

Home & Contact

Curriculum Vitae

Research

Computer arithmetic

Parallel processing

Fault tolerance

Broader research

Research history

List of publications

Teaching

ECE1 Freshman sem

ECE154 Comp arch

ECE252B Comp arith

ECE252C Adv dig des

ECE254B Par proc

ECE257A Fault toler

Student supervision

Math + Fun!

Textbooks

Computer arithmetic

Parallel processing

Dependable comp

Comp architecture

Other books

Service

Professional activities

Academic service

Community service

Industrial consulting

Files & Documents

Useful Links

Personal

Blog & books

Behrooz Parhami's Blog & Books Page

Page last updated on 2014 December 31

This page was created in March 2009 as an outgrowth of the section entitled "Books Read or Heard" in my personal page. The rapid expansion of the list of books warranted devoting a separate page to it. Given that the book introductions and reviews constituted a form of personal blog, I decided to title this page "Blog & Books," to also allow discussion of interesting topics unrelated to books from time to time. Lately, non-book items (such as political news, tech news, puzzles, oddities, trivia, humor, art, and music) have formed the vast majority of the entries.

Entries in each section appear in reverse chronological order.

Blog entries for 2014

[Archived blogs for 2012-13](#)

[Archived blogs up to 2011](#)

Blog Entries for 2014

2014/12/31 (Wed.): Here are nine items of potential interest to close the year.

(1) Freedom of the press worldwide in 2014: As assessed by Reporters Without Borders.

(2) Quote of the day: "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." ~ George Bernard Shaw

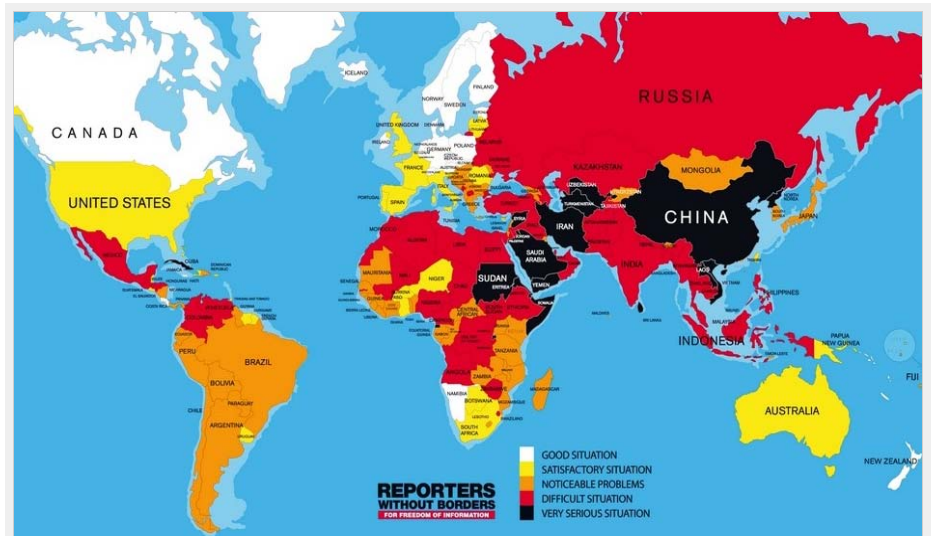
(3) The last four death-row inmates in Maryland will get their sentences reduced to life: Outgoing Governor Martin O'Malley has announced plans to [commute the sentences](#) before leaving office.

(4) Snow in Southern California: We never have a white Christmas in our neck of the woods, but [some snow](#) did arrive in SoCal mountain areas to spice up our New-Year celebrations.

(5) Beachy Head Lighthouse in East Sussex, England. [[Photo](#)]

(6) Spacecraft to become first to orbit two unexplored alien worlds: After spending over a year orbiting protoplanet Vesta (which has shown signs of water), NASA's [Dawn space probe](#) is now heading for its March 6, 2015, rendezvous with dwarf planet Ceres.

(7) How the Himalayas were formed: Several landmasses of the [ancient continent of Pangaea](#) separated from it, moving, over many millions of years, to where we know today as the Americas, Antarctica, Australia, and India. As the northward-moving Indian landmass collided with the much larger Eurasia and pushed into it, the ground had nowhere to go but up, which created all of the world's peaks exceeding 8000m in elevation and some 100 other mountains of height 7200m or more. This also explains the mountainous geography of Afghanistan. Interestingly, Iran, parts of Pakistan, and several other countries in the region were under water at the time, later emerging, with the Caspian Sea being the only remnant of the ocean that covered them.



Favorite quotations

Poetry

Pet peeve

Virtual retirement

CE Program

ECE Department

UCSB Engineering

UC Santa Barbara

[Animation]

(8) Great tips for using your time and enjoying the results: I resolve to remember [these 5 tips](#) as I journey through 2015. * Schedule things that make you happy. * Time perception is everything. * Optimize the time you have. * You are how you spend your time. * Big picture—You get ~30K days at birth.

(9) My top-10 list: The year's end always brings top ten lists of people (alive or dead), places, events, songs, books, and everything else under the sun. I am getting dizzy as the lists from various sources appear on my newsfeed and on every news and entertainment site I visit. [Time magazine](#) has published a few such lists on its Web site. But the most important top-10 list for each person is the list of things for which s/he is grateful. Here is mine, as I move into 2015: My health; My children; My extended family; My friends; My teachers over the years; My students (current and past); My adopted country; My profession; My job; My home.

2014/12/30 (Tue.): Here are two items of potential interest on culture and literary history.

(1) In defense of Golshifteh Farahani: This is the second time that the appearance of a nude photo of the Iranian-born actress Golshifteh Farahani has caused a furor in the Iranian community, including among those who have lived in diaspora for decades. There are opinions on both sides of the issue (personal freedom vs. dishonoring the Iranian culture), although those who scold the actress vastly outnumber her supporters. Several commentators have pointed out that Iranians tend to politicize every issue, in part to compensate for the lack of political and personal freedoms.



A prime example in support of the view just cited is the politicization, by both the people and the regime, of the recent death of pop singer Morteza Pashaei.

Not one person holding political power in Iran has been chosen freely by the people; many were appointed to their positions and some were "elected" by people as the least-bad among a set of horrible alternatives presented to them. Farahani's critics view her as a representative of the Iranian culture, the same culture that forced her to leave the country because she was stifled in her creative work and restricted in the kinds of films she could choose. The issues did not pertain to nudity, as no director/producer dares to touch that in Iran; they were mostly related to social ills, particularly about how women are treated by their families and the society at large. Now that Farahani has become a successful artist in exile, she is suddenly burdened with representing a culture that abhors strong, independent women like her.

Even setting aside the fact that culture both shapes and is shaped by people, thus making some taboo-breakers positive forces in transforming the culture, it is unclear which aspect of the Iranian culture Farahani has supposedly dishonored. Is it the part of the current (archaic, Arab-influenced) culture that belittles women, punishes them, and even throws acid in their faces for the slightest deviation from government-sanctioned clothing? Is it the culture that denies civil rights, including education, to some religious minorities? Is it the culture that imprisons and tortures political dissidents, and goes as far as raping them, in state prisons? Is it the culture that keeps quiet when attorneys who dare to defend political dissidents and human-rights activists are themselves jailed and disbarred?

Farhani does not represent the Iranian culture any more than you or I do. We are each individuals living our lives by taking culture, personal values, aspirations, and opportunities into account. Our choices can be judged by our friends or others who are close to us, but they should not be viewed as templates for anyone.

[P.S.: I would have liked to include with my post the original magazine cover photo of Farahani (with no censorship) and be able to put the equal sign with no question mark at the center of the photo. In the final analysis, I decided that some readers may be offended by the nude photo. In fact, deeming photos of shirtless women offensive while putting photos of shirtless men everywhere, including in social-media posts that carry overt sexual connotations, is not unique to the Iranian culture, but that's a topic for a different discussion.]

(2) The (legal) campaign to prove Shakespeare didn't exist: Doubting the existence of the literary genius isn't new. This fascinating [Newsweek on-line article](#) sheds some light on the reasons for doubting his existence, based on a new book, *Shakespeare in Court*, which uses a mock-trial format to sift the evidence. A coalition is considering legal action against Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for all the money they have taken under false pretenses. "Not a single poem or letter or play has ever been found in his own hand. We have just six shaky signatures. His will mentions no books, plays or anything else to suggest the balding Stratford businessman was also a writer. His personality, love interests, movements are all a total mysery. The documents relating to his life are all of a legal nature. Nobody ever recognised Shakespeare as a writer during his lifetime and when he died, in 1616, no one seemed to notice. Not a single letter refers to the great author's passing at the time."

[P.S.: When I posted this story on Facebook, a well-informed reader commented at length that the claims are too bizarre to be worth a reply, as any reply may seem to legitimize them; "it's like debating with the people who think we didn't land on the moon," he wrote. Shakespeare's contemporaries did give credit to him, one rival going as far as to call him "a poet for our time and for all time." Shakespeare's writings are full of "howlers and mistakes that no great aristocrat would have made." Those mistakes are all in irrelevant facts and figures and thus do not undermine the brilliance of the work.]

2014/12/29 (Mon.): Here are eight items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "When the sun is shining, I can do anything; no mountain is too high, no trouble too difficult to overcome." ~ Wilma Rudolph
- (2) To launch a new ship: I had seen ships launched into water lengthwise, with the ceremonial champagne bottles broken on their sterns. This video shows ships launched sideways. **This approach**, admittedly more space-efficient, is also nerve-wracking.
- (3) Yanni concert piece: With some wonderful solo performances. [**3-minute video**]
- (4) Pope Francis weighs in on climate change: Vatican conservatives and climate-change deniers are not pleased with the Pope's declaration that **his mission in 2015** will be to take on climate change.
- (5) Beautiful smiles, in the face of poverty and dearth of resources in Kashmir, India. [**Photo**]
- (6) Today's world is safer, more peaceful, and more democratic than ever before: Bill Gates has made a Facebook post that begins "The world isn't falling apart," in which he quotes Bill Clinton as saying, "Follow the trend line, not the headline" and provides a link to an **excellent article** by Steven Pinker and Andrew Mack. The article contains several trend charts and accompanying arguments about why things are improving and why we don't hear about all the improvements in news headlines. Yes, we have "ISIS, Crimea, Donetsk, Gaza, Burma, Ebola, school shootings, campus rapes, wife-beating athletes, lethal cops," but the world has never been better, no matter what yardstick you use.
- (7) Goleta's Camino Real Marketplace: As I was sipping coffee, soaking up the sun, and reading a book at one of the outdoor tables of our local Starbucks this afternoon, it occurred to me that the big shopping center, opened 15 years ago over some local opposition, has become a valuable asset to our community. Other than turning into a meeting place and a de facto community center for informal gatherings, dining, art shows, local street musicians, cinemas, and twice-a-week farmers market, it provides access to some convenient shops (for me, Costco and Home Depot are life savers). Being 40 minutes away on foot, it also serves as a walking destination for me. All in all, a worthy addition to the city of Goleta!
- (8) Final thought for the day: "Hate: it has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has not solved one yet." ~ Maya Angelou

2014/12/28 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) My day spent organizing the garage: The process I describe in this post may be helpful to others, so here it is. My garage had gradually become a mess as we retained items of sentimental value upon my ex-wife's passing and later simplified the interior of the house during a recarpeting project.



As it became difficult to access needed items or even walk in the garage, something had to be done. Like any big project, the clean-up and reorganization looked daunting, making it extremely difficult to get started. Finally, I decided to attack the problem in two phases: First I would organize and box everything (while discarding nothing) and then I would take my time going through the items box by box to decide what to keep, donate, or trash. It is the difficulty of the latter decisions that slows things down if the task is attempted in a single step. Deciding which school papers, artwork, and other memorabilia to keep is an inherently slow process that impedes progress and kills motivation. I had saved a large number of Costco water-jug boxes over the past couple of months, which made it easy to neatly stack and label the boxed items. Phase 1 is now complete!

- (2) This gallery of the Sony World Photography Award Competition contains **24 stunning photos**, including one showing a winding **mountain road at dusk**.
- (3) DaGamba's acoustic performance of **"Immigrant Song"** (check out this unusual band on YouTube for some very interesting music).
- (4) A beautiful piece of **Gilaki folk music**, from southwestern Caspian Sea region.
- (5) Iran's beautiful nature: A cabin in the **Masouleh Forest**, and part of the nature of **Kermanshah Province**.
- (6) Obama deemed one of the most successful US presidents: Okay, I am setting myself up for some

unpleasant comments and conversations, but I do agree with [Paul Krugman's assessment](#). While acknowledging President Obama's low approval rating, Krugman classifies his bashers as being of three types: the right, which has never stopped characterizing him as Muslim, atheist, Marxist, and Kenyan; the left, which views him as a counterfeit, who posed as a progressive; and the mainstream media pundits and talking heads that are on an endless loop of calling his administration rudderless, stalled, or even failed.

2014/12/27 (Sat.): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It has become one of the basic laws of the digital universe that data tend to flow from private to public. The same way nature abhors a vacuum, the Internet abhors a secret." ~ Lev Grossman, writing in *Time* magazine (double issue of December 29, 2014, and January 5, 2015), on why the Sony hack isn't surprising at all

(2) To watch or not to watch "The Interview": People are already arguing on all sides of this question about the comedy that lampoons North Korea's Kim Jong Un; and Sony is laughing all the way to the bank. Here are some of the opinions I have seen in recent days.

- Watching the film is a sign of patriotism and commitment to free speech.
- Watching the film benefits North Korea by making it and its leader seem more important than they are.
- North Korea wants you to consider the film an insult against its leader; watching the film confirms their view.
- Do you really want to enrich a Japanese multinational that cares nothing about art and artists?
- You are not exercising free choice if you go see the film, just because someone said you shouldn't.

(3) Yalda Night in Tehran: Street [scenes and interviews](#) (in Persian).

(4) Ray Kurzweil rebuffs Stephen Hawking: In a commentary published in *Time* magazine (double issue of December 29, 2014, and January 5, 2015), the man who formulated the notion of "Singularity," and recent author of the NYT best-seller *How to Create a Mind*, claims that perfecting artificial intelligence does not necessarily spell the end of the human race, as the Nobel Laureate physicist and other modern-day thinkers have warned. He believes that humans are fully capable of thwarting a takeover by intelligent, self-preserving machines through adjustments in governance and social institutions.

(5) Some important anniversaries coming up in 2015: 5th anniversary of the US Supreme Court's Citizens United decision; 10th anniversary of the first YouTube video post; 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s first march from Selma (also, of the release of the quintessential family film "The Sound of Music"); 150th anniversary of the end of the US Civil War.

(6) For Jazz and solo-piano enthusiasts: Here is a [3-hour playlist](#) for extended enjoyment.

(7) Our beloved English language: The words "pony" and "bologna" rhyme, while "through" and "rough" don't.

(8) Commemorating the annual ACM International Collegiate Programming Contests in Iran: Three-minute combination [video/slide-show](#), put together by Sharif University of Technology students of Computer Engineering. It's nice to see young Iranians both engaged in academic activities and feeling happy about it. Hoping that the music accompanying the slide show doesn't get them in trouble! Also, hats off to their mentors for creating such learning opportunities for them!

(9) Final thought for the day: "It is fine seasoning for joy to think of those we love." ~ Moliere

2014/12/26 (Fri.): An essay on the economics of personal health decisions:

I recently read, and reviewed, a refresher book on microeconomics (*Microeconomics: A Very Short Introduction*; see my blog entry for 2014/10/08). While reading the part that explains "opportunity cost," it occurred to me that the notion is applicable to many areas of our personal lives, including healthcare.

In way of definition, opportunity cost refers to the the loss of potential gains from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen. Let me explain by looking first at the example of smoking. A person pondering the decision to quit, might make the following lists of gains and losses.

Gains: a few extra years of life expectancy; better health during the living years; saving the direct and indirect costs of cigarettes

Losses: the pleasures and possible soothing effects of smoking

Based on these lists, for most people the decision to quit is a no-brainer; more so for lower-income individuals.

Now, let me consider a more difficult case: healthy eating.

Gains: a few extra years of life expectancy; better health and fitness

Losses: added costs of healthy eating; extra food preparation time (at least until habits change); missing one's favorite foods

The decision isn't as clear-cut here, with each person assigning different weights (pun intended!) to the losses. My final example has to do with getting enough sleep, and I will do the analysis in greater detail here, as an instructive example. Please take the figures with a grain of salt (not too much though, as it may be detrimental to your health; LOL), as they are meant for illustration only.



I read an article a few weeks ago that expounded on the importance of getting adequate sleep each night, because sleeping allows our bones, muscles, and skin to repair wear and tear, and our brain to get rid of debris (garbage) generated as a result of energy-intensive neural activity during waking hours. This is all good, and I have no problem with it. But getting adequate sleep has an opportunity cost that must be factored in. Here is the equation for sleep and leisure time for a typical working adult:

24 hours in a day – 8 hours of work – 1 hour of commute – 3 hours of chores = 12 hours of sleep and leisure
So I can double my free "pleasure" time from 3 hours to 6 hours if I sleep for 6 hours instead of 9. Assuming that I live another 20 years with 6 hours of sleep, I can get 40 years worth of pleasure compared with what I would get with 9 hours of sleep. Will getting 9 hours of sleep actually add 20 years to my life expectancy? Even if it does, will the last 20 years be equally enjoyable as the first 20?

As I wrote before, you can take issue with the numbers I have used for the example above, but please focus on the gist of the argument, that is, the wisdom of trading time at a younger age for time later in life. Focus on a 50-year-old, say, and compare the quality of life from 50 to 70 versus from 70 to 90 (assuming survival to 90). One caveat: If your work, or part of it, is also your pleasure, then the analysis above becomes invalid and must be adjusted accordingly.

These ideas have been in the back of my mind for many years, but brushing up on my knowledge of economics allowed me to formulate them in the manner above.

2014/12/25 (Thu.): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "[The idea of women's equal participation in society is] negative, primitive, and childish." – Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran (Source: Tehran Radio, July 1997)
- (2) The Four Corners Monument: This [granite and brass monument](#) marks the only place in the US where you can be [in four different states](#) at the same time (Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah).
- (3) Listening to a wonderful street musician. As I took a breather during yesterday's neighborhood walk on a gorgeous winter day, I heard a street musician at Goleta's Camino Real Marketplace perform [this song](#). Here is [another one](#) of his pieces.
- (4) Twin astronaut brothers: Scott and Mark Kelly will help NASA study the challenges of long-term space travel. One will spend a year in space; the other will stay on Earth, while scientists study them both. [Source: *Time* magazine, double issue of December 29, 2014, and January 5, 2015.]
- (5) Deaths due to car accidents and firearms compared: Cars still kill more people, but firearm deaths are catching up quickly. The ratio of car deaths to firearm deaths, which was a tad over 3-to-1 in 1950, is about even now. For other interesting stats and charts, see [this article](#).
- (6) Yesterday, someone posted the following Bill Cosby quote: "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody." I was tempted to comment: "Yes, especially if you try to please them by force!" However, since I did not know the person who posted the quote, I refrained from commenting.
- (7) The Armenian Jazz Band performs Christmas music and more: The final piece of Part 1, beginning at minute 32, is wonderful. [[Part 1: 37 minutes](#)] [[Part 2: 54 minutes](#)]
- (8) A thoughtful analysis of the inherent contradictions of Iran's Islamic regime: [This article](#), in Persian, points out the inconsistencies in Supreme Leader Ali Kamenei's statements, containing the claim that non-Muslims and even non-believers can enjoy equal civil rights under a 'democratic' Islamic regime, while attributing any opposition to the rule of the clerics to foreign powers and their spies. To see the contradiction, one needs to look no further than the fates of previous regime leaders (such as Mousavi and Karroubi), who dared to criticize the powers that be.
- (9) Final thought for the day: "Things don't have to change the world to be important." ~ Steve Jobs

2014/12/24 (Wed.): Here are nine items of potential interest.

- (1) On this Christmas Eve, I wish everyone a joyous holiday season and a bright new year!
- (2) Andre Rieu's traditional [concert for Christmas](#).
- (3) Quote of the day: "When young Baha'is are not allowed to study or enroll in school, it's a crime." ~ Actor Rainn Wilson, on the plight of Baha'is in Iran"
- (4) The puzzle of cold medications: The [scores of cold remedies](#) on drugstore shelves all use combinations of five basic ingredients, and each ingredient or combination is much cheaper and equally effective in generic form. The five ingredients are "a decongestant (usually phenylephrine), a cough suppressant (usually dextromethorphan), a pain/fever reducer (usually acetaminophen), plus or minus an expectorant (usually guaifenesin), and something that will put you to sleep (usually diphenhydramine)."
- (5) The North Korea hacking saga continues: There are stories about North Korea's minimal Internet connections (available only to the government elites) having gone down for an extended period of time, fueling



speculations that the US retaliation has begun. Also circulating in cyberspace are claims (conspiracy theories) that there was no hacking at Sony and that the entire account may have been a publicity stunt.

(6) Defector plans to distribute "The Interview" in North Korea: Park Sang Hak **has been launching balloons**, carrying information on the country's labor camps and other atrocities, into North Korea. His goal is to challenge the image that North Korea presents to its citizens via its sole government-run TV channel, military parades, and the like. The defector plans to include copies of the controversial film as soon as it becomes available on DVD.

(7) There are many public service announcements about the dangers of texting while driving, but **this one** is one of the most effective.

(8) Remote-control car induces **fear and curiosity** in cattle: Applications in roundup, perhaps?

(9) Device that helps one **put on or take off socks**: I don't know how practical this is, but decided to share, as it may be helpful to some people with physical limitations.

2014/12/23 (Tue.): Here are nine items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "A rereading of [Agatha] Christie's 66 detective novels reveals that almost all stand the test of time." ~ Tina Jordan, in *Entertainment Weekly*, double issue of December 26, 2014, and January 2, 2015

(2) Milestone birthdays of celebrities in December 2014 and January 2015: Turning 50 is the gorgeous Diane Lane; turning 60 are Chris Evert, Annie Lennox, and Denzel Washington; turning 70 are Rod Stewart and Tom Seleck; turning 80 is Judi Dench. [Info from *AARP Magazine*, issue of December 2014.]

(3) Extreme mountain biking: Watching this isn't for the fainthearted. [[Video](#)]

(4) The "plane people" at Gander, Newfoundland: This is a **true story about 9/11**; not about terror or terrorism, but about friendship and hospitality. Some much needed good news in a dark and cruel world! (I have confirmed the truth of this story via Snopes.com)

(5) Best-film Oscar contenders: According to *Entertainment Weekly*, double issue of December 26, 2014, and January 2, 2015, here are a dozen great films to see over the next couple of months.

Sure things (5 films): *The Imitation Game*, *Birdman*, *Selma*, *Boyhood*, *The Theory of Everything*

Serious threats (4 films): *Foxcatcher*, *Unbroken*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Gone Girl*

Potential spoilers (3 films): *Whiplash*, *Wild*, *American Sniper*

(6) Remembering Morteza Ahmadi: The BBC staff has fun during Norooz celebration with the **rhythmic singing** of Morteza Ahmadi, an Iranian artist who passed away on Sunday 2014/12/21 at age 90.

(7) Joe Cocker dead at 70: He sang some of the most penetrating ballads with his raspy voice. Here is an album containing 23 of his **greatest hits**.

(8) Machine Gun America: This is the name of a newly opened theme park in Orlando, Florida, home of Disney World. The promotional blurb on the park's Web site reads, in part: "Fire live rounds using fully-automatic machine guns and legendary firearms for an unparalleled rush of excitement and the ultimate shooting experience." Each time I think that we are taking small steps in combatting our country's gun culture, there is a huge setback. Shoot me!

(9) The Pope's unexpected **Christmas greeting**: He took the opportunity at the presence of Catholic bigwigs to slam them for opulent lifestyles and to point out the need to live what they preach.

2014/12/22 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) By calling on 8 women and no men at a press conference, President Obama **makes a statement** about equality and women's rights.

(2) Political cronyism at its worst: Former Iranian Minister of Science and Higher Education answers questions about Ahmadinejad's pushing through the **approval of Iranian University** during the last days of his tenure as President, without input from the ministry in charge of such permits. He claims that the permit was issued through normal channels, but his incoherent responses and body language betray him.

(3) **Hyperloop ground transport system** that moves faster than passenger jets is coming within a decade, according to its developers.

(4) Reduction of highway deaths: Introduction of automobile safety features and advances in highway design have led to sharply reduced death toll in car accidents. Engineers who have made our highways safer often do not get their due credit. This **AP report** credits better highway engineering for an expected 7-decade-low road fatalities in Wisconsin.

(5) Golshifteh Farahani in the spotlight: She appears in two major motion pictures now showing around the world. In director Ridley Scott's "Exodus: Gods and Kings," Farahani **plays Nefertari**, the wife of Rameses. In director/producer Jon Stewart's "Rosewater," she plays Maryam, ghost of an older sister of the film's protagonist (Iranian-Canadian journalist Maziar Bahari), herself imprisoned by the Islamic Republic, who appears to him during his ordeal.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Native American Council considers offering amnesty to an estimated 240 million undocumented whites." ~ Humorous immigration reform news circulating in cyberspace

2014/12/21 (Sun.): Here are nine photos and video clips of potential interest.

- (1) When thinking outside the box can put you in the box.
- (2) The father who dreamt of having two sons. [Photo]
- (3) **Falak-ol-Aflak castle** in Khorramabad, the capital city of Iran's Lorestan province.



- (4) It's never too early to learn to **play music**: And I hope, for my sake, never too late!
- (5) Holiday **music and cheer** at Goleta's shopping center (Camino Real Marketplace).
- (6) South Africa's Sterling EQ electric quartet plays "Theme from Caravans." [Video]
- (7) Subjects in a painting come to life. [Video]
- (8) Pendulums of different lengths create wonderful **wave patterns**, as they swing.
- (9) An old **video clip** of Meryl Streep, Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn, Cher, Olivia Newton John, and Lily Tomlin singing "What a Wonderful World."

2014/12/20 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Celebrating **Yalda Night**: The Wikipedia entry for Yalda reads, in part: "The longest and darkest night of the year is a time when friends and family gather together to eat, drink and read poetry (especially Hafez) until well after midnight. Fruits and nuts are eaten and pomegranates and watermelons are particularly significant. The red color in these fruits symbolizes the crimson hues of dawn and glow of life." Just as the Iranian Yalda Night is the celebration of darkness losing its grip and being replaced, over the next few months, by more daylight, the Jewish festival of Hanukkah commemorates light overcoming darkness.

(2) Hanukkah music: Street performance of **music and dance**, and **Six13 having fun** to the tune of Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off."

(3) Instagram deletes **millions of fake accounts**: These accounts were purchased en masse to inflate some users' follower counts. "The rapper Mase woke up to find his 1.6 million followers had dwindled to 100,000, prompting him to delete his [Instagram] account for good."

(4) Sony changes its mind about not releasing "The Interview": After President Obama said that Sony made a mistake in bowing to pressure, and in view of other criticisms of its decision to pull the film, the media company released a statement that read, in part, "[We are] actively surveying alternatives to enable us to release the movie on a different platform." If I were in charge of Sony, I would hire smugglers in northeast China to distribute free copies of the film's DVDs (with Korean subtitles) along with food and other items routinely smuggled from China to North Korea.

[Addendum of Sunday 12/21: In related news, George Clooney **blasts Sony** and Hollywood bigwigs for hiding in fear of North Korea. This guy claims that he has no political ambitions, but that may change. He has 50% of the votes in the bag already!]

(5) Iranian politics: In this **14-minute monologue**, Mohammad Nourizad addresses Ayatollah Khamenei, warning him of the dangers of being isolated from the Iranian people and listening only to power-hungry yes-men around him.

(6) Multistate memristors: Today's computer systems are predominantly binary by virtue of the accident of 2-state logic and memory technology having been perfected when the demands of digital computing emerged. Even then, serious consideration was given to 3-state devices and ternary arithmetic in the 1940s, but binary logic prevailed in the end.

In recent years, implementing decimal arithmetic circuits (using binary encoding, of course) has triggered much research, given its benefits of not needing decimal-to-binary or binary-to-decimal conversion for input/output, and, thus, not incurring any conversion time penalty or inaccuracy. Given that the dollar amount 12.30, say, has no exact binary representation, financial applications would be one of the main beneficiaries of exact decimal arithmetic in computers.

Multivalued logic has been one of the active areas of science/technology studies, but the results have not yet found many applications. Now, with memristors (resistors that exhibit memory) already showing the ability to store one of 6 different values easily and economically, direct decimal data storage and processing via extension of this ability appears within reach.

Six-state memristor technology is the subject of a news story in *IEEE Spectrum* (December 2014, p. 18).

2014/12/19 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Iran honors Jewish heroes: Flanked by an Iranian flag and a menorah, officials inaugurated **a memorial** for Jewish soldiers who fought and died in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

[In case you are puzzled about this development: The Islamic regime is full of contradictions. It seems to be engaging in a public relations campaign to deflect attention from serious human rights abuses, particularly against the Baha'is. Furthermore, the regime benefits from reminding people of the Iran-Iraq war, which at least in its early years, had popular support.]

(2) Persons of the Year: *Time* magazine selected the Ebola fighters as its 2014 Persons of the Year. Here are the other four candidates in the short list.

- The Activists: Ferguson Protesters
- The Imperialist: Vladimir Putin
- The Opportunist: Masoud Barzani (Kurdish Leader)
- The Capitalist: Jack Ma (Alibaba Founder)

(3) Apologists for Islamic extremism are back at work: They are claiming that the "cartoon character" Sheik Man Haron Monis, previously known as Ayatollah Manteghi Boroujerdi (the gunman in the Sydney hostage siege, which led to his death along with two of the hostages), is a creation of **Western propaganda** against Iran.

(4) A worm's neurons can guide a robot: Scientists have mapped all the 302 neurons under the transparent skin of a simple worm (*C. elegans*), simulated them, and implanted the result into a Lego Mindstorms EV3 robot. The **augmented robot** acted a lot like the worm. For example, stimulating its nose made it stop moving, while touching a food sensor made it move forward.

(5) An engineer/physicist's book on Iran: Nigel Coulthard's book about Iran (*Iran: Hussein's Dilemma*) is unique in the sense of it having been written not by a historian, orientalist, or diplomat, but by an electrical engineer, with a PhD in physics. The author is married to an Iranian woman and has lived in Iran over four different decades, beginning with the final decade of Shah's rule. The book is intended for those foreigners who want to gain an understanding of Iran and Iranians, as well as those who want to do business or run a project in the country. [The book is on my to-read list.]

(6) On storing new and used batteries: It is obvious to anyone with a minimal knowledge of physics that if the two terminals of a battery are shorted, current will flow. If you store batteries in a haphazard way in a drawer or bag, shorts may occur. This leads to the relatively minor inconvenience of facing drained batteries when you need them. However, there is also a much more serious side effect, particularly in the case of boxy 9-volt batteries that have their positive and negative terminals near each other and a voltage that is 6 times that of conventional 1.5-volt batteries. If conducting material happen to touch both terminals, high current will flow, leading to fire in the material (if it is flammable) or inside the battery (due to overheating). In short (pun intended!), store batteries so that their terminals cannot become shorted together to other batteries. I personally store batteries upright, with provisions to ensure that they won't topple. **This video** (a bit sensationalized, but sound otherwise) depicts some of the dangers.

2014/12/18 (Thu.): Warren, Elizabeth, *A Fighting Chance*, unabridged audiobook on 9 CDs, read by the author, Macmillan Audio, 2014.

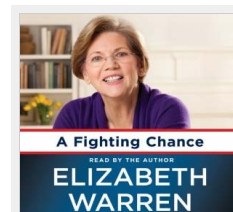
This book chronicles the life of Elizabeth Ann Warren, from her days as the youngest child of a struggling working-class family in Oklahoma to becoming a US Senator from Massachusetts. Along the way, she taught bankruptcy law at Harvard and several other law schools and helped the Obama administration set up the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau as part of regulatory reforms following the 2008 economic meltdown.

The new agency has contributed to giving bank customers a chance to understand the complexities of loans and other financial instruments and to avoid many of the traps previously hidden in fine print (hence the book's title). The playing field isn't quite even yet, but much progress has been made toward transparency, thanks, in no small part, to Warren's efforts.

Even though the aforementioned efforts made Warren an ideal candidate to head the new agency, President Obama did not nominate her for the position, because he and his advisors saw virtually no chance of her being confirmed by the US Senate. The main reason for this absurdity is the strength of the banking industry's lobby and Warren's multiple confrontations with the big banks, which, in her opinion, got away unscathed, with their executives never held accountable for major misdeeds (the execs, in fact, enriched themselves with exorbitant bonuses, despite the failures that brought the US economy to its knees).

The transition from fundraising for her daughter's brownie troops to raising a record \$42M for her Senate campaign wasn't easy for Warren. Her academic accomplishments at some of the most prestigious universities are awe-inspiring, given her humble beginnings. Her story of going from an activist outsider, who had to fight hard to get face time with politicians, to a Washington insider is even more fascinating.

Warren's meteoric rise, likeability, and compelling personal story, reflected in this book and previous writings, have created a movement to make her a presidential candidate in 2016. Whether this will materialize will depend on the Democratic Party's internal politics and other considerations. She is likely to play a major role in the next Democratic administration, if not as President then as a cabinet member or some other high-level



official.

I enjoyed listening to this audiobook and recommend it to everyone for its inspirational narrative and clear exposition of what ails the US financial system.

[P.S.: Here is a [10-minute video clip](#) of Senator Elizabeth Warren speaking against the mid-December 2014 federal spending bill for its provisions that benefit Wall Street and big banks.]

2014/12/17 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Today is the first day of Hanukkah: Best wishes to all readers who observe the Jewish festival!
- (2) Elizabeth Warren, on the frightening power of big banks: A heartwarming [10-minute video clip](#) of the Massachusetts Senator speaking against the mid-December 2014 federal spending bill for its provisions that benefit Wall Street and big banks. [I will review Warren's book, *A Fighting Chance*, shortly.]
- (3) Full diplomatic relations to resume between [Cuba and the US](#): This is the result of 18 months of secret talks, brokered largely by Canada and encouraged by Pope Francis, who hosted a final meeting in Vatican.
- (4) A rare defeat for the gun lobby: The UK-born vice admiral Dr. Vivek Murthy, a critic of gun violence as a threat to public health, was confirmed by the US Senate as the next Surgeon General.
- (5) Nine staff members and 132 children killed in [Taliban attack on school](#): Pakistani military has launched airstrikes against Taliban positions in its remote Khyber border region in retaliation for the Peshawar attack.
- (6) Police brutality and kindness: These days, the US media is filled with videos showing police brutality. While police misconduct does occur, we also have misconduct among physicians, accountants, university professors, and any other profession. How many surgeons, taxi drivers, or babysitters would submit to wearing a body-cam that records their every move? If we were to record videos around people in any profession, no group would come out totally clean. Here is [a video](#) showing the kind side of police officers and a very generous philanthropist who supplied them with cash to distribute as secret Santas.

2014/12/16 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Science captured by mathematical beauty: The December 2014 issue of *IEEE Spectrum* contains a feature article discussing Maxwell's Equations, which form the heart of our unified understanding of electricity, magnetism, light, and radiation. The long road to discovering these four concise equations, shown in the image, was anything but smooth. Many individuals contributed to our journey along that road.

[Elaboration added on 2014/12/17: Maxwell built his contributions upon the works of Coulomb, Volta, Orsted, Ampere, and Faraday. His original version of the unifying laws entailed 20 equations, which were later condensed to 4 by Heaviside. Hertz added some experimental evidence. Einstein was instrumental in promoting and popularizing the term "Maxwell's Equations."]

- (2) Turkish women's dual lives: They are among the most modern and socially active women in the Middle East (in fact, they got the right to vote before women in many European countries), yet [they continue to suffer](#) from family restrictions, virginity tests, honor killings, and domestic violence.
- (3) Sydney [hostage crisis](#) ends: The gunman and two of the hostages died, with several others injured, during the police raid. The gunman, 50, who had a history of criminal activities, was an Iranian refugee who changed his name to Haron Monis, according to other news reports. He does not appear to have any links to organized terror groups. Even though the gunman used a black flag with Arabic symbols on it, the flag was different from that of ISIS/Daesh.
- (4) Philadelphia gunman kills ex-wife and 5 in-laws at 3 different sites: An [intense manhunt](#) is in progress to apprehend the gunman.
- (5) NASA emerges a winner as US Senate puts its stamp of approval on an [\\$18B budget](#): The space agency got all the funds it needs to develop a space capsule for transporting astronauts to the International Space Station by the end of 2017, plus a healthy level of support for its Orion crew capsule and Space Launch System heavy-lift rocket.
- (6) Engineer pleads guilty to defrauding USAID: The former CEO of NJ-based consulting firm Louis Berger Group pleaded guilty to long-term overbilling practices in connection with [reconstruction contracts](#) in Iraq and Afghanistan. His company had previously agreed to pay \$69M to resolve criminal and civil probes of its

Four Golden Rules

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{D} = \rho$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{E} = -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t}$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{H} = \frac{\partial \mathbf{D}}{\partial t} + \mathbf{J}$$

Today, the relationship between electricity and magnetism, along with the wave nature of light and electromagnetic radiation in general, is encoded in the four "Maxwell's equations" shown above. The equations can be written in different ways. Here, \mathbf{J} is the current density. \mathbf{E} and \mathbf{B} are the electric and magnetic fields, respectively. And there are two other fields, the displacement field \mathbf{D} and the magnetic field \mathbf{H} . These fields are related to \mathbf{E} and \mathbf{B} by constants that reflect the nature of the medium that the fields pass through (the values of these constants in vacuum can be combined to give the speed of light). The displacement field \mathbf{D} was one of Maxwell's key contributions, and the last equation describes how both current and changing electric fields can give rise to magnetic fields. The symbols at the beginning of each equation are differential operators. These compactly encode calculus that involves vectors, quantities that have a directionality and thus x , y , and z components. Maxwell's original formulation of his electromagnetic theory contained 20 equations.

activities.

2014/12/15 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind." ~ Maya Angelou, / *Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

(2) The Jews of Arabia: During the British rule over India and much of the Middle East, sizable Jewish populations lived in the Persian Gulf region, including Baghdad. **This article**, with many interesting historical tidbits, mentions a plan (obviously unsuccessful) to establish a Jewish state in Eastern Arabia. It also contains a link to a sound recording by the Jewish-Iraqi singer Sett Salima Pasha.

(3) To conspiracy theorists: [I made the following comments on a Facebook post of mine, as part of an extensive discussion. Here, I am offering them as a separate post for greater visibility, particularly since we, people of Iranian origins, are very fond of conspiracies of all kinds, especially by the British.]
One never knows the full truth behind any complex international situation, but clinging to conspiracy theory is unhelpful. There is no way to counter a claim of conspiracy by an all-powerful and invisible force. I have engaged in discussions such as this before and whenever I pointed to a hole in an argument or a gap in logic, I was told that these "imperfections" in the plan are deliberate and are planted to throw us off the truth track. I would rather think that there is some economic logic to the events, augmented with ample randomness, and, yes, some opportunism on the part of powers, large and small, to extract benefits from what happens beyond their control.

(4)

(5) Successful, rich pop stars are also prone to jealousy: But they turn the green-eyed monster into albums and cash. Here is a list from *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of December 19, 2014.
John Lennon, 1971, "Jealous Guy"; Queen, 1978, "Jealousy"; Jin Blossoms, 1992, "Hey Jealousy"; Natalie Merchant, 1995, "Jealousy"; RuPaul, 2009, "Jealous of My Boogie"; Beyonce, 2013, "Jealous"; Nick Jonas, 2014, "Jealous"; Chromeo, 2014, "Jealous (I Ain't With It)"

(6) A few interesting musical performances, to end today's posts.

Stairway to Heaven: Honoree Led Zeppelin is brought to tears by **Heart's cover** of his band's trademark song.
Hey There Khalilah: **Musical parody**, based on the Plain White T's song "Hey There Delilah."

Christmas in Hawaii: **"Mele Kalikamaka"**, performed by Gianni and Sarah.

Contemporary Persian music: **"Baa To-am"** ("I'm with You"), a composition by Majid Derakhshani.

2014/12/14 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It turns out that I wasn't supposed to spend my 20s frantically looking for a husband; I should have been building my career and enjoying my last gasp of freedom. I then spent my 30s ruminating on grievances accumulated in my 20s. ... This time around, I'd like to save time by figuring out the decade while I'm still in it." ~ Pamela Duckerman, 44, writing in the *New York Times*

(2) Iranian hackers attack computers at Sands Casino and affiliated Las Vegas properties: The sophisticated and **debilitating attack** is believed to be in retaliation for Sands CEO Adelson musing about nuking Iran.

(3) A major problem of humanity solved: According to Pope Francis, dogs CAN go to heaven! In case you are wondering, we don't need separate theological pronouncements for the 8.7 million or so other animal species. "Paradise is open to all of God's creatures," according to Pope Francis. If you are a dog owner, just make sure your beloved pet does not end up alone in heaven!

(4) Girls Who Code: This is the name of an organization aiming to enlist **one million students** in its clubs over the next decade. Women constitute only 12% of all computer science graduates, down from 37% in 1984.

(5) The Easter Island heads have bodies. **[Pictorial]**

(6) "Persistence is the key," and other lessons from interesting/unusual video clips:

Ducklings **conquer stairs** after many, many tries.

Catching piranhas in Brazil, **using only a piece of meat**.

Facebook presents **year in review** in 2 minutes, based on topics and events most discussed on Facebook.

Making real goldfish from Goldfish crackers: This **neat clip** is the brainchild of special-effects whiz Zach King.

Extreme weather: **Rare tornado** strikes south Los Angeles.

2014/12/13 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Albert Einstein, on racism in America: The so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls" of physics, a collection of Albert Einstein documents, **were released** over the past week. In a 1946 document titled "A Message to My Adopted Country," Einstein wrote: "There is ... a somber point in the social outlook of Americans. Their sense of equality and human dignity is mainly limited to men of white skins."

(2) The historical 7th-century village of Abyaneh: One of the last surviving villages built by Zoroastrians, when they fled into the mountains to escape forced conversion to Islam, Abyaneh "is a muddle of narrow and sloped

lanes, and crumbling mud-brick houses with lattice windows and fragile wooden balconies that cling to the slope." [This article](#) includes beautiful photos.

(3) US Congress suggests more funds for NASA than it had requested: In a rare reversal from cutting to boosting, NASA's Mars 2020 rover mission and the study of a possible mission to Jupiter's moon Europa, among other programs, will get more funds from a proposed \$18B budget (more than \$0.5B over administration's request) by the US Congress. [[Los Angeles Times story](#)]

(4) The largest known star in the universe: [VY Canis Majoris](#) (Red Hypergiant) has a diameter of about 2.8 billion kilometers and is located 4900 light years away from the Earth. It would reach as far as Saturn if placed where our Sun is. A typical jetliner would need 1100 years to circle it once.

(5) I see something in you, but I don't know what it is: This is the refrain of an [inspirational speech](#) by Dananjaya Hettiarachchi that won the 2014 first-place prize in a public speaking competition.

(6) A failing US President: I have to give it to my conservative friends. Everything is sinking under the current administration. Gas prices are the lowest in years. Unemployment rate is down. Interest rates are at record lows. The number of uninsured people continues to fall. And we are being deprived of large-scale wars. No wonder the President's approval rating is plummeting!

P.S.: I was perhaps too harsh in the preceding lines. Stock holders and corporate execs are gleeful that the market is reaching record highs and corporate profits are soaring. The dollar is up, too. Still, these don't change the fact that Obama is "the worst President ever"!

2014/12/12 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The wheelchair and the computer voice would fit the part." ~ Physicist Stephen Hawking, on why his ideal acting role would be a James Bond villain

(2) On-line shopping is making headway: *Time* magazine (issue of December 15, 2014) reports that Black Friday sales dropped by 11%, while Cyber Monday sales went up by 17%, compared with last year.

(3) Egypt's Arab Spring has fizzled: Only about 1000 people took to the streets when a court cleared Hosni Mubarak of all criminal charges, including issuing orders to kill the demonstrators during the uprising. [From *Time* magazine, issue of December 15, 2014.]

(4) Israel may have to pay Iran \$100M for a pre-Islamic-Revolution alliance: The two countries collaborated to provide oil to Israel and to export Iran's oil to Europe, without going through the Suez Canal. The alliance entailed [building a pipeline](#) from the Red Sea port of Eilat to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon.

(5) Discarded laptop batteries can provide energy to villagers: An [IBM study](#) has found that 75% of discarded laptop batteries have enough energy left to provide 4 hours of nightly LED lighting, for a full year.

(6) Iranian films that were never screened in Iran: Censorship is a fact of life in Iranian cinema. Producers and directors live with it by cutting scenes, modifying dialog, or simply waiting until criticisms die down or a change of people at the top leads to a screening permit that had eluded them before. [This article](#) lists a few films, mostly addressing poverty, social ills, and injustice, that are unlikely to ever gain the approval of the Ministry of Guidance censors. Among them are a film from 3.5 decades ago in which the female protagonists had inadequate hijab by today's standards, one that depicts a failed offensive during the 8-year Iran-Iraq war, a couple that depict suicide or illicit sexual relations, and one addressing the issue of women being banned from sports venues. Some of these films have won awards at international film festivals and a few have been marketed by smugglers who pocket all the illicit profits.

2014/12/11 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the Day: "Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts." ~ Aristotle

(2) Every day should be human rights day: But December 10th (yesterday) was officially designated by the UN to observe the state of human rights in the world and to reflect on problems. Meanwhile, earlier in the day, Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi received their Nobel Peace Prize in special ceremonies.

(3) *Time* magazine's Persons of the Year: [Ebola fighters](#) as a group have been chosen as the 2014 Persons of the Year honorees. Among those named, is [Dr. Pardis Sabeti](#), 38, the geneticist who sequenced the Ebola genome from the outbreak.

(4) Mark Zuckerberg's Plan to Get Every Human Online: This is the subtitle of a *Time* magazine [cover story](#), "Half the World Is Not Enough" (December 15, 2014, issue), about Facebook's ambitious expansion plans, after going from a dorm-room side project to a global service with 1.35B users and \$1.5B annual profit at the end of its first decade.

(5) Interview on the relationship between the Kurds and Iraq's central government: This Kurdish leader (identified as prime minister) speaks better Persian than most Iranian politicians. [[15-minute video](#)]

(6) Voice of America celebrates Rumi: This [60-minute "Ofogh" program](#) (December 10, 2014, edition; in Persian) covers Mowlavi's work and his influence on religion and arts in Iran. There are interesting tidbits

around minute 43 about the reasons for Abdolkarim Soroush's TV program on Mowlavi being discontinued on orders from Khomeini, even though he was a high-ranking official of the Islamic Republic.

2014/12/10 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Ready to celebrate Hanukkah, Yalda, Christmas, and New Year's: The Jewish, Persian, and Christian holidays are neatly lined up (12/17, 12/20, 12/25) and I am celebrating them in a minimalist way this year. Our large artificial Christmas tree and its many decorations will remain boxed in the garage for future use.

(2) Sony wasn't particularly negligent in protecting employee data: The **hacking attack** on the company's computers was undetectable by industry standard methods.



(3) The Ohio State marching band formations depict **Michael Jackson's moonwalking**.

(4) President Obama guest-hosts a "Colbert Report" segment: He **pokes fun at himself**, but certainly doesn't spare his opponents.

(5) ISIS publishes **Q&A pamphlet** about how to treat female slaves: Sexual intercourse with the women is allowed, as are beating and trading them. An escapee must be reprimanded to deter others from escaping.

(6) CIA and GOP continue to **insist that torture worked**: They sidestep moral issues altogether and do not address the findings that much of the info extracted from torture could have been obtained by other methods. The New York Times characterizes the just-released torture report as a **sweeping indictment of the CIA**.

2014/12/09 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Computationally Modeling Human Emotion: This is the title of a cover feature in the December 2014 issue of *Communications of the ACM*. Key insights from the article follow.

"Processes akin to emotion are required by any intelligent entity facing a dynamic, uncertain, and social environment."

"Psychological theories of emotion (such as appraisal theory) can serve as an architectural specification for machines that aim to recognize, model, and simulate human affect."

"Realizing psychological theories as working computational models advances science by forcing concreteness, revealing hidden assumptions, and creating dynamic artifacts that can be subject to empirical study."

(2) Cartoon of the day: **Price of bread skyrockets** in Iran.

(3) A few pretty **soccer goals**.

(4) Innocent little children **used for stealing**; so very sad!

(5) Ten things grocery stores won't tell you: Some of the more interesting items follow ([WSJ PDF](#)).

Over the past 25 years, grocery carts have doubled in size.

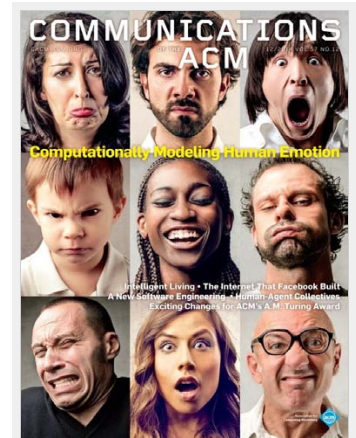
Their toilet seats are on average cleaner than their carts.

The average apple in some stores is 14 months old.

Many chains use sensors/cameras to track their customers.

The same item is priced differently in different store sections.

Misters cause you to pay more for some produce sold by weight.



2014/12/08 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The important work of moving the world forward does not wait to be done by perfect men." ~ Victorian author Mary Ann Evans, writing under the pen name George Eliot

(2) Talk about wind gusts! Those in **this video** turn a waterfall into a waterrise!

(3) Adele's wonderful concert performance of **"Rolling in the Deep"** (with sing-along and Persian subtitles).

(4) How to cope with waiting and uncertainty: Kate Sweeny, an associate professor of psychology at University of California, Riverside, has published the **results of her studies** on 50 law school graduates who were waiting for the results of the California bar exam in 2011. They found the rather unsurprising result that having an optimistic outlook helped people handle the waiting period better. The surprising part was that self-esteem did not help much with tempering anxiety during the waiting period.

(5) Lara Fabian sings **"Sari Gelin"** during her concert in Baku. [The song's title is Azeri for "Yellow/Blond Bride," which in Azeri myths refers to the Sun.]

(6) **Zionist Steals Lunch from Hungry Russian Lion**: This imaginary newspaper headline is part of a bitter joke that Jews in the old Soviet Union used to tell. The joke is about a Jew jumping into a zoo enclosure and saving a child who had fallen in. A reporter, who happened to witness the incident, interviewed the man and learned that he was a Jew. This joke has gained relevance in light of headlines after several recent terror attacks in Israel. One headline read "Israeli Police Shoot Man in East Jerusalem" (the man shot by police was the driver of a truck who drove into a crowd and was maneuvering his car to try to hit more people). Another headline about the same incident, with doubt-inducing quotes, read: "A Three Year Old Infant Died in a 'Terror' Attack." On a separate terror attack, a headline read: "Jerusalem Police Fatally Shoot 2 after Apparent Synagogue Attack." Here is another headline about the same incident: "4 Israelis, 2 Paletinians Dead in Jerusalem." [Abridged from an aish.com [article by Yvette Alt Miller](#).]

2014/12/07 (Sun.): Here are six musical items of potential interest.

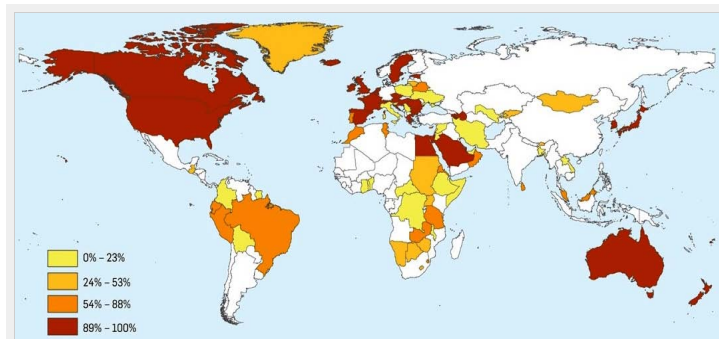
- (1) White people's hummus: **Musical parody** by an Arab-American and his mom.
- (2) Maryam Ghasemi, a friend of the late Morteza Pashaei and his clothes designer, **sings in his memory**.
- (3) Fusion Persian music: Tara Tiba performs the Persian version of "**The Autumn Leaves**" mixed with the chah-chah of traditional Persian style. A few other songs: Persian version of "**Fly Me to the Moon**" with her quintet; "**Segodar**" (folk music from northeastern Iran); "**Shah-e Man, Mah-e Man**" ("My King, My Moon")
- (4) Kurdish music from Iran: These video clips were sent to me by a dear friend and are representative of Kurdish ballads and dance music as played in Iran. The signer, Mehrdad Mousavi, performed these songs at a wedding. [[Clip 1](#)] [[Clip 2](#)] [[Clip 3](#)]
- (5) Kurdish music from outside Iran: Hejar Duhoki performs an adaptation of "**Ekmeli**" based on a folk song.
- (6) Dancing at a Kurdish wedding in the Dallas-Plano area, Texas. [[4-minute video](#)]

2014/12/06 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "If you kill the murderer, the quantity of murderers will not change." ~ Winston Churchill
- (2) NASA's **Orion test flight** was launched yesterday and it ended successfully by splashing back.
- (3) Holograms you can touch: Bristol University computer scientists have succeeded in making 3D holograms that you can touch and feel in mid-air. The illusion of a touchable 3D object is created by picking up focused ultrasound waves present in the air and condensing them to form a perceivable pressure difference. Make sure to watch the video clip embedded in [this article](#).
- (4) Nominees for FIFA's best goal of the year award for 2014 include (for the first time ever) a goal by a female soccer player. [See minute 2:10 in [this video](#)]
- (5) Sony Pictures brings in law enforcement: Revelations about the **Sony hacking incident** have caused new concerns among employees and management. The hackers have reportedly gained access to Social Security Numbers and salary data and used the collected info to threaten employees and their families. The prime suspect, North Korea, has denied any involvement, but the Sony Pictures film "The Interview," which lampoons the North Korean Leader Kim Jung-un, may have caused what is called a "revenge hacking."
- (6) Tonight's Fleetwood Mac concert: The "**On with the Show**" tour is FM's first tour (with an associated album, to come) after Christine McVie rejoined the band. McVie had quit FM in 1998 after three decades. Despite two shortcomings, I enjoyed the concert and its many familiar songs. One problem was the extreme saturated sound used, particularly in the concert's first half, that took away the rich rhythms and subtle melodies that are the band's trademarks. The second problem was certain rearrangements of old favorites that did not feel like improvements. In my opinion, Christine McVie's participation might have saved the concert, because she sounded as good as her earlier days with the band. McVie performed "**Songbird**" (her own composition) while playing the piano as the last encore song at this concert. It is perhaps my most favorite song of the band. The late Eva Cassidy's **cover of "Songbird"** is the only decent one I have heard. Here are a few more of the many Fleetwood Mac songs that I like: "**The Chain**"; "**Gold Dust Woman**"; "**Tusk**"

2014/12/05 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) The Internet haves and have-nots: This map shows the percentage of the population around the world covered by at least a 3G mobile network. [Image taken from: *Communications of the ACM*, issue of December 2014.]
- (2) Quote of the day: "The on-ramp might appear free but exiting takes a toll." ~ Subtitle for the article "The Internet that Facebook Built," by Michael L. Best,



Communications of the ACM, December 2014

(3) Google funds increasing Turing Award's cash prize to \$1M: Touted informally as the Nobel Prize for computer scientists and engineers, ACM's A. M. Turing Award has honored fundamental contributions to information technology since 1966. For 2013, Leslie Lamport was honored by the Award; the 2014 Award will be announced in early 2015. You can find a list of Turing Award winners, their citations, descriptions of their work, and, in some cases videos of interviews and lectures from this [Web page](#).

(4) Amazing talent for [mimicking animal sounds](#)?

(5) Be careful where you park your car: Have you ever seen [so many birds](#) emerging from a single tree?

(6) It is safe to assume that the people in [this photo](#) are not engineers and have never taken a course in strength of materials.

2014/12/04 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Two departmental colleagues retire: Professors Louise E. Moser and P. Michael Melliar-Smith will be retiring at the end of 2014, after 25 and 27 years of service to UCSB. The husband and wife, who specialize in networking and distributed systems, including pertinent software engineering and fault tolerance aspects, were both established researchers when they joined UCSB in the late 1980s, around the same time as I did. Yesterday, our department hosted a reception to celebrate their service.



Michael received a PhD in CS from University of Cambridge and has had a productive research career, with around 300 publications, 12 patents, and a host of honors, the most recent of which is the 2014 Jean-Claude Laprie Award in Dependable Computing. Louise received a PhD in mathematics from University of Wisconsin, Madison. She too has had a distinguished career with nearly 300 publications, a dozen patents, and several journal editorships. They will be missed!

(2) This photo is from Monday 12/01, when the Computer Engineering Group marked its last faculty meeting with the retiring couple, Michael Melliar-Smith and Louise Moser, present.



(3) Mars landing mission preparations kick off with Orion test: The unmanned capsule's test, slated for December 4, is seen as a first step to a manned Mars mission in the 2030s, preceded by landing on an asteroid by 2025. [[7-minute video](#)]

(4) California Democrats offer funding plan to prevent UC tuition hikes: [The plan](#) would not only wipe out the need for the provisional 5%-per-year hike over the next 5 years but also funds more classes and financial aid.

(5) ISIS leader's [wife and son arrested](#) in Lebanon: They were caught traveling across the Syrian border with fake IDs. DNA testing has confirmed the son's identity (US intelligence reportedly has al-Baghdadi's DNA from his 9-month imprisonment in Iraq, suggesting cooperation between US and Lebanese authorities). Al-Baghdadi is said to have three wives, two Iraqis and one Syrian.

(6) Space-Time vs. the Quantum: This was the title of today's Faculty Research Lecture (an honor bestowed upon one member of the UCSB faculty each year) by physicist Joseph Polchinski. Three concepts were developed over the years to explain various laws of nature. Special relativity explains things that move very fast. General relativity pertains to things that are massive. Quantum mechanics explains the behavior of things that are very small. Unification of these domains to derive the so-called "theory of everything" has been a long-time goal of physicists. Just as unification of electricity and magnetism led to a much better understanding of light, putting quantum mechanics and special relativity together enabled the discovery of antimatter. Unifying general relativity and quantum mechanics, however, has proven more difficult and has led to a host of conflicting opinions among leading physicists. The speaker discussed some of the progress toward unification made in recent years. Among other things, Polchinski addressed a paradox, discovered in 1975 by Stephen Hawking, suggesting that either general relativity or quantum mechanics must give way; in other words, the two theories appear to be irreconcilable in the vicinity of a black hole. Hawking changed his mind in 2004, but the paper in which he explained his reasons for the change of heart was understood by no one, according to the speaker. Recent thought experiments with black holes have led to some surprising discoveries that may hold the key to an eventual unification. These discoveries include black hole bits, the holographic principle, and Maldacena's duality. [Now I feel prepared to see the movie "Intergalactic"!]

2014/12/03 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Bubblemaster: Ana Yang takes you back to your childhood with her fun [bubbles show](#).

(2) Hold on to your shirt: Politicians and Wall-Street types aren't the only ones who want to take the shirt off your back. [[3-minute video](#)]

(3) The owner of [this bed](#) apparently can't get enough pizzas during his/her waking hours.

(4) The Iranian government is bent on destroying historic buildings: Multiple buildings and sites are threatened. One is the mansion built by Habibollah Saabet (a prominent pre-Islamic-Revolution Baha'i industrialist), that is slated to be replaced with a commercial complex. Another is the famous Qajar-era Eyn-al-Dowleh Building whose integrity is threatened by excavation for commercial development on its grounds. In the southern city of Shiraz, six historic residences were demolished overnight. At least one factory has been given the green light to build its plant in the vicinity of Pasargad, the burial place of Cyrus the Great. [From various news sources]

(5) Cheers to the in-betweeners: Yesterday, I was reading in sports news an article in which Kobe Bryant was praised for all the skills he exhibits at such an advanced age (for a basketballer). It was only a few years ago when Bryant was praised for his skills at a very young age. It occurred to me that in life, as in sports, we often limit our praise to the very young and the very old. Facebook is filled with videos of children uttering wise words or playing musical instruments, and of bent-over octogenarians pulling off impossible dance moves. I don't want to trivialize the beauty of such deeds, but aren't we forgetting those in the middle, who are actually carrying the society forward through both mundane work and remarkable feats, without much fanfare? Here is to all the forgotten in-betweeners!

2014/12/02 (Tue.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) The *New Yorker* magazine cover about the broken state of race relations in St. Louis, Missouri.

(2) Panama Canal's facelift and its 100th birthday: This year, the engineering marvel that connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans turned 100. This event was to coincide with the grand opening of the new, improved canal that would allow vessels larger than the current maximum capacity, the so-called "post-Panamax" ships, to sail through (technical difficulties have pushed the opening to 2015). Ports on the US East Coast have already been prepared to allow these gigantic ships, now accounting for 37% of the world's fleet, to bring cargo directly from Asia, and the roadway of New York's Bayonne Bridge is being raised to provide clearance for the skyscraper ships. [Info from *ASEE Prism* magazine, issue of November 2014.]

(3) Arthur C. Clarke, in an [ABC interview clip](#) from 40 years ago: He says, among other things, that by 2001, every household will have a computer, much as it has a telephone, and will be connected all over the world.

(4) Islamic Republic apologists blame Iranian women and the public: The author of this [opinion piece](#) on Iranian.com claims that forced hijab is not a serious problem and should not be part of the women's rights discourse in Iran. He (the author uses a pseudonym, but it is safe to assume a man behind these opinions) claims that women are well off in the Islamic Republic, because they earn a majority of science degrees at Iranian universities; women in many other countries are worse off. These claims are so off-base that I don't need to write much here. Yes, Iranian women earn many science degrees, but they are not offered jobs commensurate with their degrees; and, this on top of counting as half a man in legal matters and in inheritance, losing custody of their children upon divorce (if and when they succeed in getting a divorce), not being allowed to travel without permission from a husband or a male relative, and being subjected to abuse (including by the morality police). Mandatory hijab means profuse sweating in hot summer months, inability to swim at the beach, compromised safety on amusement park rides and around some industrial equipment, and restricted movement overall. More importantly, fighting mandatory hijab laws has assumed a symbolic value that is much greater than getting rid of the hijab itself. Mandatory hijab laws stand for second-class citizenship for women and defying these laws, overtly or covertly, partially or in full, is a way of saying no to patriarchal oppression.



2014/11/30 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I hope you always smile like this. The smile on your face is your right. We, who brought about the Islamic Revolution, have wiped the smile off your face. Smile, young one! Smiling faces are free from resentment, or at least not as prone to it. Gloomy faces, on the other hand, develop a kinship with hatred, narrow-mindedness, and anger." ~ Mohammad Nourizad, addressing a [smiling young woman](#) who presented him with a potted flower plant

(2) World's most popular tourist attraction: With 91 million annual visitors, the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul wins the tourism crown. [From *Time* magazine, double issue of December 1-8, 2014]

(3) Modern Persian music: Daal Band plays "[Aavazam ra Mi-raghsidi](#)" ("Dancing my Song").

(4) Unlikely magazine cover: The commander of the Quds Force within Iran's Revolutionary Guards is featured

on the [cover of Newsweek magazine](#), issue of December 5, 2014. The accompanying story tells of the success of the Quds Force in fighting ISIS.

(5) The 2015 "UCSB Reads" program: Each year for the past few years, the UCSB library, in consultation with various campus groups, has chosen a book to provide a common reading experience and a vehicle for discussion among UCSB students, faculty, and staff. The book chosen for next year, *Orange Is the New Black*, is intended to engage us in dialogue about issues of local and national significance, including the US criminal justice system, the war on drugs, economic inequality, and racial and sexual identity. The author, Piper Kerman, will give a free lecture in Campbell Hall on April 15, 2015.

