

Extracts from the late Dr. David Fleming's *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It* (2011). Reproduced with kind permission of his estate. Extensive references are given in the dictionary itself, but are omitted here. “\*” points to another entry in the dictionary.

**Death.** The means by which an ecosystem keeps itself alive, selects its fittest, controls its \*scale, gives peace to the tormented, enables young life, and accumulates a \*grammar of inherited meaning as generations change places. A natural system lies in tension between life and death: death is as important to it as life. *A lot* of death is a sign of a healthy large population. *Too much* death is a sign that it is in danger; it is not coping; its terms of coexistence with its habitat are breaking down. *Too little* death is a sign of the population exploding to levels which will destroy it and the ecology that supports it. *No death* means that the system is already dead. The reduction of life to an \*icon – the assertion that life (*viz*, human life) is sacred – disconnects the mind from the ecosystem to which it belongs. It is a fertile error. Beneath the exaggerated regard for life lies an impatience with, a disdain for, the actual processes that sustain the \*ecology that sustains us. Expressing faith in the sanctity of human life is a license – in a series of little, well-intentioned, \*self-evident steps – to kill the ecology that supports it. The large scale system, relying on its size and technology, and making an enemy of death which should be its friend, joins a battle which it cannot win. In \*systems thinking, death is sacred.

**Descent, of the Industrial Economy.** The ways in which the descent could develop are so varied that there is a risk of being paralysed by the uncertainty, so *Lean Logic* focuses on a particular aspect of it – an aspect that matters intensely to all of us. As descent develops, unemployment will rise, and there will come a point when government revenues are so deeply reduced that funds are not there to support the unemployed nor to pay for such fundamentals as \*education, \*health, and \*law and order. \*Households and \*communities will find it hard, bordering on impossible, to pay their way. Such necessities as \*food and even \*water supplies could be hard to get. Communities will therefore have to provide those things for themselves, or do without. They will need to rediscover \*place and local skills, rebuild a \*culture, and apply the power of \*lean thinking; sharply focused, widely shared.

The shocks of descent converging into our culture's \*climacteric will leave nothing in our lives unchanged. We cannot now avoid it, but it can be managed, mitigated, made survivable, recognised as our species' toughest, but greatest, opportunity. At such moments of discontinuity, with sharp changes of direction, societies – or at least the technologies they use – can slip back, not by years, but by ages: when the Romans arrived in Britain, they found a thriving, technically advanced Celtic Iron Age society; when they left, it retreated, not to the Iron

Age, but another 2000 years further, to the Bronze Age. But we know what we need to do. We need to build the sequel, to draw on inspiration which has lain dormant, like the seed beneath the snow.

**Devil's Tunes.** Simple, attractive-sounding solutions; \*reductionist responses to complex systems. Devils' tunes are much easier to argue for than solutions which are consistent with \*systems thinking, which have the disadvantage (from the Devil's point of view) of taking longer to explain, being harder to understand, and often involving action which is contrary to intuition and expectation; they may also begin by making matters worse before they get better. There is a powerful bias in a \*democracy towards seduction by devils' tunes; it should, however, be a primary objective of democratic politicians not to exploit this, nor to fall for them, and to try to help others not to fall for them either.

**Different Premises.** If the starting point – the premises or assumptions – of the two sides of the argument are different, shifting them can be difficult. Socrates' technique was to apply what is now known as the law of non-contradiction: a statement cannot be true if it, or an inference arising from it, contradicts another statement which is known to be true. The weakness is that, if the premise is held firmly enough, the method may not work: the person "knows" that the premise is true, so that, even if an argument leads from that to an absurd conclusion, it must be the argument that is wrong, not the premise.

Disagreements between premises tend to be stable. If you are in a meeting, and you disagree with the conclusions, you may still be able to make helpful contributions to the discussion. If you disagree with the premises, you have to go in with a complex and lengthy explanation which no one wants to hear: you threaten the ability of the meeting to achieve anything at all. The probability is that, next meeting, you won't be there. Recommended response: get some allies. If there is just one person at the meeting who agrees with you, things may begin to go better. And yet, \*institutions are defined by their assumptions, the premises from which everything else follows. Revision remains unlikely. A shock might do it, but by then it may be too late.

