

My First Sonnets

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to all my children. While I wish them all long and prosperous lives, my deepest wish is that they live full lives. I believe that this can only come from knowing truth and walking in the light. I have laid out what I believe reflects principles of truth and light as God has revealed through his Word and creation. I want my children to know those principles, to guide their lives based on these principles, and to judge their parent's lives based on these principles. Catalina and I recognize that we are not perfect, and often fail to live our lives in truth and light. We hope our children can see through our imperfections to the work that God has done and continues to do in us – and we pray will be done in them. We extend these wishes for our children to the families all around the world.

Preface:

Before reading any of the poems, I believe it will be helpful to understand a few key components of my writing.

Purpose: Some may wonder why I would make this project my dedication to children. It seems a bit beyond them. I'd like to lay out a few reasons for this work, which will hopefully help you understand it better as well.

- 1) It seems to me that the most worthwhile dedication my children could have is one that extends beyond the here and now. If I believe that preparation for the future, long term gratification, and integrity are important, then a work that will grow in sentiment seems to symbolize such a belief well.
- 2) One of my most depressing thoughts with our pregnancies is "what if I die before my children get to know me." While I don't fear death, I ache at the thought of separation and not being known. It's also hard to think about because I don't trust God enough with my children's future. I think they need me, though I know deep down that if I do have an impact on them in any positive way, it was God's work through me. So to allay such thoughts, I put my wishes, desires, and commands into writing so my children can know me even if their opportunity to speak with me gets cut short.
- 3) I want my children to be able to appreciate this when they are older. I want them to be able to look at their lives as ones that were thought of from beginning to end. I made the "ABC's," "123's," and "Colors" in honor of their birth – which is a joyous thing. But their lives aren't accidents or afterthoughts. Their births are hoped for, and we look forward to walking with them for the rest of their lives.
- 4) I want these poems to be like vows to my children. These are standards I want to embody, and what I want to exemplify to them. I will certainly fall short, but these poems are reminders to me about what is important, what I should be teaching, and how I should live.

Sonnets: I have found that sonnets are wonderful mediums through which to convey ideas. They hold a special place in my repertoire for a number of reasons. First, sonnets provide a known form so readers have a general idea how to read them and what to expect. Most of my sonnets are English/Shakespearean in form, meaning they have 14 lines of poetry, with each line containing 5 stressed and 5 unstressed syllables. It can be fun to read the poems fluidly, but you can also read most of them in strong iambic pentameter, with an exaggeration of emphasis built into the underlying scheme.

Second, sonnets provide a good structure to condense thought. When you have only 140 syllables. This requires the writer to be extremely intentional in word selection so as not only to fit the appropriate form, but to convey all the meaning they wish to convey.

As you read through most of the sonnets, recognize that they almost always follow the stressed – unstressed format, and an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme.

Elin's ABC's: Not knowing how many children we would have, I wanted to ensure that I covered the issue of character and morality with our first child. I wanted my child(ren) to know what kind of person they should strive to be. "Elin's ABC's," then, are focused on conveying aspects of character and morality that I think are guiding biblical principles. These poems are designed to set up the trait, then end the last two lines with an exhortation to embody and pursue the trait. The first letter of each poem also begins with the letter the poem is meant to represent in the ABC's.

Atticus's 123's: The second compilation leaves the emphasis of morality to focus more on ontology – or the way the world is. It is the nature of things. I speak of the nature of love and existence, the nature of the soul, the nature of family and structure, etc. While some of these issues touch on aspects like morality or epistemology, the core is intended to focus on the way the world is, not so much how it should be. While recognizing how it is can guide us to prescribe how we should act, my goal here was largely to describe. Similarly to “Elin’s ABC’s,” I incorporate the numbers (rather than letters this time) into the sonnets. The numbers can be observed beginning their respective lines (e.g. the sound “one” appears at the beginning of the first line in “One”).

Baby K’s Colors: Baby K never didn’t make it into our arms. I had these poems finished a couple weeks before we found out that our child had died. While I can’t say I’m certain about the issue of traducianism and when ensoulment begins, my commitment to the sanctity of life means that I give human life the benefit of the doubt. I believe there was a soul who was with us for a short period of time. Though we never got to know that soul, my commitment to life means that I’m not going to save these sentiments for a child we get to know better. My sentiments ring just as true for this child.

This compilation focuses mainly on epistemology – or the way we know truth. I was reminded of a song from my early Sunday School Days. “Red and yellow, black, and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.” I thought about all the different people groups represented in the song and how certain worldviews and understandings of truth had developed greater concentrations regionally. Of course these are very broad generalities, but I wanted to explore some of the stereotypical epistemologies from around the world. I did this by looking at African, Asian, European, and Native American worldviews. Obviously this is a very broad generality, and it leaves out some groups. However, I wanted to use this as a starting point. From these groups, I jumped to a bunch of other epistemologies that exist and addressed those – many of which relate to atheism and materialism, as that is my passion and a lot of what I encounter here in the West today. Of course not every sonnet is strictly epistemological. Some of them are focused more on ontology, metaphysics, or morality. However, many of the poems here touch on either how we know truth, or assumptions about what truth is, or the information we take in.

These sonnets are laid out a little differently in that there isn’t a particular place where I reference the colors like I did the numbers and letters. Many of the poems do include the color, and all of them allude to a phrase that contains a color. I also laid out the poems to have a similar equation of thought each time. The first quatrain (four lines) usually sets up the ideology at which I will inspect. It makes a four-line case or summary of the notion being addressed. Sometimes this is very general - a broad look at an ideology – and sometimes it is a specific aspect of an ideology. The second quatrain usually sets up a flaw with the ideology mentioned. If the ideology in the first quatrain is true, then what about such and such? The fourth quatrain either attempts to answer the questions raised by the second from my worldview and how I think the world really works, or it attempts to elaborate on the negative statements made in the second quatrain by asserting a positive philosophy in rebuttal. Finally, the couplet (last two lines) either 1) summarizes the crux of the dilemma, 2) summarizes the solution, or 3) uses the first line to summarize the dilemma and the second line of the couplet to summarize the solution.

Footnotes: One of the aspects of poetry I love most, is the thought it produces. The reader has to work through some of the meaning – it’s not all sugar coated for them. However, this is also one of the things

I hate most about poetry. It often seems as though the most obscure, open-ended poems are viewed as the best. Ambiguity and the notion that everyone can create their own meaning seem to be viewed as good things. I think that's terrible – in general. The author should be directing readers to an idea they are trying to convey, and readers should find out what that meaning is. How else can there be any discussion or disagreement if there is only shifting sands? It is for this reason that I like to explain some of the symbolism and meaning in my poems. I try to implement a great deal of depth into many of my poems, and I don't want readers to miss either aspect. I don't have room to explain everything I intend, but the framework of the explanation should provide a good starting point. Please don't read any of my poems and walk away thinking they're a garbled mess. They may be terrible poems or have terribly misguided ideologies, but there is intention there, and I lay that out for the reader for them to decide and rebut – not merely opine.

Masculine/Feminine Terms: I have had it pointed out by others that I use “man,” “mankind,” and “men” very frequently – and that is true. When I went through these poems with this awareness, I recognized that I was ignorant of a sensitivity that I needed to address. So I went through and changed many of the instances of “men/man/mankind” to generic terms of humanity. However, there were places where this was difficult to do due to rhyme scheme and syllable count, so I left those instances. To balance out my use of the masculine as representing all humanity, I changed some instances so that the feminine would represent all humanity. So in the “Discipline” poem, you will notice that I left “men,” as it was very difficult to change without altering the whole poem. Therefore, I was able to change “men” to “women” in some poems to balance out my masculine use. Some may see this as a ridiculous concession because they think language doesn't matter – and some will think the concession doesn't go far enough because I should change all masculine instances regardless. Hopefully the reasonable, empathetic people will understand that my recognition of my language is a step towards compassion and empathy, love me for who I am, and work with me as I attempt to love others – even to the degree of taking care in my language. For from the heart the mouth speaks.

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Elin's ABC's

Affections

*A*fflicted with a heavy mortal load

*The weight borne on the shoulders of us all
A choice remains for each one on their own
Press on toward goal or be pressed on and fall*

*One who has no affections has no heart
One who has dark affections has no soul
For anyone who lives, loves life imparts
And any who love life doth light extol*

*So live and press on to that which you're called
Desire with all your heart the light you see
Bear your load through tunnel, that we may laud
Your light encompassed soul in victory*

*Set your affections on that which is right
Throw off all that is dark, embrace the light*

All mankind is afflicted with sin and death. We all bear the same torturous burden of imperfection, and the knowledge that our lives are limited. Beyond the obvious burden of immoral decisions in sin, the most cumbersome aspect of our journey is the twisted affections within us. As Paul says, what we don't want to do we do, and what we want to do we don't do. It is a difficult thing to press on towards the good when we often don't want to. Our very affections fight against what we truly want, and what is truly the best for us.

While we all may bear the same burden, we make individual choices when it comes to dealing with that burden. We can either choose to press on towards our goal – in spite of the burden, or we can be weighed down by our burden and succumb to it (Heb. 12). I by no means intend to imply that we need to just grin and bear our burden. We do have a choice, but the only way we will succeed is by casting our cares upon Christ (1 Peter), and fixing our eyes solely on him rather than our burden (Hebrews). We only succeed by realizing our inability and giving that up to Christ. The focus is on the end goal, not on the current burden.

Every human has affections (desires/loves). The only human who doesn't have any affections is a dead human (or a heartless one as I say here, pointing to the source of physical life). Any man who lives will have life impart or bestow loves/affections on him/her.

Likewise, a human who does have affections, but embraces the dark affections, is a human who is spiritually dead (or a soulless one as I say here, pointing to the source of spiritual life). A human who is truly alive spiritually will embrace light/life. While Christ does sometimes mention that we must throw our lives away for his cause, he is referring to our clinging on to temporal life and goods. Here, life means true, abundant life – as Christ has called himself both life and light in John. The two often go hand in hand. A truly alive person embraces and glories in the light, and thus true life.

My desire for my children is that they have affections for that which is light. That is the goal that truly imparts life.

While we bear our burden here on earth, all we often see of the light (and true life) is a glimmer. Here I allude to the common phrase "light at the end of the tunnel." We are encompassed by the burden of darkness, but we press on towards the light. That is the true source of life, our goal, and the hope that awaits us at the end of the tunnel. This is largely a summary of the whole poem, but it is more in the format of an exhortation.

Beauty

*B*eset by distractions from all around

Afflicted by deception in oneself

By what means then can true beauty be crowned

That allow it to maintain its fair wealth

This world only leases, never to own

Merely insipid, fabricated things

Overwhelming masses, lest they bemoan

A façade that could never hold their gaze

But darling, truth, it opens up one's eyes

It scintillates inside their very being

So when they look with love or with despise

They can't avert eyes from what they're seeing

Present yourself with truth and without guile

And all will stare in awe of what is real

With all the distractions that are in the world (“world” as in the fleshly world, not as in the natural world), and all the “pleasures” with which it and the media entice us, how are we to sift through and determine what is beautiful? It makes our job more difficult. That difficulty is compounded by the deceit that is present within ourselves, as we often times fool ourselves as to what is truly beautiful.

Everything the world throws at us to satisfy our craving for beauty is temporary. We lease out our fulfillment of beauty and pleasure, but the world cannot give us that fulfillment because it does not own those things.

The strategy of the world, then, is to constantly throw “beauty” our way. Definitions constantly change, fads change, and the items that satiate our temporary desires change. By inundating us with fabrications of real/true beauty, we often don’t have time to be discerning about what true beauty is. Yet we do get inklings of this, as we recognize there is temporary satisfaction. What the world throws at us never holds our gaze. It is fleeting.

Truth is at the core of true beauty. Whether it’s mathematical truths that make the art appear beautiful, scientific truths which are beautiful to our minds, or moral truths that – when fulfilled – make our souls feel good that the world is how it should be, those things are beautiful. The purity and intrigue of seeing things for what they truly are fascinates people as it comes together and shows how the world truly is and/or should be.

While I believe beauty is strongly linked to the true essence of something, this does not sit well with everyone. Whether others feel threatened that their true selves will be exposed, whether it’s jealousy, or something else, some will despise beauty and truth. Nevertheless, they will be captured by it. And at least they’ll get a glimpse of reality, which will hopefully one day change them.

When we encourage our children to be beautiful, this isn’t to say that we are concerned with them looking physically beautiful. While that may be great if they are, their true beauty comes from presenting their true selves, not a façade – whatever that may look like to others. That is not to say just being yourself is beautiful. Nobody would say that of the serial killer, the kleptomaniac, etc. This notion of presenting one’s true self needs to be tempered with the rest of the 25 poems I am writing. Your true self is unique, but at the same time must fit within certain parameters. A boxer’s strength in his hit is wonderful inside the ring, but is generally bad when used outside. Likewise, being truly human and being truly fulfilled means living with an understanding not only of who we are, but of who we are meant to be. In this sense, beauty is something that can very actively be pursued in a non-superficial sense. In fact, it’s antithetical to superficial, as it is not putting on makeup and putting up fronts, it’s the tearing down of facades and living in true reality.

Courage

*Comfort is sparse in a world of despair
Where hope is oft destroyed before it's born
And sparser is it still in a world where
Those attempting escape, by masses scorned*

*But those depressed should never keep you down
For you must kick against goads that oppress
And though masses compress from all around
Your job is to live well, not to impress*

*Comfort in this world is in courage found
As courage releases from bond of fear
It's only master he who is not bound
Its only source, freedom from the austere*

*Press on, move out, into the world's expanse
Be burdened not by man and his commands*

Comfort is difficult to find in a world where you know that everything could be demolished tomorrow. [Here I use the word comfort to be somewhat synonymous with “peace.” In a world of difficulty peace provides the only comfort, which is why I sort of use it interchangeably]. It’s even harder in a world where, for many, it seems as though the deck was stacked against them from ages past- before they were even born. Whether it’s class systems, genes, educational opportunities (or lack thereof), etc. – the world is cruel. The word “world” here is used in a single syllabic way. People sometimes pronounce it “world” or “wer-uld.” To pronounce it with two syllables would throw off the meter and flow.

What makes this world even more difficult, is that since many face the same hardships and threat of destruction, they often scorn those who are able to escape and find temporary or significant comfort/peace. Our culture glories in rags to riches stories, yet it’s often in a very envious sort of way, as we live vicariously through the success of others. However, we are often cynical about those in power, those with wealth, and those who succeed. It isn’t long before those who have succeeded are viewed with cynicism, as envy and greed take over. The same can be said of those who have perpetual peace. The comfort I hope you find is a comfort that is not a result of money, power, or certain forms of success. In fact, my desire is that your peace would come from your ability to escape the notion that those things can bring you lasting comfort and peace, as I mention at the end of the poem. Many will not understand that, and will scorn you regardless of where you find the source of your peace.

Whether it’s the world or the people that try to keep one from comfort, the imperative is that you fight back against that oppression. Your job is to live well and live at peace with the knowledge that the world and the people in that world ultimately have nothing that binds you or obligates you to what they decree. While others are important, they are important not because they create the rules and expectations to which you are truly bound, but because the true moral ontology binds you to live an exemplary life that comes in contact with those who are bound by self and fabricated structures. It is in this higher call that you can show them freedom from their oppressive systems they create, and the oppressive systems to which they willfully bind themselves. Therefore, don’t worry about what anyone does or thinks, as impressing those who have no peace is a futile, irrational endeavor. Rather, live outside their constrained bounds so you can help them freely, and be an example to lead them out of their oppression.

Courage is what provides us comfort/peace in this world, because it recognizes fear as largely irrelevant, and pushes on with what it knows must be done and is more important. Without the fear of the world or others, one can live in comfort and peace regardless of circumstances.

The only one who can control courage, however, is one who is not bound to those things that produce fear (the world and people). And the only way one cannot be bound to those two things is to throw off the overbearing, tedious rigidity of the moral and social law. This is an allusion to a reliance on grace and being bound to the one who gives us freedom from the law – Jesus Christ. We can have courage because we are bound to the one who has freed us from this world’s fear, and to himself in his victory and continued power over it.

This courage gives us the ability to move out into the world rather than remain back, being overly protective and concerned about our status and possessions, if we were fortunate enough to experience any of that. But it doesn’t matter, since that is not what fulfills us. I desire you to daily throw off your encumbrances and live in grace, which is a position that provides immeasurable courage, and will surely exemplify it in one’s life as such.

Discipline

*D*esire's end leads to desire' for more

*And more leads to desire for it now
World's enticements make it hard to abjure
Instant fulfillment to which we kowtow*

*While it seems all good things come to an end
No truly good thing comes without long start
For time invested in great discipline
Grows deeper pleasures which it can impart*

*Desire's grand - affections we all need
But it makes terrible ruler of men
My long grown desire' is that you'd be free,
Your desires controlled by discipline*

*Look far ahead and always count the cost
What's now fulfilled kills time, forever lost*

*I use the apostrophe to denote when “desire” is read with 2 syllables instead of 3 to help the reader know my intention, since meter and iamb are so important for reading sonnets. “Desire” is sometimes pronounced as DE-SIRE, but is also pronounced DE-SI-ER. Here I use the various pronunciations to aid the formation of the sonnet into the typical pentameter a little more easily.

Desires are good overall. In fact, the very first poem was about “affections,” which are essentially desires. However, I think the term “desire” can connote more short term, emotion laden wants. Desire’s end (fulfillment/goal) is often addicting, leading to a desire for more (food, entertainment, power, money, etc.). We love the reward of achieving what we’ve desired. But the more we get, the more we tend to want. As we wallow in our desire and our focus on achieving those ends, not only do our desires increase and become insatiable, but our desire for the immediacy of the results grows as well. I discussed in the last poem how fickle the world is with its distractions and pleasures, and I bring that up again here. In a world that provides constant enticements at your fingertips, it is easy to get in this downward spiral of desire and immediacy. While desire, possessions, pleasures, and the like are not inherently bad by any means, it shouldn’t be hard for most of us to see how desires easily move from something possessed by individuals, to something that possesses individuals – often in the form of materialism.

While everything here on earth fades – even the good things – the fickle, instant pleasures the world offers us are particularly fleeting (just like the pseudo-beauty we see as alluring us and failing us in the “Beauty” poem). While many good works and good investments will eventually fade as well, desire placed into the hearth of discipline will forge a much stronger, richer product than those crafted hastily. It is much more worth the while to meld desires with discipline. I use the word “grow” here to allude to something that takes time (we usually think of plants and the effort of gardening). It is not matured from the start, but must be coddled and cared for until it reaches fruition.

We certainly need affections, and it is even something I desire for my children. However, that comes with the caveat that I placed in the “Affections” poem. Those affections must be of the light. The affections that are of the light rule well, and tend to be affections that require discipline to achieve. Since we are caught up in a world and in a body that are temporal and fleeting – and since what is truly worthwhile is that which invests in the eternal – it makes sense that what is valuable would take time to build. That’s not to say that this world and our bodies are bad in the gnostic sense. We know that being truly human now and in the future requires embodiment. The body (or bodies) is/are good. Rather, it’s acknowledging the current limitations of this particular body and world. It’s also important to know that I am not being double minded in desiring affections and discipline both. But even good desires can lead men astray, as they lose sight of the long term goal and the discipline it takes to get there. Desire and affections are both great, but if the desire – even good desire - becomes the goal or ruler, it becomes insidious. It isn’t just the heinously evil who fall short, but the Pharisee as well.

I make sure to note that my desire for my children to be disciplined is a long grown desire. That hints back to the previous stanza where I note that it isn’t all desire that’s bad, but desire without discipline – or desire without putting in the time for it to grow. I’ve been alive over 28 years, and my desires for what is best for my children have grown through many experiences, challenges, failures, successes, etc. This is not a shallow desire or one I expect will just be exhibited by my children. It’s a desire I have for them, which means for that to succeed, it is also a commitment to them on my part as I nurture its growth in them.

Those who do receive instant and/or shallow gratification of their desires may scorn others who abstain in discipline, either because they are jealous of those strong enough and dedicated enough to build lasting riches, or because such actions shine light on the fickle reality of their works and make them look bad. Either way, their instant gratification has a cost. It kills time one will never get back, and will never again have to invest in that which is truly, lastingly meaningful and fulfilling.

Empathy

*E*motion laden culture we indwell

*Accosting our senses at every turn
Displaying evils straight from gates of Hell
Embracing sensual sights for to burn*

*Such high emotions are a strong litmus
Indicating culture desensitized
For what else can explain this consensus
To entertain atrocity and vice*

*Oh how the world needs people who can feel
Those who relate to even the mundane
And those who will run to rather than reel
Women who hideously cover pain*

*Run out into the world in empathy
Stand with men where they stand, don't turn and flee*

Our society is filled with high emotions. This goes hand in hand with the “beauty” I mention society constantly throwing at us. We are inculcated to pursue stimulation and instant gratification. We’re constantly bombarded in the media, on YouTube, in discussions, etc. – about the horrendous evils and provocative, sensuality that is present in our world. Some of these things are so evil, it appears that they come straight from Hell, while others so embrace vice and the carnal desires of man, they cause us to burn with lust and shallow, carnal desires. While many may not think the two (pleasure/atrocious) on the same level, here I link them with “Hell” and “burn” to show that they have the same source and connotations.

The fact that we are enthralled by such extremes in feeding our emotions shows us we’ve been desensitized. We’ve acclimated to lesser emotions. It is a travesty of our senses that we cannot sympathize with that which would have been a tragedy in other times and other cultures. Nothing other than a searing of our emotions and consciences could explain our whole culture’s affinity with such extreme emotions.

It now takes a huge atrocity for many to feel any semblance of sorrow or sympathy. That desensitization banishes those who have “lesser,” but certainly severe or difficult situations they deal with to a time of utter loneliness. It invalidates their hardships and the emotions pursuant to those experiences. The world needs people who are sensitive in their emotions and can empathize with those who experience evil against them, especially evils that most others who are desensitized would consider mundane. Likewise, the world needs those who can empathize with others struggling with temptations and vices we might otherwise think harmless. Most will never commit atrocities against large groups of humans, and most will never murder another, but many will be utterly lost and sidetracked in the “mundane” sins and struggles, along with the guilt and despair that brings. We need those who can empathize with the common man. At the same time, we also need to be sensitive enough to what is right and wrong that we do not fail to call evil, evil. Ironically, it is only by identifying and calling out evil that one is able to begin counteracting the effects of it. It’s like the first step to recovery, as you need to acknowledge your problem before you can address it and the consequences of it. While that may be easily accepted when it comes to calling out atrocities, it is usually deemed as judgmental, bigoted, or condescending when doing so about vice. However, just as it is unloving for a parent to fail in the disciplining of their child, or a friend to avoid being honest with their friend about a potentially harmful decision, so it is unloving for us to fail to identify evil and name it as such. This is a huge problem in our society, as anyone who speaks out against sins our culture has now embraced due to a seared conscience and emotional palate, is railroaded into compliance with the social and moral norms. Regardless of being called bigots, of being criticized, of being berated, and of being persecuted – we need to speak out against evil. However, one who has the characteristic of empathy (as well as many of the other characteristics I mention in this compilation) will do so in a loving way. Yes, evil is bad and brings judgment, but one who empathizes and lives in grace understands that they also are under judgment, and but by the grace of God, they would be in the other’s shoes - and often are in other shoes, and the one in need of another's empathy. Rather than criticize from afar, then, the empathizer will put themselves in the other’s shoes, understanding that a savior has done the same for all. The empathizer, therefore, approaches the grotesqueness of atrocity and the grotesqueness of vice in much the same way – not with self-righteous judgment, but rather with courage, faith, grace, hope, kindness, love, majesty, nobility, optimism, humility, respect, a servant’s heart, thankfulness, vulnerability, wisdom, the power of Christ, and zeal (see past and future poems).

