

Turtle Mind

by [Carl Nelson](#) (September 2020)



Two Human Beings, Edvard Munch, 1905

*A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is
putting on its shoes.*

—Mark

Twain

Oh, if I only knew then what I know now.

So many judgments from life take place in a

kangaroo court, and it seems I'm the last to understand. When I do, I find myself standing slack jawed, and then – as when I was tossed from the Ritz in Paris for gawking—I get it. (Though I was buoyed years later to read that a favored Portuguese poet of mine, Fernando Pessoa, (1888-1935) was also, in his day, pitched from the Ritz for the same indiscretion.)

I'm also reminded of my former neighbor, a long retired chemical engineer, who was reminiscing upon the naiveté of his youth in the corporate sphere: "People would talk about workplace politics," he said. "And I remember thinking, 'We don't have any of that here!'" He shook his head ruefully.

A little time spent waiting can really inflate one's IQ. For example, the bright boys might be out front on the TV telling us what the economy will do. But the slow ones who describe it later will be more correct. And you can take this to the bank. (Or return it to the bank.) So I ask you, why shouldn't we, as a general cultural predilection, let an event solve itself or at least unravel itself a bit? After all, life takes a while. This might be why both our brain and our lifespan eclipse the mosquito's. We have the Darwinian advantage. Let's press it.

If a problem does indeed sort itself, certainly there is much to learn from this which would *also* be quite accurate. And if the problem does not solve itself immediately, what is the difficulty in observing a little longer? As I've pointed out, we are not mosquitoes. I have problems I've shelved for ages. They sit in the back of my mind to be re-considered in light of events at some later date. In fact, a whole back room of my mind is filled with round toits, (as in, *when I get a-round to it*) which now and then will joggle themselves out, when a new coin of the realm is dropped, to dance their epiphany. It's a lovely thing, and surely something to write about . . . let me digress.

A few points about the rush to judgment:

As a youth, I didn't disrupt. I didn't rebel, as is supposed to be natural. The adults said or implied strongly that obedience is what they preferred. And having no inclination to do otherwise, I was pleased to continue my life unhindered. It seemed a win/win. Then later, just as I was saying above, time blessed me with greater understanding when it became obvious that those who caused trouble received greater attention. "A squeaky wheel gets the grease." And then as the years passed further, I was galled to find that those that had caused all the trouble were remembered for it fondly! While those who didn't were thought of as disappointments—or as the sibling who had failed to thrive—while I wondered where my reward was for exercising prudence? And it further appears that without reacting to events rashly, a person practically doesn't exist at all, that is, in terms of clicks or hits or likes, or just general acknowledgement. One must shout out while the issue is hot and the issue burns in you! And that it burns hotter than in any other! So of what practical persuasion is knowledge if it fails to catch the last bandwagon leaving? And what use is a wisdom that doesn't shout and gather audience? At the same time, most wisdom reflects reality, and reality is the quietest thing around. Why reality is everywhere, all around us, all of the time, and not making a peep.

These are the thoughts that have churned my mind, as they have churned minds much wiser and far older than mine.

The one talent which is worth all other talents put together in all human affairs is the talent of judging right upon imperfect materials, the talent if you please of guessing right. It is a talent which no rules will ever teach and which even experience does not always give. It often coexists with a good deal of slowness and dullness

and with a very slight power of expression. —James
Fitzjames Stephen

Doesn't "a good deal of slowness and dullness and with a very slight power of expression" sound a lot like a turtle?

Our rash culture does seem infested with haste in laying waste. And it is not hard to see how jumping to conclusions—a mark of incipient hysteria—can lead one astray. But it takes a bit longer to realize that *not* jumping to conclusions can make the person irrelevant, vulnerable, hated or even prey. (Once the Dutch tulip bubble started, you'd best have gotten onboard.)