(6) Well-preserved mosaics from 2200 years ago discovered in Turkey: In what must be characterized as an important archaeological discovery, three different [mosaics from the Greek city of Zeugma](#), now part of southern Turkey, have been discovered. Excavations in Zeugma, which began in 2007, have already yielded many treasures from 2000-3000 houses.

2014/11/29 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Global warming isn't real because I was cold today! Also, great news: World hunger is over because I just ate." ~ Comedian Stephen Colbert

(2) Bill Cosby biographer apologizes on Tweeter for not treating rape allegation in his 2014 book: Mark Whitaker's book is purported to be a "frank, fun and fascinating account [of the comic's life]," so leaving out such an important aspect of the story (even assuming that all of the allegations are false) is hardly justifiable.

(3) Amnesty International reports that the death sentence of Soheil Arabi for "insulting the Prophet of Islam" has been upheld by Iran's Supreme Court.

(4) Older siblings have a big influence on younger ones: A younger sister is five times as likely to get pregnant if her older sister has gotten pregnant. A drinking (smoking) older sibling makes a younger sibling 36% (25%) more likely to drink (smoke). [[NPR story](#)]

(5) The four things that make a relationship go bad: According to Eric Barker (who was featured in Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Blink*, as someone who can predict with 91% accuracy whether a relationship will fail, after listening to a couple for only 5 minutes), the [four signs of a failing relationship](#) are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

2014/11/28 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Alan Turing and "The Imitation Game," a movie (starring Benedict Cumberbatch) about Turing's life and contributions to information science/technology, are cover stories in *E&T* magazine's December 2014 issue and *Time* magazine's December 1-8 double issue.

(2) Just divorced: Sign of the times in Santa Barbara, California ([video shot on Stearns Wharf](#)). Another sign of the times in Santa Barbara is a recently noticed poster in front of a store in the Paseo Nuevo shopping mall that advertised a free "selfie scope" (a gadget that extends the arm's reach when taking a selfie) with a \$40 purchase.

(3) This isn't a palace but a [metro station in Moscow](#).

(4) Amazing talent: [Drawing a wine glass](#).

(5) Quote of the day: "It is a pleasure to open the Information Age exhibition today @ScienceMuseum and I hope people will enjoy visiting. Elizabeth R." (Queen Elizabeth, finally joining the social media craze by sending her first tweet from the @BritishMonarchy account)

(6) First 3D printing in space: A 3D printer aboard the International Space Station has printed a replacement part for itself. There were difficulties with some of the material sticking to the printer's tray, suggesting possible differences in the layer-by-layer bonding process on Earth and in space, which may require adjustments to the printing process.

2014/11/27 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Thanksgiving Day: "Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse." ~ Henry van Dyke

(2) The Science of Interstellar: This is the title of a book of around 300 pages in which Caltech astrophysicist Kip Thorne explains the science behind the hit movie. He served as one of the movie's executive producers, vowing to use only scientific theories that have been verified or are deemed feasible by at least some scientists. Although intended primarily for those who have seen the movie, the book provides a concise overview of some of today's boldest scientific theories for other interested readers.



(3) Solving a Rubik's Cube in **two easy steps**.

(4) Don't judge too quickly: A **6-minute compilation** of Ameriquest commercials. [This is a re-posting of a funny video that has been around for a while.]

(5) Turkey takes a step backward to join Iran and Saudi Arabia in denying that women and men have equal rights: **President Erdogan has said** that "Equality between men and women is against nature."

(6) Mohammad Nourizad, one of the sternest critics of the Islamic regime in Iran, has reportedly survived being rear-ended by a **truck with failed brakes**.

2014/11/26 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "If you want to be helpful to us, just open up the damn letter, read it, and e-mail us what it says." ~ Jerry Seinfeld (addressing the US Postal Service and its continuing financial woes)

(2) Insane domino tricks: **Four minutes of pure joy**, as you watch the many clever ways of knocking domino tiles over. **This one** uses elaborate gadgets, a la Rube Goldberg, but is still fun to watch.

(3) The mullah who destroyed Hafez's memorial monument three times: Ali-Akbar Faal Asiri had said, in a fiery sermon, that "If the King rebuilds it a thousand times, I will keep destroying it." [**This story** is in Persian.]

(4) A Most Wanted Man (title of a 2014 movie): Philip Seymour Hoffman is brilliant as a German intelligence operative in this complex spy/terrorism thriller based a John le Carre novel.

(5) US Presidential **Medals of Freedom**: On Monday 11/24, President Obama awarded medals to writer Isabel Allende, newscaster Tom Brokaw, actress Meryl Streep, musician Stevie Wonder, and 14 others.

(6) A wonderful **math-based illusion**: Eight balls moving in straight lines create the illusion of circular motion.

2014/11/25 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Violence against women: Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. We have a long way to go in preventing violence against women and affording them their human rights. The situation is particularly dire in most Islamic countries, but **this video** shows that even in an advanced country like Sweden, a vast majority of riders in an elevator equipped with a hidden camera do not interfere when they see a woman being abused by a male companion.

(2) A math puzzle: Take the number 4 and use it 5 times to produce the number 54. You can use any number of arithmetic operations and parentheses. [From *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of November/December 2014.]

(3) Robert Reich states that the Republicans have no chance of winning the 2016 US presidential elections or to keep their majority in the Senate. **Here's why**.

(4) Taking justice hostage: No citizen has the right to demand a particular outcome (indictment/conviction or exoneration) in a criminal justice case, much less threatening violence if the outcome isn't to his/her liking. If our justice system has faults, which it does, there are ways of working to improve it.

[Addendum to my comments relating to the race-based tensions in Ferguson, Missouri: As of 7:00 PM today, low-intensity riots have already started in Ferguson after it was announced that officer Darren Wilson will not be indicted for the shooting of Michael Brown, but, unfortunately, such events tend to escalate into full-blown riots.]

(5) West-Iran nuclear negotiations extended: The two sides reportedly "ran out of time" before they could iron out the last few wrinkles in the draft agreement, thus opting for a 7-month **extension of the deadline** for a final deal to July 1, 2015. This may be the optimistic view. President Rouhani once boasted that during his tenure as a nuclear negotiator, he purposely dragged his feet to buy time, while Iran further developed its nuclear capabilities. I see no reason to think that this time around, it is different.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Writing is no trouble: you just jot down ideas as they occur to you. The jotting is simply itself—it is the occurring which is difficult." ~ Stephen Leacock

2014/11/24 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Liberals got women the right to vote. Liberals got African-Americans the right to vote. Liberals created social security and lifted millions of elderly people out of poverty. Liberals ended segregation. Liberals passed the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Liberals created Medicare. Liberals passed the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. What did Conservatives do? They opposed every one of those programs. Every one! So when you try to hurl the word 'liberal' at my feet, as if it were dirty, something to run away from, something that I should be ashamed of, it won't work, Senator, because I will pick up that label and wear it as a badge of honor." ~ Congressman Matt Santos, of "The West Wing" TV show

(2) Penalty shootout: **Humorous soccer video**.

(3) Some of **these mishaps** are funny: Others are outright dangerous, but somehow still bring a smile to our faces. [Liberty Mutual Insurance ad]

(4) Aerial photos of Buffalo, NY, [under several feet of snow](#) in mid-November 2014.

(5) Two guys play a giant keyboard by [jumping and dancing](#) on it.

(6) Cyberspace etiquette: Late last week, over a period of 2 days, I responded to half-dozen students from a university in Iran, who wanted PDF copies of some of my publications, presumably to use in a homework or project assignment. Some of the students used abbreviated names, such as "S. Gh." (a la Facebook). I sent them a link to my publications page, which contains PDF copies of the references they needed. I ended my responses with an advice for the students and one for their instructor. "My advice to you is that when you request something from someone who doesn't know you, it is polite to introduce yourself (include full name, where you study, and why you need the item you are requesting). Most people do not respond to e-mails with fake or abbreviated names. My advice to your instructor (please forward this message to your instructor, as I could not find an e-mail for him/her) is that rather than have each of his/her students contact me individually for references, s/he do some research and obtain the references for you. This would be much more efficient for everyone, both you and me."

2014/11/23 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) This massive [raised-earth pony sculpture](#) in South Wales is 200 meters long.

(2) Stealthy freedoms, times two: These women are [filmed in Tehran](#) not only without headscarves but also while singing, an equally serious transgression in the eyes of Islamic authorities.

(3) Having a way with words: *Entertainment Weekly* (issue of November 28, 2014) introduces a new book entitled *The Describer's Dictionary: A Treasury of Terms & Literary Quotations*. The entry for "Very warm," for example, reads "hot, torrid, burning, blazing, scorching, blistering, broiling, baking, searing, roasting, tropical, pitiless," followed by an actual literary quotation that includes one of the words. This wonderful book, which is much more than a thesaurus, constitutes a valuable resource for authors.

(4) Munchies guide to Tehran's bazaars: Please don't watch this [11-minute video](#) about various kinds of food you can find in Tehran's bazaars on an empty stomach.

(5) Gloves inspired by gecko feet can give humans superhero-like abilities: Using friction, rather than suction, [the gloves](#) allow a human wearer to climb sheer glass walls. Earlier, small robots with such abilities had been built, but accommodating human weight of up to 200 lbs proved a difficult challenge to overcome.

(6) Save [this photo](#) to show to your kids and grandkids when they ask what a bookstore is.

2014/11/22 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A simple math puzzle: A chicken and a half can lay an egg and a half in a day and a half. How long will it take for a chicken to lay a dozen eggs? [From *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of November/December 2014.]

(2) Traditional Iranian music: ["Golrokh"](#) performed by Mah Banoo Ensemble.

(3) Circular musical keyboard: Built by Lady Gaga's keyboard player, Brockett Parsons, [the keyboard](#) has 294 keys, with 3 contiguous 88-note keyboards and a 30-note control section.

(4) Saudi Arabia's morality police and Quebec's language police: In a post dated November 19, 2014, Newsweek magazine reports that the 4-day "Miss Makkah" beauty pageant, planned by a group of businesswomen, will likely be cancelled owing to objections from the morality police (formally, The Commission for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue). A reader of the article commented that such an act of interference in people's lives is to be expected in a misogynistic society, but more surprising is that in Canada's Quebec province there is a special force that goes around, making sure that English signage uses no bigger typeface than the accompanying French inscription (apparently, this is the law).

(5) The myth of personalized health care: A great deal of lip service is paid in the technical literature to the prospects of personalizing healthcare evaluations and decision with help from technology. For example, a couple of days ago, I read in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine (issue of November 2014) an article entitled "Your Personal Virtual Heart" about efforts to model human heart, so that physicians can test various treatments on the digital models before applying them to human patients. This is great! But the words "personal" and "healthcare" next to each other make me a bit jittery. Technology will lead to personalized healthcare only if physicians and health clinics are predisposed to offering personalized care. In other words, only if healthcare becomes personalized, independent of technology, will technology be able to help in the direction of greater personalization. Today, even with the help of computerized health records, physicians know next to nothing about the patients they examine. So, it takes an extremely alert patient to avoid errors and unnecessary treatments. With this attitude on the part of physicians, no amount of added technology will help.

(6) Some lessons from the death of Morteza Pashaei: After posting an item about the pop singer's death and an instrumental solo-piano version of one of his songs, performed by Fariborz Lachini, I received a couple of private messages from acquaintances and came across multiple posts on social media to the effect that Pashaei was a "regime artist," meaning that he approved of, and was in turn approved by, the Islamic regime and that this mutual approval was the reason for the Iranian authorities making a big deal of his death. It amuses me

that we people of Iranian origins find a way to infuse politics into any situation. To me, an artist should be judged by his/her art. Yes, an artist can have political views and can, if s/he chooses, let his/her politics show through the art. But that is a side issue; the art is central. Ironically, I don't even like Pashaei's kind of singing. The music is fine in some pieces; hence my posting of the instrumental version noted above. But the words and singing style are too defeatist and gloomy for my taste. At any rate, looking at the huge crowd of people who showed up for Pashaei's funeral, he seems to have been genuinely liked by Iranians of all types: there were mourners with chadors, as well as modern women with dyed hair and the smallest possible headscarves; there were bearded young men in traditional attire, alongside men with T-shirts and Western jeans and haircuts. I, for one, respect this outpouring of love, regardless of my own view of Pashaei as an artist.

2014/11/21 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The story of immigrants in America isn't a story of 'them'; it's a story of 'us'." ~ President Barack Obama

(2) Daniela Andrade sings "**La Vie en Rose**" and Pink's "**Just Give Me a Reason**"; there are quite a few other great songs on the same YouTube play list.

(3) Maziar Bahari's "118 Days in Hell": Bahari wrote a **cover story** for *Newsweek* magazine, to coincide with the release of Jon Stewart's movie "Rosewater," chronicling Bahari's imprisonment and interrogation in Iran. Here's an excerpt: "Whether the regime successfully preempts the demonstrations this time we will have to wait and see, but it cannot play this game forever. Its fantasy of justice, like its fantasy of democracy, and its fantasy of economic development is a farce. Iranians are too smart, and too hungry for that. One way or another the future will belong to those who want to build their future in the real world."

(4) Results of survey of 40,000 University of California PhD earners: Here are some highlights for UC PhDs who graduated 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, or 40 years ago (as a 1973 graduate, I participated in this survey last year):

- Their unemployment rate is fairly low, at roughly 1%.
- Most have stable careers in suitable fields and are satisfied with their choice of degree, major, and school.
- Roughly 2/3 pursued academic careers at some point, with 42% in tenure-track positions.
- More than 1/2 of engineering and CS PhDs (and many in hard sciences) went into the private, for-profit sector.
- More than 1/2 of the doctoral graduates are in the professional/scientific/career services sector.

The PDF "fact sheet" on the right-hand side of **this Web page** provides interesting charts and summaries.

(5) The luxury house of a self-described "struggling single mom": Bristol Palin is following in the footsteps of her mom by putting her foot in her mouth. She faulted a **speech of President Obama** by saying that he does not respect stay-at-home moms because he advocates affordable day care. Meanwhile, photos of her lakeside house tell a different story.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Knowledge is power. Ignorance is bliss. Tough choice!" ~ Anonymous

2014/11/20 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Award-winning film director **Mike Nichols dead at 83**: Nichols was best known for his films "The Graduate" (best-director Oscar), "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf," "Silkwood," "The Working Girl," and "The Birdcage." He was married to former ABC News anchor Diane Sawyer.

(2) Overreacting to small setbacks: UCLA student government has apparently approved a resolution calling for the University of California to divest from a number of companies that do business with the Israeli military. Of course what a group of UCLA students think is their business and where they invest their personal funds is also their business. No University of California investment is actually controlled by these students. At any rate, this incident has resulted in calls to boycott UC and to withhold any philanthropic and research-related donations from it. These calls are misguided in my opinion. UC is an immense institution with a budget of about \$25B. It hosts some of the brightest US students who will lead the social and technological transformations of the future. It is also home to thousands of world-class scholars and scientists, including 61 Nobel Laureates. Causing permanent damage to this fine institution on the account of actions of some immature students is difficult to comprehend.

(3) Iranians protest sexist and racist jokes: Sexist/racist humor has always been part of the Iranian culture, but now, with the women's movement in full stride and religious/ethnic minorities more than fed up with the way they are treated by the Islamic regime, **a new awareness** is developing that makes people reconsider their attitude toward such humor.

(4) Unbelievable fact of the day: While there are 6.8B cell-phone service subscriptions worldwide, only 4.6B people have access to proper toilet facilities. The health impact of this deficiency is huge. So this is no laughing matter: yesterday was **World Toilet Day**!

(5) A Battle for UC's Soul: This is the title of an editorial in *Los Angeles Times* about the proposed 5-year schedule of **tuition hikes** of up to 5% per year.

(6) A gruesome terrorist attack at a synagogue in Jerusalem: The attackers use knives and machetes to kill 5, including 3 American rabbis. ([Story and video](#))

2014/11/19 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) On the latest ISIS beheading: Beheadings of US citizens and other Westerners by ISIS are done with the sole purpose of drawing American and European troops into the region. They say something about the killers' cruel hearts and twisted minds and they take a heavy toll on the victims' families and fellow countrymen. But, in the final analysis, a death is a death. Each of the 5000+ American soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan also represents loss of a life that was equally valuable. The beheadings should not be given more weight as far as our loss is concerned, or we will fall into the trap set for us.

(2) Superhigh-speed train tested in Japan: [This one attained 500 km/hr](#) (around 310 mph), which is a bit more than half the cruising speed of a typical passenger jet.

(3) Amazing soccer skills: [Video clip](#), set to "Midnight" by Haddouken.

(4) Revolve/Evolve: This is the title of an interesting [GIF art image](#), in which life begins at the center, evolves outward in clockwise rotation, and disappears at the edge.

(5) Poet Ali's [16-minute TEDx talk](#) about languages: If we define a language as a collection of symbols/conventions for human communication, we all know many more languages than we think. Very interesting observations!

(6) Conservatives, who pounce on every piece of bad news, completely ignore the good news: Here are examples of [scare tactics and fake scandals](#) that have been paraded, while ignoring related positive outcomes.

- The Ebola scare that has since fizzled due to competent management by CDC and other authorities.
- Treasury's \$528M loss on a loan to Solyndra, within a program that is on track to return profits of \$5B or more.
- The ACA devil: coverage for 10M newly insured Americans; next year's rate hikes are below historical averages.
- Crying foul over out-of-control spending, with no praise for the deficit returning to the pre-crisis levels.

2014/11/18 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Why do they say we're over the hill? I don't even know what that means and why it's a bad thing. When I go hiking and I get over the hill, that means I'm past the hard part and there's a snack in my future." ~ Ellen DeGeneres

(2) Persian solo piano: Fariborz Lachini plays ["Jadeye Yek Tarafeh"](#) ("One-Way Road"), a beautiful song made famous by the recently passed Iranian pop singer Morteza Pashaei.

(3) Solo piano performance by Shirin (ahang1001): ["Parece Que Fue Ayer"](#) ("It Seems That Was Yesterday").

(4) Big pharma no fan of big data: Incidents of [hiding clinical trial data](#) by big pharma are coming to light. Cochrane Collaboration, a London-based nonprofit has exposed much negative data from clinical trials that were hidden from the public. Interestingly, US regulators (FDA) knew about the hidden data but did not share their knowledge with the medical community.

(5) Rosetta Lander [a partial success](#): The lander has lodged itself in an area where it does not get sunlight, leading to its primary battery being almost completely drained. The lander has drilled a hole into the comet's surface, but it is unclear whether it will have enough power to transmit test results to the orbiter the next time it gets close to the lander. Scientists are discussing the possibility of moving the lander or reorienting its solar panels, but without a source of power, this feat may prove impossible.

(6) International undergraduate students at US colleges: American universities being eager to attract the more lucrative out-of-state and international students, to ease their budget shortfalls, and a surge in the number of Chinese students have led to a [record-high enrollment of 0.9M](#) international undergraduate students, an 8% increase over last year. Given China's accelerated investment in institutions of higher learning, this trend may be reversed in the coming years.

2014/11/16 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Continued negativity from the US Congress: "Net neutrality is Obamacare for the Internet." ~ Ted Cruz, Texas Republican Senator

(2) The four Brown sisters [photographed together](#) every year, for 40 years.

(3) Gone with the Wind: In honor of the 75th anniversary of this historic film from 1939, here is ["Tara's Theme"](#) performed by violin maestro Itzhak Perlman.

(4) Danube Express [luxury train to Iran](#): Tourists, including Americans, are making reservations on this train at record rates, but I am not sure how it will work. Will they have alcoholic beverages on board? If so, what will

they do with them once the train enters Iran? What about on the trip back? What will be the clothing and hijab rules? Will Basijis stop and inspect the train and its passengers from time to time?

(5) On human rights and treatment of religious/ethnic minorities in Iran: If Javad Larijani, the interviewee in this Iranian TV [video clip](#), were Pinocchio, the tip of his nose would be in Europe now!

(6) Power of a cliché: This is the title of a beautifully written and produced [21-minute documentary](#) by Haleh Anvari, which points to the way in which Iranian women have been used by both the Islamic authorities and by the West to advance sociopolitical goals. Through a sequence of 220 photos, from the Internet and personal sources, Anvari looks at the role of the chador in her own life and in the way Iran is depicted around the world.

2014/11/15 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The joys of teaching: One of the perks of being a teacher for 42 years is the occasional letter or e-mail from a former student who relates pleasant memories from a course s/he took, or research s/he performed, with me. That such letters have positive tones should not come as a surprise, because those with negative experiences seldom write. Still, such instances of paying respect, or merely remembering, have an enormous impact on my energy level and determination to continue for many more years.

In fact, teaching isn't just a one-way knowledge transfer, and I often find myself thankful for the learning opportunities that a secure teaching job provides. In addition to what my students teach me, I regularly take advantage of free on-line courses (I am "attending" two at the moment) to update old knowledge and learn new concepts. Having easy access to an extensive library of conventional printed books and electronic material is an added bonus of incredible value.

(2) Quote of the day: "Experience is not what happens to you; it's what you do with what happens to you." ~ Aldous Huxley

(3) A pretty harrowing [driving experience](#) in Greece.

(4) An oasis in Gobi Desert. [[Photo](#)]

(5) The death of a pop music icon in Iran: During a moving street gathering, in front of the hospital where Morteza Pashaei died at age 30 (reportedly of cancer), people of Tehran [sing his songs](#) in memoriam.

(6) The best worst president ever: "The bottom line seems obvious: Much to the GOP's bitter revulsion, it turns out a calm, intellectual black man really can run an entire country—certainly far better than an inarticulate Texas bumbler, and even in the face of what is easily the most obstructionist, hateful, acidic and often downright racist Congress in modern memory. Quite an achievement, really." ~ From an [article in SF Gate](#)]



2014/11/13 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The new look of New York City's World Trade Center. [[Development plans](#)]

(2) Quote of the day: "A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it." ~ Jean de la Fontaine

(3) Jesus has returned: He lives in a mansion, surrounded by manicured gardens, in the Philippines and owns both a private jet and a helicopter. People line up to carry his parasol and work for free to maintain his mansion. [[8-minute video](#)]



(4) Six college football players [nearly kill a man](#) who comes to the defense of his girlfriend: Lewis Campbell suffered severe brain injuries as a result of being kicked and stomped savagely by six California University of Pennsylvania football players, who were harassing his student girlfriend. This is yet another example of inhumane behavior by football players, both college and professional.

(5) Music can be enjoyed with the simplest of instruments or with no instruments at all: Hang Massive drum duo performs "Once Again" in this [6-minute video](#). Heres another [nice performance](#) in India.

(6) Canadian Richard Brunt's letter to *The Detroit Free Press* editor, from Victoria, BC:

[I post this letter, knowing that it may be a planted piece and aware of the possibility that my conservative friends will respond, "please ship him to Canada right now!"]

Many of us Canadians are confused by the U.S. midterm elections.

Consider, right now in America, corporate profits are at record highs, the country's adding 200,000 jobs per month, unemployment is below 6%, U.S. gross national product growth is the best of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

The dollar is at its strongest levels in years, the stock market is near record highs, gasoline prices are falling, there's no inflation, interest rates are the lowest in 30 years, U.S. oil imports are declining, U.S. oil production is

rapidly increasing, the deficit is rapidly declining, and the wealthy are still making astonishing amounts of money.

America is leading the world once again and respected internationally — in sharp contrast to the Bush years. Obama brought soldiers home from Iraq and killed Osama bin Laden.

So, Americans vote for the party that got you into the mess that Obama just dug you out of? This defies reason.

When you are done with Obama, could you send him our way?

2014/11/12 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) An impressive space feat: The European Space Agency's Rosetta mission has successfully landed its Philae probe on comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko at the conclusion of a 6.4B-km journey that began on earth a decade ago. The current distance of the comet from Earth is 0.5B km, more than twice as far as our average distance to Mars. The first images from the comet's surface have already been received and are being processed for public release. Scientists aren't sure at this time whether the probe has successfully anchored itself to the comet to ensure its stability over time.

(2) Yesterday was Veterans' appreciation day in the US: I asked my friends and other readers on Facebook to please save their anti-war status posts and commentaries for the other 364 days of the year. We reserve this one day to honor the sacrifices made by soldiers who fight to protect our country and to keep us safe. Politicians, in consort with high-ranking military administrators, start wars, many of which are self-serving or misguided, but the US military by and large fights with honor and the best of intentions. We salute all active and retired military personnel!

(3) Quote of the day: "In war the heroes always outnumber the soldiers ten to one." ~ H. L. Mencken

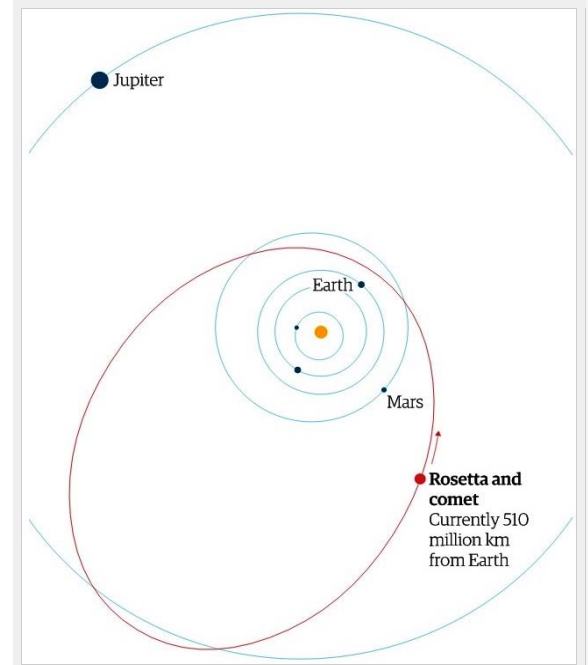
(4) A DNA case that seems direct out of a murder-mystery novel: The Italian police has solved a very complicated **murder case** using DNA evidence, but there are more twists in the story than in even the most convoluted murder-mysteries. To identify the murderer of a 13-year-old girl, DNA samples recovered from her body and clothing (pointing to a male killer) were compared against samples from thousands of local men. A partial match was found, suggesting that the killer was a relative of the matching man. Relatives of the man were tested. The man's father, a long dead bus driver, was also tested via the remnants of his saliva on the back of a postage stamp. The dead father was an almost perfect match, but he had died before the crime was committed. The killer must have been one of the dead man's sons, but none was a close enough match. This apparent dead end could have been the end of the story. But, from information gathered about the dead man's lifestyle, it was hypothesized that he may have had a male child out of wedlock, but how to find that son? The man's wife was in the dark about her dead husband's extramarital affairs. From various information sources, the police identified hundreds of women that had come in contact with the dead man and, sure enough, one of them was a good match for the DNA. The woman had 3 children, believed to have been fathered by her husband of many years. But, her twins proved to be fathered by the dead bus driver and, hence, the male half was the killer.

(5) College soccer: Tonight, UC Irvine defeated UCSB 3-2 in a semifinals match of the Big West Conference, making it less likely that UCSB can play in the NCAA tournament, held from November 20 to December 14. UCSB dominated in the first half, but could not take advantage of scoring opportunities, settling for a 1-1 halftime score. In the second half, the two sides played evenly on offense, but UCSB committed several costly defensive mistakes. The field of 48 teams for the 2014 NCAA soccer tournament will be composed of 23 conference champions and 25 other teams selected at large by NCAA's Division I Men's Soccer Committee. Team selections will be announced this coming weekend.

2014/11/11 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Experience is not what happens to you; it's what you do with what happens to you." ~ Aldous Huxley

(2) Islamic guidelines for showing happiness: Javad Larijani, the official in charge of human rights within Iran's judiciary, has said that people should express their joy according to **Islamic norms**; they should not scream



and shout, buck like donkeys, or dance in the streets. He also reiterated the need for Internet censoring, likening it to doors and windows for a house.

(3) Half of all stars may lie outside galaxies: This **surprising finding** by Caltech researchers, using data from the Cosmic Infrared Background Experiment (CIBER) rocket flights, means that to study galaxy formation, one must pay attention to areas outside the galaxies as well. Now that the existence of such stars in large numbers has been confirmed, scientists can learn more about them by reprocessing images in telescope archives, where the stars may have been missed earlier.

(4) Solo piano performance: Shirin (ahang1001) performs **"The Silk Road."**

(5) How to spot a liar: This is the title of a highly popular **19-minute TED talk** by Pamela Meyer, with the thesis that lying is widespread among humans and that there are proven methods to spot lies with high accuracy.

(6) Iranians and the Islamic Republic authorities must take the crime of rape seriously: Whether or not the recently executed Reyhaneh Jabbari killed in justifiable self-defense, the eloquent comments of her mother in this **7-minute video** must be taken seriously. Rape is never okay, even when the woman is deemed "loose" by a society's standards.

2014/11/10 (Mon.): Skloot, Rebecca, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, unabridged audiobook on 10 CDs read by Cassandra Campbell (with Bahni Turpin), Random House Audio, 2010.

Henrietta Lacks (b. 1920 in Roanoke, VA, referred to as Helen Lane or Helen Larson at various times, out of concern for her privacy) is the person behind HeLa cells that live today, decades after her death, and will likely live forever. The cancerous cells removed from the poor tobacco farmer's cervix continue to reproduce at a high rate and can be found in abundance within virtually every major medical research lab, allowing the study of the ways in which bacteria, viruses, and drugs affect human cells. This is all good news for medicine/pharmacology, and for science in general, but the story has a dark side.

The Lacks family did not learn about the immortality of HeLa cells, and how they had been collected and used, until two decades after Henrietta's death in 1951 at age 31, and they did not benefit at all from the multimillion-dollar industry launched around these valuable cells that have been instrumental in finding cures, or making progress toward cures, for many important diseases. HeLa cells are reproduced at industrial scale and distributed to medical researchers. Ironically, Henrietta Lacks and her financially strapped family did not even have access to adequate healthcare.

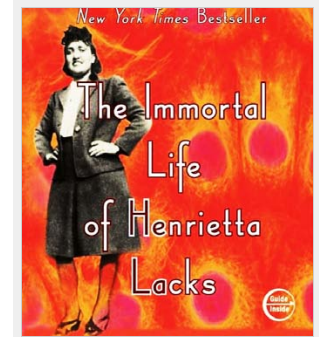
This story is connected to earlier immoral experimentation on African-Americans, the field of bioethics, and the ongoing legal battle over the ownership of the stuff we are made of. As the field of biotechnology makes further progress, we will come face to face with numerous ethical considerations, not just with regard to human tissue markets, but across the entire fields of medical and pharmacological research. So, reading this book is good preparation for such discussions.

It appears that the scientists involved in the early collection and distribution of HeLa cells were not motivated by personal gain, financial or otherwise. They were just doing science the way it was done in medical fields at the time, that is, without paying much attention to the human side of their endeavor. The same people did come to the conclusion that they should have proceeded differently, apologizing and trying to make it up to Henrietta's family in hindsight.

This first book by Rebecca Skloot has received widespread acclaim, both for its storytelling and for the lucidity with which scientific concepts are explained. Skloot tells the story of Henrietta and her family with compassion and in great detail, painting a clear and painful picture of their ambivalence: excitement for contributing to scientific advances and bitterness over being kept in the dark for so long. A movie version of the book is said to be in the making by HBO.

2014/11/09 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Expanded UCSB student housing at the intersection of Storke and El Colegio Roads: Under consideration for approval by City of Goleta are a number of building and road projects on UCSB's West Campus properties. One of these projects consists of building on the large parking lots to the north of Santa Catalina (formerly Francisco Torres) dorms two 6-story and a significant number of other





structures and to partially compensate for the loss of parking by constructing a surface parking lot across the street, where there is currently a green open space.

Residents of homes to the north of the project (left side of the photo above) as well as other area residents, who are not thrilled about the dense development and its potential noise and traffic implications, will be attending a forthcoming hearing to voice their concerns.

(2) Texts from *Jane Eyre*: This is the title of a new book by Mallory Ortberg in which she imagines what classic literary characters would text if they had an unlimited data plan. Here is an example from Miss Havisham: "I'm surrounded by the ruins of an aching, hopeless love that's slowly congealing into poison. So I'm keeping busy." [From *Entertainment Weekly*, double issue of November 14/21, 2014.]

(3) Neuroscience enters a golden age: Having just reviewed the book *The End of Illness*, I was delighted to read in [this article](#) that "We have learned more about the thinking brain in the last 10-15 years than in all of previous human history." The new knowledge is bearing fruit in prosthetics and exoskeletons that will soon put an end to disability as we know it today. Scientists have succeeded in recording and uploading memories directly into an animal brain, which is a monumental advance and can be used, in the short term, to create a "brain pacemaker" for Alzheimer's patients.

(4) Goodbye to Hollywood: *Entertainment Weekly* (November 14/21, 2014) reports that a large number of popular fall TV shows are being filmed in Vancouver, instead of Hollywood.

(5) A highly educational museum visit: Today, I visited "Bodies: The Exhibition" in Buena Park. This fascinating exhibit, showcasing real full-body specimen and organs (both healthy and diseased), provides detailed 3D views of the miraculous machine that is the human body, in a manner that few have ever seen. This [10-minute video](#) provides a sample of what you can see at the exhibit. There is also a parallel "Titanic" exhibit, featuring artifacts recovered from the doomed ship, at the same location.

2014/11/08 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest on developments in the Middle East.

(1) Walking dogs may become punishable in Iran: Already many clerics have condemned those who keep dogs, which are considered unclean in Islam. Now a group of MPs have introduced legislation that will make dog-walking a crime punishable by 74 lashes.

(2) Iran threatens those who speak up against acid-throwing attacks: Instead of focusing their efforts on finding and prosecuting those who threw acid on faces of four Isfahani women as a warning to all women about obeying hijab laws, the Iranian judiciary and security agents are threatening and arresting those who have spoken up against discriminatory laws and gender-based social injustice. Narges Mohammadi, who spoke eloquently at the grave of Sattar Beheshti on the 2nd anniversary of his death under torture by security agents, has been summoned to the court at Evin Prison.

(3) Saudi Arabia's religious police bans "tempting eyes": Saudi leaders have repeatedly reassured Westerners that they know many of their laws against women must be reformed but that making changes quickly would destabilize the country, given opposition from conservative clerics. It now seems that not only they are not moving slowly in the direction of reforming their backward laws but they are taking steps in the opposite direction. Both naturally beautiful eyes and those made fetching with makeup **must now be covered in full**, according to an edict by the beyond-Orwellian Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

(4) Why ISIS fights Muslims instead of Israel: "We haven't given orders to kill the Israelis and the Jews. The war against the nearer enemy, those who rebel against the faith, is more important. Allah commands us in the Koran to fight the hypocrites, because they are much more dangerous than those who are fundamentally heretics." ~ ISIS representative, responding to Internet queries (Yeah, right! It has nothing to do with facing full and immediate extinction if they decided to attack Israel.)

(5) Perfect is the enemy of good: After years of criticizing Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, some Iranian intellectuals have turned their aim to Malala Yusafzai, the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner, because they are suspicious of the West's motives for honoring her. We people of Iranian origins must learn to respect those who

have done good deeds and are honored as a result, even if we think they are not the best or most deserving for the honor. Any award selection process is imperfect and the results depend on the list of nominees, the skill with which the case is presented by the nominator(s), and the peripheral considerations that come into play. This year's physics Nobel selections were also criticized for excluding earlier pioneers of LED technology in favor of newcomers who invented blue LEDs. There is no doubt, however, that the honorees have done scientifically important and high-impact work and should not be belittled because some people think others should have been chosen for the honor. Everyone should pay tribute to what Malala has done and respect her for the great honor bestowed upon her. If we believe that someone else was more deserving, then we should put effort into making sure that the other person is honored too, rather than working toward knocking down those who have been honored. The same goes for Shirin Ebadi, Maryam Mirzakhani, and other honorees in any field.

2014/11/07 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love is the child of illusion and the parent of disillusion." ~ Miguel de Unamuno

(2) Forming a human table: See if you can [do this at home](#).

(3) Midterm elections afterthoughts: After only one day of civility and talk of "working together with the President," the Republicans are back at their old refrain of trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cutting spending. They also cautioned President Obama that if he plays with fire, he will burn himself. Well, these same Republicans gloating in the victory handed to them by the voters, were belittling the "uniformed," "naive," and even "stupid" voters who put an "alien Muslim" in the White House. I personally respect the outcome and fully believe in the "one person, one vote" principle. It doesn't matter how a voter arrives at his/her selection. If they voted "the wrong way" according to my principles and convictions, then it was my fault, not theirs.

(4) Growing quince and pomegranates in Idaho: Esmail "Essie" Fallahi, known as "the fruit doctor," is turning Idaho agriculture around, away from potatoes and toward the [exotic fruit market](#). Idahoans, skeptical at first, are loving it, so much so that they have named a day of the year after Fallahi.

(5) Inspiring the next generation of female engineers: [TEDx talk at Penn State](#) (17 minutes) by Debbie Sterling, the creator of Goldie Blox.

(6) Assessment—the silent killer of learning: This is the title of an enjoyable and informative talk, by Eric Mazur, that I attended today. Mazur, distinguished Harvard physicist and educator extraordinaire, believes that the methods we use for teaching (e.g., lectures) and learning (e.g., flash cards) need serious updating for the 21st century. Teaching to, and learning for, exams is not just ineffective, but harmful. We need to start from desired outcomes, rather than list of topics in a syllabus, and shape our teaching according to those outcomes. For example, if we want to train a workforce that collaborates and uses the Web effectively, testing them in isolation and with no access to information sources is not the best method of assessment. At UCSB, I often tell my students that I hate exams as much as they do, elaborating that I like the information exchange and joy of teaching/learning, but given our educational system and societal expectations, testing is a necessary evil; of course, they usually don't believe me! Mazur mentioned the concept of team learning (championed, for example, by [teambasedlearning.org](#)), which was initially used in management programs but is being adapted to other fields of study. If you find the subject matter interesting, the lecture is available on YouTube. The lecture itself spans minutes 9-61 of this [78-minute video](#) (it is preceded by introductions and followed by questions).

[An anecdote told by Professor Mazur: He taught physics to his students by using many examples from baseball to motivate them. To see whether his students could use what they had learned in a different context, he asked them to solve a similar problem in football. "But professor, we never solved a problem about football!" the students complained.]

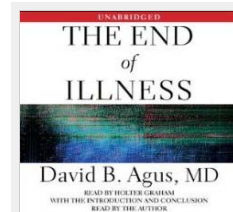
2014/11/06 (Thu.): Agus, David B., MD, *The End of Illness*, unabridged audiobook on 9 CDs, read by Holter Graham, Simon & Schuster Audio, 2012. [Edited on 11/08]

Many infectious diseases have either been eradicated or will soon be gone forever, thanks to medical, pharmacological, nutritional, and other scientific breakthroughs. Healthier living and longer life expectancy are among the results of these advances. The main message of this book is that by becoming our own personal health advocates, we can live robustly until our last breath.

The author is an avid proponent of using data in dealing with diseases and health epidemics. A striking example supporting this viewpoint is the [Google flu trends](#) Web page that uses aggregated Google search data to track and forecast flu activity. In some cases, paying attention to search terms on Google can signal a pandemic weeks in advance of specialized entities such as the US Center for Disease Control.

The bullet-point summary on the back cover is an apt summary of the kinds of counterintuitive knowledge one gains from it:

- How taking multivitamins and supplements could increase our risk for diseases such as cancer over time.
- Why sitting down most of the day, despite a strenuous morning workout, can be even worse than smoking.



- How sneaky sources of daily inflammation—from high heels to the common cold—can lead to a fatal heart attack, and even rob us of our sanity.
- How three inexpensive medications can substantially change the course of our health for the better.
- How taking shortcuts to health via blending fruits and vegetables, and sometimes even by purchasing what we think is "fresh," could be shortchanging our health.
- The single most important thing we can do to preserve our health and happiness that costs absolutely nothing.

I listened to this audiobook several months ago, but could not put my thoughts and notes together until now. The book is fascinating and quite useful for gaining insight into how to manage our health and how to judge the quality of (often contradictory) information floating around in how-to books and in cyberspace.

2014/11/05 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Iranian woman continue to defy social restrictions: This woman mocks a mural bearing a poem that asks her to embrace, rather than feel ashamed of or be saddened by, the chador (the full-body-covering form of hijab).



(2) Los Angeles Plays Itself: This is the title of a 2004 documentary by Thom Anderson. Viewers like me who have lived in LA or those who are fascinated by it for various reasons will enjoy this film. Familiar LA locations are used in cinema and television, but there are also films in which the city is depicted as something dissimilar to itself. The full **170-minute film** is available on YouTube for \$3.99.

(3) Republicans victorious last night: US voters handed the Republicans a major victory and they will expect results in return. If the Republican-controlled Congress produces sensible legislation, then everyone will benefit from these changes and the elimination of gridlock. If they maintain a do-nothing style (for example, due to internal conflicts between mainstream Republicans and Tea Party types on one side and center-leaning members on the other), or if they start doing things that voters do not endorse and President Obama vetoes, then Democrats will benefit in 2016.

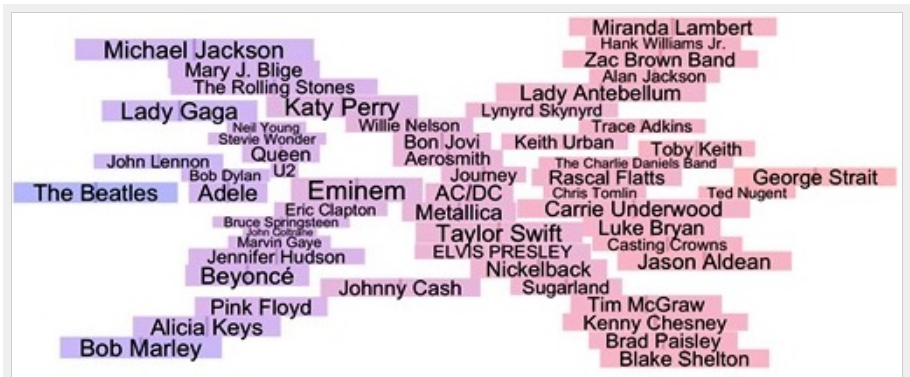
(4) The down side of cheaper oil and gas: While everyone welcomes reduced oil and gas prices (especially in California, where we have some of the highest gas prices in the US), the lower prices are already affecting consumer enthusiasm for all-electric and hybrid vehicles, whose sales were gathering momentum during the upward spiral of gas prices. Further improvement in battery life and lower prices for such vehicles are needed to reverse this setback.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Motivation will almost always beat mere talent." ~ Norman Ralph Augustine

2014/11/04 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest on this election day in the US.

(1) Musical blue/red politics:

I always thought that the Beatles are universally popular, but according to *Entertainment Weekly*, those who like the Fab Four are most likely Democrats, just as fans of George Strait are predominantly Republican. The chart shows Democratic (blue) and Republican (red) leanings of musicians' fans.



(2) Secret USA-Iran meetings shortly after the Islamic Revolution: This **BBC Persian report** contains claims that American envoys met with a number of Islamic Republic officials at the highest level in 1980. The students who occupied the US embassy and held its personnel hostage were selective in releasing the names of those who had met or otherwise contacted the Americans. Abbas Amir Entezam was charged with spying and treason, and he was punished by a lengthy prison term. But the students never released the name of Ayatollah Beheshti, who according to this report also met with the Americans, purportedly because the record of his contacts showed discretion and revolutionary zeal.

(3) The mirror that reflects only some people: **Hidden-camera prank**.

(4) Iran's "modern" and "reformist" President Rouhani leads mourning rituals at a cabinet meeting, according to this **4-minute news clip** about Muharram in Iran.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is swift probably why so few engage in it." ~ Henry Ford

(6) Election results tonight: Rather surprisingly, I am resigned to the outcome of these elections, no matter how they turn out. Democrats keeping control of the Senate sends a signal to the Republicans that as dissatisfied as the voters are with the Democrats, they detest the Republicans even more. The gridlock will continue, allowing President Obama to focus on doing what he can through executive actions. Republicans gaining control of the Senate isn't as disastrous as some suggest. Congress will then have no excuse for not passing legislation. If it focuses on the wrong problems or acts irresponsibly, voters will punish the Republicans in 2016. President Obama will veto the worst bills, and the Republicans will not have a veto-proof majority to override him. Lack of action or misguided legislation in a Republican-controlled Congress will benefit the Democrats two years from now. All in all, not much will change either way.

2014/11/03 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The proliferation of space facilities in the US: With several private companies active in space projects, a number of spaceports are being built. This map, taken from *IEEE Spectrum*, issue of November 2014, shows existing and proposed US facilities.

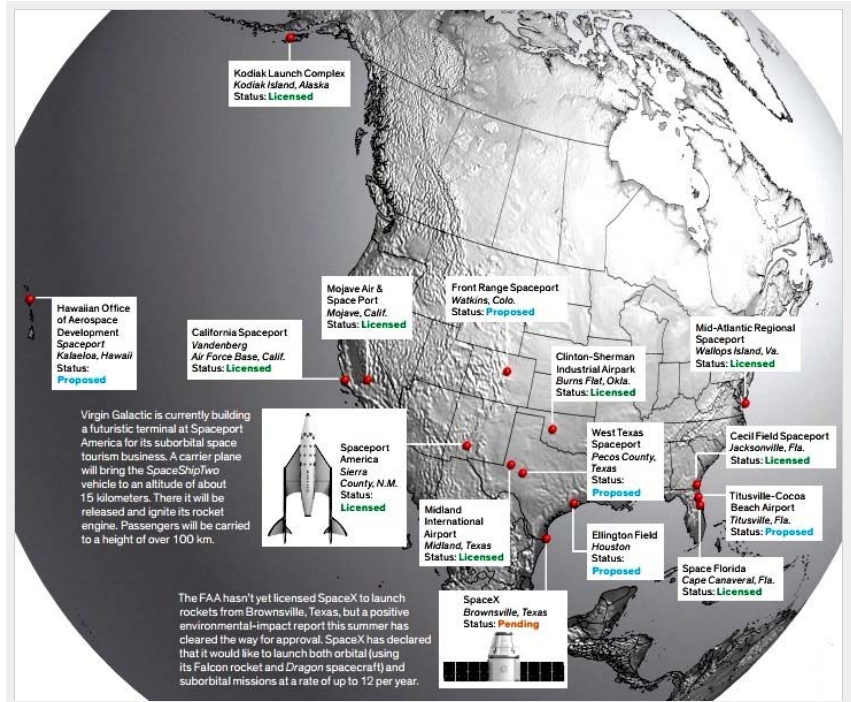
(2) How to deflect unwanted attention. [[0.5-minute video](#)]

(3) Accelerated extinction: The most endangered species on earth face [accelerated extinction](#) due to what *Newsweek* magazine calls "Extinct.com," illicit on-line trading (including on Facebook) of these animals and their body parts.

(4) Modern Persian music: Armin sings "[Khaterat-e Man](#)," a song about childhood memories with his father Vigen. He sounds/looks very much like his dad.

(5) Trade and war linked: Network theory, game theory, and big data are revolutionizing the study of modern history. An interesting question concerns the existence of kinds of networks that are stable against the outbreak of war. Unequivocal evidence has emerged that strong trade alliances lead to fewer military conflicts. A group of countries that possessed an average of about 2.5 alliances between 1816 and 1950 now have about 10. There were 10 times as many wars per year during 1820 and 1950 than between 1960 and 2000. [[Stanford study](#)]

(6) American Film Institute Festival: Friends living in the LA area may want to take advantage of [free tickets](#) to film screenings on November 6-13, 2014, at various Hollywood theaters.



2014/11/02 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) It's official—I don't understand modern dance: This afternoon, I attended a performance at UCLA's Royce Hall by the Israeli Batsheva Dance Company, currently touring the US as part of their 50th anniversary celebration. The critically acclaimed company's performance, entitled "Sadeh21," was set to alternately beautiful and disturbing music and entailed moves that made the viewer admire the dancers' agility and skills. But the story or message of the performance flew right above my head. Here is a short video clip of "[Sadeh21](#)" from 2011.

(2) Today on "Fareed Zakaria GPS": Sam Harris debated Zakaria about Islamic extremism. As much as I like Zakaria, Harris won the argument. He cited polls and academic studies to back up his claim that 20% of all Muslims are either jihadists or Islamists. The program also contained a preview of Anthony Bourdain's CNN program on Iran and its cuisine, to be broadcast this evening.

(3) I had not seen hail this nasty before! [[Video clip](#)]

(4) Angelic voice and music: Loreena McKennitt sings "[The Lady of Shalott](#)" (live).

(5) An Iranian filmmaker speaks her mind: Tahmineh Milani, in an interview on Iranian TV, challenges the assertion that if Iranian films portray social and other ills, they provide ammunition to Iran's critics abroad. [If you don't have time for the full [40-minute video](#), watch minutes 27-34.]

(6) Fiery political speech: Mohammad Nourizad, dissident Iranian journalist, [gives a speech](#) (on the 2nd anniversary of Sattar Beheshti's death under torture by security agents) that will surely land him in jail.

2014/11/01 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Poster girl for Kurdish female fighters may have been beheaded by ISIS: She had captured everyone's imagination with her sweet smile and V-sign for victory in a [widely circulated photo](#).
- (2) Belgium's zero-emission research base opens in 2015: [Princess Elisabeth Base](#) in Antarctica will be powered exclusively by wind and sun.
- (3) The Koch brothers make the mistake of buying ad time during the Daily Show: [Here is how](#) Jon Stewart skewered them.
- (4) Persian poetry: [A beautiful poem](#) by Hamid Reza Rajaei Ramsheh, featuring masterfully-constructed rhyming contraries such as, "I ask for water, but am given a mirage | I offer love, but am tormented in return."
- (5) Iranian food to be featured on CNN: [Anthony Bourdain](#) shows his culinary adventures in Iran tomorrow, 11/2. People of Iranian origins in the West should be ready for inquiries and expectation of being treated to these delicious dishes from their friends.
- (6) I am waiting impatiently for next Tuesday night, 11/4, when numerous pieces of junk mail urging a yes or no vote on this or that issue and unsolicited political phone calls stop.

2014/10/31 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) A simple math puzzle: Find a 5-digit number abcde so that if you place a 1 after it, the resulting 6-digit number abcde1 is three times the 6-digit number 1abcde formed by placing a 1 before it.
- (2) Apple Computer CEO comes out as gay: The revelation, after years of rumors and speculation, makes Tim Cook the world's most prominent [openly-gay business leader](#). In characterizing his sexual orientation as a gift from God, he explains in *Businessweek* that being gay has made him more emphatic (as a member of a minority group) and has given him thick skin, which is useful for a business leader.
- (3) Cheerleading robots: Equipped with gyroscopes and infrared sensors, [these robots](#) perform precision moves as a group.
- (4) Campaign spending inflation: In the 28 years between 1984 and 2012, US spending on political campaigns rose by 555%. Here are other increases for comparison: Health care +425%; Private college tuition +311%; GDP +308%; Median household income +128%. [From *Time* magazine, issue of November 3, 2014.]
- (5) Paula Abdul's "Check Yourself": The [2-minute video](#) uses a catchy tune to remind women of the need for regular self-checks for breast cancer.
- (6) America's strangest drive-throughs (from *Time* magazine, issue of November 3, 2014):
 A Michigan funeral home offers drive-through casket viewing for mourners who can't make it to the full service.
 Hawaii launched a drive-through voter registration service (visitors can leave their engines running) to increase voter turnout.
 Arizona and other states have drive-through liquor stores. (What happened to not drinking and driving?)
 Las Vegas has a drive-through wedding chapel that can be used by limos and motorcycles alike.
 A Connecticut law firm specializing in personal injury and malpractice offers a drive-through window service.



2014/10/30 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "To a mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders." ~ Lao Tzu
- (2) White House computers hacked by the Russian government: [Newsweek magazine](#) reports that a highly advanced case of hacking brought down some unclassified computers at the White House, as security experts tried to mitigate the activity.
- (3) A flower-laden patio in Cordoba (southern Spain). [\[Photo\]](#)
- (4) As they say, "boys will be boys": But they really should grow up to become self-respecting men. [\[Photo\]](#)
- (5) Harassment of a woman on NYC streets: This [2-minute video](#) shows a woman, walking in Manhattan dressed in jeans and a crewneck T-shirt, being harassed constantly by people of all backgrounds.
- (6) Is Bill Cosby a sexual predator? According to [Snopes.com](#), there is anecdotal evidence, based on complaints from multiple women over the years, for Cosby's sexual impropriety, but legally speaking, there is insufficient evidence. In recent days, the old allegations have been rehashed and some new ones added, making the topic go viral. It would indeed be ironic if such a venerated celebrity and black America's father figure were guilty, but the jury is still out.

2014/10/29 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Cartoon of the day: From *E&T* magazine, issue of November 2014.
- (2) Joke of the day (paraphrased from an old "Roseanne" episode, which still resonates with us):

"Hi, I am running for Congress from this district and am going door to door to get to know my constituents."

"Door to door, huh? That takes a lot of time. Why don't you go to the unemployment office and meet everyone at once?"

(3) Impersonations: Those who are familiar with Iranian singers of yore might enjoy [these impersonations](#) of them singing the same song.

(4) The teenage fans of ISIS: Alerted by parents that [three American girls](#), their passports, and substantial sums of cash were missing, the FBI placed notice on the passports, leading to the girls being turned back in Frankfurt, en route to Turkey. The oldest girl, 17, had planned the trip for several months and had recruited the younger girls. The FBI is trying to figure out if anyone had helped the girls. Don't these girls read the news or conduct research to know what ISIS is all about and how it views/treats women?

(5) Nobel Prize in physics creates bitterness: Professor Nick Holonyak, 85, who invented the first visible-light LED in 1962, is upset that he and other pioneers of LED technology, including Texas Instruments researchers who built the first infrared units, have been snubbed by the Nobel committee (and, perhaps, by the winners). [Holonyak believes](#) that blue LEDs would never have happened without the foundational work on LEDs during the early 1960s.

(6) Afghan cleric gets [20-year jail term](#) for raping a 10-year-old girl: This is hailed as a positive step in a country where male rapists often get only a slap on the wrist and rape victims are punished as adulterers. But, it should be viewed only as a small step.

2014/10/28 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We hold the hand of our young child when crossing a street. Think of the Internet as the world's busiest street." ~ Anonymous (Heard on the radio while driving)

(2) Bird uses bread as bait to [catch fish](#).

(3) Public lecture about the US Supreme Court: Last night's enlightening lecture entitled "The Case Against the Supreme Court," by Erwin Chemerinsky (one of our country's leading constitutional lawyers and author of a book by the same title), was held at UCSB's Campbell Hall. Unlike what most Americans think, the US Supreme Court is made up of fallible individuals who render decisions based on their own biases. Analyzing the Court's decisions over the last 200 years, the speaker presented a case on how it has largely failed at crucial moments throughout American history. He cited "Citizens United" as one of the Court's major failures. One of Chemerinsky's suggestions is to institute an 18-year term limit on Court membership, and making arrangements for one new justice to be elected every two years. This will contribute to the diversity of the Court's composition. Also, when life expectancy was much lower, life appointments presented less of a problem, but now when a Supreme Court justice is appointed in his/her late forties or early fifties, we are looking at a term of four decades or more.

(4) Behind the scenes of Ebola cases in Dallas: CBS News program "60 Minutes" ran a [14-minute segment](#) on the first Ebola patient in Dallas and the nurses who treated him. Two of those nurses contracted the disease, but have since recovered. The testimony of the selfless nurses, none of whom opted out of caring for the dangerously sick man is heartwarming.

(5) Iranian women under attack: The Economist reviews the worsening condition of women's rights in Iran, citing the recent acid-throwing incidents in Isfahan, execution of a young woman who had killed a would-be sexual molester, banning of female musicians in Isfahan, segregation of the sexes in municipal offices in Tehran, and banning of female servers in Tehran cafes and restaurants. The worsening condition is sometimes not apparent from photos such as the one accompanying [this article](#).

(6) Final thought for the day: "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is knowing that a tomato doesn't belong in a fruit salad." ~ Miles Kington

2014/10/27 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The thing about quotes on the Internet is you can't confirm their authenticity." ~ Buddha (Or was it the Dalai Lama who said it? Perhaps Albert Einstein?)

(2) US women's national soccer team wins the [CONCACAF championship](#): Last night, USA defeated Costa Rica 6-0 to finish on top. Previously, USA had rolled past Mexico 3-0 in the semifinals to ensure an appearance in the 2015 World Cup tournament.

(3) Toronto-area Islamic center stages beheading play for kids. [See the beginning of this [12-minute video](#).]



(4) **The Imitation Game**: This is the title of a forthcoming movie in which Benedict Cumberbatch portrays Alan Turing, the mathematician who led a team of British code-breakers during World War II to figure out how the Germans encoded their secret wartime communications. The filmmakers went to great lengths to build a replica of Turing's code-breaking machine, using authentic WWII-era parts. Only the looks of the machine was recreated, not its workings, which was beyond the filmmakers' means. [Adapted from *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of October 31, 2014.]

(5) **Director looks to science, not miracles, in parting of the Red Sea**: "You can't just do a giant sudden parting with walls of water trembling while people ride between them." ~ Ridley Scott, on why he looked to science for a realistic depiction of the Red Sea parting scene in his film "Exodus: Gods and Kings," concluding that the most likely explanation is a pre-tsunami drainage, with the water then returning with a vengeance

(6) **Treatment of women in Persian children's stories and textbooks**: An **excellent article** from BBC Persian paints an unflattering picture of women's depiction in Persian children's reading material. From the classic tale of "khaleh sooskeh," in which a female cockroach screens her suitors by asking how they would beat her if they were to get married, to a mere 16% of names mentioned in school textbooks being those of women, misogyny is deeply entrenched in the post-Islamic Persian culture. A mere 24% of pictures in school textbooks depict women, predominantly in domestic or school situations, with a picture of a nurse in a 2nd-grade textbook being the sole representation of women engaging in social activities.

2014/10/26 (Sun.): Fox, Michael J., *Always Looking Up: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*, abridged audiobook on 5 CDs read by the author, Hyperion Audio, 2009.

Michael J. Fox, who rose to fame owing to several TV acting roles, began an equally noteworthy career after he left TV and shifted his focus to activism on behalf of Parkinson's Disease (PD) victims, forming **his own foundation** to raise awareness and money for PD research.

This memoir covers 10 years of Fox's life after retirement from the TV show "Spin City," a major life event that left him "struggling with a strange new dynamic: the shifting of public and private personas." He had once been "Mike the actor" and then became "Mike the actor with PD"; now he was "Mike [the former actor] with PD," his focus suddenly changing from acting to PD advocacy, which necessitated the building a new life.

The book follows the same witty and humorous style of Fox's first book *Lucky Man*. He describes how recognizing the gift of everyday life, and relying on his faith and family, made him a happier man, despite all the challenges.

Fox sings the praises of cyclist Lance Armstrong, an unfortunate happenstance, given that Armstrong's Tour de France victories, and thus his motivational pretenses, have been discredited. The most touching parts of the book concern Fox's family life and how he and his wife Tracy (whom he met as a co-star on "Family Ties") raised their four children according to Jewish norms and how Fox, who is not Jewish, endeavored to familiarize himself with the faith and its traditions.

The author's fast-paced speech and monotone voice make it rather difficult to listen to this audiobook. On the other hand, his reading does lend authenticity to the book and sheds light on extreme challenges faced by Fox during the final years of his TV career, when he had to go to extremes to hide his shaking and other handicaps. Overall, this abridged audiobook is a worthwhile pursuit, providing a reasonably detailed picture of Fox's post-TV life. I am not sure I would have had the patience to listen to, or read, the full book, so coming across this abridged version in our public library was a happy coincidence.

2014/10/25 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) **Business titan's \$65M gift is the biggest ever for UCSB**: Charlie Munger, Vice Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, has **donated \$65M**, to be used for building a guest housing facility to support the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics, a collaborative study hub that relies heavily on the contributions of top visiting scientists.

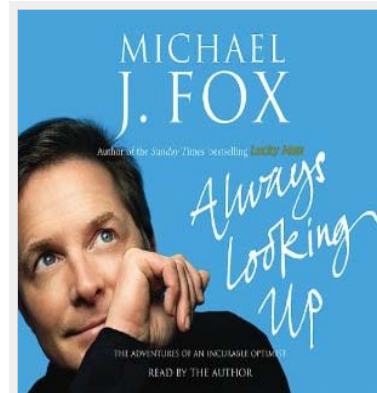
(2) **Women's World Cup soccer**: The US women's national soccer team defeated Mexico 3-0 last night to qualify for the World Cup tournament, to be held in Canada from June 6 to July 5, 2015. The US goalie, Hope Solo, had a relatively **easy night**.

(3) **Use of robots for dealing with Ebola**: Robots can assist in activities such as waste disposal, burials, and protective equipment removal. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy is leading a series of **brainstorming sessions** in this area.

(4) **The little drummer boy**: **Three-year-old drummer performs** with a symphony orchestra.

(5) **The little guitarist girl**: **Impressive skill**; and for balance, after posting about the little drummer boy!

(6) **Final thought for the day**: "Everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don't" ~ Bill Nye



2014/10/24 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "I do not want art for a few any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few." ~ William Morris
- (2) Some topics should be off-limits in jokes and pranks: The ability to laugh and make others laugh at our foibles is a sign of open-mindedness and self-confidence. However, there is a red line that should not be crossed. One cannot laugh at jokes about acts that leave people scarred for life. So, young men who spray women with water on the streets of Iran (supposedly making fun of acid spraying) are crossing this red line, as are those who tell jokes about rape and other despicable acts of violence and violation.
- (3) All smart, no phone: To squeeze in more functionality, the voice quality in phone conversations seems to have been forgotten in modern cell phones. For example, microphone location often takes a back seat to other design considerations. To make things worse, voice-to-data conversion, with its multiple stages of compression, leads to garbling of the speaker's voice. Improving the voice quality should be on top of the to-do list for smartphone designers and manufacturers. [Adapted from *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of October 2014.]
- (4) The biggest academic fraud ever: An investigation at University of North Carolina has revealed that for two decades, athletes (particularly from UNC's football and basketball programs) were channeled into fake courses that had no class meetings and no exams. A single employee (later joined by a professor who retired in 2012) managed the [program of fake courses](#) and often gave "A"s and "B+"s to plagiarized or fluff-padded papers that constituted the only course requirement, with the grade determined in many cases by what the student needed to remain academically eligible for athletics.
- (5) The crisis that changed Pope Francis: This is the title of an [article in Newsweek on-line](#) (posted on October 23, 2014) with the thesis that dramatic life events changed Pope Francis from a typical autocratic hardliner to an unorthodox, people-centered cleric. Those life events consisted of his close contacts with poor people (at one point, he became known as the "Bishop of the Slums"), exemplified by a conversation with a middle-aged mother about life in an impoverished slum ruled by gangs, where addiction to cheap cocaine byproducts, specifically targeted to the children of the poor, was the norm.
- (6) World's largest freshwater wetland: Annual floods fed by tropical rains convert an area half the size of France, mostly in western Brazil but extending into Bolivia and Paraguay, into the world's largest freshwater wetland ecosystem. The [Pantanal area](#), situated south of the Amazon basin and east of the Andes, is one of Brazil's major tourist draws.