**Hypocrisy, The Fallacy of.** The fallacy that, if what I do falls below the standards of what I say, my argument can be dismissed without more ado. The fallacy arises from the obvious discomforts of a contrast between good words and bad deeds, like those of *Measure for Measure's* Angelo, upright in public, outrageous in private.

And yet, if an argument is a good one, dissonant deeds do nothing to contradict it. In fact, the

hypocrite may have something to be said for him. For instance, he may not be making any claims at all about how he lives, but only about his values in the context of the argument. There is no reason why he should not argue for standards better than he manages to achieve in his own life; in fact, it would be worrying if his ideals were *not* better than the way he lives. He is not dazzled by his high personal standards; he does not make an \*icon of himself as the model of high moral standing. He is not defended by his \*sincerity from the possibility of self-criticism. His ideals are not limited to what he can achieve himself. What matters is whether his argument is right or not. With accusations of hypocrisy in the air, difficult questions about real problems short-circuit into \**ad hominem* quarrel.

Hypocrisy is a bad thing with good qualities. Sincerity is a good thing with bad qualities; it shines a light on the simple certainties of your feelings on the matter, rather than on the awkward realities of the case. Some of the most intensely savage people this planet has ever produced were noted for their sincerity and their incorruptible and austere lives. There was Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), largely responsible for the reign of terror during the French revolution, but, in his own life, he was the “Sea-Green Incorruptible”. And there was Conrad of Marburg (d. 1233), thin with fasting, who, in imitation of Jesus, rode on a donkey from place to place on his mission to discover and burn heretics and witches. For ground-breaking catastrophes, we have to turn to the incorruptible. We are safer with those who are not preoccupied with admiration of their own moral standing, confident that they can think no wrong.

If required to choose between sincerity and hypocrisy (writes the theologian David Martin), “Give me a friendly hypocrite any day”.

See also: \*Humour, \*Ad Hominem

**Implicature.** The presence of a subtext – another meaning – which makes a statement not quite as simple, or as innocent, as it looks. Examples:

- o “What did you think of the singer?” “Well, I liked her dress.”
- o “We are tackling the problem of global warming”. There is nothing wrong with the statement itself, but it implies that we are on the way to solving the problem; it may also be taken to imply that we can do the job on our own. It sounds reassuring, but it may be telling you that the efforts to tackle global warming are not having much success.

The philosopher Paul Grice, who coined the word, pointed out that implicature is commonplace in \*conversation, and that it comes in many forms (e.g. \*Accent). Given its potential to mislead, he argued for a code of good conduct in communication, which he called the Cooperative Principle: be as informative as required (but no more), do not say things which you believe to be false or for which you have no evidence, be relevant, avoid obscurity and ambiguity, be brief and

orderly...

... except when you're not. Lean Logic advocates asides, long-windedness if it comes with a story, frank untruths if there is a reasonable chance that the other person can untangle the irony, broken logic if it reflects the difficulty of explaining things which break your heart or are hard to understand. It does not share the modest self-restraint which we find in Psalm 131:

I do not exercise myself in great matters : which are too high for me.

Lean Logic finds that, when dealing with great matters, it can, from time to time, be a good thing if there are cracks and faults in the argument, for the repair of which help is invited. It is a reminder that a conversation is a cooperative affair, not just a series of beautifully-manicured statements.

**Indignation, The Fallacy of.** Indignation is an urban emotion: it looks for action to be taken by someone else; it believes that the way forward is agitation; and it \*begs the question: if you are indignant about something, it has to be an outrage, and caused by someone other than you – otherwise, of course, you wouldn't be indignant, would you? And it is urban in the sense that, in the city, it is easy to get away, so you can absent yourself from a \*conversation, indignantly telling the other person you find his views repugnant. You won't be needing to borrow his horse.

Out of town, it is different. It is a waste of time being indignant in a field of buttercups. You have to see to it yourself. That may involve time in a circumstance not of your choosing, in a conversation not on your terms.

See also: \*Anger, \*Blame, \*Empowerment, \*Unmentionable, The Fallacy of

**Localisation.** ... Localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility, but it has the decisive argument in its favour that there will be no alternative.

**Myth.** Among the meanings:

1. Ancient legend; story which seems to be as permanent as the landscape with which it is linked, giving it significance and a personality.
2. The narrative underlying a religion; the meeting-point between religion and culture.
3. A story which (the speaker insists) is untrue, though widely held to be true.
4. Shared commonsense, about behaviour and opinion; a society's idea of normality.
5. A nation's history.