To know this Turtle Mind is to understand a quiet child, very slow to react. For a long while it seemed to me as if I had been deposited somehow on the wrong planet, though I couldn't grasp how wrong. I have a baby picture of me with my dome shaped forehead staring goggle-eyed from where I sat between my two older exuberant brothers. "Oh dear!" My wife imagined me thinking, with a laugh. Presently I believe the Stork is responsible for a lot more of these mix-ups than is commonly thought—with a statistical delivery error approximating that of the local US Postal Service.

Later, my family drove off to the mountains for the day, leaving me as a baby and non-entity—for I was like the tree or toadstool cast in the grammar school play —settled by myself on the front stoop. They were gone for an hour or so. My mother recalled that she had turned around to look into the back seat for some reason and realized to her dismay, "Where's Carl?" My guess is that there was a break in the caterwaul for a moment, and I was noticed to be missing in the vacancy. That is, the vacancy brought me to mind and made my absence apparent. They then returned to find me quite pleasantly solitary and occupied, digging with a spoon in the neighbor's backyard, no doubt in tunneling for an escape via

China.

Later in life, mother threatened—over the period of several years during my adolescence—to send me off to military school. This was apparently, as far as I can make out, for *not* misbehaving. During my earliest years she later confided, she had worried about me being autistic, though we had no name for that at the time.

Standing beside her at the stove, I'd chatter, trying to catch her attention. But making the mistake, I'd guess, of voicing docile concerns which were infuriating. For finally, she would smack her wooden spoon again on the steel pot side to reiterate her *idée fixe*, "I think a military school might be just the thing." She'd whack the broth from her spoon and turn with her palliative. "That would spark some life into you." Smack, smack! Perhaps if I had spoken up suddenly with more vim and confidence . . . or just argued? Which way to veer? Oh, but that woman was hard to please.

Nevertheless, these were my first initiations into a literal ordeal of the maniacal through which life has led me. A further realization in later years—adding even more grease to the gears—was that *immediate* disobedience was *most* celebrated. This fully rounded the epiphany, for I realized that reaction speed was seen as a bellwether of something more important than the thing itself. That there is a sense of entitlement (as it's referred to now) that is inherent in the speed of a retort. Entitlement must be a muscle memory sort of response. Relations laughed when their toddlers spouted the foulest language suddenly, inappropriately. I also recognized that their child's bullying pleased them. "Did you see that?" They smiled as their youngster took the other's toy or just "shoved him right on his ass!" Theirs was the narrative of precocious development. "She was always way ahead of the others."

One afternoon's visit, I admonished my niece

gently not to throw her ball in her grandmother's living room as she could "easily break many fragile things." My brother in law took the ball from the perch where I'd placed it—and gave it back to her. The message was clear: "You don't tell my four-year-old what to do." *Our kids and their immediate desires are to be given the day.* This is what the cultural reality was. Why had it taken me so long to understand it?

Indeed, society can be quite predatory if you don't rebel, hate enough or are unable to harbor resentment long enough to find yourself in the same stew as the others—as people generally seem to detest the docile disposition. We are taught to be humble, but people in general just hate it like administered castor oil.

Consider the British writer P. G. Woodhouse and his internment in Nazi Germany. Woodhouse was a comic writer and so like most people of a comic bent, he was naturally inclined to take the lightened view of things. After all, it is a purpose of comedy to deflate our pretensions a bit, deflate our urgencies, deflate our ire, deflate our scares. Due to being caught in Germany during the outbreak of WWII, Woodhouse wrote skits and humorous articles, some of which he read over the radio making light of his internment. It's true, he got co-opted by the Nazis' publicity machine into making six broadcasts from Berlin to the United States before our entry into the war. "The talks were comic and apolitical, but his broadcasting over enemy radio prompted anger and strident controversy in Britain, and a threat of prosecution." (Wikipedia)

Upon his return to England, he was castigated for collaboration and forced to relocate to New York City. But isn't this just the sort of kerfuffle one gets themselves into when they haven't their finger on the current pulse of hate? When they really have their mind on other things or haven't understood fully, or really haven't wanted to bother? Or perhaps they just haven't the knack for harboring anger and

expelling it as a corrosive spit, but just enjoy getting along, something like the trouble others might have with math.