The word “reel,” here, serves three functions. 1) It means what is probably most apparent. We should run to, not reel from those who are hurting. 2) I do not include the “from” in the phrase “reel from,” so without the reader filling that in for themselves, it literally reads that we need to run to men, not reel men. In this sense, it means that our words and actions should not cause others to reel from us. 3) While Christ calls believers “fishers of men,” here I push back against that concept because of our cultural perceptions. I don’t think it’s a bad analogy of what we should be, but I think it conveys certain connotations in our culture I would like to avoid. Rather than standing on the bank or being in the safety of a boat and fishing for “fish,” we need to see ourselves as part of our culture and those who are suffering. We are not forcing or reeling others to us. Our actions and our hands-on involvement and love will compel others towards us. This is extremely distinct from our political activist Christian culture, which believes that the political sphere is really our savior, and following strict, moral laws is what will save others. In this sense, they are trying to drag (or reel) culture forcefully rather than getting their hands dirty. To me, this seems more of a pharisaic picture. We’re telling the world they need a savior, then showing them with our beliefs and

actions that this savior is really politics and moral laws. We are our saviors and the saviors of men. This needs to be adamantly pushed back against by those who are saved by grace from the moral law which has seen all men fall short, even and especially the self-righteous.

We also need those who can empathize with the worst of it all. Those who can meet our society and the world where atrocities are made and vices nurtured. While that all may be wicked, we are called to be lovers of men, even men who are our enemies. It is easy to forget that the worst are still humans, but it is vital to remember this so we can reach them, and so we can be humbled as we see who we truly are without God's continued intervention.

*I say here that "women" hideously cover their pain. This is not intended to single out women at all. Rather, it is meant to balance out my use of the term "men," as explained in the preface.

Sympathy is me sitting here feeling sorry for someone else. Empathy is me relating to someone else and therefore performing an action in response. I desire for my children to run out into the world and to stand right alongside those who are in it – whether the mundane or the worst of the worst. I do not want them to react to the world and pull out of it. Withdraw style Christianity's sympathy lies only in a sympathy of self. "Why, Oh Lord, do you tarry and leave me – your blessed and righteous child - here to suffer alongside such evil?" I want my children to hold up others as they bear together the consequences of evil which have been brought on by all who are evil, including them. This sort of empathy stems from a humbling acknowledgement that we all are part of the fallenness that pervades this world, and only one minor appendage in need of working towards the redemption and support of all.

Faith

Forgotten promise - longing since long gone

*Humans believe in nothing but what is
Without belief that right will turn from wrong
Faith is as distant as forlorn promise*

*But lack of faith about what is to come
Is symptom of a hope that is not there
For how can one have faith in hope one shuns -
Freedom from pleasure's tendrils of despair*

*I hope you cling to promise as we do
I hope your life is steadied by your faith
I trust your faith will surely be imbued
Faith in and sustained by Almighty's grace*

*Set your affections on the things above
And faith will follow, in the things to come*

When Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden, there was a knowledge of loss and a separation, with a hope of all made right. Likewise, in early Christendom, there was a fresh revitalization of the hope of restoration, as Christ and his promises were near in heart and mind. However, most seem distant from such hope of restoration today, even Christians, as they don't really seem to align their faith and hope with the claim of redemption and a lasting, possible, future hope. All we seem to believe is that which is before us. While that may look slightly different to different people, it is basically the beliefs that the world is cruel, evil usually wins, vice is rarely punished by God's fist, and good men die and suffer. The world is not right, and we have no hope of realizing that rightness. I don't think it is a coincidence that dystopian stories are prevailing in our culture at the moment, alongside voter turnout being so low. We are as cynical a society as we've been for some time, and if we are finally coming to the realization that we can't affect change in the real world, why not accomplish the impossible vicariously through fantasy? Often times, these beliefs about how the world actually is lead people to wonder why they themselves shouldn't indulge in the pleasures evil seems to bring with surety, if God is just going to be lax about it – if there is a god at all. There is no judgment and no forthcoming promise, therefore there is no hope in anything other than the moment, so live it up, *carpe diem*, YOLO.

Without the belief, or hope, that what is wrong will be made right, faith is as far from our hearts as dwelling on seemingly broken/never going to be fulfilled promises are from actually being fulfilled in our minds.

This reiterates the last section. Our lack of faith isn't a fault of mustering on our part. People don't just garner faith in themselves. As many who are into doxastic voluntarism will attest – we can't "just believe" something. Belief is something that is fostered, not mustered. Faith is a result of hope, as Hebrews 11 says. Our lack of faith generally belies our claims of hope.

Unfortunately, our lack of faith is much deeper than just a forgotten promise. Not only have we thrown off faith in restoration, but we've replaced that faith with another belief. We believe that restoration isn't coming and therefore that vice isn't punished, that good men do suffer, and that earthly pleasures are the best consolation. We are now so enthralled by pleasure and vice, that we are averse to hope, even if we see glimmers of it every now and then. We are held by the tendrils of earthly desires and are so caught up in evil's false promises, we no longer even want another source of hope to exist. Sensuality and immediate gratification have become our hope, and therefore our rulers. I know I've talked pejoratively about "pleasure" quite a bit, but I by no means intend to promote asceticism. The issue I have is not at all with pleasure, but with fostering true characteristics, true pleasures, and those true experiences of the light which bring about lasting, full joy. Pleasure – particularly temporal, fleeting, pleasures devoid of light – are terrible masters if they are pursued as an end in themselves. Their hope lasts only as long as their momentary stimulation.

I desire that our children cling to the true hope, not as distant, but as near – just like their parents try to do (though imperfectly). I hope their lives are controlled by their faith. Notice here, how I use the word "hope." I have a hope for my children, which fosters certain aspects of what my faith looks like for them.

I transition from using the word "hope" to "trust," which is intended to be synonymous with "faith," plus add a notion of a reliance and relationship that trust typically connotes a little more strongly (in my opinion). I have faith that faith will be granted to my children. Here I don't speak of my children garnering up their own faith, but rather I trust that God will impart that faith to them. Were that faith and its promises to rely on my children, I would have a very limited faith in their mustering of it. No amount of imperfect genes, imperfect parenting, or imperfect children could provide me with surety of their faith. However, God and his promises and goodness allow me to have faith in him, and therefore my children's faith through his power. That is one way we are reminded of the immediacy of the future, perfect promise, as we see the beginning of God's redemption and promises come to fruition in the lives of us and those whom we know and love, understanding what a miracle it is that these imperfect lives can be impacted and changed.

The summary exhortation emphasizes the order of operations. Our hope comes prior to our faith. We broken, destitute sinners recognize our position, and realize that a way has been made for us. Our hope in that mercy and grace is the spark that ignites faith within us. Faith is not simply believing without seeing, but rather seeing a goal

so clearly, we can't help but believe. Our faith is the result of seeing the finished work of Jesus Christ as we are regenerated, in contrast to the opening of our eyes to the truth of the depravity in which we lie, the evil we create, and the sinfulness in which we relish. Perhaps out of all poems, this will be the most contentious – as it most belies a particular theological camp. Nevertheless, the point is that many have lost hope, embraced evil, and focus/rely on self. I want my children to hold hope close, keep evil far, and rely on their God - their only hope.

*Grace

*Good men are thrown into the sea of fate
Drowning in ocean's fury, towards demise
Praying that deeds sufficient will abate
Tempestuous abyss preventing rise*

*But women entangled in their good works
Sink heavier than one unencumbered
For good women seeking favor from earth
Find their favor when god they seek, inters*

*Daily men die and languish in the sea
Daily you must avoid their same mistake
Eternally you live and set men free
Eternities, the costs that are at stake*

*Be burdened not as you unburden men
Live in grace, and with it grace all's presence*

While I believe that “good men” could be replaced by “all men,” I think it works best as it is. I think this is particularly the case because all men think they’re good men – at least for a time. Even most who believe they’re lower than others (e.g. certain classes in class systems), they think they’re good for sticking to that class and “following the rules.” Others who may accept and embrace that they’re “bad” and continue to pursue that path, are no longer men who are alive, but have already been devoured by and interred in the earth, as shall be seen later. Their embracing of earthly pleasures and fulfillment indicates their death and embracing of it, at least in their soul. This fury of the sea batters us and ultimately attempts to pull all of us down – some sooner than others.

Most men fight the seas of life with good works – karma. Your good deeds will come back around to you, or your good deeds will negate or abate the fury of life, either in the corporeal or ethereal sphere, or in both. Maybe – if one happens to be good enough, they can rise above the turmoil of the sea and live in peace and comfort.

Those who attempt to rise via good works miss the point. To truly live free, we cannot add to ourselves. Attempting to avoid sinking by encumbering ourselves makes things worse. It entangles us and weighs us down as we fight each incoming wave (Heb. 12). We must throw off our burdens and the weight of sin which entangles us – stripping ourselves naked – looking only unto Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, stripped and striped himself for us.

Men who are attempting to receive favor from the earth (earthly pleasures, earthly comfort, earthly possessions, imperfect peace on earth, etc.) are worshiping the earth. That doesn’t necessarily mean the granola type worship, but people who are fully invested and focused on this temporary, earthly, mortal life. All men who worship this as the ultimate end eventually find it, as the earth obliges them and makes them permanent fixtures when it inters them in herself. Ironically, the abyss of the earth is pulling at men, and to escape her, they worship her. While the earth sets out with fury against man, men tend to worship this wicked tormenter rather than seek one who is greater and more benevolent than she.

All men are struggling to stay afloat in the sea, and many will be pulled down to their death every day. But my desire for my children is that they will not be weighed down by the same encumbrances of putting stock in their good works, or temporary, earthly relenting of the tumult. In the “Nobility” poem, I will allude back to this poem, as I exhort to live above the sea seen here, and I explain the source of the power to embrace good works.

But I hope more for my children than they just escape the wrath of life themselves. I desire for them to seek and save the lost. I want them to reach out with grace to others, empowered by the grace that saved them from the sea, and continues to shelter them from the tempests daily. It is not merely self that is at stake, but the eternities of multitudes.

Grace is a double edged virtue. It is first a virtue that we must receive. It unburdens those who are burdened. It is the extension of mercy and favor to those who are not necessarily worthy of mercy or favorable. Because everyone is lesser than another – and all are lesser than God – we must be freed of our burden if we are to be able to help others (like oxygen masks on airplanes). But for those who have received true grace, it is impossible and damnable to hoard that grace for oneself. It frees us and compels us to move out into the world, extending grace to all whom we meet, as all are in need just as we. Those who receive grace do not likewise extend grace because they are required to – which would be antithetical to grace. Rather, grace compels them.

Hope

*H*ouses rest upon strong foundations
Great lives rely upon the very same
Both will crumble if they are weakened
Both will hold strong if they are well maintained

*Abode alone, as life in shambles,
Cannot for long withstand a tempest's beat
For wind is stronger than wooden beams
And troubles batter hollow souls, effete*

*So as you build this life of your own
Do so first with your pick and with your spade
Rest upon your deeply entrenched hope
So your faith and love will stand through the waves*

*Your life cannot rest if not arrested
Be grounded in hope's solid foundation*

To symbolize hope, of sorts, I altered the normal sonnet scheme slightly. The first and third lines in each stanza are 9 syllables instead of 10 (one syllable short of the expected pentameter). That makes the poem read differently, and it seems incomplete. It is very awkward to read, especially in the context of all the other poems which tend to read in more fluid iambic pentameter. It just feels as if something isn't right, especially if you read it with emphasis on syllables. It is only in the final couplet where everything is brought together to fit. This is meant to symbolize hope, as the reader should be hoping for resolution, and expecting it, then finally realizing it at the end.

Out of all the poems in this series, I feel like this is the most straightforward in meaning. To live a full, guided life, we really have to have a strong foundation. I believe that strong foundation is mostly hope. Hope indicates where our focus lies, and in turn will guide all of our other characteristics. It will determine where our affections lie, how much we're willing to endure, etc. While the greatest of faith, hope, and love is love, I believe that is due to its effect on others and the impact on the world. But without the hope to ground that love, I don't think love would be willing to endure, it wouldn't be as strong, it wouldn't be as deep. Hope grounds it all because it's based upon our ultimate goal and desire. So before you work on other affections, you must first dig deep and figure out where your hope lies.

This sums it up. If your life is not captured by some hope- if you're not deeply invested in some area – particularly a worthwhile area - you are aimless and your life will be in ruins internally, externally, or both. The only way we get rest and build strong is by being grounded in a strong foundation, having a hope with a foundation built upon rocks rather than sand.

Inquisitiveness

*I*llustr'ous mankind vivit in mundo

*Yet most choose to survive absque luce
Taking advantage of life's large loop hole -
Thriving off others' work, in the mundane*

*But more is life than mere utility
To hold a grudge at mass for ignorance
Life is the one, precious Ubiquity
That's called to subjugate all dissonance*

*So you, with life, should never stand to bear,
Darkness, which like all, you were born into
For never should you be a subject here,
Where you were meant to conquer and to rule*

*Be ignorant not, for this is not bliss
Answer your call with inquisitiveness*

Man is “illustrious” regardless of his accomplishments. All man is made in the image of God (as will be expounded upon in “Majesty”) and has significant dignity. While some men end up accomplishing more and being illustrious for more reasons, as shall be seen with the inquisitive ones in this poem, we all have a basic, but profound dignity and worth. Although we all share the same dignity and worth, many choose to live in the darkness. However, I use the word “survive” here because it’s not really living. It’s a shallow getting by. Since the topic is inquisitiveness, I used Latin here (hopefully Google Translate was accurate). Understanding Latin was a symbol of the learned in the Western World for centuries. I also used Latin to hopefully require the reader to be inquisitive and seek out what it meant and why it was used (Lives in this world / Without light).

I consider life’s loop hole to be that most of humanity thrives off the advances made by those who are inquisitive. Most of the advances, discoveries, and good things brought forth to the populous are from the inquisitive. The masses benefit from the work and attributes of a few. I used the word “loop hole” for another reason. I talk about how those who aren’t inquisitive choose to live in darkness, and then use “loop hole” to allude to the notion of a physical hole/cave. The willfully ignorant are a subterranean breed. There are organisms that can thrive in underground/cave systems, but they do so in darkness and in an extremely limited fashion compared to those on the surface.

But if all I was bemoaning was that a lot of people don’t contribute to making things – or being useful to me – that would be a childish grudge to hold against someone and their preference, and a selfish grudge at that.

But to live - particularly to live with true Life (as discussed in life and light from Affections) - carries a call upon all who possess life. The ubiquity of life is not that human life is everywhere, but that we have been given dominion, to use our life to rule everywhere. We are called to “tend and keep” the garden, which implies not only a “no harm” policy, but a betterment notion as well. Now that the world is fallen, particularly as Christians, we are called to seek restoration of the world as it should be. These two lines also have a double meaning, as “Ubiquity” is another name for God, and has particular connotations of his omnipresence. In that sense, the call to dominion of [human] life is everywhere, along with the true Life. While human life attempts to answer their call to stewarded dominion, the true Life rules over all things actually, and will bring all dissonance into subjection, restoring the world as it should be.

With Life and Light, anything that has a hint of darkness should be empty and repulsive. You were born into ignorance and sin, but you should not remain there. Embracing ignorance, therefore, should not be palatable. You should be inquisitive and seek out answers to the intellectual, natural, and redemptive problems in this world. This isn’t for the purpose of knowing more than someone else, or simply making mindless pleasures to ease those in the dark through their meaningless lives. It’s because learning is part of who we truly are, and is one step towards our own restoration as we attempt to fulfill one of our original tasks given before the world and our selves were felled. It also helps us to enjoy our creator more, as we learn more about the world he created, and more about the ubiquity in which he resides, while at the same time being awed that the Ubiquitous One resides specially, particularly, and instantially within us. Many early scientists knew this well, as many declared the desire of God as the main reason they pursued knowledge of the natural world.

To give in and embrace the darkness is denying who you were called to be. It denies your humanity. It also fails to shed light into the darkness in an attempt to make that darkness repulse. This will be resonated again in the “Majesty” poem, as it explores our call to rule and uphold the dignity of mankind as he was created to bear the image of God.

Ignorance is not bliss, it is mundane, dark, and unfulfilling. To be who we were meant to be, or answer our call, we need to be inquisitive. To answer our call, we must ask questions.

Joy

*J*uxtaposed beings bright with their fair gift
Dark out the sun, the source which doth sustain
Ignorant of their ever wide'ning rift
Where Joy's bereft - remuneration, pain

*Why is it these creatures abhor the light?
Why is it creatures indulge agony?
Tis better than to bear sun's blinding sight
And better than to feel vicar'ously*

*But joy is not a bar that's set too high
For no bar could extend unto the sun
And sun the one who sets the bars awry
Op'ning bars to make merry, everyone*

*Do not be double minded in this world
Let joy shine in and on and through your soul*

I'm going to provide a brief summary here (TLDR) before I go into detail, as it may be hard to understand how this really fits joy. Man and God are juxtaposed in that they are both similar in their light (life), yet man is dark because of his turning away from the source of his life (God). While man thinks this provides him with autonomy and true joy, it creates darkness and a gulf between true joy and themselves – instead, bringing pain and despair. Men do this for one of two reasons: 1) because they hate delayed gratification and want to personally experience the pleasures others are experiencing now – they don't want to miss out on fulfillment (or what they think is fulfilling, or 2) they can't bear a hope so distant, and a perfection so unachievable, especially when it requires reliance on someone else (see "Faith"). However, joy is not a bar so low as to require instant gratification, and it's not a bar set so high we cannot achieve it. Ironically, it is only by the vicarious (from the previous paragraph) that we can have this hope. Since God and Christ are above the bar, they can empower us to get over the bar, achieving joy. In fact, they're the only source to empower us. But not only can they empower us over the bar, they free us from the prison bars in which we're trapped. And not only are we freed and empowered, but they open up the bars of libations to make us merry. It is these three things (freedom from all, empowerment to accomplish, and merriment for our souls) that allow us to experience joy.

The beings I am speaking of are humans. Their fair gift is their life, particularly the human life empowered by their soul. This magnificent breath of God breathed into humans, however, is juxtaposed by the darkness created by their turning on him. While there is still light in them, and while God is still light, humans have turned from that light in an attempt to block it out from their eyes and minds.

Humans are and have become ignorant of the cost of blocking out God and masking over the indwelling of light in them. While humans turn away in an attempt to find what they believe is true pleasure, happiness, and joy, they are really trading joy for pain. While they may experience momentary pleasures, compared to true joy, all they get is pain.

So if light is good and its absence leads to agony, why would anyone want to blot out the sun? As Milton says in "Paradise Lost," "better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Our imperfection causes man to strongly resist the light. It is sometimes difficult to look at the light either because it hurts our eyes too much due to our sensitivity to it from dwelling so long in utter darkness, or it hurts to see what the world is not and long for what seems so impossible and distant. We trade illumination of our wrongs and a hope for what is to come for temporary, momentary, indulgences. It is difficult to see others seemingly enjoy this life, and to trust God, the source of the light, for a future we have to wait for and cannot control in regard to its certainty. Rather than allow others to enjoy this life, and rather than trust in the vicarious works of Christ and his imputation towards us, we only trust what we can experience - and we want to experience it through our senses and selves, not by watching others seemingly enjoy what we're not. We throw off everything so we can be in control. Ironically, if the future were in our control it would be certainly lost, yet we refuse to rescind our perceived power over to God, the one who guarantees success and victory, which is ultimately our only assurance for joy.

But an expectation for true joy is not an impossibility. While we may believe the bar for joy is too high for us to hurdle (which it is), that bar is not higher than the sun. And since the sun is the source that sustains all life (as seen in the first stanza), the sun can sustain us over any bar lower than itself.

This sun (or Son, as it is intended to doubly mean) is able to not only get us over the bar, but also break the bars of our imprisonment to free us. Furthermore, the Son opens the bars making us merry (the marriage feast of the lamb and the celebration of his power over sin and death as he draws his beloved to himself). The allusion here changes from a bar to hurdle over, to bars of a prison, to a bar of libations. Jesus's first miracle was turning water into wine, you know.

To have true joy in this world, one cannot be double minded. True joy comes when we have our faith, hope, and affections set on the sun/Son, which is the only thing that can set us free, get us over our hurdles, and make us merry. The sun is the only one that can sustain us and give us true light, life, and pleasure. When we set our mind solely on that, we can have joy regardless of our circumstances. I pray that my children would have joy shining on

their souls, from God – they would have joy actualized in their souls and experience that – and they would allow joy to shine through their souls as a testimony and healing to others.

Kindness

*K*aleidoscope of stories which to parse
To find a morsel worthy to repeat
Chapters of our lives are extremely sparse
With that which helps to make them most replete

*But who is it that has a hand to write
To fill the gaps and erase the mistakes?
Only one whose hand wills to be in mine
Only one's helping hand that gives, not takes*

*Not all do live, though all will surely die
And most will spend their whole lives in duress
The only ones free, those who help their kind
Freeing by killing tyrant with kindness*

*Walk hand in hand, along with fellow man
Together write a story life demands*

There are billions of human lives, many of which come from unique backgrounds. Add to this that each human story probably averages around 70 years, and you'd think that we could only scratch the surface with delving into them. However, with all the stories available, there are relatively few portions worth repeating. How many truly touching memories do we have compared to how much time we've spent on the Earth? Most stories are missing significant portions of that which is most fulfilling and meaningful. I also use the word "replete" here for two reasons. First, it counters the notion of "scarcity" in the previous line, as "replete" connotes abundance. But most people also synonymize "replete" and "complete," which also fits what I'm trying to say. So the actual meaning and the misconception of the meaning are both what I mean here, as it truly helps to make this idea the most complete.

So how can we fix our stories and the stories in the world? How can we erase the mistakes in the current stories and add to the emptiness of them? The hand that can fix the stories is the hand that partners with others, and the hand that helps and builds up rather than takes for self. While there are many stories out there, like a kaleidoscope, most of them just look like repetitions of the others, in an individual and disjointed manner, yet all similar.

Not all men truly live, or enjoy the life they have. However, all men will physically die. Until that death, most will live in bondage and struggle.

The only ones who find freedom from the fear of death after life and bondage in life are those who choose not to be kept in bondage. A huge sign of one held in bondage and fear is a focus on pleasure and self. When an individual is fearful of death and wants to escape bondage, they often do so by attempting to indulge their senses and enjoy their life as much as possible, for they know death will one day come to them. They want to make the most of it, and that means a complete focus on self, and often involves taking from others. But those who truly enjoy life, write a story that is complete and meaningful, and escape the fear of death. These are those who live in kindness. Kindness is a sign of one who is living in true freedom, as they are able to focus on others constantly, in spite of self, often to one's own earthly detriment and cost. This kindness not only kills the tyranny of materialism and a focus on fleeting pleasures of our life, but it also helps to force the abdication of the tyrant in the lives of others, as they see self-sacrifice, and that light shines into their darkness, into their life. While worldly altruism can often do the same thing, this altruism typically contains unacknowledged undertones of self-centeredness.

Whether one helps others to feel good, to try to appease God or others, or for status - that sort of "kindness" is a means rather than an end. True kindness is not used as a tool to obtain something for self. Self-centered altruism is still under bondage.

I hope my children escape the bondage of life and the fear of death, and use their freedom to help others, and write a story their life demands, and the lives of others demand from them. This is a story their savior demands from them, as he stretches out his kind hands to touch their lives and walk with them as they create their story - and as they shape the stories of others through their love.