2014/10/23 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Kurds show their sense of humor under very difficult conditions: They impersonate and poke fun at ISIS/Daesh terrorists in this [musical performance](#).
- (2) Traditional Persian music: Hamidreza Tarighian performs "[Rafti](#)" ("You Went Away"), lyrics by Rahim Moeini Kermanshahi (songwriter is unknown to me).
- (3) Firefighters need more than just protective envelopes: According to a news report in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine, issue of October 2014, nearly half of US firefighter deaths are caused by heart attacks. New intelligent wear for firefighters not only improve on protective capabilities but also embed various sensors to monitor physiological indicators.
- (4) Women not attracted to computing: The initial surge in the number of women in computing programs during the decade beginning in the mid 1970s was due to affirmative action, but the women recruited quickly lost interest, when they saw very few role models among the faculty members and an industry work culture, particularly among the start-ups, that is not attuned to women's needs. [[NPR chart](#)]
- (5) Except for an oblique reference ("need for security on the streets") by President Rouhani, Iran's top officials still quiet on the acts of acid spraying on women in Isfahan: Allusion, instead of facing a problem head-on, is a sign of weakness. Isfahan's Friday Prayers Leader was more explicit when he said that his followers should pick up their sticks in dealing with the hijab problem (although he later claimed, with a straight face, despite his remarks being widely available in audio and video forms, that he never said people should go beyond words in this domain). It's nice to talk about security, but lumping this problem with various forms of robbery, for example, is doing a disservice to the cause of women's rights, which are being infringed upon by everyone, starting at the very top ("women should bear more children"), through the parliament (passing of oppressive law which are supported, ironically, by the few female members of the parliament, who, by the way, have also been quiet on this issue), down to the figurative man on the street (who uses the outdated notions of "gheirat" and "namoos" to exert pressure on members of his own family as well as other women). Yes, we need much more than a statement about security on the streets. Robbers and other criminals know that what they are doing is wrong and they will get in trouble if caught. Acid sprayers think they are doing God's work and will be treated leniently if and when they are identified. I bet that they won't even be brought on TV to confess to their acts and repent (like the makers of the "Happy" video and many political protesters). As usual, unofficial statements are being circulated to the effect that Zionists and foreign intelligence services were the culprits!

2014/10/21 (Tue.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) NASA Mars spacecraft sending data from comet encounter: Over the next couple of days, scientists will process the data collected from three Mars orbiters in the wake of Comet Siding Spring's passing by the planet. This unexpected **treasure trove of data** will go a long way toward improving our understanding of comets and their composition.

(2) Iranian women will not be forced to stay home, despite the fear of being sprayed with acid. The handwritten sign held by this **brave Isfahani woman** reads, "You can take away my face with acid, but you can never take away my thoughts." Meanwhile, neither Iran's President nor any other official has acknowledged the incidents or offered comforting words to the victims and their families, prompting **this Iranian woman** to tell the President that he has flunked his test. In a photo that has since been removed from Facebook, an Iranian woman was shown wearing a red motorcycle helmet on the street to protect her face in a protest gesture. Interestingly, and predictably, a couple of clerics have blamed the Zionists and foreign intelligence services for the acid attacks.

(3) Dealing with weapons of mass deception: **This article** in *IEEE Computer* magazine, written by Hal Berghel, concerns how one might spot lies and disinformation, which are collectively referred to as "infopollution," a particularly nasty problem in cyberspace. There is a box in the article that introduces the book *Spy the Lie: Former CIA Officers Teach You How to Detect Deception* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2012), which contains a set of guidelines for analyzing statements and body language to detect untruthful answers.

(4) Final thought for the day: "[A]s we celebrate 17-year-old Malala, let's not simply be in awe of her age or her accomplishments. Let's join her. Let's all do our part to help unlock the extraordinary talents and potential of all our children," ~ Barack and Michelle Obama, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of October 27, 2014

2014/10/20 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A very clever Honda CRV commercial, making use of 3D street paintings. [**1-minute video**]

(2) What people up and down the income ladder do for a living: The **most common job titles** for people in various income brackets.

(3) Sarah Palin isn't pleased: She will soon be able to see gay couples from her house, as Alaska's ban on gay marriage has been struck down by a federal judge.

(4) Fifteen words with interesting (though, admittedly, not very useful) properties: For example, "CHECKBOOK," written in uppercase letters, is the longest English word that has a line of horizontal symmetry. [**Read**]

(5) Historical photos worth a thousand words: **This page** contains 60 very interesting historical photos. Here is a partial list. [5] Racial segregation in the US South; [11] Da Vinci's Mona Lisa is returned to the Louvre after World War II; [13] Automobiles in 1900; [16] Execution by cannon, Shiraz, Iran, late 19th Century; [28] Charlie Chaplin and Mahatma Gandhi; [34] The Beatles at the beginning of their career; [38] Microsoft staff group photo from 1978; [42] Young Osama bin Laden and family visiting Sweden, 1970; [43] Unpacking the head of the Statue of Liberty, 1885; [46] New York City in 1900.

(6) Final thought for the day: "I was dead, I found life; I was weeping, I found laughter. | Love's blessings transformed me, and I became everlasting power. | My eyes are content now, my soul valiant. | I have the heart of a lion, and the glow of Venus." ~ Rumi

2014/10/19 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) **Ice dancing** to Indian music. Magnificent!

(2) Photographer captures fathers and daughters in Iran. [**Photos and stories**]

(3) More bad news for Iranian women: Fifteen **women have been attacked** in Isfahan and their faces disfigured by acid spray. The attackers allegedly were following the Islamic tenet of "amr-e beh ma'roof va nahy-e az monkar," which tasks each Muslim with ordering others to be virtuous and not commit sins. The vigilantes were apparently upset with the women's attire and decided to punish them and send a warning message to others. The government of Iran has kept silent so far, with initial police statements denying that there was any pattern to these barbaric acts, attributing them to personal disputes. In fact, the Islamic government is likely delighted with this low-cost way of enforcing their wishes, given that Iran's judiciary and law enforcement can blame the attacks on lawless groups, while still inducing fear in women. This strategy will no doubt backfire, given that women have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of the fight against the regime's anti-democracy and anti-modernity policies. Previously, women attending private parties without Islamic attire had been attacked and raped by intruders, with the government's response being quite similar to what we see today, effectively blaming the victims. Apparently, Iran's police force is quite capable of tracking and arresting within hours those who dare engage in water-gun recreation in a park or make a "Happy" video, but is utterly ineffective in the case of serious crimes against women.

(4) Women should not be financially independent: Just in case anyone thinks that the violence against women is committed by lawless groups (see the previous item) and is not part of a systematic marginalization of

women by the officials of the Islamic Republic, listen to [this interview](#) with a cleric, shown on the official governmental TV in Iran, where he states that God wants women to be financially dependent on men, so that, even if they earn money, they should give their earnings to their husbands and receive an allowance from him.

(5) Final thought for the day: "The true delight is in the finding out rather than in the knowing." ~ Isaac Asimov

2014/10/17 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." ~ Francis Bacon

(2) ISIS may lose the battle for Kobani: The [siege of Kobani](#) seems to be easing up with help from US airstrikes. One such defeat, if it comes, can trigger greater resistance to ISIS advances and may impede the terrorist group's recruitment efforts.

(3) Italian nurse, arrested for murdering a patient, may have killed dozens: Daniela Poggiali allegedly [killed patients she found annoying](#). She took smiling selfies with the cadaver of a patient she is suspected to have killed. I remember several years ago, a male nurse in the US was accused of killing even more people. This is a greater threat in our hospitals than the current Ebola scare.

(4) Pink brain, blue brain (neurosexism): Myths about differences between male and female brains have persisted for a long time, leading, among other problems, to fewer opportunities for women in STEM fields. The BBC series "Is Your Brain Male or Female?" has fueled the misconceptions. [The myths](#) have it that, according to research studies (plural), men are better at discovering rules that govern a system, while women excel in guessing other people's emotions and showing appropriate reactions. In fact, only one "study" has drawn such conclusions, and those conclusions have been widely debunked.

(5) Five things on your resume that make you sound old: If you are in the job market and fear age discrimination, [avoid the following five things](#) on your resume.

Home mailing address (no one sends mail any more).

AOL e-mail address or one provided by your cable company.

Landline home phone number.

Inserting two spaces after periods.

Outdated skills (MS-DOS and the like).

(6) Final thought for the day: "We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand" ~ Cecil Day-Lewis

2014/10/16 (Thu.): Thompson, Clive, *Smarter than You Think: How Technology Is Changing Our Minds for the Better*, Penguin, 2013.

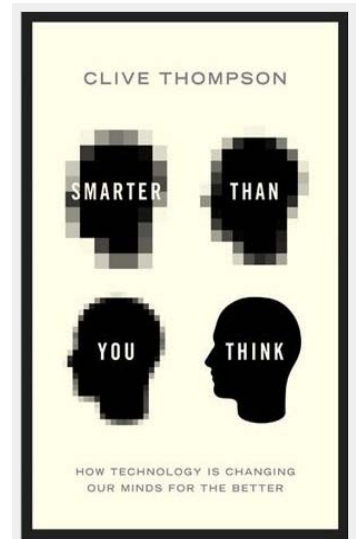
I begin this review by listing the 10 chapter titles along with the page numbers where they begin, as a way of summarizing the book's contents: The Rise of the Centaurs, 1; We the Memorious, 19; Public Thinking, 45; The New Literacies, 83; The Art of Finding, 115; The Puzzle-Hungry World, 147; Digital School, 175; Ambient Awareness, 209; The Connected Society, 245; Epilogue, 279 (followed by acknowledgment, 35 pages of notes, and an index).

The author provides a resounding "yes" answer to the question of whether electronic gadgets and services, that augment our memory, are making us smarter. He notes that alarmists, who now claim that texting, e-mail, Internet searches, and so on are dumbing us down, will be proven wrong, just as the ancient Greek philosophers who thought the invention of writing will lead to a decay of knowledge and civilization were proven wrong. As another example, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz famously worried about information explosion. He stated that the growing mass of books could lead to general oblivion and a return to barbarism.

It is quite true that we are drowning from a flood of information coming at us from electronic sources, making our lives a constant struggle to catch up with the in-flow. While there are gems among status posts, blogs, and other social-media content, one has to sift through a lot of crap to find those gems. American sci-fi writer Theodore Sturgeon [1918-1985] famously defended harsh criticisms of his genre by saying that while he agreed that 90% of sci-fi was crap, so was 90% of everything else; hence the geeky Sturgeon's Law, "Ninety percent of everything is crap" [p. 48].

Alarmists impede scientific progress in other ways as well. For example, being extra careful around newborn babies, who are quite fragile, is a good thing. Scientific experiments have shown that the brain circuits of new parents exhibit activity similar to that in people suffering from OCD. Now, an alarmist would use this finding to form the scary headline, "BECOMING A PARENT ERODES YOUR BRAIN FUNCTION" [p. 15].

In digital technology, we have moved beyond chess-playing computers, demonstrating that machines can excel



review. Had I wanted to write this review from memory, it would have been much shorter and less detailed. Having taken extensive notes during my reading, I approached this review much more confidently, validating one of the points of the author that writing allows better learning and greater recall. I recommend the book highly.

2014/10/15 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Photos of actors, alongside real people they played in film. [[Pictorial](#)]

(2) The Vatican reverses tone on gays: While [the new Vatican statement](#) (contained in its "Report after Debate" among top Catholic clergy) falls short of accepting gays and gay marriages, it does state that "[Gays] need to be welcomed and accompanied with patience and delicacy ... [as they] have gifts and qualities to offer the Christian community. ... Without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions, it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners." A very big step indeed!

(3) Luxurious universities: [ABC News \(Nightline\) reports](#) on perks (such as water parks and luxury dorms) on some college campuses, as tuition, fees, and student debt keep rising.

(4) The joy of cooking: In its issue of October 20, 2014, *Time* magazine has a feature article about healthy eating on a budget (money and time). Mark Bittman, best-selling food writer, advocates eating out as little as possible and claims that it is easier than most people think. Our idea of cooking is often tied to preparing fancy, time-consuming meals, whereas, given the increasing availability of fresh ingredients at supermarkets and local farmers' markets, eating in can be quite simple, if we learn speed-cooking and lower our expectations a bit. The article features a few popular recipes and a checklist for your pantry that would allow spontaneous cooking. I could not find the article on-line, so I looked for and found a similar [kitchen-and-pantry checklist](#).

(5) Funny French phrases: We have many phrases in English that are funny if taken literally, but are used daily without much thought. Examples include "pigging out" and "drinking like a fish." Here are [some examples](#) from the French language.

"Ah, la vache!" = "Oh my goodness!" (Literally, "Oh, the cow!")

"Avoir une araignee au plafond." = "Having a screw loose." (Literally, "Having a spider on the ceiling.")

"Casser les Oreilles." = "Getting on someone's nerves." (Literally, "Breaking someone's ears.")

"C'est la fin des haricots." = "That's the last straw." (Literally, "That's the end of the beans.")

"Avoir le cafard." = "Feeling down." (Literally, "Having a cockroach.")

"Avoir une peur bleue." = "Being scared stiff." (Literally, "Having a blue fear.")

"Faire un tabac." = "Being the toast of the town." (Literally, "Doing a tobacco.")

(6) Final thought for the day: "All grand thoughts come from the heart." ~ Luc de Clapiers

2014/10/14 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Hidden camera prank: Doing [sobriety checks](#) when the breathalyzer fails. There are other variants of this same prank floating around in cyberspace.

(2) Blacks passing as whites in America: This fascinating [NPR piece](#) tells the story of some African-Americans whose skin color and facial features allowed them to pass as whites. According to Allyson Hobbs' book, *A Chosen Exile*, some such blacks lived their lives as whites, which opened doors for them but led to psychological issues and identity crises, due to severed family ties and rewritten family histories.

(3) Do worry, but be happy: Amid gloomy news about melting sea ice and record average temperatures in 13 of the last 14 years, it is easy to lose sight of the progress we have already made and are making toward reversing global warming. In the US, the majority of new power-generating capacity is from emission-free sources. Lower oil and natural gas prices have led to the replacement of many coal power-plants with cleaner (though still polluting) alternatives. Other glimmers of hope are provided by LED lighting, improvements in battery technology that are accelerating the adoption of all-electric vehicles, and introduction of new carbon regulations worldwide. (Adapted from *Time* magazine, issue of October 20, 2014.)

(4) French proverbs and their English equivalents: Certain sayings appear in multiple cultures and languages, identically or with minor variations. For example, the French "Vouloir, c'est pouvoir" is identical to the English "Where there's a will, there's a way." The French version is both more succinct and more memorable, due to rhyming. Here are a few other [French proverbs](#).

"Chacun voit midi a sa porte." This translates to "Everyone sees noon at his own door." With a little imagination you get to the English equivalent "To each his own."

"Rien ne sert de courir, il faut partir a point." Translating this word-for-word works out to "There's no sense in running; you just have to leave on time," which is similar to the English adage "Slow and steady wins the race."

"Il n'y a pas de fume sans feu." The literal translation ("There isn't smoke without fire") is very close to the equivalent English phrase "Where there's smoke there's fire."

"Autres temps, autres moeurs." This translates to "Other times, other values," or, in English, "Times change."

"Un malheur ne vient jamais seul." The translation of this one is "Misfortune never arrives alone," more idiomatically stated as "When it rains, it pours."

"Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait." This translates directly as "If youth only knew; if old age only could," which is similar to the English proverb "Youth is wasted on the young."

(5) Final thought for the day: "One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done." ~ Marie Curie

2014/10/13 (Mon.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Nobel Prize in economics: Today, the last Nobel Prize for 2014 was announced. **The economics Nobel** went to Jean Tirole (Toulouse School of Economics) "for his analysis of market power and regulation." Free-market advocates believe that supply and demand, along with profit motive, act to align markets with the public interest. It is now known, however, that absence of meaningful regulations leads to behavior on the part of firms with market power that undermines public interest. Questions in this domain are addressed by researchers in the field of industrial organization, to which today's Nobel honoree has contributed immensely.

(2) Beautiful music and elegant group dancing: Dmitri Shostakovich's "**The Second Waltz**" (a favorite of many big orchestras).

(3) Traditional Persian music: Alireza Shahmohammadi provides the vocals in **this rendition** of "Narguess-e Bimaaar-e To."

(4) An evening with Tony Bennett in Santa Barbara's Granada Theater: A widespread downtown power outage led to the cancellation of Tony Bennett's October 2 concert in Santa Barbara, which allowed me to attend last night's rescheduled event (some ticket holders apparently opted out, thus making seats available). Antonia Bennett, Tony's daughter, opened the performance with a few jazzy tunes and a jazzed-up version of "You Are Always on My Mind." She said how excited she was for the opportunity to spend time with her father and to learn from him. Later in the show, she performed a duet, "Old Friends," with her dad. Bennett sang many classic songs ("Maybe This Time," "I Got Rhythm," "Stranger in Paradise," "Steppin' Out With My Baby," "The Best Is Yet to Come," "The Way You Look Tonight," "The Shadow of Your Smile," "One More for the Road," "For Once in My Life," "I'm Old Fashioned," and "I Left My Heart in San Francisco"), which by now seem effortless for the 88-year-old artist; he even treated us to a few nifty dance steps. A small 4-piece band (piano, guitar, bass, and percussion) accompanied him through many delightful songs, including three encore sets. As the last piece, Bennett put his microphone down and sang Charlie Chaplin's "Smile." This was the opening event of UCSB's 2014-2015 "Arts and Lectures" season.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day." ~ Zen proverb

2014/10/12 (Sun.): Solomon, Robert and Kathleen Higgins, *The Will to Power: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Parts 1 and 2, 24 lectures in the "Great Courses" series on 12 CDs, The Teaching Company, 1999.

By any measure, Nietzsche is the most influential philosopher of the past two centuries. He is also the most frequently quoted and the most misunderstood. The will-to-power that Nietzsche talks about isn't the fundamental human drive for independence and dominance (i.e., mastery over others), but rather a more refined form of power manifested in self-control and spiritual depth. The inner power allows you to become who you are; Nietzsche rejected the notion of being who you are, which implies passivity, in favor of the active maxim of developing your potentials to the fullest. Aspects of this self-mastery are captured by the husband-wife team of Solomon and Higgins in 24 half-hour lectures.

The lecture titles and their summaries (popping up by placing the cursor over the lecturer titles) are available on **this Web page**.

Here is my annotated overview of some of Nietzsche's key notions, enumerated in Lecture 1 and elaborated upon in the remaining 23 lectures. My summary below is just the tip of the iceberg, as the complexities of Nietzsche's ideas and his immaculate writings cannot be exposed so briefly.

Übermensch—Superman, representing the totally refined humanity toward which we should all strive

Nihilism—Belief that there is no objective order or structure in the world, except what we give it

Will-to-power—Misunderstood, due to a confusion between "kraft" (force) and "macht" (power)

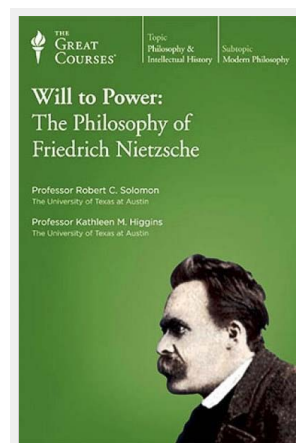
Apollonian and Dionysian—Reason/rationality vs. chaos/irrationality dichotomy, central to Greek tragedies

Christianity—His famous pronouncement "God is dead" is an attack on Christianity, not on Christ himself

Repudiation of Morality (with capital M)—He believes in moralities (with small m) based on context

War against guilt and sin—These are symptoms of "slave morality" that creates anguish and resentment

The love of fate and living dangerously—Fate isn't unalterable, but one should accept necessity



The critique of modernity—Mass culture and failed institutions have left us with declining quality of life
Saying "Yes!" to life—Another aspect of Nietzsche's attack on Morality, which he views as "Nay saying"
I have listened to other lectures in the "Great Courses" series before, finding them enlightening and absorbing
in every case. This short course on philosophy is no exception. The lectures constitute excellent resources for
learning about new topics for people with frequent long car trips.

2014/10/11 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "No matter who you are, most of the smartest people work for someone else." ~ Bill Joys, on the need for, and benefits of, collaboration in solving challenging problems
- (2) USA-Ecuador friendly soccer match: With Landon Donovan playing his last international game, the US national soccer team tied Ecuador 1-1 in East Hartford, Connecticut, yesterday. The US team had a disappointing performance in terms of missed scoring opportunities and defensive mistakes. On Tuesday 10/14, the US will play another international friendly match against Honduras in Boca Raton, Florida, beginning at 8:00 PM EDT.
- (3) Ayatollah disses Iranian woman's gold medal in Karate: "A women's merit is in properly raising kids, not in earning medals." This was the reaction of [Ayatollah Javadi Amoli](#) after he learned about Iranian athlete Hamideh Abbasali's first-place finish in Asian Games. Given the champion's kicking abilities, I guess the ayatollah would not want to deliver this message to her in person.
- (4) Facebook COO's favorite page: In an [interview with Fortune magazine](#), Sheryl Sandberg indicated that the page "My Stealthy Freedom," in which Iranian women express their distaste for mandatory hijab laws by posting hijab-less photos and telling their personal stories, is her favorite Facebook page.
- (5) Discovered [mass grave in Mexico](#) may solve the mystery of 43 missing students: Two dozen local policemen have been arrested for their possible role in the disappearance.

2014/10/10 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Growing insulin-making cells: Harvard scientists have found a way of turning human embryonic stem cells into beta cells in the pancreas that [produce insulin](#), raising hopes of more effective ways to treat diabetes.
- (2) Nobel Peace Prize winners: Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi and 17-year-old Pakistani activist Malala Yousefzay (the youngest ever Nobel Laureate) [were honored today](#) (in equal shares) "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education." Before the selection, oddsmakers were again at work, trying to make some money from people who believed they knew who would win. Pope Francis topped the list at 2 to 1 odds. Novaya Gazeta (Russian newspaper) and Malala Yousafzay were next at 5 to 1 and 8 to 1 odds. Denis Mukwege (Congolese gynecologist) and Edward Snowden were tied at 10 to 1 odds. Other recognizable names further down the list included Ban Ki-Moon (20 to 1), Catherine Ashton (25 to 1), Bill Clinton (30 to 1), and Julian Assange (40 to 1). Satyarthi was not even listed on oddsmakers' lists.
- (3) Beach Boys' song performed for a good cause: The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson and a host of well-known artists (including Stevie Wonder, Elton John, One Direction, Kylie Minogue, and Pharrell Williams) perform the 50-year-old ["God Only Knows"](#) to mark the launch of BBC Music, with proceeds going to charity. [This pictorial](#) shows who is in the video. [This video](#) covers the making of the BBC Music video (behind the scenes).
- (4) The Eiffel Tower gets a glass floor: The newly installed partial floor creates a sensation of walking on air, 200 feet above other tourists at the tower's base. [[Pictorial](#)]
- (5) Ethical aspects of college hacking courses: Many colleges offering degree programs in computer science and engineering teach students computer hacking skills that allow them to infiltrate computers, oil pipeline control systems, and the electric power grid. The idea is that a specialist who learns how to hack, will see system vulnerabilities better, allowing him/her to devise more effective countermeasures. Once the skills are learned, however, there is no way to know or to control how they are used. In this age of heightened sensitivity to terrorism and national security, there is a fear that those skills can be sold to the highest bidder, which may be an enemy of the US. There is no simple solution to this dilemma. Teaching ethics to the students and professors involved is a small step that may help reduce the chances of abuse. This [Washington Post article](#), "The Ethics of Hacking 101," does a commendable job of discussing the issues.

2014/10/09 (Thu.): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Banks don't want to lend; they want to trade, often via esoteric deals that do almost nothing for anyone outside Wall Street. ... Adair Turner, a former British banking regulator, thinks that only about 15% of U.K. financial flows go to the real economy; the rest stay within the financial system ... If the New York Fed really wants to redeem itself, it might consider commissioning a similar study to look at Wall Street's contribution to the U.S. economy." ~ Rana Foroohar, writing in *Time* magazine (issue of October 13, 2014) about the shady deals and outright deception that have recently come to light by the release of 46 hours of

secretly recorded audiotapes revealing the cozy relationship between New York's financial regulators and Wall Street

(2) The 2014 Nobel Prize in chemistry: Two Americans and a German (Eric Betzig, William E. Moerner, and Stefan W. Hell) share the honor in equal parts for their [work on optical microscopy](#) that has opened up our understanding of molecules via up-close inspection of how they work. The honorees stretched the resolution of optical microscopy beyond what was thought possible in the scientific community, pioneering nanoscopy as a key research tool in life sciences. These contributions could have just as easily been honored in physics. In fact, physics and chemistry have become increasingly similar in recent years (a colleague of mine at UCSB who is a theoretical physicist won the 1998 chemistry Nobel). Given that this year's physics Nobel was also awarded for technological development, rather than the discovery of a new scientific theory, it seems that the Nobel committee has realized that some of these technological advances are as important as new scientific discoveries in extending our understanding of nature and improving the human condition. It is now a small step to an acceptance that information technology also merits recognition by a Nobel Prize, given its broad impact on humanity and on our understanding of other scientific fields.

(3) The 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature: French writer [Patrick Modiano was honored](#) today "for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the [Nazi] occupation." Modiano's works, which deal with topics such as memory, oblivion, identity, and guilt, tend to be autobiographical in nature, with his home city of Paris always featured prominently. His novels are interconnected, with characters from earlier tales making appearances in newer ones. The autobiographical element is most visible in Modiano's 2005 book, *Un Pedigree*.

Unlike Nobel awards in the sciences, everyone seems to have an opinion about who should win the literature or peace prize, and when people have strong opinions, they wager. London oddsmakers had established 11 to 1 odds for Modiano winning. The most likely people to win, according to the oddsmakers, were Wa Thiong'o (from Kenya, 4.5 to 1) and Haruki Murakami (from Japan, 5.5 to 1). Bob Dylan was given 26 to 1 odds.

(4) CBS's newsmagazine "60 Minutes" attacks the unreasonably high drug prices: Certain cancer treatment drugs cost \$100K or more per year, per patient. Doctors and other experts deem these prices unreasonable, especially since the same drugs are sold in other countries at a fraction of their US prices. Drug companies either did not respond to CBS's inquiries or supplied canned answers through a lobbying group. If you missed last Sunday's program segment, its video and transcripts are made available on this [Forbes page](#).

2014/10/08 (Wed.): Dixit, Avinash, *Microeconomics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

This small volume (131 pp., pocket size) is part of an amazing series of books published by OUP that aims to provide stimulating and accessible ways of exploring new subjects. The still expanding [list of titles](#) includes over 400 topics, from *Accounting* to *Writing and Script*.

The books are of very high quality, having been written by authorities in the respective fields. There is another volume in the series that introduces economics, including acroeconomics.

Let me begin by defining the subject matter of this book. Microeconomics is a subfield of economics that deals with the analysis of market behavior of individual consumers and organizations, with the aim of understanding decision-making processes of firms and households and the interactions between individual sellers and buyers (supply and demand patterns). By contrast, macroeconomics is concerned with the aggregate economic behaviors, focusing on economy-wide phenomena, such as unemployment, rate of growth, gross domestic product, price trends, and inflation. The two subfields are closely related and topics from one invariably arise as one studies the other one.

The best way for me to summarize the book is to supply the chapter titles along with section titles within them.

Chapter 1. What and Why of Microeconomics (pp. 1-4): A wake-up call; Information and incentives

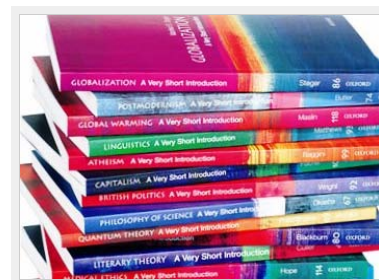
Chapter 2. Consumers (pp. 5-27): Substitution; Complements; Demand curves; Consumers as workers and servers; Statistical estimation; Cost-of-living indexes; The babysitter effect; Time—and other budgets; Opportunity cost; Risk; Are consumers rational?

Chapter 3. Producers (pp. 28-49): Costs; Small firms, supply curves; Pricing strategies; Rivalry among large firms; Supply chains; Firms as organizations

Chapter 4. Markets (pp. 50-66): Supply and demand; Efficiency; Shift of equilibrium; Taxes; Cycles of booms and busts; Price floors and ceilings

Chapter 5. Market and Policy Failures (pp. 67-98): Monopoly and oligopoly; Externalities, negative and positive; Information asymmetries; Moral hazard and adverse selection; Profit externalities between firms; A difficult trade-off; Collective goods; Political economy of policy; The financial crisis

Chapter 6. Institutions and Organizations (pp. 99-115): Property rights and contract enforcement; State and



non-state institutions; Market design; Matching markets; Auctions

Chapter 7. What Works? (pp. 116-118)

Having listed the main headings, I now proceed to write a few words about some of them. Supply and demand are two of the key concepts of microeconomics. Producers supply the commodities that consumers need or want. Philosopher/satirist Thomas Carlyle is quoted as saying: "Teach a parrot the terms supply and demand and you've got an economist." Economists are butts of jokes owing to their propensity for comparing alternatives. One joke has an economist asking another one, "How is your wife?" The second guy's answer is, "Compared to whom?"

Even something as (seemingly) simple as getting our morning cup of coffee entails many overt and hidden considerations—make at home or go out to get it. A myriad of factors are involved in this unremarkable decision, which include cost, our mood, schedule for the day, the probability of meeting a friend at the coffee shop, and so on.

For many commodities, the price-quantity curve works well in balancing supply and demand. A high price conveys information about scarcity and incentive for action to alleviate the scarcity. The price-quantity curve is negatively sloped; lower price induces greater demand and price hikes generally reduce demand. Unfortunately, however, things like clean air have no market and thus no individual incentive to deal with it. Similarly, human organ markets are despicable, but thrive in the absence of regulations. These are examples of failure of a pure market economy.

Prices are not set in a vacuum and bear complex relationships. Prices for commodities that can substitute for each other (e.g., coffee and tea) are linked, as are prices of items that complement each other (e.g., fish and chips). Similarly, prices are affected by income variations and by collusion among those offering certain commodities. The substitution property makes the calculation of inflation figures rather difficult. If you take a fixed basket of items and track the changes in its total cost, you miss the effect that if the price of butter, say, goes up, consumers will look for alternatives to lower their total expenditure.

Decrease in income generally reduces consumption, except in the case of some inferior goods to which people with lowered income tend to gravitate. One can study the effect of a 1% increase in income or commodity x on the price of commodity y . Data from one study presented in Table 1 of the book suggest that a 1% increase in income leads to a 2 percent increase in the price of alcohol but only a 2/3 percent increase in food prices. See if you can come up with an explanation for these data points.

There are also more subtle factors affecting consumer behavior and thus demand and prices. For example, money spent on a babysitter is much more significant when you eat a \$10 meal at the restaurant vs. a fancy \$50 meal. So, couples who hire a babysitter to allow them to dine out tend to move toward more expensive meals as a way of optimizing their enjoyment per dollar spent. Cost of (limited) time is also an important factor in making economic decisions.

Even though I was already familiar with the basics of economics, I learned a great deal from this excellent book. I plan to pursue a few other titles in OUP's "Very Short Introduction" series in the near future.

2014/10/07 (Tue.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The Supreme Leader plays a long game. A lot of Iran watchers believe that he'll always whack the Great Satan, even if he knows he needs to do a deal. We'll see. The important lesson about the Middle East is to watch what they do, not what they say." ~ Senior US administration official, quoted anonymously in *Time* magazine's 6-page feature on Ali Khamenei, issue of October 13, 2014

(2) The Supreme Leader's tweet: "You who claim the #leadership of the world, can you claim that African-Americans have the same rights as the whites? #Ferguson" ~ Ali Khamenei, preaching about human rights with a straight face in his August 25, 2014, tweet (he is quite active on Twitter and Facebook, both banned in Iran for ordinary mortals)

(3) Nobel Prize in medicine/physiology: An American-born British researcher got the first half and two Norwegians the second half for their discovery of the **brain's 'inner GPS'** that makes it possible for humans and other animals to orient themselves in space. Yesterday's honorees were cognitive neuroscientist John O'Keefe (credited with identifying place cells) and husband-and-wife team Edvard I. and May-Britt Moser (who discovered the complementary grid cells). The **official Nobel Web site** includes photos and biographies of all three winners, a press release containing some details of their specific technical contributions, and the context of the discoveries (under "Advanced Information"). [Other prizes will be announced over the next few days: Physics 10/7; Chemistry 10/8; Literature 10/9; Peace 10/10; Economics 10/13]

(4) UCSB engineering professor is one of the 2014 Nobel Laureates in physics: **Shuji Nakamura**, professor of materials and of electrical and computer engineering at University of California, Santa Barbara, and Japanese researchers Isamu Akasaki of Meijo and Nagoya Universities and Hiroshi Amano of Nagoya University, were announced today as equal-share co-winners of the 2014 Nobel Prize in physics. The three researchers were honored for the invention of efficient blue light-emitting diodes used in bright and energy-saving white light

sources. Nakamura is the 6th UCSB faculty member to be honored with a Nobel Prize. According to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, when the three researchers "produced bright blue light beams from their semiconductors in the early 1990s, they triggered a fundamental transformation of lighting technology. Red and green diodes had been around for a long time, but without blue light, white lamps could not be created. Despite considerable efforts, both in the scientific community and in industry, the blue LED had remained a challenge for three decades. [LED lighting] holds great promise for increasing the quality of life for over 1.5 billion people around the world who lack access to electricity grids."

[This [NYT report](#) provides some of the back story in the invention of blue LEDs, including Nakamura's leaving Japan for the US in 1999 and subsequently suing Nichia, his former employer, for a share of the huge profits it made from his inventions and process improvements. Apparently, the company had awarded Nakamura a bonus of only \$200, whereas he demanded \$193M. In 2005, the case was settled out of court for \$8M.]

2014/10/06 (Mon.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) An interesting idea for making spaghetti: Put noodles through hot dog pieces before cooking. [[Photo](#)]
 (2) A nasty Iranian habit: Last night, I chanced upon a post in cyberspace from someone who criticized Reza Zarghamee for daring to write the 700-page book *Discovering Cyrus*, because he practices law as a profession and was raised in England and the US. We people of Iranian origins have not learned constructive criticism and civil discourse, resorting to character assassination in lieu of reasoned discussion. If the book is no good, then please write a critical assessment, pointing to its inaccuracies. Ancient history is open to interpretation, given gaps in the record and dearth of unbiased accounts. If Zarghamee makes a factual error, then it should be pointed out in the hopes of correction in future editions or in an on-line errata. Everyone is free to publish anything, with the test of material being expert opinion, in the form of critical reviews, reader interest, and the reputation of the publisher. There is absolutely no requirement for someone to have lived in Iran in order to write about its history. An amateur historian can add valuable insights to the ancient history of Iran, just as an amateur mathematician or physicist can contribute enlightening original viewpoints and intuitive explanations in the domain of science.

(3) Responding to Reza Aslan: In a widely viewed TV discussion, Aslan attacked Bill Maher for his anti-Islam statements. Aslan's rebuttal resonated with many viewers. In [this response](#), ex-Muslims Muhammad Syed and Sarah Haider respond that Aslan's invoking Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh as countries that, unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran, give women equal status is a distortion of truth. In all three countries, there are laws protecting women's rights, but there are parallel religious court systems that implement Sharia law, either in defiance of civil laws or as a complement to them.

(4) Free or inexpensive educational apps: *Time* magazine lists the following apps (for Web, iOS, and/or Android) in its October 13, 2014 issue.

Lumosity: Challenges memory and attention with scientific brain games.

Duolingo: Teaches Spanish, French, Italian, German, or Portuguese.

Codecademy: Offers lessons in HTML, JavaScript, and other languages.

Dailyart: Presents a different classic painting each day, with its backstory.

Today's documents: Serves up a historical document or photo each day.

Vocabulary.com (\$2.99): Teaches 12,000 words via 120,000 questions.

2014/10/05 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) On endless movie sequels: "Can't wait for T4KEN, TA5EN, and TAKEN 6: The Taking." ~ *Entertainment Weekly's* reaction to the release of TAK3N, the third film in the TAKEN trilogy

(2) A bittersweet occasion: Iranian concert crowd [honors Simin Ghanem](#), who like other female signers is banned from performing in Iran except for all-female audiences, by singing her most famous song to her.

(3) Drawing an eye: [Time-lapse video](#).

(4) Five-year-old cutie sings Caitlin Rose's "[Own Side](#)" while her daddy plays the guitar.

(5) 'A diamond is forever' and other fairy tales: This is the title of a research paper published by economists Andrew Francis and Hugo Mialon, with the subtitle "The relationship between wedding expenses and marriage duration." [The research](#) based on data from 3000 US adults shows that women (and I presume, men) whose wedding had cost more than \$20K (in 2014 dollars) got divorced 60% more often than those whose weddings were cheaper.

(6) College soccer: The UCSB men's soccer team played two matches at home over the past few days. On Thursday night, the Gauchos pulled off an unsatisfying 2-1 win over Cal State University Northridge, despite totally dominating the first half and being in control over the latter part of the second half. The halftime score was 1-1, with CSUN scoring first. Last night, the Gauchos played the UC Irvine Anteaters, currently ranked 6th nationally. The match was scoreless until 40 seconds to the end of regulation time, when the Gauchos scored on a beautiful long-range shot, winning 1-0. Irvine had better scoring opportunities in the first half, but UCSB had

the edge in the second half. The UCSB defense was porous and there were quite a few silly defensive mistakes, but the Gaucho's goalie performed well, making a couple of excellent saves.

2014/10/04 (Sat.): Taylor, Jill Bolte, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*, unabridged audiobook on 5 CDs, read by the author, Penguin Audio, 2008.

This book is about a Harvard-trained brain scientist's personal setbacks, and what she learned from them, when she suffered a rare, hemorrhaging kind of stroke in her left brain at age 37. The author's brother, a year older than her, was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and this had motivated her to pursue brain science. Her own stroke, devastating as it was, provided her with an opportunity to observe first-hand what happens to stroke victims.

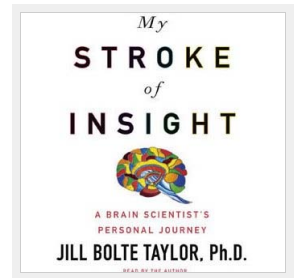
Taylor describes in great detail every sensation that she felt and every thought that went through her mind as her left brain gradually lost all function. For example, when she tried to make phone calls to seek help (even dialing a number was a great challenge), she observed that word sounds formed perfectly in her brain and she could hear them normally, but her vocal chords would not produce intelligible sounds in response. She eventually succeeded in reaching a friend, who helped transport her to a hospital where her multiyear recovery journey began. Taylor's own knowledge of how the brain functions and her mother's patience and care helped lead her to complete recovery.

Interestingly, the stroke left Taylor in a state of bliss, owing to her ability to "step into the consciousness of [her] right hemisphere" at will and experience oneness with all that is. According to the author, "Peace is only a thought away, and all we have to do to access it is silence the voice of our dominating left mind." We should bear in mind, however, that not every stroke victim is so lucky as to experience harmony instead of confusion and extreme moodiness, and not everyone is left with more or less intact brain circuitry, albeit with disconnections, and is thus able to recover fully.

Taylor's setback was in a sense fortunate for humanity, given her expertise in brain science and ability to learn, and educate others, based on the direct experience. The ideas presented in this book are invaluable for stroke survivors who are looking for ways to facilitate and speed up the rebuilding of their brains from trauma.

However, those of us with normal brains can also gain from this book a better understanding of ways to consciously influence the neural underpinnings of how we think, feel, and deal with life's challenges.

The author's **18-minute TED talk** from 2008, featuring interactive transcripts and having been enjoyed by 16 million viewers, provides an apt summary of the ideas in this book.



2014/10/03 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I'm a Muslim from Iran, my partner is a Jew from Brooklyn, my kitchen staff is all from Mexico, and we make the best Italian bread around; how's that for ethnic?" ~ Iranian-American Peter Zadeh, whose wholesale bakery business, Ethnic Breads, is featured in *Santa Barbara Independent's* Fifth Annual Foodie Awards, when asked what's so "ethnic" about his bread

(2) Iran beats the perennial powerhouse Japan 3-1 in the finals match early this morning to claim the Asian volleyball championship for the first time.

(3) Hats off to Germany: With Lower Saxony joining the other six German states in abolishing tuition fees (which, at an average of \$630 per semester, were already quite low compared with those in the United States), college education is now **completely free** throughout Germany, even for international students.

(4) Citing material from social media: Recently, I had an exchange with a friend about norms for citing social media in scholarly writing. She wondered whether engineering had established norms in this regard. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, IEEE, has guidelines for citing on-line material (see p. 3 of IEEE's **Citation Reference**), but these are not broadly accepted by other engineering fields. I am most familiar with IEEE because of my own publications. AMS (American Mathematical Society), APS (American Physical Society), and various other scientific entities have their own guidelines for material they publish. The problem with social media posts is that it is very difficult to ascertain their accuracy. If someone is an authority in some field and posts his/her ideas on Facebook or tweets about them, then perhaps the same person has made the same observations in other forums that are easier to access and check for accuracy. My personal preference is to stay away from citing social media, unless there is no alternative.

[P.S.: Social media posts tend to disappear at times, as when someone deactivates his/her Facebook account. For this reason, I try to find a more stable, publicly accessible source, such as YouTube, when reposting links to news footage or music videos.]

(5) The French delve into sex-laden politics: It used to be that the French didn't care about their politicians' private lives. They still say in public that unemployment and other economic indicators are much more important than who slept with whom, but the brisk sales of Valerie Trierweiler's book, containing juicy details

about her life with former husband and current President of France Francois Hollande, tell a different story: that the French are adopting the Anglo-Saxon morality, including the view that politicians' private lives are not off-limits. [Info from [Newsweek on-line](#).]

2014/10/02 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." ~ Mark Twain
- (2) Have you ever thought about the ends of the Great Wall of China? Here is [one of them](#).
- (3) Interesting, but not very appetizing, [cake designs](#).
- (4) President Rouhani says that his government does not imprison journalists for their writings: While this claim (also made by Ahmadinejad, by the way) is true, because Iran's judiciary always comes up with fictitious charges having to do with national security to cover its behind, there is no denying that Iran has the world's second largest population of imprisoned journalists (Turkey is #1 in this area, and China is #3), according to data published by the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#).
- (5) Reza Zarghamee featured in BBC Persian's [Chamedan Program](#): Born in England and educated in the United States, Zarghamee's passion for ancient Iranian history led him to both formal education and self-study in the area, a 16-year effort that culminated in the publication of *Discovering Cyrus*, an acclaimed 700-page English-language tome. I have just started reading the book and will report on it when done.
- (6) The story of a half-completed 7-volume book: Donald Knuth's planned 7-volume book, *The Art of Computer Programming*, is not only the most influential book in computer science and engineering but also one of a handful of technical books that have been widely honored. Knuth published volumes 1-3 in rapid succession in the 1970s, but the first half of Volume 4 did not appear until 2011. The retired Stanford University professor estimates that his volumes 4-5 will be completed by 2020. [This article](#) tells the story of Knuth's remarkable book and discusses why it has taken him, one of today's most prolific technical writers, so long to finish the job. Among the reasons are the need for multiple updatings of Volumes 1-3, that became indispensable teaching and reference resources for our field, and a detour into the world of digital typesetting and font design that gave us the most important innovations in technical publishing since Gutenberg's printing press.

2014/10/01 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "About 14% of the land globally has some form of protection as a park reserve or wildlife area. But a fraction of 1% of the ocean is fully protected, where the fish in the sea have some safe havens." ~ Sylvia Earles, interviewed by *Time* magazine, issue of October 6, 2014
- (2) Microsoft is counting in base 9: The next release of Windows will be [Windows 10](#), not 9.
- (3) The 3% economy: Yes, the economy has picked up, going from 2% to 3% annual growth, and unemployment is on the decline. But only a fraction of the lost jobs paying \$15 or better per hour have been recovered. Some 58% of the new jobs since 2010 are in low-paying food services and retail. [From *Time* magazine, issue of October 6, 2014; Rana Foroohar's column]
- (4) Non-physicists using concepts from physics to make their points: In this *New York Times* article, President Obama is quoted as having said about conferring with his advisers, "It's the Heisenberg principle; me asking the question changes the answer." Another unlikely person to use physics is Lady Gaga, who wrote/sang, "Memories are not recycled like atoms and particles in quantum physics; they can be lost forever." [The article](#) cites other interesting examples.
- (5) Every man for himself: It seems that former officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran are gradually distancing themselves from Khomeini and others whose decisions caused numerous deaths in the war against Iraq. Perhaps they are worried about the day of reckoning, when they have to defend their actions in a court of law. The latest to come out swinging is [Mohsen Rezaei](#) who led the Revolutionary Guards during the 8-year war and is gradually revealing the contents of a letter of his to Khomeini that was instrumental in ending the war.
- (6) Anthony Hopkins was a musician before he became an actor: [Andre Rieu plays](#) a beautiful waltz composed by Hopkins.

2014/09/30 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "[US] politics is about 'first world problems,' the silly battles a strong nation with an improving economy and a dominant military can afford to have." ~ Michael Grunwald, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of October 6, 2014
- (2) An impressive acoustic cover of ["Lonely No More"](#) (aka "Me and My Broken Heart") in a moving car.
- (3) An unhealthy balance: In recent years, conservatives have gotten nearly everything they wanted (e.g., spending cuts and tax breaks), while liberals have maintained and even expanded their most cherished social programs (including a new healthcare law). Now that both sides are more or less satisfied with the status quo, who will champion the next steps toward economic and social structures that are in tune with the new global order? A rather frightening question! [Adapted from *Time* magazine, issue of October 6, 2014; Michael

Grunwald's article.]

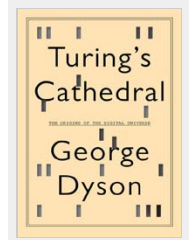
(4) Translation of a beautiful couplet attributed to Rumi: "Did you hear that at your birth, everyone smiled but you cried? Live in a way that upon your death, everyone cries and you smile."

(5) The Santa Barbara Public Market: AAA magazine's SoCal edition reports that Santa Barbara now has a collection of artisan and gourmet food outlets at 38 W. Victoria St. (the former site of a Vons supermarket). Purveyors that run their individually designed spaces within the public market include the Empty Bowl Gourmet Noodle, the Pasta Shoppe, and Rori's Artisanal Creamery.

(6) Final thought for the day: "It is still not quite clear in which brain circuits the lust for power is located. In any case data machines seem devoid of any such circuits, and it is this which gives them their moral superiority over man; it is for this reason that computers were able to establish the kind of society which man had striven for and so abysmally failed to achieve." ~ Hannes Alfvén, *The Tale of the Big Computer*

2014/09/29 (Mon.): Dyson George, *Turing's Cathedral: The Origins of the Digital Universe*, Pantheon Books, 2012.

What attracted me to this book was its subtitle, *The Origins of the Digital Universe*. I was rather disappointed with the actual contents, which is far less technical than I had reasons to expect. This [chat with the author](#) at the Computer History Museum forms a nice compliment to the contents, or a possible substitute for those who decide not to pursue the book after reading my review. The actual 78-minute interview goes from minute 5:00 in the video to its 1:23:13 mark.



This book is as much the story of technical achievements at Princeton University's Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) that led to the development of arguably the most influential early digital computer, as it is of the human relations between the key players. The geniuses at play here are shown to be all too human, complete with egos, envies, grudges, and clashing political world views. We see clearly that intelligent scientists, working on major paradigm shifts, at times engaged in petty quarrels and endless bickering about who should be asked to sponsor a research project and how much money would be needed.

The author, son of physicist Freeman Dyson (who also worked at IAS), grew up surrounded by the people involved with the IAS digital computer and played in the barn where spare parts for the machine were kept. He returned to the scene of his childhood adventures many years later to do research for his book and to interview some of the key characters. The cathedral of the book's title refers to the vast edifice of computing theory and technology that has grown from Turing's groundbreaking ideas. Sixteen pages of diagrams and very interesting historical photos appear between pages 136 and 137 and another 16 pages between pages 248 and 249.

Even though Turing's name is given prominence in the book's title, the protagonist of the story is the Hungarian-American mathematician John von Neumann, who played key roles in two of the highly influential scientific developments of the 20th century: the digital computer (through building the Princeton computer at IAS) and the atomic bomb. The two developments went hand in hand, because the kinds of devastating bombs being studied at the time (A-bomb, and later on, H-bomb) couldn't be designed by trial and error; rather, they required extensive computer modeling to predict the shock waves, the main sources of the bomb's destructive powers. In fact, MANIAC's first large-scale test was a thermonuclear simulation that ran for 60 days nonstop in the summer of 1951.

Even though von Neumann was a great thinker and a superb mathematician, his main talent, the one that allowed him to be highly effective in pulling off these great feats was the way he interacted with people, elicited respect, and convinced people, including funding agencies, of the worth of his ideas. One reason von Neumann's ideas about digital computing became so influential was that the project he worked on was not classified; ideas were shared openly via distribution of reports and by scientists visiting Princeton.

While quite interesting overall, the book contains much boring and distracting details. For example, the mention of a building is often followed by a great deal of information about its sponsor and architect, including certain details about how they grew up. We even learn about items and prices on the restaurant menu, the back of which happened to be used to sketch a preliminary floorplan for the building. While buildings such as the beautifully designed Fuld Hall (the focus of Chapter 6, pp. 88-107), with its offices, administrative space, and even a cafeteria, did play a role in facilitating research and innovation, a diatribe into the building details distracts the reader from the more important ideas and relationships that impacted trailblazing researchers at Institute for Advanced Study and similar institutions.

Many key characters in the development of information technology are mentioned or described in the book. The life of Kurt Godel, arguably the greatest logician in history, is an amazing tale of genius and misfortune. Godel was stripped of his teaching position in Austria when his country was overtaken by Nazi Germany. Godel wasn't Jewish, but he had traveled extensively in liberal Jewish circles, an offense that couldn't be ignored by the Germans. Later, when Godel was offered a research position in the US, securing a US visa for him encountered numerous problems. First, exceptions to visa quotas could be granted only for teaching faculty. His US position

was nonteaching, but the sponsors somehow added teaching assignments to get around the restrictions. Then, US immigration officials pointed to the fact that Godel had not been teaching immediately before coming to the US, violating the visa requirements. Finally, because he was now viewed as German, rather than Austrian, for visa purposes, he was subject to greater scrutiny. Godel suffered from a number of psychological conditions that forced him to check himself into an institution for treatment. Once he became a US citizen, Godel was called by Selective Service, and the US Army did not believe that due to his psychological condition, he was unfit for military service.

According to the author, "The history of digital computing can be divided into an Old Testament whose prophets, led by Leibniz, supplied the logic, and a New Testament whose prophets, led by von Neumann, built the machines. Alan Turing arrived in between" [p. 243]. Unfortunately, however, "Engineers avoided Turing's paper because it appeared entirely theoretical, and theoreticians avoided it because of the references to paper tape and machines" [p. 249]. This is why only two requests for reprints came in for Alan Turing's seminal paper, "On Computable Numbers."

One of the challenges faced by the technologists working on early computers was the culture of resistance to experimental research and development at certain centers for mathematical research. According to Julian H. Bigelow (1913-2003), chief engineer of the MANIAC project at Princeton, "[t]he prevailing attitude among the humanists toward the notion of a laboratory at the Institute was one of undisguised horror ... The attitude of the mathematicians ranged from about the same extreme to some instances of mild interest" [p. 119].

We are reminded by the author that the scientists working on the Manhattan Project had misgivings about the applications of their research. Those working on the super-bomb project (leading to the H-bomb) were even more conflicted. These scientists were also closely watched by the government. In fact, "Robert Oppenheimer was stripped of his security clearance in 1954, one day before it would have expired on its own, in a deliberate act of public humiliation that brought postwar dreams of civilian control of nuclear weapons to an end."

Oppenheimer wanted civilians to control the nukes; the generals countered by saying that the scientist should do science and leave wars to the military.

Early computer hardware was bulky and unreliable. One of the sternest challenges was to build a reliable machine from unreliable devices of widely varying characteristics that were not needed for the war effort. It was common to manually screen the components to find the ones that were acceptable for use. Even then, "It took an engineer fluent in wartime electronics and wartime ingenuity to solve the problem of building a reliable computer from unreliable war surplus parts" [p. 126]. Many of the fault tolerance methods in use today for building ultrareliable computers have their origins in the early computers. For example, "All computations were run twice [on MANIAC], and accepted only when the two runs produced duplicate results" [p. 151].

As someone interested in building systems, von Neumann devoted much effort to turning theories into practical systems, but he also made contributions in the realm of theory. Applying the results of Godel and Turing, von Neumann concluded that "you can build an organ which can do anything that can be done, but you cannot build an organ which tells you whether it can be done" [p. 285].

The origins of many hardware and software ideas, even the stored-program computer itself, are shrouded in controversy. We are told by the author that several early software development ideas came from von Neumann. "[John von Neumann,] when he was building his Princeton machine, cover[ed] the blackboard with the first stirrings of flow-diagram coding" [p. 209]. It was also von Neuman who made the insightful observation, "It is easier to write a new code than to understand an old one" [p. 315]. I learned from this book that, surprisingly, Leibniz provided (in 1679) a description of a shift-register as part of his universal binary machine, using holes and marbles. On the invention of the computer itself, opinions are even more divergent. The author refers us to the 2003 book by Arthur Burks and Alice Burks, *Who invented the computer?*, for insight on the intellectual and court battles.

The book also contains an extensive discussion of the future of information technology and its effects on, and interactions with, humans. For example, we are discovering the marvels of analog computing, which lost favor when digital circuits entered the scene. "In the age of all things digital we are building analog computers again. ... For real-world questions—especially ambiguous ones— analog computing can be faster, more accurate, and more robust, not only at computing the answers, but also at asking the questions and communicating the results" [p. 280].

Improving our understanding of how the human brain works is one of the most important sources of future advances. For example, one human handicap is the lack of full understanding of very small or very large time scales. The ordinary time scale of a few hours, that we humans can deal with rather easily, falls exactly in the middle of the range from the shortest perceivable one (blink of an eye, a few tenths of a second) to a lifetime (a few billion seconds). It is also in the middle of the range between physical timescales of interest: from the lifetime of a neutron in a nuclear explosion (10^{-8} second) to the lifetime of the sun (10^{17} seconds).

We may encounter digital universes and digital existence that are beyond our (present or future) comprehension. We humans tend to view life as organic, which makes it hard for us to imagine other life forms.

For example, in a digital universe, the notion of time as we know it does not exist, so organisms evolving in the digital universe will be quite different from us. "To us, they will appear to be evolving ever faster, but to them, our evolution will appear to have begun decelerating at their moment of creation—the way our universe appears to have suddenly begun to cool after the big bang."

I found the book of some value for a number of sparsely distributed historical nuggets, that are rather hard to find among a myriad of less interesting details. Like many other studies on the direction and impact of information technology, this book helps us get ready for a gigantic transition. In physics, shock waves are attributed to discontinuities arising from the collision between objects, or between an object and a medium, or between two mediums. They can even be produced by the collision between two universes, exemplified by the collision of the digital universe with our existing universe faster than we are able to adjust.

2014/09/28 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A challenging math puzzle: The Fibonacci sequence is 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, ... , where each term is the sum of the preceding two. If we replace the initial 0 with 2, we get the sequence 2, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, How much larger is the billionth term of the second sequence compared with the billionth term of the first one? [From *E&T magazine*, issue of October 2014.]

(2) A joint album by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga: Though the quality of the music in the **new album** "Cheek to Cheek" has not impressed some reviewers, the fact that it will expose an entire new generation of music lovers to classic jazz tunes is heartwarming. Here is a **link to tracks** from the complete album, which may be removed if it violates copyright.

(3) Emma Watson's UN speech: She advocates for the "He for She" campaign and reminds everyone that the view equating feminism with hating men is misguided. The **15-minute video** comes with Persian subtitles.

(4) Beatles pancake: How to **make portraits** with pancake batter.

(5) College soccer: Tonight in men's soccer, UCSB prevailed over Drake 4-1 at home, with the guest team's sole goal coming on a PK. The score was 3-0 at halftime.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Ninety-nine percent of us are good-hearted people who respect others and want peace. The other one percent rule the world and tell us we're at war." ~ Lee Camp

2014/09/27 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When [George W.] Bush took us to war, any criticism was shouted down as treasonous. But a president you don't like has the country poised on the same precipice [and] no transgression—no matter how immaterial and ridiculous—is too small to cite as evidence that this president isn't as American as you are." ~ Jon Stewart, on the false patriotism of Fox News' anchors and talking heads

(2) Joke of the day: An Iranian man is asked if he prays daily. He answers that he does not. What about fasting during Ramadan? "No, I can't bear it," is the response. And going to the mosque? He answers that he doesn't have the time. Asked whether he makes charitable donations, he answers, "No," citing lack of income. Finally, asked whether he takes temporary wives, he replies: "Of course I do! Do I look like I'm a nonbeliever?"

(3) A major new vulnerability for Unix and Mac OS systems: Identified as "Bash" (name of the piece of software it exploits), the vulnerability has prompted our campus authorities to issue warnings to faculty, students, and staff and direct system administrators to quickly patch all systems. This **Time magazine article** maintains that the threat is overblown, but no software system vulnerability should be taken lightly, given today's interconnected systems.

(4) College soccer: Last night, UCSB prevailed 1-0 over San Diego State, by scoring midway through the first half, on a **beautiful evening** for soccer.

(5) Final thought for the day: "It is not the lack of love, but a lack for friendship that makes unhappy marriages." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche [I am listening to a set of 24 lectures on Nietzsche's philosophy in the "Great Courses" series, which I will review in the near future.]

(6) Today is the end of the 2014 Banned Books Week: The American Library Association celebrates our freedom to read by publishing a list of banned or challenged books each year. The Washington Post has put together lists of **top-10 most-challenged books** for the 14 years 2000-2013. The lists include several literary classics and some of the most popular books ever published.

2014/09/26 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading." ~ Lao Tzu

(2) Earth's water is older than the sun: This **very surprising finding** suggests that water is abundant in other planetary systems as well, in turn implying that existence of life outside our solar system is highly probable.

(3) Common core standard for teenagers: Kristin van Ogtrop, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of September 29, 2014, suggests ten things teenagers should be required to do, beyond meeting academic standards, before graduating from high school.

- Write a (handwritten) letter that does not begin with "Hey."
- Learn to cook a good meal that can feed the entire family.
- Hold down an unpleasant job for a while.
- Go somewhere for the weekend, without a cell phone.
- Give away an old toy or gadget every time they get a new one.
- Take care of someone or something other than themselves.
- Write a heartfelt thank-you note to someone over the age of 70.
- Read a book they really love for pleasure.
- Do something nice for a neighbor, with no expectation of credit.
- Instead of racing to the top, proceed slowly and deliberately.

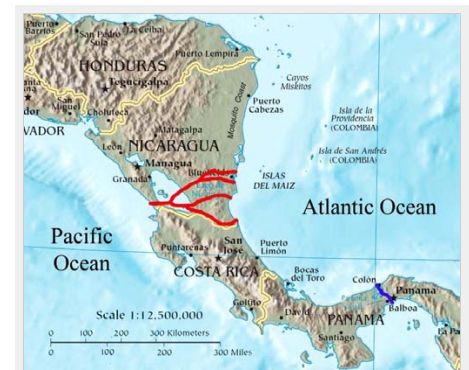
(4) Wednesday's Security Council meeting: President Obama delivered a very effective speech in defense of a resolution to deal with the ISIS threat; the resolution passed unanimously. UN Secretary General also spoke, saying that Islamic State is really un-Islamic and non-state; he probably paid little attention to what the new acronym will be after replacing "Islamic" with "un-Islamic" and "state" with "non-state."

(5) On Study Soup and similar outfits: These organizations post course notes and problem-set solutions on the Internet without the consent of instructors and hire students to take notes for on-line sales. They violate copyright laws and contribute to poor learning by distributing inaccurate or incomplete notes, while giving students the impression that they can learn the material without attending lectures or completing assignments. University of California is considering legal action against these outfits, whose other violations include use of student e-mail lists obtained via illegal channels and profiting from the sale of material explicitly marked for personal and nonprofit educational uses.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Vision without execution is hallucination." ~ Thomas A. Edison

2014/09/24 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The Panama Canal's new rival: When completed in 2016 at a cost of \$5B, the expanded Panama Canal will be the sole option for crossing between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans for only 3-4 more years. Slated for 2019-2020 completion, the \$40B Nicaragua Canal, which will accommodate ships of up to 250,000 tons (compared with Panama Canal's 120,000 tons), will shorten travel time between eastern and western United States by a full day or 800 km, and it will give the Nicaraguan economy a huge boost. At 278 km, the Nicaragua Canal is 3.6 times as long as the Panama Canal. The map shows options that were considered for routing the new canal, of which the second from bottom was eventually chosen. [Info from *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2014; photo from Wikipedia]



(2) Happy Jewish New Year 5775 to my friends who observe it! Rosh Hashana (literally, "head of the year") begins tomorrow and, like all Jewish festivals/holidays, is observed beginning with the previous night. Traditionally, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes committed over the past year and planning changes (setting goals) for the coming year.

(3) A logical reasoning puzzle: A dictator decided that his country needed more boys to supply the army, so he issued an edict that any women bearing a female child may have no more children; women bearing male children were allowed to become pregnant again. This edict was strictly enforced for 5 years, before the dictator was overthrown through an uprising. How many more boys were born than girls during the 5-year period? [From *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2014.]

(4) Undergraduate speaker at Harvard's 2014 commencement: Syrian young woman, Sarah Abushaar, delivers a passionate and at times humorous speech. [[10-minute video](#)]

(5) Student loans on the rise: According to a [new study](#) conducted by Experian, US consumer debt is decreasing in every major lending category except for student loans.

(6) Final thought for the day: Have you ever noticed that when people post screen-shots of their cell phones, the battery charge is invariably near-empty?

2014/09/23 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and it is not possible to find it elsewhere." ~ Agnes Repplier

(2) David Sedaris pokes fun at Santa Barbara in a [new essay](#).

(3) Scotland's and UK's status went from "in a relationship" to "it's complicated" in the wake of Scotland's unsuccessful independence referendum.

(4) Embarrassing ignorance in the US House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology: Jon Stewart points

out some unintentionally funny comments made by US Congressmen in his **"comedy" program**.

(5) Cartoon caption of the day: Woman to man, as she looks at her smartphone: "How embarrassing—somebody's leaked photos of the dust behind our sofa." [From *E&T* magazine, issue of October 2014]

(6) Final thought for the day: "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." ~ Albert Einstein

2014/09/21 (Sun.): The Computer History Museum: If you are ever in the San Francisco Bay Area, I highly recommend a visit to Mountain View, the home of a museum on the history of computing devices and software. During my visit yesterday, three special demonstrations were held: Explaining IBM 1401 (a punched-card-operated data processing machine), including the running of a simple program to print out consecutive powers of 2 on 132-column paper; Introducing DEC PDP-1, a one-ton minicomputer whose interactivity and graphics made it a favorite of early hackers in the late 1950s; The theory behind, and the operation of, Babbage's Difference Engine, a mid-19th-century mechanical giant that was supposed to revolutionize the computing of numerical function tables, whose manual calculation was time-consuming and error-prone (the machine was not implemented in Babbage's time, but prototypes built much later demonstrated its soundness). The main exhibit is currently organized to represent a 2000-year timeline of innovations in computing, from ancient calculators to modern gadgets. A special exhibit on self-driving-cars provides a glimpse of the future.



2014/09/20 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) PBS interviews Iran's Foreign Minister: In his [interview with Margaret Warner](#), Javad Zarif indicated that Iran opposes any foreign military presence in the region. Warner should have asked him about Iran's military presence in Syria and Lebanon. He also talked about a connected planet (globalism), making the suffering of people in one region of concern to the entire world. Again, he should have been asked why this globalism does not apply to the oppression of women and Bahai'is in Iran.

(2) Physics in action: Can you explain this [water trick](#)?