Nevertheless, one must harbor this hate and allow it to shape one's perceptions. One must know who exactly to hate—to recognize them immediately—and then to speak out forcefully. Half-measures will not be appreciated. "Silence is consent." This is very difficult for a Turtle Mind whose nature is to let the perceptions shape themselves; to wait and watch as the waters clear. But it seems there is no middle ground. There is an eastern hemisphere and a western hemisphere, a southern and a northern, but no middle hemisphere. No one will be spared.

The reason for the current level of anger, I'm urgently told by the Urgent, is because we suffer a multitude of urgent problems created or left to us by very many selfish, uncaring or lax, if not outright hateful people. Apparently, nothing just occurs. Impartial reality plays no part.

The two fundamental issues with using experience to solve these problems, I am left to understand by the most active Urgents, is that experience takes too long and secondly, experience cannot think outside of the box. That is, experience is terribly limited by what has actually happened. And experience can never predict, obviously, what has never happened before. For example, experience is never going to tell you when the sky is due to fall. Moreover, the emerging problems we suffer from, it is argued by the Urgent, are so unique and imminent that if we wait so long to act as to fully understand them, we'll be toast. "You can read it (the legislation) after you pass it," as Congressional Madame Pelosi so piquantly declared.

So the very most critical situation which concerns the Urgent, is the present itself. Nothing can be more critical than what is occurring right now! How could it? And yet today is necessarily bounded by the possible and so

constrained by the past and tradition. So it's like we can't even move. So get excited! Scream at the sky. Because it's like being stuck in a small town which rankles anyone of sophistication—or can frighten anybody who can sense disaster, as small towns are the essence of the quotidian.

Fortunately, the Urgents have shown to their satisfaction, that we can generate experience through scientific modeling. By artificially generating a reality, they can analyze the 'facts' of this reality to assess and generate action towards a rational 'scientific' solution in a fraction of the time the findings of an actual event would demand, and therefore, before a crisis could reach the critical stage. In fact, we now have the ability to react as soon as their models *sense* a crisis. Youth, such as Greta Thunberg, are particularly adept at pointing up areas of concern. For example, like a canary in a mine, Greta can actually "see (an accumulation of) carbon dioxide". Youth are obviously less constrained by experience and so quite valuable as advisors or even as actors on the national stage.

Things we want or even desire are often simply not possible or of prohibitive cost compared to benefit, Conservatives often argue. We need to consider the trade-offs. And Conservatives also point out that history may have demonstrated this—over and over. If you can't see this whatever is history for, Conservatives argue?

But how can the Conservatives talk trade-offs when human lives are at stake? To be frank, the Urgent would do away with history altogether if the current state of popular consciousness weren't so sentimental and intimidated by Dead White Males. The future hasn't happened yet! How can Conservatives not see this? How should something which hasn't ever occurred—which could exist in any form imaginable—be constrained by the present or past? Small wonder that those

Urgents with a raised consciousness, have 'awoke'n to feel though as though Conservatives have "Stupid" writ large across their foreheads and "Don't care" emblazoned on their hearts.

So here we are within the disagreement described by the Urgent and Prudent camps; the sophisticated cities versus the quotidian towns. The Prudent are drawn into a sense of urgency, on their hand, to guard the present as a grand culmination of everything we have sacrificed for in the past—and the Urgent, on the other hand, would discard the present as the single most important impediment in the face of an increasingly urgent necessity to realize the future.

The Turtle Mind creates a third crisis however, for its very docility is a hazard to all! "Best run over them, when we see them moving slowly across our thoroughfares and at cross-purposes," is an emotion both parties to the tug-of-war feel. And so is the Turtle's long journey made short.

Currently the Urgents have begun to really exploit Imperfection.

