

## Confusion and the Clock

George A. Kelly

### Some Things I would Like to Know, But Not Yet

It has often occurred to me, as I am sure it has to you too, that it would be amusing to have a peek through the curtain of night at what tomorrow has in store. Suppose I could observe what I would be doing at this time tomorrow night. It might be interesting to watch the goings on from this present vantage point of the evening before, yet not to participate in them, nor to be concerned with whether I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, nor even to be in any danger of being recognized as an intruder. Such a thing would have to be done surreptitiously, however, for I am sure if I were to be caught at my eavesdropping, my tomorrow's I (How do you say that?) would become self-conscious about the arrangement and start acting in an unnatural manner. He might not even do things the way he was destined to do them, and the whole affair might fall apart in a shambles of irreality.

But if I could manage to keep out of sight, so that all the performers in tomorrow evening's episode would act the way the sum-total of their previous experiences supposedly required them to act, that is, would act naturally, the affair might come off pretty well. Now that I think of it, the other people, other than myself-tomorrow and myself-today, ought to be easy enough to fool, even if they did get a glimpse of me eavesdropping. They would probably no more than mistake me for myself-tomorrow, and think it quite natural that I should be there - unless, of course, I was wearing a different colored shirt, or hadn't shined my shoes, as I haven't tonight. So that part of the arrangement has a reasonable chance of being worked out, in spite of what some of my more skeptical readers - not you; I didn't mean you! - are likely to think.

Where I would get into trouble, if I weren't extremely careful, is with myself. Perhaps if I arrived in some kind of disguise, it would keep me from finding myself out. Now, let's see: I could go as my Cousin Leander. I don't know him very well, and if I looked a little familiar to myself, there would be a perfectly logical explanation.

Leander, however, if I remember correctly, is a little nearsighted, and, unless his nearsightedness has been offset by presbyopia during the last ten years, he might miss a good deal of what was going on. Besides, I doubt if Cousin Leander would be very much interested in what I am going to do tomorrow night. That wouldn't be a real obstacle, of course, since I would only be pretending to myself that I was Cousin Leander.

Still, the performance would have to be pretty good - pretty realistic, I mean - to fool me, because I am sure that I would know right off that the real Cousin Leander was not genuinely interested enough to be acting so alert to all the things that would need watching. So, if I let myself get too closely involved with the events of the evening, I am sure that my tomorrow's

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self would suspect that something unusual was up and start asking pointed questions. And, whenever that happens, I mean when I start to ask myself pointed questions, I get confused and my stories don't hang together.

Before the evening was over I am sure I would be found out and I would have to come back to today, if it weren't too late, which is where I am now. Then, I would simply have to wait it out until tomorrow came around and I found out what I want to know by the time -honored method of living through it. While this wait - and- see approach to the problem seems unnecessarily conservative - even reactionary - I doubt I shall be able to do much in the way of improving it, at least until I have given the matter a great deal more thought.

Still, I don't like to give up on this project too quickly; people who give up too quickly are apt to earn the reputation of being unwise; like my grandfather who once bought a thousand acres of rice land in Texas. He sold it a year or two later, just before oil was discovered on it; which was unwise. He did not know that he was selling a part of the fabulously rich Beaumont Field.

Then, on the other hand, there is my neighbor, I mean there was my neighbor - that is to say, he is now a neighbor to where I used to live - who has been convinced for years and years that there is oil underneath his farm. He thinks there is oil under mine, too, but only the edge of the oil deposit is under mine. The center of it, where the gushers are going to be, is under his.

Now some people think he is being a little fanciful about the matter, but if he holds on year after year, and some day they do find oil on his place, he will, unlike my grandfather, be acclaimed as a very wise man, if he is still alive; and if he isn't still alive, they will probably acclaim him as an even wiser man. On the other hand, if they don't find oil, all he has to do is to sit and wait until something else turns up - maybe a new market for sandburrs - and after that he will be considered almost as wise as if it had turned out to be oil.

So, let me try again. While I probably will not succeed this time either, I can at least establish the reputation of being a person of vision. Then, if something does turn up later and people can tell what is going to happen to them twenty-four hours in advance, I can put in my claim to wisdom.

Since writing the paragraphs above, I have been thinking very hard and I believe I have reached a conclusion. The real sticker in this business of predicting the future is the danger of my remembering in the midst of tomorrow night's activities that I have already been there, and who that fellow over there who claims to be Cousin Leander really is. Now I think, at last, we have got to the nub of the matter, like isolating the schizococcus, and it should only be a matter of time until we achieve a major break-through and the whole thing will seem as simple as A-B-C.

We shall need funds, of course, to achieve this breakthrough. Perhaps someone will organize a *Tomorrow Research Fund* and put on campaigns with the neighbors around the block collecting coins from each other. Or a *March of Times* might do the trick. Now that we know what the problem is - our discovery that the human mind takes account of what it has foreseen - our research will have a wholly different emphasis.

The task will be to help forget what they foresaw just before it happens. This would enable them to step across the threshold of any new situation with a freshly opened mind, completely emptied of its expectations. In a word, we would replace memory with foresight. Thus, we would always know in advance what was going to happen, but we would not be hampered at the instant of occurrence by looking for it or remembering what it was.

My! My! We could predict events faithfully, right down to the last sneeze, even down to the sneeze that doesn't quite come off, but we would be just as pleasantly surprised as ever at the final ka-choo! Sneezes would appear to have slipped up on us unawares, just as they do

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now. And, while we would know that the next sneeze that fails to come off was not really supposed to come off anyway, we could enjoy the suspense and the tingling sensation that precedes sneezes that don't come off. The sneeze that doesn't happen is an event, too, you know, or didn't you realize that?

