

Heinlein: Some of His Comments and Observations

This collection was first completed on Friday, February 28, 2014 and was most recently revised on Thursday, May 5, 2022.

This document is approximately 9,638 words long.

Quotations and excerpts presented herein are taken from the sources listed in the Sources section, at the end of this document. I might eventually add more such information, and additional sources.

I have included one excerpt from a book, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*, that I don't possess. I borrowed that book from, and returned it to, its owner many years ago. While I had the book, I copied the quotation but I didn't copy the bibliographical information. If I ever again have possession of a copy of that book, and if I remember to do so, then I'll add the missing information to the Sources section of this document.

In the main part of this document, I've shown quotations and excerpts in the alphabetical order of the titles of their sources. That makes it easier for me to find something if I need to make a correction or an addition, later. In the Sources section, I've shown sources in chronological order of their dates of copyright, something that I started doing in my documents a good many years ago.

—Sam Aurelius Milam III, curator
The Sovereign's Library

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Beyond This Horizon (©1942)

The police of a state should never be stronger or better armed than the citizenry. An armed citizenry, willing to fight, is the foundation of civil freedom. —Chapter Nine

Farmer in the Sky (©1950)

But you do know that in the greatest wars the Earth ever had there were always more people after the war than before, no matter how many were killed. Life is not merely persistent, as Jock puts it; life is explosive. The basic theorem of population mathematics *to which there has never been found an exception* is that population increases always, not merely up to extent of the food supply, but beyond it, to the minimum diet that will sustain life — the ragged edge of starvation.

—Chapter 18, Pioneer Party

Glory Road (© 1963)

Virtue is right conduct in the face of temptation. If there is no temptation, there can be no virtue. —Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon

Anything that is unenforceable is not contractual. —Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon

A woman's costume is a failure unless it makes men want to tear it off.

—Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes

Culturologists state a “law” of religious freedom which they say is invariant: Religious freedom in a cultural complex is inversely proportional to the strength of the strongest religion. This is supposed to be one case of a general invariant, that all freedoms arise from cultural conflicts because a custom which is not opposed by its negative is mandatory and always regarded as a “law of nature.” —Chapter XVIII

I admit I was sneaky. But my intentions were good. However, I know, as the prime lesson of my profession, that good intentions are the source of more folly than all other causes put together.

—Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes

Chapter XIX

JOB: A Comedy of Justice (© 1984)

But those infernally noisy driving engines! How any engineer could accept that, I could not see. As one of my professors said (back before thermodynamics convinced me that I had a call for the ministry), noise is always a byproduct of inefficiency. A correctly designed engine is as silent as the grave. —Chapter IX

But I took even greater satisfaction in our labors in the vineyards, as fund raising means nothing if our programs of spiritual welfare do not meet their goals.

The past year had seen the following positive accomplishments:

- a) A federal law making abortion a capital offense;
 - b) A federal law making the manufacture, sale, possession, importation, transportation, and/or use of any contraceptive drug or device a felony carrying a manda-
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tory prison sentence of not less than a year and a day but not more than twenty years for each offense — and eliminating the hypocritical subterfuge of “For Prevention of Disease Only”;

c) A federal law that, while it did not abolish gambling, did make the control and licensing of it a federal jurisdiction. One step at a time — having built this foundation we could tackle those twin pits, Nevada and New Jersey, piece by piece. Divide and conquer!

d) A Supreme Court decision in which we had appeared as *amicus curiae* under which community standards of the typical or median-population community applied to all cities of each state (Tomkins v. Allied News Distributors);

e) Real progress in our drive to get tobacco defined as a prescription drug through the tactical device of separating snuff and chewing tobacco from the problem by inaugurating the definition “substances intended for burning and inhaling”;

f) Progress at our annual national prayer meeting on several subjects in which I was interested. One was the matter of how to remove the tax-free status of any private school not affiliated with a Christian sect. Policy on this was not yet complete because of the thorny matter of Roman Catholic schools. Should our umbrella cover them? Or was it time to strike? Whether the Catholics were allies or enemies was always a deep problem to those of us out on the firing line.

At least as difficult was the Jewish problem — was a humane solution possible? If not, then what? Should we grasp the nettle? This was debated only *in camera*.

Another matter was a pet project of my own: the frustrating of astronomers. Few laymen realize what mischief astronomers are up to. I first noticed it when I was still in engineering school and took a course in descriptive astronomy under the requirements for breadth in each student’s program. Give an astronomer a bigger telescope and turn him loose, leave him unsupervised, and the first thing he does is to come down with pestiferous, half-baked guesses denying the ancient truths of Genesis.

There is only one way to deal with this sort of nonsense: Hit them in the pocket-book! Redefine “educational” to exclude those colossal white elephants, astronomical observatories. Make the Naval Observatory the only one tax free, reduce its staff, and limit their activity to matters clearly related to navigation. (Some of the most blasphemous and subversive theories have come from tenured civil servants there who don’t have enough legitimate work to keep them busy.)

Self-styled “scientists” are usually up to no good, but astronomers are the worst of the lot.

Another matter that comes up regularly at each annual prayer meeting I did not favor spending time or money on: “Votes for Women.” These hysterical females styling themselves “suffragettes” are not a threat, can never win, and it just makes them feel self-important to pay attention to them. They should not be jailed and should not be displayed in stocks — never let them be martyrs! Ignore them.