When economies improve and living standards rise it is natural, especially in wealthy countries, for there to be an increase in income inequality. Generally, all are doing better. But those who are doing best generally are better at doing better and have expanded their income more than those who are simply doing better. It's the natural outcome of good times. For Conservatives, the increasing income inequality is a trade-off, and a nice trade off to have. It is a good trade off because everyone does better. For Progressives though, the fact of greater income inequality makes it a problem, because some are doing worse. And it is a problem which can never be solved within a free society, because it represents the natural solution. The only way to end this imperfection is to eliminate freedom with mandates, or to eliminate wealth.

(Though they would probably not put it this way.)

As I've mentioned, people who hate immediately, that is with Urgency, can really start us solving problems fast. But what really ignites the crack bong, is when a *non-problem*, such as income inequality—or any other fabricated non-problem is made new and shipped and sold throughout the country via the corporate media. Exploiting a non-problem is as momentous a post-modern practical development as the wheel or fire were to pre-history. The turning of the beneficial trade-off (that is, a solution) into an unsolvable problem leads directly to the establishment of perpetual frustration (which in the free world is analogous to Mao's "permanent revolution") —which can operate like the portal to other worlds! And by which we can replicate conditions—such as we now see in Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington or Minneapolis which is beginning to resemble Somalia—all over the world, and nearly overnight. It's a re-conceived, weaponized and scaled upgrade of the old maxim which is, as Hemingway noted, "People find problems where there aren't any." And for good reason, it's high octane and politically unifying.

The biggest source of the public focus on non-problems today, as I noted, is on *Imperfection*. Imperfection is literally the San Andreas fault of the Blue State/ Red State political configuration and at the same time a decanted brandy mash made from some of our cultural traditions' finest trade-offs. While the Blue State Urgents hate Imperfection, the Red State Prudentials virtually worship Imperfection as a traditionally created best solution, finely aged. Prudentials talk trade-offs amongst themselves with nearly as much animation as the Urgents speak of injustice. The sun rises and sets by their respective terms in both cases.

But Imperfection has been around since Adam and Eve devoured the apple and were forced to leave Eden and search for their existential succor in an unfair, Godless

world, as the Urgents would have it. Or they were forced to weigh the trade-offs inherent in an actual real and imperfect world, as the Prudent would later explain, where the trade-off of the greatest overall benefit would approximate perfection. The Urgent would later posit a New Jerusalem—a return to mandated and governmentally enforced Eden here on earth. While the Prudent would maintain that the days of Eden are lost forever, and that trade-offs are the currency of this new consciousness. And as a friend's Polish grandmother used to say, "If you want perfect, you got to die." Are the Progressives trying to kill us? They might have added.

And here is where we are: the Urgents large vision of a heaven legislated on earth in a shining New Jerusalem (as yet to manifest) of governmental mandates—versus the Prudent's small vision, tradition-based use of trade-offs to manage irreconcilable desires and limited resources in order to raise stable families? Just take these big choices and mix thoroughly with social justice to generate a lot of anger.

But as the sun sets on this essay, perhaps think of the chasm separating these two intractable positions as a vacancy—into which suddenly, the Turtle Mind's daydream has appeared and begun digging with his little spoon in the cultural wasteland.

Personally, I blush to hear our nation described as the greatest country in the world. This posture just makes everybody uncomfortable, from those to whom we're explaining this, to ourselves who are forced to explain it. And if our country is so great, people should just be swarming to get in. I mean, we should have to build walls! Wouldn't we?

Also boasting brings out carping from the wannabes. It sounds like bragging; which is what it is, and I'd rather the politicos just called the USA a pretty good

country and a fairly nice place to live, where we treat each other fairly well, say approximately what we want, do pretty much as we please, make some money, and also give our bit to make things better and don't mind a little change (especially if it doesn't happen). In other words, we admit to imperfection but speak with a bit of self-acceptance. A complainer will just look like a prissy scold with their harping fricatives and sibilants and spittle lost in a friendly room of decent people, cheap decorative furniture and sofa art.

Look at the people in Wal-Mart for example. Perhaps the Deplorables know something? They're pretty happy. Not real happy. But they like being there, or they'd be somewhere else. It's a free country. There's some eccentricity, but it's the general human condition that, "We're all here, because we're not all there."