This brings me to an obstacle. I know that wise men always surmount obstacles, so I suppose I should try to be wise enough to climb over this one too, just as I have been scrambling over a good many others during the past few minutes - *your* minutes, *my* hours - that some of you might have considered insurmountable. The obstacle is this: If something like a sneeze doesn't happen, and you already knew in advance that it wasn't going to happen, why is its failure to explode into reality an event? Are all the things that don't happen events, just like the things that do? Can something be an event without ever happening, or something happen without being an event?

Looked at this way, our little peeks into the future are going to be very complicated, because we will have to see displayed before us all the things that are not going to happen as well as the one thing that will. Sorting out the one from all the others will be like finding a needle in a haystack. It may not even be worth the trouble it would take. My grandfather, for example, would have had to paw through an awfully big clutter of things that were not going to happen to his land before coming across the one thing that was not not-going-to-happen - discovery of oil. Even he, though he was a prodigiously energetic man, might not have felt it was worth the bother.

There is one possibility that I have not considered. Now that I think of it, it seems so obvious that I wonder why it did not occur to me before. Perhaps man already knows how to anticipate the future and the reason he thinks he doesn't is that he always forgets what he has predicted just before it happens. Or, just before it doesn't happen, whichever is the case - I mean if he predicts that it will not happen and, sure enough, it doesn't, then, instead of saying, 'This is just what I expected', he forgets, and finds himself just as surprised as he would be if he hadn't ever known. This is just what we were talking about, isn't it - forgetting our predictions so as not to spoil the taste of things when they actually happen?

Now take me. The night before last I was wondering what would happen the next night - remember? So I wrote about it, and if you have been reading this chapter straight through, you must have come across what I had to say. Well, now, that next night has come and gone - the night I wanted to foresee. There was nothing very unusual about it, nothing that I noticed, anyway. No thing seemed incongruous with what had happened the night before, and I don't remember thinking of anything that was expected to come off and didn't Cousin Leander didn't show up and even the TV show turned out the way it was supposed to, as far as I could tell.

Now, while I may have forgotten what it was I predicted, let us suppose that when I wrote about forecasting, I could actually tell just what was going to happen, and that when last night rolled around, I promptly forget what I had predicted. Would that not explain why I felt that I was experiencing things for the first time?

A curious thing! I had the feeling that everything was going along reasonably enough, even though I couldn't think what was supposed to happen. I wonder if that was because, while I had forgotten what was supposed to happen, I had not forgotten the fact that I had been expecting it. This kept me from being flabbergasted at everything my wife said, although I had no idea of what it was to be. Thus, the whole evening went by pretty much as if I were being reminded of something. Altogether, it was a very pleasant experience - not a bit shocking - just a series of interesting reminders. There is even the fact that I didn't get very much written yesterday. That is always a source of minor annoyance. But even that did not surprise me very much. You know, I don't think I expected to, anyway!

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In a way, I wish that I could remember what I must have known I was going to do this afternoon. In particular, I wish I could remember - but, of course, I can't - what it was I was destined to write this afternoon. Especially I would like to remember how it was going to be said. It seems like such a long ways from the kind of discourse in which I am now involved to the point where I will be saying anything you can agree with, or that will make the whole passage come together, coherent and reasonable. If I could only remember now, then I would have nothing to do except type it off in a hurry and use the extra time before supper to putter around in the basement shop. Somehow, I have the feeling that puttering around in the shop is not in the cards for me this afternoon.

It has doubtless occurred to you that we could check up on this hunch about forgetting one's infallible predictions if we simply wrote down our predictions at the time we made them, and then came back to see if things had turned out the way the writing said they would. This assumes that we would remember having written something down. But, in any case, my wife would probably find the manuscript and ask if I was ready to have it burned with the trash; and if I had already started to forget I would probably tell her to go ahead.

I must confess this bothers me, and casts some doubt on my entire line of reasoning. A while ago, I thought it was going to turn out all right, but now I am not so sure. It must be that ever-present forgetting process again; it has just now erased my prophesy of what I was going to say.

Thirteen months and an ocean now separate me from the time and place at which the last of the sentences above were written. As it happens, the manuscript was not burned with the trash. Yet, as I re-read it, I find that at no point did I do what I was talking about doing and make specific predictions of what would occur during the ensuing days. Perhaps the part of the manuscript containing the predictions was destroyed, though I doubt it. It would be especially interesting to read what I might have said was not going to happen. But nothing like that was put down and I cannot be sure how much of what did go on was anticipated. This I know: Nothing that came about was wholly expected and nothing was wholly unexpected. This raises a question of whether one is ever capable of being completely surprised, either by the things that happen or those that don't. But, that is something we can take up later.

What took place, among other things, was this. I was writing during the weekend, and on Saturday had a rather good day of it, probably because I was letting my mind wander unhampered into all kinds of logical traps without concerning myself with how I was going to reason my way out of them. Then came Sunday; as usual, a lazy day. That was the day I was to disguise myself as Cousin Leander. Perhaps I was waiting for something special to happen, and rather proving to myself that nothing special actually would.

On Monday the going was tortuous, as it usually is even when I pretend that I am typing out a message to the most fascinated and wide-eyed listener my imagination can dream up. I remarked to you in that day's manuscript that there wasn't anything particularly special about the evening before. As the writing shows, I even wished on Monday that the conjured fates would take over and tell me what to say, so I could get on with it.

Tuesday and Wednesday my muse deserted me altogether. This was no great surprise. She often leaves me like this, without warning, and, while I don't like it and I occasionally complain to her about her fickleness, I have decided that she must find herself cramped by my efforts to put her soft breath into precise psychological terms, and she must slip away to recover her composure, or perhaps to avoid quarreling with me openly. If so, it is better that way, for I would not want matters between her and me to come to such a state that we would break up permanently.

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If you have a few moments to spare, perhaps you wouldn't mind my trying to describe our relationship a little more fully. If you are in a hurry, just skip ahead, since the following passage has very little to do with what I set out to tell you.