(3) Ranking of US healthcare before Obamacare: Those who think that US healthcare will get worse as a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) may have some explaining to do. Our system of healthcare **ranked 44th out of the 51** countries assessed via metrics such as cost, life expectancy, and expenditure as a fraction of GDP. The Bloomberg ranking is based on data collected 2 years before ACA went into effect.

(4) One source of economic troubles in the US: The share of US federal tax revenue coming from corporations declined from 33% in 1952 to 10.5% (projected) in 2014. [Source: Column by Rana Foroohar in *Time* magazine, issue of September 22, 2014.]

(5) Carillon recital at UCSB on October 4: Dedicated on September 28, 1969, the 175-foot Storke Tower is a landmark of the UCSB campus. Atop the tower, hang 61 bells weighing from 13 to 4793 lbs. A keyboard (actually, lever board) allows a carillonist to play the bells, and this is done occasionally as part of free public concerts or on important campus occasions. The next carillon concert will take place on Saturday, October 4, 3:00-4:00 PM; there will be a tour of the tower and its bells immediately afterwards. Long-time carillon performer Professor Margo Halsted is joined by 2013 UCSB alumnus Ethan Schwartz in this hourlong concert. Here is a [1-minute sample](#) of carillon music (Theme from Harry Potter).

(6) iBand: The idea of playing music with tablets/smartphones goes back a few years. [This video](#) from 2008 is the earliest example I could find. Here is an iBand playing a number of [Christmas Carols](#). The Iranian band Bomrani has also embraced this style. Here is their Persian version of ["What a Wonderful World,"](#) played with iPhones, iPads, and laptops.

2014/09/19 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Because gender makes us overestimate male performance and underestimate female performance, we have more tolerance for men's mistakes." ~ Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO, in answer to *Time* magazine's question (issue of September 22, 2014) about why women are so afraid of making mistakes

(2) Scottish independence referendum headed for defeat; no votes now lead yes votes 55-45%.

(3) Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History: This [virtual tour](#) can be pursued at your leisure and is almost as good as being there. You can select any one of the exhibits on the ground, first, or second floor and

proceed sequentially through the displays, zooming and panning to get a better view of the items or their textual descriptions.

(4) On freedom of association: A few days ago, I chanced upon a Persian "poem" on a friend's Facebook timeline (the man who posted it is unknown to me). The "poet" showered insults on a woman he knows for not paying enough attention to him, while being friendly toward others. In the final verse, he wrote, "I hate your being a whore with others and chaste with me." Why is it that some men feel entitled to call a woman a "whore" when she prefers someone else to them?

(5) On spousal abuse: "I said 'Don't call me. I never want to see you again.' But then you start taking his phone calls. Then he asks to see you in person, and you say yes to that. Then you have a big giant man crying like a baby on your lap, and next thing you know, you're consoling him. ... You think the black man in America has it so difficult anyway, and now you're turning him in. It seems like the ultimate betrayal." ~ Robin Givens, chiming in on the recent NFL spousal abuse scandals, by explaining why women stay in abusive relationships [*Time* magazine, issue of September 22, 2014]

(While, personally, I don't agree with such justifications, one has to look at the situation from the viewpoint of some women, especially in the African-American community, who have very few options for an independent life. Educating and empowering women is the only way out of this mess.)

(6) An old puzzle that keeps popping up from time to time: Three friends travelling together pay \$150 in cash for a hotel room. After they leave the lobby, the hotel manager realizes that he overcharged them and asks the bell boy to take \$25 to their room. The bell boy thinks that \$25 cannot be evenly divided among three people, so he pockets \$10 and returns \$15 to the hotel guests. After getting \$5 back, each traveler paid \$45 for the room, for a total of \$135, and the bell boy pocketed \$10. What happened to the remaining \$5?

2014/09/18 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A logical reasoning puzzle: What number best fits where there is a question mark? [The answer may not be unique.]

(2) Quote of the day: "When a scientist doesn't know the answer to a problem, he is ignorant. When he has a hunch as to what the result is, he is uncertain. And when he is pretty darn sure of what the result is going to be, he is still in some doubt. We have found it of paramount importance that in order to progress we must recognize our ignorance and leave room for doubt." ~ Richard Feynman

(3) Insert the word "only" anywhere into the following sentence and consider how the placement changes the meaning:

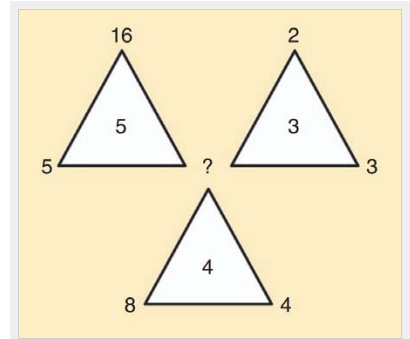
"She told him that she loved him."

(4) Lady Al-Qaeda: This is the title given in the US intelligence circles to Aafia Siddiqui, a 42-year-old MIT- and Brandeis-educated neuroscientist married to a nephew of the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, whose exchange with American prisoners has been suggested on multiple occasions by the Taliban and now by the Islamic State. Why is this woman, now serving an 86-year jail term in the US (pending appeals), so valuable to Islamic extremists? No one really knows. There are suggestions by one of her attorneys that she has been framed by the Pakistani secret police, but such statements may be self-serving and unverifiable. [Source:

[Newsweek on-line](#)]

(5) The American football tradition, and its NFL embodiment, must take responsibility for breeding violent young men: You can't just tell a 250+ lb man to hit the opponents as hard as he can, even going as far at times as saying that he should hit with the intent to injure or maim, and then expect the player to simply turn off the rage as soon as he gets off the field and become a gentle, caring man.

(6) Final thought for the day: "To every man is given the key to the gates of heaven; the same key opens the gates of hell." ~ Buddhist proverb



2014/09/17 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Serious quote of the day: "We cannot afford to live in a culture that doesn't use the power in its hands with the kind of rationality that produced it in the first place." ~ Physicist Richard Feynman

(2) Humorous quote of the day: "I owe America a global apology." ~ Sarah Palin, on the McCain-Palin ticket failing to prevail in 2008, implying that with McCain as President, we would not be in the current mess

(3) A humanitarian gesture: Dissident Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad and former Tehran University President Mohammad Maleki expressed shame and apologized to representative members of three generations of Bahai'i citizens who have been denied education at Iranian universities. Nourizad concludes his [accompanying essay](#) thus: "It might be a good idea for the clerics to place their turbans a bit higher to allow their brains to be ventilated and for new ideas to find a way in."

(4) Game Jam sponsored by the White House: Participants were fed pizza, coffee, and Red Bull in a weekend

gathering to develop a batch of cutting-edge educational games. The event was part of a broader effort to get tech companies interested in investing, at least experimentally, in education. [Source: *USA Today*]

(5) Former U. Maryland student donates a record \$31M for scholarships and computer labs: Brendan Inbe, who dropped out of UMD in his freshman year, recently attended a hackathon event, where he was impressed with the students and found laboratory conditions depressing; so he decided to do something about it. [Source: *Washington Post*]

(6) James Baker blames Bush/Cheney for ISIL: Appearing on this week's "Meet the Press," the former Secretary of State theorized that the unnecessary Iraq war kicked over a sectarian hornet's nest, something that was avoided by Bush senior in 1991, when he refrained from marching on Baghdad. [Source: Robert Creamer, 9/15, *Huffington Post*]

2014/09/16 (Tue.): Feynman, Richard P. (edited by Ralph Leighton), *Classic Feynman: All the Adventures of a Curious Character*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

This 500-plus-page volume contains all the material from the 1985 book, *Surely You're Joking Mr. Feynman! (Adventures of a Curious Character)*, and its 1988 sequel, *What Do You Care What Other People Think? Further Adventures of a Curious Character*. The two books are not simply juxtaposed but their essays and chapters are merged to form a new arrangement of the material. The nine parts of the book, each containing 1-18 chapters/essays, are:

Prologues [pp. 1-9]: Ralph Leighton's "To the Reader" and Freeman Dyson's "Foreword"

From Far Rockaway to MIT [pp. 11-55]

The Princeton Years [pp. 57-88]

Arlene (actually spelled "Arline"; Feynman's first wife, lost to tuberculosis at age 25) [pp. 89-119]

Feynman, the Military, and the Bomb [pp. 121-179]

From Cornell to Caltech, with a Touch of Brazil [pp. 181-248]

The World of One Physicist [pp. 249-378]

Mr. Feynman Goes to Washington: Investigating the Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster [pp. 379-478]

Epilogues [pp. 479-506]: Reflections on the value of science and the perils of cult science

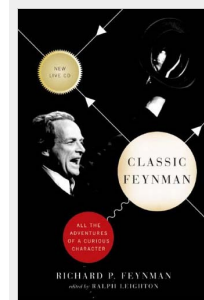
The book comes with a commemorative audio CD containing a February 1975 talk by Feynman at UC Santa Barbara, entitled "Los Alamos from Below." I listened to this talk before beginning to read the book. The talk, available on-line as a [69-minute audio file](#), is enjoyable and enlightening. Hearing the Nobel Laureate's voice adds another dimension to the understanding provided by the textual description of his adventures. The phrase "from Below" signifies the fact that Feynman talks about a time period when he was a low-level researcher who observed the goings on at Los Alamos, without being privy to reasons behind various decisions made higher up. While autobiographical, this book does not list and discuss events in chronological order. Rather, it jumps back and forth among Feynman's childhood, his college days, his early career (when his wife Arlene was still alive, though quite sick most of the time), and his later affiliation with Caltech. Each chapter/essay has a theme that is reflected in its title. Some of these cover not a particular time slice in Feynman's life, but rather mix memories from his childhood and youth with events later in his life.

Feynman emerges as a collection of contradictions. He comes across as a bright scientist, who worked with intensity for extended periods of time on problems that fascinated him, but who also showed a lack of interest in pursuing the traditional path of scientific research. He worked in fits and starts, highly inspired at times and getting bored at others. According to physicist Freeman Dyson, who wrote the book's foreword, there were two great creative periods in Feynman's life: the 10 years between 1939 and 1949 and the 1960s decade.

Feynman was curious, playful, and quite a prankster. At parties, he would emulate a bloodhound, attempting to tell through his sense of smell which guest had touched which object. He became quite good at this; he was convinced that the human sense of smell, though way inferior to that of bloodhounds, isn't as bad as most people think. Of course, party guests never believed him, given his reputation for making things up; they usually thought that he did a magic trick with help from an accomplice. Socially, he was more comfortable with street people than with top-notch scientists and academic administrators. In women, too, he preferred to befriend barflies and Las Vegas showgirls, hinting that his upbringing and early nerdiness may have played a role in shaping his social quirks.

I found reading this book an educational experience and a reaffirmation of some of my unconventional beliefs about how scientific work should be pursued; that having fun doing science leads both to more rewarding research experiences and more important discoveries. I was reassured to learn that, in the end, people value and respect someone who knows what s/he is talking about, even if the said person's opinions are stated bluntly and not always in politically correct (PC) terms.

Speaking of PC, there are two aspects of Feynman's life and character that bothered me a lot. Let me try to get these disturbing aspects out of the way, so that I can devote the rest of my review to his amazing and



endearing qualities.

Feynman loved women and went out of his way to impress and attract them. He would meet many at bars, dances, Las Vegas shows, and they would immediately take a liking to him and confide in him. It appears, however, that he did not respect women and viewed them only as amusement and objects of conquest. Examples that confirm this impression abound in the book. He comments about women's physical attributes first, on several occasions (such as on p. 338, where he writes, "She was really cute, a beautiful blonde"), when he introduces female characters he has encountered. He writes at length about how to get women interested by pretending that you don't care much about them and treating them poorly. Perhaps, Feynman shouldn't be blamed for this line of thinking, which was the norm during his days as a young man, but then, this is such a contrast with the rest of his character that one can't help but wonder.

Feynman was also judgmental at times, yet dismissive of those who would judge him or others. He blamed people or called them names, without knowing much about them. A striking example appears on p. 407, where he, justifiably, makes fun of the NASA bureaucracy after receiving a reply to a simple question (asked as part of his research for the commission to investigate the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster), with the reply sheet sandwiched between memos in the management hierarchy sending the question down the chain and the reply back up, he refers to the person at the end of the chain (the one person who actually did some work), as "the poor bastard at the bottom."

Feynman was an excellent amateur scientist in areas outside his physics expertise, a talent he picked up from his not-very-educated father, who would explain to him some basic principles of science; not what something was called, but how it behaved, why it was the way it was, and so on. These interactions with his father led Feynman to seek deeper understanding and not stop when a reasonable explanation had been found. He would observe ants for hours, conducting various experiments about their sense of direction or geometry. Whereas most students mingled with their own kinds (physicists sitting at the "physics" table at the dining hall, for example), Feynman, the college student, tried to learn about others, so he would venture to the "philosophy" or "biology" table and listen to them, was easily persuaded to attend classes or seminars in those areas, and often ended up teaching a thing or two about their discipline by simply raising important questions that occur only to outsiders.

He discovered that in biology, "it was very easy to find a question that was very interesting, and that nobody knew the answer to." This curiosity and desire to work and learn in other disciplines persisted even after he became an established physicist. In the chapter entitled "But Is It Art?" [pp. 298-316], he describes his interactions, and mutual learning experiences, with an artist friend. Feynman learned quickly and produced some impressive paintings (even managing to sell some of them and to have his works exhibited in a fancy department store), but the artist friend never learned any physics! Feynman questioned the conventional wisdom that a scientist sees less beauty in a flower than an artist does. He believed that there is beauty not just in colors and shapes but also at the underlying cellular level. So, a scientist sees more beauty, not less.

In a short chapter entitled "The Chief Research Chemist of the Metaplast Corporation" [pp. 50-55], Feynman describes his trials and tribulations as the "chief chemist" for a company that had only 4 other employees: the President, a VP, a salesperson, and a bottle washer. The title of another short chapter, "Surely You're Joking Mr. Feynman!" [pp. 59-64], refers to a social blunder he made at the Dean's tea at Princeton, when he answered the question "Would you like cream or lemon in your tea?" by saying "I'll have both, thank you." Then there's the story of Feynman's first technical talk that was attended by Einstein and other "monster minds" [pp. 65-68]. He was understandably nervous, but the talk went well.

The fairly long, and touchingly personal, chapter entitled "What Do You Care What Other People Think?" [pp. 91-119] is about his relationship with his first wife, Arline, who died at a young age. He struggled with the doctors' ideas of not telling his wife about her being afflicted with Hodgkin's disease. His wife's parents were for the idea, and he went along with it for a while. But Feynman suffered greatly from keeping something so important from the woman he loved.

At some point in his career, Feynman began feeling disgust for physics; it wasn't fun any more. He realized that physics was fun when he played with it, regardless of whether the problem he examined was fashionable or important for the future of science; when he did it simply because he was curious and didn't care about someone else already having studied or invented the concept.

Feynman does not hide his contempt for scientists who report their results in complicated ways. When he couldn't make sense of a sociologist's research paper, he decided to take it one sentence at a time and try to understand it fully before moving on to the next sentence. He then read this sentence: "The individual member of the social community often receives his information via visual, symbolic channels." After struggling with the meaning of this sentence, understanding finally came when he translated it to "People read." Later in the book, Feynman explains further that things appear complicated to us, because we don't read carefully enough. Feynman lambasts a number of misguided efforts to develop high-school science textbooks and the way in which school boards choose them. He relates an experience when he was helping a school board evaluate

candidate physics textbooks. One book described stars of various colors and the relationship of those colors with the star's temperature. So far, so good! The book's authors then proceeded to describe a boy and his father observing a number of such stars of various given colors, asking the reader to figure out the total temperature of the stars they saw. The total temperature has no physical significance; had they asked about the average temperature of the stars, it would have made sense, but would still fall short of being a very interesting or enlightening exercise.

Actor/director Alan Alda provides a touching essay in the "Epilogues" part, bearing the title "Finding Feynman" [pp. 499-506]: Alda worked for many years to stage the play "QED" (which portrayed a day in the life of Richard Feynman), despite finding it difficult to muster support for the project. Later, in 1996, the movie "Infinity" based on material in this book was released that chronicles the early life of Feynman, portrayed by Matthew Broderick, with Patricia Arquette playing his wife Arline.



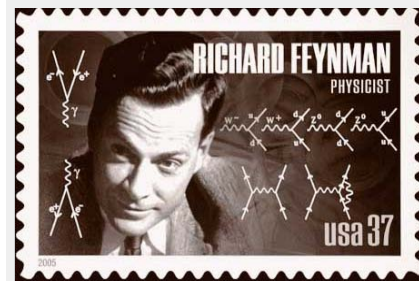
I read the part of the book dealing with Feynman's role in investigating the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster [pp. 379-478] with even greater interest, as I teach in one of my graduate-level courses about the use of redundant computers on the Shuttle as a way of dealing with hardware and software imperfections. Reading Feynman's account of the Challenger disaster and the political posturing and power struggles in preparing and releasing the Commission's final report, was particularly eye-opening.

When Feynman noticed that the official Space Shuttle report was moving in the wrong direction, not being specific enough about what went wrong and who was to blame, he tried to have his name removed from the list of authors/signatories. Eventual compromises in wording of the report's final recommendations, and an opportunity to voice his concerns in an appendix under his own name, persuaded Feynman to leave his signature on the report.

Feynman complains that many people talk about failure probabilities that do not make sense. When he asked a number of "specialists" about the failure probability for the Space Shuttle, he often got the response "1 in 100,000." Such a failure probability would mean that you can fly the Shuttle every day an average of 300 years between accidents. There is no way the Shuttle was this reliable. A failure rate of about 4% had been observed for rockets and even a couple of orders of magnitude improvement on this figure, to account for the greater care exercised for manned missions, would only get us to 1 in 1000 at best. This book reproduces Appendix F of the investigation's report [pp. 465-478], containing Feynman's analysis of Space Shuttle's reliability, including his disagreement with NASA management's exaggerated figures. He also comments on the 4-way and 5-way redundant computers for the Shuttle and on the difficulties arising from the use of obsolete hardware and software, given that operational experience with existing systems would be difficult to reproduce in replacement systems.

In line with the observations I made earlier about Feynman's weakness for pretty women, he confesses to giving his as yet unreleased observations on the Challenger disaster to two blonde reporters and then regretting his action.

To summarize, I truly enjoyed this book and emerged from reading it with even greater respect for Feynman and his abilities. The negative character traits notwithstanding, Feynman is one of the very few human beings who have contributed both to expanding the frontiers of science and to explaining science and its importance to the masses. He showed us that a scientist at the pinnacle of his field can/must still find time to explain his work to ordinary mortals, to explore other disciplines, and to pay attention to ethical implications of his own work and of science/technology in general.



2014/09/15 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Ordinary fools are all right; you can talk to them, and try to help them out. But pompous fools—who are fools and are covering it all over and impressing people as to how wonderful they are with all this hocus pocus—that I cannot stand." ~ Physicist Richard Feynman

(2) Impressive aerial acrobatics: Dozens of people dancing in the air. [[8-minute video](#)]

(3) A heartfelt essay on anti-Semitism: Roya Hakakian, a Jewish Iranian writer, shares her personal experiences with [anti-Semitism among Iranian intellectuals](#).

(4) Perspective: Apple Computer's [3-minute video](#) tribute to those who see things differently. My daughter pointed out to me that some elements of this video may have been adapted from this [OK Go music video](#) from June 2014.

(5) Hot debates from last year's presidential campaign in Iran: In this [8-minute video](#), Sadegh Zibakalam, debating with Mehdi Kouchekezadeh, questions whether Iran and Iranians should be sacrificed for nuclear technology. The same two people debate about whether it is appropriate for Iran to pursue the goal of

destroying Israel in this [7-minute video](#). Zibakalam was reportedly jailed for his stance in this debate.

(6) Final thought for the day [part of a poem by physicist Richard Feynman, taken from a book whose review I will post shortly]: There are the rushing waves | Mountains of molecules | Each stupidly minding his own business | Trillions apart | Yet forming white surf in unison

2014/09/14 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

(2) A clever [hidden-camera prank](#) that makes the prankee doubt his/her sanity.

(3) A cheerful rendition of a popular Kurdish song: "[Papoo Soleymani](#)" performed by Ehsan Heydari.

(4) Guitar-duo's Impressive [street performance](#).

(5) Time-lapse video of a remarkable drawing: Heather Rooney, a self-taught 21-year-old college student, draws a [photo-like image](#) of the late Robin Williams.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Perhaps too much of everything is as bad as too little." ~ Edna Ferber

2014/09/13 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quotote of the day: "Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant with the weak and wrong. Sometime in your life, you will have been all of these." ~ Buddha [This is listed as a fake Buddha quote in some sources, but I still like it.]

(2) Marvels of engineering: Machines that [harvest cherries](#) and others that turn them into pie fillings, jams, concentrated juice, and so on.

(3) The son of a terrorist, on how he chose peace: You can absolutely choose a different path when you are raised on dogma ([9-minute TED talk](#) by Zak Ebrahim).

(4) US News and World Report ranks UCSB among the [top 10 US public universities](#) for 2015.

(5) Americans [pay more than anyone else](#) for communication services: We pay nearly three times as much as the Brits or the French for a package of TV, Internet, and other communication services.

(6) Actress with PhD in neuroscience, on education: Three-time Emmy nominated Mayim Bialik is concerned that students do not appreciate the significance of [growth in STEM jobs](#) and thus of STEM education.

2014/09/12 (Fri.): Various authors, *Short Stories: The Vintage Collection*, 21 unabridged stories on 6 CDs, read by various performers, a CSA Word recording, 2009.

The blurb on the back of the CD box characterizes this collection (5th in a series) as "fine vintage stories that slip down as easily as a 1787 Chateau Lafite but are considerably lighter on the pocket to indulge in." The 21 selected stories include works by Saki, Thomas Hardy, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kate Chopin, James Thurber, and Louisa May Alcott.

My favorite story in this enjoyable collection is "A Tale of Negative Gravity" by Frank R. Stockton (read by Nicky Henson), which is told by an elderly man who uses his invention of a device counteracting gravity to facilitate his hikes and other daily tasks. The inventor gets himself and his wife into various tricky situations that lead him to abandon any further use of the antigravity device. My second favorite is "The Wrong Black Bag" by Angelo Lewis (read by Rupert Degas), in which a middle-aged man feeling stifled by his domineering wife decides to go on an adventure during her short absence and finds himself in deep trouble when he is arrested after accidentally picking up a woman's bag that looked exactly like his. A third interesting story, "To Catch a Thief" by E. W. Hornung (read by Rupert Degas), is the tale of an amateur sleuth and his naive accomplice who set out to outwit a meticulous jewelry thief and get more than they bargained for.

2014/09/11 (Thu.): I offer a note of remembrance and 5 diverse musical performances on this special day.

(1) Remembering the events of 9/11, 13 years ago, when a nation was terrorized, the world grieved, and others, who now demand sympathy, danced in the streets.

(2) One of the last recorded performances of Elvis Presley: "[Unchained Melody](#)" (he looks sick, but performs with his usual passion).

(3) Julio Iglesias sings "[Mal Acostumbrado](#)" ("Bad Habit").

(4) Four talented young people perform their own [Patty Cake song](#).

(5) Rana Mansour sings "[Shohar-e Pooldar](#)" ("Rich Husband"), which is what she says she does not want.

(6) Traditional Persian music: The all-female band Shahnava performs "[Ayeneh dar Ayeneh](#)" ("Mirror in Mirror"), with vocals by Mahdieh Mohammadkhani; lyrics by Hooshang Ebtehaj.

2014/09/10 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Modern Persian music: Kiosk band performs "[Oono Nadidi?](#)" ("Haven't You Seen Him/Her"; English translation of the lyrics included).

(2) Childish science comics take the Web by a storm: Dubbed by its creator, CNU physics graduate Randall

Munroe, as "A webcomic of romance, sarcasm, math, and language," **XKCD** is a fun site to visit. Munroe has a book out with the title *What If?: Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions*. And his XKCD site also has a "What If" section.

(3) The information revolution's collateral damage: "But revolutions always create collateral damage. Wikipedia killed the encyclopedia. Apps killed maps. Nobody buys classified ads in printed newspapers now that Craigslist is free and searchable. The democratization of information is particularly threatening to middlemen and gatekeepers. Who needs a travel agent when there's Kayak and Priceline? How long can real estate agents and stockbrokers survive when buyers and sellers are linking up online? Things do get lost in this ocean of info. We no longer bother to remember stuff we can easily look up. GPS killed the fun of bumbling around a new city. We spend too much time reconnecting on Facebook with that kid we barely knew in summer camp and not enough time connecting with real friends in real life. ... Still, spoilers, pop-up ads, Internet hoaxes and other inconveniences of the answers age are small prices to pay for instant access to infinite information. ... If there's a cost to the age of answers, it's probably our loss of serendipity. We've honed our daily news feeds to send us stuff that already interest us, so we're less likely to stumble upon a quirky story on page B-13. We gravitate toward online cocoons of like-minded people who don't challenge our assumptions. Optimizing isn't always optimal." ~ Michael Grunwald, writing in the introductory article of *Time* magazine's "The Answers Issue" (September 8 & 15, 2014)

(4) Interview with the author of *City of Lies*: Jon Stewart [interviews Ramita Navai](#), describing Tehran whose residents' lives are filled with lies to circumvent harsh social restrictions.

(5) Seven self-deprecating one-liners from the late comedian Joan Rivers:

I knew I was an unwanted baby when I saw that my bath toys were a toaster and a radio.

I was so flat, I used to put Xs on my chest and write, "You are here."

I have no sex appeal—if my husband didn't toss and turn, we'd never have had the kid.

I watched a Jewish porno film: one minute of sex and nine minutes of guilt.

I told my mother-in-law that my house was her house, and she said, "Get off my property."

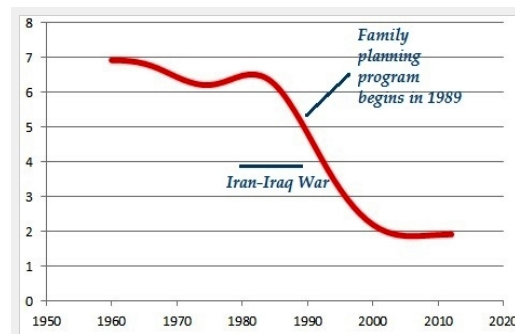
I have had so much plastic surgery, when I die, they will donate my body to Tupperware.

I wish I had a twin, so I could know what I'd look like without plastic surgery.

(6) Final thought for the day: "We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen." ~ D. H. Lawrence

2014/09/09 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Fertility rate in Iran: Based on World Bank data, the number of children an Iranian woman bears has dropped from around 7 in 1960 to just under 2 in 2010 (other sources cite a figure as low as 1.65), with the bulk of the drop having occurred since the institution of family planning programs in 1989. There was a small bump during the 8-year Iran-Iraq war. It would be interesting to see how the rate continues over the next decade, given the hard push by Islamic Republic officials to reverse the trend.



(2) A book-lover's garage door. [[Photo](#)]

(3) World's longest hedge maze: Located near the village of Horningsham in England, the maze with 2.5-meter tall hedges has pathways totaling 2.72 km, sprawled out over 1.5 acres. [[Photo](#)]

(4) Rap music and videos are now allowed in Iran: Calling the new art form "**goftaavaaz**" ("speaking song"), a spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance indicated that allowing this kind of music is in line with the country's very similar traditions of "rajaz khaani" and "bahr-e tavil."

(5) ISIS is doomed (just be patient): Taking land in surprise attacks is one thing, holding on to it and ruling the occupants is another (as the US found out in Iraq). According to [Kurt Eichenwald](#), writing for *Newsweek*, ISIS has 9 other enemies besides its enemy #1, the United States and its allies. These are: [2] nonviolent Salafis; [3] Arab oil sheiks; [4] Shi'ite Muslims; [5] Iran's government and its military; [6] Iraq's government and its military; [7] Syria's government and its military; [8] Hamas; [9] Hizbollah; [10] Al-Qaeda.

(6) Intriguing questions and answers from *Time* magazine's "The Answers Issue" (September 8 & 15, 2014). For brevity, I have removed a lot of details, such as the time period over which averages are taken.

Q: What's the best selfie look? A: NYC women tilt their heads 7.6 degrees on average to get a good shot.

Q: Where should I sit to catch a foul ball? A: *Time* magazine provides section numbers for many ballparks.

Q: What is the most patriotic color? A: According to an analysis of all the world's flags, it's red.

Q: Who watches more TV, men or women? A: Men watch an average of 24.6 minutes more (avg. 2.77 hours).

Q: When will China's economy overtake that of US? A: in 2019, when both countries reach an 18% share.

Q: Why don't we get heart cancer? A: Heart cells do not split and multiply after fetal development.

Q: How much stubble do women find most attractive? A: About 10 days' worth.

Q: Where is the most dangerous intersection in America? A: Knights Rd. and Street Rd., in Bensalem, PA.

2014/09/08 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "What is the point of having countless books and libraries whose titles the owner could scarcely read through in a lifetime?" ~ Roman philosopher Seneca, predicting information overload some 2000 years ago, but failing to foresee search engines for dealing with it
- (2) Football map of the US: Though not a football fan myself, I found [this map](#) of the United States showing the sphere of influence for each NFL team quite interesting.
- (3) Children of Iranian politicians study and work in the decadent West: Leading chants of "Death to America!" at Friday prayers and other rallies, some Islamic Republic officials send their children to top-tier colleges in the US and Europe, where they enjoy [educational opportunities and freedoms](#) denied to other Iranians.
- (4) Iran earned 4th place in volleyball championship: [World volleyball dream team](#) for 2014 includes 1 player from Iran and 2 from the US. In the recently concluded World League championships, Iran lost to Italy in the third-place match, while USA beat Brazil in the title match. In the currently ongoing FIVB championship, Iran is doing quite well, having just crushed the hopes of Puerto Rico 3-0.
- (5) Illinois passes law to protect unpaid interns against sexual harassment: [The law](#) essentially includes an unpaid intern in its definition of an "employee," thus affording such interns the same protections and rights as paid employees in cases of sexual harassment and discrimination.
[P.S.: English wonks among the readers please enlighten me. I often see, as in the beginning of this article, statements like "one of the only states to pass ..." Shouldn't it be either "the only state to pass ..." or "one of a handful of states to pass ..."?]
- (6) Final thought for the day: "Genius is talent set on fire by courage." ~ Henry Van Dyke

2014/09/07 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." ~ Henry David Thoreau
- (2) A list of [infrequently used English words](#) to know.
- (3) Interesting contrast in an Iranian village. [\[Photo\]](#)
- (4) The humorous side of engineering: Since 1982, Robert W. Lucky has written a bimonthly column for *IEEE Spectrum* in which he focuses on interesting, often humorous, aspects of the engineering profession. The column is titled "Reflections." Now, after 190 such columns, [he reflects on his reflections](#). He ends this latest column thus: "Now, the hesitation [in answering the question "what do you do?" at social gatherings] is gone. I am proud to reply that I am an electrical engineer, and I think that I can discern a flicker of respect for that answer. But it seems as if people still don't want to hear more about what I actually do. They probably think that I design iPhones, and that's fine with me."
- (5) Something much harder than the ice-bucket challenge: "As brilliantly simple as the Ice Bucket Challenge is, its phenomenal success is making many of us think hard about new ways to raise awareness and dollars. The efficiency of the campaign, for one, is awe-inspiring. The only overhead the ALS Association incurred was the cost and staff time of drafting and then sending a single email to 60,000 people in its database. The campaign also demonstrated the power of one or two people who care passionately about a cause. After all, the Ice Bucket Challenge wasn't started by the ALS Association or a PR agency but by young people who wanted to support their friend with ALS." ~ Kathy Giusti, writing in [Time magazine](#)
- (6) Venice Film Festival award for Iranian female screenwriter/director: [Rakhshan Bani E'temaad](#) was honored for best screenplay.

2014/09/06 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote the day: "The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls." ~ Pablo Picasso
- (2) College soccer is back: UCSB played its first match of the 2014 soccer season against Northwestern last night. The two teams were pretty evenly matched, each dominating the other for extended periods of time, with both sustained attacks and fast breaks. The 1-1 final score at the end of overtime was quite fair. I found a new feature of the stadium announcer's work quite annoying. After each corner kick, the announcer would say, "this corner kick was brought to you by such and such gourmet sandwich shop." Goalie saves were brought to us by another merchant, not by the skillful goalkeeper. I hope they will discontinue this practice, or it will be a very long season.
- (3) Kurdish music concert: This [74-minute video](#) contains a complete concert by Nishtiman, a Kurdish group with musicians from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.
- (4) A 'documentary' film that's scary, sad, and funny at the same time: Borrowing liberally from Hollywood films and using some musings of conservative hatemongers in the US, this [31-minute video mishmash](#) touted as a documentary film, frames Jews as the evil brains behind all of the world's troubles, from the deaths of prophets to Sunni Islam, terrorist groups, 9/11, and beheadings. It begins with the claim that the increase in

the number of disaster movies coming out of Hollywood studios is an indication of the approaching End Times and the emergence of the 12th Imam Mahdi, who will rule the earth and will take back Palestine. It is revealing that in several passages, when the narrator says "Jews" the English caption replaces it with "Zionism," a naive effort on the part of the producers to deflect criticism from the West regarding anti-Semitism. So, here we go again: Islamic countries blaming everyone but themselves for their troubles. Apologists for extreme Islamism are already posting about the beheading videos being fake!

(5) When did everything become 'epic'? *Time* magazine, issue of September 8 & 15, 2014, presents an [interesting timeline](#) for slang terms that came to mean 'excellent,' beginning with 'special' in 1225, through 'smooth' in 1893 and 'epic' in 1983, to 'chronic' in 1998. Enjoy!

(6) Final thought for the day: According to *Time* magazine (issue of September 8 & 15, 2014) 80% of Americans check their smartphones first thing in the morning, right after waking up.

2014/09/05 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) The world isn't a playground: Kids taunt each other on the playground and it takes only an oblique dare or a minor incitement to start a fight. Nations and world leaders, on the other hand, are expected to act differently and not rush to war at the slightest provocation. Those who believe that the US and other Western countries should send forces to confront ISIS are using the playground model, not the world stage.

(2) Seven photos, taken before and after the California drought: Drag the boundary line in the middle to see more of the before or after photo. [[Pictorial](#)]

(3) California's lost opportunity is Nevada's gain: California's legislature adjourned before acting on a bill that would have provided economic incentives to Tesla Motors for building its battery factory close to its main assembly plant in Fremont and corporate headquarters in Palo Alto. Instead, the factory for advanced batteries [will be built near Reno](#), Nevada.

(4) Making a prosthetic human memory chip: A [news report](#) in *IEEE Spectrum*, issue of September 2014, describes a DARPA project that aims to develop implanted memory devices within 4 years. Researchers at UCLA and elsewhere seek to map their understanding of the neuroscience of memory to build a prosthetic memory device for implantation in a human brain.

(5) The universal 'anger face': A group of UCSB and Australian researchers have studied the functional advantages of [the face humans make when they are angry](#). "The expression is cross-culturally universal, and even congenitally blind children make this same face without ever having seen one." The seven distinct muscle contractions forming an angry face have evolved to impart strength and thus "to motivate effective bargaining behavior during conflicts of interest." Next time you get angry, take a look in the mirror and see the face for yourself!

2014/09/04 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I don't know; you'll have to ask Nikola Tesla." ~ Albert Einstein, when asked how it felt to be the smartest man in the world

(2) A one-girl band: Prompted by my daughter sharing a cover of Michael Jackson's "The Way You Make Me Feel" by Kawehi, I searched for her other works on-line and found this [Esquire article](#) containing her story and links to several of her videos. So much talent!

(3) Google's quantum computing initiative: Partnering with UCSB, NASA Ames Research Center, and others, Google has established the [Quantum Artificial Intelligence Lab](#) to build superconductor-based quantum information processing systems.

(4) A printed 12-foot-tall castle: Using one of the first [3D concrete printers](#), engineer/contractor Andrey Rudenko pushed a few buttons to have the castle built, layer by layer, in his Minnesota backyard.

(5) Those seemingly unimportant "function words" can tell us a lot: In conversations, we instinctively pay attention to content-heavy words (which tell us about what, where, when) and ignore little words that glue the stuff together ("I," "the," "this," "though," "and," "there"). In an [analysis of speech patterns](#) during speed-dating sessions, it was determined that "when the language styles of two people matched, when they used pronouns, prepositions, articles and so forth in similar ways at similar rates, they were much more likely to end up on a date." Fascinating stuff!

(6) Los Angeles claims [top spot in manufacturing jobs](#): With slightly more than half-a-million manufacturing workers, the greater Los Angeles area (which includes Long Beach and Santa Ana) beat out Chicago as America's largest manufacturing hub.

2014/09/03 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quotes of the day about religion: (1) "We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision." ~ The Catholic bishops of England, Scotland, and Wales, who maintain that the Bible is accurate in passages relating to human soul and salvation, but not in other secular matters (2) "If

science proves Buddhism is wrong, then Buddhism must change." ~ Dalai Lama

(2) Clickable calendar, with lots of trivia for each day of the year.

(3) Joke of the day: (Q) Is it true you married your wife for her looks? (A) Yes, but not the looks she's been giving me lately.

(4) Under the hood of Islamic State finances: Here is a revealing passage from a [BBC News article](#) about how the Islamic State gets its support.

To understand how the [IS] economy functions is to delve into a murky world of middlemen and shady business dealings, in which "loyal ideologues" on differing sides spot business opportunities and pounce upon them.

IS exports about 9,000 barrels of oil per day at prices ranging from about \$25 to \$45.

Some of this goes to Kurdish middlemen up towards Turkey, some goes for domestic IS consumption and some goes to the Assad regime, which in turn sells weapons back to the group.

"It is a traditional war economy," notes Jamestown analyst Wladimir van Wilgenburg.

Indeed, the dodgy dealings and strange alliances are beginning to look very similar to events that occurred during the Lebanese civil war, when feuding war lords would similarly fight and do business with each other.

(5) Iran doing well in FIVB World Volleyball Championship: In its first match, Iran had defeated Italy 3-1. The second match against USA ended 3-2 in Iran's favor. After two matches, Iran leads Group D, which also includes Belgium, France, USA, Italy, and Puerto Rico. Iran will play France on 9/4, Belgium on 9/6, and Puerto Rico on 9/7.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The first message that a criminal wants to convey is that even if he cannot kill you physically, he will seize control of your emotions and demeanor with fear." ~ [Shiva Mahbobi](#), human and women's rights activists on the ISIS campaign of terror

2014/09/02 (Tue.): Linden, David J., *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*, Harvard Univ. Press, 2007.

In this scientifically accurate yet highly accessible book, neuroscientist David Linden (of Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine) reviews the biology of the human brain, focusing on its inelegant and haphazard design. By discussing the biological bases of human emotions and perception, Linden shows how most of our foibles are direct results of the less-than-perfect computational and reasoning hardware we possess.

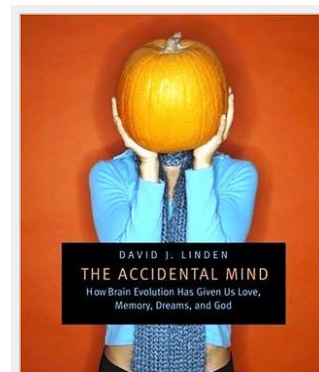
The titles of Chapters 1 and 9, "The Inelegant Design of the Brain" and "The Unintelligent Design of the Brain," leave no doubt that the author does not belong to the camp that worships the miracle of the human brain. Far from being the work of an all-knowing designer aiming to build a general-purpose problem-solving machine, the human brain consists of layers of ad-hoc solutions, added to the basic lizardian brain at its base, over eons of evolutionary history. The human brain's keeping some of the older parts that are of very limited use today is akin to a modern MP3 player containing a rudimentary 8-track tape player from the 1960s or an advanced race car having all the parts of a Model-T Ford underneath.

By presenting arguments in support of the statement that the human brain is "a kludge ... a design that is inefficient, inelegant, and unfathomable, but that nevertheless works" [p. 6], the author builds a solid case against "intelligent design," a topic that is somewhat outside the scope of the book and thus of this review. I refer the interested readers to [Jerry Coyne's essay](#), "The Faith That Dare Not Speak Its Name: The Case Against Intelligent Design" (*The New Republic*, August 22 & 29, 2005, pp. 21-33).

There are numerous constraints in our brain and its development that make us who we are. For example, the small size of the birth canal necessitates that humans come into the world with a partially developed brain, because a fully developed brain would be too large to pass through. This property in turn dictates our long period of dependence on our parents compared with other animals. Human brain is not only an energy hog (it uses a good part of our body's energy) but also a gene hog (an estimated 70% of our 23,000 or so genes are expressed in the brain).

Human brain is very slow compared with today's computers: hundreds of spikes per second for neurons vs. billions for computer CPUs, a ratio of about 10M (the speed of signal propagation in the brain is also a factor of 1M lower). The brain makes up for this speed deficit with massive amounts of hardware (100B neurons) and extreme connectivity (1000s of synapses per neuron). So, a great deal of redundancy and parallel processing is applied to obtaining reliable and timely solutions to difficult problems.

Much of what we know about the brain and its impact on personality has been derived from studying humans afflicted with various brain injuries. Examples of injuries include disconnection of the left and right half-brains, damage to certain parts of the cortex (such as the area responsible for visual processing), and, in one highly unusual case, extensive damage due to an industrial accident that pushed a metal bar through the skull of a



railroad worker, entering just below one eye and exiting at the top of the head. Interestingly, there have been cases of individuals with brain injuries who recovered and were able to live normal lives, but ended up having distinctly different personalities after recovery.

What we perceive as the external world is really the result of our senses cherry-picking and our brain processing certain aspects of the environment around us. We don't perceive the world in purely sensory terms, because "by the time we are aware of sensory information, it's already been deeply intertwined with emotions and plans for action" [p. 83]. In other words, there is no such thing as pure perception. So, it isn't surprising that we don't all see the world in the same way; by the time the visual sensation is created, the real world has been mixed with our emotions, memories, and expectations. As we look around a room or outdoor space, the jerky raw images resulting from the movement of our eyes are smoothed out according to our internal models, with gaps potentially filled differently by each individual.

In addition to not being pure, our senses are quite limited and imprecise. For example, the same nerve endings that are stimulated by high temperature also detect spiciness; hence the cross-cultural use of the term "hot" to describe the sensations of high temperature and spicy food. If you drink hot tea after a spicy meal, the receptors will be super-activated, leading to the tea feeling hotter than it actually is. The same overlap exists between cold and menthol receptors.

Our still-improving knowledge of how the human brain works is reflected in the fact that there are two different fields of science for dealing with brain disease. "Neurology mostly deals with perceptual, motor, and cognitive problems, while psychiatry mostly deals with emotional and social problems" [p. 97], the dichotomy being an accident of the recent history of scientific development, rather than a necessity.

Among the wonders of the human brain is an internal circadian clock, taking its name from "circa" (approximately) and "dia" (day). The working of the clock, which consists of a cluster of approximately 20,000 neurons, is coordinated with light in the external world via a special set of retinal neurons. In the absence of light clues, the clock continues to work but gradually drifts. You can also force the clock to drift through artificial lighting, but the change is limited to 1-2 hours per day (this is what causes jet lag when one flies across many time zones).

A good deal of the book is devoted to how memories are formed and recalled. It is postulated that sleep cycles have a major role in shaping and consolidating memories. Our brain has been developed to build consistent narratives from disjoint facts, in part to make recall easier. People with disconnection of the left and right sides of their brains sometimes explain their actions in consistent, fabricated narratives that have little to do with reality, although they are not consciously lying.

Human dreams have always fascinated scientists and lay people alike. There are many theories on why we dream and some of these theories come with associated rules for "interpreting" dreams. Dreams with storylines (often not making much sense) are the results of the narrative-making mechanism building a story from disjoint facts and memories, as they are being integrated and archived during our sleep. Most dreams accompany negative narratives; only 15% of dreams are emotionally positive and, contrary to popular belief, a mere 10% are overtly sexual. The negative emotional content of dreams may be for the purpose of enhancing memory formation and consolidation, because we tend to remember threatening or dangerous situations better.

I was intrigued by this book and learned a great deal from it, especially as its reading coincided with my preparations for a keynote talk entitled "Engineering the Future: Toward Self-Organizing, Self-Improving, Self-Healing, and Self-Sustaining Systems." The human brain provides one of the finest examples of self-organization and self-improvement.

2014/09/01 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Labor Day to all my friends in the US! Different countries of the world celebrate a day during which workers' rights and their contributions to the national economy are recognized. For much of the world, this celebration occurs on the International Workers' Day (May 1). A list of other days used around the world for this purpose is given in this [Wikipedia entry](#).

(2) Quote of the day: "Iran must be the flag-bearer of human rights in the world." ~ Islamic Republic politician Javad Larijani [[Cartoon](#)]

(3) Interesting facts about human sensation: The same nerve endings that are stimulated by high temperature also detect spiciness; hence the cross-cultural use of the term "hot" to describe the sensations of heat and spicy food. If you drink hot tea after a spicy meal, the receptors will be super-activated, leading to the tea feeling extra hot. The same overlap exists between cold and menthol receptors. [Info from *The Accidental Mind*, a book that I will review shortly.]

(4) An Iranian-American girl, born in California, struggles with parents' nostalgic view of Iran: What her parents tell her about the country's [traditions and rich history](#) rings hollow when juxtaposed with the grim daily news from the region.

(5) Bon appetit: Starfish shown [having an anchovy for dinner](#).

(6) Final thought for the day: The company hired to build the border fence separating California from Mexico agreed to pay \$5M in fines for hiring illegal immigrants. [From an actual 2006 news story.]

2014/08/31 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "[He] was passionate about everything in his life—family, friends, country, and career ... [His 'Gandhi'] was a gift to the world." ~ Steven Spielberg honoring the recently passed actor/director Richard Attenborough, whose film 'Gandhi' beat Spielberg's 'ET' 8 to 4 in the number of Oscars won in 1982

(2) Highly creative sculptures and statues in the world: Each of these [25 art pieces/installations](#) challenges and intrigues the viewer like no other.

(3) Ice-water-bucket challenge gone wrong. You know what will happen [right from the start](#).

(4) Movie stars of Hollywood's golden era, as they age: On a different post of [this video](#), someone commented that the men seem to age better than the women. In reality, we all age the same, but centuries of patriarchal norms have conditioned us to view old, graying men as handsome and women of the same age as, well, less than desirable.

(5) Dessert tip: [Making chocolate bowls](#) with balloons.

(6) Final thought for the day: "A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person." ~ Mignon McLaughlin

2014/08/30 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Inverted priorities? This chart, constructed from 2011 CDC data, shows that there is a mismatch between donations for research and causes of death in the US. [IFLScience chart, extended and relabeled by me for greater clarity.]

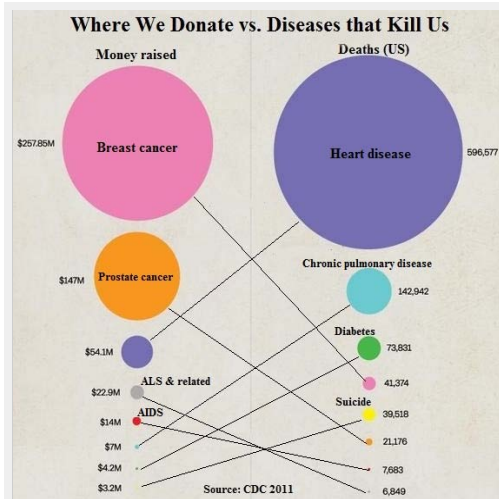
(2) Quote of the day: "With them the seed of wisdom did I sow | And with my own hand labored it to grow | And this was all the harvest that I reaped | I came like water, and like wind I go." ~ Omar Khayyam

(3) The earth's melting glaciers: The eye-opening 2012 documentary film "Chasing Ice" is the result of efforts by National Geographic photographer James Balog who traveled across the Arctic to deploy time-lapse cameras designed to capture a multiyear record of the world's changing glaciers. If you don't have access or time to watch the full 75-minute film, this [10-minute TED talk](#) provides many of the key points.

(4) Guns as musical instruments? I can't decide whether [these soldiers](#) really play musical instruments made from guns or just pretend and lip-sync to recorded music.

(5) NRA made the mistake of ticking off Bill Gates: The Microsoft founder and his wife have donated \$1M in support of a [Washington State ballot initiative](#) that would institute universal background checks for all firearms purchases.

(6) Final thought for the day: "A friend to all is a friend to none." ~ Aristotle



2014/08/29 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The distance from administering justice to committing a crime is as short as a belief." ~ Shokoufeh Taghi [Translated from the Persian original.]

(2) Nine-year-old girl accidentally [kills her instructor](#) while being taught how to fire an Uzi submachine gun: And you have to be 16 to drive, 18 to vote, and 21 to drink?

(3) A spade becomes a violin-like instrument: [Amazing musical talent](#), playing a single-string instrument built from a spade.

(4) High-speed Internet and 3G communications services un-Islamic: Following a Sharia-based fatwa from Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, [Iran's Minister of Telecommunications](#) has said that his ministry will work toward restricting access to such services. Way to go, Islamic Republic! You have alienated women with mandatory hijab laws, and now you exert more pressure on the youth and the educated; only about 15% of the population left to alienate in some way.

(5) The Emir of Kuwait [appears to be drunk](#) during welcoming ceremonies in Iran a couple of months ago, creating some challenges for Iran's President Rouhani.

(6) Final thought for the day: "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." ~ Physicist Max Planck

2014/08/28 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Hurricane Marie brought huge waves to SoCal yesterday: The sea wasn't as rough in Santa Barbara as in Newport Beach, but we had some **good-size waves** at the breakwater.
- (2) Choking the oceans with plastic: **The Great Pacific Garbage Patch** revisited and seen to be expanding.
- (3) President Obama seeking UN climate agreement that does not need Senate ratification: Europeans, aware of the difficulties of ratifying such a deal by the US Congress, are helping draft an agreement, to be signed at the 2015 UN summit in Paris, that is not binding but works by **naming and shaming countries** into cutting their emissions.
- (4) An aerial view of the **east entrance** to the UC Santa Barbara campus (Henley Gate).
- (5) An animated GIF is worth 10,000 words: Diagrams and charts are indispensable for explaining science and technology concepts. A little bit of animation can add immensely to the explanatory power of a diagram. Here are **some examples**.
- (6) Recitations of a poem, in Persian and English: Simin Behbahani's "**I'm So in Love**" is recited by Homa Sarshar and Niloufar Talebi.

2014/08/27 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Deception has been used in various contexts throughout human history ... Social media provide new environments and technologies for potential deceivers. There are many examples of people deceived through social media, with some suffering devastating consequences to their personal lives." ~ Michael Tsikerdekis and Sherali Zeadally, in an article entitled "Online Deception in Social Media," *Communications of the ACM*, September 2014
- (2) Fitness trackers provide insight on the Napa Valley quake: **A chart** showing the number of people who woke up as a result of the quake provides interesting insights. The Napa Valley quake was the first major quake for which a wealth of fitness tracker data is available.
- (3) Weird science news: A robot sent to hitchhike across Canada completed its 4000-mile trip after 3 weeks on the road. [From *Time* magazine, issue of September 1, 2014.]
- (4) New nail polish detects date-rape drugs: The nail polish, being developed by a group of 4 NC State students majoring in materials science and engineering, **changes color** when exposed to common date-rape drugs. Some experts have indicated that given the wide variety of date-rape drugs used and the rate at which new drugs are developed, the nail-polish solution may provide a false sense of security.
- (5) Tribute to Robin Williams: Monday night's Emmy Awards included a **5-minute tribute** to Robin Williams, delivered by his friend Billy Crystal.
- (6) Iran's red line for ISIS is the Shi'ite holy sites: The mullahs are apparently not worried about mass executions, beheadings, and other atrocities, as long as the tombs from 14 centuries ago and the associated religious establishments are safe. [**News story in Persian**]

2014/08/26 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes." ~ Carl Jung
- (2) British intelligence close to identifying the ISIS member who beheaded James Foley: The prime suspect is a rapper, one of whose songs had been featured on BBC. The British are using the song's lyrics along with advanced **voice recognition technology** on what they have identified as a south London accent.
- (3) Huge rubber duck sails into the Port of Los Angeles: The **inflatable work of art**, by the Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman, is 6 stories tall and weighs 11 tons.
- (4) Advances in breast cancer detection via 3D mammograms: Invasive breast cancer can be detected with 41% better accuracy using 3D mammograms, which also reduce the need for repeat tests and biopsies. [From *Time* magazine, issue of September 1, 2014.]
- (5) Another underground city discovered in Anatolia: A homeowner in the Anatolia region of Turkey was surprised to find an **underground city** while cleaning an area under his house. The region is famous for its underground cities and vilages, each composed of multiple chambers across several levels. A typical city/village has areas for sleeping, livestock, water tanks, cooking, ventilation, baths, and tombs.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "When faced with senseless drama, spiteful criticisms and misguided opinions, walking away is the best way to stand up for yourself. To respond with anger is an endorsement of their attitude." ~ Dodinski

2014/08/25 (Mon.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it." ~ Rabindranath Tagore
- (2) A new nation may be born soon: The odds are in favor of the **Scottish independence** movement, whose poll numbers show steady improvement.
- (3) Banks increasingly cater to the rich: The top 1% continue to enjoy generous banking services, while

receiving complimentary Broadway tickets and spa trips on top of easy credit. Meanwhile the bottom 99% find it difficult to get credit, as they struggle to maintain high enough balances to avoid stiff fees and penalties. In the business world too, small and midsize businesses pay on average 1.75% higher interest on loans than larger companies. This condition creates a vicious cycle that exacerbates the wealth gap. [From a [column by Rana Foroohar](#), in *Time* magazine, issue of September 1, 2014.]

(4) Race remains an open wound: Thus [writes Joe Klein](#) in his *Time* magazine column (issue of September 1, 2014). He suggests that we must address race relation in a thoughtful, provocative way. "Blacks represent 13% of the population but commit 50% of the murders; 90% of black victims are murdered by other blacks. ... Black crime rates are much higher than they were before the Civil Rights movement. These problems won't be solved simply by recognition of historic grievances. Absent a truly candid conversation about the culture that emerged from slavery, they won't be solved at all."

(5) Final thought for the day: The three 'A's of awesome are: attitude, authenticity, awareness.

2014/08/24 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Napa Valley's magnitude-6.0 (6.1?) quake felt as far south as San Jose: In all, 9 million Californians felt the quake, which led to 90 injuries, a handful of them critical, and a lot of structural damage due to rattling and fires. So far, no one has been reported killed or missing. I hope that family and friends in the SF Bay Area are safe. Bridges, rail, and other infrastructure are being examined for safety.

(2) Quote of the day: "I was awakened early this morning by a 6.0 earthquake that shook the house and rolled me out of bed. I love living in the Bay Area of California, and tell myself everywhere has its dangers—hurricanes in the East, tornados in the Midwest, floods and landslides in the Rockies. But there's something so very basic about the ground that when it doesn't stay still, everything seems precarious. Maybe that's a useful reminder. Life itself is precarious. Most of us get rattled by the small stuff. Maybe once in a while we need a good shaking to remind us how briefly we're on this earth, and how precious our time here is." ~ Robert Reich (Facebook post)

(3) Iran's silent youth revolution: Based on direct experience from a long stay and schooling in Tehran, and writing under a pseudonym, a teen-aged Iranian-American [shares his observations](#) on a silent youth revolution in Iran.

(4) Canadian jazz-pop singer Nikki Yanofsky: Here is her excellent cover of "[Something New.](#)" She is also the voice behind the Canadian CTV theme song "[I Believe,](#)" used for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

(5) The two-space rule after a period is wrong: It is a leftover from the days of manual typewriters with constant spacing per letter, for which leaving two spaces after a period enhanced readability. But now almost all fonts in use have proportional spacing and [typographic authorities are unanimous](#) in their preference for a single space between sentences.

2014/08/23 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "What love we have given, we'll have forever. What love we fail to give, will be lost for all eternity." ~ Leo Buscaglia

(2) Innovating to Zero: This is the title of a 2010 [TED talk by Bill Gates](#) about the world's energy future and the necessity to reach near-zero emissions.

(3) Typing in Persian: If, like me, you don't have a Persian word processor, you have several options for composing Persian texts. [Behnevis](#) is the one I have been using for a long time. There is also a very similar tool in [Google transliteration](#). I have just begun using an on-line [Persian keyboard](#) which in many ways is more convenient. Once you get used to the keystroke for each Persian letter, you can type rather quickly.

(4) A mugger's son apologizes to a victim for his dad's action: His mostly absent dad, who went in and out of the prison, sent his son \$250 for a band trip. When the teenager found out that his dad had been arrested for mugging, [he contacted the victim](#) and tried to return part of the money she had lost.

(5) All those awesome feelings over small things [Sampled from 1000awesomethings.com].

#464: When characters in movies visit a place you know.

#473: When the social event you didn't want to attend gets cancelled.

#499: When you should have gotten a parking ticket, but didn't.

#501: When you pick the fastest-moving line at the store checkout.

#523: When you learn a new word and then start seeing it everywhere.

(6) Final thought for the day: If there is a God, what is s/he thinking about ISIS/ISIL/IS? Is s/he exalting "Way to go, my wholesome and brave followers!" or is s/he groaning, "Darn, what have I done?"

2014/08/22 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the Day: "You're only given a little spark of madness. You mustn't lose it." ~ Robin Williams

(2) Interviewee commits multiple errors in his [12-second Persian statement](#) on "Eid-e Mab'as."

(3) This latest [legal battle](#) isn't a joke: The fight is over who owns the copyright to the resulting photo when a monkey takes a selfie.

(4) NFL reaches new heights in greed: The rich, do-nothing entity has asked candidates for performing at the Super Bowl halftime show to [pay large sums of money](#) for the privilege to perform and the attendant publicity. It seems that the big league is taking a lesson from multibillion-dollar corporations that lure unpaid interns seeking resume fillers. But wait, this is a bit more: it's like asking the interns to pay the company. [Side note: A petition is circulating to get 'Weird Al' Yankovic to perform at the February 1, 2015, Super Bowl XLIX halftime show.]

(5) Why Maryam Mirzakhani won the Fields Medal: Nearly all posts about the Iranian-American mathematician's accomplishment have been celebratory and congratulatory statements. Here is the official International Mathematical Union's presentation of her work, a detailed description of contributions for which she was recognized ([PDF file](#)). Here is a [less technical Persian version](#). This [Quanta magazine article](#) includes personal details and an informative 3-minute video about Mirzakhani's life and work. By the way, according to Wikipedia, Mirzakhani is married to Jan Vondrak, a Czech theoretical computer scientist who works at IBM Almaden Research Center. The couple has a daughter named Anahita.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The only time a woman really succeeds in changing a man is when he is a baby." ~ Natalie Wood

2014/08/21 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

(2) Everything is political: [This Google graphic](#) shows the correlation between the level of humanitarian crises in the world (as measured by number of deaths) during 2014 and the intensity of worldwide Google searches involving the countries where they occurred. Notice the almost total lack of interest in Syria, the site of the worst loss of life.

(3) Annotated slides of my keynote talk at SUTA reunion in Milan: I have completed and posted annotated versions of my slides for the keynote talk entitled "Engineering the Future: Toward Self-Organizing, Self-Improving, Self-Healing, and Self-Sustaining Systems," delivered in Milan on August 2, 2014. You can find the PDF and PPTX files on my [publications page](#) under item [283].

(4) Iran's minister of science impeached by the parliament: His [key offenses](#) included rehiring/reenrolling some previously terminated faculty members and students, and an uptick in political activism on university campuses. President Rouhani did not come to his appointee's defense and, like the former moderate President Khatami, seems to be shunning confrontation with the very vocal conservative faction.

(5) Report all suspicious information: Early this afternoon, I received a UCSB e-mail alert message about a bomb threat at Campbell Hall and the ongoing evacuations; a bit scary, but nothing to write home about. What cracked me up was the request to "report any suspicious information to UCSB Police Department." I do have tons of suspicious information, but somehow I don't think they would be interested in any of it.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Friendship may, and often does, grow into love, but love never subsides into friendship." ~ Lord Byron

2014/08/20 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Absence diminishes mediocre passions and increases great ones, as the wind extinguishes candles and fans fires." ~ Francois de la Rochefoucauld

(2) A teenager's Facebook status: A bunch of my friends are coming over tonight to play on their phones.

(3) Things found on the Internet: [Thirteen interesting items](#), from microcars to lego-shaped chocolate.

(4) Eight UC campuses are among the world's top 100 universities: In the 2014 edition of the rankings released by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, [Berkeley leads the UC campuses](#) in 4th place, followed by UCLA (12th), UCSD (14th), UCSF (18th), UCSB (41st), UC Irvine (47th), UC Davis (55th), and UCSC (93rd). UCSB attained the 7th rank in engineering-technology & computer sciences and the 18th rank in natural sciences & mathematics. [Among Iranian universities](#) in engineering, University of Tehran ranked 51-75th, while Sharif University of Technology was placed in the 151-200th grouping.

(5) Zero and infinity in economics: Mathematicians struggled with zero and infinity for ages, but they now have a reasonably good hold on the two extreme notions and their relationships. In economics, the advent of zero pricing (the free economy) created some angst, before theories were developed to deal with the anomaly. This [very interesting article](#) suggests that the notions of "free" and "priceless" (of the Mastercard commercials kind) go hand in hand, and that the two extremes must be studied together.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Love is never lost. If not reciprocated, it will flow back and soften and purify the heart." ~ Washington Irving

2014/08/18 (Mon.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Remembering poetess extraordinaire Simin Behbahani (1927-2014):

A rare photo of a gathering of some of the most famous 20th-century Iranian poets. Left to right: Fereidoon Moshiri, Forough Farrokhzad, Hooshang Ebtehaj, Nader Naderpour, Mohammad Ghazi, Lo'bat Vala, Simin Behbahani, and Mansoureh Naderpour.



(2) State of siege in Ferguson: CNN provided live coverage of protests and associated police actions in Ferguson, Missouri, this evening. As usual for this kind of intensive coverage, half of the reporters' utterances consist of statements about not knowing what is going on. Why hours of live coverage if facts are so hard to come by? This kind of raw footage, with no background info, and interviews with the most vocal people around, perhaps having hidden agendas, is counterproductive. A few members of the crowd kept claiming that most marchers were peaceful and blamed anarchists coming from other areas of the country for throwing things at the police. One reporter kept asking why there is such a heavy police presence. Could it be that the police had gained some info about what would transpire or who would show up?

(3) Reading English texts with garbled words: By now, most of you have seen images like this, along with commentary expressing surprise that we can read English texts rather easily when word letters are garbled, except those in the first and last positions. That this feat should not be surprising comes from two facts.

First fact: Readers do not focus on recognizing letters, at least not in the first attempt, but rather perceive words based on their "shapes" (loops, dots, up/down strokes, etc.). This is why lowercase texts, perhaps with initial caps, are easier to read than all-uppercase texts in which words have less distinctive shapes.

Second fact: A large fraction of all words appearing in English texts and speech have 1-3 letters, and thus are not garbled at all according to the rule given. Four-letter words are only minimally garbled by the middle two letters being flipped. Only 2 of the top 20 most frequently used English words, "the of to in and a for was is that on at he with by be it an as his," are 4-letter words ([source](#)).

So, are you still surprised? Make sure to visit the page cited at the end of the text and watch its video.

[P.S.: The text has a couple of typos; see if you can spot them.]

(4) Nobel Laureate to Fields Medalist: Shirin Ebadi sends a [congratulatory and cautionary message](#) to Maryam Mirzakhani, who is apparently scheduled to travel to Iran in January 2015 to attend a mathematics conference at her alma mater, Sharif University of Technology. Ebadi points out that Mirzakhani will no doubt be courted by some Islamic Republic officials eager for photo-ops. She asks Mirzakhani to remind those officials of the plight of imprisoned Iranian scientists and those who were forced to flee their homeland. Of course, Ebadi is already being criticized for politicizing a scientific achievement and asking others to do what she herself has not done as a prominent, internationally recognized Iranian. The Persian message is too long for me to translate in its entirety, but if I find an English translation, I will post a link to it here.