There were other interesting and worthwhile goals that I kept off the agenda and did not suffer to be brought up from the floor in the sessions I moderated, but instead carried them on my “Maybe next year” list:

Separate schools for boys and girls.

Restoring the death penalty for witchcraft and satanism.

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The Alaska option for the Negro problem.

Federal control of prostitution.

Homosexuals — what's the answer? Punishment? Surgery? Other?

There are endless good causes commending themselves to guardians of the public morals — the question is always how to pick and choose to the greater glory of God.

—Alexander Hergensheimer, a Protestant preacher
ordained in the Brothers of the Apocalypse Christian Church of the One Truth
Chapter XII

Revolt in 2100 (© 1953)

The man who condones a sin because he enjoys the result of the sin is equally guilty of the sin.

—Master Peter van Eyck
Chapter 6 of *If This Goes On-*

When any government, or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its subjects, “This you may not read, this you must not see, this you are forbidden to know,” the end result is tyranny and oppression, no matter how holy the motives.

—John Lyle
Chapter 6 of *If This Goes On-*

... The Free State was an absolute dictatorship; the head man of the ruling clique was designated the “Liberator”. Their watchwords were Duty and Obedience; an arbitrary discipline was enforced with a severity that left no room for any freedom of opinion... Anything not compulsory was forbidden...

—Coventry

As for the second notion, the idea that we could lose our freedom by succumbing to a wave of religious hysteria, I am sorry to say that I consider it possible. I hope that it is not probable. But there is a latent deep strain of religious fanaticism in this, our culture; it is rooted in our history and it has broken out many times in the past. It is with us now; there has been a sharp rise in strongly evangelical sects in this country in recent years, some of which hold beliefs theocratic in the extreme, anti-intellectual, anti-scientific, and anti-libertarian.

It is a truism that almost any sect, cult, or religion will legislate its creed into law if it acquires the political power to do so, and will follow it by suppressing opposition, subverting all education to seize early the minds of the young, and by killing, locking up, or driving underground all heretics. This is equally true whether the faith is Communism or Holy-Rollerism; indeed it is the bounden duty of the faithful to do so. The custodians of the True Faith cannot logically admit tolerance of heresy to be a virtue.

Nevertheless this business of legislating religious beliefs into law has never been more than sporadically successful in this country — Sunday closing laws here and there, birth control legislation in spots, the Prohibition experiment, temporary enclaves of theocracy such as Voliva's Zion, Smith's Nauvoo, a few others. The country is split up into such a variety of faiths and sects that a degree of uneasy tolerance now exists from expedient compromise; the minorities constitute a majority of opposition against each other.

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Could it be otherwise here? Could any one sect obtain a working majority at the polls and take over the country? Perhaps not — but a combination of a dynamic evangelist, television, enough money, and modern techniques of advertising and propaganda might make Billy Sunday's efforts look like a corner store compared to Sears Roebuck. Throw in a depression for good measure, promise a material heaven here on earth, add a dash of anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Negroism, and a good large dose of anti-“furriners” in general and anti-intellectuals here at home and the result might be something quite frightening — particularly when one recalls that our voting system is such that a minority distributed as pluralities in enough states can constitute a working majority in Washington.

I imagined Nehemiah Scudder as a backwoods evangelist who combined some of the features of John Calvin, Savonarola, Judge Rutherford and Huey Long. His influence was not national until after the death of Mrs. Rachel Biggs, an early convert who had the single virtue of being the widow of an extremely wealthy man who shared none of her religious myopia — she left Brother Scudder several millions of dollars with which to establish a television station. Shortly thereafter he teamed up with an ex-Senator from his home state; they placed their affairs in the hands of a major advertising agency and were on their way to fame and fortune. Presently they needed stormtroopers; they revived the Ku Klux Klan in everything but the name — sheets, passwords, grips and all. It was a “good gimmick” once and still served. Blood at the polls and blood in the streets, but Scudder won the election. The next election was never held.

Impossible? Remember the Klan of the Twenties — and how far it got without even a dynamic leader. Remember Karl Marx and note how close that unscientific piece of nonsense called *Das Kapital* has come to smothering out all freedom of thought on half a planet, without — mind you — the emotional advantage of calling it a religion. The capacity of the human mind for swallowing nonsense and spewing it forth in violent and repressive action has never yet been plumbed.

—Concerning Stories Never Written: Postscript

Starship Troopers (©1959)

Come on, you apes! You wanta live forever? —Unknown platoon sergeant, 1918
Chapter One

Anyone who clings to the historically untrue — and thoroughly immoral — doctrine that ‘violence never settles anything’ I would advise to conjure up the ghosts of Napoleon Bonaparte and of the Duke of Wellington and let them debate it. The ghost of Hitler could referee, and the jury might well be the Dodo, the Great Auk and the Passenger Pigeon. Violence, naked force, has settled more issues in history than has any other factor, and the contrary opinion is wishful thinking at its worst. Breeds that forget this basic truth have always paid for it with their lives and freedom.