### BEMUSED

Whose muse are youse?  
Last night, the cushioned hours  
Piled deep and soft,  
You whispered close.  
Your voice was in my ear.  
"You're mine", I thought.  
"All mine!"  
So I set down  
The throbbing syllables.  
And then, at dawn,  
I read those lines  
I'd written in your spell  
And - What-th'hell!  
No sign!  
No trace of all  
Those sentient moments we  
Alone had shared.  
You'd slipped away  
And stealthily closed the door  
And where we lay -  
See!  
The pillows there,  
Each one puffed smooth and bare.  
And where, where  
Are you? Just where  
Are you? And look! In my hands  
These incoherent words!  
So!  
Today, I played  
The game a different way.  
Within my den,  
The hours stacked high  
With books upon the floor,  
I read from men  
Of yore.  
I sought only words  
That meant just what they said,  
And nothing more.  
Then twilight came.  
The print began to fade,  
And there, instead -  
You jade!  
You wench! You whore!

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Our secrets of the night before  
You'd been whispering into others' ears  
A thousand years  
Or more!  
Tonight, recluse,  
I sit. No man nor muse  
Dares pass that door!  
In dark silence sit,  
Until, across the room,  
I hear a sigh.  
She's here!  
Already here,  
She sits as lone as I;  
Ten thousand years  
Without a love.  
Of all the consorts she  
Has had, none wooed  
Her true!  
Each one pressed close  
The eager lips to snatch  
Some precious words,  
As dowry pay  
From her supply, to shout  
Themselves, all day.  
Hard gold!  
And so had I;  
Just so had failed to clasp  
My lonely wraith  
In love!  
From now I woos m'muse!

Well, that's that.

Thursday, with some reluctance, I went to see my doctor about a pain I had in a certain place where I had always supposed my stomach to be. It's not that I have ever taken much interest in anatomy - internal anatomy, that is. It's rather, that in a general sort of way I like to know where my vital possessions are. I remember distinctly that my seventh grade physiology book at Pleasant Valley School had a picture in it that showed precisely where the things I swallowed got formally admitted to the stomach. Moreover, I know from experience that on those rare occasions when admission is denied, or recinded, this is the spot where the rumpus starts.

Perhaps I had better explain my reluctance. It's not that I don't like to talk to my friend, the doctor. I do like to talk to him. He happens to be a scholar, and is therefore both humble and fascinated by a variety of things. Medicine, of course, is one of them, though I doubt if he recognizes the vital relationship between it and country club membership. Indeed, I would be surprised if it should turn out that he ever belonged to a country club. No, the reason for my reluctance was that I always felt rather embarrassed in going to him about a furtive pain, or a persistent wart, or an ambulant itchy spot that has developed in the inaccessible reaches of my back. I know he finds medicine just as puzzling as I find psychology, and it seems a little unfair to keep presenting him with problems like these that may trip him up.

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But still, he is a man who has faced up to the vagaries of medical practice, and, therefore, has sense enough to make me share some of the responsibility for the decisions that are made. Moreover, he seems to recognize my inalienable and constitutional right to manage my own insides, and would never think of giving me 'doctor's orders'. Nor has he ever audibly invoked 'The Medical Profession' in my presence. Instead, when I turn up with something pretty vague or obscure we are both likely to be embarrassed, so we sit there and look at each other and try to think of something to say that will relieve the other's discomfort.

As a physician he has his more enterprising moments, just as I have, and on these occasions he shows great ingenuity in thinking of places that can be looked into. This is the way he was on this particular Thursday. In no time at all he had wangled an appointment for a series of tests in a laboratory the next day.

None of this seemed particularly surprising, nor, on the other hand, was it anything I could have precisely predicted. It was all, more or less, within the pattern of life according to which I lived day by day. I felt no more than the usual relief that something systematic could be done, the usual annoyance at further intrusions on an already unproductive week, and the usual undertone of curiosity about how much of this life I would be privileged to see.

That evening the Thursday Nighters gathered. These are the patient souls who accept the standing invitation my wife and I extend to all those who are willing to listen and comment on whatever manuscript I have produced during the preceding week. Needless to say, I often greet them with apprehension, an apprehension I try to hide beneath my role as host.

This evening I read the latest installment of this manuscript - right up to the end. They were puzzled, as they had been with the previous installments of this particular undertaking, and not particularly pleased with what I was doing. What literary reputation I have among them is that of an expository writer with a commitment to a certain amount of scientific discipline, and, while they knew I was off on a different track this time, they did not see that I was going anywhere. But they were momentarily interested in the propositions conjured up by my whimsy and, somewhat to my relief, turned the discussion to such questions as whether *anticipation* was a posture one assumed toward the future and if it should be distinguished from *prediction*, the latter being something which may be better understood as a probability statement about events. And, too, they raised the question of 'phenomenal time' and wondered if anticipation were bounded by that. According to my notes, we did not, on this occasion, get into a discussion of anxiety, the central topic of this chapter.

Early the following morning I had an acute coronary attack - my first. Some years ago I watched my mother die from a coronary. It took two weeks of agony. It has seemed to me, particularly since that experience, that mankind ought to find a better way to go about this business. I'm all for putting it off as long as it is decently possible, of course, but when the time comes it should be possible for a person to pass on with a little more dignity. I have in mind that one ought to be able to think noble thoughts on such an occasion, or, if he finds it hard to think noble thoughts on his own, he ought to have a chance to recall the lines of *Thanatopsis*, which are pretty noble, I think, or something like that.

While I have noticed that death often does give other people in the vicinity a certain amount of inspiration - particularly those whose lives are not too intimately tied up in the deceased - it is apt to be a very distracting and messy business for the person who is doing the dying and for those who lose part of their own lives along with him. The fact that death, in many cases, is preceded by months or years of physical and mental deterioration adds to the indignity.

