying philosophy from the Greeks to Anselm and Aquinas, to Nietzsche and Heidegger, the man knew just how to build such a box. He refused because he hadn't it within him to oversee the construction of such a thing. He had seen, heard of at least, what happened when someone succeeded. Hitler had succeeded. Lenin had attempted to construct Marx's box, as had Mao. Both failed. The founders of the United States of America had built such a box, but tried to leave it open. Philosophy told him how and why such boxes were made, and he felt that it urged him to build his own. The very world, when viewed in such a light, seemed to consist of box sides, ready with glue, that he must merely choose six sides and jump in.

Knowing this, he could not embark upon such an endeavor. Where would the adventure lie? As before, outside of any box he found himself in. The box being of his own making would not, could not possibly, help.

But life, he thought, dejected. Where are you? Though I cast about, all of my nets return empty except for new sides – and I wish not to build myself a box.

City, *Community*!

The big city is a
different sort
of human
creation

Most of the residents
are absorbed—in
the types of trivia
one might expect.

The ones who aren't
as self-absorbed as
their peers in the
populace

probably experience
a bit more
joy

at their awareness
of just what we're all
—doing—
together

True happiness was
always, deep down,
a *communal* sort of
activity.

Anywhere, Too

It isn't about being there.
And it isn't about being here, either.

Each morning you wake up
is another
opportunity to seize the day—
but which day?

How do we balance our
desire for what the future
will bring, with our undying
appreciation for the fact

we aren't *there* yet?

We shouldn't fail to
appreciate the difference
between where we started
and where we are now.

The little sacrifices, made
constantly, the plans
which determined our every
move along the way.

We should work hard to
remind ourselves of
the facts, of our
current situations, of what
it took to make that *happen*,
and of the fact that the bill
is almost paid in
full.

And this works for *anyone*.

The perspective can be
evolutionary, social, familial, or
personal - it makes

no difference to the achiever.

However, when we
look at where we are
currently,
seeing things through a
narrow, personal lens
can be an
irrefutable
sign of progress.

Life is beautiful,

life is *wild*.

Don't forget.

Do You Love?

Do you love something?
I don't believe you.

First, take what you love
and analyze it
Understand its parts, its flaws
the little
regrets

Then, do it all wrong.
Maim it;
make it
suffer and
bleed.

Destroy what you love,
in your mind,
In your life.

If there is any question
about whether you'd

—*die*—

for its sake.

Trees

We hadn't had a Christmas tree since the incident. We still celebrated, though. Our cheeks rosy from the eggnog, Susie hung up the stockings and Dad told Jonie and Mitch to go to bed early or Santa wouldn't come down the chimney to fill them.

The younger kids giggled and raced to their bedrooms, ebullient with a juvenile jubilation which they swore would keep them up all night, and which actually kept them up about ten more minutes after Dad insisted they turn out the light.

Susie and me were already well beyond the belief in Santa, and the adults had even begun sharing small amounts of booze with us on special occasions. It was our reward for not spoiling the magic of Christmas and disabusing our younger brother and sister of the notion of the naughty list.

There was still a certain magic in the air, though, and we still felt it. Even after everything.

I was excited for a new laptop and to laugh as Susie opened my gift to her... a dictionary. When she opened it, she would find a gift card for \$50 to her favorite store in the mall. I couldn't justify such expense without a laugh.

We went to our bedrooms in the new house, doing as we did each year now. We each considered the fire that had claimed our old house, thankful for the nicer new one and for our lives. We didn't need trees anymore.

I forgot, too.

I don't think anything,
anymore

So perhaps just this once,
I can say what I want:

I'm tired of getting older
and saying goodbye
Of women I used to sleep with
not talking to me

I'm tired of loves
running away,
disappearing.

But aside from that I'm
excited about each one
being better than the one
who came before;

Perhaps just as all my exes
find better companions

I want to believe
there's some perfect
person for me out there

Someone I'm just working up to.
Someone who won't leave
because I have feelings,
Or for some other reason

Really, at last,
the thing relationships turn on is,
maybe, just presence.

Think about it.

Someone you don't want to leave,

who wants to stay...

Maybe all these dating apps just
want to help us find company,
and getting laid should be
viewed as a part of the process,
instead of an ouroboros
of pleasure and pain,
proportional to the gifts we
gave at the outset.

Perhaps none of us is truly alone,
who knows the pain of loneliness.

It's okay.

I forgot, too.