—Jean V. Dubois, Lt.-Col., M.I. rtd. and
Instructor of History and Moral Philosophy
Chapter Two

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Stranger in a Strange Land (© 1961)

... Anybody can see a pretty girl. An artist can look at a pretty girl and see the old woman she will become. A better artist can look at an old woman and see the pretty girl she used to be. A *great* artist can look at an old woman, portray her *exactly* as she is ... and force the viewer to see the pretty girl she used to be ... more than that, he can make anyone with the sensitivity of an armadillo see that this lovely young girl is still alive, prisoned inside her ruined body. He can make you feel the quiet, endless tragedy that there was never a girl born who ever grew older than eighteen in her heart ... no matter what the merciless hours have done

—Jubal Harshaw
Part Four, His Scandalous Career,
Chapter XXX

The Cat Who Walks Through Walls (Copyright Date Unknown)

.... Disturb a writer when he is in the throes of creation and he is likely to turn and bite right to the bone . . . and not even know that he's doing it. As writers' wives and husbands often learn to their horror.

And — attend me carefully, Gwen! — there is no way that writers can be tamed and rendered civilized. Or even cured. In a household with more than one person, of which one is a writer, the only solution known to science is to provide the patient with an isolation room, where he can endure the acute stages in private, and where food can be poked in to him with a stick. Because, if you disturb the patient at such times, he may break into tears or become violent. Or he may not hear you at all . . . and, if you shake him at this stage, he bites. —Colin Richard speaking to Sadie Gwendolyn

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress (© 1966)

Revolution is an art that I pursue rather than a goal I expect to achieve. Nor is this a source of dismay; a lost cause can be as spiritually satisfying as a victory.

—Professor Bernardo de la Paz, Chapter 6

Remarks by Professor Bernardo de la Paz at the Constitutional Convention

Comrade Members, like fire and fusion, government is a dangerous servant and a terrible master. You now have freedom — if you can keep it. But do remember that you can lose this freedom more quickly to yourselves than to any other tyrant. Move slowly, be hesitant, puzzle out the consequences of every word. I would not be unhappy if this convention sat for ten years before reporting — but I would be frightened if you took less than a year.

Distrust the obvious, suspect the traditional ... for in the past mankind has not done well when saddling itself with governments. For example, I note in one draft report a proposal for setting up a commission to divide Luna into congressional districts and to reapportion them from time to time according to population.

This is the traditional way; therefore it should be suspect, considered guilty until proved innocent. Perhaps you feel that this is the *only* way. May I suggest others? Surely where a man lives is the least important thing about him. Constituencies might be formed by dividing people by occupation ... or by age ... or even alphabetically. Or they might not be divided, every member elected at large — and do not ob-

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ject that this would make it impossible for any man not widely known throughout Luna to be elected; that might be the best possible thing for Luna.

You might even consider installing the candidates who receive the *least* number of votes; unpopular men may be just the sort to save you from a new tyranny. Don't reject the idea merely because it seems preposterous — think about it! In past history popularly elected governments have been no better and sometimes far worse than overt tyrannies.

But if representative government turns out to be your intention there still may be ways to achieve it better than the territorial district. For example you each represent about ten thousand human beings, perhaps seven thousand of voting age — and some of you were elected by slim majorities. Suppose instead of election a man were qualified for office by petition signed by four thousand citizens. He would then represent those four thousand affirmatively, with no disgruntled minority, for what would have been a minority in a territorial constituency would all be free to start other petitions or join in them. *All* would then be represented by men of their choice. Or a man with eight thousand supporters might have two votes in this body. Difficulties, objections, practical points to be worked out — *many* of them! But you could work them out ... and thereby avoid the chronic sickness of representative government, the disgruntled minority which feels — correctly! — that it has been disenfranchised.

But whatever you do, *do not let the past be a straitjacket!*

I note one proposal to make this Congress a two-house body. Excellent — the more impediments to legislation the better. But, instead of following tradition, I suggest one house of legislators, another whose single duty is to repeal laws. Let the legislators pass laws only with a two-thirds majority ... while the repealers are able to cancel any law through a mere one-third minority. Preposterous? Think about it. If a bill is so poor that it cannot command two-thirds of your consents, is it not likely that it would make a poor law? And if a law is disliked by as many as one-third is it not likely that you would be better off without it?

But in writing your constitution let me invite attention to the wonderful virtues of the negative! Accentuate the negative! Let your document be studded with things the government is forever forbidden to do. No conscript armies ... no interference however slight with freedom of press, or speech, or travel, or assembly, or of religion, or of instruction, or communication, or occupation ... no involuntary taxation. Comrades, if you were to spend five years in a study of history while thinking of more and more things that your government should promise *never* to do and then let your constitution be nothing but those negatives, I would not fear the outcome.

What I fear most are affirmative actions of sober and well-intentioned men, granting to government powers to *do* something that appears to need doing. Please remember always that the Lunar Authority [*tyranny previously overthrown in the story — editor*] was created for the noblest of purposes by just such sober and well-intentioned men, all popularly elected. And with that thought, I leave you to your labors. Thank you.

—Chapter 22

The Puppet Masters (© 1951)

Luck is a tag given by the mediocre to account for the accomplishments of genius.