In this case, of course, I didn't die. Moreover, I managed, I think, to retain a certain amount of dignity, though not as much as one might wish, and I kept it until I got to the hospital. There, in spite of my best efforts, professionals who are highly trained in such techniques, took most of what I had left away from me.

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The pain, at first, was terribly distracting and, when I realized what was going on inside me, which was within an hour or so after the commotion started, I supposed that the odds were pretty much against me - a mistaken conception, as I was to discover later. So, here I was, with a Fire Department inhalator over my face, and, so I thought, on the brink of one of life's greatest ventures. I was facing for myself the one thing in the world that has most stirred mankind's imagination, yet has offered him the least literal verification of his outflung hypotheses. I remember thinking of this, in the split seconds between cramps, retches, and gasps.

I remember thinking, and being somewhat relieved to discover, that there was nothing particularly frightening about it. I even thought about one of the allegorical tales of Sir Garth, I believe it was, from the *Idylls of the King* in which the same theme was expressed, and I thought to myself how true it was. It might have been interesting to mention this point to some of the people close to me, later on when I could talk. But it was a thought not particularly appropriate to the kind of torture they were going through and it seemed in rather bad taste to bring it up at the time. No, there was nothing frightening, as far as I was concerned about the imminent prospect of dying. Nor was the climactic experience I was having utterly strange or confused.

I remember thinking, while we were waiting for the ambulance, that, since this had developed into a nip-and-tuck affair, I was going to put up the fight of my life. I felt, strangely enough, that I was ready to put up such a fight. I had been in a similar spot before, holding on by my teeth against losing consciousness, and I had won. Besides, if this was to be my last fight, I wanted it to be a good one. And I remember thinking, too, that in the months I might be able to hang on, even if I survived this first attack, there would probably be some everyday things to be done in order to make the transition as easy as possible for my family. But this was about as far as my planning went. I was much too involved with immediate matters to try to go into these speculations in any detail.

Again, let me come back to the theme of this chapter, which is really the only excuse for talking about these rather personal matters. Was all this that happened something that was, in some measure, anticipated? Had I seen them behind my Cousin Leander's mask? Yes, I think so. I had indeed eavesdropped on myself in this moment many times before, but had never been clear as to what I saw going on or as to when it was happening. Perhaps this was because of Cousin Leander's nearsightedness, or perhaps his tendency not to be greatly interested in my personal affairs.

And, another question: Was the experience itself characterized by further anticipations? I think it was that, too! I have already mentioned my fleeting glimpses of what the future might be. But there was more of anticipation in the experience than that. Even among the tortured moments each gasping pain was a preview of the next, telling me what to expect moment by moment, and the contortions into which I twisted myself were as much postures against the next onslaught as they were reactions to the last. Nor did I, before undertaking each spasm, have to reason to myself that the next stab was coming; my preparatory efforts were as spontaneous as life itself. As life itself!

In general, then, was it not, on the one hand, a passage of human experience whose strange unprecedented notes derived significance that early morning from the underlying theme of my life, which they so sharply embellished, and, on the other, one whose meaning stemmed less from the repetitive familiarity of its details than from what it seemed to foretell.

But now I am arguing, I suspect, and this book is not intended to prove anything; only to be an adventure in human feelings, one in which I have asked you to join me, so that, when we are finished, we can each ask the other where we have been and what we have found out.



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So far, in talking about this experience, I have reported only those feelings that had to do with my direct personal relationship to the events. There were also other things that crossed my mind. Like those I have already mentioned, one-half these were experienced both in their reassuring and in their disquieting dimensions. In fact, I am not sure I can always tell the difference between what is reassuring and what is not, or between what is pleasant and what is not. Such qualities often seem not to be so much properties of the things that happen as there are ways of coping with them.

There are some things, I grant, that I would find terribly difficult to regard as pleasant. The pain I had was an example. I didn't like that, not one bit! The knack of enjoying it was an art I had not mastered at all, possibly because I've never really tried. But I am not sure that there aren't some people who would be delighted by such misery. I'll go even further; I know that there are people who are thrilled by such experiences. I have seen them at it. And, now that I think of it, I can remember there have been times when I have myself enjoyed sharp pains, as in playing football, for example. But that was 'sport' and, so far, I have not taken up coronaries as a form of sport.

As for regarding some of my experiences as intrinsically disquieting, that, too, is hard to pin down. I have referred to the pain as 'distracting'. It turned my attention away from what I was doing; got me away from this manuscript for a whole year, as you can see. But this flat label may be a misnomer. During the months when I was trying to get caught up with other things, so I could get back to writing, I thought many times about the discussion in which I was engaged when my work was interrupted. In a sense, then, the effect has been quite the opposite of distraction; instead of being turned from what I was doing, I have found myself preoccupied with it. Moreover, this is not a reaction against - a turning away from - the illness, in some sort of counter-play, but actually a viewing of it in a new perspective. As one can see, I am now turning out page after page of manuscript, splashing the events of last year across the outlines of this chapter. So, as I say, even my cautious adjective, 'distracting', may be too arbitrary a term for what happened.

And as for what is inherently disquieting or reassuring, or whether the feelings I have described so far were essentially calm or turbulent; that, too, I cannot set down definitively. I can talk about those feelings from the standpoint of the calmness I perceived. And, I can talk also about turbulence - as I have, in some degree! But what were the feelings, really? I don't think I can answer that question. And, I think I would be very skeptical of anyone who tried to answer for me.

There are some scholars who make a big to-do about getting down to the genuineness of human experience - the existentialists, for example, whoever they may be (I have never been quite able to identify them). Or, the followers of Carl Rogers who concentrate upon the full acceptance of feelings as they naturally are (these folks are easier to identify)! I can't say I disapprove of such efforts to reach a terminal point in human inquiry; it is only when someone claims to have arrived that I get that restless feeling again.