Love

*L*abor of love for which our world was wrought

*Prepared for him who reigns preeminent
All by his words the one true word begot
With one resounding, ever infinite*

*Now world has turned destroyer of itself
Begrudging all are its inhabitants
Denying him who reigns and divvies wealth
Foregoing infinite for mere pittance*

*But love is kind and never will it fail
It's patient as it humbly perseveres
For knowledge of world as was will prevail
In consecrating a love that endures*

*Forget not the word that has brought you life
Bear all things for same reason word bore strikes*

Our world was created for love. It was created for Christ, the one who reigns above all. At the same time, it was created by Christ. It's sort of like taking your girlfriend to Build-a-Bear. You pay for it, you do it for her, but she builds it herself.

Solely by words, the true Word (Christ) begot the world. I also use the "One true word begot" because it can also be read "One true word, begot." This points to Christ as the only begotten of God. The last line also has a double connotation. The way it's supposed to be read points to one word still resounding. When Christ spoke creation into existence, he said it was all good (complete/finished as he rested). However, one word resounded throughout time and into eternity, and that word is "love." The other way this can be read is "With One resounding, ever infinite." This just points to Christ's resounding from eternity past to eternity future, through the pages of history, and into eternity, which he has done mainly through love.

The world created in perfection, however, now begrudges all creation and all others. We have thrown off the ruler to make ourselves the rulers. However, we forget that by throwing off the ruler, we're also throwing off the only one who can give true wealth. We trade another's reign for our own, but in doing so, we trade riches for a pittance.

But love has many features that will cause it to prevail, despite the currently bleak outlook. I took these from the 1st Corinthians 13 passage, but I couldn't fit all those characteristics into the sonnet. The world was created in love and for love. Since it was created by the perfect ruler in perfection, and since that perfection has been working through the course of history, we know that love will prevail in the end to make the world as it once was. But this time, the love will endure forever and will not be thrown off.

My charge to my children is to not forget the word that brought life (the creator's words). To have true life, they must dwell and relish in his word. They must also bear all difficulties for the same reason word (or creation) bore strikes (as words are stricken in a paper, this is intended to show corruption or difficulty). The reason the world was allowed to diverge is love. Ultimately, love will win out, and it was only due to love that it ever could have deviated. However, there is also another meaning here. The Word brought you true life, and the Word bore our stripes (rather than strikes). This alludes to Isaiah 53 where it discusses our healing through our savior's stripes. In summary, this poem is probably not what one would expect for "love." It isn't a great, feel-good poem. But I think writing as such felt patronizing and demeaning. Love is a beautiful thing, but it's not a frivolous or easy thing.

We rarely see the Hollywood version of love and good times play out. So rather than minimize love, I attempted to ground it in assurance, but clearly state its current state, the problems it faces, and the cost for its ultimate realization. At the same time, I try to portray the utter confidence we have in its ultimate fulfillment, grounding our love in both necessity and desire. Our world may be very unloving, but it was born in our savior's love, is borne by our savior's love, and will be born anew in the culmination and realization when the ultimate, redemptive love is consummated.

Majesty

Milieu of peasants grovel at our feet

*Our mere presence enough to halt their breath
Their ignorance of their own royalty
That which drags them down to subservience*

*These masses, they've thrown off their dignity
To serve a master, wretched, just as they
They've traded self for world's debauchery
Infinite worth for a temporal pay*

*Now peasants kneel, stooped in their poor disguise
Heads bowed, eyes down, seeing only their feet
Standing with others, whom like them, despise
All they think they are, all that they can't see*

*Now rule this world in light of your true worth
Bow not to one who bows knee to you first*

All mankind is royalty because we are made in God's image, as He brings us value. However, most do not realize this. Most act as groveling peasants. Their ignorance of their own royalty is that which makes them act as peasants and peons in this world – servants to its whims, lusts, desires, fears, and bondage.

These royal peasants have knowingly or unknowingly traded their dignity for a lifestyle of debauchery that debases and detracts from that which makes them most valuable. They skew the inviolable image that they seek to obtain, so that while still bearing the image of worth, it is far from their view and understanding.

Despite most acting as peasants, it is a poor disguise. It's both poor in that it is a peasant disguise which devalues, and poor because it fails to actually disguise their dignity. They and most others may not see through the disguise, but that is more because they are willfully blind. They blend in with the majority of others, and therefore don't expect to see anything different. All the while, they despise themselves, but also the royalty they wish they could be (which they unknowingly are).

Live in light of your majesty and true royalty. Bow to other men in light of their true dignity as well. However, do not bow to anyone who first bows to you as a subject. Those who are bowing in this way are peasant-minded. They do not understand the true value of human beings. To give in to them is to allow their debasing position and validate that is to allow the redefinition of human dignity and the image bearing aspect of humanity. This debases the true value of man. While these individuals still have dignity in full beneath their disguise, and that dignity must be acknowledged, they must not be bowed to or given in to. The royal who realizes their royalty must stand against the debasing of man's dignity. Ironically, by not giving into these debasers and bowing to them, we are actually upholding their dignity as well.

* Nobility

*N*imble are feet of one who run the plains
And strong the arms of those on precipice
How deep the lungs of one from Ocean's bay
And tough the skin of those born on the steppes

But no one's birth could prepare them for good
Fleeting and heavy, dense in the abyss
A thing so weighty few men ever could
Dwell alongside in Euclidian bliss

But quickened are the minds of noble men
Robust their sensibilities alike
How full their souls with the breath of heaven
And soft their hearts to that which is divine

Live lofty in abode above the sea
But do so in air of nobility

I basically attempt to cover the regions of earth where most would be born. I cover the coasts, the plains (grassy/wooded areas), steppes (rolling, treeless planes – like the Mongols), and mountains – hitting on the strengths one may associate with each of those regions.

Regardless of the beneficial attribute one may obtain by the region with which they're associated, no strength could prepare a man for good. It is something that surpasses any strengths with which a man is born. It is quicker, heavier, denser, and deeper than man can grasp, as portrayed in the "Grace" sonnet.

Not only is this true in the physical realm, but in the mental realm. The Euclidian model of reason was based largely on first principles. We find a largely agreed upon starting principle, and build up from there. However, as we find in our society and throughout history, "good" has been a hugely fluid and highly manipulated idea. While I would argue that it is a knowable, static sort of thing, it is very difficult for fallen man to grasp it securely, and impossible in our state to do so perfectly. It's hard to come up with a first principle and have a well-reasoned discussion with other fallen men, knowing that they are corrupt, and knowing that we ourselves are also corrupt.

This is why nobility is a vital characteristic. While most may think of nobility in the "royal" sense, I covered that notion in "majesty." Whereas majesty deals with the recognition of intrinsic value and living up to that, nobility here deals more with the lofty moral or mental ideas to which I exhort my children to be in tune, as well as assent and comply. A "noble" thought, for instance, or a "noble" goal are notions they should recognize and for which to aim. Those who are centered on noble principles are lofty. While mere man is born on the earth and lacks what is needed to dredge good from the lost depths – the bowels of the earth – noble man is equipped beyond mortal man. Noble man has a quickened mind and can grasp fleeting good. Noble man is sensitive and can perceive emotions that are vital to sensing situations, but also knowledge of the senses that helps him to know when senses are deceiving. Noble man can dive to the depths, bearing evil and despair – clinging to good as he pulls it from the abyss without faltering, without floundering, and without foundering. And noble man is in touch with that which makes and keeps him noble, the divine. All of these attributes correspond to the individual attributes represented in the first stanza, although the "soft" actually seems to contradict the notion of "toughness" to which it is supposed to correspond. However, I would argue that a soft heart requires a very tough person to bear such a weight.

I hope you live above the depths of this world that entraps and hides good from the likes of most men who are born (see the "sea of fate" from the "Grace" poem). But not only do I hope you don't drown in the sea, or merely live a nice life on earth as others struggle, I hope you live above the ground, in the air of nobility. I hope you live in the heavens, as the spark of divinity in you calls you to do. Live connected to God, live with the breath of heaven, and live with your heart, mind, soul, thoughts, and deeds higher than can be swallowed by the abyss. Do not be dragged down into evil and despair, but live above, and use that nobility to pull others out of the sea of fate.

* Optimism

*O*rwellian allure of the helpless
Opiate du jour of the hopeless mass
Pet of the cynic, comfort in distress
Pessimism lies in half empty flask

Tyrant soars, seeking only his weak prey
Time leaves the lost out of our history
Ills befall those who see no use to pray
Intoxicants, a fleet-footed quarry

May your life be more than journey at hand
Memories one longs only to forget
Islands of solace, only source of land
In which you spend your time digging for death

Settle not for the bottle's empty lies
Make merry with optimism's new wine

This poem spells “optimism” down the side. It’s intended to give only two letters at once to help one see a pattern forming, yet taking the whole poem to form. It’s supposed to make one somewhat expectant at first, and more optimistic of the completion as they draw near the end.

The despair of the helpless, seen in pessimism, often moves them into pushing a tyrannical government through, either in hopes of change, or because they have no hope left they might as well. Often, it seems, this resort to the tyrannical is more steeped in revenge, as the overthrow of the system usually involves significant purging of the powerful and the aristocratic, and often brings more misery than was before. Pessimism in the hopeless is also an opiate for many who feel they have no recourse in society. It causes them to take advantage of the system, spiraling the system into more and more decay. Yet this pessimism fuels the hopeless in their vengeance and beliefs, as they become addicted to their depressed view, and the very state which makes them pessimistic. Finally, the cynic who acts calloused, is really in despair. The cynic coddles pessimism as a pet, their only comfort in what they think they know is reality. But all that pessimism brings is a half empty flask of inebriant. It’s a frequenting of the bottle as an escape disguised as a solution. It doesn’t even have the decency to leave a full bottle. It’s nearly gone already, and will only satisfy temporarily, really just masking the issues, and most likely leading the drinker to a near withdraw when their drink leaves, but their state does not change.

Tyrants soar (like Tyrannosaur, ha ha) like nimble birds seeking their prey and an opportunity to rule and devour. But they are also thunderous lizards, despicable, vile, and overbearing. Pessimism’s end with the helpless is death and destruction. The hopeless likewise lose out, as they spend their time grumbling and changing nothing, spending their whole lives merely wallowing in their despair. In reality, time forgets them as they fail to exact change or produce anything worthwhile. They just end up being the mindless peasant pawns or plebes, amassed in a future history book, podcast, or Frankenstein novel. Finally, the cynic becomes ill, whether in depression, ulcers, a hermitic state of atrophying, or whatever other social or physical disorder befalls such men. This all happens because the cynic sees no use in praying. Were the cynic to truly believe that God existed and could exact change in the world – whether God chose to do that or not – the cynic would not be a cynic as all would not necessarily be lost. But that would require faith and hope. All these evils that come as a result of man’s pessimism, once the intoxicant wears off, are very sobering. It leaves the pessimist wanting back on his drug of choice. In fact, while the main meaning here is “pray,” it also works into a double meaning, as the pessimist’s cycle is to seek intoxication for so long, to “prey” on it, that they eventually give up. Intoxication is a fleet-footed prey, often escaping its captor, and leaving them with a reminder of their hunger and thirst for their appetite to be satiated.

I hope my children’s lives are more than just this life in the moment. That’s what the world says it is, but that’s so depressing. I also hope it’s not a life filled with a past that drives them to pessimism.

As stated in several poems, we are all in the sea of fate. Some of us, however, find a few moments of clarity or sanity, and these are our “islands of solace” amidst the tumultuous sea. When most think of deserted islands in the middle of the ocean, the notion of digging implies burying or digging up of treasure. However, here it signifies one frivolously digging, or one digging one’s own grave. I hope my children don’t live in pessimism, these lonely islands that pop up every now and then in the sea of life. And on these islands – or moments of sobriety and opportunity for clear thinking - rather than getting grounded, their solace is found in pessimism, which is really the digging of their own graves, a preparation for the death and gloom of what’s to come.

This is a play on both pessimism and the notion of the phrase “bottle’s empty lies.” Here, I switch around the meaning. Rather than pejoratively speaking of “the bottle,” the bottle is a good thing. The reason pessimism is bad is because its intoxication is fleeting and empty. The intoxication of optimism and hope, however, is a new wine – libations filled to the brim. Don’t settle for temporary pessimism. Embrace optimism’s intoxication. It is a new wine, filling the wineskins to the brim. It isn’t half gone, and it’s uncorked for celebratory reasons, not an attempt to cover issues. Make merry with this abundance of newly made, fresh, filled to the brim wine that is not fleeting. Optimism is the evidence of hope’s expectance (similarly to “faith”), and as Christians, we are called to be filled with joy, hope, and faith.

*Pride

*P*innacle of our work, the harvest comes
Aided only by friend and harvest moon
We pluck their sustenance and plenty from
The hand of fate wielding impending doom

What more is there to revel in than this?
Seizing our lives from clutches of the wild
Who can think of better ground for hubris
Than providing for man woman and child?

But revelers err if they dare forget
The soothsayer's hackneyed calls for reprieve
Whether one knows or remains ignorant,
Pride cometh just before the autumn leaves

Work hard and be proud of your endeavors
Weep when you begin to feel fall's shivers

The world is a cruel place. Often we feel everything and everyone is out to get us, except for a few who are extremely close to us. There is no better example of man's struggle with nature than that of the food supply. We must harvest or die. It's a very cyclical event, but there are so many factors and so much riding on the harvest. If there is no harvest – for whatever reason – people die. Harvest or doom. Life, then, must be pried from the hands of fate constantly. It isn't something that just continues uncontested. But the forcefulness with which we must pluck life away from fate also means that one day, due to exhaustion or misstep, fate will win.

What should make us more proud in life than the work in supporting ourselves, and particularly in supporting our community. Such pride seems nobly earned. This is an especially American/Western notion, where self-sufficiency is the ultimate source of pride. Second to self-sufficiency is altruism. While there is some sense of solidarity in altruism, I also think much of the worldly altruism is a relishing in one's own works and pride as well. While we generally assume altruism is about another, it is a huge source of self-righteousness and self-benefit for many who give. The feeling behind this giving is often, "I am so self-sufficient I have more than I need. Let me be merciful to one who hasn't been as disciplined and good as me." The act of supporting self and then showing off that self-sufficiency and its abundance to others is all about building and upholding an image of self - to self and to others.

However, those who revel in the pride of their work should remember the one who tells the future. While the notion of a soothsayer implies the mystical, this soothsayer knows the future because he's wise. Just as the men relishing in their pride understand natural laws of no work equaling destruction, so this soothsayer knows the natural and moral laws of much pride equaling destruction. If mankind forgets or remain ignorant, putting their stake in their own, tangible works, they err greatly. Their need is to humble themselves and recognize that no amount of work will save them ultimately from destruction. The humility required for salvation from doom is not so much a work of self, but an accurate recognition of the situation and one's position in that situation. Though many may think this prophecy is banal and overdone, and many may think it false as they rarely see it come true, or they can give examples where it does not.

Pride comes before autumn leaves. This has a double meaning: 1) in this story, harvest comes right before autumn, or the leaves of autumn. The harvest moon is the first full moon prior to the autumnal equinox. This story and harvest take place before autumn's leaves set in. This is when pride begins as well, because the harvest was the source of the pride. One's accomplishments lead to their pride. 2) The common saying when discussing pride is "pride goes/comes before the fall." Thus pride comes before the leaves of autumn in this poem. I recognize that the verse technically says "pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before the fall," but I think the spirit of it all and the common saying work well here. Anyway, this is basically saying that pride comes before the fall, and the wise soothsayer is telling the revelers to beware dwelling on their pride. 3) A third meaning can also be derived from this. Pride comes before autumn leaves, as in "goes away." Since pride is obtained before the leaves of autumn, and pride leads to the fall or destruction, we could also say that this destruction is represented metaphorically by the winter season – barrenness of the land and death. The reason the harvest brings such pride is because men view it as their self-sufficiency in avoiding their own destruction, or destruction of their kind (self, line, family, community, species, etc.). So pride comes before the leaves of autumn in the harvest, and it leads to destruction as it comes before autumn leaves or goes away (winter). It provides a false sense of security to revel in this year's harvest, as pestilence or fire can destroy this year's crop, or the next year may not be so plentiful. This world and its hands of fate are ever upon us and leave no room for any security, as all is temporary and distracting from what is ultimate and inevitable.

This is the first and only poem in the series where the one thing I wish for my children is one thing of which I also want them to beware. It is important and appropriate to be proud of the work they do. If there wasn't pride in the work, it is probably either unnecessary, not beneficial, or poorly done. Pride also connotes an understanding of the undergirding of ourselves and our work (hopefully) – God. However, to dwell on our work as the end itself, and to revel in our pride is to invite destruction. I desire my children to have pride, but when they feel the shivers of autumn's approach, they must heed the soothsayer's warnings of wisdom that call for a doom even more weighty and looming than temporal consequences of a poor harvest.

* Quiescence

*Q*uiet nights pause and linger on the most
Filled to the brim with thought and reflection
In quiet minds, a memory's best host
Thoughts find a way to wax luminous sun

*Sun's rays shine bright, they pierce and raze the night
Sending dark back to perpetual gloom
They warm the land - once fallowed springs to life
Releasing breath from its once barren tomb*

*A day goes by in twinkling of an eye
When night returns, greeting spry day with peace
Once thoughts, like stars, they dance across the sky
Traveling homebound, in their sweet release*

*Allow beauty and thought in your presence
Greet every day with twilight's quiescence*

I find that quiet, still, beautiful nights are the best for thinking and pondering. They are so still and magnificent, they really bring peace to me, but they also stir in me deep thoughts. And while I believe people certainly remember the crazy, active moments the most or most vividly, it's amazing how many serene, beautiful moments shape one's thoughts and character the most. While we may remember vibrant moments, it is upon nights of quiescence that we reflect upon what those moments meant, and solidify their importance and images in our mind. I think those quiet moments are vital to a healthy mind and thought life. They solidify our thoughts, but they also help us to sort through and organize our minds appropriately, so our memories are accurate and most helpful when we recall them. These quiet, pondering nights are ones that while physically dark, allow our minds to be illuminated. Unfortunately, our society is not conducive to such things. We are always going and always find ways to occupy our minds with anything other than self-reflection and thoughtfulness.

It's easy to live day to day, allowing our minds to be overgrown with vegetation and strangled in darkness. Being quiet and still allows us to hack back the weeds and make a path for clear thinking and illumination, whether that be with new thoughts or novel, synthesizing thoughts about old memories and experiences.

It's amazing how time stands still in these quiet moments. When you come to again, out of the abode of your mind, you may find yourself amazed that you time traveled. You spent a lifetime in your mind, yet didn't move anywhere in time.

But just as stars - born from the gasses and dust – explode and streak across the night sky, so it is with our thoughts. (I recognize that “shooting stars” aren't really stars but meteors/meteorites, I like the poetic imagery so I'm going with the figurative in the literal sense). They began as minutia (gas particles), were formed into existence as something grand, and then return to dust as they streak across our mind to land somewhere.

Whatever you do, make time for quietness. Have a quiet spirit with others. Think, think, think – especially before you speak or pass judgment. And when possible, make extended periods of time to do this (your mother refers to these as “cave days”). This is important to a healthy mind, soul, and body, and it will help you to ensure that you are aligned in your reasons and thoughts. It keeps you on track and helps you to get back on track. Quiescence goes hand in hand with inquisitiveness.

*Respect

*R*esilience is a currency inert

*As are the many virtues here discussed
These currencies, the soon fermenting wort
Fungible, growing interest in time's trust*

*While some build up their funds along with time
Others are granted riches from their birth
Monies no distinguisher of the kind
No respecter of acquisition's worth*

*Position, then, and virtue are alike
Both earning preference and high esteem
With both made bankrupt in the tub of vice
Or with envy sought when aged as a mead*

*Time is not a respecter of persons
So use your time to gain respect of men*

Resilience – or persisting through even the difficult times, along with all other virtues and strong characteristics – is a currency of sorts. Those values lived out, in time, accrue and earn interest. I liken them to the wort (pronounced WERT)– the portion of the beer that has just had the sugars extracted from the grain, and moves into the process of fermentation. Virtues are like this, as they grow over time. Virtues accrued are also fungible in a sense. Whatever the virtue in which you are investing, it is of the same sort of currency. This is also a play on the notion that for wort to build up into a substantial product of alcohol, it requires yeast, which is part of the kingdom “fungi.” These virtues invested, with time, grow in value, as does the ABV.

While some receive their riches as a result of their investment in virtues, others receive it by their birth. The goal of the poem is to point out that people earn respect in two ways: they build it up due to their character or they gain it as a result of their position. Birth, then, does not here mean that it’s necessarily given to people due to their lineage. Rather, when they are vested in a job that confers respect (civil authority, educator, religious leader, etc.), they can gain it through means other than their character. This isn’t to say that they may not have also earned it via their character, and positions of higher esteem generally filter candidates by their character. Nevertheless, there are certainly two routes to respect, whether divergent or not, at times. Regardless of the route taken, either group can cash in on the respect they have in the bank. A civil authority – whether worthy of respect in character or not – can demand respect just as one who has earned it with character. Romans 13 deals with this situation of sorts. Positions demand respect.

So both position and virtue demand respect. However, both are also made bankrupt by vice. They have the same weakness. One who invested in character will be bankrupted with his character in vice. However, so will one who demands respect due to position. Scandalous presidents, corrupt cops, and pedophilic educators and clergy have all lost respect in the public’s eye, even though some may still maintain the remnants of their position. But as both are made shambles in vice, both are lifted up with time, as a mead. I chose the comparison to a mead because this particular drink is one that is better with extended age (unlike many others beverages, whose tastes fall out over long periods of time). Whether one has lived a lifetime of virtue or held an esteemed position for an extended time, age and time maintain and demand respect.

Time demands our respect in another way. It is not a respecter of persons, meaning it will treat us all the same. It will pass us by. That is why we must respect time and use it to build on virtue and the time in our position. We must treat others with respect who are deserving of respect, and we must build up respect for ourselves. And most importantly, we must do this consistently and remain resilient in our character both in terms of its strength and duration.

Servanthood

*S*urreptitiously performed deeds of grace
Feats most women rarely dare complete
For who can find time to challenge the pace
When on one's knees, washing enemy's feet

*The dust one finds on sandal straps and thongs
Same dust one ate only two hours before
Becomes now dust on top of harbored wrongs
Resentment heaped on embers by pride's door*

*But choking dust and fire that burns one's soul
A forming trial, and one perspective makes
Head bowed, a reminder to be thankful
You lost the race to Hell's un-quenching gates*

*One has already gone to Hell for you
In servanthood, walk in another's shoes*

Servanthood is not about recognition. They are surreptitiously performed feats of grace. True servanthood is rare to find. It's infrequently performed, and if you do find it, it is very likely to not be true, complete, utter servanthood – as the action may have sought discovery.

When you are on your knees serving others, especially those who are a direct challenge to you (your enemies), you are risking losing out in the race of life (wealth, power, etc.). You are not only helping your enemy and the competition, but you are putting yourself out of the race by not resting up and taking care of yourself.

As one washes his enemy's feet, he can only imagine where the dust he's wiping off their sandals has been. That same dust being wiped off of the sandals is from the same dirt you ate as you trailed your enemy/competitor only a little while before. And now the distance between you will be even larger tomorrow, as you take care of your enemy instead of yourself. It's a reminder of your loss in the race and your enemy's advancement. And as you serve your enemy, you remember all the races, all the segments of races lost to him, all his wrongs against you. And you remember all of this in light of your desire to be number one. Serving your enemy reminds you of your loss and your status in the race. It makes you resentful and fuels your hatred of your enemy even more, and even as you serve him.

But this pain that we experience from our sacrifice, whether in being left behind, eating the dust of our enemies, or struggling with our own internal pride and resentment – it is a visceral reminder of our true state. It provides us with tangible reminders of reality and fallenness.