Jsut lkie in the oirgialn "jkoe", msot wrods are not cahnegd a lot or at all ! All wrods in the oirgialn sarrt wih the smae lteter and end wih the smae lteter. Aslo you wlli ntocie taht the scenod lteter and the tihrd of mny wrods are siwthced aornud, amlsot awlyas. Aslo, tehre are mny 3 lteter wrods taht dno't need to canhge and mny 2 lteter wrods too. It is not that hrad ! Egnlsih is, but it deos not need to be !

You dno't need to be taht samrt to raed tihs or the oirgialn ! But, Egnilsh is hrad to laern ! So hrad taht wrods are mmeroiesd as paitcuers bceuae dceoding is ueslles for mny wrods. Tihs is why you can raed this !

BTW, the rscheearch is not ture. It was nveer dneo at the uinervtisy of Cmabridge ! Hwoever, Egnlsih seplling is a jkoe, a mses. If it was a car, it wuold not slel ! If it was a pohne, no one wuold buy it! It tkaes meor tmie and mroe taehcers to laren it ! All jkoe aisde, taehcers cuold taech mroe itnetsnig cnocetps and raednig cuold tkae palce eraleir ! Myabe txaes cuold be rdeuced. Porudticvity mghit icnraese too ! Act now !

Go to <http://reforming-english.blogspot.ca> and laern mroe!

2014/08/17 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Correction to an earlier post: I am sorry to have posted on August 7 a premature announcement of Simin Behbahani's death. I learned yesterday that she is still in a coma at a hospital.

(2) A neat [science experiment](#): Water pouring down reacts to sound waves.

(3) Where the hackers are: A group of hackers in Russia, one of the centers of hacking in the world, has gathered 1.2B names and passwords from Internet users since 2011. Eastern Europe is also rife with hacking activities. Other hacking hotspots are China, Brazil, Nigeria, and Vietnam. [From *Time* magazine, issue of August 25, 2014.]

(4) Kurdish music: Hossein Alizadeh's Kurdish song "Laylahen," composed for the movie "Half Moon" ("Niwah Maang"), with [the video](#) including scenes from the film. And here is his song "[Vernal Presence](#)" from the same movie.

(5) Classic Persian music video: Anoushirvan Rohani and Hassan Golnaraghi perform the song "Maraa Beboos" ("Kiss Me") in this [10-minute video](#) from a private gathering of 22 years ago. (There is a long intro, before the segment with its recognized lyrics begins.)

(6) Sad, but true: The most highly recognized Iranian scientist, a woman who married a foreign national, cannot get an Iranian passport for her child. Iranian men, however, can marry non-Iranians and the resulting

children are recognized as Iranian. President Rouhani can send all the congratulatory messages he wants to Fields Medalist Maryam Mirzakhani, but he too, by virtue of recognizing **discriminatory Iranian laws**, deems her unequal to a man.

2014/08/16 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) The delightful world of Hattie Newman's **paper cities**.
- (2) A new wave of exodus from Europe: **Newsweek.com's take** on why European Jews are fleeing again.
- (3) Atrocities by ISIS/ISIL/IS continue: Here are some **horrific photos**.
- (4) Dramatic rescue operation, **airlifting a small number of Izadis** to safety.
- (5) Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones: The **GIF-illustrated story** of how Benny Johnson, the highly successful BuzzFeed editor, got fired; his plagiarism caught up with him when he brazenly accused others of plagiarizing his work.
- (6) Jon Stewart's directorial debut: No, it's not a comedy! Scheduled for release on 11/07, **"Rosewater"** is based on the book *Then They Came for Me*, by the imprisoned and tortured Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari. The film's title signifies the fact that the usually blindfolded Bahari's interrogator smelled of rosewater. I am looking forward to this film, which casts Gael Garcia Bernal as Bahari and also stars Shohreh Aghdashloo.

2014/08/15 (Fri.): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) A must-read for anyone dealing with a depressed loved one: The death of Robin Williams brought about numerous posts that showed his comic genius, putting smiles on our faces. But it also triggered an intense discussion of depression and its effects on a person's life and the lives of those around him/her. I am sharing **this article** which raises two key points: that depression fools a person into thinking that the condition is normal, thus impeding the will and effort to snap out of it, and that modern antidepressants have miraculous effects that make a more or less normal life possible.
- (2) Confronting identity theft: I spent a good part of today following up on recommendations from my employer's payroll department in the aftermath of a database compromise that exposed our identity details and bank account numbers. We are so vulnerable in this information society that stores everything on computers without appropriate access safeguard and protection measures. As part of the process, I requested my free annual credit reports to check if there have been any suspicious activities. If you have not done this, I highly recommend it. The process is fairly painless. You log on to the following Web site, provide some personal info, and sequentially request your credit report from the three companies that supply them: Equifax, Experian, and Trans Union. In my case, two of them provided immediate on-line access to my report and the third one asked me to submit a paper application (I skipped that one). <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action>
- (3) Photos of McCain with some ISIS members in 2013: A large number of photos such as **this one** are circulating in cyberspace. None of them is from reputable news sources, but my searches revealed no claims of doctoring and no denials. I hope McCain issues a clarifying statement to dispel the accusations that the US created ISIS, as it did Al Qaeda.
- (4) Confronting identity theft: I spent a good part of yesterday following up on recommendations from my employer's payroll department in the aftermath of a database compromise that exposed our identity details and bank account numbers. We are so vulnerable in this information society that stores everything on computers without appropriate access safeguards and protection measures. As part of the process, I requested my free annual credit reports to check if there have been any suspicious activities. If you have not done this, I highly recommend it. The process is fairly painless. You log on to **this Web site**, provide some personal info, and sequentially request your credit report from the three companies that supply them: Equifax, Experian, and Trans Union. In my case, two of them provided immediate on-line access to my report and the third one asked me to submit a paper application (I skipped that one).

2014/08/14 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Maryam Mirzakhani's Fields Medal, as covered in the media: Friends residing in Iran have reported that Professor Mirzakhani's major scientific accomplishment was given minimal coverage by Iran's government-controlled media. A brief announcement accompanied a photo of Mirzakhani in headscarf. Her former professors and classmates could have been interviewed and the story afforded its due weight, given that Mirzakhani can serve as a role model for all women, regardless of their study areas. Ironically, **BBC Persian** did present such interviews within several stories.
- (2) The fuss over **Facebook's new Messenger app**: Some pundits have claimed that using the Messenger app implies giving Facebook unlimited access to your mobile device, including its cameras and GPS device. The truth, however, is more complicated and some of these claims are mere myths. Still, given that we all have messaging capabilities outside Facebook, it may be prudent to avoid using the new app.
- (3) Is Siri an accomplice to murder? In a **real story** that reads like a horrid fantasy, a 20-year-old Florida man

is being tried for murdering his roommate over a shared love interest and dumping his body in the woods. An unusual aspect of the case is that the accused consulted Apple's Siri for ideas about where to hide the body. After asking "what kind of place are you looking for?" Siri suggested "swamps, reservoirs, metal foundries and dumps" as options. If not an accomplice, Siri may end up becoming a key witness.

(4) The great **mosque of Samara**: Only the outer walls and the imposing 52-meter minaret remain from a mosque in Iraq that was the world's largest for 4 centuries, until it was destroyed by Hulaku Khan in 1278.

(5) Final thought for the day: To your stomach, all potato is mashed potato.

(6) This year's last summer concert in the park: Country Nation performed this evening under beautiful blue skies at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park. The band is based in Los Angeles and does what is characterized in the concert's ads as "high-energy country." They performed a number of Carrie Underwood and Eagles hits, among others, alternating between female and male lead singers. [[YouTube video](#)]

2014/08/13 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Joke of the day: A computer programmer seemed puzzled inside an elevator, so a custodian approached him to see what was wrong. The programmer said that he wanted to go to the 12th floor, but after pressing the "1" and "2" buttons, he couldn't find the "enter" button.

(2) Liking everything on Facebook: I have long been puzzled by some people's Facebook posts being liked by scores of others, minutes after they appear. Some users garner hundreds of likes and dozens of comments for even trivial posts. I often examine such posts carefully to see if they contain valuable insights I may have missed upon first inspection. So, [this article](#) aroused my interest, thinking that it might contain an answer to this puzzle. The article is based on someone's personal experiences during two days, when he liked everything he saw on Facebook, even if he actually hated them, the only exceptions being when friends posted announcements of deaths in their families. He discovered that his newsfeed was greatly affected and that he was shown a lot of stories about or related to the things he liked. It is no secret that Facebook uses a sophisticated algorithm to shape your newsfeed based on things you like and comments you leave. Like a right-wing rant, and you'll be shown posts about the Second Amendment or perils of immigration. Hit like on a post condemning police brutality, and you'll get a lot of left-wing propaganda. So, if you don't want to be swamped by stories you don't care about, honesty in liking is the best policy.

(3) Is it morally okay for a billionaire to donate money to both sides in a political race? Calling the practice "double dipping" in his *Time* magazine column (issue of August 18, 2014), Joel Stein examines the issue with his usual humor. He found it extremely difficult to get such double donors on the record to discover their motives, which may include access to politicians regardless of who wins the election. On the lighter side, Stein observes that "Money in politics is less like giving a diamond ring and more like texting a little thumbs-up emoticon."

(4) Lauren Bacall (1924-2014) **dead at 89**: Not a most talented actresses, but an icon nonetheless.

(5) The Arab-Israeli conflict is no more: A semi-official Saudi newspaper has claimed that the Arab-Israeli conflict no longer exists and what we see now is Israel fighting against political movements, such as Hamas and its supporters Iran, Turkey, and Qatar. Iran and Turkey aren't Arab countries and Qatar is isolated in the Persian Gulf region. Hamas has very little support among Arab countries. [The article](#) concludes that now might be a good time for Israel to pursue a comprehensive deal with the Arabs.

2014/08/12 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "How far back in history do you have to go before it's considered archeology instead of grave robbing?" ~ Anonymous

(2) The first female **Fields Medalist** is a graduate of Iran's Sharif University of Technology: Maryam Mirzakhani earned her BS from SUT in 1999 and her PhD from Harvard University in 2004, and is now a Professor at Stanford University. The award recognizes her sophisticated and highly original contributions to the fields of geometry and dynamical systems, particularly in understanding the symmetry of curved surfaces, such as spheres, the surfaces of doughnuts and of hyperbolic objects.

(3) On the low-T industry's scams: Having saturated the feminine vanity market, the big pharma is now targeting men through scare tactics. Combating low testosterone levels via hormone therapy is suddenly a high priority for aging men. In a [Time magazine article](#) (issue of August 18, 2014), David Von Drehle discusses the promise, the science, and the risk of low-T therapies. He maintains that FDA's promise to review the safety of such treatments after multiple lawsuits and the increased risk of heart attacks from taking testosterone have cast doubts on the \$2B industry's practices.

(4) Country version of a classic song: [Emmylou Harris performs](#) "Save the Last Dance for Me."

(5) Robin Williams (1951-2014), master of comic improvisation: Many years ago, I watched an episode of the interview show "Inside the Actors Studio" featuring Robin Williams. I could not find the full show on-line, but here is a [9-minute segment](#) as a sample.

(6) Final thought for the day: Miracles happen all the time; just ask the lobster that was in the kitchen when

the Titanic sank!

2014/08/11 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Video and pictorial reports from the **8th Global SUTA Reunion** in Milan, August 1-3, 2014.
- (2) Robin Williams dead at 63: Returning from Milan via Zurich 5 days ago, I watched "The Angriest Man in Brooklyn," starring Robin Williams and Mila Kunis, in flight. While not one of Williams' better films, the plot includes his character being informed that he has only hours to live, a fate that changes his outlook on life. Nevertheless, his character ends up trying to commit suicide by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. Now, it seems, **he has died by suicide** due to asphyxia. May the talented actor, who made us all laugh via a number of memorable roles in movies and on TV, rest in peace!
- (3) Beautiful recreation of the **sounds of a thundershower**.
- (4) The Affordable Care Act's unlikely supporters: "Over the past year, Kentucky's healthcare website has proved to be a huge success. More than half-million Kentucky residents have signed up for the Bluegrass State's version of Obamacare. A majority of Kentuckians approve of it. That this has happened in a deeply red state is unexpected but hardly an accident." ~ Steven Brill, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of August 18
- (5) Culture of incivility toward women: According to a **US National Science Foundation report**, few women enter or remain in the engineering field because of a workplace culture of incivility toward them.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "We are all here for some special reason. Stop being a prisoner of your past. Become the architect of your future." ~ Robin Sharma

2014/08/10 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Merging companies always say that they'll save money and bring down prices. But the reality is that they often end up with monopoly power that allows them to exert incredible pressure in whatever way they like." ~ Albert Foer, quoted by Rana Foroohar in her *Time* magazine column (issue of August 18, 2014)
- (2) Plane crash near Tehran kills 39: **The passenger jet crashed** in a residential neighborhood shortly after takeoff from Mehrabad Airport. Nine of the 48 on board survived the crash, but the extent of their injuries is not known. President Rouhani has ordered a halt of flights for the Antonov-14-type planes, pending an investigation of the cause of engine failure.
- (3) New rendition of an old song: **"Farda To Mi-aayee"** ("Tomorrow You'll Come") by Hooshmand Aghili.
- (4) Is climate change largely the result of human activity? People in 20 countries were polled to see what fraction responded positively to this question. Here are some of the results: China 93%; India 80%; Japan 70%; Australia 64%; United States 54%. [From *Time* magazine, issue of August 18, 2014]
- (5) A movie about the life of physicist Stephen Hawking: The upcoming film, titled "The Theory of Everything," stars Eddie Redmayne as Hawking and Felicity Jones as his first wife, Jane Wilde. [From *Time* magazine, issue of August 18, 2014]
- (6) Final thought for the day: "We are all here for some special reason. Stop being a prisoner of your past. Become the architect of your future." ~ Robin Sharma

2014/08/08 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Man may have discovered fire, but women discovered how to play with it." ~ Candace Bushnell, *Sex and the City*
- (2) Turkish jets strike Islamic State forces: Ankara has denied the air strikes, but a former high-ranking CIA official in Baghdad **has confirmed them**. US forces are on alert for possible air strikes of their own.
- (3) Silent films: The summer film series continued, on this beautiful moon-lit night at the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, with the screening of two Buster Keaton films from the 1920s: "One Week" (adventures of a couple trying to build a house from prefab parts) and "The Navigator" (two spoiled rich people are trapped on an empty passenger ship, mid-ocean). Michael Mortilla provided live piano accompaniment.
- (4) IBM's brainlike computer chip: A paper published in the journal *Science* reports on a **processor chip** built by IBM researchers that mimics the way the brain recognizes patterns, using densely interconnected webs of transistors in lieu of neurons. The chip uses a fraction of the power needed by ordinary computer chips and can be powered like a hearing aid.
- (5) Final thought for the day: Evaluate people based only on their actions, not words. Those who find it necessary to repeatedly tell you how much they care usually don't. The great Persian poet Ferdowsi put it nicely when he wrote: "Two hundred statements are worth less than half an action."

2014/08/07 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Back in Santa Barbara: Finally, 25 hours after waking up yesterday morning in Milan, I was happy to sleep at home last night. My flights on Swiss Air (1 hour from Milan to Zurich and 12.5 hours from Zurich to Los Angeles) were as pleasant as one can expect these days. Swiss Air service is still one of the best, but airports

are airports, regardless of which airline you use.

(2) Simin Behbahani dead at 87: Nee Simin Khalili, the [Iranian poetess](#) passed away today after a brief hospitalization. Her passport was confiscated 4 years ago as she tried to board a flight to Paris, making her a virtual prisoner in Iran. She underwent harsh interrogations and was viewed as a threat by the Islamic government. Behbahani was one the very few, if not the only, Iranian poetess to reach national and international prominence in her lifetime. May she rest in peace!

[Note added on 8/16/2014: The story above was premature; Behbahani is in a coma at a hospital.]

(3) SUTA reunion report: This [6-minute Deutsche Welle Persian video](#) touches upon some of the technical and social events of the 8th Global Sharif University of Technology Association reunion, held in Milan on August 1-3, 2014.

(4) Concert in the park: Tonight's concert "Summer of Rock!" featured four local youth bands (Voice of Reason; Bi-Polar Bears; Bad Jack; Galvanized Souls). It was longer than the previous concerts and, not surprisingly, sparser in attendance. [Check out the last band's YouTube video "Carry On."]

(5) Reality TV in the Islamic Republic: [This woman's tears](#) upon turning over her jewelry to be auctioned off for religious causes may be real or fake; either way, it is very troubling for the future of Iran, where subsequent generations will be nurtured by her likes. In Turkey, they are saying that women who laugh in public should be punished, because their laughter arouses men. I wonder if crying in public has the same ill effects on men.

2014/08/05 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." ~ Nelson Mandela

(2) Tel Aviv residents relieved as the frequency of incoming missiles decreases: It seems that Hamas is running out of long-range missiles, but it still has thousands of shorter-range ones that can hit Israeli cities in the south.

[[Newsweek story](#)]

(3) James S. Brady [dead at 73](#): President Reagan's Press Secretary took a bullet in the head in during a 1981 assassination attempt on Reagan. He recovered from his injury to become a gun control advocate, passing the 1993 Brady Bill.

(4) Pretend fortune-teller: A man tells a number of participants [intimate details](#) about their lives and then reveals that all the info was obtained from on-line sources. Very eye-opening!

(5) My last day in Milan: I will be heading home tomorrow morning. Today, I went back to [Sforza Castle](#) (Castello Sforzesco), whose museums, like most other ones in Milan, were closed on Monday. I visited 3 of more than a dozen museums housed in the Castle. I then walked the crooked, narrow streets of central Milan, where one can find magnificent churches and gorgeous historical buildings in virtually every neighborhood. I snapped a large number of photos from the castle and the streets and had my "last supper" in Milan at a restaurant with sidewalk seating. Almost all restaurants here close in the afternoon and don't reopen until about 7:00 PM, so I had to look hard to find one that was open around 5:30 PM.

2014/08/02 (Sat.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Yesterday's (mis)adventures: After registration for SUTA's reunion and mingling with other participants for a short while, I joined a group tour of La Triennale di Milano, a cultural institution (hosted inside the Palace of Art) that produces international exhibitions and events for art, design, architecture, fashion, cinema, communication, and society. The reunion treated us to seeing some very interesting exhibits on architecture and design, including historical artifacts, or gadgets, of all kinds, representing advanced and ingenious designs of their times. Another group of reunion attendees chose to go see "The Last Supper," but I am an engineer, not an artist! The misadventure part was a nasty fall I took on a metro escalator. I am perfectly fine, except for some scrapes and bruises.

(2) Classical Persian music: Young boy plays tar, a traditional Iranian instrument in this [5-minute video](#).

(3) A very young violinist: He [performs with Andre Rieu](#) and seems to enjoy the experience and the audience's attention.

(4) Laughing in public: This is [Turkish women's version](#) of Iranian women posing without their veils and posting the photos on Facebook. With brave and active women such as these, there may be hope for human rights in the Middle East.

2014/08/01 (Fri.): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Absence from the US: I have been in Milan since 8/31 on a work/pleasure trip. The work part includes participation in the 8th Global Reunion of [Sharif University of Technology Association](#) (at Teatro Versace), where I will be chairing a panel discussion on "Engineering in Iran and the World: Cultures and Infrastructures for Education and Innovation" and presenting a keynote talk entitled "Engineering the Future: Toward Self-Organizing, Self-Improving, Self-Healing, and Self-Sustaining Systems." SUTA encompasses multiple

generations of people associated with the premier technical university in Iran, from active students in their teens and twenties, through graduates and current academic and administrative staff at various stages of their careers, to former professors in their 70s and 80s. Despite the wide variation in age, status, and experience (members live in Iran and nearly every other country in the world), the atmosphere of this gathering is collegial, with shared memories of SUT and desire to help the institution trumping differences in social lifestyles, political views, and so on. A common feature of such gatherings is relating interesting experiences from the past, which often takes the form of ex-students making fun of us former professors. We take the jokes in stride, as they are meant for amusement and often reflect more than a trace of truth. Additional info on the SUTA reunion will be forthcoming.

(2) The cost components for a UC education: The most surprising aspect of [this graphic](#) is UCSB being the most expensive UC campus, followed by the Santa Cruz and Davis campuses (UCSF is excluded because it isn't a general campus). Again, surprisingly, Irvine and UCLA are among the three cheapest, alongside the expected Riverside. San Diego, Berkeley, and Merced are in the middle with regard to tuition cost. The allocation includes 13% for health insurance, which I will factor out in what follows, because, student or not, a person needs such insurance anyway. That of the remaining \$13,032 tuition cost, 31% goes to financial aid, 38% to instructional salaries, 2% to instructional enhancement, and 29% to overhead did not surprise me. It is disheartening that well-to-do families not only pay the cost of a UC education for their own children, but are also subsidizing other people's education (in addition to paying higher tax rates, which are meant to support infrastructure and education). The various ad-hoc "hidden fees" which we pay for all classes are not included in this chart.

(3) Final thought for the day: "It's fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure." ~ Bill Gates

2014/07/30 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Someone asked me, if I were stranded on a desert island what book would I bring? *How to Build a Boat*." ~ Steven Wright

(2) A Pakistani-Canadian writes about Israel vs. Gaza: He asks his readers to [consider 7 things](#) before choosing sides in this conflict.

(3) Iran's architectural marvels: I had posted a [3-minute video](#) of the Nasir al-Mulk Mosque in Shiraz a couple of weeks ago. Here is a set of beautifully shot [panoramic photos](#) of that mosque and others by Mohammad Domiri.

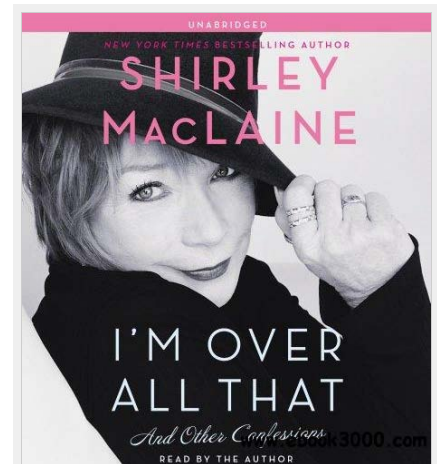
(4) Origins of the Persian expression "aatash beyaar-e ma'rakeh": According to [this post](#) (in Persian), the expression, meaning someone who facilitates or even maliciously intensifies a conflict, used to refer to a stagehand who brought coal embers (in a "manghal") to the stage of a musical performance in order to dry out percussion instruments which would stretch due to humidity and thus suffer from changed tones. During hot summer months, the same person would bring a steaming contraption to prevent excessive dryness in the instruments. The negative connotation for this task/role arises from the fact that playing music is viewed as sinful in Islam.

(5) I love your country: In this [1-minute video](#), US Congressman Curt Clawson (R-FL) mistakenly addresses Nisha Biswal and Arun Kumar, high-ranking officials from the US State and Commerce Departments, as Indian diplomats and, after paying compliments to their country, asks if India would commit to open markets and free trade. A dumbfounded Biswal politely responds that his question should be addressed to the Indian government and that they will certainly advocate for this outcome on behalf of the US.

(6) Final thought for the day: "And, if you improve on the present, what comes later will also be better." ~ Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

2014/07/29 (Tue.): MacLaine, Shirley, *I'm Over All That: And Other Confessions*, unabridged 5.5-hour audiobook read by the author, Simon & Schuster Audio, 2011.

Given all that has been written about MacLaine, I begin my review by saying that she's not as loony as she is made out to be. This entertaining book, divided into 50 chapters, could have been titled "Thoughts on Life." In it, MacLaine discusses things she has gotten over and things she will never get over. For example, she never liked the fact that she started getting only grandmotherly roles as she grew older. She offers both big-picture principles ("Money is like manure; it's not worth a thing unless it's spread around encouraging young things to grow." ~ Thornton Wilder, *The Matchmaker*) and less important observations (it is peaceful not to have to look pretty anymore or worry about your dress size), all written and read in a witty, down-to-earth style.



MacLaine recalls her many romantic relationships with costars, scientists, journalists, and two prime ministers, some of which were long-distance. It seems that she had love affairs with several men at the same time, on at least one occasion, and believed in open marriage. Some of her esteemed film personalities include Alfred Hitchcock, Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor, Jack Lemmon, and Jack Nicholson. Even though she fell for many of her male co-stars, she did not get involved with either of the two Jacks; Lemmon, because he was too nice, and Nicholson, because he was too dangerous. As expected, she does discuss her past lives and how they prepared her for this one.

Enjoying this book was a pleasant surprise for me, and I recommend it highly.

2014/07/28 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I've never seen a monument erected to a pessimist." ~ Paul Harvey

(2) Is **this statue** at NYC's Metropolitan Museum of Art texting?

(3) One dead, a dozen injured by **lightning strike** at Southern California's Venice Beach: A man in his mid-20s died yesterday at Marina Del Rey Hospital. A few people were assessed and treated on the beach and 8 others were transported to local hospitals.

(4) Games on graphs: Consider two games played on undirected graphs, where Player 1 begins the game and the two players alternate by each marking a new vertex; the player making the last legal move wins.

Path game: Player 1 marks a vertex. Subsequently, a legal move entails marking an unmarked neighbor of the vertex marked in the last move.

Match game: Same as path game, except that Player 1 is unrestricted; Player 2 must still mark an unmarked vertex adjacent to the last choice.

Identify a graph in which with best choices of moves, Player 2 wins the path game and Player 1 wins the match game. [This challenging puzzle is from *Communications of the ACM*, issue of August 2014.]

(5) The last word on nutrition and health:

The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

The Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

The Chinese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

The Italians drink a lot of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

The Germans drink a lot and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Each one has to find his peace from within. And peace to be real must be unaffected by outside circumstances." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

2014/07/27 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Hearing aids based on fly's ear: In research published in the prestigious journal *Applied Physics Letters*, University of Texas ECE Professor Neal Hall discusses the design of a new kind of **miniature microphone** inspired by the ear of a parasitic fly called "ormia ocheracea."

(2) Kayhan Kalhor's "Symphony for Palestine": Classical Persian melodies are combined with Arabic folk music and the sound of a European string orchestra in **this work** "dedicated to Juliano Mer-Khamis, the murdered director of Jenin's Freedom Theatre, as well as to the eleven-year old boy Ahmed Khatib, shot dead in 2005 by an Israeli soldier, who mistook his water pistol for a weapon; his story spread, because his parents donated Ahmed's organs to five Israeli children."

(3) The secret process of watchlisting individuals revealed: Just pray that you aren't mistakenly put on the US no-fly list, because getting off it is a major ordeal! Ironically, the "**watchlisting guidance**" document isn't classified, but it had been kept secret.

(4) Wikipedia bans the US House of Representatives from anonymous editing: Some members of Congress and/or their staffers had been making **changes to Wikipedia articles** that ranged from banal to truly outrageous. "What precipitated the ban was not edits to articles about jam bands and their fans' favorite foods, but rather a series of more creative edits that suggested that, among other things, Cuban spies orchestrated the assassination of JFK and a race of hyper-intelligent extra-terrestrial lizardmen has infiltrated the U.S. government."

(5) On the perils of forecasting: For a talk I am preparing about the future of engineering, I searched for prediction/forecasting quotes. Here are some of the more interesting ones; the last three are anonymous. [In computer science/engineering, there are many forecasts that proved silly soon after they were made, such as Thomas Watson's prediction of a world market of about 5 for computers and Bill Gates' assertion that a memory of 640 KB ought to be enough for everyone in future.]

"Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." ~ Nobel Laureate Niels Bohr

"It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." ~ Yogi Berra, paraphrasing Niels Bohr

"It is far better to foresee even without certainty than not to foresee at all." ~ Henri Poincare

"I never think of the future; it comes soon enough." ~ Albert Einstein

"A good forecaster is not smarter than everyone else; he merely has his ignorance better organized."

"There are two kinds of forecasts: lucky and wrong."

"Forecasting is the art of saying what will happen, and then explaining why it didn't."

2014/07/26 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) An interesting math puzzle: Bob goes to a hardware store to buy the six letters that spell "TWELVE" for his house-number sign. Three customers ahead of him are all doing the same, the first buying "ONE" and paying \$2, the second buying "TWO" and paying \$3, and the third buying "ELEVEN" and paying \$5. How much will Bob be charged?

(2) Teach computer science and statistics in high schools, not calculus: This is a controversial proposal by Steven Salzberg, a Johns Hopkins professor, who believes that calculus does not serve the needs of the 21st century. I do think that there is some merit to **deferring calculus to college years**, where it can be taught only to those who need it. But this is a major change whose pros and cons, including indirect effects on other subjects and on reasoning ability in general, must be weighed very carefully.

(3) Montana Supreme Court publicly reprimands a district judge for giving 30 days jail time to a teacher who raped his 14-year-old student: This **slap-on-the-wrist punishment** sends the wrong message and does nothing to restore public confidence in the state's judiciary.

(4) Classic comedy skit with Carol Burnett and Tim Conway: **"Wrong Number"**

(5) Using everyday objects, simple animation, and an iPhone 5S to create a cool **cartoon universe**.

(6) The Amazon river is **flowing backwards**: Given the Andes Mountains to the west of the South American continent, it seems very natural for Amazon to flow from west to east. Yet, up to about 10 million years ago, the Amazon was flowing in the opposite direction, draining into a giant lake at the foot of the northern Andes, with the water then flowing north to the Caribbean Sea. Recent geological modeling has shown that such a reversal would have been possible solely on the basis of the rise of the Andes, not requiring major changes in convection within the Earth's mantle.

2014/07/25 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Time is what we want most, but what use worst." ~ William Penn

(2) Megacities of the future: According to *Time* magazine, issue of July 28, 2014, the following five cities are projected to have populations over 10 million (15-11 million, actually) by 2030: Bangalore, India; Lima, Peru; Bogota, Colombia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

(3) A contrarian view on driverless cars: Self-driving cars are often touted as a solution to traffic jams because they can drive at more or less constant speeds and with less separation on highways. But, according to **Ken Laberteaux** of Toyota North America, "US history shows that anytime you make driving easier, there seems to be this inexhaustible desire to live further from things." Driverless cars may also render public transportation less attractive, thus increasing traffic.

(4) Romanian hacker jailed for 4 years: A cab driver by trade, Marcel Lazar Lehel, aka Guccifer, became famous in 2013 for hacking into the Bush family e-mails and posting artwork by the 43rd US President, including self-portraits in the bathtub. [From **IET E&T magazine**, issue of August 2014]

(5) Two Iranians jailed in Germany on smuggling charges: The charges include disguising some 61 drone engines as jetski engines and sending them to Iran during 2008 and 2009 in violation of Germany's Foreign Trade Act. [From **IET E&T magazine**, issue of August 2014]

(6) The East's academic superpower: China is fast rising in science and engineering. At 1.1 million in 2010, the number of science and engineering degrees awarded in China was 4 times the US figure, and it was also much higher in relative terms (44% of all students, compared with 16% in the US). At the doctoral level, China still has some catching up to do, but the numbers have risen from 10% of the US in 1993 to 18% in 2010. In 2011, China produced 98% of the US's output of research articles in physical sciences, 77% in engineering, and 62% in mathematical sciences. Interestingly, Chinese engineers have higher pays than both lawyers and doctors. [From **IET E&T magazine**, issue of August 2014]

2014/07/24 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Why walk, when you can dance? One way of **injecting some fun** into people's everyday lives.

(2) Is segregation back in the US? The luxury apartment project at 40 Riverside gets New York City's approval to provide a **separate entrance** for those who buy affordable street-view units in a high-rise that is composed mostly of luxury waterfront-view condos. The Boston Globe's Amanda Katz tweeted some other names for the so-called "poor entrance": Service entrance; Portal of destitution; The 99% door; Striver's entry; The debtor gate; The Porte of Serfs.

(3) Are you ready to watch a **720-hour movie**? How about a 72-minute trailer for the month-long film? Don't

worry yet. The artistic film "Ambiance" by Swedish director Anders Weberg won't be released until 2020.

(4) *Funny in Farsi* finds new fame: The book has climbed to #16 on the NYT best-selling nonfiction e-books list, 11 years after appearing in print. Congratulations to its author, Firoozeh Dumas!

(5) Google overtakes Apple as the most valuable global brand: The 2014 top-5 brands, with the 2013 rankings, value change, and current value given in parentheses, are: Google (2, +40%, \$159B); Apple (1, -20%, \$148B); IBM (3, -4%, \$108B); Microsoft (7, +29%, \$90B); McDonalds (4, -5%, \$86B). Some of the other tech brands in the ranking are AT&T (8th), Amazon (10th), Verizon (11th), and Facebook (21st). [Info from *IEEE Computer* magazine, issue of July 2014.]

(6) Mr. Haloo goes to jail for his satire: This isn't funny at all! Mohammad Reza Ali Payam, well-known for his poems which he often recites at poetry readings, has been sentenced to 15 months jail time on charges that include anti-regime propaganda (via composing humorous poems and distributing them over the Internet), insulting the Quran and the 12th Imam, and ridiculing a number of Islamic Republic officials, including ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei. The road sign behind Ali Payam in [this photo](#) reads "Khomeini's Legacy (name of an expressway); Evin," which is really funny.

2014/07/23 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Joke of the day: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has offered to help solve the illegal immigration problem in the US by bringing traffic over the border to a standstill. [Adapted from the Borowitz Report.]

(2) Passenger planes are [sitting ducks](#): The publicity surrounding the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 may give terrorist groups ideas. Readily available equipment, far less sophisticated than that used in Ukraine, can bring down civilian flights as they land at, or take off from, the world's busiest hubs. Like ordinary copycat criminals, insurgent groups have a tendency to imitate their counterparts.

(3) Elizabeth Warren in 2020? The populist Democratic Senator's message of regulating Wall Street and the super-rich paying at least the same tax rates as the middle class is increasingly resonating with red-state crowds at her speeches. She has become a rock-star fundraiser for the Democratic Party. At 65, she is only 18 months younger than Clinton and her window of opportunity for US presidency might be closing. [From *Time* magazine, issue of July 28, 2014.]

(4) Toaster selfies: Vermont-based Burnt Impressions is making [customizable toasters](#) that can be used to burn an image onto your toast. Cell-phone camera selfies are suddenly so five minutes ago!

(5) Jon Stewart's [humorous take](#) on the perils of talking about Israel (or Hamas). In the same program, he takes down the myth that Ronald Reagan acted decisively when a Korean airliner was shot down. It took him 4 days to return from his vacation in Santa Barbara and, in his published diary, he lamented over losing the last 3 days of his 25-day vacation.

(6) Invasive animal species threaten the US: From snakes and snails to certain kinds of hogs and fish, invasive alien species threaten US habitats and bring economic damage to regions that rely on fishing and agriculture for survival. [From *Time* magazine, issue of July 28, 2014.]

2014/07/22 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Photos of Gaza's massive underground infrastructure, collected from various sources. [[Pictorial](#)]

(2) How the Israel-Palestine peace process got derailed: This [comprehensive article](#) contains the best and most insightful explanation of the faltering Middle East peace process that I have ever seen. It provides observations on the peace negotiators and the hard choices they face, as they try to reconcile their own beliefs with views held by people sitting across the table, while being mindful of the watchful eyes of the more extreme elements on their own sides.

(3) One Direction: ["What Makes You Beautiful"](#) (5 Piano Guys, 1 piano).

(4) Little kids take delight in, or are scared of, [discovering their shadows](#).

(5) James Garner (1928-2014): The down-to-earth actor, star of the TV series "Maverick" and numerous big-screen films, [has died at 86](#). He famously said that he got into the film business to put a roof over his head, not to achieve star status.

(6) FedEx indicted for its role in [illegal distribution of prescription drugs](#): Among the charges are that FedEx had ignored six separate warnings from the federal government about abuses by on-line pharmacies. The company may face forfeiture of profits and a fine of no less than \$1.6B if convicted.

2014/07/21 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The International Olympiad in Informatics, held in Taiwan: [Iran's team](#) achieved third rank in term of medals (2 gold, 2 silver), after China and USA.

(2) A beautiful Persian poem of Shafiei Kadkani, [read by F. Tizabi](#).

(3) An eye-opening expose on the market for eyeglasses: Luxattica, a little-known Italian company, which owns the Ray-Ban and Lenscrafters brands, among others, has a near-monopoly on the "eyewear" market, hence the

outrageous consumer prices that we see. [[CBS "60 Minutes" segment](#)]

(4) Nature's amazing scheme for sustaining life: This [7-minute video](#) shows dozens of baby turtles emerging from under the sand and heading directly toward the water. How do they know which way to go?

(5) The Piano Guys, featuring guest artist J. Rice: ["More than Words"](#)

(6) Persian essay about Facebook: This is an old post, but I was reminded of it through an e-mail I received yesterday. It would be impossible to translate this into English, so I apologize to those who can't read Persian. Here is one of several versions of [the essay](#) that float in cyberspace.

2014/07/20 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Giant crater discovered in a remote region of Russia: Scientists are studying the crater to explain how it was formed. So far, meteorite impact has been ruled out, with an [underground explosion](#), creating an effect like the popping of a champagne bottle cork, being the leading theory.

(2) Adorable baby can't decide between smiling and sleeping. [[2-minute video](#)]

(3) Iran's architectural marvels: A [3-minute video tour](#) of the Nasir al-Mulk mosque in Shiraz.

(4) Women on the Front Line: This is the title of a [56-minute documentary](#) about the plight of Iranian women as they fight against clothing restrictions, subjugation to husbands (and males in general), political exclusion (other than in voting), and social/economic injustices. There isn't much new in the film, but it is good to remind ourselves once in a while of these inequities so as not to become complacent. An important point made in the film is that women's rights advocates view themselves as social activists, but the Islamic regime confronts them politically and deals with them as national security threats.

(5) The moral dilemmas of fighting Hamas: This is an [IDF propaganda film](#), but the very fact that they feel the need to talk about moral issues in an asymmetric warfare is revealing. I hope to see Hamas also talk about such issues someday.

(6) Final thought for the day: "A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart." ~ Goethe

2014/07/19 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Chess- and Go-playing computer programs: Chess-playing programs surpassed the grandmaster skill level about a decade ago and now can beat the very best human players. Go-playing programs lag far behind, primarily because of the game's greater combinatorial complexity (explosion in the number of possible plays). A few years ago, programs emerged that could play Go at average club level. The rate of progress has picked up recently and the computers' skill level is quickly approaching that of grandmasters. [Information and chart from *IEEE Spectrum*, issue of July 2014.]



(2) Spiderboy: Four-year-old [climbs a column](#).

(3) Personality traits that lead to liberalism/conservatism: The kind of research discussed in [this article](#) was widely attacked a decade or so ago, but now there is widespread agreement that conservatives can be distinguished from liberals using a handful of personality traits. Conservatives, it seems, are much more attuned to threatening or disgusting stimuli in their environments. Researchers, whose work is reviewed in this article, speculate that this is ultimately an evolutionary imperative, given that a strong negativity bias was extremely useful in the Pleistocene.

(4) Top 10 programming languages for 2014: In its July 2014 issue, *IEEE Spectrum* magazine presents the results of ranking current programming languages based on 12 metrics from sources such as IEEE Xplore and Google. When the results are normalized to 100 for the top language (Java), four languages score in the 90s (C, C++, C#, Python), two in the 80s (Java Sript, PHP), and three in the 70s (Ruby, SQL, Matlab). HTML, assembly, Fortran, and VHDL are ranked 12, 15, 24, and 26, respectively. The [interactive version](#) of this info allows you to modify the weights of various metrics or explore rankings in different market segments.

(5) Germany may [bring back typewriters](#) in wake of spy scandal: The suggestion for using (nonelectronic) typewriters is being ridiculed for the most part. "Before I start using typewriters and burning notes after reading, I'd rather abolish the secret services," read a tweet by opposition party MP Martina Renner.

(6) Iran beat Brazil 3-1 to advance to the semifinals round of the [Volleyball World League](#).

2014/07/18 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Summer concert in the park: Last night, I attended a concert by Savor (a Santana tribute band) at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park. The band played virtually the entire collection of memorable Santana tunes in two sets. The weather was perfect and I had a book and a magazine to keep me busy and productive as I listened. [[Sample of Savor's music](#)]

(2) Modern Persian music: Shahrzad Sepanlou sings ["1-3-Tar-Hich"](#) (with Dang Show Band). [Partial lyrics, translated by Sepanlou: "In the vast skies, I possess not a single star | Jewels? I possess not a single jagged

stone | Where shall I go, with whom shall I get drunk | Where is my beloved?"]

(3) Modern rendition of an old Persian song: Dang Show performs "**Yavash, Yavash**" ("Slowly, Slowly").

(4) Phone app to track Hamas rockets: Israel has reportedly developed a cell-phone app that lets its user know where Hamas rockets are landing. Jon Stewart joked, "That's the \$2.99 version ... the free version ..."

(5) The US Republican Party is now in the 19th Century, and regressing: GOP Congresswoman Renee Ellmers has urged her male Republican colleagues to be more careful with the use of pie charts and trillion-dollar budget figures. "We need our male colleagues to understand that if you can bring it down to a woman's level ... that's the way to go."

(6) Javad Zarif's true colors, when his public-relations shell is removed: Javad Zarif and other members of the current Iranian government are often depicted as "moderate" and "modern" by supporters of President Rouhani. In this intimate **interview aboard a plane**, perhaps produced for internal consumption in Iran, a different picture of Zarif emerges. Here, he talks about the ongoing nuclear negotiations and his personal behavior (such as not shaking hands with women) being driven by the Supreme Leader's fatwas. [Note: Beware of some of the comments posted under the video, which show that many who oppose the current Iranian regime aren't any more cultured.]

2014/07/17 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The decision whether or not to bear a child is central to a woman's life, to her well-being and dignity. When the government controls that decision for her, she is being treated as less than a full adult human responsible for her own choices." ~ US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

(2) Heat-activated nickel-titanium magic: Paper clip can be reshaped at will but it snaps back to its original shape when heated. [**Video**]

(3) Stop killing your fellow beings: Prominent Iranians campaign against killings of all kinds. [**Image**]

(4) Learn your English grammar and usage rules from this **4-minute video** by "Weird AI" Yankovic, singing "Word Crimes."

(5) Older Americans are more likely to feel confident about how they look: According to a **Gallup poll**, based on 80,000 interviews conducted in the first half of 2014, two-thirds of Americans 65 or older gave high rankings of 4 or 5 to how satisfied they are with their looks (predictably, men's rankings were higher up to age 70, when the gap narrowed). In contrast, only 42% of those aged 35-64 were satisfied with their looks. Of young people 18-34, 61% indicated satisfaction.

(6) Computing research, at the center of everything: This was the title of last evening's public lecture by UCSB Professor of Computer Science Chandra Krintz, who outlined how the use of abstraction is allowing everyone to interact with computers (without the need to know about the workings of hardware and software) and to innovate with them. There is still room for improvement in the way non-experts use computing systems, but by and large almost anyone can develop apps that would be of interest to millions of users. The ubiquity of computing systems and applications is creating many opportunities for innovation as well as a number of challenges (security, data privacy, and cyber-attacks). A typical smartphone runs hundreds of apps simultaneously and a typical smartphone user interacts with thousands of pieces of software in a week.

2014/07/16 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The Internet is a battlefield, the prize is your information, and bugs are the weapons." ~ Lev Grossman, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of July 21, 2014, on software bugs and how they are traded internationally as a commodity that allows sophisticated cyberattacks for espionage and trade-secrets theft

(2) Moscow **subway derailment** kills 20, injures 150: Terrorism has been ruled out as a cause.

(3) The World Volleyball League **threatens Iran with expulsion**: The reason is stated as Iran's prohibition against women spectators at sporting events. I hope more sports and other bodies exert this kind of pressure on Iran, because logic and the language of human decency and rights have not worked.

(4) The young musician who took ancient Persian poetry to the top of US classical music charts: Hafez Nazeri came to the US at the age of 19 to study music and now, a decade later, **he has achieved something** never before done by an Iranian musician.

(5) Blind hatred: Muslim-Israeli physicians **arriving to assist in Gaza** get a less-than-welcome reception.

(6) Final thought for the day: "You have no idea how hard I've looked for a gift to bring You. Nothing seemed right. What's the point of bringing gold to the gold mine, or water to the ocean? Everything I came up with was like taking spices to the Orient. It's no good giving my heart and my soul, because you already have these. So I've brought you a mirror. Look at yourself and remember me." ~ Rumi

2014/07/15 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "To find joy in work is to discover the fountain of youth." ~ Pearl S. Buck

(2) A most amazing 3D sidewalk art. [**Image**]

(3) A photographer's illusion. [[Image](#)]

(4) A sickening educational system: Videos like this one [showing corporal punishment](#) are difficult to watch, but we owe it to humanity to bring attention to them. This kind of attitude is the root cause of all the backwardness in most Arab and other Middle Eastern countries. It is easy to see this truly sick man as evil, but he was probably treated in the same way by his teachers and, perhaps, by his parents. The culture that allows torturing children and mistreating women is at fault.

(5) A mass retraction of scientific articles: Journal articles in the sciences are occasionally retracted by publishers when evidence of scientific misconduct surfaces. Usual examples of misconduct include plagiarism and data forgery. Now, *Journal of Vibration and Control* has retracted dozens of articles en masse and apologized to its readers for falling prey to a "peer review ring." The [uncovered ring of academics](#) with assumed and fictitious identities appears to be centered around Peter Chen, a Taiwanese researcher who has since resigned from his position. Chen's creation of multiple fake identities generated fraudulent citations and led, in at least one instance, to the refereeing of his work by Chen himself.

(6) Final thought for the day: "People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude." ~ John C. Maxwell

2014/07/14 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It's like when Chuck Berry sings 'Sweet Little Sixteen'; you're 90 man!" ~ Bill Maher, on Dick Cheney still repeating the lies about why the US invaded Iraq

(2) World Cup celebration champs: *Time* magazine, issue of July 21, 2014, contains an interesting infographic showing the degree of celebration by various countries through the insertion of extra letters when posting about goals, or the equivalent word in local languages. Mexico, with 6.6 extra letters on the average ("gooooooooocal") finished first, where "c" represents about half an "o." Brazilians used an average of 5.4 extra letters ("gooooooooocal"), Americans used 3.3 ("gooooocal"), Japanese and Germans were close at 1.6 and 1.4, respectively ("gooocal"), and Iranians used only 0.2 ("goal").

(3) A restaurant responds to Craigslist reviews citing slow service: They hired a consultant to study what led to an increase in the average customer stay (nearly doubling from 1:05 to 1:55 hr, the study revealed), in the decade since 2004. The results identified electronic gadgets and social media as [the main culprits](#).

(4) Hidden camera crew rewards the [courtesy and kindness of drivers](#).

(5) Ringo Starr concert: The 74-year-old ex-Beatle and his "All-Starr" band performed on Saturday 7/12 at the Santa Barbara Bowl, treating the cheering crowd to a diverse set of songs. The band's high energy made the audience dance and sing along. The concert included a number of Beatles/Starr songs ("Don't Pass Me By," "Only You," "Boys," "I Wanna Be Your Man," "Photograph," "Yellow Submarine," "With a Little Help from My Friends," and "Honey Don't"), a couple of songs from Starr's 2012 album ("Wings" and "Anthem"), three Santana songs ("Evil Ways," "Black Magic Woman," and "Oye Como Va"), and a few miscellaneous tunes ("Love Isn't Always on Time," "Rosanna," and "Act Naturally").

(6) Final thought for the day: "Don't let people pull you into their storms ... pull them into your peace." ~ Anonymous (there are multiple attributions in cyberspace and I could not ascertain which one is correct)

2014/07/13 (Sun.): Here are four items of potential interest about the just concluded soccer World Cup.

(1) World Cup championship match: After more than a month of exciting, world-class matches, Argentina met Germany to determine the 2014 FIFA World Cup champion. Brazilian fans were reportedly conflicted about which team to cheer on: the regional power, which is their archrival, or the European team that humiliated them in a 7-1 match just days ago. In the initial minutes of the match, Germany showed some of the quick, one-touch passing game that served them so well against Brazil. Argentina too had a couple of quick attacks, with precision passes near the German goal. Later in the first half, Argentina nearly scored on a German defensive mistake and later had a goal called off due to offside. In the rest of the first half, both teams had opportunities in what at times appeared to be a wide-open game, despite tight defensive markings (especially by Argentina). The match remained scoreless at halftime. In the second half, Germany lost nearly all its substantial edge in possession time, but it maintained an edge in scoring opportunities. Germany pressed with all its might in the final 10 minutes of regulation time, but the match remained scoreless and went into overtime. Another defensive mistake midway in the first overtime period nearly cost Germany a goal, but it recovered and continued to dominate in terms of possession, with Argentina appearing quite tired. In the second overtime period, Argentina seemed content to let time run out, perhaps thinking that it would have an edge in a penalty shootout. Germany finally scored in minute 113 on a beautiful cross from the left. Messi had a chance to pen a fairytale ending to the game when he got a free kick from 25 yards out in the last minute of stoppage time. But his shot sailed over the crossbar and Germany won the World Cup for the fourth time, marking the first time a European team has won the Cup while playing in the Americas.

(2) World Cup third-place match: The consolation or third-place match does not generate much excitement, but this time things were different. Brazil was out to prove that it is a much better team than one might deduce

from its 1-7 loss to Germany days ago. Netherlands, too, wanted to partially soothe the pain of its loss to Argentina, while arguably playing better. Netherlands opened the scoring on a minute-3 penalty kick. By minute 17, it was 2-0, with the goal scored on a rebound by a poorly marked player. However, this time the floodgates did not open. Though seeming more dangerous than it did against Germany, Brazil still went into halftime with a 2-goal deficit. No team in World Cup history has recovered from a 0-2 halftime score to win, and this historical tidbit did not change this year. A third goal by Netherlands in minute 91 cemented its 3-0 win. The refereeing was poor, denying Brazil a penalty kick and granting Netherlands an undeserved PK. But, in the end, Netherlands did deserve to win.

(3) The 2014 World Cup is history: Here is the **completed bracket** with matches and their outcomes in the knockout round.

(4) Attending the 2018 World Cup in Russia will require no visas: In a surprise announcement, Russia's President Vladimir Putin indicated that the usual requirements for Russian visa **will be waived** during the next soccer World Cup, not just for athletes, but for all visitors.

	6/28, 30	July 4	July 8	July 13	
1A: BRA	--1--	BRA* --2--	BRA --1--	GER --1--	GER ⁺
2B: CHI	--1--				Champs
1C: COL	--2--	COL --1--			
2D: URU	--0--				
1E: FRA	--2--	FRA --0--	GER --7--		
2F: NGA	--0--				
1G: GER	--2--	GER ⁺ --1--			
2H: ALG	--1--				
1B: NED	--2--	NED --0--	NED ^o --0--	ARG ^o --0--	
2A: MEX	--1--				
1D: CRC	--1--	CRC ^o --0--			
2C: GRE	--1--				
1F: ARG	--1--	ARG ⁺ --1--	ARG --0--	BRA --0--	NED
2E: SUI	--0--				3rd place
1H: BEL	--2--	BEL ⁺ --0--		NED --3--	
2G: USA	--1--				

^oWon in overtime ^{*}Won on PKs 3-2 ^oWon on PKs 5-3 ⁺Won on PKs 4-3 ^oWon on PKs 4-2

World Cup, Brasil 2014

First group team is the seed (Host 11 & 1-7)
 A: Brazil, Croatia, Mexico, Cameroon
 BRA CRO MEX CMR
 B: Spain, Netherlands, Chile, Australia
 ESP NED CHE AUS
 C: Colombia, Greece, Ivory Coast, Japan
 COL GRE CIV JPN
 D: Uruguay, Costa Rica, England, Italy
 URU CRC ENG ITA
 E: Switzerland, Ecuador, France, Honduras
 SUI ECU FRA HON
 F: Argentina, Bosnia-Herz., Iran, Nigeria
 ARG BIH IRN NGA
 G: Germany, Portugal, Ghana, United States
 GER POR GHA USA
 H: Belgium, Algeria, Russia, South Korea
 BEL ALG RUS KOR
 [Each group consists of a seeded leader, plus one randomly chosen team from each of three pots.]

2014/07/11 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quotes of the day: Three from Dalai Lama.

"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible."

"[W]e pay attention to brain development, but the development of warmheartedness we take for granted."

"The ultimate authority must always rest with the individual's own reason and critical analysis."

(2) One way to strike back: Some conservatives who hate President Obama and his clean-air regulations are striking back by **modifying their trucks and other vehicles** to purposefully spew black smoke into the atmosphere. How smart!

(3) Security concerns in and around the UCSB campus: On Wednesday night, I attended a homeowners association meeting in which Chancellor Henry Yang and the Campus Police Chief Dustin Olson briefed the residents of UCSB's faculty housing on the **arson investigations** (including why they think the arsonists may strike again soon) and short- and long-range plans to improve the security of UCSB and its surrounding areas. Their big test will come on Halloween, when hordes of out-of-towners descend on Isla Vista to party. The situation will be worse than usual this fall, given that October 31 falls on a Friday.

(4) USA and the Middle East: Jon Stewart, on the secret love affairs between the US and Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia on the other, with Israel looking over our shoulder. [**5-minute video clip**]

(5) Texan husband looking for his estranged wife kills 6 in a shooting rampage: A teen-aged girl, herself badly injured, called 911 and gave the local police a description of the suspect and where he was headed, potentially saving many lives. She is being **hailed as a heroine** by authorities and surviving family members.

(6) Summer concert in the park: Last night, I attended a concert by the band Captain Cardiac and the Coronaries (I know, not not an appealing name), which played 50s and 60s rock & roll and some swing at Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park. I am fond of the music of that era, having been a teenager in the early 1960s and learning about the 50s music via an oldies radio station I liked as a graduate student. I took a book with me and read while enjoying the music (just like my UCLA student days in the early 1970s).

2014/07/09 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The killings of 4 teenagers may escalate into full-blown war: The offensive in Gaza and missiles fired into Israel by Hamas (including one intercepted as it headed to Tel Aviv) show **no signs of slowing down**.

(2) The World Cup heads into finals: Today's second semifinals match between Netherlands and Argentina went scoreless in the first half due to close marking and good defense by both sides; quite a contrast to yesterday's match in which Germany led 5-0 at halftime. Defense continued to stifle the possession game and scoring chances for both sides in the second half. Sustained attacks, with many consecutive successful passes, were rare. By minute 70, there had been just one shot on goal (by Argentina). The match remained scoreless at the end of the second half, with Netherlands still not having any shots on goal. Netherlands had the upper hand in the first overtime period, taking 2 shots on goal and improving its possession time to 54%. The second overtime period also ended with no score, sending the match into a penalty shootout, which Argentina won 4-2 after 4 shots on each side. So, it will be Germany v. Argentina for the championship on Sunday, July 13. [**The bracket**]

(3) Faking injuries in the World Cup: Brazil apparently **faked most injuries** among this year's World Cup teams but at 7:40 minutes, Honduras has spent the most time appearing injured. The stats show that winning teams (those that are ahead and thus prone to wasting time) faked more injuries.

(4) Young Iranian girls playing soccer: Despite all the restrictions from the central government, these girls enjoy a game of soccer in Sistan & Baluchestan province. [\[Image\]](#)

(5) When did #LikeAGirl become an insult? An effective **3-minute public-relations video** showing that little girls don't view "running like a girl," "throwing like a girl," and "hitting like a girl" as insults, whereas men and some women do.

(6) Luciana Zogbi covers John Legend's **"All of Me"** with her silky voice.

2014/07/08 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The middle class creates us rich people, not the other way around." ~ 0.01-percenter Nick Hanauer, arguing that if the **US wealth/income gap** is not corrected, the only possible outcomes are a police state or an uprising, because there are no counterexamples to this rule in the entire human history

(2) World Cup soccer today: In the first semifinals match, Brazil (slightly favored despite missing two of its key players) faced Germany. Thomas Muller scored his 10th World Cup goal to give Germany the lead in minute 11. Germany scored again in minutes 23, 24, 26, and 29 due to poor marking on defense. Brazil was now trailing by 5 goals for the first time in its World Cup history. Not even the most ardent fans of Brazil thought that it can come back from a 0-5 halftime score (they were shown crying in the stands, as the floodgates opened). Brazil came out attacking in the second half and had some good chances early on. Before he was replaced in minute 58, Miroslav Klose had established himself as the all-time leading World Cup scorer with 16 goals. Germany added a 6th goal in minute 69 and a 7th in minute 79, surpassing Brazil's worst result ever. A rather meaningless goal by Brazil in minute 90 made the final score 7-1. Ironically, this was Brazil's first loss at home in a dozen years. Germany will move on to play the winner of the second semifinals match (Netherlands v. Argentina), to be played tomorrow.

(3) Joke of the day (**an oldie, but goodie**): Scientists have discovered the heaviest element yet known. The new element, dubbed Governmentium (Gv), has one neutron, 25 assistant neutrons, 88 deputy neutrons, and 198 assistant deputy neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312.

(4) Tracking smaller objects orbiting the Earth: Current tracking is limited to objects the size of a basketball or larger. However, smaller objects also threaten the International Space Station and a multitude of satellites on which our modern way of life depends. Lockheed Martin will use a **US Air Force contract** of just under \$1B to expand the "Space Fence" system down to softball-size objects.

(5) Adorable little girl **recites Persian poetry**.

(6) Final thought for the day: Remember that what is now your favorite place on earth used to be a place you had never seen.

2014/07/06 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Money is like manure; it's not worth a thing unless it's spread around encouraging young things to grow." ~ Thornton Wilder, *The Matchmaker* (I was reminded of this famous quote when listening to the audiobook version of Shirley MacLaine's memoirs, *I'm Over All That*, which I will review in due time; I might as well say it right now that she's not as nutty as she is made out to be.)

(2) Spectacular view of fireworks, **as seen from a drone** flying through the explosions.

(3) Going from a fuselage to a complete Boeing 737 jetliner in 3.5 minutes: **Time-lapse video**

(4) The British stereotypical view of the US and its states: The first map on **this Web page** contains a summary, with more detailed regional views supplies in separate maps.

(5) Europe's Rosetta satellite closes in on Comet 67P: Now only a few Earth diameters away from its intended target, the satellite will execute maneuvers to put it in the comet's orbit, from where it will move at walking pace toward landing. After the 10-year trip, **landing on the comet** is only a month away (August 6).

(6) Final thought for the day: "Beauty is more than what we see with the eyes. People are more than their conditions. I am more than my hair and skin. This only shows my exterior, I hope that people will check out my videos to see more of the girl inside." ~ Rebecca Brown, on documenting her life via 2100 daily selfies as she aged from 14 (in 2007) to 21 and putting the photos together in a **YouTube video** that shows her battles with depression, anxiety, and trichotillomania.

2014/07/05 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We need one another. We don't need anger; we don't need yet another division among us; we don't need a competition over whose rage is holier or whose hate is purer. Rage is not holy. Hate can never be pure. I can certainly understand all those demanding revenge ... But today, at this funeral, in the presence of this family, we need love. We need to speak in one language. We need to rediscover the paths that

connect all of us." ~ From a eulogy read at the funeral of Gil-ad Shaar (one of the three Israeli teenagers who were kidnapped and murdered) at the request of his family

(2) World Cup's quarterfinals (second day): Today, two more teams were chosen to join Germany and Brazil in the semifinals matches.

Argentina v. Belgium: Argentina scored in minute 8 on a volley shot off a deflected pass, which was enough to carry it into the semifinals (for the first time since 1990) with a 1-0 win. The rest of the match was played fairly evenly, with both teams having scoring opportunities. Near the 90th minute and in the 5-minute stoppage time, Belgium put caution aside and attacked with all its might. This wasn't enough, however, and it led to a breakaway attack by Messi, whose attempt was stopped by the charging Belgian goalie, creating a few more moments of hope for Belgium.

Netherlands v. Costa Rica: This match remained scoreless after 94 minutes, with Netherlands dominating possession time nearly 2 to 1 and Costa Rica not even taking a single shot on goal. So going into overtime was a relief for Costa Rica. The match ended scoreless at the end of two overtime periods, despite Netherlands dominating in every possible way: 15-2 in shots on goal, 11-1 in corner kicks, and 65%-35% in time of possession. The Costa Rican goalie made 14 saves in all. Netherlands won the penalty shootout 4-3, by virtue of its goalie saving 2 of the 5 shots.

Semifinals matches will be Brazil v. Germany (July 8) and Netherlands v. Argentina (July 9); both on ESPN at 1:00 PM Pacific time. [[The bracket](#)]

(3) A beautiful [Persian poem](#) by Sogol Mashayekhi.

(4) Belgium, a divided country: All Belgians are behind their soccer team, which is having one of its better performances in the 2014 World Cup; it advanced into the quarterfinals after beating the US and will face Argentina on July 5 for a chance to play in the semifinals. Once the World Cup tournament is over, however, Belgians will return to their bitterly divided politics, which may lead to the [country being partitioned](#) along ethno-cultural lines by the time of the next World Cup.

(5) A computer science/engineering paper you might want to look at: Normally, technical publications are read by a few specialists and don't make sense to others. This [just-accepted paper](#) of mine, however, has segments (the introduction and conclusion sections) that may be of interest to scientists in other fields as well as casual readers. The paper is about an arithmetical system apparently used by rats, and perhaps other animals, to provide location awareness. This particular pre-publication version will be available only until the paper is published on-line and in print (likely in late 2014 or 2015), at which time the published version will appear on my [publications page](#).

2014/07/04 (Fri.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Happy July 4th! Lompoc, CA, a city one hour to the north of Santa Barbara and famous for its flower fields, was home to this [floral US flag](#) planted shortly after 9/11. I visited the flag a few years ago and hiked on a nearby hill to get a better view of it. According to Lompoc's Chamber of Commerce, there are currently no plans to replant the floral flag.

(2) World Cup's quarterfinals round (first day): Today and tomorrow, four of the eight teams playing in the quarterfinals will be chosen (via overtime and penalty shootouts, if needed) to play in the semifinals matches on July 8-9 (ESPN, 1:00 PM Pacific time). Here is my take on today's matches.

France v. Germany: After dodging some close calls early on, Germany scored first in minute 13 on a header that kissed the bottom of the crossbar before going in. The rest of the match was not as exciting as one would have thought. France did not seem to have a sense of urgency as it faced elimination, even in the final moments. Two German players were shown yellow cards during the match; one of those should have been a red card, in my opinion. Germany will face Brazil on July 8 to determine one of the two finalists. This is the fourth straight semifinals appearance for Germany.

Brazil v. Colombia: Brazil was the favorite going in, and it proved the prediction correct by scoring in minute 7. There were other scoring chances for Brazil throughout the first half, particularly in minutes 19 and 28, but the score remained 1-0 at halftime, to Colombia's delight. In the second half, Colombia looked dangerous at times, but Brazil continued to dominate, leading to a second goal in minute 69. Colombia eventually scored on a penalty kick in minute 80. Despite intense efforts late in the match, Colombia could not catch up and Brazil won 2-1 to face Germany in the semifinals match on July 8.

(3) First 2014 summer concert in the Park: Yesterday, I attended a performance by [Sgt. Pepper](#), Beatles 50th Anniversary Tribute Band, in Santa Barbara's Chase Palm Park. The weather was perfect for an open-air event and the concert was well attended. The Beatles took America by a storm when they performed on the Ed Sullivan variety show in 1964. When I came to the US in early 1969 as a graduate student, the Beatles were at the peak of their fame, having just released their "White Album."