So now, as I start to talk about the other things I found in the experience - the ones I did not mention in the paragraphs above - I want to enter an advance protest. I still do not know whether the events were of themselves good or bad, painful or pleasant, reassuring or disquieting. All I can do is report what I made of them; that is to say, what I thought, or what I remember thinking. To do this I have to align my perspective along various preconceived axes, else it would be practically impossible to have any sense of ever having been there at all. The dimensions I use are the dimensions I have myself devised, both for description of such events in general and for the fullest possible appreciation of the particular experience itself. Who knows how adequate these terms of reference are! This is what I do about such matters, and the best I

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can do about this special matter, and probably something of the sort is the best anyone can do in coming to grips with such affairs.

I remember looking at my wife and thinking of the chilling shock she must be experiencing at that moment. Yet there was no outward sign, only an alertness and a quick efficiency, as she turned here and there to do the things that had to be done. It crossed my mind that I was very proud of her, that she was probably stronger than I was accustomed to give her credit for being, and that there are great resources in the human personality which one can easily overlook in day-by-day casual living. But there, inside, there was none-the-less the icy grip of reality; I knew that for sure, in spite of all the resources she might be mobilizing against it. And there I was, sprawled and twisting on the bed, making a shameful spectacle of myself, and, moment by moment, making matters all the worse for her. All these were scarcely more than fleeting thoughts, of course.

There was also a dimension of reprehensibility that ran through these feelings. That is to say, I could not escape thinking that I was responsible for the mess we all were in. If I had listened to the experts and heeded their dire warnings, I might have been able to live the life of a healthy organism. In that case, I would have been waking up just about then, bouncing into a cold shower, eating a hearty but leisurely breakfast of prunes and yoghurt, and getting ready for a snappy day at the office, during which I would delegate responsibility right and left, make clear-cut simple-minded decisions, clear my desk promptly, and - with never a backward glance at the inanities I had perpetrated - arrive on time for three o' clock golf, followed by an inspirational dinner meeting on the subject of 'Why isn't *everybody* smart and successful'. I cannot say that I thought in exactly these terms, but this was the gist of it.

While I felt uncomfortably responsible for the confused state of affairs into which it appeared I had plunged us all, I remember I still felt rebellious against doing the things that people say would have avoided it. So, not only did I feel ashamed, responsible, and stupid; I also felt unrepentant. And, then a whole new round of thought threatened to start; I was beginning to feel ashamed of being unrepentant. As long as I was on this track, I was caught between being a virtuous vegetable and an independent corpse. Stretched out along this axis of appraisal - this yardstick - I found myself confused, disorganised, put upon, and, as if I were trying to go two ways at once.

Now let's have no misunderstanding about this. I know perfectly well, and I knew then, that the way to avoid this kind of feeling is to conform to some ready-made doctrine. And if you get caught and find that you have already slipped up, you start kicking yourself in the shins and make some special display of your eagerness to conform. In some cultures this is called 'repentance', in others, 'self-criticism'. Of course, nobody claims that self-abnegation will keep unpleasant things from happening to you - well, *almost* nobody these days - but there is ample evidence to indicate that it keeps you from being upset over the messes you stumble into.

There are still other people who take the view that the sort of confusion I experienced at this point constitutes bed-rock realistic thinking. Things actually are in a mess - all over - everywhere: They say we are all inclined to ignore the trouble we are in and we go blithely about making it worse by engaging in such diversions as watching TV, whistling, dressing up to go places, and being polite to each other. Finally, when we are all alone and it is too late to do anything about it, there is nothing left to do but look at the nightmare that has been shadowing the backs of our minds all the time.

To subscribe to this kind of notion takes a bit of preliminary thinking. You have to start out by assuming that the stark naked truth of man's existence is to be seen just by turning around and looking at it. We just open our eyes, stare in the right direction, and the whole thing stands there perfectly clear. You don't understand things by experimenting with interpretations of

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them - you understand them directly, by confronting them. Just around the corner of your facade you can face up to what's what.

Well, this is one way to go at it. When we start out with such a notion in mind, it happens that each time we turn a corner and see something rather grim we are likely to think, 'This is it. We have arrived. This is the end'. Still, there always seem to be more corners to turn and a starker nakeder truth that someone claims to have glimpsed in the dusk just ahead. It's awfully hard to settle on something grim enough to suit everybody.

So, while I was quite miserable, in some ways, about the goings-on that Friday morning, I was not then, nor am I now, convinced that I was face to face with the ultimate meaning of my life - or even very close to it, for that matter. Almost anybody - certainly any of my readers - could think up something a great deal more stark than what I have described. As a matter of fact, if I may address myself to you personally, haven't you already done so while reading this? As for me, if there was a nightmare catching up with me, I was well aware that it was the one I had personally manufactured and not the ultimate logos.

It seems to me that it must make a considerable difference whether one assumes that the ultimate facts of life are close at hand or that there are vast remote truths towards which we progress but slowly. The former view often seems quite practical - quite workable. You figure something out, and you believe it's there, and you believe in it, and you cling to it, and its everyday workability seems to support your feeling of having hit upon something solid. Like money, for example: there are so many things you can do with money, and, day after day, quite consistently, money gets results. So most of us put a lot of faith in it. Moreover, if we were smart enough, we could probably do a good deal more with money than we do.

But now consider the latter view, the view that there are vast remote truths towards which we progress but slowly. That is the kind of outlook that can encourage mysticism. You are always expecting tomorrow to be different, and you get fooled because it turns out to be the same, thousands of times in succession. Pretty soon you begin to look like an utter nincompoop. So you go through life half believing that anything is possible, no matter how unlikely it may be.

If every day were under a firm contract to duplicate every other day the bed rock realism of the former view should be the more comfortable of the two. The vast majority of one's days are indeed pretty much alike - at least we can get by by construing them so - just as the Sunday night about which I speculated in the first part of this chapter could be interpreted as pretty much like any other Sunday night. I wrote a remark - which I intend to retain in the manuscript - about this on Monday, the day my muse was packing up to leave. Having experienced a good many thousand of such everyday appearing days I suppose one could hardly blame himself for concluding that he had a pretty realistic slant on life.