—Elihu Nivens' father, "the Old Man"

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Time Enough For Love, The Lives of Lazarus Long (© 1973)

History has the relation to truth that theology has to religion — i.e., none to speak of. —Introduction

At best, history is hard to grasp; at worst, it is a lifeless collection of questionable records. It is most alive through the words of eyewitnesses.... —Introduction

“No doubt at all,” Lazarus agreed. “But your cops have run up the price on a good phony set of ID’s. If I hadn’t been too tired to bother, I would have forged my own. Safer. Was that how I was caught? Did you squeeze it out of the paper merchant?”

“No, we never found him. By the way, you might let me know who he is, so that —
“And I might *not*,” Lazarus said sharply. “Not ratting on him was implicit in the bargain. It’s nothing to me how many of your rules he breaks. And — who knows? — I might need him again. Certainly someone will need his services, somebody just as anxious to avoid your busies as I was. Ira, no doubt you mean well but I don’t like setups where ID’s are necessary. I told myself centuries back to stay away from places crowded enough to require them, and mostly I’ve followed that rule...”

—Prelude, 1

“That’s what I intended,” Lazarus agreed. “But — Son, it’s your pidgin and I’ll never touch that gavel again — but I have doubts about the wisdom of getting rid of troublemakers. Every loaf needs yeast. A society that gets rid of all its troublemakers goes downhill. Sheep. Pyramid builders at best, decadent savages at worst. You may be eliminating your creative one-tenth of one percent. Your yeast.” —Prelude, 1

“... Oh, I have strong opinions, but a thousand reasoned opinions are never equal to one case of diving in and finding out...” —Prelude, 1

“Never mind computers, Ira, the most sophisticated machine the human mind can build has in it the limitations of the human mind. Anyone who thinks otherwise does not understand the Second Law of Thermodynamics...” —Prelude, 1

“... To get anywhere, or even to live a long time, a man has to guess, and guess right, over and over again, without enough data for a logical answer...” —Prelude, 1

Lazarus grinned. “That’s my boy! I was wondering if you would have the gall to try to twist it into some high moral principle, like a damned preacher. I don’t trust a man who talks about ethics when he’s picking my pocket. But if he’s acting in his own self-interest and says so, I have usually been able to work out some way to do business with him.” —Prelude, 1

“...As a thumb rule, one can say that any time a planet starts developing cities of more than one million people, it is approaching critical mass. In a century or two it won’t be fit to live on...” —Prelude, 1

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“... Migration always involves selection and improvement...” —Prelude, 1

Lazarus shrugged. “Forget it, Ira, I learned centuries back that there is *no* privacy in any society crowded enough to need ID’s. A law guaranteeing privacy simply insures that bugs — microphones and lenses and so forth — are that much harder to spot. I hadn’t thought about it up till now because I take it for granted that my privacy will be invaded any time I visit such places — then I ignore it unless I’m up to something the local law won’t like. In which case I use evasive tactics.”

“Lazarus, that record can be wiped. Its only purpose is to make me certain that the Senior is being properly taken care of — a responsibility I will not delegate.”

“I said, ‘Forget it.’ But I’m surprised at your naïveté, a man in your position, in thinking that the record is piped only to your desk. I’ll lay long odds, any amount you like, that it goes one, two, even three or more other places.”

“If so, Lazarus, and I can find it out, Felicity will have some new colonists — after they’ve spent some unpleasant hours in the Colosseum.”

“Ira, it doesn’t mater. If any fool wants to watch an old, old man grunting on the pot or taking a bath, he’s welcome. You yourself insured that it would happen by making a point of the record being secret, your eyes only. Security people always spy on their bosses; they can’t help it, it’s a syndrome that goes with the job...”

—Prelude, 1

“... there’s no virtue in being old, it just takes a long time....” —Prelude, 1

Lazarus scowled and bit his lip. “Son, one of the few things I’ve learned is that humans hardly ever learn from the experiences of others. They learn — when they do, which isn’t often — on their own, the hard way.”

“That one statement is worth recording for all time.”

“*Hmm!* No one would learn anything from it; that’s what it says. Ira, age does not bring wisdom. Often it merely changes simple stupidity into arrogant conceit. Its only advantage, so far as I have been able to see, is that it spans *change*. A young person sees the world as a still picture, immutable. An old person has had his nose rubbed in changes and more changes and still more changes so many times that he *knows* it is a moving picture, forever changing. He may not like it — probably doesn’t; *I* don’t — but he knows it’s so, and knowing it is the first step in coping with it.”

“May I place in open record what you have just said?” —Prelude, 2

“Slow up! I don’t *believe* in anything. I *know* certain things — little things, not the Nine Billion Names of God — from experience. But I have *no* beliefs. Belief gets in the way of learning.”

—Prelude, 2

“What is there to remember? I spent my boyhood the way every boy does — trying to keep my elders from finding out what I was up to.”

—Prelude, 2

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“... Damn it, Ira, after a long time it is hard to tell a real memory from a memory of a memory of a memory of a real memory. That’s what happens when you think about the past: You edit it and rearrange it, make it more tolerable —“ —Prelude, 2

“Now, Ira — a little respect, please. I have *never* swindled a man. At most I kept quiet and let him swindle himself. This does no harm, as a fool cannot be protected from his folly. If you attempt to do so, you will not only arouse his animosity but also you will be attempting to deprive him of whatever benefit he is capable of deriving from experience. Never attempt to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.” —Prelude, 2

Despite what I told the Senior, my ancestor Grandfather Lazarus, I work hard in governing Secundus. But only in thinking about policy and in judging the work of others. I don’t do donkey work; I leave that to professional administrators. Even so, the problems of a planet with more than a billion people can keep a man busy, especially if his intention is to govern as little as possible — as that means he must keep a sharp eye out and his ear tuned for signs that subordinates are doing unnecessary governing. Half my time is used in the negative work of plucking such officious officials and ordering that they never again serve in any public capacity.