Then take another look, when you're out shopping at Wal-Mart. Do they look like the sort of people you're gonna make much happier anywhere else? They might be as happy watching TV or eating their abundant meals—or not quite as happy as they would be out hunting, fishing or watching their childrens' events. But probably happier than paying more taxes or listening to politicians or trying to help their children with their Common Core homework or sitting at the DMV or talking to an official of any sort. The government just isn't going to make these people's lives happier, nor are gender fluid bathrooms, nor are abortions (they want grandkids for Pete's sake), nor higher taxes, nor solar or wind power, nor racial quotas, nor Social Services—especially Social Services. The less they see of Social Services, the happier they'll be. And they don't need the cops bothering them, either. They've got guns. Basically, they behave themselves and the law stays away from them—and it all works out pretty well. Sometimes they spit and fart even, whose sound is a testament to both a willful avoiding of perfection and the

effort to achieve it; the Alpha and the Omega of wearing a life with a little slack sewn in; a dart here, a gusset there...

They may like the freedom to start a little cottage business out of their garage and see what it will do. They might read a book now and then, buy some artwork or see a movie. They'll probably learn what they need to learn to do what they want to do, and then stop. Degrees don't mean much to them beyond the achieved skill set, and a living is basically what they'd like to earn. And they're not expecting a perfect life, just hoping for a pretty good one. Then to let it age like a fine wine, gather wisdom and wait for the water to clear, when the truth should be apparent to all. This is pretty much what the church going is about. Next to watching how things change, as their thoughts change, and the light changes . . . especially how the light changes, especially when the light is dying, in the early evening, when the reasons life is so beautiful are suddenly cast into view. Any photographer will tell you this. Maybe even a mosquito would. I'm simply saying the same thing as an author who moseys around and talks to people and has found himself revealed to be more and more imperfect, but fairly happy.

So the question is, what to do with these turtle minds? What to do with these people who would rather just lounge in their play pools with their rubber duckies, their grandchildren and a beer? Will the passage of time reveal the answer? Or has the passage of time already revealed the answer, and the people-who-know-better just don't get it? Here again, only time will tell—or *has* it told us? And it's just about to . . . REAR BACK AND YELL!

Personally, I avoid perfection like the plague. For example, as I've maintained in a previous book, "The Poet's (Thirty Year) Marriage Plan," that a "pretty good" marriage *is* the perfect marriage. A pretty good marriage is

like beer with the game on ESPN watched from a duct-taped recliner—whereas the perfect marriage is like watching PBS with correct posture from a crinkly, plastic covered matching Chippendale chair with an overdressed wife.

Who could endure that? Time is on our side. We just have to not let events freak us out and to practice some serious docility! Maybe even daydream.

Okay. So I showed this poet's essay to my poet's wife (aka "Beatrice") —as I feared I might have written my readership into "a tangly wood". My wife read it and said that I'd "got about 75% of the way to my point of letting things work themselves out or of how Deplorables are going to rise up."

Well, I considered this, and think it important to clearly declare, that *I certainly wouldn't propose or endorse a perfect, 100% Docile World*. Let me be clear that my own weary experience has shown that a hundred percent docile existence can fall far short. It would be like a 100% cotton garment. It might breathe well but look like hell and all rumpled with no discernible shape. So I do recognize the need for some fight and effort extended, which I don't see as an imperfection, but more as a trade-off. So place me in the Prudent camp for trade-offs. But the more I fight and exert, the more I enjoy watching TV at day's end (so maybe move me a little further back into the Deplorables). And whether or not the Deplorables will rise up or sink back further into the sofa is still to be seen. However, seventy five percent of anything is pretty good, a passing essay grade and certainly a 'substantial majority'. (Hell, let's call it a landslide!) So I'm good, if you are.

Are you good?

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Carl Nelson has recently published his newest Self Help Book, *The Poet's (30 Year) Marriage Plan*, which is a useful collection of interlarded poems and prose advice (schemes), all celebrating the hallowed institution of marriage. To learn more about the author and peruse his work, please visit