6. A nation's popular history.
7. A nation's history, revised with malicious intent.

But these are fragmented. The condensed meaning of myth is the most telling one. The myth of a \*place is the \*narrative that gives it identity. The story is a mixture of \*truth and untruth; it is in quantum space: to observe it too closely is to destroy it. The \*identity that derives from it is real, but fragile.

**No-Alternative, The Fallacy of.** (1) The fallacy that there is no alternative (but you may not have looked hard enough). (2) The fallacy that, because there is no alternative to the particular strategy that is being discussed, that strategy must be feasible. Example: It is argued that the other big energy options are not going to provide solutions in the future, and that *therefore* therefore the solution is a vast expansion of \*nuclear energy. But this is a *\*non sequitur*: the lack of feasibility of the other options tells us nothing about whether an expansion of nuclear power is feasible or not. Lean Logic's response is to think about the problem in a different way, starting from \*different premises.

**Peasant.** A person practicing small-scale, mixed, energy-efficient, fertility-conserving farming designed chiefly for local subsistence. It is integrated into local \*culture. It is the defining practice of the \*community. This model of farming, however, became briefly obsolete in the \*market economy, with its abundant cheap \*energy, enabling a different one to develop which did not need to supply its own energy and sustain its own fertility.

Peasant farming is a skilled and efficient way of sustaining \*food production within the limits of the \*ecology. It is an eco-ethic, sustaining the measured synergy with nature that we find in \*Tao philosophy. It has the five properties of \*resilience.

But it has a flaw. It is highly productive, so it yields a surplus, and this is a tempting resource for the gradual evolution of an urban civic society, with its unstoppable implications of \*growth, hubris and trouble. Is there a way of learning from that dismal cycle, and sustaining, instead, a localised, community-based, decentralised society, without the seeds of its own destruction...?

**Place.** Space whose local narrative can still be heard, and could be heard again, given the chance. Place is the practical, located, tangible, bounded setting which protects us from \*abstractions, \*generalities and \*ideologies and opens the way to thinking as discovery. On this scale, there is \*elegance, and some relief from the need to be right, for if you are wrong, the small \*scale of place allows for revision and repair, supported by \*conversation.

The philosopher David Hume considers the matter:

There are in *England*, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects which are every day expos'd to their senses. ... They do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and instead of refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou'd communicate to our founders of systems a share of this gross earthy mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which wou'd serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are compos'd.

Place is the endangered habitat of our species.

See also: \*County, \*Harmless Lunatic, \*Home, \*Identity, \*Localisation, \*Parish, \*Practice, \*Proximity Principle, \*Regrettable Necessities, \*Scale, \*Transition

**Slack.** It is a truth universally acknowledged that \*competitiveness is a good thing. It is a life-saver, in that it enables an \*economy to pay its way. It is a provider of equity, in that it enables people to achieve wealth and status on their own merits. And it is the only way in which a price-based market economy will work. But it comes at a cost.

A competitive \*market economy must, by definition, be “taut”. The price charged by Fred for his goods will hold only so long as the price charged by Dan for the same goods, in the same place, is no lower. If it is, Fred will need to reduce his prices, or else to go out of business. Prices for goods therefore tend to converge to the same level. And that level requires all the producers in the market to be efficient – to work full-time, to use the methods that cost least, and to sell as much as they can. Producers know what they need to do – there is little choice in the matter; what distinguishes them is how good they are at doing it. There is a requirement to innovate, because the competitive market is *taut*: everyone else is doing so, and anyone who does not is quickly priced out of business.

In the future, it will not be like that. Producers will not always want to provide their goods and services in the most efficient way. They may – for good local reasons – want to use a technology which is more expensive. For instance, it could make sense, from the point of view of the resilient \*community, to use less \*energy, \*water or material, at the cost of having to spend more on labour. Or local craftsmen may be able to keep up with local demand for long-lasting goods despite working for only three days a week. Or producers may simply decide not to produce the maximum quantity, and to take it easy and produce according to what they see as reasonable need, or what they have the time for, after spending time with family and neighbours.

