

Aphorisms

by Jo Han (November 2017)



Prophets of doom are usually wrong in the short run, but as the fate of all civilizations bears out, unfailingly correct in the long run. Thus, it is essential to ascertain where one stands in relation to the long run.

Achilles inverted: some people are invulnerable only in the heel, a condition that often confers to them the element of surprise when they use it as a weapon.

How odd it is that when we feel overwhelmed by our worries and cares, our troubled look can have the effect of arousing in

cunning people the suspicion that we have seen through their designs.

The chief hazard of becoming erudite is that it can render one uneducable.

The curse that afflicts so many of the educated in our time: they are intelligent enough to envy and feel threatened by wisdom, but too vain to profit from it.

Pragmatist. Someone who believes that his philosophy is foolproof.

Fanatic. A sort of pedant of the soul.

History. What we become incapable of understanding once we have abandoned the belief in the afterlife.

Liberal. An individual who excuses in others those vices and failings to which he can imagine himself succumbing, and condemning in others the faults and wrongs that he believes himself in no danger of committing

Conservative. Someone who possesses a vast arsenal—of weapons that were used to fight the last war.

Theory. The effort to ascertain which of our prophecies are self-fulfilling.

Sexual freedom comes at the cost of an inordinate degree of political prudery.

A utilitarian and mercenary outlook renders us suspicious, wary, anxious, devious, and, ultimately, superficial.

Tolerance is most salutary if it is understood to be hypocrisy, but, elevated into a virtue, it has effects more destructive than any vice.

We keep our distance from the wounded because we fear their power to wound us.

True morality begins with the refusal to envy the hypocrite.

How much more dangerous would ambition be, were it not so frequently accompanied by an equally intense desire to be admired and esteemed. The ambitious person who has no desire to be admired or esteemed enjoys the advantage of surprise.

Like spoiling one's children. "This too shall pass"—but who is heartless enough to say this to his passion?

There are some people who are so clever that they are incapable of benefiting from wisdom, hence the instruction not to cast pearls before swine.

Nostalgia draws life from a secret desire for disappointment—it is a ghost whose strength and influence depend on jealously guarding its own corpse.

Fear is an effective governor of humankind because the possibility of harm holds human beings in check more readily than the actual inflicting of harm itself. Imagination, far from liberating us, works more typically to keep us anxious and docile.

A man who has ambition but not pride operates with an uncommonly wide latitude—he is capable of changing course easily as circumstances dictate and is apt to take his adversaries by surprise.

Memory is the closest and yet furthest point from the happiness we impute to the constant possession of an object or feeling.

Cunning people usually do not know the limits of their cunning.

Weak persons are undone not by their lack of strength but by their hatred and contempt for weakness.

It is gauche to point out that the emperor is naked. It is almost as gauche to say this.

The opposite of fiction is not truth, but discretion.

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Even the fish in a barrel are deserving of our bait.

The fall is what reveals the peak.

I lack the patience to reap the fruits of my patience.

The most immodest gaze—when one stares admiringly at another, without at the same time looking up.

The surest means of deliverance from a bad dream is typically the greatest gamble one can take in waking life: the frontal assault.

We cast two shadows—the first is simply the antithesis of who we are, a personification of the attributes that are the opposite of our own, while the second is the sum total of all

that we hate about ourselves, of all the things that make us feel ashamed of ourselves, which we keep hidden from the sight of others. It is to our advantage to learn how to emulate the qualities of the first, to be able on occasion to break character and act against our personality, as the situation demands. As for the second, we should become accustomed to hearing its scornful laughter, and then learn to laugh alongside it in the manner of a king keeping company with his jester.

True passions at the end of liberalism. It has become more dangerous to come between a man and what he hates than to deprive him of what he loves.

What makes for force of character: a narrow range of motives, passions that are concealed, deep suffering that has become invisible, and the energy provided by acts, both good and evil, that one refrains from committing but is nevertheless capable of carrying out.

Seize the nettle, and smother the candle's flame.

Temerity is what is needed, when inconstancy deflects all blame.

The next stage of corruption, after the idea that all publicity is good publicity has become a piece of dogma, is the belief that all flattery is sincere.

Those who take great pride in their intelligence rarely

experience much delight in using it.

Sometimes it is only with the formation of a second nature that one becomes capable of acting naturally.

Whenever I realize I am dreaming, I look into the sun.

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