Then I usually abolish their jobs, and all jobs subordinate to them.

I have never noticed any harm from such pruning save that parasites whose jobs are eliminated must find some other way to avoid starvation. (They are welcome to starve — better if they do. But they don’t.)

The important thing is to spot these malignant growths and remove them while they are small. The more skill a Chairman Pro Tem acquires in this, the more emerging ones he finds, which keeps him busier than ever. Anyone can see a forest fire; skill lies in sniffing the first smoke.

This leaves me too little time for my prime work: thinking about policy. The purpose of my government is never to do good, but simply to refrain from doing evil. This sounds simple but is not. For example, although prevention of armed revolution is obviously part of my main duty, *i.e.*, to keep order, I began to have doubt about the wisdom of transporting potential revolutionary leaders years before Grandfather Lazarus called my attention to it. But the symptom that roused my worry was so null that it took ten years for me to notice it:

During those ten years there was not one attempt to assassinate me.

By the time Lazarus Long returned to Secundus for the purpose of dying this disturbing symptom had continued twenty years.

This was ominous, and I realized it. A population of one billion-plus so contented, so uniform, so smug that not one determined assassin shows up in a double decade is seriously ill no matter how healthy it looks. In the ten years that elapsed after I noticed this lack I worried about it every hour I could spare — and found myself asking myself over and over again: What would Lazarus Long do?

I knew in broad outline what he *had* done — and that was why I decided to migrate — either lead my people off planet or go alone if none would follow.

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(In rereading this, it sounds as if I sought to be assassinated in some mystic *The King Must Die* sense. Not at all! I am surrounded at all times by powerful and subtle safeguards the nature of which I will not divulge. But there is no harm in mentioning three negative precautions; my facial appearance is not known to the public, I almost never appear in public anyhow, and when I do, it is never announced. The job of ruler is dangerous or should be — but I don't intend to die from it. The "Disturbing symptom" was not that I am alive but that there are no dead assassins. No one seems to hate me enough to try. Frightening. Where have I failed them?)

—Ira Weatheral, Chairman Pro Tem of the Families
Variations on a Theme, I, Affairs of State

"Well .. you said as I came in that 'early rising is a vice.' Did you mean that seriously?"

"Maybe. Gramp Johnson claimed it was. He used to tell a story bout a man who was condemned to be shot at sunrise — but overslept and missed it. His sentence was commuted that day, and he lived another forty, fifty years. Said it proved his point."

"Do you think that's a true story?"

"As true as any of Scheherazade's. I took it to mean 'Sleep whenever you can; you may have to stay awake a long time.' Early rising may not be a vice, Ira, but it is certainly no virtue. The old saw about the early bird just goes to show that the worm should have stayed in bed. I can't stand people who are smug about how early they get up."

—Variations on a Theme, I, Affairs of State

Every impossible rule has its loopholes; every general prohibition creates its bootleggers. —Variations on a Theme, II, The Tale of the Man Who Was Too Lazy to Fail

... It was widely known though rarely mentioned that an eager young bride could accomplish in seven months or less what takes nine for cow or countess.

—Variations on a Theme, II, The Tale of the Man Who Was Too Lazy to Fail

"Senior, I've read about economic depressions. But I've never understood what caused them."

Lazarus Long went tsk-tsk. "And yet you are in charge of a whole planet."

"Perhaps I shouldn't be," I admitted.

"Don't be so confounded humble. I'll let you in on a secret: At that time *nobody* knew what caused them. Even the Howard Foundation might have gone broke had not Ira Howard left firm instructions about how the fund must be handled. On the other hand, *everybody*, right down to street sweepers and professors of economics, was certain they knew both causes and cures. So almost every remedy was tried — and none worked. That depression continued until the country blundered into a war — which didn't cure what was wrong; it just masked the symptoms with a high fever."

"Well .. what *was* wrong, Grandfather?" I persisted.

"Do I look smart enough to answer that, Ira? I've gone broke many times. Sometimes financially, sometimes through abandoning my baggage to save my skin. Um.

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Be darned if I'll offer any fancy explanations but — what happens when you control machinery by positive feedback?”

I was startled. “I'm not sure I understand you, Lazarus. One doesn't control machinery by positive feedback — at least I can't think of a case. Positive feedback will cause any system to oscillate out of control.”

“Go to the head of the class, Ira. I'm suspicious of arguments by analogy — but from what I've seen over the centuries, there doesn't seem to be anything that a *government* can do to an economy that does not act as positive feedback, or as a brake. Or both. Maybe someday, somewhere, someone smart as Andy Libby will figure out a way to tinker with the Law of Supply and Demand to make it work better, instead of letting it go its own cruel way. Maybe. But I've never seen it. Though God knows everybody has tried. Always with the best of intentions.”