(4) Free movie screenings: UCSB, in collaboration with several City of Santa Barbara entities, will screen a number of classic silent comedies, mostly from the 1920s, Wednesdays, 7:30 PM, in Campbell Hall and Fridays

(with live musical accompaniment by Michael Mortilla), 8:30 PM, at the Courthouse Sunken Garden.

7/09-11: "The Freshman," Harold Lloyd (naive college student experiences social life and sports), 1925

7/16-18: "The Gold Rush," Charlie Chaplin (Chaplin's personal favorite, filmed in the Sierra Nevadas), 1925

7/23-25: "Sherlock Jr." and "Cops," Buster Keaton (projectionist's dream puts him on the movie screen), 1924, 1922

7/30 (no Friday, due to Fiesta): "Girl Shy," Harold Lloyd (shy bachelor pens *The Secrets of Making Love*), 1924

8/06-08: "The Navigator" and "One Week," Buster Keaton (sailing misadventures, build-it-yourself house kit), 1924, 1920

8/13-15: "Speedy," Harold Lloyd (Harold the baseball fan, features cameo by Babe Ruth), 1928

8/20-22: "Modern Times," Charlie Chaplin (satire about the industrial age), 1936

2014/07/02 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Will Westerners fighting in Syria and elsewhere bring radical Islam back with them? According to Aryn Baker, writing in *Time magazine*, double-issue of July 7-14, 2014, the threat may not be as great as some think. Many of these fighters are committed to staying in Islamic countries and some burn their passports in a show of allegiance. Nevertheless, given that Islamic countries have a tendency to collapse economically and politically, the West should make plans to reintegrate these fighters into their home societies should they decide to return, to prevent further radicalization.

(2) Iranian folk music: This **modern, up-tempo arrangement** of the Iranian folk song "Moosem-e Gol" ("Season of Flowers") is one of the pieces Shahrzad Sepanlou performed at the UCLA Iranian Culture Show for Norooz.

(3) The far left and far right agree on more than you would think: They both hate Wall Street, financial crooks not held accountable, tax credits for the super-rich, free trade, and corporate welfare. According to Rana Foroohar, writing in *Time magazine* (double-issue of July 7-14, 2014), the ouster of Eric Cantor by economics professor David Brat is an omen of an unexpected alignment that troubles mainstream Democrats and Republicans alike.

(4) Khamenei claims he is doing Mousavi and Karroubi a favor by keeping them under house arrest: An **Iranian MP from the Rouhani camp** has revealed his conversation with Iran's Supreme Leader on the fate of the two opposition leaders who have been under house arrest for more than 3 years, with no formal charges or trial. Khamenei reportedly warned against efforts to release Mousavi and Karroubi and indicated that they will likely face severe punishment if brought to trial.

(5) Women would be wise to turn the birth control debate into an economic one, which is easier to win: One woman needs no more than 35 years or 420 months of birth control. One month's supply of birth control pills costs consumers \$15-\$50, according to Internet sources. Let's say insurance companies, with their immense purchasing power and a small co-pay, end up paying about \$12 for one month's supply. The lifetime cost of birth control for one woman is therefore around \$5000. One US childbirth currently costs \$18,000+ on average (50% more, in case of C-section). Insurance companies would be crazy not to pay for birth control, even if not mandated. The difference is large enough for the argument to hold even if my numbers are a bit off. And this analysis doesn't even include other side benefits of the pill for some women.

[P.S.: I am not saying that the human-decency (moral, or whatever else you want to call it) argument should be abandoned. I am proposing that there is a quicker path to getting the health coverage women need while pursuing longer-term goals of fairness and equality.]

2014/07/01 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) NASA testing 'flying saucer' technology: A **UFO sighting** in Hawaii was actually NASA's newest spaceship designed for Mars exploration. The flying saucer was being pulled by a balloon into the upper atmosphere for experimentation. The test was a partial success, given that the vehicle's supersonic parachute failed to deploy properly, leading to a hard ocean splashdown.

(2) World Cup's knockout round (fourth day): The last 2 matches in the first knockout round, to complete the list of quarterfinalists, were held today, with quarterfinals matches scheduled for July 4-5. [**The bracket**] Argentina v. Switzerland: There were scoring opportunities in the first half, but with a couple of exceptions, shots on goal were of fairly low quality, leaving the match scoreless at halftime. Argentina had the upper hand in the second half, but the Swiss defense held on, preserving the 0-0 draw and sending the match into overtime (the 4th in 7 knockout-round matches). Much of first overtime period was played sloppily by both sides, but Switzerland showed flashes of brilliance near the end. The second overtime period belonged to Argentina, leading to a Messi-assisted goal in minute 118. Switzerland's header off a corner kick in stoppage time hit the goalpost and Argentina ended up winning 1-0.

Belgium v. USA: A win today would have given USA its second quarterfinals appearance, the first one having occurred in 2002 (I am excluding the first World Cup tournament in 1930, where there were only 13 teams in 4

groups, and USA went into semifinals directly, after winning in the group stage). The US team shaped its early attacks to take advantage of the weaknesses of Belgium's 4-fullback formation, but several sloppy defensive plays created serious opportunities for Belgium. The match going into halftime scoreless provided the US with a much-needed chance to rethink its strategy, particularly on defense. Defensive woes and poor possession continued for the US early in the second half, giving Belgium many scoring chances. Tim Howard was forced to make save after save, so the US was lucky to go into overtime 0-0. The luck did not last long, and Belgium scored in minute 93. With Howard still making more saves, Belgium struck again to make the score 2-0 in minute 105. The US responded with a goal in minute 108, but Belgium deservedly won 2-1 to earn the right to play Argentina on July 5.

(3) World Cup goals. [Pictorial]

(4) Home smart home: This is the title of a **special report** in *Time* magazine, double-issue of July 7 & 14, 2014, that contains multiple articles on design criteria/attributes: conscious, adaptable, human, efficient, beautiful (miscellaneous category that includes floating, healing, pop-up, communal, and breathing homes).

(5) Are US institutions of higher education truly the envy of the world? Kevin Carey, writing in the *New York Times*, **challenges this conventional wisdom** and claims that many of the weaknesses of our K-12 educational system are also present at the college level. He maintains that when the same kinds of international comparisons that have shaped the negative view of our K-12 education are done at the college level, the results are quite different from reputation-based rankings that place 3/4 of world's top 25 universities in the US. For example, in numeracy tests, US college graduates score below average (296 vs. 305), whereas Japan and 9 European countries are above average; Canada is also below average, but a tad higher than the US.

(6) Ocean waves created out of layered sheets of glass. [Image]

2014/06/30 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Song from an Iranian children's TV series (nostalgia): "**Zir-e Gonbad-e Kabood**" ("Under the Blue Sky")

(2) World Cup's knockout round (third day): The last 4 matches in the first knockout round to complete the list of quarterfinalists are held today and tomorrow, with quarterfinals matches scheduled for July 4-5.

France v. Nigeria: Early on, Nigeria was dominant, attacking, taking corner kicks, and even scoring a goal that was disallowed due to a questionable offside call. The match remained scoreless at halftime. The second half began with Nigeria exhibiting beautiful ball control and sharp passing. France came close to scoring several times, with one ball saved by a defender on the goal line, another bouncing back after hitting the lower part of the crossbar, and a third effort deflected over the bar by the Nigerian goalkeeper. Finally a goalie and defense miscue led to the first goal by France in minute 79. France looked sharp late in the match, continuing its attacks and making the final score 2-0 on an own goal (deflection) in minute 91.

Germany v. Algeria: Going into this match, Algeria was the sole remaining representative of Africa. Despite being dominated in terms of ball possession, Algeria staged several dangerous counterattacks early on. The rest of the fast-paced and exciting first half featured many back-and-forth attacks, with scoring chances for both teams and the Algerian goalie making a number of fantastic saves to keep the score 0-0. The Algerian goalie continued his stellar performance throughout the second half. The German goalie also prevented some very dangerous situations by coming outside the box and heading or kicking away fast-break balls. In the end, what could have been a 2- or 3-goal German win went into overtime. Germany scored in minute 92 and again in minute 119, as Algeria apparently ran out of gas. Algeria scored a minute later, but Germany held on for a 2-1 win.

Only two matches are left (Argentina v. Switzerland and Belgium v. USA) to complete the list of 8 teams playing in the four quarterfinals matches on July 4-5.

(3) Soccer World Cup is a global conspiracy to distract us and take our American values away: Stephen Colbert's **hilarious take** on the right-wing paranoia over soccer.

(4) Summer concerts in the park: Anyone who is in the Santa Barbara area on Thursday nights can enjoy an impressive array of free summer concerts (bring a lawn chair and a blanket) at the Chase Palm Park, near Stearns Wharf.

7/03: Sgt. Pepper; Beatles 50th Anniversary Tribute

7/10: Captain Cardiac and the Coronaries; 50s and 60s Rock 'n Roll

7/17: Savor; Santana Tribute Band

7/24: Fortunate Son; A Tribute to John Fogerty & CCR

8/07: Summer of Rock! Voice of Reason, Bi-Polar Bears, Bad Jack & Galvanized Souls

7/14: Country Nation; High-Energy Contemporary Country

(5) Clockwise for some can be counterclockwise for others: Bolivia **turns back the clock** in bid to rediscover identity and 'southernness.' Apparently, you can buy many different models of such backwards clocks on-line.

(6) A beautiful **Persian poem** by Amir Houshang Ebtehaj.

2014/06/29 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Happiness does not depend on what you have or who you are. It solely relies on what you think." ~ Buddha

(2) World Cup's knockout round (second day): The first 8 matches in the knockout round to determine the quarterfinalists are played over 4 days, beginning yesterday, with the quarterfinals matches held July 4-5. Netherlands v. Mexico: History was on the side of Netherlands, which had advanced to the quarterfinals 3 of the last 4 times, whereas Mexico had gone beyond the round-of-16 only twice, both times when it hosted the event a long time ago. Yet, after a 0-0 first half, Mexico scored in minute 48 to take the lead. Netherlands created many scoring chances, but could not get a goal out of them. Shortly after minute 30, the referee granted the teams a "cooling break," given the scorching heat. Cooling breaks are common in some hotter climates, but this was the first ever for a World Cup. Netherlands scored on a bullet off a rebound during a minute-88 corner kick to tie the score. Netherlands scored again on a (somewhat questionable) penalty kick in minute 92, cementing a miraculous 2-1 comeback win.

Costa Rica v. Greece: Both of the teams were making unexpected appearances in the knockout round. Greece advanced along with Colombia from an easy group that included Ivory Coast and Japan. Costa Rica was not expected to advance alongside Uruguay from a group that included England and Italy. Greece played a better game and created more opportunities in the scoreless first half. Greece kept up its attacks in the second half, but Costa Rica scored in minute 52 on a well-placed soft kick from the top of the box, when one of its wide-open players got the ball. Costa Rica had a player ejected in minute 66 due to a second yellow card, forcing it to go into a defensive stance and eventually giving up a goal in minute 91. Greece nearly scored again 2 minutes later, but the Costa Rican goalie deflected the ball over the crossbar, sending the 1-1 match into overtime. The two 15-minute overtime periods went scoreless, despite opportunities for both teams. After a 4-3 lead in 4 penalty kicks, Costa Rica converted its last kick to win 5-3 and advance to the quarterfinal match against Netherlands.

I have posted the current state of [the bracket](#) for the knockout stage on Iranian.com.

(3) Explain this magic trick: The magician picks a random participant (not an accomplice) and asks him/her to think of a 3-digit number that isn't a palindrome (its first and last digits are not the same). For example, let the number chosen be 478. The participant is instructed to reverse the number and find the difference between the larger and smaller of the two numbers ($874 - 478 = 396$). Then, the magician asks that the latter result be added to its reverse ($396 + 693 = 1089$), and proceeds to guess the final result.

(4) Centenary of WW I: The [First World War exhibits](#) at the Imperial War Museum's main London site are being prepared for reopening in July, in time for marking the 100th anniversary of WW I in August 2014. The revamped museum will take advantage of digital technology and interaction to better tell the story of a silly war (I don't know if there are sane wars) that began as a result of diplomatic clashes, a couple of political assassinations, and territorial disputes.

(5) Interview with an expert on spirits: [This mullah claims](#) that Israel has tried, unsuccessfully, to use spirits to infiltrate the information systems of Iran, Hizbollah, and Hamas.

2014/06/28 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Don't get your dress dirty: Words such as these can potentially stifle a girl's interest in science and technology. The [Verizon ad](#) that went viral is the subject of [this article](#) in *The Christian Science Monitor*. The article points out that overt and subtle discouraging messages are responsible for the small proportion of young girls interested in science and technology ending up pursuing STEM majors in college.

(2) World Cup's knockout round is on (as are overtimes and penalty shootouts): The first 8 matches in the knockout round to determine the quarterfinalists will be played over 4 days, beginning today, with the quarterfinals matches scheduled for July 4-5.

Brazil v. Chile: After threatening with multiple opportunities, Brazil finally scored on a minute-18 corner kick, and continued to control the game. Chile caught Brazil off-guard to even things up in minute 32. Both teams had other scoring chances, but the match remained tied at halftime. Brazil's second apparent goal was called off due to the ball touching the upper part of the scorer's arm; an unpopular but correct call. Brazil put together a number of serious threats 8-9 minutes from the end, but the match went into overtime. The first 15-minute overtime period was uneventful. In the second overtime period, Chile seemed content to go into penalty shootout, but Brazil kept pressing. Chile's long-range shot hit the crossbar in minute 120 and Brazil was relieved as time ran out with the 1-1 score. Brazil took a 2-0 lead on kicks and advanced by winning the shootout 3-2. This wasn't the beautiful match everyone expected. Neither team appeared capable of going all the way to claim the World Cup.

Colombia v. Uruguay: In the second match of this Latin-America day, Colombia dominated play and took the lead in minute 28 on a long-range blast that kissed the bottom of the crossbar. The 1-0 score persisted until halftime. Colombia resumed its attacks in the second half, leading to Rodriguez's second goal in minute 50.

Uruguay had some scoring opportunities, but the outcome of the match was never in doubt. Colombia moves on with this 2-0 win to face Brazil in the quarterfinals.

(3) Mechanical engineering curricula being changed by 3D printing: Soon, machine-shop skills such as lathing and milling will be **things of the past**. Prototyping is now a breeze, and parts that interlock are becoming easier to build, affecting the designs used as well as the design process itself.

(4) Barbara Walters interviews the Isla Vista mass killer's father: I watched last night's "20/20," because I was curious about Peter Rodger's views on his son's killing spree and why, unlike other mass murderers' families, he decided to speak up. I also wanted to see why, after communicating through an attorney for several weeks, he has decided to go public and give an interview. Is this a publicity stunt or a genuine change of heart? I am undecided at this point about Peter Rodger's motives, but I think **the program** did a good job of reviewing the events and analyzing their root causes.

(5) Howard H. Baker, Jr., dead at 88: Ronald Reagan used to tell this story. When I was elected president, Baker told me, "Mr. President, I will be with you through thick ..." "Wait a minute," I exclaimed, "what about thin?" To which Baker replied: "Welcome to Washington!"

(6) Islam apparently does not apply in Brazil: This young lady, sitting next to Iran's Ambassador to Brazil, does not face the same bans and police brutality as women in Iran who attempted to enter a sporting venue recently. **[Photo]**

2014/06/27 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) FB@Work may arrive soon: Facebook is rumored to be building a version of its networking system with the goal of **improving communication and productivity** at work.

(2) Laptops or no laptops in classrooms, that is the question: I used to think like the author of **this article** but have recently reconsidered my stance. This problem ties into the debate on traditional face-to-face vs. on-line instruction, as the main reasons for students not paying attention to the instructor or subject matter being discussed are the same, regardless of the mode of instruction and whether or not laptops (or electronic gadgets in general) are allowed. I see no difference between a student who is distracted by a computer and one who is dozing off or checking out a classmate sitting next to him/her. With electronic textbooks, Web sites for homework submission, virtual labs, and so on, it will be impossible to ban laptops in classrooms within a decade. We might as well begin now to learn how to turn distracting gadgets into tools for better teaching and learning. I am seriously considering allowing the use of laptops in open-book exams, so that students can consult Internet sources in solving problems, the way they would do in the real world after they graduate.

(3) Trick with multiple rings: I am trying to figure out how **this trick** is done, but have not succeeded yet. It makes a good puzzle.

(4) UCLA campus in late 1929 (#TBT; 85 years ago): The **four original buildings** (Powell Library, Royce Hall, Humanities Building, and Haines Hall) are seen, along with an under-construction Moore Hall, currently housing the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, near the bottom of the photo. An aerial photo from the same spot showing today's campus would be nice.

(5) The sorry state of the Persian language on the Internet: **This post**, with numerous typos and grammatical errors is very typical of what goes around these days as "Persian" on the Internet. I occasionally encounter Persian "poems" that make me feel sad, if not angry, that my beloved mother tongue has sunk so low. There is no one culprit. Iranians in diaspora often learn colloquial Persian, which they then put in writing with frightful results. Persian language keyboards and word processors are not widely available or user-friendly, forcing many to use converters from phonetic spelling of the words in English into Persian (e.g., Behnevis). Then there is the general apathy on the Internet for correct writing and punctuation, which applies to any language. I can cite many horror stories from English writings on the Internet (say, the "your"/"you're" syndrome), but that's a different story.

2014/06/26 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "A woman's role is bearing and raising children and taking care of her husband, not watching sports matches." ~ Fatemeh Alia, female member of the Iranian parliament, reacting to disgruntled women who criticized the Islamic government for banning their attendance at a recent volleyball match

(2) World Cup matches today: The final matches of Groups H and G were played, leading to Germany and USA advancing from Group G and Algeria joining Belgium, which had already qualified in Group H.

USA v. Germany: Germany led on possession time and scoring chances, but to the US's delight, the match remained scoreless at halftime. If the Ghana loss (0-1 halftime score) held up, the US could lose by a difference of up to 4 goals and still advance. So, US fans were cheering for Portugal. Germany scored on a beautifully placed long drive, taking advantage of a rebound ball from a saved shot, to take the lead in minute 55. A Ghana win would now eliminate the US. The US team looked disorganized and tired in the second half and was lucky to advance with this 0-1 loss, thanks to Portugal. The US will play Belgium next.

Portugal v. Ghana: A draw or a Portugal victory were the preferred outcomes from the US's viewpoint, given Ghana's better goal difference. Portugal went ahead in minute 31 on an own goal by Ghana, a score that persisted until halftime. Ghana equalized the score in minute 57. Fortunately for the US, Portugal's Ronaldo scored in minute 80 to relieve the pressure on the US resulting from a possibility of a victory by Ghana. Portugal won the match 2-1.

South Korea v. Belgium: Nothing was at stake in this match for Belgium, and South Korea's advancement chances were rather slim. Against this backdrop, the first half went scoreless. Belgium played the entire second half a man short, having lost a player to a red card as the first-half ended. Belgium eventually scored in minute 78, when a player put away the rebound from a saved shot, winning the match 1-0.

Algeria v. Russia: Russia scored in minute 6 and took the one-goal advantage into halftime. Faced with elimination, Algeria came out attacking in the second half, eventually scoring in minute 60 to keep its advancement hopes alive. Russia kept the pressure on late in the match but failed to change the 1-1 score. The goal average went down substantially and now stands at 2.83/match (136 goals in 48 matches).

I have posted [the bracket](#) for the knockout stage on Iranian.com.

(3) SUTA reunion event in Milan: Sharif University of Technology Association, encompassing current and former students, faculty, and other affiliates of Iran's highest-ranking engineering school, will hold its next reunion in Milan, Italy, August 1-3, 2014. Both technical activities (keynote talks, panel discussions) and social events (tours, entertainment) are envisaged. I will be in Milan from July 31 to August 6 and look forward to meeting and interacting with as many of my former colleagues and students as possible.

(4) Don't forget the benefits of genetic crop modification: There are a lot of alarming posts about GMO crops, a technology that is nearly as old as agriculture itself. No doubt the more extensive and intrusive use of this technology requires added care, but, to be fair, the benefits of GMO must also be presented. According to *Time* magazine, issue of June 30, 2014, a vitamin-A enriched variety of bananas, which is easily grown in Africa, has the potential to significantly reduce deaths due to vitamin A deficiency (some 700K in all) and blindness (300K per year) in that continent.

(5) Mathematics research can be quite lucrative: Mathematicians are winning multimillion dollar prizes for their [breakthrough discoveries](#). This is a welcome trend that will increase the appeal of the field.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The love that you withhold is the pain that you carry." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

2014/06/25 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love is an emotion experienced by the many and enjoyed by the few." ~ George Jean Nathan

(2) World Cup matches yesterday, 6/24: The final matches of Groups D and C were played, leading to Greece from Group C and Uruguay from Group D advancing to the knockout round, joining Colombia and Costa Rica which had already qualified.

Italy v. Uruguay: Uruguay needed a win to advance, while Italy could do so with a draw. Italy stayed in a defensive shell, trying to force a scoreless draw, but Uruguay scored on a corner kick late in the match (minute 81). Faced with elimination, Italy woke up and put together a few offensive efforts, but there just wasn't enough time to change the 0-1 losing outcome. Uruguay's victory was tarnished by its star player Suarez biting (a la Mike Tyson) the shoulder of an Italian player.

Costa Rica v. England: Nothing was at stake in this match, as Costa Rica had already advanced and England had been eliminated. The 0-0 final score reflected the lack of excitement on both sides.

Japan v. Colombia: Japan needed a win for any chance at advancement, while Colombia was already looking past Japan to its next match against Uruguay. Colombia was awarded a penalty kick in minute 17, on a play that was almost identical to the one denied Iran against Argentina. Japan tied the score in stoppage time, going into halftime 1-1. Colombia scored 3 more times in the second half, winning the match 4-1.

Greece v. Ivory Coast: Greece needed a win for any chance at advancement, while Ivory Coast could do so with a draw. Greece scored on a fast break in minute 42, thus leading at halftime. Ivory Coast scored in minute 74 to even things up. A stoppage-time penalty kick, justly awarded, allowed Greece to get a much deserved 2-1 win (they had hit the crossbar twice on beautiful long-range shots).

The goal average went down a tad and now stands at 2.93/match (117 goals in 40 matches).

(3) World Cup matches today: The final matches of Groups F and E were played, leading to Nigeria joining Argentina, which had already qualified in Group F, and France and Switzerland from the wide-open Group E advancing to the knockout round. Nigeria's celebration was tarnished by news of another explosion in that country that killed dozens at a World Cup viewing event.

Nigeria v. Argentina: Argentina's Messi scored in minute 3, but Nigeria responded immediately to tie the game in minute 4. Messi scored again in stoppage time on one of his trademark free kicks, to put Argentina ahead 2-1 at halftime. Nigeria retaliated again in minute 47 to tie the score: Messi 2, Ahmed Musa 2! Argentina took the lead again in minute 59. The match ended 3-2 in Argentina's favor.

Bosnia-Herzegovina v. Iran: Iran should have started attacking right away, given that only a win could carry them forward. Instead, the team came out in its usual defensive shell, and suffered the first goal in minute 23 as a result. A second defensive mistake put Iran behind 0-2 in minute 59. Iran finally scored its first goal of the tournament in minute 82, but the glimmer of hope did not last long, as Bosnia-Herzegovina scored its third goal one minute later, winning the match 3-1. Well, it is back to the drawing board for Iran: there isn't much a team can do at the World Cup level if it scores a single goal! Bosnia-Herzegovina redeemed itself for its early elimination.

Ecuador v. France: France did not mind the scoreless draw, which placed it atop Group E. Ecuador played much of the second half a man short, due to a straight red-card ejection in minute 50. France rested some of its veteran players and experimented with new positions for others. Despite these factors, France outplayed and outshot Ecuador and came very close to scoring on multiple occasions. France's reward for ending up first in its group is playing against Algeria, rather than Argentina, next.

Honduras v. Switzerland: The heavily favored Switzerland scored in minutes 6, 31, and 71, a hat trick by Xherdan Shaqiri, to win 3-0. Strangely enough, Honduras played much better than the lopsided score indicates, controlling the ball 62% of the time. The match was otherwise uneventful; only one yellow card, and no biting! The goal average stayed the same at 2.93/match (129 goals in 44 matches).

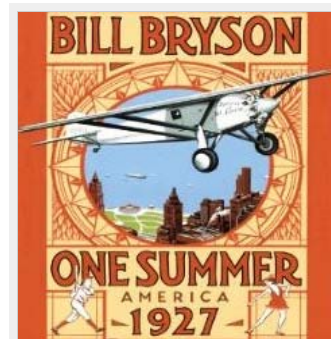
(4) At the margins of the 2014 World Cup: The Serbian referee of the Iran-Argentina match may face disciplinary action by FIFA for "gross mistakes." In Iran's city of Shahroud, three Iranian youths have been arrested for "vulgarity," i.e., dancing in London-based Ajam Band's music video, which celebrates Iran's participation in the World Cup.

(5) The Piano Guys: Tonight, I had a most enjoyable concert experience! The Piano Guys' first stop in their 2014 concert tour (at Santa Barbara's Granada Theater) was a real treat. The two-man-band's unique blend of classical and pop styles, combined with their elaborate stories and self-deprecating humor (including their explanation of why a cellist and a pianist are called "The Piano Guys"), created a memorable night for 2000+ Santa Barbarans. You can sample their music on this [YouTube channel](#). If you are inclined to listen to just one of their tunes, I recommend "[Code Name Vivaldi](#) (Bourne Soundtrack / Vivaldi Double Cello Concerto)." Two members of the four-man group (four middle-aged fathers, as they described themselves and their marketing challenges) apparently work behind the scenes.

(6) Final thought for the day: "I do have a life outside Facebook ... I just don't remember the password for it." ~ Caption of an "Aunty Acid" cartoon by Ged Backland

2014/06/24 (Tue.): Bryson, Bill, *One Summer: America, 1927*, unabridged audiobook on 14 CDs, read by the author, Random House Audio, 2013.

Bryson has a remarkable talent for presenting vivid and highly detailed descriptions of events and ideas. In this book, he focuses on the summer of 1927, when an astonishing number of important events occurred and when America fell in love with the celebrity culture and mass communication (tabloids, in particular). Charles Lindberg's flight across the Atlantic Ocean was perhaps the most important event, but there were others. Babe Ruth was having a record-breaking year in baseball, a murder case that inspired the movie "Double Indemnity" captured the public's attention, and skyscrapers were being built everywhere. Radio was arriving big time, so much so that about 1/3 of all money spent on furniture was for radios (yes, in those days, radio receivers were considered furniture pieces). Lindberg's triumphant return to the US and the World Series of baseball were broadcast live to eager audiences.



Alongside these main events, Bryson weaves tales of less significant happenings that tickled the public's fancy for a short while and were quickly replaced by other amusing events. The narrative sometimes goes back several years to describe the background and context of specific events. Thus, the book is about more than that one summer and can be viewed as a portrait of America in the 1920s, with the Prohibition, mobs, the release of the first talking film, and financial misdeeds that led to the collapse of 1929 in full display. Bryson's many peripheral tales enrich the narrative and make it clear that America of 1927 wasn't all fun and glamor, but was struggling with serious problems in race relations, unethical science experiments, and patent wars. The book constitutes breezy reading or listening, and it should be perused as such. Because of the many threads and subjective observations, one cannot rely on it as an accurate account of history. In fact, other reviewers have pointed to a number of historical inaccuracies in the book. Nevertheless, I enjoyed listening to this audiobook and recommend it highly.

2014/06/23 (Mon.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Empathetic people—dreamers and idealists—have this sort of accidental power. Most

spend their early years ridden with self-doubt, insecurity, and people pleasing habits. But their journey is inevitably derailed when this comfortable life gets uprooted by an unexpected darkness. Suddenly their trusted methods no longer seem to bring them happiness. At first this depression convinces them that they might never feel joyful again. But ultimately, it sets them on a quest for something more—for love, justice, and wisdom." ~ Anonymous

(2) World Cup matches today: The final matches of Groups B and A were played, leading to Brazil & Mexico from Group A advancing to the knockout round (Netherlands & Chile had already advanced from Group B, so the first two matches of the day were inconsequential)

Netherlands v. Chile: Not much at stake in this match, as both teams had already advanced and the outcome only influenced who they would play in the knockout stage (Mexico or Brazil). But given that the last Group-A matches are played later today, there was no way for either team in this match to try to shape the outcome according to its preferred opponent, except in a probabilistic sense (Brazil was more likely to emerge atop its group). Netherlands led Group B going in, and it would end up on top even with a tie score. Netherlands won the match 2-0, for an impressive 10 goals for and 3 goals against in 3 matches played.

Australia v. Spain: With both teams already eliminated from the tournament, national pride was the only thing the two teams played for. Spain scored in minutes 36, 69, and 82 to partially redeem itself with a 3-0 win, following poor showings against Netherlands and Chile.

Croatia v. Mexico: Croatia needed a win to avoid elimination. It dominated the first 15 minutes of the match. However, the first serious threat came from Mexico in minute 16 and the game was more balanced from that point on. The first half ended scoreless. The floodgates opened in the second half, with Mexico scoring 3 goals and Croatia responding with a goal near the end of the match, leading to a 3-1 Mexico win.

Cameroon v. Brazil: Nothing at stake for the already-eliminated Cameroon; first- or second-place group position was at issue for the heavily-favored Brazil, which led 2-1 at halftime. Brazil scored early in the second half and again 6 minutes from the end to seal its first-place position in Group A with a 4-1 victory.

The goal average improved and now stands at 3.00/match (108 goals in 36 matches).

(3) World Cup 2014 status: [This Web page](#) provides the current status of all teams (advanced, eliminated, or still in play), along with odds of advancement. [Iran's odds 16%] [USA's odds 78%]

(4) Final thought for the day: "[Researchers have found that] around the age of 40, people begin to experience a diminished sense of well-being ... [but surprisingly] around the age of 50, feelings of well-being begin to rise again—and keep on rising, well into the 70s. In the 21st century, 50 is the beginning of a new and aspirational time of life." ~ Broadcast journalist Jane Pauley, writing on retirement and aging, in *Time* magazine, issue of June 30, 2014

2014/06/22 (Sun.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Study casts doubts on quantum computing claims: [New research](#) published in *Science* refutes the claims of D-Wave that its second-generation quantum computer is 1000s of times faster than a conventional PC. On a number of optimization problems, for which quantum computing is ideally suited, only a factor-of-10 speed-up was observed.

(2) Today's World Cup matches: With a sole minute-88 goal, Belgium squeaked past Russia 1-0 in the first match. Leading 3-0 at halftime, Algeria earned a convincing 4-2 victory against South Korea in the second match. Belgium advances from Group H, with Algeria the likely second team; Russia must beat Algeria and South Korea must beat Belgium to have any chances, both rather unlikely.

USA tied Portugal 2-2, after giving up a very early goal due to a silly defensive mistake. The equalizing goal for Portugal came late in stoppage time (very similar to Argentina's winning goal against Iran). Germany and USA (4 points each) top Group G, with Ghana and Portugal (1 point each) technically not eliminated yet. Germany and USA can both advance with a tie score in their 6/26 match, while Ghana and Portugal need a victory with high goal difference to have any chance.

The goal average now stands at 2.94/match (94 goals in 32 matches). [\[Standings\]](#)

(3) Freedom fries and liberty cabbage: You might remember that a decade or so ago, in response to France not supporting the invasion of Iraq, the US Congress retaliated by introducing the term "freedom fries" in its cafeteria to replace French fries. From Bill Bryson's book, *One Summer: America, 1927*, which I will review shortly, I learned that something similar occurred during World War I. The outrage created by Germany's sinking of passenger ships led to sauerkraut being renamed "liberty cabbage."

(4) Grownups ruined Facebook: According to *AARP Magazine* (June/July 2014 issue, with the fabulous Helen Mirren on the cover), young people are losing interest in Facebook and gravitating toward Snapchat and other social networking sites. "Facebook is not totally without use for young people: It's still a great way to keep tabs on your mother and your aunts."

2014/06/21 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Walking through Isla Vista: Yesterday, exactly 4 weeks after the tragic mass murders in Isla Vista, I mustered enough courage to resume my 2-mile walks to/from work. In front of IV Deli, which is on my normal walking path, I snapped a photo of a makeshift memorial to the victims. Detouring a bit to the new 7-11, I noticed a bouquet of flowers at the base of a tree in front of the store. With most students already gone for the summer (although there were still occasional U-Haul trucks and other vehicles loading up mattresses and other personal belongings), Isla Vista was quieter than usual. But there were still plenty of friendly smiles and gentle nods to reassure me that all will be okay in this enclave of student life.

(2) World Cup matches today: The first match between Argentina and Iran was important for both teams; Argentina could secure a place in the knockout round and Iran could keep its advancement chances alive. Argentina was in total control in the first half, with Iran mostly defending and rarely succeeding in putting 3 straight passes together. The 0-0 halftime score was quite lucky for Iran, given its 30% time of possession and being outshot 11-3. Iran opened the second half much stronger and more confident, creating some excellent scoring chances. Argentina regained control later in the second half, but failed to capitalize on its scoring opportunities. Finally, in stoppage time, Messi, who was not guarded as closely as earlier in the game, scored on a beautiful long-range shot to win the match for Argentina 1-0.

In the first half of the second match, Germany kept pressuring Ghana, but failed to score. Ghana relied mostly on counterattacks, and despite a couple of great shots on goal, did not score either. Germany finally scored in a minute-51 fast break. The advantage lasted only 3 minutes, before Ghana scored on a beautiful header and again on a fast break in minute 62. It was now Ghana's turn to pressure Germany, but Germany equalized the score in minute 71. The 2-2 final score was pretty fair for this exciting game. Although a German win would have been better for the US, the tie score isn't bad. A US win against Portugal will guarantee advancement, easing the pressure in its final game against Germany.

In the third match, Nigeria defeated Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0, thus eliminating it. Argentina has already advanced from Group F. Iran might advance under the following scenario: a win over Bosnia-Herzegovina, combined with a Nigeria loss to Argentina. This isn't inconceivable, so there is room for hope.

The goal average went down slightly and now stands at 2.86/match (83 goals in 29 matches). Here is a table of [team standings](#), which includes information about eliminated and already advanced teams.

(3) Sherry Bijan's [music video "Iran"](#) combines elements of ancient and modern Iran (focusing on soccer, of course), both musically and visually.

(4) Iranians show their excitement over the World Cup: Dozens of songs and other videos are being posted online to celebrate Iran's presence at the 2014 World Cup tournament. In this one, [Pick Band performs "The World Cup Song,"](#) showing clips of soccer games and honoring the pioneers who contributed to the development of soccer in Iran.

(5) Iran's volleyball team stuns Italy: Quietly, and with much less fanfare than Iran's soccer team, the country's national volleyball team has been racking up impressive victories. Yesterday (6/20), [Iran beat Italy](#) in straight sets (25-18, 25-20, 25-15). Brazil had been similarly swept by Iran on June 7.

(6) Modern Persian music: Ziba Shirazi sings "Gheseh" ("Story"). [[Audio file](#)]

2014/06/20 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within." ~ James A. Baldwin

(2) World Cup matches today: I couldn't watch any of today's games. Nevertheless, here is a summary from highlights on ESPN and Internet sources.

In the first match, Costa Rica beat Italy 1-0 to ensure its own advancement as well as England's elimination. The sole goal was scored just before halftime.

In the second match, France exploded to beat Switzerland 5-2, in what was the highest-scoring match thus far. France scored in minutes 17, 18, 40, 67, 73. Switzerland avoided a humiliating shut-out by scoring in minutes 81 and 87.

In the final match of the day, Ecuador came back from a goal down to win 2-1. With its second loss, Honduras isn't yet eliminated, but its advancement chances are slim.

Four teams are already out: Cameroon (Group A); Australia & Spain (B); England (D)

Four teams have already advanced: Netherlands & Chile (Group B); Columbia (C); Costa Rica (D)

The goal average went up slightly and now stands at 2.96/match (77 goals in 26 matches). [[Standings](#)]

(3) Selfie as an art form: A famous French photographer known only by his initials (JR) is installing a collection of [4000 selfies](#) in Pantehon (mausoleum for many French luminaries such as Victor Hugo, Voltaire, Alexandre Dumas, and Marie Curie) in Paris.

(4) Achieving immortality as a data file: In Orlando, two poles transmit the memories, thoughts, and feeling of those who want to create digital copies of themselves into space. The expectation is that the data files will eventually reach benevolent alien species who would recreate the person from the data. This project is managed

by 31-year-old Gabriel Rothblatt, the leader of a new form of religion that places faith in technology. The name "Terasem" of the religion is taken from Octavia Butler's 1993 sci-fi novel *Parable of the Sower*. [From *Time* magazine, issue of June 23, 2014.]

(5) Incompetent interviewer on Iranian TV asks a national soccer team player silly questions, to which he reacts with intelligence and dignity. Here is an example. Q: "Are you afraid of Messi?" A: "Why should I be afraid? He seems like a nice person." I hope that someday key media posts in Iran are given to those who know something about the job. [[3-minute video](#)]

(6) Final thought for the day: "The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt." ~ Sylvia Plath

2014/06/19 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The science behind the 2014 World Cup soccer ball: Multiple layers of foam interlaced with advanced materials and culminating in a leather-like synthetic skin make this soccer ball [an engineering marvel](#).



(2) Soccer style: Discussions of Iran's appearance in the World Cup have centered more on the looks and hairstyles of certain players, particularly the handsome goalkeeper [Alireza Haghighi](#), than on soccer techniques or advancement chances. This may be in part due to the shock of seeing good-looking Iranians, after years of staring at photos of Ahmadinejad and his ilk in the world media.

(3) World Cup matches today: I watched only snippets from today's games. Nevertheless, here is a summary of the day's matches from highlights on ESPN and Internet sources.

Colombia dominated Ivory Coast with respect to possession in the first match, which went scoreless in the first half. After many attacks and scoring chances, Colombia eventually broke through in minute 64 and again in minute 70. Ivory Coast responded in minute 73, making the final score 2-1.

In the second match of the day, Uruguay scored in minutes 39 and 85. England had a lot of scoring opportunities, but seemed jinxed until minute 75 when it scored its only goal, which seemed to energize it for a while. The 1-2 loss put England on the brink of elimination, pending the outcome of the Italy v. Costa Rica match tomorrow.

In today's final match, Greece and Japan played to a scoreless tie, despite scoring opportunities for both teams throughout the match. Neither team is completely out yet, with their advancement chances hinging upon an Ivory Coast loss to Greece.

The goal average went down slightly and now stands at 2.87/match (66 goals in 23 matches). [[Standings](#)]

(4) Iran's national [soccer team coach to quit](#) after the World Cup: Frankly, I have never understood how international coaches can function under Iran's stifling restrictions (in funding, recruitment, travel, and so on) and interference from various outside bodies. Most end up quitting due to systemic dysfunction in Iranian sports management system.

(5) Dick Cheney discusses "The Collapsing Obama Doctrine": Writing with Liz Cheney in the Opinion pages of [Wall Street Journal](#), and not showing a trace of contrition for the tragic missteps of the Bush administration in which he had a key role, Cheney contends that President Obama's telling us he is ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is wishful thinking. He maintains that when Obama came into office, Al-Qaeda in Iraq had been largely defeated; talk about getting it backwards! Dick Cheney isn't the only member of the Bush administration to criticize Obama's efforts in cleaning up the mess they created; others are also pontificating on various media. We will see which will be judged more favorably by history: Bush/Cheney or Obama/Biden.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Everyone talks about the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, but no one ever talks about the 'mah' of a tie." ~ Stephen Colbert

2014/06/18 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Nighttime satellite image of Iran and the Persian Gulf.

(2) Useless Facebook posts: On Fathers' Day (6/15), I came across a post, supposedly from a little girl holding a sign that read: "My Daddy said if I got 1,000 likes he will STOP SMOKING. Please like and share. I love my Dad." The post was liked by 1.36M people and shared by 33K. Let's assume that the post is legit and not a hoax. Why exactly does the little girl's dad need "likes" from a bunch of strangers to stop smoking? Does he not love his daughter enough to do it for her?



(3) World Cup matches today: I watched only the second half of the last game today. Nevertheless, here is a summary of the day's matches from Internet sources.

In the first match, Netherlands prevailed over Australia 3-2, with Netherlands scoring in minutes 20, 58, and 68

and Australia's goals coming in minutes 21 and 54 (penalty kick).

In the upset of the day, Chile defeated Spain 2-0, scoring in minutes 20 and 43 and sending the Spaniards packing, given that Netherlands and Chile, each with two wins, will advance from Group B.

In the last match of the day, Cameroon seemed lost and helped Croatia win 4-0 by engaging in self-defeating behavior that put them one player down near the end of the first half. Croatia scored 3 of its goals in the second half.

Today's 2 high-scoring matches helped increase the goal average, which now stands at 3.00/match (60 goals in 20 matches). [[Standings](#)]

(4) Marking 50 years of *IEEE Spectrum* magazine: The June 2014 issue of the general technical publication of Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers celebrates its 50th anniversary. Incidentally, the Swimsuit Issue of *Sports Illustrated* has also just turned 50, but that requires a different post. Another 50th anniversary this year is that of Isaac Asimov's legendary essay "Visit to the World's Fair of 2014." Well, as they say, predictions are perilous affairs; in the latter case, prediction errors begin with the essay's title. In fact, of Asimov's 30 or so predictions, only four were indisputably accurate. Despite such perils, *IEEE Spectrum* editors have assembled a set of articles about what to expect in engineering and technology over the next 5 decades. Here is a sampling of ideas presented in the articles.

Biomed: the end of disability

Space: exploiting solar-system resources

Science: infinitely malleable materials

Movies: computer-generated humans

Energy: rise of the personal power plant

Cars: humans move to the passenger seat

Mobile: sharing thoughts and sensations

Robots: true helpers and companions

(5) Final thought for the day: "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." ~ Leonardo da Vinci

2014/06/17 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When kids look up to great scientists the way they do to great musicians and actors, civilization will jump to the next level." ~ Brian Greene

(2) World Cup matches today: In the first match, Algeria scored first on a penalty kick. Belgium equalized in minute 70 on an arching header that sailed over the goalie's outstretched hands and scored again in minute 79 on a beautifully executed fast break, winning the match 2-1.

Brazil was in full control early in the first half, but couldn't capitalize on its scoring chances. Mexico came alive midway through the first half and put together a few impressive attacks, making the rest of the scoreless first half more competitive. The match eventually ended 0-0 to Mexico's huge relief. With wide-open play and the need for several saves from each goalie, the game was much more exciting than the score indicates.

In the final, rather unexciting, match of the day, South Korea scored first midway through the second half, but Russia tied it up 6 minutes later, with the 1-1 score persisting to the end of the match. Both goals resulted from errors, with the ball slipping through the Russian goalie's hands being the more serious error.

After some unusually high-scoring matches to begin the World Cup, the pace has gone down a tad. The goal-scoring rate in the tournament now stands at 2.88/match (49 goals in 17 matches). [[Standings](#)]

(3) Aging infrastructure in the US: In 2013, the average age of US bridges was 42 years. More than 250M vehicles cross structurally deficient US bridges daily. Pennsylvania alone has more than 5200 structurally deficient bridges and it would cost \$106B to fix all such bridges nationwide (the annual bridge maintenance budget is about \$17B). The aging US icons include NYC's Brooklyn Bridge, SF's Golden Gate Bridge, and Pittsburgh's Liberty Bridge. [Info from *Time* magazine, issue of June 23, 2014.]

(4) Eat butter: This is the headline appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine, issue of June 23, 2014, which conveys the message that scientists were wrong to consider fat the enemy. Please take all pronouncements about what to eat and what not to eat with a grain of salt: just a grain, because salt isn't good for you; oh wait, maybe it is!

(5) Final thought for the day: "The best thinking has been done in solitude. The worst has been done in turmoil." ~ Thomas A. Edison

2014/06/16 (Mon.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The reason a lot of people do not recognize opportunity is because it usually goes around wearing overalls and looking like hard work." ~ Thomas A. Edison

(2) World Cup matches today: In the first match, Germany defeated Portugal 4-0; a surprising score and a gift to the US team, because it may be able to advance with a tie against Portugal, if it does better against Germany. Thomas Mueller scored a hat trick in minutes 12 (penalty kick), 45, and 78, with Mats Hummels

adding a goal in minute 32. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo was completely neutralized in this game. Iran needed a win against Nigeria to have any hopes of advancing, given the presence of Argentina and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the same group. The 0-0 halftime score was good for Iran, which did not show any consistency until late in the first half. In the end, Iran escaped with a 0-0 tie, which is a great result, given that Nigeria was dominant for much of the match and Iran looked nervous (Iran did not qualify in 2010, so the players had no prior World Cup experience). By the way, this was the first tie score as well as the lowest-scoring match in the tournament.

The final match began with USA scoring in the first minute. Ghana dominated in terms of possession for the rest of the first half, with both teams having scoring opportunities. But the score remained 1-0 at halftime. Ghana put the pressure on USA in the second half, peppering the US goal with headers and long-range shots and giving goalie Tim Howard a rigorous workout. Ghana equalized in minute 82 on an impressive combination play. The US responded 3 minutes later and the game ended 2-1 in favor of USA.

Here are the [group standings](#) at the end of the fifth day. The goal-scoring rate in the tournament now stands at 3.14/match (44 goals in 14 matches).

(3) Three soccer quotes, from Rod Stewart, Eduardo Galeano, and Brandi Chastain:

"I'm a rock star because I couldn't be a soccer star."

"I'm attracted to soccer's capacity for beauty. When well played, the game is a dance with a ball."

"I think there are a lot of things that soccer does in the communities that transcend the soccer field."

(4) Bush's toxic legacy in Iraq: This is the title of [an analysis](#) by CNN's Peter Bergen, who views the strengthening of Al-Qaeda in Iraq a direct result of the US invasion of that country.

2014/06/15 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Fathers' Day to all fathers among my friends, as well as those mothers who have had to also act as fathers at times. My gifts for the day included a Nikola Tesla stuffed doll and a 1000-piece Beatles jigsaw puzzle. I also got a handmade card from my children with their messages and featuring a curve with the caption "lim x -> inf (our love for you) does not exist" (a nerdy message that may not make sense to all). Finally, I was treated by my family to Persian food at Darband Grill and got to dance with a cute belly dancer there. Thank you all!

(2) World Cup matches today: In the first match, the Swiss looked clueless for the entire first half, suffering from inaccurate passes and missed opportunities. Ecuador was only slightly better, taking a one-goal lead into halftime. Switzerland equalized early in the second half and scored the winning goal seconds before the end of stoppage time to escape with a 2-1 win. France convincingly beat Honduras 3-0, with goal-line technology coming into play on the second goal, when the ball hit the goalpost and then went slightly over the line as it was deflected by the goalie's body. This second goal was ruled an "own goal," depriving Karim Benzema from being credited with a hat-trick and earning leading-scorer status thus far. Argentina scored very early against Bosnia-Herzegovina and took the 1-0 lead into halftime. Argentina went ahead 2-0 on a classic Messi goal, but B-H responded with a late goal. Argentina survived more pressure, creating some chances of its own on counterattacks. Argentina won the match 2-1. The high scoring pace went down a tad, from the previous 3.50 to 3.36 goals per game. It is also significant that there have been no draws through the first 11 matches.

[Group stats]

(3) Team USA ready for Monday's opener in World Cup competition: USA's mix of veteran players and younger talent will face Ghana on Monday 6/16. With Portugal and Germany also in the same group, beating Ghana appears to be mandatory for advancement. Accordingly, the US team is putting its entire focus on achieving this goal. The US coach, Jurgen Klinsmann, looks for redemption, after facing severe criticism for excluding Landon Donovan, USA's greatest ever player according to some, from the team. With Germany's and Portugal's firepower, Tim Howard's performance in the US goal may be a key to the team's success.

(4) Iran's chances in the World Cup: In the same preliminary group as Argentina, Nigeria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran isn't expected to advance to the knockout stage. But the current team has the best chance ever to surprise everyone. Iran's experienced Portuguese coach, Carlos Queiroz of Real Madrid fame, has revamped the defense and hand-picked his offensive stars: the team's highest scorer in qualifying matches and team captain Javad Nekounam, playing at midfield and known for his precision passes as well as long-range shots, and strikers Ashkan Dejagah and Reza Ghoochannejad, who were brought back from British Premier-League club teams. The first match of Asia's champion and top-ranking team, in its fourth World-Cup appearance, will pit it against Africa's best national team on Monday 6/16.

(5) My two cents on the current situation in Iraq: The prevailing condition is very complex and its solution requires much thought. Just bombing or pushing back the insurgents isn't a real solution. The problem with US's (and the West's) Mideast strategy is solving problems in a piecemeal fashion, dealing with isolated crises as they arise. There is a deep divide between Shi'i and Sunni Islam, with its roots in religious beliefs and political power struggles of 14 centuries ago, that manifests itself in various sociopolitical conflicts. These conflicts lay

dormant for centuries in a perilous political equilibrium. In modern times, the conflict began to intensify with interventions over resources (oil, primarily) and geopolitical advantage, producing factions that are at odds with each other. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, Sunnis, constituting some 90% of the Islamic world, have become nervous over losing their advantage in many areas. These fears were intensified with Shi'is coming to power in Iraq and gaining more influence in Lebanon. The Sunni pushback is funded by the Saudis, who are apprehensive about their diminishing influence. The bottom line is that the US and the West cannot appease both sides by leaving the Saudi adventurism unchallenged. The militants fighting in Iraq and elsewhere are fearless, because they do not have much to lose. The Iraqi military has no sense of allegiance to its government and people, fleeing their positions in droves upon slightest threat from the advancing terrorists. The US cannot play both sides: be friendly toward the Saudis and toward governments they are trying to undermine. The "let sleeping dogs lie" policy has reached the end of its usefulness and must be replaced. Once in a while the US becomes concerned with the Saudis' funding of Islamic "charities" that are fronts for terrorist organizations, but there is no sense of urgency in dealing with the roots of the problems. I guess the Saudi thinking is that if concerns of these organizations are vented elsewhere, the House of Saud will be immune to their ire. This theory has proven incorrect in recent years, as terrorists have been strengthening their hold inside Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries. It is only a matter of time before the Saudis' funding of terror will come back to haunt them. That might be a good thing.

2014/06/14 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Graduation time at UCSB: Today, UCSB holds its official commencement for our entire campus, but yesterday, we had College of Engineering's "Senior Send-off" ceremonies during which outstanding graduating seniors were honored and the three students of the College killed in the Isla Vista tragedy were remembered. After presenting awards to seniors in various categories, as well as to outstanding faculty and TAs, the Dean of Engineering announced that a special scholarship fund has been set up in the name of each of the six mass-murder victims to make them permanent parts of student life on campus.

(2) Beginning the third day in the 2014 World Cup: Yesterday, Mexico prevailed over Cameroon 3-1, world-champion Spain was humiliated by Netherlands 1-5, and Chile beat Australia 3-1. Spain's loss caught everyone by surprise and dimmed their chances of advancing past the preliminary stage. Four matches are scheduled for today: Colombia v. Greece; Uruguay v. Costa Rica; England v. Italy; Ivory Coast v. Japan. Both Iran and USA will begin play on Monday 6/16.

(3) My daughter's cover feature: The Spring 2014 issue of UCLA's *Total Wellness* is [available on-line](#). This is the first issue in which my daughter took responsibility for the content, choosing the topics and letting writers do the research and presentation. Her own article, entitled "Healthy Today, Healthy Tomorrow," appears on pp. 36-45.

(4) The next time you want to call someone a "liberal" with the intention of demeaning them, you might want to check the word's [dictionary definition](#); calling someone a liberal is actually a compliment (synonyms: progressive, broad-minded, unprejudiced, beneficent, charitable, openhanded, munificent, unstinting, lavish, generous). Perhaps liberals had a hand in writing these dictionaries!

(5) Lost in translation: "All is not what a real value, you cannot through hard work and hard to get." ~ Thomas Alva Edison [Sign displayed in China, a result of retranslating Edison's statement from Chinese.]

2014/06/13 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Today is **Friday the 13th**, complete with a full honey moon. Just saying!

(2) Quote of the day: "Life is 10 percent what you make it, and 90 percent how you take it." ~ Irving Berlin

(3) Full concert of Anoushirvan Rohani and his son Reza, from 2013. [[77-minute video](#)]

(4) Vice President Biden's message to UCSB: In an emotional [5-minute commencement message](#) to UC Santa Barbara community, Joe Biden praises the compassion and courage shown in the wake of losing 6 students to the Isla Vista tragedy. He recalls his mother as quoting this saying: "Courage lies in every heart, and the expectation is that one day it will be summoned." Thank you, VP Biden!

(5) The 2014 World Cup is now in full swing: Following yesterday's opening match, in which Brazil prevailed over Croatia (barely, despite the seemingly lopsided 3-1 score), seven matches will be played today and tomorrow. Today's matches are Mexico v. Cameroon, Spain v. Netherlands, and Chile v. Australia. Tomorrow's matches are Colombia v. Greece, Uruguay v. Costa Rica, England v. Italy, and Ivory Coast v. Japan. Both Iran and USA will begin play on Monday 6/16. Interestingly, in yesterday's coverage, ESPN switched to golf right after the match ended; no highlights, no analysis, no commentary, nothing!

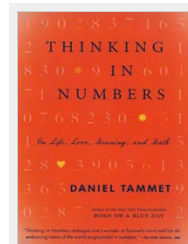
(6) Final thought for the day: "If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things." ~ Albert Einstein

2014/06/12 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." ~ Gandhi
- (2) Musical tribute to Iran's participation in the upcoming World Cup: The Ajam group performs the spirited song "**Gol-e Iran**" ("Iran's Goal"), which combines traditional Persian music with popular soccer chants.
- (3) Two cellists cover Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal." [[4-minute video](#)]
- (4) *Girl Rising*: This is the title of a **movie** that tells the stories of nine girls from different parts of the world who face arranged marriages, child slavery, and other unthinkable injustices. Narration is provided by Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Liam Neeson, Cate Blanchette, Selena Gomez and other A-list actors. The film's original music is from Academy Award winner Rachel Portman, in collaboration with Hans Zimmer.
- (5) *Unhappy meals*: This is the title of a *Time* magazine article by Jay Newton-Small who writes about the well-funded opposition to Michelle Obama's efforts to reform US school lunch programs to combat obesity and type-2 diabetes in children. The Republican-controlled House has already eased some of the school nutrition standards she helped pass in 2010. The author notes that "in the nation's capital, even kids' health can be political, as billions of dollars are at stake depending on what goes into school lunches."
- (6) Final thought for the day: "When people ask me where I am from, I say I am Persian, born in Iran. I write and dream in English, I curse in Spanish and, after a few pints of Guinness, I dance a mighty Irish jig." ~ Marsha Mehran, author of *Pomegranate Soup* and *Rosewater and Soda Bread*, who **died at 36** last month

2014/06/11 (Wed.): Tammet, Daniel, *Thinking in Numbers: On Life, Love, Meaning, and Math*, Little, Brown & Co., 2013 (c 2012).

The author, who was characterized as painfully shy and hypersensitive as a child, found out later in life that he had the high-functioning autistic savant syndrome. In this book, which follows his best-selling autobiography, *Born on a Blue Day*, Tammet intersperses observations on the role of mathematics in our daily lives with autobiographical tidbits in 25 essays. Not all chapters were equally interesting or new to me. So, I will restrict my comments to those that I found fascinating or novel.



Under the title "Counting to Four in Icelandic" (Chapter 3), Tammet offers interesting observations on how numbers are written and spoken in different languages. In Icelandic, the word "four" is different when you talk about four sheep, four hours, four years old, or the number-four bus. "We can only speculate why [these differences] stop at the number five (for which, like every number thereafter, a single word exists)."

Psychologists tell us that human beings can count instinctively up to four or so. We can tell whether there are three or four books on the table in a flash. Small numbers loom large in our minds, because they are the most useful. In Chinese, multiple forms of numbers extend much further than in Icelandic. "One hundred marchers" is written and spoken differently, depending on whether the marchers are students or villagers. Some indigenous people of Sri Lanka have words only for the numbers 1 and 2. For them, three is "two and one more," four is "two and one more and one more," and so on. This reminds me of words for successive descendants in a family. Unlike English, which uses something similar to the "and one more" construct above, in Persian, there are words for great grandchild ("natijeh"), great great grandchild ("nabireh"), and great great great grandchild ("nadideh"), with the latter term meaning "unseen," perhaps because very few people get to see their great great great grandchild. In some tribal languages, number words are imprecise, so that a word for "three" can sometimes mean "two" and, at other times, "four" or "five." A word meaning "four" may have "three" and "five"—perhaps even "six"—as synonyms. There is a tribe in the Amazon rain forest whose members know nothing about numbers. Naming a time interval is equivalent to numbering it. Without numbers as our guides, we can't tell stories, because we cannot visualize time intervals; there is no past and no future.

In Chapter 4, the author considers proverbs and adages, wondering what makes them interesting or memorable. When pursuing a book of proverbs, Tammet realized that there is a limit to how many proverbs we humans can take before becoming dizzy. In his case, after about 100 proverbs, he saw that they seemed repetitive and not as interesting. This observation reminded me of interactions on Facebook, where there is an abundance of proverbs and other catchy statements. I can confirm that it is extremely hard to read past a few pages of such status posts.

On pages 81-82, we are informed that humans cannot perceive extremely large numbers. Even a billion is beyond our limit of experience, to say nothing of a googol (1 followed by 100 zeros) and googolplex (1 followed by a googol zeroes). We just can't comprehend how different the latter two numbers are, and it blows our minds that there are numbers that are even larger than googolplex. Despite our inability to comprehend the number googolplex + 1, we can talk about its properties using mathematical abstraction. For example, we know that it is not a prime and that its smallest factor is the 36-digit number 316,912,650,057,057,350,374,175,801,344,000,001. Though Tammet focuses only on extremely large numbers, tiny numbers present comparable difficulties to most people. Humans have no clear perception of the difference between odds of 1 in a million and 1 in a trillion.

In chapter 12, "The Calendar of Omar Khayyam," we learn that Khayyam solved the problem of the extra 0.2423

day in a solar year by interleaving 8 extra days over each 33-year span. This solution, $365 + 8/33 = 365.2424$, yields a better approximation than the adjustment used by the later Gregorian calendar: $365 + 1/4 - 1/100 + 1/400 = 365 + 97/400 = 365.2425$; the latter is, of course, easier to remember and to apply.

In chapter 14, "The Admirable Number Pi," the author reveals some interesting properties of this very special number and tells the story of how he proceeded to set a Guinness World Record when he recited 22,514 digits of pi over a five-hour session attended by judges and a quietly supportive audience.

Beginning on page 154, the author discusses the similarity of beauty in magic tricks and in math. Long mathematical proofs are dissatisfying, much like elaborate magic tricks in which the magician will go to great pains to conceal his workings from the public. Elegant proofs are short and insightful, and elegant magic tricks entail no redundant actions and not a single extra step.

In chapter 16, "A Novelist's Calculus," we learn that Tolstoy literally used notions from calculus to impart his thesis that real history isn't the life stories or acts of a few notable individuals but small contributions form hordes of ordinary people. Here is a passage from his *War and Peace*: "The movement of humanity, arising as it does from innumerable arbitrary human wills, is continuous. To understand the laws of this continuous movement is the aim of history ... only by taking infinitesimally small units for observation ... and attaining to the art of integrating them (that is, finding the sum of these infinitesimals) can we hope to arrive at the laws of history." Here is an insightful observation on history [p. 165]: "As a Briton who lives in France, I see how each nation selects its own causes, and edits them convincingly into its own version of history. In Britain, Napoleon's name is synonymous with tyranny and a small comic man's delusions of grandeur. In France, au contraire, he is a revolutionary who stood up for the new Republic against the hostile monarchies of Europe. The puffed-up Napoleon with 'small white hands,' as depicted by Tolstoy, is, of course, a Napoleon from the Russian perspective." Tolstoy's fascination with calculus is matched by Nabakov's enchantment with chess. Nabakov designed interesting chess puzzles and used some of them to illustrate his 1969 anthology "Poems and Problems."

In chapter 18, "Poetry of the Primes," we learn that in each culture, poetry takes the shape of people's attitudes and tastes. The Japanese preference for brevity has led to haiku, a triplet of lines containing 5, 7, and 5 syllables, 3, 5, and 7 all being prime numbers, as is the sum $5 + 7 + 5 = 17$. Here is a sample from the form's most celebrated practitioner, the 17th-century poet Matsuo Basho:

Michinobe no (The mallow flower)

Mukuge wa uma ni (Against the side of the road)

Kuwarekeri (Eaten by my horse)

A slightly longer version of haiku, the tanka form, allows two further 7-syllable lines, resulting in 31 total syllables; a prime.

Whereas the relationship between numbers and life is explored nicely for the most part, there are simplistic statements in the book that make a mathematically sophisticated reader wonder whether the author's grasp of mathematics is as strong as other reviewers suggest. For example, in Chapter 22 entitled "Selves and Statistics," he states, in many different forms, the fact that averages are inapplicable to any given individual. Yes, averages do not apply to individuals, but they aren't meant to. Life expectancy for healthy individuals or for groups afflicted with a specific disease are intended to help insurers and government policymakers not for a cancer patient to decide what to do in the 2 years s/he is given to live. Different people might well do different things when presented with the latter diagnosis. They should know that they might well live beyond 2 years and that there is a chance that they will live for 5 years or 10 years, or die of a different ailment or of an accident. Despite the shortcomings just noted, this is an excellent book overall, and I recommend it highly.

2014/06/10 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "As always, there will be a festering low road of speculation about Clinton herself, her health, her hair, her husband. And as always, a squalid tabloid underbuzz: Did she ask Chelsea to become pregnant to give her campaign a soft, grandmotherly tinge? Will new Whitewater papers reveal that the real estate deal was really a conspiracy to sell heroin?" ~ Joe Klein's tongue-in-cheek assessment (*Time* magazine, issue of June 16, 2014) of the buzz following the June 10 release of Hilary Clinton's latest book, *Hard Choices*.

(2) Persian fusion music and dance: [Mon Art dances](#) to "Ey Asheghan" by Alireza Assar.

(3) Iranians [celebrate the 2014 World Cup](#) and Iran's participation in it: The Persian title indicates that Visa invited filmmakers from the 32 qualifying countries to show how each country is celebrating the World Cup. Search YouTube for "Visa Samba" to find videos from the other 31 countries.

(4) The Istanbul-based international fusion group Light in Babylon performs "[Gypsy Love](#)" in this 4-minute video clip. The singer, Michal Elia Kamal, is Israeli of Iranian origins.

(5) Comedian Bassem Youssef calls it quits: "Egypt's Jon Stewart" is discontinuing his popular TV show, because he has gotten in trouble with the new Egyptian president al-Sisi, as he did with the former president Morsi. He has said that he fears for his life and for the safety of his family. [Info from *Time* magazine, issue of

June 16, 2014.]

(6) Milestone in artificial intelligence reached: One of the longstanding arguments in computing is about a rigorous definition of intelligence that would allow us to tell whether a machine is capable of thinking. Alan Turing's proposed definition, known as the Turing Test, is the only one that is widely accepted: According to Turing's definition, a machine is intelligent/thinking if it can conduct a conversation (not verbally, but as in text-chatting) with a human in such a way that the latter cannot tell whether s/he is conversing with a machine or with another human. A supercomputer program has become the first "chatbot" to pass the Turing Test. The program, claiming to be a 13-year-old boy from Ukraine, was able to fool enough people for judges to rule that it has **passed the Turing Test**.