Were Today My Last

As I lie here,
in Zilker park on my stomach
on a towel in the grass
buoyed and saddened by the
unavoidable fact of the sunset

I believe today has been a good one.
I harbored thoughts of neither anger,
nor fear nor jealousy
I did not seek what was not to be and

I lived within my
means.
I was neither particularly social
nor uncomfortable
nor convinced of my
greatness

even once.
I stayed close to home and
I enjoyed being *alive*.

Were today my last,
it might be a good one
to go out on.

What Sort Of Thing Is Consciousness?

Leaving behind any postulation which entails the origin of human consciousness, with the main goal we set for ourselves consisting of precisely the reconnaissance of the character of human consciousness, not distinguished from other forms of consciousness for any particular reason aside from the fact that we lack personal access to the innermost workings of such forms of consciousness, we enable ourselves to understand precisely what sort of thing we are in possession of with regard to our self-awareness.

The Freudian view was a nice attempt at explicating consciousness in terms of drives, just as the Nietzschean concept was. However, the Nietzschean account is more accurate. Nietzsche was able to produce a useful and functional account which required little or no modification to impact the life of a reader. Freud's attempt to simplify the subject of which he wrote was ultimately quite misguided for the simple yet ample reason that it became nigh-impossible to put it into practice.

Nietzsche's lower-definition, more chaotic attempt to situate the human mind within a particular position with regard to reason, self-awareness, and social acumen was born of a very particular interpersonal situation itself. The recent advent of the typewriter, the novel possibility of cheap rapid travel over long distances, and even widely circulated print communications are all examples of technological advances which made Nietzsche's life as a philosopher different from any who had come before him, yet Nietzsche's mind was far different from those of his contemporaries, as well.

This possibility was enabled by a particular moment in time in which the old guard had withered and fallen away in the face of new technologies and yet the new faces of the disciplines of academia were still open to the possibility, indeed the fact, of a brilliant mind joining their ranks. Nietzsche's exemplary political and academic performance in his rapid rise to fame made it possible for his mind to at once conquer the political realm in the service of his academic agenda and simultaneously doom himself to a life in which he could never speak freely.

Somewhat tragically, Nietzsche spoke his mind in the face of powers far greater than himself, attempting a failed conquest of the conservative element of academia which ultimately cost him everything.

By understanding the situation in which the most novel philosopher of the nineteenth century spoke his mind, it becomes clear to us that the revolutionary thoughts written by this formidable philosopher were in fact uttered from a standpoint of compulsion. Nietzsche was deeply dissatisfied with the lack of vision; both personal and in terms of the cognitive limitations he noticed in his fellows!

This dissatisfaction became central to Nietzsche throughout his life, driving him to attempt to enlighten those who would be his peers as well as to attempt to explain the convoluted relations he continually witnessed between himself and these others.

In this explanation, which can roughly be summed up in terms of the Kantian distinction between minority and moral agency; i.e., a moral agent is someone free to act due to the fortunate circumstance engendered by their embrace of the ability to reason, as distinct from a situation in which one free person surrenders agency to another to make decisions about life for them, Nietzsche gains a great deal of freedom from the constraints of the academy (i.e., the need to

continually explain one's work at a low level to fellow academics, the need to appeal to publishers with wide circulation, the need to second-guess and slow down to pore over one's texts to ensure their correctness, etc...) which Freud never had.

It is true that Freud's ideas still enjoy a good deal more celebrity than Nietzsche's, but the fact that Nietzsche's ideas have more power is vindicated every day that the society he struggled to found survives. Contemporary society, in every sense, is the heir to Nietzsche's foresight—a bold claim which is substantiated by the untamed human will as evidenced by the general chaos which, at every turn, creeps into the orderly machinations of the best intentions of our political mind. And with this vindication of the Nietzschean worldview, it becomes possible to discuss consciousness in a way that is at once quite timely and also excessive, alien, foreign, and terrifying.

The Nietzschean View of Consciousness

The Nietzschean view of consciousness entails a single division between what we think of as the self and the rest of us; there is to be no distinction between body and mind or soul or world. Just as Antonio Damasio's 1994 exposition of the Somatic Marker Hypothesis has shown the world of cognitive neuroscience, Nietzsche's understanding of the I as a divided, conflicted, tormented and will-enabled organism exposes a pair of levels upon which an organism can be conscious: the awareness of drives and/or emotions (one body), and the stage upon which these drives and/or emotions play out their synergies and conflicts (many bodies).