As our head bows in humiliating, resentful, difficult servanthood – as we are called to do – it reminds us to pray. It reminds us that we are bowed before a God who has washed our feet – his enemy's feet. It reminds us of our need for a servant. And that burning within us – in our lungs and in our soul – it reminds us that we lost the race, but it was a race we needed to lose. To refuse servanthood, to refuse grace, to refuse love, and to refuse bowing our heads in acknowledged submission would be to continue pursuing the race. But this race finishes at the gates of Hell. They are fiery gates that will not abate the burning within you. Rather than quench your burning, they would continue it and amplify it for all eternity, as you would have sought wealth and power over a relationship with God. That is why we need a servant. That is why we bow our heads to our enemies.

Fortunately, we have one who was a servant for us. He accosted the gates of Hell and conquered them. He walked in our shoes and dealt with our Hell so he could prevent us from entering there. In light of this, we live as servants, willing to walk in the shoes of others, into the hells they face, and up against the very gates of Hell we know have been conquered for us. We serve in humility, but with great pride and assurance that our service is one bent on prevailing as we serve a living God and savior who is making the world his footstool, and making all come into subjection to him. So while we may lose this earthly race, it is a race we want to lose and save others from through servanthood. Furthermore, I hope that you find a way to truly love serving others, and not deal with the human aspect of the resentment that can accompany serving others.

Thankfulness

*T*repidation's aroused by mere being
Living afraid that we won't truly live
Our trembling hands and hearts both agreeing
Tis much better to receive than to give

Receiving in desperation or fear
To ease the tremors with a hasty fix
Leaves recipients looking far and near
For a source where they can score their next trick

But she who delights in what she now has
Fears not the future, nor throws away time
For hands and hearts filled up with what they have -
Need nothing more to add to make alive

In thankfulness enjoy the life you own
And share that wealth with everyone you know

Fear haunts all who are living – some more than others. We all, at times, have a desire for more. We fear that what we have isn't enough and we aren't truly alive. We need more money, more things, more hobbies, more charity notches in our belt. We need to be fulfilled. All of these things – including charity for the purpose of making ourselves feel good – are looking to gain. Giving with the intention of gaining is not truly giving. It may benefit another, but it is not a virtue. Yet as humans, especially humans who rely on reciprocal altruism (particularly the atheist blends), this is the type of thought we're drawn to. What benefits me? What do I get out of it?

But actually obtaining goods doesn't solve our tremors. We're still shaking, and while we may get a quick fix (used to mean both a satiation of our addiction and a perceived "fix" or solution to the emptiness of it all), we will return to trembling very shortly, like any other addict does as they continue to pursue their empty, erosive mistress. When the trembling comes back not long afterwards, these addicts are looking for their next high, in whatever realm that may be, betraying the real solution and worthwhile endeavors.

Ironically, those who are the happiest and least fearful are those not seeking more, but those who are content with what they already have, in the state they're currently in. These individuals are not worried about the future, and they also don't kill time scrambling around looking for a fix. They are enjoying the moment continually, and their focus is on their life rather than on what they want their life to be. The focus is on enjoying the good in life rather than subduing what they perceive as bad.

Content hearts and hands are filled as they enjoy what they have. They have no room or desire for more, as there is no room or need for that.

Thankfulness is a partner with contentment, and I use it in a synonymous way here. If you recognize that what you have is a gift – you could have less – you don't deserve what you have – it causes one to be so thankful for what they do have. The perception that one is owed great things is what leaves so many empty in pursuit of those mythical cryptids. But thankfulness makes a content heart and a full life. It is not empty, as there is no room for that, and it is not chasing after banal, vain, empty affections. And it is only in the fullness of your own life that you will be able to move out in true love, giving to others. For how could one ever give of what they don't have?

Uniqueness

YOU *will never in your life find a moment where you find yourself concerned about your looks or about your*

hair

End sarcasm

I know your world will fill with all the pressures that ours has, but take a cue from those of us who have experience

Queues are already beginning to be formed, with family and friends, cults and marketers galore

You must not drink the punch, you must stave off with your life, or soon you'll find you've auctioned it for quite the measly price

Eat rather from the apple of your true Father's eye, in whom you will always be loved, whom always in you delights

Since the poem is about uniqueness, I thought I'd throw a few things in that made it a bit different. 1) Instead of the normal capital letter (which would be "U" for this), I capitalized "YOU." This is done because "you" is a homophone for "u," so it's still capitalized in a sense, but it also highlights the true goal of uniqueness. While all of the other virtues and characteristics fit a largely agreed upon definition, an individual is one who makes something unique. So "you" is appropriately capitalized as it emphasizes that the uniqueness resides within and is defined by the individual. 2) "Unique" is spelled down, like it was in the "Optimism" poem. However, it's done differently. It's done with words instead of letters (You = u, End = n, I = i, Queue = q, You = u, Eat = E). Most poems I wrote here didn't have anything written like this (only Optimism), so I thought this would add a touch of uniqueness. 3) This is not a sonnet. All other poems in this series have been a sonnet. 4) This does not have a normal rhyme scheme. It kind of does its own thing. 5) It does not have a set meter. 6) I never put the actual word in the poem ("uniqueness"), whereas I have in almost every other one.

No matter who you are, you are concerned about what others think, if only at times.

Those who have gone before can attest to the pressures that will be faced. We know the temptations and the pitfalls. However, since we've gone before, our experience provides good reason to listen to our advice and exhortations.

These two lines aren't really hyperbole. I know that parents, grandparents, some in our church family, friends, and others already have ideas of what our children, their children, and the children of others will be. They have notions of how they will invest in them, expectations they have for them, etc. We've even received mail about baby stuff, investments, college savings plans, DNA banks, and religious things from the JW's (not particularly for our kids, but trying to sell to us, which would in turn have us selling it to our kids as they grow up). Many of these aren't particularly bad things. The community's job is to teach and it is to impart values and hold expectations. But that's a mighty weighty job, and one that no party will do perfectly. So as an individual, it's vital that my children recognize that others are in line to shape them. They need to know that they must live their life as themselves. While I exhort my children to heed the voices of experience, they must discern when a party is attempting to inappropriately detract from their domain of who they are for personal reasons rather than for upholding concrete, objective moral standards. While there are domains that are not ours to decide (i.e. most areas of morality), all parties will overstep their bounds at some point in an attempt to conform individuals to their notion of value. Do not "drink the punch" of such cultish calls for devotion. It is a death sentence to self. Do not auction away your life to the highest bidder, or most invested party in your life. This bid is still offering far too small a price for your life.

I had originally left out the "true" from this sentence. However, upon reflection I realized that I am one of the parties bidding on your life. While I hope and desire that I will always delight in my children and love them, I cannot guarantee that I will never falter, and I will never attempt to conform them to my created values rather than valuing them for who they are. But despite my future (and hopefully few) failings, I know my children have a true Father who will always love them and will always delight in them. He will also always watch over them, and is able to prevent and fix the damage from my failings. He will never falter. My children will have to make the decision for themselves as to whether they acknowledge him as their true father, but I have "Faith" that they will and that my father will bring about that faith in them. And my children can listen to my experience, as he has never failed me.

Vulnerability

*V*oluptuous presentation to men

*Exterior of self is but a cost
Paid to all regardless of our consent
Until every shred of interest is lost*

*How cruel is a world where such price exists
Where all is paid so life can do the same
But how much worse would be a world distressed
Where no one accounts the cost of pain?*

*So let not shreds of dignity be marred
Continue to share your unjaded self
For the cost you pay can also reward
When you enrich others with your true wealth*

*Real riches come when you show yourself free
With vulnerable heart which others see*

I recognize that the word “voluptuous” is typically used in a sexual way. However, it conveys the notion of sensuality (or the senses), which is what I wanted to convey. It seemed like a killer “v” word to start with and I hope the modern connotations don’t keep people from reading it appropriately. The point here is that our physical self is a price we pay daily to all mankind. It’s not something we are able to really keep from others to a large extent. It greets anyone’s senses with whom we come in contact, and they can choose whether or not to devalue that. But as we know from our culture, few people have a wealth built up here. Society has so accosted everyone’s physical image, that even those in Hollywood who have a “beautiful” physique are constantly trying to be better, disguise themselves, etc. While I largely relate to the physical here, this is also true of your social presentation. How you speak with others, how you act, what you share, etc. – it’s all on display, whatever you choose to display. This vulnerability also goes hand in hand with “Beauty,” as being vulnerable generally portrays much more beauty because it is honest and true.

This notion hits on three concepts: 1) Since I’m talking about our image being a cost we pay, I am claiming that all the worth we have here is eventually lost. Every ounce of interest disappears. 2) Eventually, people’s interest in our image goes away. After we’ve been made bankrupt, they leave. Whether their interest is in our beauty or in our ugliness – gazing at us with lust or with contempt – speaking sweet nothings to us or debasing us, men’s interest in our image eventually fade once they have used us how they want to. 3) The final meaning here is hinted at. I attempted to lead the thought up to a point where the reader would feel this concept coming, so when I used the phrase “shred of...” their minds would finish it with “dignity.” Here, “interest” is used synonymously with dignity. However, I wanted to create a money picture to go with the imagery, and I believe interest is a perfect allusion.

It is a cruel world where our riches are exposed for all the world to do with as they please – unguarded, helpless, frail.

But even worse than a world where pain is inflicted so easily, is a world in which pain is not unburdened easily. It would be terrible to live a life where one harbored up pain within themselves, never accounting for it (both a money term and a social term) either in the cost or in the social factor of sharing with others.

So regardless of what people do with your exterior, do not let that jade you to your need for others. There are some who won’t just use you, and you need to be able to share openly with others so they can see real beauty and truth.

The pain inflicted upon you can be used to relate to others. But even more than this, there is a deep wealth which you have. While everyone is distracted by the wealth they see on the surface, they often overlook the true wealth an individual has. Your job is to be unique and throw off your concerns of other’s thoughts, so that your true wealth is guarded. While most attempt to guard their true wealth by being silent and protective of it, that is ironically the worst way to guard it. This alerts people to the storehouse of that wealth where they will bombard it until they open it and destroy it. But if you share of it freely, in an unjaded manner, you can share your riches with others without concern for your true wealth being destroyed as well.

Let others see your true worth. Share yourself and your riches with the world.

Wisdom

When three men set out on their journey, only one was wise

*They all entered into a room with virtue and with vice
When all three men left the room, only one did so alive
For only one clung on to life, the others, death disguised*

*Many men who face the choice between life and life of ease
Waver not from the one they would choose eventually
And those who life, at first do choose, soon find hard to appease,
Their screaming lusts which satiate their appetite of greed*

*But some are men of lofty birth who clearly life can see
Their perspective not darkened out by ignobility
They always smell the stench of Hell, wherever it is breathed
And hear the siren's beck'ning song as nothing but caprice*

*Strive to be among lofty men who clearly discern life
With your senses don't be fooled by every scheming device
Walk earth as gently as a dove, do not men's wrath entice
As a serpent crafts his own way, so also you be wise*

I changed up the poem a little to represent a few things. I did this with Wisdom because I believe wisdom is one of the most vital attributes. Love is extremely important as well, but wisdom helps us to know what true love is, how to have love, how to use love, etc. Here I use heptameter (7 stressed/unstressed) rather than pentameter. I also have four complete stanzas of four lines without the general couplet (two lines) at the bottom. I did this for two reasons: 1) 7 is a number of perfection or completeness, so I wanted 7 in here to show how wisdom helps tie all the other attributes together. However, the couplet at the bottom seems incomplete, as it differs from the other three stanzas. Therefore, I tied the couplet up with a finishing two lines. 2) Ecclesiastes 7:4 sums up what I was saying: "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." Wisdom is difficult and involves picking the things that seem less pleasurable and more tiresome. But, wisdom is far better in the long run.

I went with three men to tap into the thought most would be having about 3 wise men. However, the story throws that notion off as we find only one was wise. I also used three men to show that most do not choose wisely. Most lack wisdom, as we can see two chose unwisely and only one chose wisely. The unwise don't realize that the choice between virtue and vice is really the choice between life and death. But death does a good job of concealing itself as pleasure and fulfillment (vice), the unwise can't distinguish it from true life.

Here I continue to use "life" to indicate virtue, but now I use "life of ease" to indicate vice. I do this because living a virtuous life is generally more difficult than living a life of vice. Now a life of vice may make life difficult down the road, but I'm speaking temporarily here. In the moment. And even most men who may want to choose life initially, actually don't. They think through their life and realize that while life may sound good now, they're going to eventually cave to vice. So why not just go with it now?

Then there are those who actually choose life. But they find that choosing life is a daily struggle, as their lusts and greed want to be appeased. Giving into vice seems like the answer to appeasing those desires, although it really only temporarily satisfies them. It is a daily struggle to cling to that life which one first chose.

This ties back into the "Nobility" poem. Wise men are not tainted by ignobility. Rather, they live in nobility in part because they are so discerning.

Wise men are able to discern that which reeks of Hell, and so can avoid it. Likewise, men are able to avoid the beautiful song of the siren's which is pleasant. However, wise men hear this song as caprice (or musically, capriccio). It does not fulfill long term, but is a whim.

Live loftily in wisdom. Don't be fooled with your senses. Be discerning.

Be as gentle as a dove, not harming or provoking anyone. But also be wise like a serpent in your dealings with this world. You will need to be on your toes (or belly) to navigate the treacherous terrain.

*Χριστός

*Enjoy
promise found
in him assured by
Ageless this resurrection Forever
yet aged just baptised by dwelling with
for his own glory **Χριστός** freedoms captured
is glorifying impassioned finally alive
mankind loving man tasted in life
of unheavenly sin
when death he
vised*

*Enjoy
PromisE found
In him aSured by
Ageless this resUrrection Forever
yet aged just baptiSed by dwelling with
for his own glory Χριστός freedoms captured
is glorifying impaSioned finally alive
mankind loving mAn tasted in life
of unheaVenly sin
when dEath he
viSed*

*Ageless, yet aged just for his own glory, Christ is glorifying mankind
Christ, impassioned, loving man, tasted of unheavenly sin, when death he vied
Enjoy promise found in him, assured by this resurrection, baptized by Christ
Forever dwelling with Christ, freedoms captured, finally alive in life*

The title of this poem is the center of the poem itself. It is the Greek word for “Christ.” I thought this would be a creative way to sneak in the “X,” as it’s hard to find an “X” word that is meaningful, and to start a poem off with an “X” word. I didn’t want to lower myself to the general “eX” work around. Interestingly, then, the most important poem ends up being the “X” one. I stole this format from a poem I wrote earlier, but I liked the concept and thought it would add some importance to this poem. It is a picture of a flower, which throughout Christendom has often symbolized purity and other great characteristics. The picture is also a representative of a cross. While most crosses we think of are taller and not of equal proportions, some celtic crosses we’re familiar with are represented in a shorter and stockier manner. One of the largest means of symbolism in this poem is its use of prime numbers to show uniqueness and purity. All lines contain a prime number of symbols and spaces both in the four separate stanzas themselves, the center word by itself, the number of lines counted down from any point (starting on the sides or starting from the very top), and the number of symbols/spaces across. The only exception to this is when double spaced, if you count the spacing in the count. It looks better that way and I’d consider the spacing a formatting issue, but I’ve done it both ways for technicality’s sake. Finally, the very center of the top stanza and the very center of the bottom stanza spell out “Jesus” and “saves” respectively. If you read down, then, using the center of the poem (by letter and space count, not the visual center), it says “Jesus Christ Saves,” and this internal message within the message makes the shape of a more traditional cross within the larger cross.

One other noteworthy aspect of this poem lies in its relation to the other poems in this series. This is the only other poem, besides “Unique,” that is not a sonnet in any form. But it goes beyond that in the way it is structured as a picture. It also doesn’t have an exhortation like the rest, though the upper petal could be read as such. But the exhortation overall is really the whole poem itself. It’s a poem that’s meant to encompass an immense number of facets. This poem is the gospel, which is an exhortation in and of itself to make Christ the Lord of one’s life.

Note: When reading the poem, you must use the center word in the poem to make each stanza complete. The interpretation of order and reading is at the bottom of the poem, written in the normal format.

1st Stanza: The poem is meant to be read starting from the left. The backwards pointing leaf points towards the past, so I talk about God’s eternal past and his choosing to enter into time in the past, and a particular point of entry at his birth. He never aged, but was eternal, yet he chose to age in human flesh for his own glory. And his utmost glory was brought about by his glorifying of men. This does not mean he glorified men over God or worshipped man, but that he brought many sons to glory.

2nd Stanza: The second stanza is pointing down, and thus represents Christ’s death and burial. Jesus Christ of heaven, tasted sin – the opposite of heaven’s true life – in his squeezing out every last drop of death from the world’s sponge. I picture Christ being handed the sponge with pain reliever while on the cross. Instead of squeezing that into his mouth, he bore every last drop of death and sin for us.

3rd Stanza: This stanza points up, and thus represents Christ’s resurrection and victory over sin. We have a promise of life everlasting in which ~~that~~ we can rest assured ~~in~~ due to Christ being the first fruits of our own resurrection. He resurrected, and has baptized us with his Holy Spirit so we will taste of the same resurrection. His resurrection and the spirit that lives within us are our guarantee of our resurrection to come. This notion of baptism and seal of the Spirit is also vital, as it symbolizes not only Christ’s role in sacrificing, but also of his intercession for us, the application of Christ’s sacrifice and his preparation of a place for us is brought about by his intercession for us (both necessary roles to fulfill to be a perfect high priest). Here I use the British rendering of “baptize,” as I needed that “s” for my own subliminal purposes.

4th Stanza: The fourth stanza points to the right, and thus our future in eternity with Christ. The whole work of Christ from eternity past was to glorify himself. He did this by working to capture or secure us to himself. While that language sounds like bondage, it is our true freedom which we will be able to experience forever because of his work. Christ has captured our freedoms and affections that were wayward, and helped us to see what true life is, and what our true desires and fulfillment are and should be. We will finally have true life in eternity, and it will last forever because of our savior who secured it. This is not a captivity of freedom, but rather a captivation of it.

Youthfulness

*Y*our age is just a number, not your life

*It measures what is gone, not what there is
And those who find they have less time alive
Should time reverse, lest they not truly live*

*So with the years that you now have to spend
Hoard them not for want of what you now know
Nor waste them on frivolous, darkened ends
Life not planted, or life that will not grow*

*Be barren not, then, in the life you have
Bear fruit always, as years your roots accrue
And fret not for death's storm that will attack
Rather, live always as if in your youth*

*The sting of death lies in exalting life
And death itself in not exalting light*

Age doesn't really mean anything. I've met 80+ year olds who were more alive than teenagers. Most if it comes down to perspective and choice. So if someone says they're 80, it doesn't mean they only have a small percentage of life left. They can have 100% of life for the rest of the life they live, though their lives may not last as long as someone who has lived less years. So if you find yourself up in years, it doesn't mean you're down in life. You choose how you spend the rest of that life, and if you don't respect time, you'll end up wasting what you have left to spend.

Hording your years – as if you could save them up – (or living safely) because of the unknowns of the future isn't really living. Neither is wasting the life you have on frivolity and empty, vices. Life horded is like seeds that are not planted. They cannot grow into anything if not planted. Likewise, life thrown away on frivolous ends is like a seed planted in the dark, where it will never grow, as there is no light to nourish it.

So don't be barren either by not planting at all, or by planting in a bad environment. Bear fruit, and do so by living in the light as long as possible. Be nourished and plant roots. The deeper you grow the more life you will have. But don't let your age diminish the amount of fruit you bear.

So don't fear death as you age. Don't fear the storm that can snap your limbs, or the rot that can accrue. Rather, live as if you are youthful and have limber limbs. Live as if you are in your youth bearing baskets of healthy fruit.

The pain of death isn't in death itself. Once you're dead, you're dead. The pain of death lies in our experiencing of the death of others, and our fear of our own death. While disdain for death is appropriate, we often overly exalt life. Again, life is valuable, but when we place such a high value on our physical lives, when we think that's what is so important, it causes death to truly sting. But death itself is a result of not exalting light, and thus true life. So an exhortation to embrace youthfulness is one that calls you to live a life where you don't fear death, where you embrace the light, and where you live life to the fullest. Explore, travel, and embrace this life you have to live in the light.

Zeal

*Z*enith of life passes over the Earth
Over us all, each and every the same
Poor greet the sight at the moment of birth
And wicked, the day their souls reach the flames

*But some, their souls are headed for greatness
As life they live fights on for what is good
And pinnacle of their lives is success
In showing world what a world could*

*So life you have, live it with passion great
Let birth nor death be that which doth define
Embrace a life that grabs a hold of fate
Letting go only when the stars align*

*Invade the world with unrelenting zeal
Leaving nothing to chance upon fate's wheel*

All mankind has a high point. For many who just go through life, the high point of their life is that they received life at all. They do nothing with their life. Others are so utterly wicked, that the greatest good of their life is their utter demise and destruction as they greet justice in the flames.

But some are able to live lives of passion as they fight for greatness. Their greatness sets an example to the world. It shows the world what it could be and what it should be.

So live your life with passion and don't live it frivolously or wickedly.

Don't allow the natural parts of life you can't control be those which define you. Rather, grab a hold of your life and live it in zeal as you shape your own life. Only let go when you cause your stars to align. Normally, the notion of the stars aligning shows the notion of fate, but here you are causing the stars to align. You are controlling the aligning of the stars as you control your zenith.

Go out into the world and attack it and your future with zeal and passion. Leave nothing to happenings, but take control of your own life.

Atticus's 123's

*Zero

The distance spanned between our love and you
Time in which you have not been known in mind
Days you will see where hope's conquered by rue
Inches you'll travel destitute and blind

Miles you'll move in silence, void song's retort
Roads leading you to roam, or to your loss
Seasons through which you will pass without warmth
Fields left empty in sunshine, hearths in frost

'ours spent bemoaning unrequited love
Minutes in which you wonder what you're worth
Seconds of doubt dwelling on life above
Moments of joy expunged with you from Earth

Days without our blessing that you will go
Life without One who can make all this so

All statements here look back to the idea of zero. There will be 0 days without this, or minutes without that. I don't really expect that all of these things will occur. But as a father, they are the most idealistic hopes I can have for my children, as I think about how the world should be, and hope for the world the way it one day will be.

All three stanzas have a 3-2-1 aspect to them. Since "0" as we know it was missing from numbers for most of history, I wanted to acknowledge it and pay homage to it even though it's called learning your "1,2,3's," not "0,1,2's." Since zero is often viewed as something missing, or it's the ultimate number reached when counting backwards to an event, I thought I'd make my stanzas reminiscent of a backwards flow. In the first stanza, this reverses faith, hope, and love, so that we have love, hope, and faith represented. The first two lines talk about how our children have always been loved, and loved deeply. Every event in our lives has brought us up to this moment.

And while our progeny may not have always been at the forefront of our mind, everything we've done has led to them. Even if this is me imposing my current love and emotion onto past events, I believe that helps to tie life events together. For instance, fathers can say that the birth of their child was the happiest day of their lives, even though they love their children more and more as they grow. Even though their future love is greater than their initial love, that future love can be imposed back on the day of their child's birth and infused into the meaning of that moment, because that was the moment that led to their current love, and it was a/the moment that began that love. Likewise, I think I can say that our children were always in our mind, even though I know that they were not in a literal sense. The third line obviously deals with hope, and the fourth deals with a faith for provisions (consider the lilies of the field), though faith is not explicitly mentioned.