[*Note added on 6/11:* A number of reservations have been expressed in the scientific community about the validity of the claim that the Turing Test has been passed, given the short duration of the conversations and the fact that only 10 of 30 judges were fooled by the computer program. Such doubts are quite reasonable. Turing never specified the length of the conversation and a 5-minute chat is, in my view, quite significant. Similarly, even fooling a single judge is quite an accomplishment, so 10 out of 30 can't be due to sheer luck. Let's bear in mind that the passing of the Turing Test is inevitable in the current decade (even assuming that this particular claim is invalid). Watson's winning in Jeopardy! was an omen and I fully expect a machine to pass the test without any doubts by 2020. It would be interesting to find out how many out of the 30 judges might be convinced that an actual 13-year-old conversing with them is a human. Such a control experiment is required before passing judgment on the reported results.]

2014/06/09 (Mon.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The world is divided into two kinds of people: those who divide the world into two kinds of people ..." ~ The main character in the movie "Inside Llewyn Davis" (his former girlfriend completes the statement thus: "... and losers.")

(2) Dr. Nayereh Tohidi speaks on 2014 Women's Day: In this **25-minute video** of her lecture in Persian at UC Irvine, she elaborates on women's rights and feminism.

(3) The fight over heaven in Iran: A new hot-button issue has arisen in Iran's political scene, which together with the intensifying opposition to mandatory hijab laws, will likely lead to the toppling of the Islamic regime. Hardliners are of the belief that an Islamic government is responsible for its citizens' salvation and must thus lead them to heaven by force, even if it requires lashing or imprisonment for religious offenses. Moderates, including President Rouhani who characterizes those favoring the use of force in leading people to heaven as "delusional," stress that people should be left alone to choose their own path to salvation. Rouhani likens the current stance of the hardliners to the opposition of the religious establishment some 50 years ago to the replacement of public baths with indoor plumbing and showers and to the establishment of daylight saving time in Iran, both of which were advanced by the mullahs as **Western plots to destroy Islam**.

(4) The Isla Vista problem: Whereas the recent incidents of violence, including sexual assaults, in Isla Vista can be blamed on a number of factors, such as the US gun culture, misogyny, shortcomings in addressing mental illness, and lax police procedures in dealing with potential threats, a more important underlying problem is the very high density of young people in Isla Vista and its party culture. So claim a group of UCSB history professors in a letter to UC President Janet Napolitano, UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang, and UC Regents Chair Bruce Varner. The letter contains the outline of a possible solution, which though extreme, merits consideration in my view. The group proposes that UCSB expand its campus into Isla Vista, buying properties (using eminent domain if needed), in order to mitigate the density problem and modify the party culture that is no longer reflective of UCSB or its student body (most attendees of such parties and nearly all troublemakers are not UCSB students). The letter isn't available on-line at this time. I will post a link for you when it becomes publicly available.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Peace is only a thought away, and all we have to do to access it is silence the voice of our dominating left mind." ~ Jill Bolte Taylor, a brain scientist who suffered a rare kind of stroke at age 37 and learned a great deal from the experience of a silenced mind, as she went through the recovery process [I will review her book, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*, shortly.]

2014/06/08 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The more articulate one is, the more dangerous words become." ~ May Sarton

(2) Direct modeling and printing in 3D: SpaceX is exploring **direct 3D manipulation** to improve the productivity of designers.

(3) Mr. Haloo strikes again: This time with a **humorous poem** bearing the message that if you put a donkey in a high place, he will ruin both itself and you.

(4) Two significant steps in the direction of gender equality: Stanford University hires the first female dean for its School of Engineering and Lego approves female scientist characters. The second of these news items, which appeared side by side in a daily newsletter from the American Society for Engineering Education, may appear

minor compared with the first one, but in the grand scheme of things, it may prove of greater significance in crushing gender stereotypes, given the number of children that play with Lego blocks.

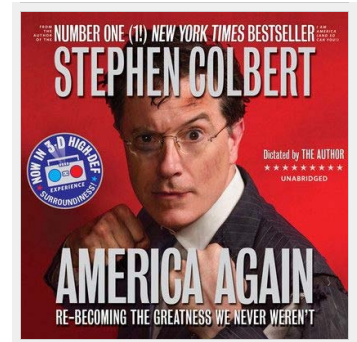
(5) The man who guards the planet: This is the title of a *Time* magazine story about Don Yeomans, an astronomer at NASA's JPL who heads the Near Earth Object Program Office. His staff monitors asteroids that can present a serious danger to our planet. Our planet is hit daily by basketball-size asteroids that cause damage comparable to that of a cruise missile. Once every 8 months, on average, a car-size asteroid hits us with a destructive power of 0.2x, the unit being the power of the Hiroshima nuclear blast. Once every 200 years we should expect a yacht-size asteroid with 87x destructive power to come along. The next three types of event are truly scary: pyramid-size, very-large-city-block-size, and metropolis-size asteroids are expected once every 13,000 years, 440,000 years, and 89 million years, with destructive powers 8600x, 3Mx, and 3Bx, respectively, the last one being comparable to the one that wiped out the dinosaurs.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The higher you climb in life, the more ridiculous your hats will become." ~ Charlie Day's words of wisdom during a commencement speech

2014/06/07 (Sat.): Colbert, Stephen, *America Again: Re-Becoming the Greatness We Never Weren't*, unabridged audiobook on 3 CDs, read by the author, Hachette Audio, 2012.

The author, best known for his pseudo-news show "The Colbert Report" (a spinoff of Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show") on Comedy Central, mocks conservatives in his unique style. In this rather short book, Colbert offers the thesis that as perfect as America is, it is broken; and we can't exchange it, because we are way past the 30-day return window. Colbert offers more or less random observations on America's political scene, such as a clarification of a quote from Newt Gingrich, who said, "America's exceptional greatness ... (is) the result of American Exceptionalism."

In my view, the author's TV show is of much higher quality than his books, this one being even less substantial than his first, *I Am America (and So Can You!)*. This may be due to the fact that the TV show has other writers, whose teamwork helps make the jokes more polished. I don't recommend this (audio)book to anyone but the most avid Colbert fans. The book's reviews are mostly positive, but other reviewers have also described it as "intermittently funny" and, in haiku form, "I laughed, but I laughed | harder when his writers wrote | the previous book."



2014/06/06 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "You can tell Monopoly is an old game because there's a luxury tax and rich people can go to jail." ~ Anonymous
- (2) The "sails" of Sydney's Opera House showcase projected art: As part of the annual Vivid light and music festival, a specially commissioned [video piece](#) is being projected on Sydney's architectural icon through 6/9.
- (3) NRA's belated response to the Isla Vista mass murders: Following the by-now-familiar pattern, the NRA stayed quiet for an extended period of time to let the furor subside. Then, using the usual twisted logic, an NRA spokesman [blamed the media](#) for not putting enough emphasis on the stabbings that preceded the shooting rampage and claimed that the solution to such problems is fewer gun control laws.
- (4) Autonomous atmospheric satellites: [Google beat out Facebook](#) to acquire Albuquerque-based Titan Aerospace, which specializes in solar-powered atmosats flying 12 miles above the earth and able to stay aloft for 5 years. Google intends to use the technology for providing wireless Internet access to mobile devices in areas not currently served.
- (5) Modern Persian music: Mohsen Namjoo sings "[Reza Khan](#)." [This song about the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty has created a stir among Iranians in diaspora. Some monarchists believe that the song disrespects Reza Shah, while some republicans complain that it gives Reza Shah too much credit. This is so typical of Iranian politics; whatever you do or say will be criticized, often viciously.]
- (6) Final thought for the day: "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it." ~ Rumi

2014/06/05 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "I've had bad luck with both my wives. The first one left me, and the second one didn't." ~ James Holt McGarva
- (2) Very cool [card trick](#), quite different from standard ones.
- (3) The history of the world in 18 minutes: The second law of thermodynamics tells us that order gradually turns into disorder. So, how is it that extremely complicated and orderly systems develop in our universe? This [18-minute TED talk](#) by David Christian (from 2011) explains it nicely.

(4) Anti-science sentiments not just a Republican problem: In recent years, the US Republican Party has developed a reputation for being anti-science, and deservedly so. However, there are certain areas in which Democrats also show **anti-science biases**. Notable among these is opposition to genetically modified food, an irrational fear of toxic chemical exposure, and hostility toward nuclear power (the latter enjoys support from 70% of scientists). Anti-vaccination sentiment runs in both parties.

(5) The game "2048": It has some of the addictive properties of Tetris. You shift tiles in various directions, using your keyboard's arrow keys. Tiles initially bear the number 2 but then two adjacent tiles with the same number are combined to create the next higher power of 2. The goal is to get to a tile with 2048 on it through this doubling process. You score points as your tiles are combined, so even if you don't reach the ultimate goal, you can try to top your previous best score. [[Play "2048" on-line](#)]

(6) Smear campaign against exiled Iranian reporter: Masih Alinejad, the woman behind the enormously popular Facebook page "Stealthy Freedoms of Iranian Women" (where women post photos without a veil in defiance of the Islamic Regime's mandatory hijab laws), has become the subject of a **smear campaign** by Iran's state-controlled media, which characterized her as a morally corrupt woman trying to promote immorality and promiscuity among Iranian girls and women. Reports published on these media accused Alinejad of cooperating with foreign intelligence services and included a fabricated account of her being raped in London after using drugs and undressing in public. This panic-driven smear campaign is a sure sign that Alinejad is doing something quite valuable for the cause of freedom in Iran.

2014/06/04 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Sunset and clouds make nature smile.

(2) Quote of the day: "People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do." ~ Isaac Asimov

(3) Trick-shot wizards having **fun in Rio**: In anticipation of the 2014 World Cup tournament in Brazil, McDonalds sponsored trick-soccer-ball-shooters in performing amazing feats.



(4) The new US EPA **coal emission regulations** deemed historic: One side lauds the moves, which include a 30% cut in emissions from coal power plants by 2030, as visionary and effective against global warming, while the other side bashes their negative effects on jobs and cost of energy.

(5) Non-Newtonian fluid pool: Combining cornstarch and water creates oobleck, a fluid that doesn't behave like an ordinary fluid, in the sense that you can walk on it and perform all sorts of neat tricks. [[Video](#)]

(6) Final thought for the day: "Two secrets to keep your marriage brimming. Whenever you're wrong, admit it. Whenever you're right, shut up." ~ Patrick Murray

2014/06/03 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "My wife and I were happy for twenty years. Then we met." ~ Henry Youngman

(2) Freak **sandstorm in Tehran** kills at least 4: Superstrong winds accompanying the sandstorm knocked down trees, swept debris across city streets, and forced residents to run for cover.

(3) Success of engineers as CEOs analyzed: A common path to corporate leadership is an engineering degree combined with an MBA from a top business school. Engineering is the most common undergraduate degree among Fortune 500 CEOs. **This article** hypothesizes that engineers' attention to detail, problem solving ability, numeracy, and understanding of risk make them great leaders.

(4) Comprehensive coverage of the Isla Vista tragedy by *Santa Barbara Independent*: This May 29 story, entitled "**Shock. Suffering. Survival.**" contains links to other stories, including a pictorial of the Harder Stadium memorial, a map, and a timeline. It now appears that the mass killings were by and large hate crimes. We knew that the gunman set out to kill women. The *Independent* reports that he killed his Asian roommates and a visitor because he hated Asians, and he was very troubled by the fact that he himself was half-Asian.

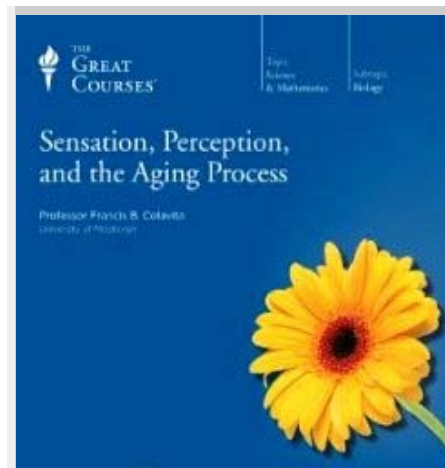
(5) A surf-and-float **tribute to the six victims** of the 5/23 Isla Vista mass murders.

(6) Final thought for the day: "You don't stop loving someone just because you hate them." ~ Hanif Kureishi, *Intimacy*

2014/06/02 (Mon.): Colavita, Francis B., *Sensation, Perception and the Aging Process*, a collection of 24 lectures on 12 CDs (two boxes of 6 CDs, each with a guidebook), The Teaching Company, 2006.

Over the past few years, I have been looking at a lot of books on psychology and the workings of the human mind. The audiobook I am reviewing here isn't a book in the traditional sense but a set of 24 half-hour lectures in the "Great Courses" series.

To study the human mind, one needs to understand our sensory



systems, because nearly all of the information collected and processed by the mind comes from our senses. It is interesting that we all react to the world similarly in some instances and differently in others. For example, we all turn our heads when tapped on the shoulder or when we sense movement in our peripheral field of vision. On the other hand, we sometimes gasp in utter fear at a sharp sound that our spouse or roommate barely notices.

What makes us become more conservative with age, changing from the youngster who wanted to get on the scariest rides to someone whose stomach begins to churn even looking at other people get on those same rides? The answer lies in the fact that although the physical world should logically appear the same to everyone, perceptions aren't just a function of physical realities but also of our past encounters with the same or similar sensory inputs. And such variations apply to different individuals as well as the same person over time, as his/her sensory system evolves, mostly in the direction of deterioration and loss of sensitivity.

With the introduction and context just presented, here is a list of what the 24 lectures cover.

Lectures 1-2: Introduction (and distinction between sensation and perception)

Lectures 3-6: Vision (optical systems, retina, optic nerve, age-related changes)

Lectures 7-9: Hearing (structures, the inner ear, age-related changes)

Lectures 10-12: The Cutaneous System (receptors, pathways, early development, age-related changes)

Lectures 13-14: Pain (early history, acupuncture, endorphins, and aging)

Lectures 15-16: Taste (stimulus, structures, receptors, and factors influencing preferences)

Lectures 17-18: Smell (the unappreciated sense, consequences of anosmia)

Lecture 19: The Vestibular Systems (orientation of the body and its position in space)

Lecture 20: The Kinesthetic Sense (sensory input to the brain from muscles, tendons, ligaments, and joints)

Lecture 21: Brain Mechanisms and Perception (evolution has added new areas to the brain rather than replace old parts)

Lecture 22: Perception of Language (speech production and understanding are done in two different areas of the brain)

Lecture 23: The Visual Agnosias (integrating sensory data and memory into visual images)

Lecture 24: Perception of Other People (and course summary)

2014/06/01 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Dear whatever doesn't kill me: I think I'm strong enough now. Please stop it. Thank you." ~ Anonymous

(2) Sand sculptures in different countries/regions (clockwise from bottom left): England, Italy, India, Africa, Brazil, Iran. [[Image](#)]

(3) Airborne wind turbine for remote regions: Attached to a **helium-filled shell**, the turbine can float 300 m off the ground, where winds are more consistent and 5 times stronger, and be adjusted to align with wind direction. The shell can also support sensors and communication equipment.

(4) Epic **gathering of mobular rays**: And they have fun using their "wings" to fly.

(5) Guitar legends: John McLaughlin, Paco De Lucia, and Al Di Meola perform "**Mediterranean Sun Dance**"; a full **2-hour concert** of the three is also available on YouTube.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Intimacy is the capacity to be rather weird with someone—and finding that that's ok with them." ~ Alain de Botton

2014/05/31 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I had some words with my wife, and she had some paragraphs with me." ~ Anonymous

(2) Modern Persian music: Shahrzad Sepanlou sings "**Osyan**" ("Rebellion").

(3) [Put on your thinking cap] True or false: It is impossible for someone's grandfather to be younger than his father.

(4) Boeing 737 reaches a milestone: Boeing has delivered its **8000th 737**, the world's best-selling aircraft, to United Airlines. A further 3700 of the plane are on order, so the 10,000th sale will come around shortly.

(5) The paradox that is Persia: Abbas Milani's review of Iranian history in an [18-minute TEDx talk](#) aimed at changing the West's view of the country as a land ruled by angry old men to an appreciation of its rich history and cultural heritage. I take issue with one of his points, though. He mentions as a virtue the fact that Iran was one of only 6 Third World countries that were not colonized by the West. In my view, this is because the West, after gaining full control of the Persian royalty through intimidation and bribery (to the extent that Western advisers made all key economic and military decisions for the "rulers"), saw no need for colonization in the conventional sense of the term. I liked his references to the role of women in opposition to the mullahs and to "Erotic Republic" as a more apt descriptor than "Islamic Republic" for the country.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Women and men can sleep together but very few of them can stay awake together." ~ Statement attributed to Bertrand Russell, but which I could not confirm from reputable sources; anyway, this is a sobering thought, whether or not Russell expressed it.

2014/05/30 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand." ~ Henri Nouwen

(2) Things cats do that'd be [creepy if you did them](#).

(3) Persian translations of Maya Angelou's poems: This [blog post](#) contains two poems of the recently departed Maya Angelou, alongside two different translations of each poem into Persian. The translations, while of value to those who cannot read her work in English, demonstrate the inherent difficulty in trans-cultural translation of works of poetry.

(4) The Channel Tunnel is 20: On May 6, 2014, the undersea Channel Tunnel, connecting the French port town of Calais to UK's Folkestone in Kent, celebrated the [20th anniversary](#) of the first train trip through it by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and French president Francois Mitterrand.

(5) Anti-sex-trafficking efforts suffer a set-back: A [Newsweek report](#), exposing fabrication of stories by Cambodian activist Somaly Mam and someone closely associated with her, [has forced Mam to resign](#) from the Somaly Mam Foundation. It is unfortunate that people try to embellish already horrifying stories for short-term gains in fundraising.

(6) Final thought for the day: "There's nothing more intimate in life than simply being understood. And understanding someone else." ~ Brad Meltzer, *The Inner Circle*

2014/05/29 (Thu.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Legendary author/poet/activist [Maya Angelou dead at 86](#): Like Nelson Mandela, she endured hardships beyond compare and yet remained compassionate, hopeful, and courageous. Angelou was widely honored with awards for her literary work and for her positive influence on multiple generations of artists and political activists. Her passing is a great loss for literature and for the world.

(2) TV program addresses climate change: In a segment of the Fox series "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey," to air in our area on Fox 11 on Sunday 6/1, 9:00-10:00 PM, Neil deGrasse Tyson tells the story of how a runaway greenhouse effect devastated Venus and then addresses [climate change](#) on our own planet.

(3) Mark Zuckerberg summoned to Iranian court: According to [BBC Persian](#), a judge in Iran's Fars province has ruled that "the Zionist Facebook manager or his attorney must appear in court to defend his actions and face retribution." The ruling cites invasion of users' privacy through WhatsApp and Instagram applications, which have been ordered blocked or removed. [[Continuation](#), in English.]

(4) Here is what I am telling my students in the first meeting of each of my classes held in the wake of the 5/23 Isla Vista mass murders:

I am very sorry about what happened to the UCSB community on Friday, May 23rd. Remember that the entire campus is grieving and we are all in this together. Two of the six slain students were studying computer engineering and one was in computer science. So, our College of Engineering took a particularly hard hit. Please don't hesitate to call on me if I can be of any assistance. I am not a trained counselor, but I can listen to your concerns and direct you to a professional, if needed.

We come to this classroom to learn about computer engineering. But, in the grand scheme of things, what we do in the realm of technology is quite insignificant compared with our roles in society and in relation to our fellow human beings. We can do more good as parents, spouses, mentors, or friends, than we can do as engineers. We can be of service or do harm, regardless of our economic means, intelligence, and training. Let's give priority to our humanity over our technical expertise in supporting our fellow Gauchos as they tussle with this tragedy, reaching out to our own families and loved ones who may be worried about our safety, and helping any human being we are fortunate to meet. Thank you.

2014/05/28 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "You know, when a man is raped you never hear about what he was wearing." ~ George Takei

(2) On gun culture and gun violence: After the killing of 6 UCSB students by a Santa Barbara City College student in Isla Vista, some NRA types are using the fact that the killer stabbed 3 students to death before beginning to shoot with automatic pistols, ultimately killing 3 more and wounding 13, to claim that guns are no more dangerous than other weapons. Well, it turns out that the killer stabbed 3 housemates to death according to a carefully devised plan. He planned to kill dozens, perhaps hundreds, with his pistols (the 400 unspent rounds in his car constitute evidence that he did not intend to kill only a handful of people). In his writings, he had hinted at beginning his rampage with quiet killings. This makes perfect sense, because had he shot his housemates to death, he might not have succeeded in carrying out the rest of his evil plans. We are extremely lucky that his plans were cut short. Using the fact that as many people died from stabbings as from gunshot wounds to defend unrestricted gun ownership is disingenuous at best. And we must not forget the misogynistic aspects of the gunman's twisted mind.

(3) Houshang Seyhoun, famed Iranian architect **dead at 93**: He designed many important monuments in Iran and lived in exile in Vancouver near the end of his life.

(4) Final thought for the day: "In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit." ~ Albert Schweitzer

(5) A classic poem about irregularities in the English language: **The poem "Chaos"** was written in 1922 by Gerard Nolst Trenite (1870-1946) to catalog about 800 irregularities of English spelling and pronunciation.

2014/05/27 (Tue.): UCSB is in mourning: The **tragic events of last Friday night** in Isla Vista that led to the murder of 6 UCSB students by a gunman, who also took his own life, have prompted the campus administration to cancel classes today and to hold various events to honor the dead and to help their friends and other members of the UCSB family properly grieve their loss. We have learned that two of 3 engineering students stabbed to death at the gunman's residence before he went on a shooting rampage were studying computer engineering: Cheng-Yuan James Hong (20), a senior, and Weihan David Wang (20), a junior. Although I don't remember either of these students, I do teach a large required freshman seminar every spring that they must have taken 2-3 years ago. The third engineering student was George Chen (20, computer science major). The three shooting victims were Katherine Cooper (22, art history & classics), Veronika Weiss (19, financial math & statistics), and Christopher Ross Michael-Martinez (20, undeclared). An all-day vigil at the College of Engineering was followed by a large gathering of all UCSB affiliates at Harder Stadium, beginning at 4:00 PM.

The late afternoon **memorial service** for the slain students was attended by 20,000+ people. Harder Stadium, often host to joyful events such as soccer games and concerts, was filled to capacity (bleachers completely full and a good part of the field also occupied). The program opened with the bells of Storke Tower and UCSB Young Artist String Quartet. Following interfaith reflections from religious leaders of Isla Vista, Chancellor Henry Yang, UC President Janet Napolitano, and UC Board of Regents Chair Bruce D. Varner spoke effectively and compassionately, promising students full support from the University in their grieving process. UCSB students were represented by Associated Students President Ali Guthy, the parents of the victims by Richard Martinez, and the faculty by Academic Senate Chair Kum-Kum Bavnani, all of whom suggested that as hard as this is for us, we should focus not on the loss but on continuing the legacy of the lost students (some of their interests and extracurricular contributions were outlined). Martinez asked those in attendance who agreed with his stance on gun control to chant "not one more" so loud that they can be heard in Washington. The crowd was indeed loud in its support. Two student a cappella groups performed beautiful songs and the program closed with final interfaith remarks.

The memorial was an impressive display of unity, friendship, and mutual support on the part of UCSB community. I went there expecting to feel gloomy and desolate. Instead, I came back energized and hopeful. Various other ceremonies and commemorations, including a memorial wall in Isla Vista, are planned. Aranye Fradenburg, UCSB Professor of History and Comparative Literature, has **written to our students** in the wake of the Isla Vista mass murders.

2014/05/25 (Sun.): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Tragedy strikes our town: Friday night's **shooting near UCSB** was a premeditated mass murder (my family and I are safe, but in shock): The gunman and 6 others are dead, with at least 6 hospitalized due to gunshot wounds or traumatic injuries. The gunman, tentatively identified as Santa Barbara City College student Elliot Rodger, had posted a **YouTube video**, taped on Thursday, in which he talks about "day of retribution" for his "loneliness, rejection, and unfulfilled desires." He wanted to punish "spoiled girls" who rejected him. CNN had live coverage from Isla Vista throughout yesterday.

(2) Some thoughts on Friday's mass murder: I am slowly coming out of the shock created by Friday night's mass murder near UCSB (at a spot that is midway between my home and my campus office, along a path that I walk daily), I will try to put my thoughts together in this post. Mass murders happen everywhere, but they hit harder when the streets whose names you hear on the news are the ones where you walk daily, and businesses that are mentioned as shooting sites are where you stop on the way home to pick up a loaf of bread, some cream cheese, or a snack. Those killed, or those who witnessed the death of a friend by their side, may be students in one of my classes (names of victims have not been released). The chilling YouTube video, in which the gunman talks about "day of retribution," apparently to punish those who dared to leave him a virgin at age 22, is said to be the last one in a series of rants and threats, that either went unnoticed or else were ignored. People this sick aren't hard to spot, if only those around them care and pay attention. In the aftermath of this horrible tragedy, we will probably see a week or so of talking heads on TV proposing gun control and others opposing it, repeating the same old slogan that "guns don't kill, people do." They may even attack Obamacare for not doing a good job of dealing with the mentally ill. Then everyone forgets about it, until the next mass shooting. I wish things were different, but ... Dealing with mental illness and making access to guns more difficult are two fronts that should be pursued at the same time. If we can intervene before a mentally ill person commits such a crime, then great. But if we can't, or miss the signs, that person cannot create so much carnage with a knife or a baseball bat.

(3) My Family's 2014 Reunion: The Parhami Family had its 4th annual reunion today in Ventura, CA. This enjoyable and energizing event was hosted by my sisters Behnaz and Farnaz Parhami. We took several group photos. The one on the left shows nearly all attendees. We also took separate photos of the family's 4th generation, the group being introduced and honored this year. About half of the 68 members of the generation attended the reunion. Most absent members are scattered in various regions of the world. Our generation count begins with my grandparents, who assumed the name "Parhami" in Kurdistan province, when the government of Iran began issuing identity cards to all citizens. A couple of 5th-generation members have sneaked in with their parents and two 3rd-generation members, who are expecting the next member of the 4th generation in 4 months, are sitting in the front.



2014/05/24 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day (rather long, but worth reading and thinking about): "There's a worm in the street, you walk by it. Does the worm know that you think you're smart? The worm has no concept of your smarts. Because you're that much smarter than the worm. So the worm has no idea that something smart is walking by it. Which makes me wonder whether we have any concept—if a super species walked by us. Maybe they're uninterested in us because we're too stupid for them to even imagine having a conversation. You don't walk by worms and go 'Gee I wonder what the worm is thinking.' This is just not a thought that you have! So one of the best pieces of evidence for why we haven't been visited by aliens is that they have actually observed us, and concluded there is no intelligent sign of life on earth." ~ Neil deGrasse Tyson

(2) Beautiful songs and performances never get old: Andrea Bocelli sings "**Quizas, Quizas, Quizas**" in a romantic setting. Here is the same song, **performed with Jennifer Lopez**. For Bocelli fans: Several full concerts of his are available on YouTube (search for "Bocelli full concert" and you'll get them; such posts tend to disappear after a while due to copyright enforcement).

(3) A beautiful **photo from Uppsala**, Sweden, that resembles an exquisite painting.

(4) A new photo post on the Facebook page "Stealthy Freedoms of Iranian Women" **includes a sign** that reads: "I am an Iranian woman and I believe in hijab, but I abhor mandatory hijab laws."

(5) Threats of rape for women who ignore mandatory hijab laws: An Islamic regime that feels increasingly powerless in the face of **overt and covert anti-hijab acts** by Iranian women has resorted to threats to try to control the outburst. Several news outlets closely tied to the regime have suggested that if going hijabless is a women's right, then sexual assault is the right of men who are "provoked" by hijabless women. The wording of the various threats is different, but they all amount to the same thing: wear your hijab or else we will unleash

the thugs on you. This line of thinking about women isn't new. A few years ago when a number of women were assaulted at a private party by intruders, a local religious leader said that the women's clothing and actions (referring to dancing) were to blame. Good to see that the Iranian regime isn't heeding the advice: "when in a hole, stop digging!" By all means, continue to dig!

(6) Shootings in Isla Vista, with multiple fatalities: It seems that our peaceful town is being transformed into the crime capital of southern California right in front of our eyes. Memories of April 2014 riots and multiple sexual assaults in recent months are still quite fresh in our area.

2014/05/23 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Antisocial networking (or is it social antinetworking?): Well, it was bound to happen! There is now an **antisocial app** that helps you avoid, rather than connect with, other people. :)

(2) Guns are not children's toys: How many accidents are needed to impress this point on gun-crazed people? I saw some suggestions on-line that **this viral video** is a fake. However, given the way in which the firing knocks down the toddler and testimony from some commenters that it is indeed common in some countries to take guns to weddings so as to celebrate by firing in the air, I am convinced of its veracity.

(3) Vocal ranges of world's most prominent singers: Topping **the list** is Axl Rose [F1-Bb6], followed by Mariah Carey [F2-G7]. At the bottom, we see Luke Bryan [A2-A4] and Taylor Swift [E3-F#5], with Justin Bieber and Katy Perry only a few notches up. [The article uses "greatest singers" in its title, but some of those listed aren't so great; hence my title "most prominent singers."]

(4) These North Korean generals seem to have run out of space for medals on their jackets, so they have put several on their pants! I wonder what kinds of bravery have earned them all these medals. :)

(5) Stealthy freedoms of Iranian women (continued): I am sorry to see this **Facebook page**, where Iranian women post scarfless photos, personal stories, and viewpoints, come under attack. As far as I can tell, there are three distinct reasons for disliking the page. One group objects to the fact that it makes the opposition of Iranian women to hijab laws seem new and covert, whereas women have been opposing these laws openly and continuously since hijab was made mandatory more than three decades ago. This group also thinks that the page trivializes the opposition to hijab laws. Another kind of objection comes from a dislike for the administrator of the page, journalist Masih Alinejad, who is a sympathizer of Iran's reformist (green) movement. Because reformists accept the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic, including its religious basis and founder, they are not seen as genuine believers in women's equality. A third group views the page as a trap, designed to identify people who oppose the Islamic regime. I personally see some validity to the first two objections and reject the third one. I view the opposition expressed by women, who expose their hair in photos, post viewpoints, and add personal stories, as positive steps in the direction of reclaiming women's rights in Iran. Of course once women are deemed equal to men, the bigger step is to ensure that both sexes enjoy true human rights.

2014/05/22 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) What animal is this? If you said parrot, as most people do, look more carefully at the parrot's tail, which is in fact a woman's leg.

(2) Quote of the day: "I don't have an issue with what you do in the church, but I'm going to be up in your face if you are going to knock on my science classroom and tell me they've got to teach what you're teaching in your Sunday school. Because that's when we're going to fight." ~ Physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson

(3) The long-dead Michael Jackson sang a new song at the Billboard Music Awards: We are told that it wasn't an impersonator or a hologram. The **mystery technology** that allowed the placement of live performers alongside a number of avatars is part of a publicity campaign for a just-released posthumous album of new MJ songs.

[The video has been removed from other sites and it may happen here too.]

(4) The right to be forgotten: A European Union court has told Google that it should not return old information during searches, because such information may no longer be relevant. It seems that for the first time in human history, we have too much memory, so instead of working hard to be remembered by posterity, we must now beg to be forgotten. I, for one, question the wisdom of **the recent ruling**. It's one thing to restrict what kinds of information can be made available on-line and publicly searchable. The decision is based on privacy expectations and norms. However, once something is made public, saying that after 7 years, or 10 years, or some other length of time it should be ignored by search engines does not make sense to me.

(5) Iranian sangak bakers are happy: Islamic Republic police authorities are probably working to identify and locate these **two happy guys**. :)



(6) My World Cup calendar: I have entered the [entire TV broadcast schedule](#) of the 2014 World Cup soccer games on my Google calendar. In the early part of the tournament (round-robin group matches), there are 3-4 games daily, mostly on ESPN between 11:30 AM and 8:00 PM ET, with a few matches on ABC and ESPN2. Luckily for me, the first day of the tournament is a couple of days after my final exam, so I will be able to watch many of the matches. The first three must-watch games for me are the Iran-Nigeria and Ghana-US matches on 6/16 and the Argentina-Iran match on 6/21. The first serious test for the US team will come on 6/22 against Portugal.

2014/05/21 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I don't have an issue with what you do in the church, but I'm going to be up in your face if you are going to knock on my science classroom and tell me they've got to teach what you're teaching in your Sunday school. Because that's when we're going to fight." ~ Physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson

(2) Popularity of given names over time: At this [time.com page](#), you can enter names and get a plot of how they have varied in popularity since 1880 (up to 6 names can be compared side by side). It also predicts the names' popularity for the next few decades. For example, "Margaret," which was quite popular in the 1910s and 1920s but has been out of favor over the past 4 decades, is predicted to peak again around 2035.

(3) A cruiseship is cut in the middle to extend its length by inserting a prefabricated piece and reconnecting the three pieces. [[3-minute timelapse video](#)]

(4) Rape on college campuses: This is the subject of a cover feature in *Time* magazine, issue of May 26, 2014. It seems that in their efforts to project a better image to attract students and to ease the minds of parents, colleges have been doing a poor job of alerting female students of the widespread problem (1 in 5 women experience sexual assault while in college) and have tended to sweep incidents under the proverbial rug. The reporting, counseling, and disciplinary procedures need a great deal of work. [No link, because the content is available to subscribers only]

(5) Trigger warnings: A [New York Times story](#) covers student-driven initiatives that would require colleges to take student sensitivities into account when presenting material in class that may offend or upset them. "Colleges across the country this spring have been wrestling with student requests for ... explicit alerts that the material they are about to read or see in a classroom might upset them or, as some students assert, cause symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in victims of rape or in war veterans." UCSB, which is at the forefront of this movement, is featured prominently in the report. This battle between free-speech advocates and those who believe there is a limit to free speech when war atrocities, torture, rape, and similarly traumatic events are discussed or shown in classrooms will likely heat up over the next few months and has the potential of going all the way to the US Supreme Court.

(6) Iranians no longer so "Happy": According to BBC Persian, Iranian police authorities have reported of the [identification and arrest](#) of all youngsters who made the Iranian version of dancing to Pharrell Williams' "Happy," as has been done around the world.

2014/05/20 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When did you start caring about the brain fitness of those who occupy the Oval Office?" ~ Jon Stewart, addressing Carl Rove's assertion that Hillary Clinton may be unfit for presidency, because a nasty fall she had may have led to brain injury

(2) Celebrating 40 years of Rubik Cube: Yesterday's [Google doodle](#) was an interactive Rubik Cube whose faces could be rotated by dragging the mouse, making it quite addictive.

(3) Brilliantly designed [convertible furniture](#) for small apartments.

(4) The long-dead Michael Jackson sang a new song at the Billboard Music Awards: We are told that it wasn't an impersonator or a hologram. The [mystery technology](#) that allowed the placement of live performers alongside a number of avatars is part of a publicity campaign for a just-released posthumous album of new MJ songs.

(5) Unprecedented speech on telecommunications and information technology by Iran's President Rouhani: He boldly and directly contradicts Supreme Leader Khamenei by saying that Iran cannot stop the march of social media and cyberconnectivity through censorship. He advocates a proactive rather than a defensive approach to combatting cultural invasion. He also talks about the end of one-way communication and of the "tyranny of the message." Live broadcasting of the speech was cut short by Iran's national radio and TV network. Now, whether he has the will or the means to follow through on fixing the problems he enumerates is a different story! What he says reminds me a lot of Khatami, who ultimately proved powerless to implement any changes. [[37-minute video](#)]

(6) Final thought for the day: "I am driven by two philosophies: know more today about the world than I knew yesterday and lessen the suffering of others. You'd be surprised how far that gets you." ~ Physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson

2014/05/19 (Mon.): Keillor, Garrison, *Homegrown Democrat: A Few Plain Thoughts from the Heart of America*, unabridged audiobook on 4 CDs, read by the author, HighBridge Audio, 2004.

The author, best known for his radio program "Prairie Home Companion" and a book of the same title, turned into a 2006 movie starring Meryl Streep, rails at certain hypocritical conservatives, using beautifully chosen examples and his unique style of humor. Keillor is a regular visitor to the UCSB campus and Santa Barbara, but so far I have not been able to attend any of his lectures/readings; perhaps next time. He is also a regular staple at NPR, and this is how I got to know him and decided to borrow this audiobook from our local public library.

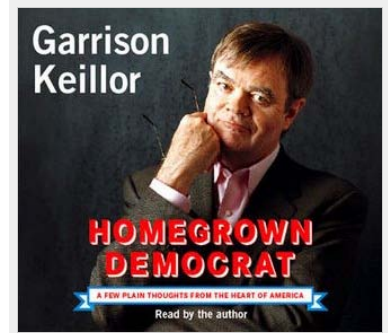
Keillor sings the praises of liberalism, which he defines as "the politics of kindness." At the very beginning of the book, he says that he became a Democrat not by choice, but simply owing to the way he was brought up, starting with the two ideas of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and "[y]ou are not so different from other people so don't give yourself airs."

He talks about the Midwest's "democracy of flatness," where "there simply aren't so many hills for rich people to live on top of." Keillor lives in Minnesota in part because the social compact is still intact there, "despite Republicans trying to pound it out of us." He praises the St. Paul Fire Department for its caring emergency personnel and speedy service, something he experienced personally, and contrasts this with Republicans who are for school prayers and sanctity of marriage, but if you need help, they might send an ambulance or a get-well card.

Keillor reminds Americans of all the good things they owe to the Democratic Party, including civil rights, women's rights, and clean air and water. He also points out the limitations of free enterprise and personal responsibility, pet notions of the conservatives.

Keillor misses "the other GOP," the one that existed as he was growing up, that wasn't so hostile to the idea of public service and a sense of community. "Forget all the political jabber and gossip, all the theoretical balderdash and horse feathers, here is reality: the river rises up in its power and majesty, and the people rise up in theirs, and while one can only do so much, you must do that much, and we did. None of the news reports captured the reality of that event, which was the spirit of the crowd, of which I was one. An experience that warms a Democrat's heart, a scene from *Grapes of Wrath*, or the crossing of the Red Sea."

You can read a sample of *Homegrown Democrat* (Chapters 1-4, 55 pp.) for free on [this Web page](#). Much of the charm of this audiobook, a mix of political manifesto and memoir, is in Keillor's reading style. If you decide to peruse some of his writings, please make sure one of them is an audiobook read by him.



2014/05/18 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) A wonderful Rumi poem: I have been searching for the original Persian version of this poem ever since I saw a translation of it some time ago. Today, I found it by accident on my Facebook Newsfeed, because a dear friend had liked someone else's post of the poem. Those who do not read Persian can see [this English translation](#).

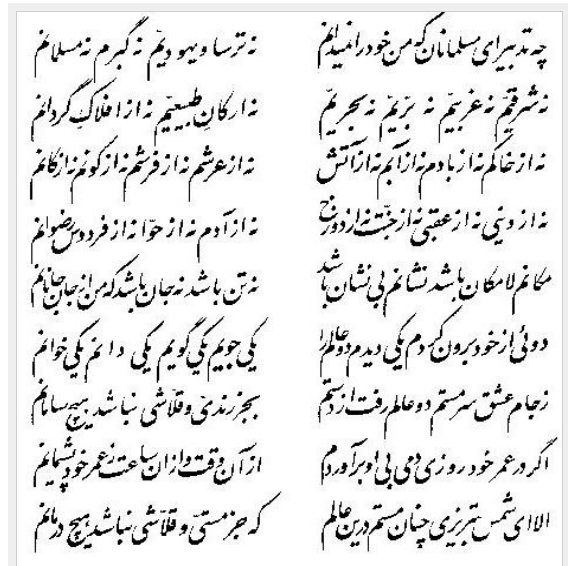
(2) Quote of the day: "Reading a great novel is like talking to the dead. There is no need for a psychic. When you read the words of a dead or absent master, they sound in your brain and he or she is present in the room." ~ Phyllis Rose, *The Shelf: Adventures in Extreme Reading*

(3) Modern Persian music: The talented Pallet group performs "[Delam Mikhahadat](#)" ("My Heart Desires You").

(4) This is my first, and perhaps the last, [dog video](#) posting; it impressed me so much!

(5) An enjoyable [9-minute video](#) featuring music by Strauss: Conducting the orchestra is 7-year-old Edward Yudenich from Uzbekistan.

(6) Iran, one of the subjects of tonight's "60 Minutes": Those of you who watch the CBS newsmagazine "60 Minutes" on Sundays may be interested to know that in [tonight's program](#), Steve Kroft reports from Iran on the prospects of a nuclear deal.



2014/05/17 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Nerdy illustration of a famous Persian verse by Hafez.

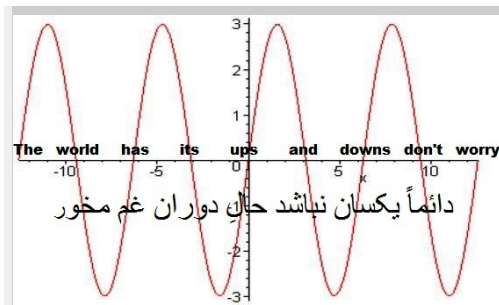
(2) Quote of the day: "It is not what you do for your children, but what you taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings." ~ Ann Landers

(3) Debunking 8 **pseudoscientific climate claims**: Data cherry-picking, confusing long-term projections with short-term predictions, and other sins of climate change deniers.

(4) Solo piano performance: Shirin (aka ahang1001) performs "**The Godfather Waltz**" or "The Godfather Theme," a Nino Rota composition.

(5) Leila Hatami, Cannes juror: In a photo taken at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, Iranian actress Leila Hatami looks fabulous **wearing a compromise outfit** (not too revealing and definitely not too Islamic).

(6) Final thought for the day: "You don't love someone for their looks, or their clothes, or for their fancy car, but because they sing a song only you can hear." ~ Oscar Wilde



2014/05/16 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The Facebook page "**Stealthy Freedoms of Iranian Women**" continues to attract photos and sobering personal stories. Go Iranian women! I admire your courage and feel your pain.

(2) **High-speed Beijing-US train** being planned by China: The 8000-mile (13,000-km) railroad goes north from Beijing and enters North America via a 125-mile (200-km) tunnel under Bering Strait, the longest undersea tunnel project ever (by a factor of 4). Negotiations with Russia are underway to secure the rights for trains to go through Siberia.

(3) We need more tech savvy judges like Lucy H. Koh: Yesterday, I posted a quote about how the US Supreme Court justices' distaste for modern technology affects the quality of their decisions on privacy issues pertaining to personal electronic gadgets. **This story** is about a Silicon Valley US District Court judge, who has ruled competently and intelligently on a number of major tech cases, including the landmark patent fight between Apple and Samsung. One of her rulings forced Google to make its privacy policy more transparent. She has also handled similar LinkedIn and Yahoo! cases about privacy policies.

(4) Voice-activated-elevator prank: This **13-minute video** of "Intelevator" contains an elaborate set of pranks, most of which are quite funny. For example, there is the quiz version of the elevator that takes you up one floor for every correct answer to questions and back down one floor for every wrong answer.

(5) A treasure trove of Persian poetry: **This collection** is indexed by poet names and is supposed to be searchable for words and phrases, although my attempts at doing so failed multiple times. Perhaps there is a transient bug that will go away soon.

(6) Final thought for the day (from the pages of history): "We Germans won a gold medal, the Americans three, of which two were Negroes. That is a disgrace." ~ Joseph Goebbels, writing in his diary after the second day of the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin [**Photo** showing Jesse Owens saluting the US flag.]

2014/05/15 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) : Quote of the day: "With an average age of nearly 70 years, no one expects the justices to be regular users of technology ... However, the perception that the members of the Court simply do not understand the basic workings or culture surrounding the use of technology has many observers worried about whether the highest court in the land is unprepared or unwilling to make truly informed rulings on today's pressing Constitutional issues that are impacted by technology." ~ Keith Kirkpatrick, writing in *Communications of the ACM*, issue of May 2014, about how technology confounds and clouds the judgment of US Supreme Court justices, some of whom have publicly admitted to being resistant to using technology in their own professional and personal lives

(2) A mathematical puzzle: If n is an integer, show that $n + 3$ and $n^2 + 3$ cannot both be perfect cubes. [From *IEEE Potentials* magazine issue of June 2014.]

(3) Wildfires are raging in southern California: Extremely hot weather, high winds, and an ongoing drought have led to **a number of wildfires** around San Diego and elsewhere, months before the traditional fire season. Dozens of homes have been destroyed and vast areas are being evacuated.

(4) Columbians **recite poetry and sing in Persian**: Students of Dr. Bahador Bagheri, who have learned Persian from him, sing a song made famous by Mohammad Reza Shajarian.

(5) Iranian women enjoy stealthy freedoms: Over the years, Iranian women have shown their distaste for mandatory hijab laws. A new trend in fighting these inhumane laws is taking off headscarves and posting hijab-free photos and videos on **this Facebook page** (liked by 170K people so far). This is a brave act of protest, but I do hope that women posting photos on this page don't get in trouble, given that the Islamic Republic officials routinely monitor social media posts and other forms of electronic communication.

(6) California statewide fire map shows **9 active fires** at this time, 8 of which are located in the south, between Mission Viejo and La Jolla.

2014/05/13 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. ... You don't have to compromise convictions to be compassionate." ~ Rick Warren

(2) Sharif Univ. of Technology Assoc. (SUTA) reunion, Milan, Italy, 1-3 August 2014: In case some of the SUT affiliates (graduates, former students, former and current faculty members, etc.) among the readers of this page did not know about the forthcoming reunion event in Milan, I am providing a [link to SUTA's Web site](#), where you can find info on the reunion and other activities. I will be in Milan from July 31 to August 5, returning on 8/6.

(3) A mathematical puzzle: A car travels downhill at 72 mph, on level ground at 63 mph, and uphill at 56 mph. The car takes 4 hours to travel from town A to town B, with the return trip along the same road taking 4 hours and 40 minutes. What is the distance from A to B? [From *IEEE Potentials* magazine, June 2014.]

(4) "Star Wars" returns to its roots: After a set of 3 prequels (1999, 2002, 2005) to the original "Star Wars" trilogy (1977, 1980, 1983), plans are afoot for sequels, rumored to be set some 30 years after the original story. This would allow the producers to bring the original cast back. Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill are said to have already signed on, and Harrison Ford's return is a real possibility. The most exciting prospect for me is the return of 82-year-old John Williams as composer. Williams has many brilliant film scores to his credit, but his musical score for "Star Wars" is truly remarkable. [Info from *Entertainment Weekly*, May 16, 2014.]

(5) Toyless Indian children play with snake: This **1-minute video** is difficult to watch, even though one knows that the king cobra has been defanged.

2014/05/11 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Honoring moms throughout the day: A mother's love is unconditional, unwavering, and unforgettable. **Happy Mothers' Day** to my loving mom and to all the mothers among my friends and acquaintances! I have been reading messages about Mothers' Day on Facebook since this morning. It is heartwarming to see such an outpouring of love and respect towards mothers.

(2) Quote of the day: "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

(3) Art on the beach: **3D sand drawings**.

(4) Poll on the well-being of college graduates: A new **Gallup/Purdue survey**, the largest of its kind, has gauged the well-being of college graduates; not just their material success in terms of jobs and incomes, but also their emotional and social contentment. One surprising conclusion of the study is that the type of college attended (public, private, small, large, Ivy League, etc.) has virtually no effect on the graduates' overall well-being.

(5) It's always sunny in space: This is the title of a **feature article** in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine (issue of May 2014) about Japan's ambitious plans for a space-based solar power industry. In space, we can harvest 10 times as much solar energy as on earth, given the absence of day-night cycles, seasonal variations, or weather conditions. The microwave technology for transferring the collected energy from space to earth is partly in place and will be further developed within the project. The ramp-up plan calls for a 1-kW experimental satellite by 2017, 100 kW by 2021, 2 MW by 2024, 200 MW by 2028, and a full-scale 1 GW power station by 2031. By 2037, a commercial space-based solar power industry will be in place, which will pursue a one-launch-per-year plan.

2014/05/10 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." ~ C. S. Lewis

(2) A beautiful **photo of NYC**.

(3) If the moon were replaced with some of our planets: **How would the planets look** if they were as close to us as the moon?

(4) Mehdi Ghadyanloo's playful street art in Tehran: With the help of the municipality, the artist is brightening up building walls, having painted over 100 of them in the past 5 years. Several of his amazingly creative works are featured on [this page](#).

(5) Rumi faulted for his poem "Moses and the Shepherd": The entire world admires Rumi (Mowlavi), but mullah Mohsen Ghara'ati **criticizes him** for his "un-Islamic" poem, in which God teaches Moses a lesson in faith and humility. This is an excellent example of getting drunk from power. No sober person would dare insult one of his country's respected poets and scholars.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." ~ C. S.

Lewis

2014/05/09 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." ~ Aristotle
- (2) Pottery hotel in South Korea: Guest units in this hotel are shaped like [giant pottery pieces](#).
- (3) Pundits literally fight over differences: Jordanian TV's [political discussion](#) of freedoms and Arab Spring turns ugly, as pundits begin physical fight.
- (4) In search of earth-like planets: This is the title of a ["Point of View" article](#) in *Proceedings of the IEEE* (Vol. 102, No. 5, pp. 643-645, May 2014) by my friend, and old college classmate, Dr. Faramarz Davarian of JPL. This highly readable and informative article discusses what it means to find life outside our Earth and the Solar System.
- (5) On Facebook friendships: Dozens of versions of the sentiment expressed in [this image](#) are being posted to Facebook and elsewhere. In one instance, I posted a comment that I want to share with you. Here it is: "I agree, to a point. In my opinion, expressing some personal thoughts and revealing a bit about our personalities, hobbies, family life, and the like is needed on Facebook. After all, there is a reason Facebook connections are called "friends." Friendship requires some closeness and trust, which is not produced by mere expression of political opinions and posting of news stories, valuable as they are."
- (6) Final thought for the day: "The only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. And if everybody has guns, chances are that at least one of them is good." ~ Stephen Colbert, poking fun at the NRA response to calls for stricter gun controls

2014/05/08 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Blindness separates people from things; deafness separates people from people." ~ Helen Keller
- (2) Michelle Obama gets involved in publicizing the plight of the [kidnapped Nigerian girls](#).
- (3) Centimeter-scale GPS coming to Japan: Current GPS positioning systems suffer from errors of as much as 10 meters and don't work when the sky view is blocked by skyscrapers or mountains. A system to be deployed in Japan by 2018 will solve both problems, according to [IEEE Spectrum](#), issue of May 2014.
- (4) Pocket molecular sensor: An Israeli start-up company has built the world's first molecular sensor that fits in the palm of your hand. When aimed at any object (food, medicine, plant, and more), it gives you information about its [chemical composition](#).
- (5) Santa Barbara's guitar maker: The construction of musical instruments has always fascinated me. The latest issue of *Santa Barbara Sentinel* features Guitarist and guitar maker Robert Carbonaro, shown at work in this [3-minute video](#). For more info, and lots of photos, see [this Facebook page](#).
- (6) A geographical puzzle: You may have seen the puzzle about a man walking 1 mile south, then 1 mile east, and finally 1 mile north and ending up at the exact point where he started. The standard answer is that the man was at the North Pole. Where else on earth could the man have been? [From *IEEE Potentials* magazine, issue of June 2014.]

2014/05/07 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest on women's rights.

- (1) Quote of the day: "A state that does not educate and train women is like a man who only trains his right arm." ~ Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*
- (2) More atrocities against women in the name of Islam: An Al-Qaeda-affiliated group in Nigeria has kidnapped hundreds of girls and [threatened to sell them](#) "in the market." So far, there has been no condemnation of this act from Islamic leaders in Iran or elsewhere.
- (3) Turkish women tell men to close their legs: This is a [public-relations campaign](#) to prevent men from violating women's personal spaces on public transport and elsewhere.
- (4) Hidden sexism: Have you noticed that of former and potential future US presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton is the only one mentioned in Facebook posts and many news stories by first name alone? As a small gesture to demonstrate commitment to equal rights, please refer to her as Hillary Clinton or H. Clinton.
- (5) Final thought for the day: "There could be a powerful international women's rights movement if only philanthropists would donate as much to real women as to paintings and sculptures of women." ~ Nicholas D. Kristof

2014/05/06 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "It is better to be an optimist who is sometimes wrong than a pessimist who is always right." ~ Anonymous
- (2) Iran's World Cup history: This [12-minute FIFA video](#) traces the history of Iran's participation in soccer World Cup tournaments.
- (3) Say "ya Ali" or "ya Zahra" tonight and go for having 14 children (5, at the very least): [This mullah says](#)

that the Shah-era slogan "fewer children, for a better life," advocated by some gullible people even after the Islamic revolution, is shameful and must not be heeded.

(4) Man "accidentally" shoots and kills his 11-year-old nephew: He was showing his gun collection to his son and the nephew and decided to **demonstrate the laser sight** on a gun by pointing it at the victim's forehead. What a smart thing to do! And, of course, the Second Amendment gives everyone the right to point a loaded gun at a kid for demonstration!

(5) Detecting life on Mars: Research at the Int'l Space Station has revealed that some microorganisms can survive for up to 18 months in space. Given that spacecrafts landing on Mars take less than 18 months to get there, scientists must exercise care not to confuse Earth microorganisms that **hitched a ride to Mars** with possible lifeforms on Mars.

(6) Circus tragedy: In an attempt to outdo previous stunts, circus performers are putting themselves in dire danger. **Nine acrobatic performers were hurt**, some seriously, when the apparatus from which they were hanging by their hairs collapsed and plunged 30 feet to the ground.

2014/05/04 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Innovation for tea lovers: Tea kettle with five spouts.

(2) The human condition in the year 02008: No, the extra 0 isn't a typo. Our year 2008 is referred to as 02008 by the **Long Now Foundation** that has prepared a 2008 snapshot of human culture and civilization for those who will live tens of thousands of years after us. In order to avoid format compatibility and readability problems, the optical archive is micro-etched on both sides of a disk that carries 13,000 pages of information in 1500 human languages.



(3) Four quotes over the years from the recently passed author Gabriel Garcia Marquez (taken from *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of May 2, 2014):

"Tell him yes. Even if you are dying of fear, even if you are sorry later, because whatever you do, you will be sorry the rest of your life if you say no." *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985)

"I'll never fall in love again ... it's like having two souls at the same time." *The General in His Labyrinth* (1989)

"No medicine cures what happiness cannot." *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994)

"Nobody can take away the dances you've already had." *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* (2004)

(4) Man and elephant play **duet on piano**: The piano needs some serious tuning now.

(5) Final thought for the day: "A recent study has found that women who carry a little extra weight live longer than the men who mention it." ~ Anonymous

2014/05/03 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Ziba Shirazi sings "**Baazgasht**" ("The Return"), accompanied by Danny on taar and Farid on guitar.

(2) Four-year-old "accidentally" shoots and kills his one-year-old brother: How is this an accident, when three children 4 and under are left unsupervised, with a **loaded gun in a drawer**?

(3) Bahareh Hedayat writes from Evin Prison: In response to the recent violence against political detainees, a brave prisoner **speaks up**.

(4) World's largest floating structure: Nearly 500m long and 75m wide, the larger-than-an-aircraft-carrier structure, being built by Samsung Heavy Industries, will drill for and liquefy natural gas, transferring the final product directly to tankers, with no need for terrestrial pipelines. About 30 such projects are afoot worldwide, including 14 in the US and 6 in Canada. **[Image]**

(5) Taar maestro Mohammad Reza Lotfi dead at 68: **He passed away in Tehran** after a long battle with cancer. **This video** shows him playing kamancheh alongside Sepideh Meshki on sehtaar, with Alireza Shahmohammadi singing. **This performance on taar** demonstrates Lotfi's improvisational skills.

(6) The meaning of apartheid: I have seen several calls for the resignation of the US Secretary of State John Kerry, or for his issuing an apology, because he used the word "apartheid" to describe the current Israeli treatment of its Arab population as second-class citizens. Looking up the word on dictionary.com, I discovered that whereas it was originally used to describe the specific system of racial segregation in South Africa, it has since assumed the broader meaning, "any system or practice that separates people according to race, caste, etc." It is interesting that the use of a word has generated such an outcry, whereas starting of two wars that led to the deaths of thousands of US and Iraqi/Afghan citizens didn't elicit an equally antagonistic reaction toward the Secretary of State or the President from the same crowd.

2014/05/01 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people." ~ John F. Kennedy

(2) The Beatles' complete 2009 remastered "White Album." [[94-minute YouTube audio file](#)]

(3) City of Valencia's festival of lights: The centuries-old [Las Fallas street festival](#) in Valencia, Spain, has been recently augmented to include a lighting contest in addition to its traditional papier mache displays. The neighborhood putting up the most impressive lighting display (mostly made of LEDs) is awarded a prize.

(4) The fire season is upon us in southern California: The ongoing drought, along with an extreme heat wave and high winds, have created an explosive situation with regard to wildfires in our area. Please be careful not to start such fires accidentally and report any sighting or smell of smoke immediately.

(5) Sleaze begets sleaze: The right wing media is having a feast with remarks by NBA legend Karim Abdul-Jabbar, who had [some harsh words](#) for both the Clippers owner Donald Sterling and organizations (e.g., NAACP) and individuals who showed outrage over Sterling's racist remarks. Among other things, Abdul-Jabbar faults NAACP for accepting contributions from Sterling, even though his racist leanings were already public knowledge in view of a discrimination case pertaining to rental properties, which he settled. Abdul-Jabbar also faults Sterling's girlfriend for apparently setting up and recording her private conversation with him and supplying the tapes to the media. I accept the fact that a lot of the goings on in this case are sleazy. But remember that sleaze begets sleaze. A lot of the sleazy characters surrounding Sterling have served him well in the past and in the process, enriched him and themselves. Now, some of those sleazy characters have seen fit to get even by publicly humiliating Sterling. I won't shed any tears for Sterling, any more than I would shed tears for an Al Qaeda operative who is exposed through undercover work involving secret recordings and entrapment.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Knowing the truth, feeling the truth, and acting on the truth are three very separate entities." ~ Isabella Poretsis

2014/04/30 (Wed.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When ignorant folks want to advertise their ignorance, you don't have to do anything, you just let them talk." ~ President Barack Obama, on alleged racist remarks by Clippers owner Donald Sterling

(2) Goats having fun with a piece of sheet metal. [[1-minute video](#)]

(3) William Shatner awarded NASA's Distinguished Public Service Medal: The actor, known for his role on the "Star Trek" TV series and films, was recognized for "encouraging students to study science and math, and for inspiring generations of explorers, including many of the astronauts and engineers who are a part of NASA today." [This Web page](#) contains two videos that Shatner narrated for NASA: The story of the Space Shuttle and Curiosity's grand entrance to Mars.

(4) US colleges must take sexual assaults more seriously: The Obama administration has issued a report containing [welcome guidelines](#) for assessing the sexual assault picture on campuses and to facilitate the reporting of incidents. In the fierce competition for students, some colleges have been painting rosy pictures of campus safety for women.

(5) Final thought for the day: "There is no pleasure in having nothing to do; the fun is having lots to do and not doing it." ~ Andrew Jackson

2014/04/29 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Yesterday was the 2014 Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel: In 1949, shortly after Israel's independence, the ashes and bones of thousands of Jews were brought over from concentration camps near Munich and placed in a crypt in a Jerusalem cemetery. A day was designated to remember the atrocities. For some 3 decades, Holocaust remembrance was an Israeli affair, until the US and a few European countries began marking the occasion, on various dates. In 2005, the United Nations set aside January 27 as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Israel has made January 27 its official Day of Struggle against Anti-Semitism, but continues to observe the Holocaust on Nissan 27 of the Hebrew calendar.

(2) On affirmative action: [I posted the following comment on a discussion thread in which a couple of Facebook friends argued against the need for, and effectiveness of, affirmative action.] Affirmative action is a comprehensive program and does not consist solely of considering race or minority status in selection; although race is really a substitute for economic disadvantage (no one would consider giving President Obama's daughters preferential treatment on the basis of race). A certain performance in high school (grades, etc.) means more if the student comes from a family of 6 living in a small apartment, making it difficult to study at home. This kind of contextual info is taken into account all the time without any objection. For example, if someone volunteered in a hospital, it counts as a positive factor in admission because it represents something about the applicant's character. But, as I wrote, the selection stage is just one aspect of affirmative action. Recruitment and help with remedial subjects are perhaps more important. For example, if disadvantaged or underrepresented applicants are enrolled in a summer session prior to their freshman year, their performance improves substantially. A couple of days ago I heard on an NPR program about some colleges that send recruiters to historically black high schools to encourage their top students to apply to those colleges. It is hard

to believe, but true, that applying to selective colleges never crosses the minds of some of these exceptional students because they don't get proper guidance from school counselors or family members who know little about higher education and the student's options. Just imagine how much help a typical middle- or upper-class student receives from his/her parents in choosing where to apply and how to select a major and you'll see the difference. Finally, no one would argue against improving inner-city schools as a desirable step in closing the gaps that necessitate affirmative action.

(3) Racial prejudice in the US: [I posted the following comment on a discussion thread in which a couple of Facebook friends denied that racism is a problem in the US.] Yes, we have come a long way in eliminating racism, but we still have a long way to go. Overt racism, of the type exhibited by this fellow [owner of the Los Angeles Clippers], is no longer prevalent, but that is in part due to social norms and laws against discrimination, hate speech, and the like. But don't tell me that hidden bigotry and discomfort with interracial marriages and associations do not exist. In Germany, it wasn't Hitler who seduced people into actions leading to the Holocaust. Rather, he just exploited sentiments that already existed. If someday a racist US administration comes to power, then we will see the true extent of the hidden racism in our society.

(4) That touchy feeling: After only two days of playing on my new iPhone and iPad, I caught myself trying to scroll on my non-touch laptop by touching the screen. Oh, how quickly we change!

(5) Final thought for the day: "There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting." ~ Buddha

2014/04/28 (Mon.): Yearning for common courtesy in the world of electronic messaging [Introduction: *Newsweek* magazine used to publish a one-page weekly feature entitled "My Turn," that contained a sharply focused personal essay about something the writer had directly experienced. The column was one of the first things I read in each issue, because the essays were insightful, touching, inspiring, humorous, or all of the above. Over time, competition for the coveted column grew, with about 800 essays submitted each week and getting published there becoming a badge of honor for aspiring and experienced writers alike. So, I set a goal for myself to one day have a "My Turn" essay published. I came up with ideas, and began writing, on several occasions, but did not submit my essays because I felt the topics were not compelling enough, or my writing not polished enough, to make it through the selection process. Then, I found a topic that had a direct effect on the quality of my life and thus ignited my passion. Years passed and I never got to polish and submit my essay. Now, with *Newsweek* no longer running the column, in part because everyone can publish anything on the Internet (it's "Anyone's Turn" now), I revisited my essay and decided to prepare it for posting on my blog and on Facebook. So, here it is.]



Electronic communication, via e-mail, blogs, text-messages, and social networking sites, does not give us a license to circumvent common courtesy. Self-evident statement, you might say! But, alas, only a minority of individuals seem to embrace it. Let me tell you how I have come to this conclusion.

I buy an airline ticket or make a hotel reservation at an Internet site and end up receiving several messages per week, for months, perhaps years, about "exceptional" travel deals. I book my next trip on a different Internet site, and get messages from the new site as well. Pretty soon, a quarter of the messages in my in-box each morning are from travel sites.

I purchase a \$15 electronic gadget from an online store. Unbeknownst to me, the gadget seems to have been bundled with multiple weekly messages from that store and its "business affiliates."

I buy concert tickets for a nearby venue. The next morning, and every day thereafter, announcements for concerts throughout my state, and sometimes outside the state, pour into my mailbox.

I feel the urge to say thanks to a former professor, whose name is nowhere to be found on my alma mater's Web site. I inquire about his whereabouts from the college's alumni association and am entered into several databases, collectively sending me a dozen automated messages per week. Another college keeps putting me on new mailing lists (department's, dean's, development office's, campus bookstore's, athletic division's, arts-and-lectures', ...) faster than I can unsubscribe from them.