Modern artificial intelligence (AI) is one area in which the modern social understanding of consciousness is most fundamentally inadequate. Instead of a complex web of different inputs being configured to produce unpredictable, strange, and novel outputs, what we today think of as AI exhibits next to nothing we would acknowledge as consciousness. Simple outputs in general, even in cases such as Deep Mind's Alpha Zero chess algorithm's products or the recent advances in natural language processing, have not yet begun to add up to anything larger. The deep compartmentalization of core components of a complete AI from one another has almost deliberately played out on the stage of the global marketplace and yet no AI-involved thought leaders seem to recognize it.

In essence, the Nietzschean critique has once again become necessary. In Descartes' Error, Antonio Damasio argued for a—now accepted—hypothesis regarding the structure of the relationship between emotion and reason which plays out in the metabolic power of the limbic system adjacent to the calculative acuity of the prefrontal cortex. This hypothesis, known as the Somatic Marker Hypothesis, consists of the simple claim that reason itself falls out of the activity of emotions. That is, reason is a product of emotions.

There is nothing particularly revolutionary about this claim, and there was nothing revolutionary about it in the mid-1990s either. The sleep-wake cycle, the heart rate, the various metabolic urges to get physical activity or to eat or to hug someone, have all received a great deal of publicity for their explanatory power. It is not revolutionary to conclude that low-brain functions, such as the experience of a given emotion or a particular feeling, when added together, somehow become more than the sum of their parts.

What was stunning, rather, about Damasio's argument in the mid-1990's, was the general lack of enthusiasm with which it was received. Philosophers of mind still argue about the existence of free will and the fundamental nature of consciousness without ever bothering to enlighten themselves about the advances taking place in the psychological sciences—the roots of all these

problems are *metabolic*, Damasio has shown, developing the Nietzschean thesis that they were *many*.

In sharp contrast with this trend, which is nonetheless quite normal in institutions and even more so with respect to institutions which pride themselves upon their philosophical acumen, Nietzsche actually anticipated the gist of Damasio's argument by a full century when he articulated his thoughts about the will, despite his lack of the terminology which would develop to describe these things or examples such as Phineas Gage to prove his conjecture with.

For Nietzsche, to be conscious could be said to roughly equate to what he meant when he used the term will. Willing something, that is, *being aware of it, caring about it, emoting about it, and fighting oneself to bring it into being*, is nothing else than becoming conscious of it in precisely a way quite consistent with modern day reductive explications about the mechanistic workings of the limbic system in the brain. To go just one degree further, it can now be said definitively that the mechanism behind even the most abstruse philosophy, even the most coldly rational thinking possible, is always a process which reduces to *metabolism*. The cruelty of this critique of rational thought is second only to precisely the *usefulness* of such a critique, insofar as it can even be called a critique at all.

AI as a Mirror

To truly conceive of a model of conscious minds as a metabolic vehicle at the most fundamental level, it is necessary that we contrast this sort of conception with its opposite: AI. Today, the term AI is something of a misnomer. AI is currently a term which applies to almost any sort of automated computer application which either performs a complex task or helps a human being accomplish something. This rather broad umbrella includes everything from spellchecking to facial recognition to data visualization—but the concept of intelligence in these applications almost universally develops directly from inputs given from outside (as in Alpha Zero, the powerful chess engine) or worse, designed by someone outside. That is, the very creativity we consider so central to human intelligence is written out of AI by the time we finish describing precisely what it is we mean when we utter the phrase itself!

To walk this critique of AI back to the intended domain, an explication of human consciousness, it is merely necessary to discuss the manifold outputs emotions are capable of producing. Words said in anger, poor dietary choices made in situations of hunger, addiction and love—all involve both a metabolic component and a corresponding change to the worldview of the individual we think of as having the feelings which lead to their various rational outputs. In each case, the cognitive system gives shape to (or, in some cases, reshapes or competes with) the high-level outputs derived from intensive competitions between distinct drives, motivations, and impulses within a given individual!

AI, then, serves as an effective mirror for our understanding of human consciousness due to its remarkable ability to show us precisely what we do not understand as entity or as consciousness. Deep Mind, for example, does not represent—at least not in terms of consciousness—as complete a revolution beyond Deep Blue as the popular press might have us believe at first. This is merely to say that the machine learning mechanism has changed in a revolutionary way which did not cause it suddenly to gain consciousness in a new way, and merely instead improved the same sort of thing we think of when we think of a simple machine, say a card-shuffler. It would be more

accurate to say that a better chess-playing machine has been created than to say a better mind or person or even entity.