All these choices would have the effect of raising the price of the goods supplied by that producer or – if other producers did the same – by the community as a whole. In a taut market, such decisions could not be made. If they were, they would not stick, because a producer that tried to do so would be quickly put out of business by others who went for the cheaper option,

the efficient and competitive one. Any market that did manage to make such sensible, yet inefficient, decisions stick, would be *slack* – and it would be at constant risk of being stymied by competitive producers seizing the opportunity to make easy money by producing and selling at a lower price.

How can a community, despite all this, be mistress of its own fate in this sense? How can it sustain that condition of slack – that is, have the freedom to make enlightened decisions and make them stick? Well, here is the good news. The “normal” state of affairs, before the era of the great civic societies, and in the intervals between them, has consisted of political economies – perhaps better known in this case as villages – where the terms on which goods and services were exchanged were not based on price. Instead, they were built around a complex culture of arrangements – obligations, \*loyalties, collaborations – which express the nature and priorities of the community and the network of relationships and \*reciprocities between its members. No, don’t scoff. This is what \*households still do – and friends, neighbours, cricket teams, magistrates, parent-teacher associations, allotment holders; this is the non-monetary \*informal economy, the central core that enables our society to exist. It is outrageous to the received values of now: it is not transparent; it is nonconformist; social mobility in it is limited; it is neither efficient nor competitive; it is full of anomalies. But it keeps things going.

So, back to the question: how does this political economy manage to keep such an apparently unstable regime going? Well, it turns on \*culture. Sheer naked loyalties and family values can only go so far. There needs to be something interesting, connecting, going on too – something to talk about, to cooperate in, to mull over, to aim for, to laugh at; there needs to be a story to tell, something to coordinate and to do together. A culture is like the upright strands that you begin with in basket-making, round which you wind the texture of the basket itself: no sticks, no basket; no culture, no community. It is the \*grammar, the story, \*humour and \*good faith that identifies a community and gives it existence. It is both the parent and child of \*social capital. And the social capital of a community is its social life – the links of cooperation and friendship between its members. It is the common culture and \*ceremony, the good faith and reciprocal obligations, the \*civility and citizenship, the \*play, humour and \*conversation which make a living community, the cooperation that builds its \*institutions. It is the social ecosystem in which a culture lives.

Ever since Adam Smith observed that people are willing to carry out almost any service for each other despite being motivated by nothing more than commercial self-interest, it has seemed to be unnecessary and ridiculous to suppose that there is any significant role for such higher motives as benevolence. Economists simply haven’t needed such concepts. Well, they do now. The economics of the future will be benignly and inextricably entangled with social capital, with intense links of reciprocity, in comparison with which the reduction of economic and social relations to the piteous simplicities of prices is not up to standard any longer, and is due for retirement. It is now all right to speak of benevolence as an economic concept, for economics is

at the early stages of being reintegrated into community, and community into the whole nature of the living things that belong there. It will not be from the impersonal price-calculations of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from the \*reciprocal obligations that join a community together, and the benevolence among its members.

Slack is the space in which judgment lies. The early shocks may leave little room for choice: just one tolerable option could be a fine thing, and that may be as much as most of us can hope for, at least for the time being. In the mature settlement that could follow, however, the tyranny of decisions being in lock-step with competitive pricing will be an ancient memory. There will be time for music.

**System-Scale Rule.** The key rule governing systems-design: large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions; they require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework.

**Tactile Deprivation.** The loneliness, coldness and lack of communication in a society which, owing to anxieties about its abuse, has lost the language of touch. Touch has a large vocabulary of meaning, between bliss and pain, none of which can be abandoned without loss. Tactile deprivation leaves a misery of depression, isolation and emotional withdrawal, followed by trouble when touch is the central skill needed for complex skills such as marriage and child-raising.

At the same time, we are losing the touch of language, for language began as a replacement for grooming and, with careful, gentle articulation, it has mildly erotic qualities, making speech a true heir to grooming. It works best when you take your time, travelling hopefully rather than being distracted by arrival. \*Community will be held together by both touch and sound: soporific, inspissated, stretch, smooth, evocative, dappled, spinster, Limpopo. Slow and attentive is best.