This stanza focuses on a farming 3-2-1. Here we have a farmer traveling to the market at the end of the growing season, then I'll speak about seasons, and then about fields (implying planting or working). First, while all roads may lead to Rome, I wish that no roads will lead my children to roam. When I think about moving through miles and song responding, I think about those Disney movies where someone is moving through life so wondrously, that song can't help but play. I desire that my kids have the sound of music playing as they go through life. I hope song can't help but sound with their movements. I think part of that comes by having purposed movement. It doesn't mean there is no wandering in the sense of adventure and openness, but rather it pushes against the idea of an aimlessness.

The 3-2-1 here is hours, minutes, seconds, and moments. The time periods get shorter as we move back. I want my children to know love in full and to not feel the unresponsiveness and callousness of unrequited love, not just in a romantic sense, but in general human love. I never want my children to doubt their worth or the intrinsic worth and for others, and I never want them to doubt the love of their God and their love for God. I believe these concepts are inextricably linked, as we are image bearers with souls who derive our value not from matter, but from the immaterial, eternal stamp of our divine creator. And lastly, I want full lives for my children, so they can both experience joy and bring joy to others. I desire no moment on earth to be without them.

In all of this longing and hope, the only thing I can really guarantee is that my children will have my blessing. While all of the above are desires and wishes I have for my children, they are largely not things I can bring about. It is only God who can ensure these things, should he see fit to do so. And while these are all things I wish for my children, as they are the way things should be if we were not in a cursed and fallen world, I understand that for the best outcome in their lives, in the lives of those they touch, and in the fight to push back against the curse – some, many, or all of these wishes may not be fulfilled. I'm ok with that, as I trust God. However, I want my children to know the love we have for them, the desires we have for them to live in a perfect and fixed world, and the God who is able to make those things true for their lives, and will make those things true eventually. Ultimately, it is a trust in God that I want my children to have above all, so one day all my wishes for my children will come true.

Time is, in one sense, counting down (represented in this particular poem) towards eternity and towards full redemption. In another sense, it is counting up (represented in the ascending numbers of the compilation as a whole), as Christ's kingdom is established, and as the curse is being pushed back. There is nothing more I can wish for my children than that they share in the same hope we do, and that they experience my blessed wish – the world as it should be.

One

One heart you have from which your passions flow
And passions, that, which all your actions, guide
This heart the part of you that others know
Its healthy beat, feat which brings you to life

One soul whose role's to fill essence's hole
As action fashioned sans substance is naught
Its goal, extol the call which makes one whole
Its source divorced not from maker who wrought

One mind behind the never ending quest
To find truth aligned with all that's real
To subjugate and abate dissonance
To sate the spate of darkness's appeal

Heart, soul, and mind all pine to truly live
The way, the life - to truth a supplicant

“One” focuses on “the One” (God), and our unity with him, as our substance and being (mind, soul, and heart) come together as distinct components or features (depending on if you’re a dichotomist or trichotomist, but that’s not at all my point here. I’m not making any claims in that department). Here I speak of how we are one, even though we are segmented in certain ways. In a sense, then, this alludes to the trinity in some ways, as God is three and one. One was also alluded to in the last line of the poem “Zero.” Here, the One is fleshed out and described. Also, the frequent rhyming of the poem gives a heartbeat sort of feel, which is appropriate here talking about the heart and what makes life tick.

Each poem from here on out will have the number used as the first word in its respective line. “Zero” wasn’t used anywhere in the last poem, as zero is an absence of number. One is now used in the first line, two will be used in the second line of the following poem, etc. So not only are the “1,2,3’s” counting in title, but are actually showing their value by counting up the lines in each subsequent poem. Our heart is the part of us which guides our actions. From our hearts flow our desires, and from desire, action. We embrace and act upon that which we are most passionate.

They say that “actions speak louder than words.” We can say whatever we will, but it is our actions that show our true selves to others, as they are an outward reflection of an inward contemplation. But our contemplative self is inert, and only truly comes to life when it is put to the test of real action. When we act, others see our true lives - who we truly are. Our heart, then, makes us alive in three ways. First, it keeps us physically alive with its movement of blood throughout our bodies. Second, its passions make us alive in the sense of action, as they pulsate out from our emotive self and move us from inert inaction to decision and action. Finally, our heart has the ability to make us alive with true, everlasting life, if it has a healthy beat whose passions are aligned with ultimate reality. This is why despite the oft problematic cliché of having Christ live in our hearts, I think that’s exactly what must happen for one to be a true Christian who experiences a transformed life, as one’s passions are changed from the inside out by the indwelling of God himself. James is a perfect book to read on this subject, as he says that “faith without works is dead,” and goes on to describe the source of our evil, the deceitfulness of our hearts even to ourselves, and the need for transformation from the inside out.

But heart, without soul, would be nothing. The trees obey God and the laws of nature as well, but we would not ascribe anything profound or significant to their action. They just act. It is the soul, however, that gives substance to our action. We are image bearers of God who contain immeasurable value and duty. Just as word without deed or idea without implementation is vacuous or meaningless, so our action without our image bearing soul would make us devoid of the great meaning and substance our soul provides.

Our soul, then, calls our heart’s passions into submission to our true calling. Our substance determines what our passions and actions should be. Because we are the image bearers of God, our passions and actions should align with that.

Just as the rocks and trees obey without substance, they also obey without volition or discernment. Our mind is a major component that provides us with the ability to choose, to weigh decisions and passions, etc. While our mind can be tricked, it’s overarching goal should be to discern true reality in order to help direct our actions and passions towards that which most accurately and fully aligns with who we are – an image bearing substance from the divine.

Living in a fallen and darkened world, it is then our mind’s goal to push back against the darkness into which we were born. Here, darkness conveys both the meaning of ignorance, as well as the notion of our original sin and birth into the bondage of sin’s utter moral darkness and despair. We are called to push back against the curse, and we must use our mind’s attaining of both natural and spiritual knowledge to do so. And we must do this amidst the overwhelming and torrential rain and subsequent flooding of darkness that perpetually pushes through the opening of our mind, against the walls of our heart, in an attempt to accost and corrode the very foundation of our being - our soul. We must constantly push back against our soul’s degradation and damnation, which is our own doing.

All three of our components which make up who we are, create value and true life. Many get this wrong, and think true life is a continued physical existence of self-absorption. Our heart seeks to be forever satisfied in its passions, our souls seek to be fulfilled by meaningfulness, and our minds seek to know all that the world holds. And while most attempt to satiate these things with the very thing that attacks true life - the darkness - true life can only be found in reality. The way, the truth, and the life found in the last line correspond to Christ's message that he is the way the truth and the life. But here, I don't overtly mention Christ. I say that the way and the life come through being a servant to truth, or a correspondence with reality (we can argue if that's a good definition of truth, but it's the way I use it here). I say this because aligning our actions and beliefs with truth (God is real, Christ is the only way, we are image bearers, etc.) is the very thing that leads us to true life. It acknowledges what true life is, who we really are, and acknowledges that Christ is Lord and we are his brothers. That is truth, that is reality, and it is for that which all of us long. It seems more and more that the Western world is trending towards creating our own reality – a byproduct, I think, of a growing unholy marriage of a naturalistic mindset that emphasizes humans as subjects, as well as the influence of Eastern religions and their notions that completely undermine any notion of truth (like throwing off the law of non-contradiction). So now, we believe that true life is making up whatever fiction suits us best, calling it reality, and expecting everyone to play along. Rather, Christianity calls us to seek truth, find grounding, and comport with reality. Only the latter will lead to true happiness and fulfillment now, and when the curtain closes on the act.

Two

Your heart, your mind, your soul, the whole of you
Two lives they live, one here and one beyond
One lusting after sweet temporal food
The other recognizing One true God

One's representation then comes in twos
The soul, with eyes to see all that there is
The mind with ears to hear all spoken truths
The heart with hands to act on its passions

But one can't sustain two lives – one must die
As flesh thrives on self, grace on selflessness
And those with lives confined to space and time
Have one life to pursue – one life to live

You're an immortal living in the flesh
Death of self, path to life truly expressed

“Two” takes the concept from “One,” and builds upon it. While we as a person are one entity, even though we are composed of parts in some sense, our one person lives in two. We are an individual living two lives. One life lived is here, and one life lived is “beyond.” Just as the first line of the “One” poem begins with the word “one,” so this poem’s second line begins with the word “two.”

This second part of the stanza points out the two lives we live. One life is focused on that which is here, now, and passing – or temporal – and the other focuses on that which is eternal, and on the true One from which we derive this true life and essence.

This whole stanza deals then with that duality. Our hearts, souls, and minds all have physical counterparts. Our eyes can see that which is physical and/or carnal, but our mind’s eye can also be used to perceive the true essence of things. Our ears can be used to pick out facts and knowledge or perceived facts about the physical world, but our ability to pause and listen can also be used to dwell on ultimate, non-physical knowledge and truths (e.g. moral, mathematical, logical, etc.). Finally, our hearts can use our hands and feet to fill its immediate passions, or it can use it to act out that which is eternally rewarding, namely the helping of and caring for others. These same senses are also often our downfall, as they represent the lust of the flesh (hands/feet), the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (hearing what we want the truth to be).

The Bible is clear that man cannot serve two masters. While the Bible also counters gnostic notions that the body or physical things are bad, nature has now been corrupted by sin which reigns in it. We must then die to our carnal and sinful self, and live unto the grace which has saved us, seeking the redemption of the body and physical realm to perfection as was originally intended. Here, “grace” is synonymous with “spirit,” as grace is the means whereby we obtain the Spirit. In the first line of this stanza, I also point to a clear picture of how this grace must come – “one must die.” This points both to the death of Christ for us so that grace could be known, as well as to the death of ourselves as grace begins its reign in us as new men and women.

It is actually through the death of our carnal self that we truly live. Even though one of us dies, one must die ultimately. If we allow our spiritual self to die (or remain dead), we will have but one, temporary, unfulfilled life to live. However, if our carnal self dies, we allow the life lived to be that of our spiritual self, which will live eternally, in a redeemed, physical body. Even though each has one life to live, the quality and length of each of those lives is far different.

The way our true selves are expressed or seen is through a death to self. This is a life that shines through, unrepressed and undisfigured by the marring of sin. This is not to say that the body is bad and the spirit is good. Rather, the poem bemoans a fallen self. We need a death to our flesh so we can live holistically – redeemed body and soul.

Three

A life devoid of life's no life at all
A life that ends in death is much the same
Three decades our savior lived life in full
Three days he took to overcome the grave

Your life's not merely this temporal one -
A life absent of hope, as future fades
Rather, this life is full of living sun
As day leads one unto another day

So days we have, we live them all in threes
Morning refreshed to well be on our way
Noon day with light shined on the lives we lead
Evening, reflecting, resting for new day

Our lives lived full as we are filled with hope
Each new day reminder of life invoked

This concept continues from the last poem, as it calls for a death to self. But here, it seems like I'm recanting, as I say death makes life pointless. However, the first line means that a life devoid of true life, or fullness, is not really life. And the second line shows that a temporal life that has an ending point is not really that which fulfills. So in reality, this ends up affirming the previous poem, which speaks of death to the temporal and fleeting and an embracing of the eternally lasting as that which fulfills.

Christ showed us that a life could be lived fully, and this meaningful life could have perpetual, lasting meaning, as he conquered death and lives eternally.

Hope is based on the notion that something good comes to fruition. However, rather than anticipation building up to something great, life is the opposite, as we are whittling away unto death. As Lecrae says, we're just "breathing to death." The future is not bright if this life is all we have. The future ends in cold darkness for us, as well as all our progeny, and eventually all of the universe.

This sentence conveys illumination, hope, warmth, and joy. Illumination comes as we see our true calling, and our purpose as human beings, as represented and proclaimed by our savior. Our hope comes as our savior has promised us that we too will conquer the grave through him, and we have a full, eternal future ahead of us. The warmth comes in the love that is bestowed upon us by our savior – a particular love that should be distinguished from the common grace given to everyone. Finally, the joy comes as the son's rising provides us redemption from our sin, fallen state, hopelessness, imminent death and damnation.

With all the vampire movies that have come out in the past few decades, there's a misconception that a never-ending life would be horrendous. The immortals who have lived ages always say that it's a curse. However, this is usually for two reasons. First, the historic vampires don't really experience pleasure from actions like eating and such. Living without any pleasure seems depressing. But all immortals talk about the other reason, which is that everyone they love dies. Their lack of decay does not prevent the decay of all they love. Here I am dismissing Stephanie Meyer's bastardized version of vampirism, and going more with the core as represented by movies like "Interview with the Vampire." Though even Meyer has Edward acknowledge vampirism as a curse due to his loss of loved ones. Our hope of everlasting life is the opposite. We will be freed from sin and guilt, freed from death, decay, and destruction, and we will be living in the one perfect place - in the presence of the one being who can and will completely fulfill our pleasures, in a redeemed body, with restored relationships. This is a blessing, not a curse.

This paragraph represents each new 24-hour day, but is also alluding to our lives (birth/younger years, adulthood, elderly).

So how can we live our lives to the fullest now, knowing that our redemption is not now, but rather awaits us? We live it freely as we are not bound to death and destruction – though we will experience those things. We also live knowing that we have a hope of perfection that has been secured for us. While we may experience death, it is not the end. While all our work on earth will be undone, what we do impacts the eternal souls of others. How I invest my time and resources is an eternal decision, not a temporal one. While my actions are initiated in time, they are initiated by and towards beings who will see no end to time. How frivolous and hopeless, then, does the mantra "Carpe Diem" seem? Cease just one day? Cease just a series of days? No thank you. I will cease eternity. (For more on the absurdity of life without God, see William Lane Craig's book, "On Guard," or check out my synopsis of his chapter here: <http://dckreider.weebly.com/blog-theological-musings/the-absurdity-of-life-without-god>).

* Four

Strong walls that stand do not a castle make
Nor moat that lies, surrounding from outside
As none can live where all are kept away
For king and liege are naught where none reside

All fabricated hindrances ward off
Life which a home's intended to embrace
Their grandeur warning vagrants to stay lost
Ramshackled ruins leave tourists amazed

A home then's not a place where rulers are
Nor place where walls stretch high into the air
A home is where bridges are drawn for hearts
And banners fly, uniting all who're there

A home's not where inhabitants are safe
A home's the most loving, welcoming place

This poem plays off the phrase “king of the castle.” While many think of one’s home as a castle, here I am pushing back against the notion of dominion or rulership. It’s not that rulers are bad – in fact they are necessary. But when people use this phrase, it’s generally conveying a notion of “stay off the grass,” or used in conversations where people talk about how they’d have no problem shooting an intruder. It’s MINE. My domain. My stuff. But even if we were talking about rulers here, if a ruler is all about themselves and has nobody with whom to reside, who are they ruling but themselves? There is no such thing as a ruler in an evacuated castle. Ironically, then, those who set themselves up in a domain unto themselves end up being neither ruler, or at home.

When I think of castles, I think of two types. The first type is a grand castle in its time of construction, or a large castle that still stands. I imagine what a passerby may have thought when they saw the towering walls and fortifications in the distance. While it may have conveyed safety to those familiar with the area, it most likely looked terrifying and awesome (in its literal sense). I imagine it did not look very inviting, as the point of castles has rarely been to appeal. Sure, structures within the castle were made to look lovely, and I’m sure they were adorned with some aesthetics in mind, but the main goal of the castle was to keep others out, and keep safe those within. The second type of castle is the one with which most firsthand experiences come today. It’s the castle whose walls have succumbed to the siege and breaching of an enemy long ago, or to the passage of time and the elements. It is a place in ruins. We know how great it must have been at one time, and we know its intended purpose, but it is now neither great nor useful. It is utterly decimated, and lives and serves only in the imagination of a curious historian.

While a home can certainly be a home with rulers, and while a home can certainly have fortifications, those two things don’t make a home. Whereas a castle seems to be largely defined by those two things in our current culture, I want to push back against our phraseology when dealing with the home, because I don’t think those should be at the forefront of our minds. Even biblical homes, where there is a leadership structure, are homes where leadership is done not by being an overbearing dictator, but by being an inviter to participate in love as the leader dies to self. This is servant-leadership, self-sacrifice, and welcoming love.

Rather than just tear down the modern notion of a home, I want to build up what I believe should most define a home. I believe it should be welcoming and uniting. First, a home should allow others in. We tend to think of homes now as immediate family, often just parents and children – at least until the children turn 18, at which point home becomes a cruise ship and wherever our retirement money takes us. Home in our culture tends to be very self-centered. We don’t have the extended family homes that much of the world has, and I think that has a negative impact on our view of family. Furthermore, our modern notion of hospitality is atrocious. People rarely invite others into their “home,” we run from getting to know people on a deep level, and God forbid a stranger or a friend of a friend needs assistance or a place to stay. We are not a welcoming culture. Many even treat their own families like crap, whether it be the neglected spouse as we throw money and time at our vicarious achievements through our kids, or our neglected kids as we are too busy fighting with our spouse because we want things to be done our way.

The second notion that defines a home is its ability to unite. Not only should people be welcome in a home (not just immediate family), but those who come into the home need to feel united. The homekeepers are advocates for each other. Everyone should be able to be candid, knowing that even if feelings are hurt or disagreements acknowledged, they are all united in their love for and dedication to each other.

While a home should be safe in certain senses, a home that is made safe by keeping most out and dictating to those within is not a home, and certainly not one worthy of defending. A home like that need not be attacked, as its walls will not be maintained, for none will replace the subjects who die or leave, and no subjects will be there to repair the walls as they fall to time and neglect. This “home” is self-destructive and fruitless. If walls define a home, they can be torn down. If openness defines a home, only a choice to erect defenses and rulers without bridges and banners can stop it.

* Five

While senses are common to all mankind
Common sense, yet, seems to be rather sparse
Latter making one reveal the divine
Former true of evolute's patriarchs

Five senses list'ning to siren's sweet lips
My child, please don't be bound to what you see
Run from the stench of clothes hellfire's licked
Don't follow feelings of what ought not be

For one who follows in ancestor's crawl
Is only able to give what he gets
The here, the now, the moment – that is all
All that was, now replaced by what there is

But you, my child, spark of divinity
Let's weigh the truth as you reason with me

Logic and reason distinguish mankind from the other animals. Whereas every creature has some sort of physical sense, none has a rational sense even close to mankind. This seems to be an evidence for our souls created in the image of God. I'm not ready to say that animals don't have souls, but our souls are definitely distinct.

Many creatures through history past have had physical senses. Here I am not making commentary on evolution. Rather, I'm just pointing out that regardless of one's belief, mankind is clearly distinct. We have the breath of God. The word "evolute" is used here in a double entendre way. First, it is meant to convey the evolutionary sense, as I take on that position for the argument. Assuming only common ancestry apart from the divine, all we as humans can draw from that is that we are indistinguishable from animals. We are all just a compilation of matter and senses. If we have simply arrived on the scene by unguided processes, what do we have to inherit but mechanistic action and instinct? Second, only with divine input, humanity is the evolute of the circle of life. An evolute of a circle tends to be a diamond in shape (more like a hypocycloid rather than a diamond). We are a diamond in the rough, certainly unique, and too unique for me to consider it a coincidence, and is evidence of the divine in us.

The first two lines start to bring in the five senses. The first line in this stanza talks about seeing, and the second line talks about hearing and tasting. I used the apostrophe in the word "listening" so that the first part of the word becomes "list." This serves, then, as a double meaning. Listening to the siren's song and focusing on their sweet lips – being bound only to what is present or what we see – causes us to list. The sirens of old were said to lure sailors in with their mesmerizing beauty and song, only to lead the sailors into shipwreck. The listing of a ship, then, is linked here with the sirens, and used to convey this physicalist path as one which will lead a life to list as well. Using only your five senses (sight and hearing in the siren example) leads to a life shipwrecked. Without immaterial discernment (the mind and spirit), life is murky at the least.

A sole reliance on the senses tends to lead one to two different materialisms. The first is a materialism that says that matter or the physical is all there is. That leads us to this notion that the senses are all we can use to determine truth. The second form of materialism it leads to is one in which we value goods and immediate pleasures, or the hoarding of wealth. If all that exists is matter, and matter's state is shifting, eventually moving towards ultimate entropy, then live it up now. But these viewpoints are evil and vacuous. The term "hellfire" here is used with Jude in mind. Jude 1:18-23 says: "In the last times there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires." These are the people who divide you, **who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit**. But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you **eternal life**. Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by **snatching them from the fire**." Those who delve in materialism and physicalism do so at the risk of their own soul. It ultimately leads to an elevation of man (ironically, as it has nowhere near the basis to do so as Christianity does), a devaluation or dismissal of the Spirit, and a belief in only the temporal and present rather than a hopeful eternity. We must turn away from that which has come in contact with such things, and pull those we can from the abyss.

If we really only follow in our ancestor's steps (on a materialistic evolutionary assumption), or crawl – since most ancestors were crawling or on all fours – then all we have in common is our use of the physical senses. We are just animals as they are (like Bloodhound Gang sang in "Bad Touch." You and me baby, we ain't nothing but mammals...).

So if we really do follow from our ancestors, we are mechanistic, reactionary creatures that only detect and respond physically. Intention disappears, as there is nothing but reactive dominos. So if I inherit my attributes from my ancestors, and they are only mechanistic, material blobs of chemical reaction, how can I ascribe any more value – or any value at all – to my actions? Well, I guess I can ascribe whatever value I want (or I should say whatever values nature has determined me to have), but my, what a massive fiction that is. This line says a lot about what becomes of love, altruism, mercy, grace, morals, etc.

So if all this materialism and physicalism is true, then all that truly exists is now. Sure, the future will come, but what is my concern for the future? I want the world to be good for my progeny? Why? There certainly is no higher moral saying that this should be. Rather, it's just the oxytocin levels in my body, or maybe the dopamine. If that

makes me feel good, I suppose I can do it, but all that concerns me is my existence and my pleasure. Now a physicalist may argue that we have memories and thoughts and hopes about the future, but I would argue that they are jumping on the immaterial bandwagon there, stealing what my system can offer that their system cannot. I will explain at the end.

All we experience is swallowed by the sands of time and replaced by what we can sense now [see poem "Time's March of Madness"]. The molecular state that existed in the past has now changed. That is an observation to which value cannot be ascribed. Molecules move and change and react. So what? Let the naturalist give me all the descriptions he wants, but as soon as he offers groundless prescription, he betrays his worldview and philosophy.

This is an allusion to the idea of a "ghost in the machine," which is often used pejoratively, but I use it positively here. It's also a nerdy videogame reference pointing to Guilty Spark in Halo, which is very reminiscent of a "ghost" in Destiny, which brings people to life. So we are more than matter. We are immaterial soul as well.

Is the materialist to reason with me? If his worldview is right, he cannot, for reason does not exist in a deterministic, mechanistic world. I can only say what all the actions and reactions in my body cause, and he can only respond in kind. Materialism says that existence is matter, but here I speak of truth as something that exists in reality. I use the phrase "weigh the truth" to poke fun at the materialist who has to agree with me about truth's existence, yet cannot according to his own standards. For if truth really exists, surely it can be weighed, as matter has physical properties. Let me provide an example I'm stealing from Greg Kokul to prove the color blue is not physical (though it can be stimulated by physical processes). While the physicalist would say the color blue is caused by light, this is demonstrably false. We can close our eyes and picture the color blue. But if we were to open up your head while doing this, would we find the color blue in there? Not at all. So where is the color blue? We can't say that the color blue is a synapse firing, though our neurons or brain may stimulate us to perceive the color. I, many philosophers, and many mathematicians would argue that the immaterial world exists in the form of abstract objects – numbers being a prime (pun intended) example. For language to exist and for us to grasp concepts beyond an action/reaction level, it can be reasonably argued that the immaterial must exist in the form of abstract objects. So for the materialist/physicalist who denies the immaterial, they are in a bind of contradiction, borrowing freedoms and abilities from competing worldviews, and spewing meaninglessness as they can't avoid the inevitability of the ball and chain ramifications of a mechanistic world and self.