A rudimentary account of consciousness is implied by any sort of discussion involving AI, after all, artificial intelligence at the very least seems to be some sort of intelligence—if there were no intelligence to it, would we not rather refer to it as Artificial Agency, or some other sort of more accurate name? Instead of this, we could also posit that perhaps some goal exists that simply hasn't been met yet. After all, world-champion chess has only been played by computers for the past twenty years at this point. The most likely outcome is that a human being will never be able to beat a strong computer in chess consistently again.

Pushing the limits of the definition of intelligence will only get us a bit closer to understanding consciousness, however. It is important to understand that intelligence is only a part of consciousness, just as being good at chess is only a single part of a very complex system we refer to as intelligence. Creativity was mentioned earlier as a means by which to differentiate between success in completing a task and intelligence, but it seems that creativity is central enough to what we mean by intelligence as to be capable of proving, by counterexample, that a given example of intelligence is not, in fact, intelligence. This is to say that creativity is a necessary condition for intelligence. We understand this to be true because intelligence only becomes visible to us when a decision is made—we cannot see a single example, anywhere in the world, of intelligence which is divorced from action.

Essentially, a truly intelligent chess computer would need to be able to act in the world beyond mere move-making and planning activities. It would be able to win games by means beyond merely making the best moves on the board—instead, a truly intelligent chess computer would be capable of bluffing, perhaps something like pulling the fire alarm to disorient its opponent. It would be able to compete at the psychological and physical level rather than merely at the intellectual one. It would also probably be an amazing *teacher*.

Truly intelligent machines are disorienting to contemplate, but if we really want to know what it would be like to have a conversation with one, all we need to do is to have a conversation with another human being.

Freud and Nietzsche Help Us Understand Consciousness

Consciousness could be said to be that which a given human mind possesses which a given machine lacks. But this is not specific enough. To improve our concept of conscious thinking, we must develop it more. We must say that machines—even elegant examples of machinery, even the finest machines in the world, are universally developed with a purpose in mind which can never be deviated from. In reality, it has thus been the case until now that a machine never truly accomplished anything its creator(s) did not intend it to do. However, a few glaring counterexamples stand out. Behemoths such as Facebook and Google essentially consist of machinery—and yet the creator of no such machine could ever have foreseen the contemporary state of the machine they set out to build initially.

The rampant growth experienced by both technology companies and by the machines which power these companies is driven by intelligence, but it is human intelligence which makes it all possible. Having thoroughly established this, it is now time to describe the difference between a conscious entity and a machine with a purpose. This will be helpful both for those of us who lead

other humans and for those of us who wish to develop machines which reach or near human-level effectiveness at jobs, rather than mere tasks.

To quickly and effectively describe human consciousness, then, we must merely point to the boundlessness of the outcomes which emerge from metabolism! It is a fact about the body that everything which transpires does so by means of a process mediated at the roots by the cellular drive to produce and utilize energy, but it is also true that the simplistic nature of this sort of fact is almost entirely trivial. The fact is, consciousness is at heart mediated entirely by the need of the organism to provide for itself, though it is not our place here to discuss those needs beyond the initial layer of complexity, i.e., the cell's need to continually nourish and divide itself and the intensive cooperation by which the organism as a whole survives despite the repeated deaths of critical cells on a massive level.

There are 37 trillion individual cells in the average human body and the sum total of the communication between these is what we ultimately think of as consciousness. Consciousness, then, is an unbelievably complex emergent phenomenon which arises from a large number of internal inputs which communicate their success in survival, metabolism, and reproduction to each other through a hostile external environment and awe-inspiringly complex internal chemical signaling mechanisms.

Nietzsche enumerated a number of internal components of consciousness as well as the influence of the external world whilst Freud sought to build a more exquisite structure from these and use them to account for the complex interactions between self and world in terms even of previous interactions between self and world. Both men contributed immensely to a modern understanding of conscious thought which is, recently, capable of not only understanding itself in a deeply meaningful way but which also seems to be on the cusp of reproducing itself by an act of will.