See also: \*Conversation, \*Reciprocity-Cooperation

## **Time, Fallacies of.**

### *The Permanent Present*

The \*fallacy which gives undue emphasis to the present when considering an option with long-term consequences. Examples include arguments that our present ability to import \*food justifies permanent burial of agricultural land under new housing; that joining the Eurozone is justified by today's low interest rates there; that the state of the jobs market at the moment calls

for migrant labour; that the current price of oil opens the way to a long-term expansion of air travel. This presumption of a constant present is a leading symptom of the dementia that afflicts the judgment of governments – *dementia absens*: the patient is so elevated, so far removed from ordinary life, so taken up with a global vision, so protected by experts, so busy, so short of sleep, and so absent, that he or she has no sense of time or \*place. (\*Abstraction, \*Presence).

And there is a risk that the values of the present may crowd out all other values. The question, “What is right?”, short-circuits to the answer, “Whatever is now”.

### *The Irrelevant Past.*

An argument that affirms that *now* is a special case in that the present has achieved standards of \*reason and \*ethics which have not been available before. The fallacy typically cites the fact that this is the twenty-first century as proof that the argument is correct:

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the independent sector had emerged pre-eminent in the British education system but the only vision the independent sector has today remains entrenched in the 20<sup>th</sup> century... We need new vision for the independent sector in the 21st century... It is no longer tenable in 2008 to retain 20<sup>th</sup> century apartheid thinking.

(Anthony Seldon (2008), “Enough of this Educational Apartheid”.)

The Irrelevant Past argument \*begs the question: if the proposal would change things around from how they were in the past, it is \*self-evidently a good thing.

Here is the scientist-philosopher Mary Warnock being sympathetic with the unfortunates who are so stuck in the past that they are opposed to \*genetically-modified crops:

[For] many confused and vaguely frightened people, the new biotechnology seems to have opened up possibilities of changing the genes of plants and animals in a way which nature, or God as the Creator, never intended. ... [And now] the argument has moved on [to] the myth of an unnatural creature being formed in the laboratory whose growth and behaviour could not be controlled. It was upon such fears that Mary Shelley played, as long ago as 1818, in her story of Frankenstein.

Oh dear. Perhaps we should learn from the future?

### *Availability.*

It's tough to get right. “The harder I work, the luckier I get”. It was Thomas Jefferson who started the stream of variations on that theme. He should have added, “The harder I work on one thing, the unluckier I get on all the other commitments I haven't had time for”.

See also: \*Feedback, \*Systems Thinking

**Wolf, The.** The fallacy that, since previous warnings of a problem have been wrong, or premature, or misunderstood, they must be wrong now.

One of Aesop's Fables is the story of the boy whose job was to look after the sheep but, having a nervous disposition, he was forever crying "wolf" when no wolf was there. One day the wolf really did come, and he cried "wolf" again, but nobody believed him, and the wolf was able to dine off the sheep and the boy at leisure.

There are two morals to the story. The first is: avoid giving false alarms. The second is: in the end, the wolf came, so do not be misled by previous false alarms into thinking that the latest alarm is false, too. Of these two morals, the second one is more significant. Believing false alarms wastes time, but it can lead to some helpful advice for apprentice shepherds; disbelieving all alarms can lead to a local lad being eaten, for starters.

We have an example of the fallacy of the wolf in the case of supplies of oil. A century or so ago, there were some false alarms about how little oil remained; the art of forecasting oil supplies earned a bad reputation. However, estimates of the quantity remaining in the world, and of the turning-point (the "peak") at which oil production would start to decline, steadily improved and, in the 1970s, estimates of the accessible and liquid oil which had been in place at the start of the industrial era settled at, or around, 2000 billion barrels, and that estimate has held. Analysts have also pointed to the regrettable consequences of a breakdown in oil supplies on a global market which has neglected to make any serious preparation. Here was a wolf that gave more than forty years notice of its arrival, and has been thoughtfully issuing reminders ever since. (For detail on recent studies, see \*Energy Prospects).

It is, however, the sceptics that tend to carry the day. "There is always a series of geologists who are concerned about imminent depletion of world supplies", BP's chief economist, Peter Davis, reassured a House of Lords Select Committee on Energy Supply in 2001. "They have been wrong for 100 years and I would be confident they will be wrong in the future".

So that's all right then: the anguished warnings are nothing more than that new kid trying to draw attention to himself. Aesop might be tempted to revise his fable slightly. Here we have the apprentice shepherd growing mature and experienced in the job. He has been giving precise fixes of the wolf's approach for as long as anyone can remember. He is specific and credible about the action that must be taken to save the village. And still he is disbelieved.