Good intentions are no substitute for knowing how a buzz saw works, Ira; the worst criminals in history have been loaded with good intentions....

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

May you live as long as you wish and love as long as you live. —Minerva, Little Nag

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“Uh .. let me think. One thing I always did every time I reached an inhabited planet was to study law. Not to practice — not usually, although for a number of years I was a very criminal lawyer — on San Andreas, that was. But to understand the ground rules. Hard to show a profit — or to conceal one — if you don't know how the game is played. It's much safer to break a law knowingly than to do so through ignorance.

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

I had to interrupt again. “‘Priest’? Lazarus, you said, or implied, that you had no religious faith of an sort.”

“Did I? But ‘faith’ is for the congregation, Ira; it handicaps a priest....”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“... Don't ever become a pessimist, Ira; a pessimist is correct oftener than an optimist, but an optimist has more fun — and neither can stop the march of events.”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“Whoring is like military service, Ira — okay in the upper brackets, not so good lower down....”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“... Whores perform the same function as priests, Ira, but far more thoroughly.”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“Let me see — I've been wealthy many times and always lost it, usually through governments inflating the money, or confiscating — ‘nationalizing’ or ‘liberating’ — something I owned. ‘Put not your faith in princes,’ Ira; since they don't produce, they

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always steal. I've been broke even oftener than I've been wealthy. Of the two, being broke is more interesting, as a man who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from is never bored. He may be angry or several other things — but *not* bored. His predicament sharpens his thoughts, spurs him into action, adds zest to his life, whether he knows it or not. Can trap him, of course; that's why food is the usual bait for traps. But that's the intriguing part about being broke: how to solve it *without* being trapped. A hungry man tends to lose his judgment — a man who has missed seven meals is often ready to kill — rarely a solution.”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“... For there is another bad thing about slavery, Ira; it is impossible to free slaves, they have to free themselves.”

—Variations on a Theme, III, Domestic Problems

“... In the first place, very little thinking was ever done in English; it is not a language suited to logical thought. Instead, it's an emotive lingo beautifully adapted to concealing fallacies. A rationalizing language, not a rational one...”

—Variations on a Theme, IV, Love

“Kinfolk, Olga wasn't even homely, she was ugly. Face like a mud pie, figure like a gunnysack — only on an outpost like Mars could she get by. What she did have was a warm and gentle voice and a sweet personality — which was enough, as a customer might pick her through Hobson's choice on a busy night, but once he had done so, he picked her some later time on purpose. Mean to say, dears, beauty will lure a man into bed, but it won't bring him back a second time, unless he's awfully young or very stupid.”

“What does bring him back a second time, Grandfather?” asked Hamadryad. “Technique? Muscular control?”

“Have you had any complaints, dear?”

“Well .. no.”

“Then you know the answer and are trifling with me. Neither of those. It's the ability to make a man happy, principally by being happy about it yourself — a spiritual quality rather than a physical one. Olga had it in gobs.”

—Variations on a Theme, IV, Love

... Maybe Jesus was right when he said that the meek shall inherit the earth — but they inherit very small plots, about six feet by three.

—Variations on a Theme, VI, The Tale of the Twins Who Weren't

...Everybody wants the human gene pool cleaned up, but nobody wants its tragic aspects to take place in his own family....

—Variations on a Theme, VI, The Tale of the Twins Who Weren't

.... Minerva, can you define 'incest'?”

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The computer replied, “ ‘Incest’ is a legal term, not a biological one. It designates sexual union between persons forbidden by law to marry. The act itself is forbidden; whether such union results in progeny is irrelevant. The prohibitions vary widely among cultures and are usually, but not always, based on degree of consanguinity.”

“Y’r durn tootin’ it’s ‘not always’. There are cultures which permit first cousins to marry — genetically risky — but forbid a man to marry his brother’s widow, which involves no more risk than it did for the first union. When I was a youngster, you could find one rule in one state, then cross an invisible line and find exactly opposite laws fifty feet away. Or some times and places both unions might be mandatory. Or forbidden. Endless rules, endless definitions for incest, and rarely any logic to them. Minerva, so far as I recall, the Howard Families are the first group in history to reject the legalistic approach and to define ‘incest’ solely in terms of genetic hazard.”

—Variations on a Theme, IX, Conversation Before Dawn

Any priest or shaman must be presumed guilty until proved innocent.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Always listen to experts. They’ll tell you what can’t be done, and why. Then do it.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Delusions are often functional. A mother’s opinions about her children’s beauty, intelligence, goodness, et cetera ad nauseam, keep her from drowning them at birth.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Most “scientists” are bottle washers and button sorters.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A poet who reads his verse in public may have other nasty habits.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

History does not record anywhere at any time a religion that has any rational basis. Religion is a crutch for people not strong enough to stand up to the unknown without help. But, like dandruff, most people do have a religion and spend time and money on it and seem to derive considerable pleasure from fiddling with it.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Cheops’ Law: Nothing *ever* gets built on schedule or within budget.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Money is a powerful aphrodisiac. But flowers work almost as well.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

There is only one way to console a widow. But remember the risk.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

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Never appeal to a man's "better nature." He may not have one. Invoking his self-interest gives you more leverage.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

You can have peace. Or you can have freedom. Don't ever count on having both at once.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Place your clothes and weapons where you can find them in the dark.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

In a mature society, "civil servant" is semantically equal to "civil *master*."