Conscious thought, then, is the complex outcome of a veritable whirlpool of physical, chemical, and mnemonic interactions throughout the human body over time. It is true that time is a difficult concept in itself, but for the purposes of understanding consciousness we can accept the definition that a quantum of time is the smallest amount of interaction between part of a body and part of the world such that the body becomes distinct from what it was before. And it is only by understanding just how small a change is necessary to make this determination that we begin to understand the incredible profundity of the action of using language to make conscious an understanding of what consciousness is.

To Smile:

By a mile,
one
truth stands out
Life is cruel;

The shit may fall
On us like rain
But there's an answer
in our brains

Smarter than we
Evolution is still
Attack us as
only Fate will

Damned if it doesn't
—feel
good—
To smile.

In Bloom

In Aristotle's work, we hear
Of men blooming, during
The peak of youth.

Today, that bloom has
been extended.

Women bloom too,
always have, but
their flowering is limited
in some cases

Monogamy, sequestration,
and ultimately menopause.

One male contains enough
semen to impregnate
every woman on the planet
over the course of his
life.

So is it really men who bloom?
or would we be better off, saying that
it is *women* who bloom?

Or do we all, during that special
peak
of youth find ourselves,
flowering?

Bring Back Satire

We don't need more

democratization!

of political deliberation.
The myriad aunts and uncles have
done enough, I think,
in their battle against the
political reason that
used to

—seemed to—

rule this land.

In league with a bajillion
angsty teenaged nitwits

They've won their war
on behalf of fascism,
and against rational
discourse.

This circumstance—
worked for—
hard, by many—
is hailed as a great
tragedy,

by all who
took such *pains* to
bring it about.

Bring back satire!

And poetry!

And nominate the most

—fluent—

among us, once again,
to wage this war
for political
direction.

Style

In living, we experience
fear, terror, shame and dread
We run from these just as
we run from ourselves

In sickness and health
we have a certain
image
to hold up;

Just who do we think
we are?

And just what do we think
we actually have to fear?

If we die of Covid-19
of the common flu
of metastatic cancer,
or getting hit by a bus—

The worst that can happen
is that we *die*.
It happens to us all,
sooner or later.

The best we can do
is die—as we live—
in style.

Happiness, Part 5

Eudaimonia is a three-part word consisting of *eu*, meaning good, *daimon*, a Greek word that translates to spirit, and *-ia*, a suffix denoting activity. We could say that, for Aristotle, happiness is the good-spirit activity or perhaps the activity of the good spirit. Hence, when Aristotle argues that “we think that pleasure must be mixed in with happiness,” it becomes clear that the activity of happiness yields supervenient pleasures that arise as the result of choosing well what to do, doing it well and without doing too much or too little of it, then reflecting upon what we have done.

But there is yet another part to this. Our Greek word for happiness—*eudaimonia*—involves an activity. For Aristotle, happiness itself is an activity. And the character of this activity is contemplative, according to Aristotle. This contemplative quality is a clue as to the general character of happiness for Aristotle, which might most aptly be defined as the activity of experiencing the goodness of one’s spirit in conjunction with the world, or with god.

Happiness is not an easy thing to experience. Circumstances, both internal and external, must align to allow even a moment of this pleasant contemplation. If we look to people whose activities “most bear the stamp of happiness,” then, we need to understand that pleasure taken in virtuous action is a significant part.

Happy people have chosen well what to do, have done it well, and have experienced pleasure as a result of them noticing that things have gone their way without being fouled by luck or circumstance. Happiness, then, seems to be something which involves our reflection upon our good fortune and the goodness of both our own spirits and the world.

When things go well enough to allow us to think such thoughts, how could we feel anything but pleasure?

Love: The Painful Pinnacle of Human Goodness

If, as I've argued, Aristotle is correct about prudence being the highest of the virtues, and the happiness which results from this state of affairs stands as evidence as to the correctness of this position, there is a blind spot which occupies a central role in modern life. Our relationships to one another are not rationally determined!

Is there any sort of moral obligation to love anyone at all, let alone everyone? Surprisingly enough, the answer must be *no*. To start from the beginning, let us first understand what a moral reason *is*, before moving on to the discussion about what love is and why it is more primary than morality—that is, why it comes more naturally to us than morality, and why it *changes less often* than morality. It could probably be argued that animals feel a deep form of love for each other and even on special occasions for humans, so this primary emotion and its place in our lives must be deeply relevant to our happiness.