But then you come to a day, just one day out of all the thousands, that does not fit the realistic way you cross off your calendar. Perhaps it is the day you die. Then, then if you try to cope with that day as just another Sunday night, or Friday morning, you may very well get the impression that you have been missing the truth of things and it is too late to do anything about it.

So, I lay there, that one day that was different from the thousands I had known before, that Friday morning, and I felt twinges of anguish. The anguish was a mixture of things: the ambiguity of my being - future, past, and present - the disarray in the orderliness of mind and body I had come to rely upon, and the unspeakable loneliness of guilt which threatened to cut me off from those closest to me. In fact, I suspect if I had been a very practical or exacting idealist I would have felt that truth had played me false, and, from that point on, the whole thing would have gotten badly out of hand. ('Practical Idealist:' No incompatibility of terms here, if we take the view that an idealist is anyone who carries a clear image of perfection around in his head:)

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But, even in those moments, I could not honestly believe that truth had played me false simply because I can't take truth very literally. Of course, I believe in truth, believe in it very deeply, but not literally like some people who hold up a book and say, 'This is it, the only infallible rule of faith and practice', or who intone some sonorous phrase, loaded with seventeen incompatible implications, and then say, 'Ah:' or 'Amen!' or 'Court's adjourned.' Why don't they say instead, 'This is the story of men's quest of God. As you can see, they haven't got very far. But it's a better guide to our further quests than the pronouncements of any one man, no matter how devout he may be'. Or, at least they could say, 'Ah, there must be more there than I can understand; I'll go home and think it over'. Or, when they rap the gavel, instead of saying, 'Court's adjourned!' why don't they say, 'Sorry! That's the best we can do today!'

Now that I think of it, I have never staked my existence wholly on the practical 'facts of life', though I have repeatedly told myself that I should. But how can one spend his whole life, the one and only life that is given him, taking notes on things as they are, without once using his pencil to make a little sketch in the margin depicting things as they might be. Must we always pretend that truth is only what is? Even on the one day, the one that is different from the thousands before, must we still pretend that?

All I need to say about keeping my anguish from enveloping me with practical disruptions is that I am not very practical anyway, and what idealism I carried over from my youth still tends to be vaguely wistful and inexact. I have never known beforehand precisely what I wanted or what I wanted to be, unless it was to be so many things that I could not decide what to eliminate. But this lack of singular purpose does not mean I have altogether failed to strive for what generally seemed worthwhile, or that I did not, in the erratic course of this striving, often find myself sitting with my arms around the very thing I wanted most. Moreover, a gratifying proportion of this striving I have managed, with a few annoying distortions here and there, to piece together into a vocation - a stroke of good fortune, in this vocation-oriented society of ours, for which I frequently have feelings of profound gratitude and amazement.

I hope, for Heaven's sake, it is clear that I am talking about my own experiences here, and not presuming to utter some basic truth about how your life can be made to conform to your most cherished expectations, or how your expectations can be stretched to conform to your life. You will have to figure out for yourself how to do that; although what I have written may suggest either ways to go about it or inadvertencies you will want to avoid. Besides, there are plenty of occasions when I find myself in circumstances I have not bargained for, and, while in retrospect I am often able to speculate on where I have made my mistakes, there are many outcomes that still have me bamboozled. So, don't take my medicine unless you want my headaches, too.

I must tell you, too, that as far as I can see, things do not turn out in others' lives the way they have in mine. To be sure, most people do not approach life the way I do, but, even if they did, there is nothing to guarantee that their experiences would add up the same way. There are some people, for example, who have had a very bad time of it - altogether too many people! And, of these, there are those who are overwhelmed and there are those who write successful books about their misfortunes and then contrive to repeat the inspirational cycle. Each person has his own entanglements and it is often convenient for him to preserve them. I know this. Among those who have spent long periods in psychotherapy with me, the cherished intricacies are vastly different, and one has to rise to very high levels of abstraction, indeed, if he is to formulate any simple over-arching principles that can be regarded, even tentatively, as inevitably governing all men's lives.

But, it is still Friday morning. I remember the faces of our daughter and son. There was deep concern there, but not, as far as I could see, any sign of panic. My job was cut out for me; it was to survive, if I could. But what were they to do? They could not help but be aware, even

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in that first hour, of the difficulties that my death would plunge them into. How well had I managed to forestall those difficulties? Not very well!

There were a thousand and one thoughts, intangible, important, that I had long imagined myself sharing with them, but always these had seemed to require a more propitious moment. So, not only was I lying there in a most unfatherly exhibition of helplessness that must give them none of the sense of security that children have a right to expect of a father in times of emergency, not only was I at the point of leaving them without having properly planned for their future, but I was about to be cut off from the last hope of ever saying to them what was always in my heart. I felt all this, not in sentences, as it is written down here, but altogether in one choking lump.

Then, there was this thought; it was a separate thought, I believe: Here I was creating additional strain for our pregnant daughter who, with her husband serving overseas, was already under too much stress. And I thought of our first grandchild, expected in a few weeks, whom I might never see, and to whom I might never tell the wonderful stories that all grandchildren should hear.

There were other moments, when I looked at our son and realized how like him it would be to try to sacrifice his own opportunities to make life easier for his widowed mother. He would undertake the sacrifices I had failed to make.

It occurred to me, too, how families always feel guilty when one of them dies, and everyone is inwardly depressed because he remembers how badly he treated the deceased. I know how terrible the pain of this kind of guilt can be, and how much one appreciates some sort of timely reassurance. So, I wanted to reassure the three members of my family standing there - to tell them how perfectly wonderful they had been. But how could I say that, without dramatizing a 'death-bed' scene! So I thought the better of it and kept my mouth shut. Besides, the doctor and the Emergency Squad people were standing around, and it was strictly none of their business.