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

When a place gets crowded enough to require ID's, social collapse is not far away. It is time to go elsewhere. The best thing about space travel is that it made it possible to go elsewhere.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The truth of a proposition has nothing to do with its credibility. And vice versa.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The most preposterous notion that *H. sapiens* has ever dreamed up is that the Lord God of Creation, Shaper and Ruler of all the Universes, wants the saccharine adoration of His creatures, can be swayed by their prayers, and becomes petulant if He does not receive this flattery. Yet this absurd fantasy, without a shred of evidence to bolster it, pays all the expenses of the oldest, largest, and least productive industry in all history.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The second most preposterous notion is that copulation is inherently sinful.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of — but do it in private and wash your hands afterwards.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

\$100 placed at 7 percent interest compounded quarterly for 200 years will increase to more than \$100,000,000 — by which time it will be worth nothing.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Taxes are not levied for the benefit of the taxed.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

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Never underestimate the power of human stupidity.

—Intermission, Excerpts from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Secrecy is the beginning of tyranny.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The greatest productive force is human selfishness.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Be wary of strong drink. It can make you shoot at tax collectors — and miss.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The profession of shaman has many advantages. It offers high status with a safe livelihood free of work in the dreary, sweaty sense. In most societies it offers legal privileges and immunities not granted to other men. But it is hard to see how a man who has been given a mandate from on High to spread tidings of joy to all mankind can be seriously interested in taking up a collection to pay his salary; it causes one to suspect that the shaman is on the moral level of any other con man.

But it's lovely work if you can stomach it.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A whore should be judged by the same criteria as other professionals offering services for pay — such as dentists, lawyers, hairdressers, physicians, plumbers, etc. Is she professionally competent? Does she give good measure? Is she honest with her clients?

It is possible that the percentage of honest and competent whores is higher than that of plumbers and much higher than that of lawyers. And *enormously* higher than that of professors. —Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Expertise in one field does not carry over into other fields. But experts often think so. The narrower their field of knowledge the more likely they are to think so.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Never try to outstubborn a cat.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Tilting at windmills hurts you more than the windmills.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Yield to temptation; it may not pass your wain again.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

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Waking a person unnecessarily should not be considered a capital crime. For a first offense, that is.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

“Go to hell!” or other insult direct is all the answer a snoopy question rates.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

The correct way to punctuate a sentence that starts: “Of course it is none of my business but — ” is to place a period after the word “but.” Don’t use excessive force in supplying such moron with a period. Cutting his throat is only a momentary pleasure and is bound to get you talked about.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A man does not insist on physical beauty in a woman who builds up his morale. After a while he realizes that she is beautiful — he just hadn’t noticed it at first.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A skunk is better company than a person who prides himself on being “frank.”

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

“All’s fair in love and war” — what a contemptible lie!

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A “practical joker” deserves applause for his wit according to its quality. Bastinado is about right. For exception[al] wit one might grant keelhauling. But staking him out on an anthill should be reserved for the very wittiest.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Natural laws have no pity.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

On the planet Tranquille around KM849 (G-O) lives a little animal known as a “knafn.” It is herbivorous and has no natural enemies and is easily approached and may be petted — sort of a six-legged puppy with scales. Stroking it is very pleasant; it wiggles its pleasure and broadcasts euphoria in some band that humans can detect. It’s worth the trip.

Someday some bright boy will figure out how to record this broadcast, then some smart boy will see commercial angles — and not long after that it will be regulated and taxed.

In the meantime I have faked the name and catalog number; it is several thousand light-years off in another direction. Selfish of me —

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

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Freedom begins when you tell Mrs. Grundy to go fly a kite.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

If “everybody knows” such-and-such, then it ain’t so, by at least ten thousand to one.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

All cats are *not* gray after midnight. Endless variety —

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Sin lies only in hurting other people unnecessarily. All other “sins” are invented nonsense. (Hurting yourself is not sinful — just stupid.)

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Being generous is inborn; being altruistic is a learned perversity. No resemblance —

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

It is impossible for a man to love his wife wholeheartedly without loving all women somewhat. I suppose that the converse must be true of women.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

You can go wrong by being too skeptical as readily as by being to trusting.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Formal courtesy between husband and wife is even more important than it is between strangers.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Anything free is worth what you pay for it.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Do not confuse “duty” with what other people expect of you; they are utterly different. Duty is a debt you owe to yourself to fulfill obligations you have assumed voluntarily. Paying that debt can entail anything from years of patient work to instant willingness to die. Difficult it may be, but the reward is self-respect.

But there is no reward at all for doing what other people expect of you, and to do so is not merely difficult, but impossible. It is easier to deal with a footpad than it is with the leech who wants “just a few minutes of your time, please — this won’t take long.” Time is your total capital, and the minutes of your life are painfully few. If you allow yourself to fall into the vice of agreeing to such requests, they quickly snowball to the point where these parasites will use up 100 percent of your time — and squawk for more!

So learn to say No — and to be rude about it when necessary.

Otherwise you will not have time to carry out your duty, or to do your own work, and certainly no time for love and happiness. The termites will nibble away your life and leave none of it for you.