Moral reason is a simple enough concept—it arises from agency, which involves quite deeply the ability to make choices which, ideally, would seem to need to be thought out, or rationally determined. Immanuel Kant's view was built out of Aristotelian philosophy and ultimately came around to the conclusion that moral agency was inseparable from the making of moral choices. To choose in accordance with reason was the highest good for Kant, just as we've seen that choice in accordance with prudence are what Aristotle and Epicurus took aim at.

A moral obligation, then, is something we cannot deny the rationality of. It's a duty so self-evident that we find ourselves feeling committed to doing as thus commanded. If I were shopping for a car and had \$25,000 in my bank account, my moral choice would be whether to buy a car I could afford or to go into debt to get a fancier one. This isn't what most people think of when they consider ethics, but I find that rather odd—we all make choices all day, every day, and most of us would claim to be doing it rationally most of the time.

Perhaps the reason this has retreated from the ethical field of study has something to do with ethicists feeling called to seem arcane and erudite. Perhaps it has to do with university politics and funding cuts. Or perhaps it's simply that, even in the field, few people who like to study ethics are really able to make the connection between everyday life and a difficult course of study. In any case, the point is that there is no reason to fear ethics—if you've ever made a decision (regardless of difficulty) you've acted as a moral agent.

Now, this moral agency is beginning to seem rather primary. It is as if most of us have it in some measure or another, and it would be quite difficult to divorce it from us. In the United States, and in particular in Texas, where I am writing this book, moral agency is something people are very concerned with. How could something as basic to a happy life as love encroach upon our very status as moral agents?

The answer is simple. Reason comes from the prefrontal cortex, or the frontal lobe, of the brain. Love, whether or not we accept that it is an emotion, comes from the limbic system—it is something we feel, *first*, and can only ask questions about later. There are a few quirks of rationality we can learn something about from the neurosciences.

For example, we know reason is above emotion from the work of a number of neuroscientists (namely Antonio Damasio, whose entire catalogue comes highly recommended). As shown in an

increasing number of experiments, we cannot reason without paying attention. Unless we're paying attention, we can only intuit things we aren't consciously aware of. Attentional guidance is mediated by two systems: the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system.

Endogenous (internal) attentional guidance stems from activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is the center of reason in the brain.

Exogenous attentional guidance (not attenuated by sleep deprivation to as large an extent as endogenous guidance) is mediated by the limbic system, which is a center for emotional processing.

My argument from neuroscience against a moral imperative to love everyone runs thusly:

1. A moral imperative is dictated by reason.
2. Love is not a rational (read: prefrontal) process.
3. A moral imperative can only guide rational behavior.

C: There can be no moral imperative to love.

I believe this stands up because it avoids a specific counterexample, which I'll explain for an analogy: Attention can be guided by the prefrontal cortex. This is how we maintain focus upon things which are then said to interest us. We do not choose to love because we never choose consciously to attend to anything. Rather, we make attentional investment into things we are already aware of. The point of departure for attention is perception, whether applied to feelings or emotions or even perceptions (observations of the world outside ourselves).

Love is a certain geometry that's just right. It's the key that opens our brains in one direction, rather than another. But real love, as opposed to infatuation, is a deep current that colors every perception we have of whatever it is we love. The closest we can come to a moral imperative to love is a moral imperative to improve ourselves—that's the end we're really seeking when we attempt to experience more love, and it, like pleasure, comes about naturally as a result of our improving ourselves.

Further evidence to support this view is provided by a range of unlikely sources: sibling rivalry, the way older married couples fight, and above all the inability to conceive of the world without someone we love deeply. In fact, it can be said with relative ease that love impacts our conscious navigation of the world so deeply that spending time with people we love approaches something like a shared cognition—that is, when two people truly love each other, *know* each other, and are together, they can experience the world together, as one. In this way, love's hand can guide our lives, touching us far more deeply than even our own prudence or rationality.

About The Author



Thomas Dylan Daniel is a freethinking Texan philosopher who gets around quite a bit, these days. With experience in biotechnology, research, entrepreneurship, and of course, philosophy, Daniel personifies the old adage, “A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.”