The cruelest clutch of all came during those moments when I thought of the window's loneliness I might be bringing down on my wife. There seemed to be nothing I could do about this except to try desperately to stay alive. How does this business of human relationships work out? With one person you share too little, and when you go you leave in his memory only the shreds of the legacy he might have had; with another, you share too much, and when you go you leave in his memory altogether too great an emptiness.

There were other thoughts during this day that was like no other, many that do not lend themselves to words, and many too intimate to mention here. What I have said ought to be enough to indicate how, on such a day, things can become a bit messy, and may even fall apart completely if there is nothing to stop them. In my case, there was one thing that helped immensely - I didn't die. So that is something that comes later! But no matter; it seems clear now that death was not itself the bugaboo I faced. The pain: that was to be taken more seriously, and I must say it occupied a lot of my attention. But pain is not the worst; it can be helped, and, in my case, it soon was.

What is not so easy to help is the failure of those 'truths' that have served to make so many thousands of days turn out as expected. We believe them because how else is one to know what is really so, or how else to bridge the chasm between past and future over which we always find ourselves suspended, how else to find continuity and thus to live. These 'truths' - they can be little tick-tock-tick-tock truths that keep repeating themselves in the corner - and always so impersonal about what is going on that you don't mind having them around - or they can be big round shining truths - brittle as all perfect things must be - that roll along majestically until they crash against the day that was not meant for them, and leave you with nothing but their fragments, a litter of words - leave you shattered too.

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I suppose one solution is to forge bigger, rounder, fuller truths - really perfect truths this time, or, if not perfect, so hard they will not be shattered by the crash of single events. Then, when that one day comes along, we can simply regard it as an exception to the rule, a statistical improbability, or, if it is something nice, as a miracle. The trouble with this is that once you come face to face with this pesky statistical improbability you have to be an awfully fast talker to keep yourself convinced that it is not genuine. But then, some of us are awfully fast talkers, and quite ready to believe something does not exist if we keep telling ourselves it is not there.

But how about grasping the perfect incontrovertible truth, the frozen ultimate, the knowledge of the way things really *really* are; would not that end the confusion of having something happen unexpectedly, end it once and for all? With such knowledge in our possession nothing could possibly occur unexpectedly and our lives would be lived out perfectly in peaceful contemplation of what was coming next.

This, it seems to me, is like a man teetering on what he thinks is the edge of the universe and daring anyone to push him off. He feels perfectly safe because he thinks he knows what is what and there is obviously no such thing as ever going beyond the limits of reality. Still, occasionally he makes a pretense of looking over the edge, just for laughs, and he says, 'See, there really isn't anything there - just a lot of nonsense'. Then, out of the corner of his eye he does catch a glimpse of something moving out there in the nothing; at first, perhaps, no more than the shadows of his own imagination. All night long he wonders what is the perfect truth about them, how much further out their limits lie. So he secretly tests these shadows, tries to see if he can make them move. Soon he is working with his hands.

In time, there arise out there in the nowhere whole new cities, built outside the walls against which he once leaned so confidently. Now his world is different. Now his once 'perfect' truths tell him what he can see is not so, and, faithful as he may try to be, he can offer no more than lip service to them. Now, each time he looks up from his work and peers beyond his latest achievement, he wonders who he is to have imagined such things, and what he is doing, and he shudders to think how much of his life was spent behind the old barriers, or what unseen walls may imprison him now. And then he wonders more; to what destinies has he been false - and why has the evening grown so late?

This tail-spin of thinking starts as all tail-spins do, from the stall that occurs when one tries to stand still in mid-flight. From the moment we assume that truth is a stationary achievement, rather than a stage in a lively quest, it is only a matter of time until things start spinning round and round. Truth is neither reality nor phantasy. It needs to be understood, instead, as a continually emerging relationship between reality and ingenuity, and thus never something that can be skewered by a phrase, a moment, or a place. But can man ever trust himself aloft to such aerodynamics? Will he ever be able to get his mind off the ground and fly?

I looked at my family that morning and it occurred to me that if I had wished for the most wonderful thing in the world to happen it would turn out to be just such a family. And I realized that while life had given me only a small proportion of all the miscellany I had, at one time or another, grasped for, it had generally ended up supplying me with the very best that could be managed under the circumstances, better than anything I could claim to have deserved.

There is a certain injustice in this kind of outcome. Perhaps it would be more just for all of us to get exactly what we demand; it might serve us right. This is a familiar theme that runs through our folklore. The moral usually drawn is that we should not reach for anything at all, that we should sit around waiting patiently for our just reward. I must confess that I do not find the idea of living in a community of such deserving people very attractive. We would all be

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trying to out-deserve each other, and such a public exhibition of deservingness could become obnoxiously unctious. What a way to live!

But, anyway, this is not the way things are. Instead, the world is filled with injustices, heart-rendering injustices for the weak, disgusting injustices for the strong. Added to these are a lot of outcomes that are hard to appraise one way or the other, for our notions about what constitutes justice, and whose job it is to see that it happens, are still pretty foggy. I suppose we are inclined to think that justice is something to be dispensed by Providence or by incorruptible public officials, rather than something that has to be figured out by all of us. Thus, we tend to regard it like truth, something all packaged, rather than something continually in the process of definition.

I suppose I could have treated this undeserved reward so closely gathered around me as an insult to my sense of true justice, and only further evidence that the world was badly managed. Or, I could have held on to my proper misery by claiming that the reward was illusory, that only a little family-bound parochial mind would describe these three dimwitted anthropoids as 'wonderful'. Thus my Olympian sense of pure and perfect justice could be kept intact, along with any long-standing complaints I might have against God and man for their loose administration of such important matters.