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(This rule does not mean that you must not do a favor for a friend, or even a stranger. But let the choice be *yours*. Don't do it because it is "expected" of you.)

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

A committee is a life form with six or more legs and no brain.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

Animals can be driven crazy by placing too many in too small a pen. *Homo sapiens* is the only animal that voluntarily does this to himself.

—Second Intermission, More from the Notebooks of Lazarus Long

"... Any machine is a concept of a human designer; it reflects the human brain, be it wheelbarrow or giant computer. So there is nothing mysterious in a machine designed by a human showing human self-awareness; the mystery lies in awareness itself, wherever it's found. I used to have a folding camp cot that liked to bite me. I don't say that it was aware — but I learned to approach it with caution."

—Variations on a Theme, XIII, Boondock

Colonists are always families; a single colonist is a contradiction in terms.

—Variations on a Theme, XIV, Bacchanalia

'Savage' describes a cultural condition, not a degree of intelligence. Nor does inbreeding damage a gene pool if conditions for survival are extreme...

—Variations on a Theme, XIV, Bacchanalia

If heredity were not overwhelmingly more important than environment, you could teach calculus to a horse.

—Variations on a Theme, XIV, Bacchanalia

... "Little whatever-your name is, do you have any last words?"

"Yes."

"'Yes' what?"

"Just 'Yes.' That's my last word."

—Variations on a Theme, XIV, Bacchanalia

"... Earth was doomed in any case; space travel just hurried it along. By 2012 it wasn't fit to live on — so I spent the next century elsewhere, although the other real estate in the Solar System is far from attractive. Missed seeing Europe destroyed, missed a nasty dictatorship in my home country. Came back when things appeared to be tolerable, found that they weren't....

"But space travel can't ease the pressure on a planet grown too crowded, not even with today's ships and probably not with any future ships — because stupid people won't leave the slopes of their home volcano even when it starts to smoke and rumble. What space travel does do is drain off the best brains: those smart enough to see a catastrophe before it happens and with the guts to pay the price — abandon home,

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wealth, friends, relatives, everything — and go. That’s a tiny fraction of one percent. But that’s enough.”

“It’s the bell curve again,” I said to Ishtar. “If — as Lazarus thinks, and statistics back him up — every migration comes primarily from the right-hand end of the normal-incidence curve of human ability, then this acts as a sorting device whereby the new planet will show a bell curve with a much higher intelligence norm than the population it came from .. and the old planet will average almost imperceptibly stupider.”

“Imperceptible except for one thing!” Lazarus objected. “That tiny fraction that hardly shows statistically is the brain. I recall a country that lost a key war by chasing out a mere half dozen geniuses. Most people *can’t* think, most of the remainder *won’t* think, the small fraction who *do* think mostly can’t do it very well. The extremely tiny fraction who think regularly, accurately, creatively, and without self-delusion — in the long run these are the only people who count .. and they are the very ones who migrate when it is physically possible to do so.

“As Justin said, statistically it hardly shows. But qualitatively it makes all the difference. Chop off a chicken’s head and it doesn’t die at once; it flops around more energetically than ever. For a while. Then it dies.

“That’s what space travel did to Earth: chopped its head off. For two thousand years its best brains have been migrating. What’s left is flopping harder than ever .. to no purpose and will die that much sooner. Soon, I think. I don’t feel guilty about it; I see no sin in those smart enough to escape escaping if they can — and the death rattle of Earth was clear and strong back in the twentieth century, Earth reckoning, when I was a young man and space travel had barely started — not even started in interstellar terms. It took two more centuries and then some to get it rolling....

—Variations on a Theme, XIV, Bacchanalia

“... Sometimes the best one can do about a weak point is not to call attention to it.”

—Variations on a Theme, XV, Agape

“... In all matters of government the correct answer is usually: *Do nothing....*”

—Variations on a Theme, XV, Agape

“... if you’re patient, problems tend to solve themselves....”

—Variations on a Theme, XV, Agape

“.. A pilot who is not a pessimist isn’t worth a hoot.”

—Variations on a Theme, XVII, Narcissus

“... Money is the universal weapon....” —Variations on a Theme, XVII, Narcissus

“... an emotional argument permits no refutation....”

—Variations on a Theme, XVII, Narcissus

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“... Morals are your agreement with yourself to abide by your own rules...”

Coda, II

To Sail Beyond the Sunset

I was taught that the one Unforgivable Sin, the offense against one's own integrity, was to accept anything at all simply on authority.

—Maureen Johnson, Chapter Seven, Ringing the Cash Register

In a society where it is a mortal offense to be different from your neighbors your only escape is to never let them find out.

—Maureen Johnson, Chapter Eight, Seacoast Bohemia

Books are meant to be read and loved, not stored.

—Ira Johnson, Chapter Eight, Seacoast Bohemia

Widows are far better than brides. They don't tell, they won't yell, they don't swell, they rarely smell, and they're grateful as hell.

—Ira Johnson, Chapter Twenty, Soothsayer

Tunnel in the Sky (© 1955)

Life, *all* life, has the twin drives to survive and to reproduce. Intelligence is an aimless byproduct except as it serves these basic drives. —Chapter II, The Fifth Way

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The Cat Who Walks Through Walls

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