Six

The world is God's, so watch and tend and keep
The world is theirs, so live life to appease
The world is mine, so take all I can reap
The world is ours, legacies we must leave

Man throughout hist'ry has value assigned
Six the sign of man and thrice of the beast
The sign with which most choose to self, align
One for self, one, unholy trinity

But men, the ones formed – fashioned from the dust
One day, once again to dust shall return
Cold molecules thrown in space to be lost
As stars, which once they were, again shall burn

The mark of man is God's supremacy
Mark of the beast death and frivolity

This stanza shows the transition from Eden where we were family with God, working to maintain and advance the garden, to present day. The second phase of history shown is where man attempted to appease the gods or nature. The third phase is where man had a free for all and did whatever pleased himself. The final phase shows man elevating humanity as a whole rather than any or every individual human. While all aspects can be seen at all times (except the bad aspects in Eden), I feel that this is fairly representative of worldviews throughout history.

Whether man acknowledges it or not, intrinsic value has been placed upon all from the beginning. But this phrase doesn't only mean that value has been assigned to mankind, but also that mankind has always tried to assign value to things. The things to which man tends to ascribe value often seem to be self-serving. When sacrificing to the gods, it was for appeasement and blessing. When sacrificing to self, it was for personal pleasure. When sacrificing to humanity, it's to take control and be gods, leaving "eternal" legacies through progeny.

Man's sign, or the sign assigned to him is "6." Man was created on the sixth day. Interestingly, the sign of the beast is the sign of man three times.

Most men take on both of those signs today. They take on the sign of man which is about self. But then they also take on the sign of the beast, which I am using here to be humanism. It is all humanity together. The focus on humanity as the goal and that which is the greatest goal is an usurping of God. At least when one is self-focused, delusions of being a messiah are fairly infrequent. You just want to get stuff. But humanism is a view of man that elevates him as messiah. This is why I call the mark of the beast or humanism the unholy trinity, as it attempts to set itself up as self-sufficient, self-sustaining god. And just as God is thrice holy, so the beast is thrice unholy.

Man was created from the dust regardless of your view of his formation. God either shaped him or he came from stardust, as atheist physicist Lawrence Krauss says. So if we assume that man was formed naturalistically, then man came from stardust. On the naturalistic viewpoint, the ultimate end of it all is a heat death, or a cold universe. All molecules will be torn apart and sent into utter darkness and oblivion as entropy runs its course. But on the spiritual view, man still returns to dust physically, but like the hot stars naturalists believe we came from, men who deny God and elevate man will return to a state of heat as they burn in their separation from God and good. While I'm not exactly sure what that will be like, I love C.S. Lewis's explanation of Hell. Hell is a place locked from the inside. Rather than God sending individuals unwillingly, he rather walks away and leaves them to their own desires, and the consequences of such a life and such a world without his gracious and merciful pursuit. He leaves men to their own devices and schemes – which is the worst Hell one could ever create, and is created by man himself. While on naturalism men may have come from stars and been the self-proclaimed stars while alive, all they will have left to show in the afterlife is their burning in seclusion – a burning of both unappeasable and false desires, and a burning of separation from that which could ever soothe and fulfill.

The mark of man is not inherently bad. Recognizing our mark for what it is, is life. Understanding that God is our creator, and that we are creations is important. Six is important because it's a mark of our subservience to the one who created us. But taking that and running with it to elevate ourselves or humanity just leads to death and meaninglessness, both as we live this life, and after we enter the next.

Seven

Day passes on to day as new arrives
Refreshing, beginning all life anew
As hope's awakened by morning's sunrise
And life empowered by what rest's imbued

But all this hope and all this life are vain
For where does hope lie in repetition?
Seven days all repeat, all named the same
All toil empty, ending in flagration

But work, we know, is not a fallen curse
Nor week creator formed something not good
But we, created creatures, form our worth
From dust, from hay, from stubble, and from wood

A day only brings hope if there is more
And works meaning only if they endure

Days repeat, and the processes in them repeat. The sun comes up initiating a new day, and our eyes open from rest preparing us to live life in a new day.

But if we rest and refresh simply to rinse and repeat, then what's the point? It's like Groundhog Day. Resting should refresh us for something new, for the accomplishment of the hope we had yesterday. But really, rest just refreshes us to do the same thing again as days repeat.

Every day repeats each week. All our deeds will end in flagration, or burning (conflagration). This has a quadruple meaning. First, it is the burning of the body and the muscles as it goes through the toils of life. Second, it is the representation of the burning and yearning for more than monotony and pointlessness – a desire for fulfillment and meaning. Third, it represents the destruction of all our vain toiling as the world's end is going to be destruction, regardless of one's worldview. Finally, the conflagration here represents our works being judged by fire at the end of time.

We know that work was given in the beginning prior to the curse. Work is something that is good, and something that should satisfy and provide us with pleasure and fulfillment. And we also know that when God created the world, he said after each day that it was good, so how could the repetition of work and days be so bad?

The vanity, then, comes not from the creation itself, but from what the creatures have done to the creation to defile it. And men, creatures of the dust, take the invaluable, intrinsic worth instilled by God, and glory in the creation itself instead. Men glory in the creation and the works geared towards that which they choose to value. Rather than acknowledging value, we attempt to create it. And what happens to those values we create? The hay and stubble are burned up. This is by no means condemning the arts. In fact, the arts are a perfect place for individuals to recognize beauty and intrinsic value, and bring those nuances out for others to see and enjoy.

Rather, the problem comes when we build up certain things to be the end for our pleasure and enjoyment rather than a means. For instance, God intended sex to be enjoyed and to accentuate and deepen a particular type of relationship. Sex for as its own end is deviating from the created order, is not lasting, and makes it into more than it is. The relationship is what is lasting and truly meaningful. Sex is simply a means to build the relationship. C.S. Lewis has a great section in one of his books: "You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?" (<http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/01/12/cs-lewis-on-lust-part-3/>).

Our appetites for sex, for approval, for accomplishment, for money, and for experiences betrays our blindness to true value, and to that which is lasting. We are a people who preoccupy ourselves with trivial matters until our life has passed us by, and all we've done is lost with us – the parts that hadn't already dissipated long before, anyway.

The only thing that provides ultimate value is that which is lasting. We are to lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust don't corrupt. What is it to hope for the repetition of another day? Hope is a looking forward to something better and lasting. This is why this life will never hold ultimate hope, and why a hope in the eternal is so vital. True hope is impossible when fire and certain destruction is inevitable, but is inevitable when life is made possible.

Eight

All life is marked by the passage of time
The body developing in its growth
Mind's acumen accruing in the wise
Soul's innocence gone for what cynic knows

Life is lived longing to time's curse eschew
Grown body longing to be in its youth
Cynic wishing for innocence imbued
Eight days of age with naught but love accrued

But life made new only to age again
Would merely extend the time which we fall
Ultimacy still death and striving's end
Or vanity, tract'less and cyclical

The promise of a new life's only good
If life brought forth truly escapes the old

None who live can escape time's impact. The body ages, wisdom is gained through experience, and cynicism is gained through the loss of innocence.

The goal for many, however, seems to be avoiding the curse of time's passage. We don't want our body to age, and many of us wish we could get back to a more innocent state when we didn't know how evil the world truly was.

The reference to eight days is due to the notion of eight being a new beginning (the first day of a new week – after seven days). It's also the day on which a male child was circumcised in Israel. Circumcision in the Bible represents a newness of life and a mark of promise. At this point in a child's life, age of the body, wisdom through pain and experiences, and cynicism have not yet taken their toll. All the child knows is the love and provision of his or her parents.

What's the point of having a new life or being born again if you're just rewinding things to repeat the aging and decaying process again? While you may end up with more time alive or more time to enjoy, you also end up with more time bemoaning the evils of the world and the decay that occurs within you.

Even if one extended their time by being born anew, the ultimate reality ends up being death and a longer time of toil before you get there, and/or if one believes in infinite reincarnation, then a vain cycle of repetition. Here, tractless is meant to convey two notions. First, it's meant to imply tractionless. An infinite rebirth would just be repetition to no end. I understand that most/all reincarnation systems end with a sort of perfection, higher state, or Nirvana, but here I am just showing that a perpetual reincarnation would be hopeless. Just like the repetition from the last poem, there's nothing that makes me think anyone's human nature would be different the second time they were reincarnated – especially if they don't take all the lessons they've learned with them from previous lives. And if one is different without bringing along their experiences, then in what way can we consider them a reincarnated individual? Haven't they become a different person – one who is only doing differently because they and their nature are different? Where is the continuity? The second way the word should be taken is in its literal sense. Tractless simply means an area of wilderness that is unclaimed or extremely wild. To live in a world where my actions had very minimal ramifications, and I could just be reborn upon each death, seems to be a wild notion that could lead to some horrendous implications for morality and the way people live. It is a bit reminiscent of the movie "Groundhog Day" or "Live. Die. Repeat." (a.k.a. "Edge of Tomorrow"), where the characters can just keep dying without any real ramifications. The implications of this for evil and justice, reward and punishment, are dismaying.

In both of the aforementioned movies, freedom comes when a higher goal is achieved, and the audience feels relief and joy. While I know that the concept of escaping the cycle is not just a Christian notion, I think it is the most fulfilling one. Not only does it provide a reasonable, ultimate end, it also acknowledges the reality of evil and suffering here. The concept of betterment and eternal goodness is a widely held idea, and I think something many long for and recognize as a necessity for any great hope.

* Nine

All long to build their home on mountain top
All long to leave the earth beneath their feet
But all this mystic dreaming is false hope
For who could dwell where glimpses are but fleet?

And who could live reminded of one's breath?
Or who could live where snow encompasses?
Who could live amongst vicious elements?
And who could live where friend rarely passes?

Nine clouds below do not a hope instill
A tenth will always float above your head
And low or high, our weak wills always will
Lead us to live a life unto our death

The mountains rise uninterred from the earth
Nature's Babel cannot defy our birth

Everyone not only wants mountain top experiences, they want to stay on top of the mountain. While the experience upon reaching the top of the mountain is great, most forget that this experience will soon be obscured by fickle weather and haze in a short while. Mountain summits are great achievements, but terrible places to live, as they are places to be conquered, not places to call home.

Besides the changing view, there are many reasons a mountain top is a terrible place to live. The air is thin, causing one to always be short of breath – even causing hypoxia leading to death. The elevation and geological formation make its weather ever changing and fierce. The elevation makes its climate extremely cold, and the mountain itself provides many perils. And finally, very few people reach the mountain top, and calling it home would mean distancing self from others.

But even if we take the experience as good in and of itself, and refuse to call the mountain top home, it is still an experience that falls short. While the experience is great and reminds us of our ultimate desire, it is not itself our ultimate desire. We may climb up above the clouds, even nine levels of clouds high, but there will always be a tenth cloud above us. I use the notion of nine clouds to evoke the implied “cloud 9,” a saying that is used to mean the best possible experience or mood one could have. This added “tenth” cloud alludes to two notions. First, NOAA classifies clouds into ten major types, though there are thirty plus subtypes. So we will never get above the tenth level of clouds. Second, it alludes to the notion in Buddhism of ten levels. The ninth level is Bodhisattvahood, while the tenth is Buddhahood. The aspiration is to reach the 10th for perfection. While I don’t ascribe to that, it’s a good use for the numerology and imagery. In the end, our mountain here represents accomplishment and success – but it falls far short of that. The perfect mountain top would extend us all the way to the heavens, but any mountain top we experience falls far short of that. Our attempt to sustain our mountain tops in this life place an emphasis on the wrong thing – the mountain – rather than on the goal towards which we should ascribe – the heavens.

Here I make very clear that the notion of reaching the tenth level is absurd. A man’s will is depraved, and will always prevent one from perfection, regardless of how high one climbs.

The mountain rises far above the earth, and allows much clearer views of the heavens through the thinner atmosphere and it is closer to the heavens. But while it rises high above the earth, it is still bound to it and connected – and still relatively far from the heavens. While mountain top experiences are great, they will always be a far cry from what the world should be, and they will always be unsustainable in the long term of humanity’s course of history.

Nature’s Babel, or a mountain that attempts to extend man to heaven, still falls very short. It cannot defy our nature and elevate us to God, or bring about a world that is truly fixed – selves included. They are means to make the world a better place and mend creation, and they are reminders of our longing for the way the world should be. However, they are terrible substitutes for the heavens.

Ten

They say when I point something strange occurs
More fingers end up pointing back at me
But one who points this out is just absurd
Prescriptive end from a descriptive means

Judgment's now passed upon judgment itself
All but affirmation is disallowed
New judges justify this evil swell
And punish those whom to their gods won't bow

This hypocrisy, though wrong, is half right
Ten fingers put to use make helping hands
But who will help cure us from evil's blight
When evil not affirmed seeks recompense

The world's in need of helping hands and feet
Solution only one the truth can treat

I hate it when people say that pointing always leads you to have more fingers pointing back at you. I understand the point...but judgment is not a bad thing in and of itself. Our culture is pushing back way too hard against our ability to judge right and wrong – ironically and hypocritically, judging those who judge. And to use such an argument as this is to prescribe an action (you shouldn't point out others) from a description (more fingers are pointing at you). While few people really use this argument, it's very similar to the types of arguments people actually use against judging. You shouldn't tell me I'm wrong (prescription) because you don't know how I feel (description). We see that the description has nothing to do with the prescription. The way I do or do not feel has nothing to do with your actions. Your actions are measured against objective morality, not the way either of us feels. Just think about how such an argument could be applied to some terrible situations (How did slave owners feel? How do dictators who commit genocide feel? – I would imagine they were getting what they wanted, so it was great for them). What our culture has done is equated morality to feelings, and conflated two very different things. Society's current argument for moral systems is often just as absurd as saying that the direction of my fingers shows who is in the wrong, and scarily, it's just as easy to amend. All I have to do to fix my fingers is point them all at another – then according to the argument, my judgment is fair. Likewise, in a society of morals based upon feelings, all I have to do is get the majority to feel the way I do. That's why in many ways, our cultures are just as barbaric when it comes to moral judgment as we say previous cultures were. We just disparage, berate, and publically shame those who don't agree – until those who disagree become dissidents, state shaming becomes state imprisonment, and in extreme cases, genocide or state mandated executions of political enemies.

This largely summarizes the beginnings of most the atrocities of the 21st century. I'm not saying it always happens, but fickle moral systems are just as, if not more prone to anarchy, revolution, and violence than systems that are grounded in and stick to more absolute standards that don't change (e.g. love, nonviolence, freedom of ideas, etc.). Absolute morality can certainly be barbaric and atrocious, but the best, most grounded system would be a good, objective system of morality. While people or societies may go against those objective morals at times, violence and barbarism could always be called wrong in such systems. As it stands in the consistent logical outworkings of many today, the only reason slave owners, violent dictators, and rapists are wrong today is because we currently think it is as a majority. But in the past or the future, such moral judgments may change.

Ironically, while it's wrong to judge others and the way they feel, it's ok to judge those who are making moral judgments, disregarding their feelings along the way. Apparently some feelings are invalid, and the judgy judges get to decide that based on their feelings.

If another's feelings aren't affirmed in a fickle society, there is backlash. Here I am writing in light of this recent lawsuit of a family in Ohio who are being fined \$135,000 because someone had the symptom of surprise and shock that they weren't agreed with. God forbid someone not affirm an action in which you participate. Now we must bow to the pleasures and whims of others, according solely to their subjective feelings rather than to an objective standard of morality. I am not saying that I necessarily agree with the individuals being fined, but to fine someone for judging an action/event – not an individual – seems to be obviously wrong.

But for as asinine as judgmental hypocrites are (and we all fit that category at some point or another), they do hit on something important. I believe their backlash is against a very judgmental church and religious Victorianism that has pervaded Christianity for a while now. The church has been using its fingers to point in condemnation, leaving their hands unavailable to be used for helping. While I strongly disagree with the major ideals and conclusions of the new liberal judgmentalists, I have to acknowledge the great disservice and injustice and indifference that has been enacted by the church in the recent past. If we would put down our fingers of condemnation and our clenched fists of vindictive anger, maybe we'd be able to come alongside people and love and serve them as they ought to be loved and served - as Jesus loved and served [see blog on "When Helping Hurts" <http://dckreider.weebly.com/blog-theological-musings/when-helping-hurts>].

But at the same time, while we want to help others where they are, we do realize that the sin in which they are living is a blight. I originally had plight, as sin definitely is a plight, but I feel as though blight more conveys the sickness and need for a cure. So unfortunately, while we help those entrapped by evil, their notion of help includes affirmation. Help without affirmation is nothing to them. Unfortunately, affirmation just feeds the disease of evil,

but not affirming it causes evil to seek payment or revenge. How are we to help those suffering from evil when they require us to feed the very thing from which we know they need freed? And how are we to do this knowing that we ourselves need freed from the exact same thing?

So what are we to do? We are to move out and help. But at the same time, we have to speak truth. While our society may relish in evil and require a double payment from us – our physical service and social payment for not affirming – we must be willing to pay the cost. But by no means should this cost include the suppression of truth. But this truth is not only meant for those whom we must move out to help, it is meant for us as well. For the truth shows us that we, the helpers, are sinners as much as anyone else, and it helps us to reach out in humility and love – the only way truth can effectively and winsomely be shared.

*Eleven

The hands of time and hands of fate are bound
Entangled in a grip loosened by naught
Each new life and new hope are soon unwound
By child – Entropy - this marriage has wrought

Many then lead parsimonious lives
Fear to spend what's for them spent anyway
While rest don't rest until endeavors thrive
Just for life and labors to run away

So hoard not that which is not yours to keep
And waste not that which is yours to steward
Eleven 'ours you have to sow and reap
'Til midnight strikes imparting just reward

Time and fate are aligned for our demise
So keep time and eyes fixed upon the skies

I link time and fate here because time and our demise seem inextricably linked. As time passes, our demise nears. Here I use “fate” in the negative sense, which is how it is largely used today. I recognize that it has had a more neutral meaning in the past. There is absolutely nothing that we can do to prevent the passage of time or the body’s demise.

Time and fate are wound at the start of each new life. As a one enters the world, and as one realizes their hopes and aspirations, time and fate are wound to their fullest extent, and start unwinding until they are realized. The imagery here is of a pocket watch that one winds up. However, entropy is the result of time and fallenness (fate), and the pinnacle of organization and creation – a new life – begins to unwind towards disorder and destruction.

In an attempt to avert the problem of time and fate, people tend to have two responses. The first is to be stingy with their time. They are afraid to spend their time, and hoard it in frustrated relaxation, afraid they’ll end up spending all their time up. Ironically, time passes regardless of one’s choice to spend it. So time is spent whether one attempts to save it or not.

The rest of the people attempt to fill every moment of time they have so that none goes to waste. They are constantly building their legacy: business, money, memories, experiences, etc. And all of this refusal to rest leaves them incapable to catch up with the time that escapes them, the fate that hunts them down, and the vanishing nature of man’s labors that are erased with their memories (see poem “History’s Humor”).

In the end, both of these positions are faulty. We don’t keep time (play on words), though we keep it – and we should not waste that with which we’ve been blessed, but rather steward it well. It’s a loan.

The eleventh hour is a phrase that means “at the last possible moment.” So we have a full twelve hours until we come to the end. As the book of James says, our life is but a vapor, so our end is always very near. We are all living in the eleventh hour. Here, the end is an allusion to the fulfillment of our fate, or death. We have a set time in which we labor, and then we die to receive our just rewards. While the original phrase is most likely not speaking of the 11th hour as leading up to midnight, I am using it in both a literal and figurative sense. The other reason I use midnight is because it is another allusion to the Bible’s story of the bridegroom coming at midnight, and the need for the wedding party to be prepared. Likewise, those on earth who know that justice and redemption are coming should be prepared for such things.

I say that time and fate align here as an allusion to the notion of the stars aligning. This phrase is usually meant as things are in our favor, but here time and fate will certainly align, and they align against us. But while those things are certain, we must also be diligent to keep time, and to keep our eyes trained upon the sky. We are not keeping time because we control it, and we are not training our eyes on the sky for the stars to align. Rather, we’re stewarding the time we have and keeping it well, as we look up to the heavens for our redemption to come, and justice to be dealt. It is not a dependence on time and fate, but rather a dependence on the only promise we have of overcoming those things.

Twelve

We all follow in the footsteps of some
By choice, some by human nature ingrown
Desire of all, a domain to be won
Life to live to seed and to harvest grow

Then the seeds harvested from long before
You sow new seeds promising to bring hope
Not for what the future may some day store
Rather all the excess you can devote

Yourself then to living a learned life
Built upon work of those whom time has passed
Examples of what we should all be like
Twelve disciples who shared our savior's path

To a life of plenty - experience
Antidote to destruction's deviance

We all follow in the footsteps of some
SOME By choice, some by human nature ingrown
INGROWN Desire of all, a domain to be won
ONE Life to live to seed and to harvest grow

GROW Then the seeds harvested from long before
BEFORE You sow new seeds promising to bring hope
HOPE Not for what the future may some day store
STORE rather all the excess you can devote

Devote yourself then to living a learned life
Life built upon work of those whom time has passed
Passed examples of what we should all be like
Like twelve disciples who shared our savior's path

Path to a life of plenty - experience
Experience antidote to destruction's deviance

This poem is all about learning from the past and discipleship. Therefore, the end of each line is also needed to build full meaning and understanding of the proceeding line. I have always underestimated the importance of tradition in the church, and have only begun to realize its importance. This is a nod to the beginning of my understanding.

There are two major categories into which I lump human action: nature and experience. We either follow human nature or human example. Following human example can either be done positively (follow good actions taken by others), or negatively (avoid bad actions taken by others).

The innate nature of mankind is to conquer. We want to be rulers of some domain. While that domain certainly includes ourselves, we often extend that to others and to nature as well. Especially in today's YOLO mindset, we've got one life – and a short one at that – to set up our kingdom. Most of us, then, use our nature or the experience of those who have come before us to attempt the goal of establishing our autonomy and our kingdom.

Here is where I begin to set up the way I think things should be. Rather than giving into our nature, which is often steeped in lusts, we should rather look at prior examples. Use the seeds that come from a proven lineage, and be wary of new seeds from crosses.

Likewise, do not be greedy about your future kingdom and accomplishments. Harvest and store as the past has shown this to be wise, for we do not know what tomorrow brings.

I think one reason I like history is because of the lessons it teaches us which we don't have to learn for ourselves. Reading and learning is not a waste of time. Mankind has a heritage of which he should be aware. This is not more true than in the area of the Christian religion, where truths were passed down directly from the ultimate example.

Thirteen

On Mockingbird lane deep in the dark woods
Live victims of hatred, instillers of fear
They unburden themselves of society's goods
And long for a day when the good perseveres

Those tainted by hate oft fail to exempt
Themselves from the same curse that curses their foes
For living in darkness causes one to accept
That light always loses to darkness imposed

Those who once scouted the fringes of life
Now seek to attack us and drive us out
Once victims are now vile bringers of strife
Once prey now the hunters prowling about

Thirteen Thirteen the lane where monsters live
The path to them, birth and experience

All I could think about with the number “13” was horror sorts of things. But at the same time, I was nearing the end of the poem series without really throwing any specific nods to Atticus. At the same time, I didn’t want to throw in anything from “To Kill a Mockingbird,” as that would have been too obvious. The only other mockingbird association I had was from the Munsters, an old TV show. That being said, the concept of this poem does fit in with the character Atticus from “To Kill a Mockingbird.” In the book, Atticus faced the darkness head on rather than receding from it, reeling from it, or embracing it.