There are a variety of ways to follow along with Thomas Dylan Daniel as he develops his philosophy and applies it to whichever problem seems most interesting:

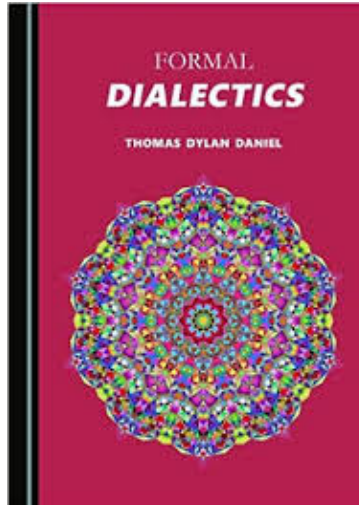
Academic works:

<https://independent.academia.edu/ThomasDylanDaniel>

Poetry and fiction development:

<https://beta.cent.co/@epicdylan>

Other Books By Thomas Dylan Daniel



Formal Dialectics

available anywhere great books are sold

<https://www.cambridgescholars.com/formal-dialectics>

Why do the attempts we make to explain the world around us fall short? Arguments for or against the existence of God, the question of free will, and even Principia Mathematica are all examples of explanations that look solid from some points of view, but which have serious weaknesses from other perspectives. This book explores the built-in limits of reason itself by pointing out the fact that language can only be used to create incomplete systems. Philosophy, mathematics, and logic supply the groundwork for the introduction of a framing mechanism to help thinkers understand why thinking itself can sometimes fail. Known as the metadialectic, this new frame of reference allows us to evaluate different arguments in terms of their constituent parts. Students from any background interested in improving critical thinking will benefit from this study of the dialectical archetypes—as can the more traditional philosophically minded questioners, those of us who are motivated by a deeper desire to understand the world.

The first philosophy book by Thomas Dylan Daniel, Formal Dialectics has been peer reviewed and has met with a substantial amount of success among initial readers. A paperback edition is on the way.



Further From Home

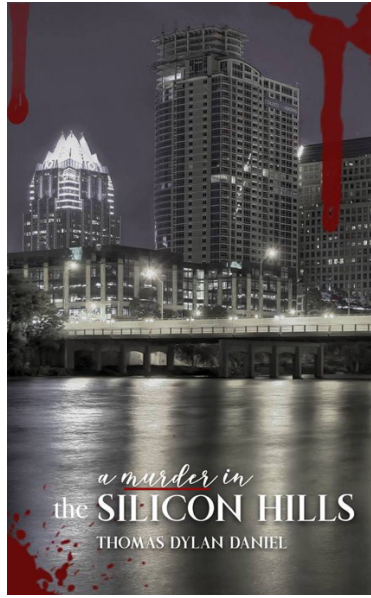
available exclusively via paperback at Amazon

<https://www.amazon.com/Further-Home-collection-philosophical-fiction-ebook/dp/B0795LDG1M>

Further From Home is an approachable collection of 20 short stories written to entertain, and yet take things a bit further. Inspired by Western philosophy as well as by Eastern philosophies such as Zen and Taoism, the key question Further From Home asks is the question of meaning: what is it for my life to have meaning right now? For each of us, the answer is different. At each moment, the answer changes.

Written for beginners and professional philosophers alike, Further From Home avoids most of the academic jargon and provokes meditations about the biggest questions through fiction. These thought-provoking short stories are intended to teach philosophy in an easygoing, fun way that still conveys the depth of the subject.

If you've ever been curious about philosophy, here is a unique, approachable introduction in the form of a thought-provoking book that will invite you to see yourself—and the world around you—in a different light. Whether you're a seasoned professional philosopher or are just looking to learn something new, Further From Home will be an excellent addition to your library.



A Murder in the Silicon Hills

available online at Cent
<https://beta.cent.co/+hhaeu1>

Detective John Lewis is a tough loner with experience and respect at the Austin Police Department. He is pulled into a web of technology and intrigue when it falls to him to solve the murder case of a young and successful technology company CEO, but by the time the case is moving everything has changed. Can Detective Lewis manage to find the killer of Jacob Kissinger? What will be left of him, if he does?

A traditional whodunnit with an accelerating plot and a shocking twist, *A Murder in the Silicon Hills* is Thomas Dylan Daniel's first full-length novel. It is designed to keep the reader guessing and turning pages, and the early reviews suggest it has been successful in both regards.

Parting Shot

This is the truth, for once and forever:

- The body is our interface with reality.
 - Even hyperreality.

Don't *think* too much.

Just let it rip.

The *creative act* is

- like dropping into
 - a half-pipe
 - on a mountain bike
- almost impossible AND
 - probably wrong
- even if it works

you *got* this.

(yes, YOU.
Anybody can write today.
Just do it your own way.
Bring your honesty,
bring your pain.
Bring your style and
use your brain.
don't forget—it matters.)