None of this occurred to me that morning. What did occur to me was that it was a shame to waste these precious moments in self-recrimination when there before me was the best that a man could want, and that simply their being the kind of persons they were was the best of all the things I could have wished for them. Whatever else I might have provided, none would have been as valuable as what they already possessed. Whether all this was a reward intended for me, or whether it was deserved by me was quite beside the point. If there was anything tragic about my state that morning, it was my momentary failure to see what was there before my very eyes. This is what I thought.

But what about my own reprehensibility? Did the fact that I felt rewarded prove I was any less guilty? Of course not! It was just as clear as ever that the role I had enacted in life was not all it should have been. How smug would I have had to be to claim otherwise! Certainly the more one scrutinizes his relations with his fellow-man, the more he should be able to find wrong with them. And the more he tinkers with those relationships to make them better, the more practical faults will turn up. So, it seems to me that a sense of wrong - doing is what inevitably results from examining yourself and from making efforts to do better.

Perhaps if one only sits around and rationalizes, he may be able to set his house in apparent order, and keep it that way. But that assumes that he neither examines the facts critically nor experiments with improvements. Once one starts experimenting, the bugs, as they say in manufacturing circles, are bound to show up. The more you try to do right, the more you find wrong with yourself.

One way to assuage those horrible guilt feelings is to regard a mistake as something to be punished rather than an occasion for revision of outlook. This tends to keep you from experimenting and hence from discovering new - faults. Such a view helps one stabilize himself, and, of course, keeps him from making any genuine progress.

Closely allied with this view is the belief that a mistake is any deviation from the blueprint that has been laid down for us. All one has to do, then, to slough off the guilt is to get himself punished and thereafter keep his finger more firmly on the blueprint. This is the view a lot of people take toward sin, and it seems pretty superficial to me. To be frank about it, punishment and conformity usually work even harder for the perpetuation of evil than for the achievement of goodness.

There are philosophers who agree that punishment and conformity are not a cure for sin. That is good. So they try to figure out what has gone wrong. That is good, too. The more they

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think about it the more of a clutter they discover in man's affairs. Naturally! But there they stop the enterprise and start caterwauling. They generate a lot of anguish in themselves, they are overwhelmed by their guilt feelings, and they are often furiously angry at anyone who refuses to share their misery.

Suppose one takes the rather practical view that a mistake - or sin, if the point is to be made more dramatically - is something to be examined and corrected. This is what I think repentance means; but, then, most people don't agree with me. Once you do this, you start turning up new complexities, old values become shaky, new values begin to shape themselves, and you find that you have been making a host of blunders that you had never recognized before. Moreover, the simple perfections on which you used to pin your faith begin to look brutally primitive.

So far, there is really nothing dangerous about this line of inference. But if you lose sight of your objective at this point, and start telling yourself that punishment is the cure for all these freshly revealed mistakes, and that you are not fit to belong to society, then you are immediately in trouble - deep trouble. So there is a real hazard in examining your mistakes, unless you keep firmly in mind that the sole object is to provide grounds for trying out better ways of doing your part. The sense of guilt, then, can be harmful or helpful, depending upon what we think should be done about it.

So when I looked up at the faces so dear to me and mustered sense enough to recognize what had really happened in spite of my shortcomings, I felt a great surge of reassurance. The moment is still very clear to me. As for my feelings of inadequacy, of wrong-doing, or of sin, it became clear that they were important to me only if I lived to do something about them.

It occurred to me, also, that most people were wise enough not to expect me to be perfect, that I had myself long since outgrown such an exalted image of my destiny, and even if I did make a flat-out attempt at here-and-now perfection, I would probably stiffen up into just as foolish a posture as have the other people I have seen make that attempt. Besides, I still could not put my finger on where all my mistakes had been - mostly I knew only where I had deviated from convention - or whether all of them had actually been mistakes; nor did I know what could readily be done even if they had been mistakes. Naturally, I had some clues, here and there, but, in the main, these were questions it would take years to work out, and, if I did well with them, they would be followed by further, more perspicacious questions.

So that was that! It was at this point in the proceedings that I found myself free to go single-mindedly about the immediate task of surviving and trying to restore to my family whatever composure my antics had destroyed.

Taken altogether, what happened that week at the beginning of which I asked you to join me in imagining what it would be like to look in on our tomorrows? I don't know what happened to you, but one thing for sure, a lot of me was thrown into disarray - my insides, my orientation toward my surroundings, the enactment of my role as a responsible person, and, to some extent, my dynamic and delicately balanced status as a human being. My insides could not get into step with my heart, my mind could not pace itself to the successive moments that tumbled down on me, my pattern of life failed to lead up smoothly to the new turns of events, and, to make a long story short, the whole system of anticipations - who expects what to happen when - got badly mixed up. The zigs stopped matching the zags.

Depending on the level at which we focus attention on this confusion, we can call it 'pain', 'anxiety', 'guilt', or - if you prefer an up-to-date soul-shaking term for chaos - call it 'anguish'. But the anxiety was not as devastating as I suspect it might have been if I had not, in some generally way, already envisioned such a state of affairs. I had indeed eavesdropped on this moment, and I was not altogether without some notion of how things might be managed.

The part of the experience that more particularly might be called 'guilt' - the sense of loss of role, the failure to live up to my own expectations in relation to those closest to me - was the



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most difficult part to get hold of. It was to abate only when I looked more carefully at what was there in front of me and when I was to realize that guilt feelings are for the person who has some time to do something about them.

Q. And what do I now think of the whole incident?

A. I can't say that I liked it.

Q. So?

A. I wonder what will happen next week.

Q. Haven't I learned not to wonder about such things?

A. Oh, No! Quite the contrary!

Q. But won't speculation about them tend to make them happen?

A. Perhaps, but I insist on having some continuity in my life.

Q. What am I going to write about next?

A. Joy and depression.

Q. Is that to be based on experience too?

A. I don't know - yet!

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### **Reference (APA)**

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