I imagined a family living in seclusion, away from the world. To be a family withdrawn like that, I imagined that some sort of terror must have befallen them. They probably withdrew because of the world’s oppression and discrimination towards them, an individual or group’s ill action towards them, or something of that sort.

But withdrawing from problems and people tends to have an extremely negative effect. Secluding oneself in darkness, from darkness, ends up choking out light, and making the two types of darkneses (moral and societal) indistinguishable. I think the recent tragedies in the U.S. show us exactly how hate can be bred in darkness, and how the victims of that hate can triumphantly fight back against that darkness by looking it straight in the eyes and maintaining a dwelling in the light rather than withdrawing into darkness themselves.

I think particularly of the boys from Columbine who were picked on, felt ostracized from the community, and ended up living in more darkness than those who drove them there. Here is where I reference “Scout” and “Atticus.”

Here is the reference to the Munsters. And the creation of a monster is both due to birth (our human nature), and our experience. This notion echoes William Blake’s idea of innocence and experience. In this poem, I acknowledge that innocence is certainly tainted by experience, but I will go beyond Blake’s seemingly behavioristic notions of sorts in my last poem, as I will harp on the nature with which we are all born. We are far from blank slates. Humanity is born in sin and darkness, and only light can push it back. Atrocities and horrors are not perpetrated by the fostering of unique evil in the hearts of deviants, but rather possible from any one of us – all of whom have the viable seeds of evil sprouted in our hearts and waiting for nutrients. As one of Catalina’s professors used to say, all of the evil we see [the Holocaust, Rape of Nanking, Khmer Rouge, Sudan’s genocide, the Croatian Genocide, Stalin’s regime, Mao’s regime, Civil Right’s era lynchings and murders, WW1, WWII, ISIS, Armenian Genocide, Ukrainian Genocide, Rwandan Genocide, massacre of the Kurds, Serial Killers like Pedro Lopez, Abul Djabar, etc.] – “this isn’t inhuman, it’s what humans do.” Only those ignorant of the history of the world, and particularly the 21st century (when all of the above horrors occurred), can deny that evil is ubiquitous not only in scale, but in scope. Horrific evil exists everywhere, and evil touches everyone.

This part plays off the last poem on discipleship as well. We need to learn from others rather than allow our human nature to reign and bring us to acts that may seem harmless (like seclusion in this poem), but lead to the destruction of self, others, and community. Humans were created to dwell in relationship with God, others, nature, and self. To pull away from that is dehumanizing.

* Fourteen

The party lines were drawn before our birth
A line we dared to cross unto demise
A choice made aligned with dark – light averse
A soul malign'd for evil's enterprise

Choice's power lines the paths we have made
As we detour rather than walk the line
We line pockets with things that time has paid
Line souls with tar from that for which we pine

Now out of line and running out of days
A life line has been tossed for salvation
The bottom line a death for life of grace
A thick red line of Christ's imputation

End of the line draws close terribly soon
Fourteen lines all our sonnet has to move

The theme of this sonnet is “14 lines,” so I used 14 phrases/words that used the phonetic “line.”

Good and evil have been established from ages past. In fact, it is so ingrained in our nature many Christians acknowledge it as “original sin.” While some think this an unfair sort of notion, we all choose to cross the line of our own accord. So while the lines were drawn before us, we reiterate it by our own choices.

Our souls, then, are marred and bent towards evil. I think I hit on this idea pretty frequently throughout my poems, though it is not in a hopeless sort of way. Yes, our natures are steeped in evil. I do not think we are all generally good. I think most generally act good, but largely for reasons of self-interest. Given certain experiences and opportunities, we could all very easily express obvious and deep evil. There is nothing in our natures to keep us from evil. Rather, our nature easily accepts and justifies it when given the opportunity.

Our choices continue to power our lives as we move forward full steam ahead, relishing in all the lust and evil we desire, pursue, and accrue along the way. But these choices we make towards evil are really just marring us more. It’s like a smoker’s lungs as the smoker continues to indulge their habit.

Despite our state, Christ has interceded on our behalf, and has interposed his blood. Here I use “thick red line” instead of thin. The phrase “thin red line” connotes the idea of a point of no return. So when Christ covers our sins, there is no turning back. We need not fear any longer, as his imputation is a joyous point of no return for our sins. But rather than use “thin” line, I use “thick” to also convey the sufficiency of the cost.

The death of our tarnished souls comes very quickly. We have only a limited time in which to use the power of choice for good. Just as all I would love to express hasn’t even been touched in these fifteen sonnets, and just as each sonnet has insufficient space to convey the notion which it is intended to convey, so it is with our lives and our expressions. We have a short amount of time alive, and need to use all the lines we get to align our selves and our souls with truth and goodness. I’ve expressed what the truth is about the world in this set of poems, and in Elin’s ABC’s I expressed the morals or goodness I most desire to express and to have my children pursue.

Baby K's Colors

Blood Red

Glorious symphony of nature sings
Inviting all within to take delight
So cherish all provisions nature brings
'Til spirits lead you to the land of light

But land of light's only light in degrees
No shining source that differs from our world
If nature has composed this symphony
I fear the crescendo of pow'r unfurled

The blood red sun of morning may entice
The dawn of day shines hope on what's to come
Sailors who've seen sea's beauty and trade's spice
Know straight lines are to fear - a rule of rhumb

Man and nature live lives that are depraved
My fear, then, to eternity enslaved

The title here conveys a number of notions. First, it alludes to the main picture of the sonnet, which is the blood red sun and sky at dawn. It also summarizes one of my major complaints with this system, which is that the continuation of a violent and depraved world isn't a system of hope and goodness. Finally, it alludes to the people group represented in the "Jesus Loves the Little Children" song.

I am not particularly familiar with Native American religions – and probably more than most other sorts of worldviews, they are the most diverse due to the number of tribes and the size of the region they encompass (N. and S. America). In general, I summarized the belief system as one that emphasizes the unity with nature, and the passage of our spirits into another world after our deaths. My novice impression is that this tended to be very nature centered, and that our spirit life tended to be a continuation of this life in some sense. We either walk this earth or a spirit world that is very much like this one – where we will be doing the same things (hunting, fishing, walking through forests, etc.).

It doesn't matter if this portrays one Native American philosophy or all of them – it is an idea that can be addressed, and it can help to highlight some of the strengths of the Christian worldview. If there is an afterlife that is essentially the same as ours, but just a continuation, then what is there to look forward to? Someone who had a relatively good life may love the concept, but this is no consolation for those with terrible lives. Being distasteful doesn't mean the view is wrong, but it should make us take a good look at its validity.

And if nature is idolized, and nature has formed this spirit world – or if nature is the focus of the spirit world – this really provides no consolation. For in this world, nature is cruel. Death and suffering often prevail. If the spirit world is a more intense version of this world, I would hate to think of what would become of pain and suffering. This is why I say the light is only light in degrees. There may be a new sun - a brighter one - but this is only a quantitative difference, not a qualitative one. The sun has more magnitude, but it is still of the same substance. There is no newness - no change of nature in this extended reality, for no problem was solved, no ultimate evil conquered, and no redemption.

As nature is worshipped for its seeming beauty and harmony, only those with experience of the great evil can truly interpret it. One can see the red sky in morning as it shines on the world and wonder at its beauty and majesty. But the sailor who has experienced the impending storm and tumult that will follow such a sky sees much more than beauty. In fact, such beauty may be obscured to the sailor by the knowledge of what evil lies behind. It is a fairly straightforward conclusion to look at the sun and its beauty and think no further. Likewise, it is a fairly straightforward conclusion to look at nature and the intuition of continued existence and think no further. But sailors know that straight lines can be far more perilous than seemingly curved ones. Attempting to travel the seas in a straight line means the constant adjusting of course as sailors attempt to follow the ever changing "great circle" trajectory. While this may not be a huge deal now with GPS, in the past, it could easily lead to being pushed off course through carelessness or in a storm. However, following a rhumb line – a seemingly hectic course on paper – actually allows the sailor to ensure they reach their destination with accuracy as they follow a constant bearing. In this line I also intend to convey two other concepts. 1) "rule of rhumb" is meant to convey the idea "rule of thumb," to show that straight lines, as a rule of thumb, aren't the best to follow when it comes to worldviews. There is often much more nuance and digging that needs to be done. Straight lines may often be the shortest distance between two points (though not in marine navigation), but they rarely work. 2) A "rhumb line" was also a nickname for taverns in seaports, and it likely reminds readers of "rum," which is thought of as a sailor's drink. If you drink a lot of rum, you will likely not be walking in a straight line.

While this poem doesn't directly address the validity of this generalized Native American philosophy or religion, it does address what comfort can and cannot come from holding to such a view. If we see the depravity of both nature and humanity in this world, it should be a very fearful thing to consider that both may continue on into eternity. Annihilation would be a much greater comfort to many who have experienced the tooth and claw of nature. Unlike Christianity, which acknowledges the problem of sin and provides a resolution for restored relationships in the resurrected life, the Native American philosophy generalized here perpetuates a miserable, meaningless existence. This doesn't disprove the truth of such a worldview, but it should unseat any hope one attempts to find in it.

*Yellow Brick Road

All is one and the one is in us all
Eternal being seeking its release
Together we stand, divided we fall
So fight illusion of reality

If all's illusion, where can trust be placed
Senses and sensibilities the same
Both liars, with desires, killed in haste
Called to trust what all shows to be inane

Why fight your intuitions and desires?
Because they lead some to destructive ends?
How is it that your temples then house fires?
Force that kills some same force that warms our friends

All yellow brick roads lead to the same place
Land of Oz where curtains are commonplace

The title alludes to the main picture of Oz. It seems like a magnificent, magical, mystical place – with a road of gold leading there. But as you travel deeper and deeper into the land, you eventually come to find that it is all legerdemain. It is all façade. The seemingly mystical substance poofs away with the click of your heels. It seems surreal because it isn't real. This poem, then, focuses on the Eastern belief system. That obviously encompasses a broad range of thought – from Confucianism to Hinduism, as well as a plethora of other ideas. The main idea I focused on here is the uniquely Eastern notion of mysticism that sees reality as illusion and throws off notions of rationality and logic. I am not at all an expert on Eastern religions, so this is intended to be my response to it as I have perceived it from those I know of who ascribe to this sort of ideology.

Eastern thought seems to have a tendency towards pantheism – or all as god. Everything is part of nature, and god is in everything. We are all part of this one substance of deity. Our problem is that we are trapped in this material world and we are bogged down by everything here. We need to free ourselves of these distractions and illusion so we can realize our oneness and divinity. Our way to freedom is to denounce this illusion and free ourselves from it, often through asceticism and ritual.

But there is one obvious place where Eastern thought breaks down. I am told that my intuition, empiricism (use of my senses), logic/rationality, and my nature (desires) are all wrong – or at least severely unknowable and misguided. I sense the world around me, my intuition tells me it's real, rationality tells me this world is more likely to be real than illusion, morals seem to be objective, and my desires correspond to this world in which I live. However, Eastern thought would have me throw off all these ways of gathering data and gaining knowledge, to adhere to their ideology. But if I have thrown out all ways of gathering data and assessing the validity of an idea, on what grounds should I trust their philosophy? How can they make a truth claim that essentially annihilates any ability to assess truth, and expect me to believe it? I certainly empathize with the idea that the aforementioned ways of gathering data and coming to knowledge are flawed, and rarely/never lead to 100% certainty (which I'll get to in my "Blues Brothers" poem. But they at least provide us with a starting point and a standard for faith. Everything about this Eastern notion screams "inane!" The philosophy may be right, but there is absolutely no way to know that it is, and no reason for me to trust it.

The often ascetic nature of this worldview makes me wonder about the allure of it. It seems as though it's draw stems more from a negative philosophy than a positive one. In fact, I don't see how it can really have much of a positive philosophy if it essentially abolishes truth. So did the first Eastern philosophers notice that desires lead to weakness in anger? Did they see how lust lead to heartache and brokenness? Did they see how desire lead to cruelty? Did they see that intuitions were sometimes faulty and lead to problems? Did they notice optical or other sensory illusions and recognize that empiricism couldn't lead to ultimate truth? Did they ponder moral dilemmas with seemingly no right answer? Did they recognize all of these things, then throw their hands up in the air and say that since nothing can be known with certainty – the one thing we can know is that this is all illusion? From my very brief, novice glance, that's what it feels like.

It is evident that desires often lead to pain. It is evident that intuitions and senses falter. But this more Eastern, negative philosophy comes up lacking in explanatory power, for it doesn't account for the positive. Here, I use the analogy of fire to make my point. We recognize that fire is a very terrible thing. It burns homes, makes orphans, kills families, displaces wildlife, annihilates resources, etc. Yet at the very heart of this philosophy – in temples and the like – we see fire in constant use. This destructive force is harnessed and used for the good, despite the knowledge of the bad contained within it. If those who adhere to Eastern thought could recognize the great symbol this fire truly is, perhaps they would realize that the potential for fault doesn't make something useless. It remains useful so long as we don't become careless.

The Eastern thought which makes truths and lies indistinguishable, makes all paths lead to the same place. All roads lead to heaven, or eventual perfection. But these roads don't truly lead there. Rather, they lead to Oz – a place that looks and sounds like where you want to go, but where truth is masked by curtains, where you can't know anything, and where that which is wrong with us and the world is never addressed or fixed. The lion remains fearful, the scarecrow doesn't get a heart, the tin man doesn't get a new body, and we never make it to our true home. We live in Kansas, but are allured into the illusion of Oz.

Black Magic

Malevolent, capricious deities
Ancestral spirits – cherished heritage
Hear our sincere incantations and pleas
Make our health and wealth your prerogative

One wonders why beings worthy of praise
Would ever by one's pittance be allured
One's kin, helpless, trapped, rotting in their graves
Gods impotent, the future not assured

A true god has all power and needs none
His creatures not just weaker creations
Rather, subjects to him and world he loves
Blessed by grace of their participation

The gods are not cause we manipulate
Our God is grace, and seeks to liberate

My impression of African religions is that they tend towards manipulation of the spiritual. I think of Voudon (Voodoo) as a prime example of this. While its origin isn't Africa, it certainly implemented religious elements from African religions. The religions seem to focus on invoking spirits who are often underlings of a greater creator, and/or are impersonal forces – as well as connecting with ancestors. The main goal of these religions seems to be less about some eternal happiness and focuses more on manipulating the spiritual realm to immediately influence particular situations in life.

There are two main problems with focusing on underling spirits or a pantheon of gods, as well as dead relatives. As far as the relatives go, if they are dead, it leaves one wondering what good they are in the spiritual realm. Second, it leaves one wondering how any deities would benefit from what one does in the physical realm, and it leaves one wondering why individuals would worship deities that lack omnipotence and control of the future.

It doesn't make sense that if a god exists, he or she has any need of us. If all things have come into existence through that god, that god has all power over his creation and subjects. This god is not simply a weaker creation, and is in a vertical rather than horizontal relationship. When a true god exists, this god needs nothing from his creation, and therefore extends all good to his creatures through grace.

If we live in a world where we can manipulate the gods, it shows that the gods aren't really gods. There may be higher powers we need to coerce to make our lives enjoyable, or gods who we can manipulate because they need us, but this doesn't answer ultimate questions. It is only if our God is truly God that we can live a life of peace because he can act solely from a position of grace.

*White Coat

White padded rooms for those who've gone insane
White houses when a room just will not do
White coats for those who tend and heal the lame
White flight for those to whom world owes its dues

A world disjointed, fractured, disabused –
Of notion that the whole world's truly whole
Sees value only in instruments used
Songs souls sang succumbing to rational

But world is more than manipulative
A place to form and fashion our own ends
The world is created explicative
God's expression we ought enjoy and tend

The best pragmatism can never work
Unless one understands their purpose first

We humans categorize everything. We have our set places for people and things events, and everything else. Whereas some nations, tribes, or peoples worked in groups or had more dynamic systems, for the past several hundred years, Europeans, in particular, have specialized and separated everything. Everything has a function, and if it doesn't make our jobs faster and easier and better, then it is trivial. In the first quatrain I describe the place for the mentally insane – in white, padded rooms. I also poke fun at our politicians, which rings especially true this political season (2016). I wrote this in October, before the president was selected, so it's not a super specific jab. It's talking about politicians in general. It seems as though the difference between the mentally insane and the politicians in DC and candidates running for the white house is a matter of degrees in terms of their housing. Sometimes it seems as though the more insane are given plush jobs and seats of responsibility.

Doctors, of course, also have their place with their attire – their pure, white coats. Others find their niche as well. Here I speak of white flight, where entitled whites leave their community. They think that their money and ability to leave entitles them to forsake the needy around them, forsake other groups of people who are unlike them, and move away from problems. This view that the world owes them a comfortable life pushes them out to the suburbs.

Such a specialized system fractures the world. It dis-integrates it. It disabuses humanity of the notion that the world is one massive, beautiful collage of story and purpose, and the notion that we are all valuable humans regardless of place or position. We are all connected and responsible for our fellow humans. Whereas the Eastern notions of wholeness take everything too far and prevent important distinctions and discernment, this notion of pragmatism that is common in Western modernity goes too far the other way. It says that there is really no wholeness, there is only distinction.

Ultimately, this fracturing leads to compartmentalization and utilitarianism. If I live in a particular fragment, then what I do is only valuable in so much as it advances my small world and agenda. If I see no use for it in my sub-world, then it has no use. We see this very clearly as the fine arts have fallen out of favor. But while we may live compartmentalized lives, we were not made compartmentalized. We may have abolished song and color from our lives, whitewashing the walls of reality into a blank canvas upon which no color will ever touch, but our souls were made to sing. They sing not because song necessarily advances our own little slice of life, but because holistic life contains song. Our pleasure, enjoyment, and fulfillment rely on integration. I recommend reading G.K. Chesterton's Orthodoxy, as he spends a considerable amount of time elaborating on the problem of hyper-focus.

The world isn't intended to be a tool we use for our own contrived purposes. When we make it as such, meaning, altruism, and all sorts of fantastic things fly out the window. This is because we aren't creators of ultimate meaning. We are discerners of meaning. God has created us with souls that reflect his image, in a world that he made to glorify him. He has blessed us with work – with the opportunity to tend the garden he has created. We are called to enjoy him and love him by tending what he has made and serving others. But notice that the tending and keeping aren't the goal – rather the enjoyment of relationship is the goal. Tending and keeping is how we enjoy each other together by helping, creating, sharing, etc. One is able to tend and serve the world as a scientist, but not only as a scientist. The liberal arts colleges still house the long held Christian notion that the world is integrated because it was created by one creator, with order and purpose. Pragmatism is a great outlook, but it can only work if it knows the purpose for the work. If the goal is survival, then that which leads to survival is good. If the goal is pleasure, then that which leads to pleasure is good. The problem with modern pragmatism is that nobody knows what the work ought to be. This leads to enmity, as all of our differing goals and forms of pragmatism which guide us conflict with each other – causing us to prioritize self over others.

It is ironic that most forms of pragmatism can't work, as this is what pragmatism is. Pragmatism may be great at shining the tires on a car, but it leaves the rest of the car in disrepair. The only pragmatism that works is the pragmatism that seeks to cut through self-centeredness and self-created "purpose," and embrace that for which we were created.

*Green Space

All that I see is what I want to get
Desire within appeased by what's without
For without all I see there is regret
A happiness only matter endows

But happiness, this immaterial
Emotion - need - cannot by mass be quenched
Burdensome weight bearing upon my soul
Only fades when greed's gravity repents

The mass accrued by mass is just more mass
The end of all, the same, an empty grave
A vast colorless field without grass
When all's made right as all's given away

Centers of galaxies are dead black holes
Centers of greedy lives, evil dark souls

The color green here is going to be used to convey the notion of envy. While envy can be about many different things, it is often founded in materialism (as in the acquiring of things, not the philosophy of what exists or how things came to be). This poem, then, is about the epistemology of materialism – the notion that having things is going to bring me happiness. We hear this all the time. When people are asking if they should take a particular job, purchase a particular item, or date a certain individual – it all boils down to “whatever makes you feel good.” Determining the veracity of a claim or the wisdom of a decision by the way it makes you feel as a consumer is not a good epistemology.

Here I use “without” in short succession but mean two different things. The first means that on materialism, I view satisfaction as brought by things outside of myself – inanimate objects and persons (which persons, on materialism, are really just animate objects. There’s no soul or significant distinction.). The second usage is essentially saying “without having that which is without” (or outside of oneself). So the goal on materialism is to achieve a state of internal happiness, but that state is only brought about by objects that are outside of oneself. Without the addition objects there is only regret.

But happiness and emotions aren’t material things. How can they then be satiated by that which is material? I’m certainly not saying that matter is bad, but that it does not explain fulfillment in and of itself. Immaterial values play a huge part. I could hand an Xbox to a remote tribe in the Amazon and they’d have a far different reaction than if I handed it to a teenager in the U.S. Matter does not contain the substance of happiness which it imparts to us upon its obtaining. Happiness is immaterial and is only filled by immaterial things. The burden of insatiable desire and greed weigh upon my soul like a black hole. They make it heavy, prevent fulfillment from being released, and cause me to devour everything within my path in search of filling the hole. But the only way for happiness to then come is for the gravity of this black hole to repent (in its literal sense, to turn completely around 180 degrees). This alludes to the notion that altruism, or the giving away of oneself to benefit others is at least part of the answer to opposing the faulty view of materialism. This is why I didn’t use the word “relent,” though it would have fit the rhyme. The answer isn’t just greed taking a back seat, it’s also about us pushing back against it to live in a truly fulfilling manner. Rather than gravity relenting altogether – which would just make one weightless – the gravity needs to do a 180, or repent. True happiness begins by being pulled outward.

Logically, we know that if we are just blobs of mass, and we accrue objects for our fulfillment, we’re merely mass acquiring mass. It’s like watching a water droplet on your windshield run into another one and become a bigger droplet. There is no value or fulfillment or worth to such an accrual of mass. In a moment, those water droplets will be engulfed by another, losing their identity, and flowing away until they are recycled to be no more as they once were. Ironically, when our standard for success is the accrual of more matter, it ends up leaving us empty. We end in death, where our end is as meaningless as the life we lived.

In the end, the universe will right the wrongs of materialism. Humans are spending their brief lives accruing material, which in the end, the universe will destroy and disperse in supernovas and heat deaths. The world of tomorrow is not the acquisition of things and therefore the acquisition of happiness, but rather a barren wasteland devoid of color, life, and light. As the universe continues to expand faster and faster, matter becomes more and more dispersed. In the end, then, all the matter we accrued for our pleasure is given away by the universe. It’s a fitting end for materialism, and a fitting end for matter. Here I use “field of grass” in two ironic ways. First, the vast field (or expanse) of space is very different than the colorful field we think of. Second, it is an allusion to the phrase “grass is greener on the other side of the fence.” The grass certainly is not greener here.

Here I summarize the poem. Galaxies are held together momentarily by black holes, but will eventually die and be dispersed into virtual nothingness. Likewise, materialists have greedy, devouring souls at their core, and try to hold their world together through stability and acquisition. But the end of them is the same. They will be destroyed and the matter they’ve accrued dispersed, and the matter that they are dispersed as well.

*Gray Matters

The mind, a ploy invented by one's brain
A ghost - more like a wrench - in the machine
Fiction that only serves, to us, restrain
Where matters by the brain would best be schemed

But brain evolved by chance cannot know truth
Nature only selecting survival
Only law, survival, guides claw and tooth
Mechanistic subjects to none higher

So go on, live "your" life as "you" desire
Dismissive hand not even yours to wave
While clarity of thought with time expires
Knowing and being known move towards the grave

Ghost of will haunts those trapped in space and time
Intellectualism, ploy of minds

This poem is about intellectualism. There are undertones of empiricism implied here as well, but it's hard to fit in a whole philosophical argument, rebuttal, and conclusion about various sorts of things with any nuance. The title is meant to say 1) the poem is about the brain (figuratively, gray matter), 2) the poem is literally about matter that is gray, the brain, 3) the poem is about issues that are very gray ("matter" used as a noun), and 4) gray matters, as in "is important" ("matter" used as an adjective). I understand that 1-2 seem very similar, but in the one I'm pointing to the brain as we intuitively think of it (as a seat of the person "I"), and in the next sense as just a blob of colored matter that does what it is programmed to do. I'm speaking of the same object in two different ways. 3-4 are also very similar, as 4 compliments 3. I am saying that what I am speaking of – the soul – is a very gray issue. There aren't clear cut answers and evidences either way. But allowing room for the gray is very important. Even on intellectualism, we need humility to understand that we are very uncertain about a lot of things and need to be open. We see this all the time on both sides of any issue.

On intellectualism, the notion of a non-physical mind is absurd. The notion is pejoratively referred to a "ghost in the machine." The mind or soul is a ghost – a fictitious goblin fabricated by mystics, loonies, and the superstitious who are still bound to foolishness by their evolution, ancestry, and social constructs. But the soul or mind, this contrived non-explanation, is more than just a silly story to intellectualists. It is actually a wrench thrown into the machine that ends up hurting man's progress. Choices and truths are easy to decide on intellectualism, as it all boils down to utility and empirical evidence. Since the mind or soul is just an obsolete, fictitious creation of our brains, we need to use our brains to toss such a notion to the side and move on with unobstructed intellect.

But what the intellectual empiricists don't understand is that this truth they "know" is extremely uncertain. In a world where we all is mechanistic – we simply follow our program. And what is our program? To survive, of course. This means that the program humans run has no concern about whether something is true or not. Alvin Plantinga has a great argument formulated about this evolutionary selection. His point isn't to say that truth wouldn't exist on naturalism, only that we could never have any confidence in whether something was true or not. William Lane Craig sums it up here: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/plantingas-evolutionary-argument-against-naturalism>. Free will, love, morality, and a plethora of other items as we intuitively know them are some of the many "truths" naturalists know to be logical fabrications on their system. So for us to live in a world with all of these lovely, intuitive aspects, and for us to have the ability to confidently know truth and be able to discover truth, it seems that we have to posit that we live with faculties endowed with reason that supersedes mere evolutionary utilitarianism, and for these things to hold, we must live in a world designed for discovery. It is a world where causation mandates all but the will of the soul. We can know truth because it exists here in our consistent world, and because our souls were created with the ability to recognize it.

On most forms of intellectualism (particularly with a materialistic bent), survival is the only game in town. Nothing else matters. See poem "Last Generation Alive" where I expound on morality. Also check out my blog to see where I expound on issues of morality on naturalism.

It's hard to see on intellectualism how we can even be having a discussion. Not only are there huge issues with my confidence about truth claims and the potential for discovery, but I've got huge issues with understanding how I can even exist as myself. Aren't I just a conglomeration of living organisms? In what way, then, do I actually exist as myself if I am really just a community of other life. By person, don't we really mean a community of cells and bacteria living in harmony with each other? The logic that a single "I" exists on naturalism - if applied consistently - seems to indicate that my subdivision, city, state, country, or world is a single living entity or person. If an individualized entity can be ascribed to me – a community of organisms working together – then certainly we are not individuals, but rather a part of some larger individual organism. Consciousness and personhood are huge issues on naturalism. The soul or mind seems less like a non-explanation and more like the only rational explanation to fit our properly basic beliefs and intuitions about how the world is. It makes the world livable and prevents us from having to live inconsistently.

In the end, where does intellectualism lead us? Well, it deteriorates as we age. Even the fame we accrue from our intellectual advancements – our legacy – fades with time as well. Aristotle has lasted two millennia, but what will be remembered of him in ten thousand years? And even if he is remembered until the end of mankind, there will be a day when he will certainly be remembered no more. Like the great Ozymandius who faded into the sands of time, or when the universe dies in heat death, Aristotle will become no more. So what benefit is it to Aristotle that he is remembered today? What ultimate benefit is it to him if he is remembered until the end of the universe? The end for all is the same. We will all be remembered until the day we will never be remembered again. And there will certainly be a day when we are remembered no more. Our fates are all the same in such a world.

Here I flip the beginning. Rather than the mind being a fabrication of the brain, I say that intellectualism as a form of empiricism or as a worldview is a fabrication of a deceitful, sinful will that stems from a fallen mind and soul. Only a soul in rebellion would devise such a hopeless system that undermines its own philosophies and longings just to prop oneself up for a finite time on the throne to rule as a self-proclaimed god.

Rose Colored Glasses

Woman - apex of chance's creation
The height to which all matter doth aspire
Being, worthy of all consecration
As all's consumed in pleasure's holy fire

Kindred souls kindle fire not just within
Releasing flame to spread where'er will blow
Consuming all, even their next of kin
To feed the fires stoked so long ago

Quench not the fire that burns within one's soul
Nor starve it unto cold mis'erable death
Rather release fire where it's controlled
To hearths - torches, to feed, to ease duress

Humans were made to live fulfilled as one
Hedonists seek pleasure but for the one

Humanity is currently viewed as the pinnacle of existence and specialness. We are it. And while we are certainly special, our desires and accomplishments can lead to complete horror. The answer to this is to avoid elevating humanity's desires and passions, and rather elevate the proper aims. I don't think passions are ever bad in and of themselves. Rather, it is the goal of those passions. Fulfilling hunger, sexual desire, and justice can be great when seeking to do so as we were made to do. But when our aim is ourselves and our elevation, the same desires push us to gluttony, objectification, revenge and cruelty, and all sorts of deviant behaviors. But this stems from our aims, not our desires. Desires are merely the motivation that pushes us forward to accomplish our aims.

By this point I'm sure it seems I'm picking on atheism/naturalism, as many of the poems assume that God does not exist. While I'm sure part of this is due to my particular fondness for thinking about atheism and discussing the topic, I think a lot of it has to do with most other worldviews not comporting with a coherent notion of God. What worldview would lead to one thinking that accumulating matter was the goal of life? Seemingly one where matter was at center stage, not a world with a supernatural deity. What worldview would lead one to thinking that humanity was the center of meaning and value? Seemingly one where mankind was the highest form of intelligence. Most thinking that deviates from classical Christian thought about the world seems to lead one towards a world without a deity. Most other religions have at least some aspect of Christianity within them, whereas atheism deviates the most.

This poem begins by arguing that the highest form is humanity. This is the highest form of matter, designed by chance. Obviously that doesn't fit, since chance cannot purpose or design things. This is one of the big ironies, contradictions, and inconsistencies on naturalism. Purposed language in a world that cannot purpose. I continue on with the irony and contradiction, saying that all matter aspires to become human kind. It is the apex of matter's goal. No form of matter can compete with the complexity and wonder of mankind. Man is the last form to develop evolutionarily in terms of complexity, and is therefore the greatest creature. Some may call that a non sequitur, but they are only able to do so because they have reason. No other form of matter could do such a thing, and arguing reasonably would only prove the point that man is the best. Here I use "woman" to represent humanity rather than "man" to be sensitive to those who may be offended that "man" represents all of humanity.

Since humanity is the highest form, all that exists is under humanity. Humanity determines value. It is generally determined that what is valuable in a temporal world is the fulfillment of desires and pleasure. Truth, then, is that which leads to the satiating of desire and the fulfillment of pleasure.

But seeking to fulfill one's pleasure is not the best metric for value and happiness. First, as stated above, desires are not prescriptive in and of themselves. Two people can feel the same desire, yet pursue its fulfillment in two very different ways. Desires don't tell us what to do or how to do it, they motivate us to act. The fire of desire that burns within a person is a dangerous thing. As humanity goes about seeking to fulfill their pleasure – a whimsical, often irrational, uncontrollable thing – they impact all with whom they come in contact. Humanity is like a fire that is blown about and spread by the air (where'er is meant to say "wherever" as well as to say "where air").

The fire is not containable when one continues to feed it as much as possible, or refuses to contain it. As it feeds on more and more pleasures, it grows and begins consuming other things with which it comes in contact – even persons that one says they love. "Their next of kin" here refers to a story I just read about sex slavery in Romania. The article discussed how most of the child sex slaves are not kidnapped, but rather prostituted out by their parents. I know that kind of thing happens everywhere. What parent would do such a thing? One for whom pleasure is the epistemological lens for success and fulfillment in life. Some parents are so consumed with their own gratification and/or wellbeing, their burning passions consume their families.

But the answer is not to quell pleasure. Desires and pleasures are wonderful things, and we were made to be fulfilled. But seeing pleasure for the sake of pleasure is not what is fulfilling.

Rather than feeding the fire at will, or failing to contain it, we need to allow desires and passions to burn, but to do so in a controlled manner. We need to allow them to burn on torches and in hearths where they can light the pathways of our fellow man and our families, and where they can be put to use to feed others. Our skills and passions are wonderful things that can fulfill us as we use them to give and love and serve. We guide our passions and desires – they should never guide us. Such a thing is impossible without a goal, purpose, or mandate. In a world without objective morality and objective good and objective beauty, pleasure for pleasure's sake is a legitimate metric.

Our moral and mandate is to live in community as lovers of all. Hedonists love, but they only love themselves. Christians can live as one, for the One, by the grace of the One, but hedonists live for number one.

Purple Haze

Chained in this life to hopelessness and strife

Only one way to experience peace -
Contempt body as it erodes in time
Appease mind to find your only release

But flesh ignored, does not, a person, free
Illusion – deception – mind's sleight of hand

It binds one to a false reality
Time seems to cease as they carpe diem

The flesh is not a lie we should despise
Nor mind a fabricator of all ills
The former, helping hands, inquir'ing eyes
Latter, our mover, creator of will

Mind chained to thought of escaping body
Is stuck in fog of immobility

“Purple Haze” is a reference to a song by Jimi Hendrix. The song is lyrically trippy, as the singer is in a fog of mental confusion and experience.

This poem focuses on the belief that what is true is that which frees our minds. This resembles the ancient gnostic heresy that viewed the flesh as bad. Some people believe that the mind supersedes the body, and attempt to free themselves of their body which hinders them. Our bodies are so limited, and they age and fade with time, until we turn purple in our death and decay. On a side note, I understand that “contempt” is not technically a verb, but I like it used as a verb. I have no problem taking words and shaping them to my meaning if it paints the picture I like.

The individual who believes that the mind will free one apart from the body is mistaken. The body is certainly limited, but the mind is limited as well. While the body fades with time, so does the mind. On top of this, the body seems more knowable as true than the mind. Our bodies largely convey what is experienced. Unless one is paralyzed, our bodies send signals to our brains. It is in our brains where the interpretation of truth is skewed. What the body senses is generally true. It is in the mind that falsity commences. Psychosomatic disorders are formed in the mind and trick the body. Our minds can produce overconfidence. Our minds can fool us into believing what is untrue. So when one argues that we should seek truth and be free by pursuing the mind, I wonder how they know this is the best course, if it is their deceitful mind that tells them this. When one proclaims that living in the mind alone is the best course of action – essentially acknowledging that we throw off all we think we know of physical reality – I am very wary. Embrace what I know exists for whatever it is my mind conceives? Not only is this very subjective, but it lends itself towards tremendous error and bias.

Accepting such a course doesn’t free, but rather binds one to oneself and a false construction of reality. It provides a false conception of self and the outside world. Ironically, this mentalist shuts out the outside world’s reality and seeks to ignore the passage of time that exists and takes a toll on the body. Yet this is one of the groups who extols all to cease the day. On their system, there is no time, and therefore no day to cease. This is a play on words as well since I say time does “cease,” as in stop, which is later turned into the notion of “cease” as in to obtain.

Elevating the mind above and apart from the body makes humanity incomplete. The mind is the seat of our will and allows us to move out into the world, affect change, etc. But our immaterial mind’s willpower is not enough to do these things. It needs the body to move and to do. The body without the mind is a useless, immobile shell. The mind without the body is a mobile, intangible, helpless wisp.

Here we end with our haze. For the mind without the body is lost in the haze or fog. There is no reality outside of what is immediately present – itself. It cannot see beyond. As such, it is aimless, helpless, lost, and immobile. It is useless and meaningless.

Agent Orange

Judge not lest ye, yourselves, also be judged
An eye for an I, a truth for a lie
The speck you find in me will be enough
To incur my wrath, condemning to die

Judgment withheld is not judgment unpassed
For silence rings as loudly as freedom
For both affect – one's course – another's path
Freedom without recourse, march to death's drum

So shame not nor silence those who critique
Though biased friend or pious enemy
Judgment taken to heart has pow'r to speak
To heal deaf ears, to make the blind to see

We can judge a tree by the fruit it bears
And judge our lives by the fruit that we share

This is a reference to the herbicide used in the Vietnam war. Its job was to destroy the vegetation and crops of the enemy. It demolished their cover and their sustenance. In this poem, the allusion carries in that I discuss the fruit one shares with others. So the notion of "orange" as a fruit comes in. I also discuss the suppression of criticism – leveling all critiques and objections that comes one's way. This is like the practice of obliterating all that is in front of you so you don't have to face opposition.

The first two lines is saying that if you judge me, I am going to retaliate. If your judgment is pronounced on an aspect of my life, rather than considering a potentially defective part of me, I am going to take offense personally to my whole being. And when you truly confront me with an issue, I will respond with lies by covering up my flaw, or lying about you.

When you approach me in judgment, I will respond with excessive force. The way for me to arrive at happiness and to account for truth is to uphold my image. What is true and good is that which upholds me.

But silencing the opposition is ultimately pointless. Suppressing one's judgment against you may temporarily lead to ease, but if a judgment is legitimate, ignoring it will ultimately lead to one's destruction. A car company with a defective part can ignore the defect so they can avoid a costly recall, but eventually, this defective part will injure or kill someone and they will incur an even greater cost. They will face the lawsuit, plus a recall, plus a hit to their reputation. Likewise, if someone points out a character flaw and judges another, ignoring this judgment or condemning the judge merely pushes off the inevitable. For those who believe this life is all there is, they may succeed in avoiding their flaws catching up with them. But for those who know and understand that there is a final judgment, they realize that final judgment cannot be avoided. All deeds will catch up with us eventually. Freedom has the power to move us along with our choices, and silenced judgment has the power to allow us to feel affirmed in our course unto destruction. If we use our freedom without re-course (changing our path), there will be recourse for our continued path of action.

Judgment is vital from both friends and enemies. Friends are biased in your favor, so if they judge, you should probably listen. It means there are likely some glaring issues. Enemies are certainly biased as well, but for an enemy to point out a flaw in you is a very generous thing. For when someone points out an error, it provides you with an opportunity to correct that error, to show humility, and to get better. An enemy could not do a nicer thing than judge you. Listening to both of these judgments allows us to have the most objective view of ourselves, as we see what others see – not what our minds and hearts want to see.

In the end, the image that we are putting out to others is important. This is why their judgment is important. It allows us to see past our self-deception and into the image we put out there. Maybe they misunderstand us and their judgment is less about our heart and more about our presentation. But either way, both are important. This notion that we shouldn't judge others is ludicrous. Its assumption is that there is no standard whereby we can judge. Yet saying we shouldn't judge is a judgement in and of itself. We can certainly argue about what the standard for judgment is, but we can't argue about whether judging is good or not. It 100% is good. For if there is no standard to judge, then I am legitimate in judging, because you can't tell me not to. And if there is a standard to which we should all adhere, then I am legitimate in judging. Rather than arguing about whether we should judge others, we should be discussing the legitimacy of a particular standard by which we can judge.

*Brown Noser

We moderns are a breed like none before
We throw off every vestige of the past
As ancients, ignorant, should be deplored
Their ideas fleeting, never to last

But by your own standard, what of your ways
Critiquing others because they're not you
Judging those who no longer have a say
Your scarecrow set out in the field to hew

Blind to your own redolent arrogance
You forget the past through your crapulence
Stuck up and in present's rear orifice
Flattery found in future's flatulence

I see now why noses smell and are brown
Recusatory scent by bias drowned

I ended up not going where I thought I would with this poem. I was originally going to focus on sycophants and those who need approval from others. But I sort of already covered that in the “Agent Orange” poem focusing on being judgmental. So here I hit on a very popular philosophy. I think it was a good change. I discuss the notion that the majority or the present rules. So what was wrong in the past may be right now, and what was right in the past may be wrong now. I set that notion up in the first quatrain where I talk about denouncing the past for what we think now.

But this ideology is just repulsive to me. It provides absolutely no standard whereby we can judge any actions – past or present – as truly right or wrong. For if actions like slavery were right in their cultures and times, who am I to judge that action and speak ill of the past? And why should such an action become wrong all of a sudden? I may say it’s not good to do that now, but I can’t judge previous cultures for any sort of atrocity. Any judgment that comes from this philosophy is really just judging another for not being alive simultaneously with you. It’s judging them for not being you. This ideology has two huge impacts, alluded to with the scarecrow analogy. First, they put a scarecrow in the field of the past. So if you hang on to any ideas deemed passé (e.g. gender norms, traditional marriage, two parent families, etc.), you can be berated as bigoted and ignorant. There need not be valid arguments in either direction, or open dialogue. Rather, the scarecrow of being labeled a “bigot” hangs in the field to scare anyone away from adhering to the past. G.K. Chesterton has a great section in his book “Orthodoxy” that speaks about tradition and the respect we should have for it. At one part he says, “...tradition is only democracy extended through time... Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of their birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of their death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.”

The second allusion the scarecrow brings up is the notion of a straw man. The straw man fallacy is when you prop up a very flimsy, non-representative argument from your opponent, and then attack and obliterate your target. Of course it’s easy to knock down a straw man as opposed to a legitimate opponent. The ideology represented in this poem essentially does that with the past. Rather than argue against ideas, it sets up ideas from the past as foolish and ignorant just because they temporally precede the present views. All of this without truly exploring the merits of the past, or the holes in modern ideas.

This ideology boils down to pure, smelly arrogance. It’s distinct and repulsive. In this arrogance that is all about self, the past is tossed to the side and forgotten in the celebration of self. I use the word “crapulence” here as well because it not only conveys a definition that fits, but the word helps to build the imagery of this quatrain. I use a lot of smell words here – particularly indicating bad smells (e.g. redolent, **crapulence**, rear orifice, and flatulence). Each line in the quatrain alludes to a strong smell.

These are the lines where the “brown noser” comes in. I say that the individual who holds the ideology represented in this poem is stuck up – enforcing the arrogance from the first line in the quatrain. But then I say that they have their nose not only up in the air, but stuck up the present’s rear orifice. The brown nose comes from being a butt-kisser of the present. It is a complete and utter worship of the here and now. As Chesterton says, throwing off tradition is to destroy democracy and subjugate the most obscure class. To do so is utter narcissism and blind ignorance, simply because we exist now and can make such decisions. Interestingly, the future will do the same thing to what is now the present, as the present quickly turns into the past. The present’s legacy is to be flatulated out by the future, just as those who hold to this ideology flatulate out the traditions of their ancestors. The future, when it becomes the present, will digest whatever it is they like from us, then fart the rest of us out, as our memory dissipates into the air.

There is a play on words here, as noses smell in two ways. Noses smell in that they detect and interpret smells, but in this poem, the noses of the individuals represented smell bad because they’ve been where the sun doesn’t shine. That is also why they are brown. This repugnant smell is so strong, it drowns out any clarity and objectivity one might claim to want. Whereas an objective individual living in the present would recuse themselves from issuing harsh judgment or from withholding appropriate judgment from the past simply for being in the past, these modern day brown nosers smell so bad, they can’t recognize the stench of bias that lingers. I also use a play on words and here to indicate why the stench of bias and the need to recuse self is drowned out. I say “bias drowned,” which could also be read “by ass drowned.” This is the most repulsive poem I’ve written in any of the compilations. Hopefully it’s not too offensive. However, I find this modern rationale so ludicrous, self-destructive, and offensive – I figured the language was fitting to describe such a thing.

*Blues Brothers

The trilemma of truth weighs on my mind
Or on or in what it is that I am
Descartes may have shown me that I am I
Why this matters – explain it! No one can

Truth interrogated by harshest souls
Like men, will slump, exhausted and lifeless
Confession gained may paint a picture whole
Or damn all color to the black abyss

Nihilism destroys all that does exist
Giving life blues, breathing life into death
The only known, our ultimate exit
Only state, optimistic'ly depressed

True skeptic's skeptical even of self
Knows one thing with certainty, forfeits wealth

This poem is centered around epistemological nihilism – or extreme skepticism. It runs in the same vein with solipsism. It is the notion that there really isn't anything we can know for sure.

The trilemma here references the triad of problems that knowledge ultimately faces (see "Munchhausen Trilemma"). At the foundation of all truth, our rationale is either circular, assumptive (reliant on baseline assumptions or intuitions that can't really be proven), or infinitely regressive explanations (I explain this truth with x, but then I have to explain x with y, and y with z, ad infinitum). In essence, there is nothing we can really know with 100% certainty which escapes some fallacious foundation of reasoning.

So as the skeptic sits and thinks about truth, they may wonder who it is they really are. That seems to be the ultimate question. We can question everything outside of ourselves, but can we question ourselves? Doesn't Descartes show us that we can at least know our existence?

But even if Descartes is right, who cares? Extreme skepticism leaves one with practically no assurance of anything. With that knowledge – that I can't know anything with certainty other than I can't know – I am left with life being pretty meaningless. There is nothing to find out there, as I can never assess the ultimate truth or validity of anything outside of me. I can't even assess the truth or validity about most of me. Perhaps I am just a brain in a jar (a Boltzmann brain of sorts), in some sense akin to the matrix.

When one runs truth through the ringer like a skeptic, this creates a problem. Truth interrogated will respond very much like a human who is interrogated harshly. It will eventually slump into a helpless heap and become useless.

But perhaps even worse than being completely useless to me anymore, truth suffers a worse fate on skepticism. Truth interrogated to the extreme may tell us exactly what we want to hear. But as such, it is most likely an incomplete picture. While we may have lucked out in extracting the accurate truth through our torturous skepticism, it is more likely that a tortured truth will give us faulty information – or at least incomplete information. Truth may tell us that we exist, as Descartes says. And though it may be true, this affirmed truth alone – devoid of all other truths and certainties – will leave us devoid of light. We will have sunk into the abyss of ourselves, where no meaning can be found. How can something have meaning if that something is only about itself? Meaning can only exist in relationship (which I explain elsewhere in my writings). Utter skepticism leads us into darkness

The utter skeptic is left with nihilism. There is no meaning. Life turns blue, loses its meaning, and it loses its color because it's losing its life. But I am also meaning that we get the "blues." It is a depressing sort of existence. Therefore, the first "blues brother" is life. The other blues brother is death, as nihilism breathes life into it. Whereas life goes on living as though it's dead, death, like a zombie, is animated as though it is alive. For death is a certainty – and perhaps a nihilist's ultimate hope – but certainly their ultimate end.

The nihilist's only certainty – other than perhaps their mere existence – is that they will one day die. When there are only one or two things that can be considered certainties or truths, they are worth latching on to. In a morbid way, the nihilist must take comfort in the certainty of their demise. They exist to exit the scene.

These utter skeptics question so much, they miss out on the beauty of truth that doesn't rely on absolute certainty, and the beauty that comes from a faith in an ordered creation. They do this to uphold truth – as though a truth that carries 100% certainty is the goal of life. What truth taught them to pursue such a philosophy? Their unwarranted philosophy – a philosophy of which they don't know with 100% certainty should be pursued – is pursued by them unto ruin. If they dwell on it, it must be depressing. Their one hope is ultimately their one certainty - that this depression will end soon – with them. Or will it?