I am not against colleges trying to stay in touch with their alumni. A well-conceived monthly newsletter from each of the three colleges I have attended might be welcome information, but 3-4 daily messages from the said sources get on my nerves.

I make a small donation to a charitable organization and am bombarded with weekly e-mail solicitations and occasional glossy brochures, address labels, and the like, collectively costing more to produce than what I contributed. Needless to say, I do not contribute to that organization again, but their e-mail messages and address labels keep coming.

I write a technical article about a new college course that I have developed. I receive e-mail messages from entrepreneurs who ask me whether particular ideas of theirs about teaching computer engineering can be turned into money-making ventures. Not whether the ideas are socially or technically valuable, mind you; the

curiosity is only about their money-making potential.

I receive messages from Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo clients, with user names that may not even be their real names, asking me for a free copy of one of my textbooks. The requestor does not bother to introduce himself or state his affiliation. All I know is that "Jack," located somewhere on this planet, wants a free electronic copy of my textbook.

People claiming to be college instructors, again going only by their first names and anonymous e-mail addresses, request problem solutions or an instructor's solutions manual. They usually receive a referral to my publisher or the generic reply: "How do I know you are not a student trying to get the solutions to your homework assignment?"

Other anonymous communicators ask about engineering design problems, research tips, references on a specific topic, or referral to someone with a particular expertise, as if having my e-mail address entitles them to free business and technical consultation.

Interestingly, the electronic media have exacerbated the problem. I can't imagine a passerby poking his head through the door during my office hour and asking for a free book, without introducing himself, specifying why he needs the book, or indicating why he can't buy it from a bookstore.

Please consider this modest request: If you ask me for a favor, or need help from me, at the very least introduce yourself with full (real, not user) name, affiliation, whereabouts, and the reason for your request. I may then respond to your request, even if it means offering free advice or foregoing my standard hourly consulting fee. Otherwise, expect your message to be tossed along with hundreds of other unsolicited and unwelcome communications.

And please do not put me on any mailing list that I did not specifically request. If you do, I will go out of my way to avoid doing business with you or will choose to support other charitable causes.

2014/04/27 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Book burning, a precursor to people burning: The main text on this plaque in Frankfurt reads: "At this location, on May 10, 1933, National Socialist students [followers of Hitler] burned the books of writers, scientists, publicists, and philosophers." The text around the plaque reads: "That event was an omen, for where they burn books, they will eventually burn people."

(2) Quote of the day: "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." ~ Buddha

(3) US professional basketball playoffs: The NBA playoffs are currently in progress, but this year, I'm not all that interested. The Los Angeles Lakers, the team I usually cheer on, are out of action and the other Los Angeles team, the Clippers, is mired in controversy of the ugliest kind. Clippers' owner **was caught on tape** dissing African-Americans: In a long rant, he admonishes his half-black girlfriend for associating with African-Americans. And this comes from a guy who makes a lot of money from African-American athletes. We are definitely past racism in this country! Not.

(4) Alumni soccer day at UCSB: Yesterday, I watched a couple of exhibition soccer matches at UCSB's Harder Stadium. In the first match, UCSB's (older) alumni beat Westmont College's alumni 2-0. The game was pretty evenly played, as Westmont had several good scoring opportunities. In the second match, UCSB's current varsity team prevailed 3-1 over a younger team of alumni that boasted several players from the US MLS and European clubs. Several brilliant saves by the goalie for UCSB's current team raised both hopes and concerns for the fate of the team in the fall 2014 college soccer season: hopes, because of having a great goalie, and concerns because of so many balls getting through that needed saves. Also, 2 of the 3 UCSB goals resulting from fast breaks constitutes a good omen for the team's speed. The super-windy afternoon wasn't perfect for soccer, but I enjoyed the outing for the sun and fresh air.

(5) Final thought for the day: "You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger." ~ Buddha



2014/04/26 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "A good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit." ~ Arnold H. Glasow

(2) Goodbye Blackberry, hello iPhone: I have finally come out of the Stone Age of electronic gadgets and upgraded my ancient Blackberry to an iPhone 5. Simultaneously, I am moving to an iPad Air as my tablet. Over the weekend, I will ask our family's expert iPhone users for advice on set-up and apps.

(3) New Silvergreens menu option: In its downtown Santa Barbara location, Silvergreens is offering a new dinner menu option, dubbed "**Proteins, Greens & Grains**," that allows one to select items from its lists of

proteins, greens, and grains.

(4) This freeway chase [video clip](#) involving a female driver is rather old, but it is hilarious. It helps that, seemingly, no one got hurt.

(5) Twenty words we owe to [William Shakespeare](#): addiction, arch-villain, assassination, bedazzled, belongings, cold-blooded, dishearten, eventful, eyeball, fashionable, half/hot-blooded, inaudible, ladybird, manager, multitudinous, new-fangled, pageantry, scuffle, swagger, uncomfortable.

(6) Message of [Nasrin Sotoodeh to political detainees](#) that were beaten up at Evin Prison: "Dear friends and former prisonmates: The punishment for the savage acts of government agents against you is imprisonment. Even though you have among you one the most capable and bravest attorneys, who will no doubt guide you in the pursuit of justice, members of Iran's legal profession will be honored to represent those of you who were beaten up, and they will perform this civic duty with no fear of arrests or reprisals."

2014/04/25 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "In youth we learn; in age we understand." ~ Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

(2) Prisoners in their palace: Two of the daughters of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia speak of being virtual [prisoners of their father](#), taking advantage of the Internet, their only window into the outside world, to speak up. [Note: I became suspicious of the authenticity of this video from its "4 News" logo and the fact that the interviewer's face is never shown. So, I searched the Internet for evidence that the video is a hoax, but found no refutation or denial. Still, please take this with a grain of salt.]

(3) Solitary confinement is a form of torture: This isn't at all surprising to me. Having read and reviewed the book *Social: How Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, I realize that an inability to connect, even in the superficial forms of chatting at a coffee shop or on a park bench, must take a toll on a human being. Apparently, the US has [one of the worst records](#) when it comes to the use of this method. Iran is also a major offender.

(4) Affirmative action's hidden benefits: Discussion of the pros and cons of affirmative action has been reignited, following the recent US Supreme Court's 6-2 decision to uphold Michigan's ban on racial preferences in college admissions. Much of the discussion carries an improper focus. I contend that affirmative action isn't only, or even primarily, about a school or job applicant getting some help. There are many successful people who were first in their families to go to college or engage in a specific line of work and, as a result, ended up benefiting their extended families and their future generations. This indirect benefit is often overlooked. Then, there is the issue of role models in school or workplace. Study after study has shown that women perform better in engineering schools if there are a few female faculty members they can look up to and confide in when they have personal or academic problems. Then, consider the issue of training doctors, for example. A Hispanic or African-American doctor is more likely to serve the disadvantaged neighborhood s/he came from, and a minority patient is more likely to trust and be able to communicate with such a doctor. Finally, there is the issue of balance and civility. From my personal experience (some 41 years in academia), committees I have served on were more civil and productive when they had a few female members. So, the presence of more women among engineering faculty benefits not just women but also men like me who are uncomfortable with old-boy networks and the way they work (often in a covert fashion) to exclude minorities as well as members of the majority race/gender who disagree with them. The abstract notion of merit-based selection and its effect on economic and technical advances is often raised to oppose affirmative action. Bear in mind, however, that life isn't all about technical excellence and economic competitiveness. Who cares if a country isn't near the top in terms of technical/economic metrics, if its citizens are secure, healthy, and fulfilled.

(5) Final thought for the day: Men who think a woman's place is in the kitchen must remember that all the knives are kept there.

2014/04/24 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I always imagined I'd move beyond this rather infantile career choice. By this point I would have become a virtuoso on a musical instrument or written novels or become an astronaut. But I'll probably be doing some version of exactly what I'm doing now." ~ Actor Colin Firth, in an interview with *Time* magazine, issue of April 28, 2014, on what he sees himself doing in 10 years

(2) Community colleges drop "Community": In a rebranding process that is partly motivated by going from an exclusive focus on 2-year programs to offering some 4-year programs, and also to fight public perception of low-quality education, many community colleges are [dropping the word "Community"](#) from their names.

(3) The talented Shankar sisters: Anoushka Shankar on the sitar and her sister, Norah Jones, perform the mesmerizing ["Traces of You."](#)

(4) The US Supreme Court upholds Michigan's ban on affirmative action: By a 6-2 vote, an unusually strong majority these days, the US Supreme Court indicated that Michigan voters have the right to ban affirmative action in college admissions. On the surface, this does not represent a major departure from the norm, because it [reaffirms a state's right](#) to enact laws according to preferences of its residents. However, expect several

states to follow Michigan's model. Bans on racial preferences are more often than not approved when put to vote. So, the case will likely have nationwide impact.

(5) Fabulous blues music: Gregg Allman and Taj Mahal perform "[Statesboro Blues](#)."

(6) Final thought for the day: A Rumi quatrain, translated by Zara Houshmand. If you feel any desire for me, then say so. | If you live without love, alone, I want to know. If your heart holds a place for me, then say so. | Say if it's so, or say no, but tell me the truth.

2014/04/23 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "For the first time, there is an understanding ... that the real threat is not Israel, the Jews or Zionism." ~ Avigdor Lieberman, Israeli Foreign Minister, quoted in *Time* magazine, issue of April 28, 2014, on secret talks between Israel and Arab states concerning their unease over Iran

(2) Join the resistance: Ohmmmmm ... [[Cartoon](#)]

(3) Equations that changed the course of history: This [list of 17 equations](#) contains some that everyone considers important and a few that are less obvious or dubious choices as world-changing.

(4) Beautiful piano music and animated dance: "[Shadows](#)" by Sameh Farouk.

(5) Soccer World Cup schedule: It isn't too early to start thinking about the 2014 Soccer World Cup, to be held in Brazil from June 12 to July 13. Group matches will be held every day during June 12-26. Then, after a day of rest, the eight round-of-16 matches will be played from June 28 to July 1. Next, after 2 days of rest, the four round-of-8 matches are scheduled for July 4-5. Another 2 days of rest will be followed by two semifinal matches on July 8-9. Semifinals losers will play in the third-place match on July 12 and the championship match will be held on July 13. The US (rank 13), playing in Group G alongside Germany (2), Portugal (4), and Ghana (37), has a tough battle for advancing to the round-of-16. Iran (rank 38), placed in Group F alongside Argentina (3), Bosnia-Herzegovina (17), and Nigeria (47), has an even tougher road ahead of it. In the US, ESPN will broadcast all 64 matches live, and in high definition, on ESPN, ESPN2, and ABC networks. [This ESPN page](#) contains the complete TV schedule in the US. I tried to include TV coverage of the tournament in Canada, but could find no info. I assume that CBC Sports will cover the matches.

(6) Final thought for the day: "I think there's an immense drama in things being held back and hidden and unspoken. I'm the go-to guy when you're doing something in that convention. But also, communication is never perfect. What your'e hearing isn't necessarily what I'm imagining you're hearing. That interests me more than repression." ~ Actor Colin Firth, in a *Time* magazine interview, issue of April 28, 2014, on why he always plays emotionally repressed guys

2014/04/22 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along." ~ Rumi

(2) Khamenei and Rouhani headed toward a [clash on women's rights](#): In speeches on consecutive days, Khamenei stated the the West has erred in pursuing equal rights for women, while Rouhani said that it is wrong to justify the subjugation of women based on religion, Islam, or the Quran. Apparently, Rafsanjani also supports Rouhani's views.

(3) US students recruited as spies: The FBI has begun extensive efforts to combat foreign governments' recruitment of US students on study-abroad programs as spies. A sleekly produced [28-minute mini-movie](#), based on a true story, warns students studying abroad that foreign governments may lure them into spying by offering them lucrative employment and other incentives.

(4) Modern Persian music: Tehranis will recognize the names of [Vanak and Tajrish](#) neighborhoods in this lighthearted song in Spanish flamenco style.

(5) Three-year-old shoots 2-year-old to death: I am reposting this [news story](#), but do not hold high hopes for any action. When dozens of deaths in a mass-shooting trigger no action, the death of a single 2-year-old isn't going to cause our politicians to lose sleep.

(6) Happy Earth Day to everyone! I am fortunate enough to live in a city that was at the forefront of the modern environmental movement in 1970, when Earth Day was born out of concerns for the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969, gas-guzzling sedans with V8 engines that roamed the streets, and smoke and sludge from unregulated industries. Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson led a bipartisan effort (unimaginable today) to create Earth Day, which led to the establishment of EPA and the passage of Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts.

2014/04/21 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "You cannot find peace by avoiding life," ~ Virginia Woolf

(2) Kermit-the-frog's shocking x-ray results. [[Cartoon](#)]

(3) Iran makes great strides in RoboCup soccer: In a [soccer tournament](#) played by specially programmed robots, Iran's team emerged victorious over three German teams and one Dutch team to claim the top spot.

The home team had to overcome the effects of economic sanctions that prevented its designers and programmers from getting the latest hardware and software upgrades.

(4) Introducing a new book: I am looking forward to obtaining and reading Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, a new book that has been making waves around the world. Yesterday, I watched a PBS program in which Paul Krugman talked about the data-rich book whose central thesis is that our future societies will be dominated by those with inherited rather than earned wealth. This is because wealthy people can lead comfortable lives, while still leaving even more money for their heirs, given the gap between the earning rate of money and economic growth. As bad as the situation currently is in the US with regard to income/wealth gap, at least most wealthy people of today are self-made, in the sense of rising to wealth from much lower economic backgrounds. In the near future, we will see a steady move toward oligarchy. Now that wealth can influence politics directly, there is even greater cause for concern. [\[A review\]](#)

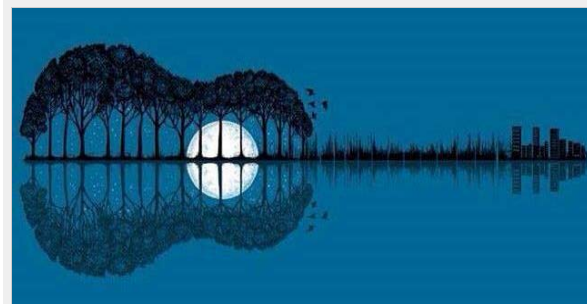
(5) People of Tehran are "Happy": At least the bunch [shown dancing](#) to Pharrell Williams' smash hit.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Love is wise, hatred is foolish." ~ Bertrand Russell, as part of his response to a question about [what he wants to say](#) that would be of value to people reading/hearing it a thousand years later

2014/04/20 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Artwork, combining nature and music.

(2) Women's rights in trouble in Iran: "The business-centered view about women's capacities in economic issues, including job, and the humiliating view about women and degrading them to an instrument to mollify men's passion is one of the principles which has made the western thoughts about women completely cruel and fanatic." ~ Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, addressing a large crowd of women on the occasion of National Women's/Mothers' Day.



(3) Ayatollah presents gift to Baha'is of the world: In a risky symbolic gesture, Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi-Tehrani has gifted an illuminated work of calligraphy, depicting the writings of Baha'u'llah, to the Baha'i community and has called for [religious coexistence](#) according to ancient Iranian traditions.

(4) Sliders in gas stations: Be wary of thieves stopping by [a car whose driver is pumping gas](#) and snatching purses or other valuables that happen to be on the car's passenger seat, driving away with the owner totally unaware or giving chase to no avail. This warning is particularly useful to women, who tend to leave their purses unattended in the car while pumping gas.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Every family has one weird relative. If you don't know who it is, then it's probably you." ~ Anonymous

2014/04/19 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We may brave human laws, but we cannot resist natural ones." ~ Jules Verne

(2) High tech in 50 years: A [2-minute video summary](#) of the results of a Pew Research Center survey about the future innovations foreseen by Americans.

(3) Iranian political prisoners beaten up: A group described by witnesses as security personnel and Revolutionary Guards descended on the section of Evin Prison where political prisoners are kept and, under the guise of "inspections," [roughed up a large number of them](#), causing many injuries.

(4) Machine that turns a live piglet into sausage: This [5-minute video](#) from Brazil seems like a cruel prank, but when you think about it, reality isn't much different.

(5) What to expect in Afghanistan after the departure of US troops: Sad to say that there will likely be a return to Taliban rule, a la 2001, before the US invasion. The current Afghan president has all but endorsed the admissibility of [wife-beating in Islam](#) according to religious scriptures, in an apparent attempt to appease the Taliban.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate." ~ Jason Priestley

2014/04/18 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Supertalented drummer performs at a shopping mall in Sydney, Australia. [\[4-minute video\]](#)

(2) The world dances to "Happy": [Five-minute video compilation](#) of people around the world dancing to Pharrell Williams' smash hit.

(3) British Muslims dance to "Happy" to break stereotypes. [\[4-minute video\]](#)

(4) Shattering religious stereotypes: Muslim and Jewish teens, [performing on stage](#), focus on their similarities

rather than their differences.

(5) Fourteen years in 4 minutes: [Dad films daughter](#) every week for 14 years to create this viral video (7.5 million views and counting).

(6) Final thought for the day: If you suggest improvements to arrogant or self-doubting people, you'll only create enemies for yourself. Make suggestions for improvement to humble, self-confident people, and you'll gain lifelong friends. [I remember hearing/reading this thought somewhere, but could not locate the source or original wording.]

2014/04/17 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "God said 'Love Your Enemy' | And I obeyed Him | And loved myself." ~ Khalil Gibran

(2) Artful words: See if you can come up with six 8-letter words or phrases that contain ART at various positions. Names and compound words are okay too.

A R T _ _ _ _ _ | _ A R T _ _ _ _ | _ _ A R T _ _ _ | _ _ _ A R T _ _ | _ _ _ _ A R T _ | _ _ _ _ _ A R T

(3) Ferry sinks off South Korean coast: [A dozen are confirmed dead](#) and 300 are still missing (trapped in the sunken boat). Many of the trapped passengers are feared dead, but it is possible that some survivors exist within air pockets. CBS News has published this [5-minute video](#) of rescue efforts.

(4) Nobel Laureate [Gabriel Garcia Marquez dead at 87](#): The author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* was known for popularizing the "magical realism" genre.

(5) Final thought for the day: "I stand for honesty, equality, kindness, compassion, treating people the way you'd want to be treated and helping those in need. To me, those are traditional values. That's what I stand for. I also believe in dance." ~ Ellen DeGeneres

2014/04/16 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Everything is the way it is because it got that way." ~ Biologist and classicist D'Arcy Thompson [This statement looks like a Yogi Berra quote, but it is indeed deep when one thinks about it.]

(2) An excellent live performance of ["Scarborough Fair"](#) by Celtic Woman.

(3) Closed-circuit-camera videos from Japan's 2011 tsunami: This [2-minute compilation](#) shows a horrifying part of the devastation on city streets. Near the end, you can see some alert drivers noticing the approaching wall of water and turning around to escape the onslaught in the nick of time.

(4) Extreme biking: This [2-minute video](#) isn't for the faint-hearted.

(5) Lunar eclipse: A couple of nights ago, I watched a spectacular [total lunar eclipse](#) around midnight, an event that has been hailed as the first one in a tetrad (four consecutive lunar eclipses, all four being total). The next three eclipses in this tetrad will occur on October 8, 2014, April 4, 2015, and September 28, 2015, all being visible in the US.

(6) Final thought for the day: "If a relationship doesn't work out after you have done your best, accept the outcome and move on. There is no sense in wasting time on something that can't be fixed." ~ Anonymous

2014/04/15 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Spiritual relationship is far more precious than physical. Physical relationship divorced from spiritual is body without soul." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

(2) Last evening at sundown Passover festivities began. [Happy Passover](#) to all my Jewish friends!

(3) Image and report from an ["arts" festival](#) in Texas, where gun-toting children roamed the streets.

(4) Silicon Beach: West Los Angeles, in a four-mile stretch extending from Venice to Santa Monica, is trying to establish itself as the next high-tech enclave. "A 2012 report from the business-data organization Compass ranked L.A. as the third largest tech ecosystem in the world, behind only Silicon Valley and Tel Aviv." [From *Time* magazine, issue of April 21, 2014.]

(5) Facebook quirks with regard to privacy: Despite paying close attention to the various privacy issues, I still don't understand Facebook's privacy settings. At this time, all of my posts are public, so at least with regard to who can view my posts, I don't have a problem and much of what I discuss below does not apply to me personally. Facebook defines circles around each individual, beginning with friends (itself divisible into close and regular ones) and moving outward to friends of friends and public. No problem so far. It would have been logical to allow a user to restrict any potential action (view, like, comment, share, tag, message, add, post) to one of these circles. This isn't how things are done, which causes a great deal of confusion. To make things worse, certain restrictions are circumvented when someone else likes, shares, or comments on a post. For example, some posts shared only with friends become visible to friends of friends or to the public, depending on actions by other individuals. Interestingly, these quirks expose certain dishonest or opportunistic individuals who present multiple faces to their various circles for personal gain. This level of dishonesty goes beyond the simple inclusion of a profile or cover photo that bears no resemblance to the person today. I believe that it isn't to Facebook's advantage to offer a logical privacy scheme that everyone can understand and use easily. Some

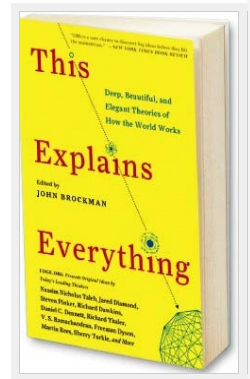
revenue is generated from inconsistencies and quirks that are exploited by advertisers, and Facebook is hardly motivated to do anything about it.

(6) Final thought for the day: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." ~ Kurt Vonnegut

2014/04/14 (Mon.): Brockman, John (ed.), *This Explains Everything: Deep, Beautiful, and Elegant Theories of How the World Works*, Harper Perennial, 2013.

[This review has been selected as a forthcoming feature on Iranian.com.]

In 1997, the Reality Club, which was formed in 1981 to explore themes of the post-Industrial Age, went on-line and was rebranded as "Edge." Those involved with Edge brainstorm to ask an annual question and challenge brilliant people to answer it. The 2012 question, "What is your favorite deep, elegant, or beautiful explanation?" which sought to gather people's opinions about their favorite scientific theory or explanation, led to more than 200 answers. This book includes edited forms of 148 of those answers in its 411 pages, making the average chapter less than 3 pages long. A common theme in the published answers is the proposal of "a simple and nonobvious idea ... as the explanation for a diverse and complicated set of phenomena."



Not surprisingly, Darwin's theory of evolution via natural selection is mentioned many times, either as the main topic of an essay or as the author's first choice that s/he passed over in favor of another explanation (because so many, perhaps more qualified, others will likely address evolution). It is pointed out in the very first chapter, by psychologist Susan Blackmore, that natural selection explains everything, not just life; it has been used to explain transformations in languages, banking, the Chelsea soccer team, and iPhone.

I enjoyed reading this book immensely and spent more time on it, per page, than on any other book. Each of the 148 byte-size chapters is a delight, and trying to summarize the content would lead to a book-length review. So, I have chosen to provide the titles of some of the chapters I found more enlightening, and either quote from or write a few words about each. As chapters are not numbered in this book, I begin each description with the chapter's starting page number.

[p. 5] "Redundancy Reduction and Pattern Recognition," by Richard Dawkins: The world around us does not change much from one instant to the next. Thus, our sensory system achieves economy by signaling change, rather than the actual state it detects at a given time. For example, neurons signaling temperature do not fire more rapidly when they detect high temperature; rather, their firing rate increases when there is a change in temperature, dying away to a low, resting frequency when the change subsides.

[p. 9] "The Power of Absurdity," by Scott Atran: "Humankind's strongest social bonds, including capacities for cooperation and forgiveness, and for killing and allowing oneself to be killed, are born of commitment to causes and courses of action that are 'ineffable'—that is, fundamentally immune to logical assessment for consistency and to empirical evaluation for costs and consequences. The more materially inexplicable one's devotion and commitment to a sacred cause—that is, the more absurd—the greater the trust others place in it and the more that trust generates commitment on their part."

[p. 11] "How Apparent Finality Can Emerge," by Carlo Rovelli: According to Darwin, spectacularly simple mechanisms produce phenomena that appear to be governed by final causes (e.g., we may think that we have mouths "so" we can eat). Such apparent false final causes exist wherever there is life, because we only observe those phenomena that have survived through reproduction.

[p. 15] "The Overdue Demise of Monogamy," by Aubrey de Grey: Monogamy can be explained quite well from an evolutionary perspective. But we may be on the verge of a significant change. In a world which is no longer driven by reproductive efficiency, sex assumes a status similar to many other recreational activities.

[p. 22] "The Dark Matter of the Mind," By Joel Gold: "The universe consists primarily of dark matter. We can't see it, but it has an enormous gravitational force. The conscious mind—much like the visible aspect of the universe—is only a small fraction of the mental world. The dark matter of the mind, the unconscious, has the greatest psychic gravity. Disregard the dark matter of the universe and anomalies appear. Ignore the dark matter of the mind and our irrationality is inexplicable."

[p. 25] "An Unresolved (and Therefore Unbeautiful) Reaction to the Edge Question," by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein: What makes us think that beauty and rigor have anything to do with each other? "Is there anything to this notion of explanatory beauty, a guide to choosing between explanatory alternatives, or is it just that any explanation that's satisfactory will, for that very reason and no other, strike us as beautiful, beautifully explanatory, so that the reference to beauty is, once again, without any substance?"

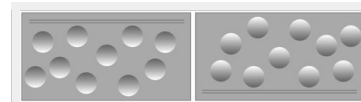
[p. 39] "Simplicity Itself," by Thomas Metzinger: Albert Einstein's view, that simplicity is the ultimate goal of a scientific explanation, is often quoted. "Can the fundamental insight—the destructive, creative virtue of simplicity—be transposed from the realm of science onto culture or onto the level of conscious experience? What kind of formal simplicity would make our culture a deeper, more beautiful culture? And what is an elegant mind?"

"

[p. 42] "Evolutionary Genetics and the Conflicts of Human Social Life," by Steven Pinker: In a succinct, 4-page statement of the human condition, the author elaborates on the following views in bullet-point form. (a) Conflict is part of the human condition. (b) The main refuge from this conflict is the family. (c) Even families are not perfect havens from conflict. (d) Sex is not entirely a pastime of mutual pleasure between consenting adults. (e) Love is not all you need, and does not make the world go round.

[p. 50] "Group Polarization," by David G. Myers: The elegant explanation in this essay is that "group interaction tends to amplify people's initial inclinations." The Internet allows like-minded individuals, from conspiracy schemers to neo-Nazis, to find and influence one another. Put in the form of an equation: "opinion-segregation + conversation --> polarization."

[p. 55] "Unconscious Inferences," by Gerd Gigerenzer: A sensation in itself does not carry information. Rather, it is the brain that draws unconscious inferences about the meaning of a sensation. Take the accompanying image, for example, where the right half is the same as the left half, turned upside down. Turn the entire image upside-down and your perception changes. Our unconscious inferences are based on evidence or assumptions (in this case, that a shade on the upper part of a dot is nearly always associated with a concave shape) that are usually reliable but can mislead us in some circumstances.



[p. 65] "Why is Our World Comprehensible?" by Andrei Linde: In the words of Albert Einstein, "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible."

[p. 71] "Our Universe Grew Like a Baby," by Max Tegmark: Right after conception, the number of cells in a baby doubles every day, going from 1 to 2, to 4, and so on. Fortunately for mothers, the doubling does not continue all the way to the end of the pregnancy. According to the inflation theory of Alan Guth and others, this is exactly what happened to the universe at Big Bang, except that the doubling did not happen daily but almost instantaneously.

[p. 79] "Impossible Inexactness," by Satyajit Das: "There was a world before Heisenberg and his uncertainty principle. There is a world after Heisenberg. They are the same world, but they are different."

[p. 82] "The Next Level of Fundamental Matter," by Haim Hariri: "The twelve fundamental quarks and leptons and their antiparticles all have electric charges 0, 1/3, 2/3, and 1 or the negative values of the same numbers. ... Why are all the charges multiples of 1/3 of the electron charge ...? Why are quark charges and lepton charges related to each other by simple ratios?"

[p. 103] "Commitment," by Richard H. Thaler: Economics theory suggests that we are always better off when we have more choices. However, there are many examples where restricting future choices and committing to specific courses of action might be beneficial. "Many of society's thorniest problems, from climate change to Middle East conflict, could be solved if the relevant parties could only find a way to commit themselves to some future course of action."

[p. 106] "True or False: Beauty is Truth," Judith Rich Harris: "The theory of the modular mind is not beautiful or elegant. But not being a poet, I prize truth above beauty."

[p. 119] "Why the Human Mind May Seem to Have an Elegant Explanation Even If It Doesn't," by Nicholas Humphrey: Consider the example sequence 2, 4, 6, 8, which seems to follow the simple rule $x + 2$ in forming the next term from a given term x but can also be explained by the more complicated rule $-(x^3)/44 + 3x^2/11 + 34/11$. The author notes that most people find the first explanation simpler and more elegant and that the human mind automatically gravitates toward that simpler explanation. But if further observation reveals that the next term in the sequence is 8.91 rather than 10, then the second (correct, but more complex) explanation becomes more elegant. "How often does the real world tease us by seeming simpler than it really is?"

[p. 125] "On Oceans and Airport Security," by Kevin P. Hand: "So the next time you're in airport security and frustrated by that disorganized person in front of you who can't seem to get it through his head that his belt, wallet, and watch will all set off the alarm, just take a deep breath and think of the possibly habitable distant oceans [e.g., on Europa, one of Jupiter's moons] we now know of, thanks to the same beautiful physics that's driving you nuts as you contemplate missing your plane."

[p. 129] "Why Some Sea Turtles Migrate," by Daniel C. Dennett: Plate tectonics explains why some turtles cross the Atlantic to lay eggs on the shores of South America, after mating on the west coast of Africa. Their swim was quite short millions of years ago. Each year, the swim became an inch or so longer, which was hardly noticeable. "Eventually they were crossing the ocean to lay their eggs, having no idea, of course, why they would do such an extravagant thing."

[p. 139] "Subjective Environment," by Andrian Kreye: The perception of an organism from its environment is quite subjective and thus changes from one kind of organism to another or among different organisms of the same kind. "Ticks perceive their surroundings by the directions of up and down, by warm and cold, or by the presence or absence of butyric acid. Their actions to survive and procreate are crawling, waiting, and gripping."

Based on these observations, Jakob von Uexkull deduced that any organism's perception of space and time are subjective.

[p. 152] "All We Need Is Help," by Seirian Sumner: Efficiencies resulting from division of labor explain not only the development of human and animal societies but also the emergence of complex, multicell organisms. Specialized cells that cooperate give an organism survival advantage over its single-cell counterparts.

[p. 179] "Epigenetics—The Missing Link," by Helen Fisher: Genes turning on and off due to environmental factors provide a beautiful explanation for variability in otherwise identical members of a species. "Take the Moroccan Amazighs, or Berbers, people with highly similar genetic profiles who now reside in three different environments: Some roam the deserts as nomads, some farm the mountain slopes, some live in the towns and cities along the Moroccan coast. And depending on where they live, up to one-third of their genes are differentially expressed."

[p. 193] "Why We Feel Pressed for Time," by Elizabeth Dunn: Why do modern humans feel more pressed for time than our ancestors? Scarcity and value are conjoined twins. When a resource is scarce, be it diamonds or drinking water, it is perceived as more valuable. As time becomes worth more and more money due to technological progress, our minds automatically perceive it as a scarcer commodity. "If feelings of time-scarcity stem in part from a sense that time is highly valuable, then one of the best things we can do to reduce this sense of pressure may be to give our time away."

[p. 221] "The Pigeonhole Principle," by Jon Kleinberg: If a flock of pigeons lands in a group of trees and there are more pigeons than trees, then at least one tree will contain more than one pigeon. Surely such an obvious statement can't lead to any deep discoveries! Yet it does. Consider this less obvious statement: Your family tree must have a loop, in the sense that sometime in the past 4000 years there was a person in your family tree whose father and mother were descendants of the same person. This is a direct result of the fact that in 40 generations, which is way less than 4000 years, a family tree with no loop must include more than 2^{40} individuals, given that each person has two parents. Scientific studies have shown that in the same 4000-year period, at most a trillion (10^{12}) people have lived on earth. Because $2^{40} > 10^{12}$, your family tree cannot be loop-free.

[p. 252] "Evolutionarily Stable Strategies," by S. Abbas Raza: Why do common animal species all have nearly equal numbers of males and females? Even among walruses, most of whose males die virgins and a few males monopolize most of the females, the 50-50 ratio exists. Don't the reproductively useless male walruses consume resources, making it evolutionarily advantageous to have fewer males to begin with? The answer is that an unbalanced ratio, such as 30-70 would not be stable, but the mathematical argument, though easily understood, is rather long.

[p. 255] "The Collingridge Dilemma," by Evgeny Morozov: "When change is easy, the need for it cannot be foreseen; when the need for change is apparent, change has become expensive, difficult, and time-consuming." This dilemma is an elegant way to explain many complex ethical and technological quandaries.

[p. 263] "Subverting Biology," by Patrick Bateson: Inbreeding is generally seen as undesirable, but in recent years, the debate has become much more nuanced. A study of a human Icelandic population has confirmed previous animal studies that there is an optimal degree of relatedness in terms of improving survival chances. In the study, couples who are third or fourth cousins have, on average, a larger number of grandchildren than more closely or more distantly related partners.

[p. 269] "Why Do Movies Move?" by Alvy Ray Smith: A photo taken from a fast-moving object appears blurred, which helps us perceive the speed and direction of movement. If in a movie that runs at 24 frames per second, say, each frame is a perfectly focused image, the movie appears jumpy to the human eye. The reason computer games have achieved remarkable realism is that we have learned how to blur images artificially, and we possess the computational power to enable this artificial blurring to be done in real time.

[p. 273] "Would You Like Blue Cheese with It?" Albert-Laszlo Barabasi: The science of large-scale or complex networks can be applied to improving culinary creations. If we graph popular dishes with respect to the ingredients they contain, we notice that certain ingredients are paired together much more often than we should expect based on their individual popularity. Tomato and garlic, combined in 12% of all recipes, fall in this category. The frequency will of course vary in different regions of the world, but a complete analysis of such trends provides valuable clues for creating new dishes or assessing their potential appeal.

[p. 287] "One Coincidence; Two Deja Vus," by Douglas Coupland: Human beings, regardless of their ages and cultural backgrounds, experience about one coincidence and 2 deja vus per year"

[p. 299] "Natural Selection is Simple but the Systems It Shapes Are Unimaginably Complex," by Randolph Nesse: "Trying to reverse-engineer brain systems focuses important attention on functional significance, but it is inherently limited, because brain systems were never engineered in the first place."

[p. 305] "Out of the Mouths of Babes," by Nicholas A. Christakis: "Why is the sky blue?" This question is asked by children and distinguished scientists alike. Here is an explanation that evaded the brightest scientific minds for centuries. When the light's wavelength is on the same order as the size of the gas molecules, the intensity of

scattered light varies inversely with the 4th power of its wavelength. Blue and violet, having shorter wavelengths, are scattered more than the other colors. "It's as if all the molecules in the air preferentially glowed blue, which is what we then see everywhere around us."

[p. 315] "The Precession of the Simulacra," by Douglas Rushkoff: There's the land and there is the maps and lines we use to represent the land. We then fight wars over where to draw the lines. There are real companies, stocks that represent their worth, and bets on the stocks that make or lose money depending on how stock prices move. Then there are credit default swaps that insure against losses. At this point, we are extremely disconnected from reality. "And that is when we become particularly vulnerable to illusion, abuse, and fantasy. Because once we are living in a world of created symbols and simulations, whoever has control of the map has control of our reality."

[p. 317] "Time Perspective Theory," by Philip Zimbardo: People are of three types, and there are various subtypes in each category: those who focus on the past ("good old days" or regrets/trauma), present-oriented individuals (hedonistic "follow my heart" or fatalistic "what's the use"), and future-minded planners ("here are my goals" or heaven/hell). The Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, or ZTPI, correlates scores on these time dimensions with other psychological traits and behavior. The correlation is often very strong, being around 0.70 between future orientation and conscientiousness and 0.75 between past-negative orientation and the traits of anxiety, depression, and anger.

[p. 324] "Implications of Ivan Pavlov's Great Discovery," by Stephen M. Kosslyn: Anticipatory salivation, observed in dogs that realize they are about to be fed, based on movement and gesture patterns they have seen just before being fed in the past, explains why we feel relief right after taking pain medication (way before the chemistry of pain relief kicks in).

[p. 328] "Nature is Cleverer than We Are," by Terrence J. Sejnowski: Temporal Difference (TD) learning provides an excellent method of learning a sequence of decisions leading to a goal. It has been applied to the game of backgammon to allow a computer program to learn from scratch (only the game rules are supplied to the program). The program then plays against itself repeatedly and uses the win/loss outcomes to value particular sequences of moves. It is rather surprising that such a program after only about a million games acquires championship-level skills.

[p. 351] "The Beautiful Law of Unintended Consequences," by Robert Kurzban: Changing one parameter in a complex system may lead to unintended, though not necessarily unanticipated, consequences. This happens all the time in economic and social systems. For example, the city of Sydney in Australia placed a bounty on rats as a way of dealing with the 1900 plague. The bounty was certainly well-intentioned, but it led to people breeding rats, in order to claim the bounty.

2014/04/13 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Adolescents develop a gas pedal and accelerator a long time before they get steering and brakes." ~ Explanation by psychologist Ron Dahl about the drive for sex, power, and respect among the youth, who lack the expertise and impulse control for avoiding pregnancy or violence [This quote is from one of the chapters in the book *This Explains Everything: Deep, Beautiful, and Elegant Theories of How the World Works*, which I will review soon.]

(2) Neo-Nazism raises its ugly head in Kansas City: **Three people are dead** following multiple shootings reported at the Jewish Community Center and Village Shalom in Overland Park. ... Police took one man into custody at the Valley Park Elementary at 123rd and Nall. The man was heard yelling 'heil Hitler' as he was taken into custody."

(3) Hilarious Q&A with Iranians about America and with Americans about Iran: The Daily Show's Jason Jones **traveled to Iran** in 2009 to see how its people are cut off from the Western world.

(4) The presidents of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, **today and in the 1970s**. Change happened for sure!

(5) A Rumi couplet, translated by Zara Houshmand [**Persian original**]:

God forbid I'd compare the moon to your face,

Or the tall cypress to your stature and grace.

Where in the moon are ruby sweet lips to be found?

What cypress sways with the luminous grace of your ways?

(6) Final thought for the day: A prisoner need not be behind bars. One can be a prisoner of his/her own biases or of other people's expectations.

2014/04/11 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The movie has been condemned by both Christians and Muslims, so it must be doing something right! And they say it may also lose a fortune for the studio, which will put it in hot water with the Jews too." ~ Bill Maher, commenting on the new movie "Noah"

(2) A Hafez poem: I wish I could show you, | When you are lonely, | Or in darkness, |

The astonishing light, | Of your own being.

(3) Knife-wielding 10th-grader stabs 21 people: There are two ways to view this latest news of violence in our high schools. The NRA is likely jumping up for joy, because it can now say, "See, it isn't about guns; violence has other root causes." While it is true that violence can be committed without guns, I propose that the "gun culture" contributes to and exacerbates other forms of violence as well. It may well be that this particular teenager actually looked for guns and, failing to gain access to them, went with his plan B. So, the takeaway from this incident should be that further restricting access to firearms for children and the mentally ill could save lives, because alternative methods that they might choose are less deadly. Confirming this view is the fact that the assailant was tackled by someone, thus stopping his rampage. Imagine trying to tackle someone wielding firearms!

(4) Has LinkedIn begun to send bogus invitations? Yesterday, I received an invitation from a former research collaborator to connect with him on LinkedIn, which I accepted. Then, I received an e-mail message from him, indicating that he has received a connection invitation from me, going on to explain that he does not like social networks and prefers to communicate in person or through e-mail. If true, then LinkedIn must have sent invitations from each of us to the other, in hopes of getting more connections and making more money. I have noticed a distinct uptick in the number of invitations I have been receiving of late, making this latter theory quite plausible. Have others experienced a surge in the number of invitations?

(5) Final thought for the day: "When you are happy, you enjoy the music, but when you are sad, you understand the lyrics." ~ Anonymous

2014/04/10 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Fifty quotes from Albert Einstein: He is perhaps the **most-quoted scientist**, having uttered memorable lines such as, "Science is a wonderful thing if one does not have to earn one's living at it." Enjoy!

(2) Total Wellness magazine: The Spring 2014 issue, in which my daughter has contributed a Q&A article "What is Dopamine?" (Volume 14, Issue 3, Page 7) is **available on-line**.

[Here is her concluding "in short" recap: Dopamine is a neurotransmitter involved in reward, pleasure, and motor control. Genetics, aging, or drug abuse can result in deficits in the dopamine circuitry, but medication and proper nutrition can restore healthy functioning.]

(3) Scenes from the pre-Islamic-Revolution Iran: This **7-minute video** is particularly focused on women's activities and attire.

(4) Statistically challenged: Today, I saw one of these pseudoscientific posts that claimed a specific regimen reduces certain stress factors by 800%. And some people thoughtlessly repost such nonsense.

(5) A very unusual beach: A wall of rocks protects beachgoers from gigantic waves in Puerto Rico, while providing an astounding view of the **breaking waves**.

(6) Final thought for the day: A sure sign of intelligence is avoiding the word "stupid" to describe those who disagree with us, politically or otherwise.

2014/04/08 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Fear does not prevent death. It prevents life." ~ Egyptian writer and Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz [1911-2006]

(2) Musical battle among four very talented musicians, each trying to outdo the others. [**3-minute video**]

(3) Mickey Rooney [1920-2014]: He wasn't a glamorous star and not everyone's idea of a leading man, but he is **fondly remembered** for 8 decades of cinematic achievements in varied roles. May he rest in peace!

(4) Former hostage-taker nominated as Iran's new UN Ambassador: Hamid Abutalebi was one of the students who held 52 Americans hostage at the US Embassy in Tehran for 444 days during 1979-1981. The US Senate has passed legislation to bar Abutalebi from entering the US, apparently with bipartisan support.

(5) Iran's executions are "great service to humanity": Mohammad Javad Larijani, Head of the Iranian Judiciary's Human Rights Council, has characterized the increased execution rate in Iran as a positive marker of the country's achievement in combating drugs. Elsewhere, he has said that there are no government bans in Iran against university education for Baha'is. He apparently left the meeting before his nose had had a chance to grow by several inches.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." ~ Anonymous

2014/04/07 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Acquiring books can be costly, but not reading books will cost you more." ~ Anonymous

(2) The final tally of the weekend riot in Isla Vista: Dozens of the 15,000 attendees of Deltopia were injured, including two men via stabbing and five police officers by bricks and bottles thrown at them. More than 100 were arrested and additional arrests are expected after videos recorded by security cameras have been reviewed.

(3) MIT's 3D display concept demo: In this [demo video](#), contours are formed and objects moved via a 3D display built of pixels that rise and retract.

(4) Singing about drones: The use of drones to selectively kill those considered US enemies from thousands of miles away has raised many questions on ethical issues. So, it was only a matter of time before the questions would show up in art forms, such as Jon Langford's song, "[Drone Operator](#)."

(5) Speaking and writing in Persian: Many Arabic and European words have found their way into the Persian language. I am not one of those purists who advocate the use of true Persian words under all circumstances, even when the practice results in awkwardness and lack of clarity. However, there are many original Persian words that are clearer and more beautiful than alternatives from Arabic or other languages. Let's try to use these words, which are exemplified by the entries on [this list](#).

(6) Final thought for the day: "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can never live long enough to make them all yourself." ~ Comedian Groucho Marx

2014/04/06 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think." ~ French philosopher Jean de La Bruyere

(2) Modern Persian music: Aref sings "[Dayache-y Noor](#)" ("Lake of Light").

(3) Rumi poetry: I was dead, then alive / Weeping, then laughing

The power of Love came into me / And I became fierce like a lion / Then tender like the evening star

(4) An unusual word puzzle: I sometime get bored with crossword, Sudoku, and other ordinary puzzles that I tackle daily. So, the following puzzle in *AARP Bulletin* roused my interest. Draw 50 blank spaces in a horizontal row and number them 1-50 from left to right. The 50 letters to be inserted in the blank spaces form multiple contiguous words from left to right and from right to left, according to the following clues.

Left to right: 1-5 Sting operation; 6-13 Marginal text; 14-18 West Point student; 19-27 Donnybrook; 28-31 Went United; 32-42 Theatrical offering; 43-45 Museum offering; 46-50 Cut.

Right to left: 50-48 Morning moisture; 47-42 Way off course; 41-38 Sample record; 37-33 Panatela, e.g.; 32-26 "___ Night"; 25-22 Present; 21-16 Treated some flour; 15-9 Flammable solvent; 8-1 Heated exchanges.

(5) A loving response to haters: In March, Honey Maid released an ad featuring families of all kinds, including a number of nontraditional unions. This [2-minute video](#) is their response to some hateful comments they received about their ad.

(6) Final thought for the day: If only our sweet tooth would listen to our wisdom tooth!

2014/04/05 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool." ~ Physicist Richard Feynman

(2) Excellent performance of the Azeri folk song "[Lachin](#)."

(3) My English translation of a Persian verse from Hafez:

If the home is fraught with danger and the destination is out of sight,
do not despair, for there is an end to any path taken and to every flight

(4) Impressive virtual reality show at a Dubai mall: [4-minute video](#)

(5) Full-blown riot in the Santa Barbara area: Returning home late at night, I received an emergency e-mail from UCSB informing area residents of an out-of-control riot in Isla Vista, a student community separating my residence from UCSB. KEYT Channel 3 is carrying a [live coverage](#), but they have lost video contact at present and are running reports from earlier tonight. Area hospitals have been placed on full alert and there are reports of scores of injuries. Right now, I can hear police helicopters flying overhead and reinforcements from Ventura and other nearby communities have been called in. There are worries about injured individuals not receiving medical care because all emergency personnel have been evacuated due to the extremely dangerous conditions.

The rioters are drunken partiers in an annual event that began several years ago, under the name "Floatopia," where thousands of partiers, mostly from out of town, gathered for drinking while floating on water. The event was outlawed after a death due to fall from the cliffs and widespread destruction and pollution on our local beaches. The organizers then moved the event to Del Playa Drive, calling it "Deltopia." Everyone, from university administration to city officials keeps telling these students that gathering thousands of drunks in a small area isn't wise, because out-of-towners feel no ownership or responsibility in our area (they jump on cars, set fire to property, break stop signs, etc.). This time, they have gone too far and many UCSB students will likely be charged based on security camera footage.

The police had actually prepared for this event and had set up traffic checkpoints, not allowing cars into the area. However, you cannot stop people who parked as far as 2 miles away and walked into the area. The reason for traffic control is that with cars, people can carry much more dangerous stuff, such as guns. But in the US

you cannot stop people from gathering. This is something we are thankful for, but liberty has its costs. My family members are staying away from Isla Vista for the rest of the weekend, in case violence continues tomorrow.

2014/04/04 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it." ~ Lou Holtz
- (2) Fusion guitar music: Danny and Farid play "**Sunrise in the Desert**" from the album "Dancing Flames."
- (3) Persian guitar and tar music: Danny and Farid play "**Persian Waltz.**"
- (4) Remote island filled with human trash: This uninhabited island is located 2000 km from the closest coastline. Yet, the island's beaches are littered with junk. **The video** shows dead birds with their insides filled with plastics, sharp objects, and other pieces of trash.
- (5) Rumi poetry: Hidden from all eyes and ears / let us tell each other of our soul.
Smile like a rose with no lips / and keep silent like a thought.
Let us speak silently the secret like Spirit / and avoid talkers who use words in vain.
Let us join our hands / listen to every flutter of our heart / let us become one in silence.
Divine destiny knows our fate / to the last detail. / Let our story be told in a silent way.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there." ~ Anonymous

2014/04/03 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "All you need is ignorance and confidence and the success is sure." ~ Mark Twain
- (2) Iranian Culture Show: Today, my daughter and other members and friends of UCLA's Iranian Student Group performed a traditional and a modern Persian dance at UCLA's Freud Playhouse. The enjoyable 3-hour evening event included an MC who cracked jokes about Iranians in diaspora and the Persian culture, ethnic dances, a play about Iranians' experiences as foreign students, traditional Iranian music, and, at the very end, an appearance by Shahrzad Sepanlou, who performed a few of her own songs and a rearrangement of an old popular song. Sepanlou invited **all the performers on stage** during a finale.
- (3) Kurdish music: Hani sings "Shapol." [**7-minute video**]
- (4) The Valley of Fire: One of the most beautiful vistas in the US' Mojave Desert, the valley, with its great mazes of canyons, arches, ridges, and domes, was forming when dinosaurs roamed the earth. [**38 photos**]
- (5) An insightful review of **why audiobooks are making a comeback**: Listening to a book is a different sensory experience than reading the printed words. It leaves your hands and eyes free to do other things and the sensory experiences from those other activities (such as gardening) get commingled with those of the story. Oral readings of the Bible in medieval Europe had the express purpose of infusing daily activities with Scripture, which is then remembered via ordinary tasks.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." ~ Bill Gates

2014/04/02 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success." ~ Dale Carnegie
- (2) Beautiful music and dance: "**Oriental Bliss**" by Lex van Someren.
- (3) Software patent case at the US Supreme Court: For the first time since 1981, the US Supreme Court is hearing arguments on whether software ("computer-implemented inventions" in legalese) should continue to enjoy **patent protection**. The specific case entails a risk management software, but the decision will have wide-ranging impact.
- (4) Persian poetry: Accompanied by tonbak and daf players, Shahram Nazeri recites/sings from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, in the style used for traditional Iranian strength-training exercises. [**18-minute video**].
- (5) Earthquakes, from the standpoint of Islam: The late ayatollah Mojtahedi Tehrani provides incontrovertible **evidence from the Quran and Hadith** that earthquakes are caused by sins and promiscuity of all kinds, including visual promiscuity (looking lustfully at members of the opposite sex). However, don't despair, or try to escape, should an earthquake occur. Rather, simply read a specific verse from the Quran and you will be protected.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit. There's no point in being a damn fool about it." ~ Comedian W. C. Fields

2014/04/01 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (5) Of interest to dog lovers: American Eagle Outfitters has released a clothing line for dogs under its new American Beagle brand. In their commercials, cute dogs are shown in cute outfits, taking selfies and saying things such as "you had me at woof" and "what's up dog?"
[In an on-line post of this April Fool's item, it was mentioned that American Eagle made the announcement as a

joke, but now is considering actually offering dog apparel after the overwhelming response it received. Maybe this, too, is part of the joke!]

(2) Yes, I know, guns don't kill/wound people; it is **mean and evil 2-year-olds** who do it.

(3) Classical music: A very young student at the St. Petersburg conservatory music school performs Marcel Lucien Grandjany's **"The Fountain."** Simply fantastic!

(4) Double vision: A fine **example of an image** representing two entirely different scenes.

(5) Some suggestions for improving US-Saudi relations: In a story cleverly titled "The King and O," *Time* magazine (issue of April 7, 2014) lists four sticky points that have made the Saudis suspicious and contemptuous of President Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East. On Iran, the Saudis believe that the US has been too soft and should have seriously considered taking military action. On Egypt, the Saudis favor more pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood and broader support for the military, apparently not quite satisfied with the generals' recent sentencing of 529 Egyptians to death on charges of killing a police officer. On Syria, the Saudis fault the US for not bombing Assad's installations last year. Finally, on Iraq, the Saudis advocate more pressure to discourage Iranian influence. It seems to me that the US can diffuse this tense situation by giving the Saudis a green light for sending all of their 7000 or so princes to fight against their enemies in all four countries. The US can sell them fighter planes, bombers, and other needed equipment. In case the Saudis have a problem paying for the needed military supplies, they can be given a loan, to be paid back by cutting down on the princes' European vacations, saving on luxury accommodations and escort services during these trips, and selling their Porsches, yachts, and private planes. The Saudis can also remove the ban on women driving vehicles, thus allowing thousands of princesses to also contribute to their war effort by driving supply trucks, ambulances, and so on.

(6) Final thought for the day: "You don't talk about the spherical earth with NASA and then say, 'Let's give equal time to the flat-earthers'." ~ Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, on the complaint by creationist groups that their views had been excluded from his new program, "Cosmos"

2014/03/31 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it." ~ Lou Holtz

(2) Improvisations on Rumi's poetry: Darya Dadvar and Golshifteh Farahani perform with Steve Shehan and other musicians in this **10-minute video**.

(3) Aerial perspectives of life on earth: Photographer Alex MacLean captures **amazing photos** of humans and human artifacts from an open window, as he flies a plane.

(4) This is the title of a **53-minute Nova science program** about aerial robots that have revolutionized warfare and will soon do the same for commerce. Be careful, because every aspect of your life will soon be visible by one of the millions of drones that will be crisscrossing the skies.

(5) Ancient Egypt's first engineer was also the first physician: Contrary to popular belief, the Egyptians of the 27th-century BCE did not practice magical and superstitious approaches to medicine. Imhotep, the engineer who built the first pyramid, developed a rational and scientific approach to medicine due to an interest in the health of his army of workers. His direct writings have not survived, but a 1600-BCE scroll, recording his medical wisdom, is available at the New York Academy of Medicine. Perhaps it is due to the desirability of this unusual combination of knowledge and skills that many pre-med students now follow engineering curricula and some medical faculty hold joint appointments in engineering. [Adapted from a column by Henry Petroski in *ASEE Prism* magazine, issue of March-April 2014.]

(6) Final thought for the day: "You're never as good as everyone tells you when you win, and you're never as bad as they say when you lose." ~ Lou Holtz

2014/03/30 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I saw Mr. Ali-Payam for the first time when I was in that small prison. Now, I am privileged to see him in the big prison." ~ Nasrin Sotoudeh, speaking at a literary gathering, after being introduced by Mohammad Reza Ali-Payam (aka humorous poet Mr. Haloo); a reference to her having been released from the Evin Prison

(2) Modern Persian music: Mohsen Namjoo sings the old Persian song **"Del-e Zaaram"** ("My Troubled Heart"), using Fereydoun Farrokhzad's interpretation.

(3) Persian-language radio stations on-line: **This Web page** allows you to listen to many different Persian-language radio stations, including the newly launched Radio Hamrah. Other parts of the same site give you access to Persian-language TV stations and other media.

(4) Earth Hour: On Saturday March 29 (last night), 8:30-9:30 PM local time, millions of people around the globe raised awareness for our planet by turning off their lights. I searched to see if there are satellite photos showing the progression of darkness (or, at least, reduced brightness) as a result of lights being turned off, but

could not find any. Upon further reflection, I remembered reading a long time ago that lights in private residences constitute a minute fraction of all lighting on earth, with the lion's share belonging to office buildings, street lights, stadium lights, and other non-private areas. So, perhaps, satellite photos won't show any noticeable change as Earth Hour moved across the globe. It is still a good symbolic gesture, though.

(5) The ten best sentences in the English literature: "Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." ~ F. Scott Fitzgerald [One of the ten best sentences in the English literature, as selected by the editors of *The American Scholar*]

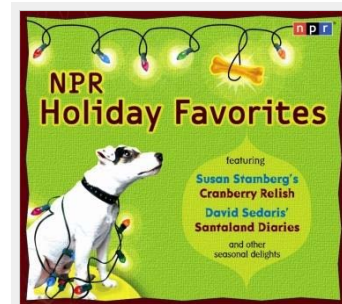
I liked [this analysis](#) of why the 10 chosen sentences are exemplary.

(6) Final thought for the day: "There are three kinds of men. The one that learns by reading. The few who learn by observation. The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves." ~ Will Rogers

2014/03/29 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Brief audiobook review: Compilation, *NPR Holiday Favorites*, written and read by various authors/performers, HighBridge Audio, 2008.

This compilation of NPR's special holiday programs on 2 CDs features a number of essays and other contributions, including Susan Stamberg's "Cranberry Relish" and David Sedaris' "Santaland Diaries." Other interesting segments include Robert Siegel's quest to find out why there are so many different spellings of the name of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah, Roya Hakakian's remembrance of a stranger's Christmas kindness, and Brian Unger's aversion to boring Thanksgiving Day speeches. This was an enjoyable listen for me during a recent car trip to Los Angeles.



(2) Quote of the day: "I am not this hair, I am not this skin. I am this soul that lives within." ~ Rumi

(3) Blind autistic boy performs "[Open the Eyes of My Heart](#)," a Paul Balloche song.

(4) Look who's talking: In a [Fox News interview](#), Donald Rumsfeld asserted that a trained ape would conduct foreign policy better than the Obama administration. The key word here is "trained," which essentially implies that the US foreign policy is at least a tad better than an untrained ape's; otherwise the articulate Rumsfeld would have used an unqualified "ape" for comparison. So, we seem to have had some improvement in conducting foreign policy, compared with the administration of Rumsfeld's boss.

(5) Final thought for the day: "To expand your knowledge, listen more than you talk. You already know everything you've got to say." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/28 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "When you blame others, you give up your power to change." ~ Anonymous

(2) Modern Persian music: Blind man [sings and plays the keyboard](#).

(3) Fusion guitar music: Danny and Farid play "[Dance on the Fire](#)" (from the album "Dance of the Flames").

(4) A modern Persian song, and the controversy it has sparked: Shahkar Binesh Pajooch sings his own composition "[Beh Toh Cheh](#)" ("None of Your Business"), apparently addressing Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. This must be part of his recent concert in southern California, in collaboration with the LA Symphony Orchestra. It is interesting to hear upbeat Persian dance music performed by a symphony orchestra. The lyrics leave much to be desired, but the overall effort is entertaining, not to mention daring. The audience, which includes a number of celebs, soaks up the insults, but others are not amused by the crass language. A Facebook friend commented on a post about the song that the lyrics resemble a poem by Khazen Bakhtiari, who uses the same "beh toh cheh" refrain. Previously, I had posted about Bineshpajooch, condemning his dishonesty in splicing images of famous concert venues in Europe along with audiences who applaud a classical music performance, with his Persian singing in an empty concert hall somewhere in Asia, implying that his performance was in Europe and he was given a standing ovation by adoring fans.

(5) Computer-generated 10-year-old Filipino girl helps nab 1000 pedophiles: This story is both disturbing and satisfying. At any given moment, 750,000 child predators are on-line, paying for live video chats with enslaved young children via untraceable prepaid credit cards. Modern computer technology had given these pedophiles anonymity and immunity, making them extremely hard to catch. But now the same technology helps bring them to justice. Please watch this very effective [8-minute video](#). At some point, the video's narrator mentions that within seconds of one of these children going on-line, dozens of men try to connect with them. Shameful, indeed!

(6) Final thought for the day: "You can't teach children to behave better by making them feel worse. When children feel better, they behave better." ~ Pam Leo

2014/03/27 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "It is a painful thing to look at your own trouble and know that you yourself and no one else has made it." ~ Sophocles
- (2) Humanity in action: Compilation of dramatic and kindhearted [animal rescues](#).
- (3) Geographic transformation of the US, in one image: This [GIF image](#) traces the move westward and formation of states, from 1789 to present. By moving down the page, you can look at the changes at a frame-by-frame level. If the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" applies to JPG, then a GIF can be worth a million words.
- (4) Before and after [photos](#) of the Washington state landslide: Geologists had warned about the potential occurrence of such a devastating landslide 15 years ago.
- (5) US fifth in executions: The top four countries are China, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Perhaps this list will convince those favoring the death penalty to reconsider, if only to avoid being in such despicable company.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs." ~ Joan Didion

2014/03/26 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "There are hundreds of paths up the mountain, all leading to the same place. The only person wasting time is the one who runs around the mountain, telling everyone that his or her path is wrong." ~ Hindu proverb
- (2) Worrisome questions for Google: In a typical month, about 1000 people ask Google about "how to hide a dead body," 1900 users perform searches about "how to get away with murder," and more than 40,000 individuals wonder "why did I get married?" [Source: *The Week*, issue of March 28, 2014.]
- (3) Identity theft, at the highest level: Two Georgia men have pleaded guilty to filing a tax return with the name and Social Security Number of US Attorney General Eric Holder, in the hope of getting his refund. [Source: *The Week*, issue of March 28, 2014.]
- (4) Art meets life. [\[Photo\]](#)
- (5) CGI replacement for actors who die before film projects are completed: Several movie studios are considering using CGI to [fill in for actors who die](#) before filming is wrapped up. The method may be applied to Paul Walker in the final scenes of "Fast and Furious 7" and to Philip Seymour Hoffman in a "Hunger Games" sequel.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "There are hundreds of paths up the mountain, all leading to the same place. The only person wasting time is the one who runs around the mountain, telling everyone that his or her path is wrong." ~ Hindu proverb

2014/03/25 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Personal attacks are nothing new. When a UN Special Rapporteur or the Secretary General or other officials can receive personal attacks for the things they say, think about what could happen to those Iranians who may express their opinions in Tehran or other places." ~ Ahmed Shahid, UN Rapporteur of human rights in Iran
- (2) Cartoon of the day: [Putin marches on](#) during March Madness.
- (3) Losing an old buddy: Parviz Rafinejad, electrical engineer, who was part of a close circle of friends at Daneshkadeh-ye Fanni during 1964-1968, passed away of heart problems on March 22 in Grenoble at the age of 68. I wish peace for his soul and patience for his survivors.
- (4) Washington state [landslide update](#): The number of confirmed deaths has risen to 14; many of the 176 missing persons may have perished as well.
- (5) Jewish history: PBS SoCal (KOCE) will air the 5-part program "The Story of the Jews" on Tuesdays March 25 (Parts 1-2) and April 1 (Parts 3-5), 2014, beginning at 8:00 PM. The miniseries is based on a book of the same name by Simon Schama, British historian and Professor of Art History and History at Columbia University. Friends in other parts of the world should check their local listings, if interested.
- (6) Final thought for the day: "Life is simple ... Fill what's empty. Empty what's full. Scratch where it itches and don't take it seriously." ~ Alice Roosevelt Longworth

2014/03/24 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Our character is more evident by our choices than by our abilities." ~ Rita Schiano
- (2) Is it true that the problem with women is men? There is a [Facebook page](#) with this title. LOL.
- (3) Innovation in bicycling: FlyKly has built a [bicycle wheel](#) containing a rechargeable battery and a motor giving up to 20 mph assist when you bike. There are no wires; everything is built into the "Smart Wheel," whose battery partially charges when you pedal and can also be plugged in at home for full charging.
- (4) Collaborative lecture annotation: This idea comes from an article in *IEEE Trans. Learning Technologies* (Vol.

6, No. 1, pp. 4-13, 2013). Students in a class participate in annotating the instructor's lecture notes, slides, and videos. Whereas textbooks can be searched, electronically or via indices, and can emphasize important material by using distinct typefaces or via highlighting, the same cannot be said about lecture notes, slides, and videos. Students can help each other by marking important passages, posting comments, or supplying links to alternate explanations, thus providing collective wisdom about the course contents.

(5) Google Glass in a pilot project: In what appears to be the first use of Google Glass in a business setting, Virgin Atlantic is running a trial at London's Heathrow Airport to offer personalized customer service and improve efficiency. Upper-class passengers arriving at Heathrow's Terminal 3 are greeted by name when encountering an airline staff member wearing the Glass, who also initiates the check-in process for them. [From *E&T magazine*, issue of April 2014.]

(6) Final thought for the day: "As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do." ~ Andrew Carnegie

2014/03/23 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Kesha has dropped the dollar sign from her name, which is very \$ad." ~ *Time* magazine, issue of March 24, 2014, commenting on the former "Ke\$ha"

(2) LACMA's Norooz celebration: The event, sponsored by Farhang Foundation, was a bit of disappointment. They had some music and dancing in the central courtyard, children's activities, and a costume parade, featuring women's wear from various regions of Iran, all in a fairly disorganized fashion. Short films were screened continuously in a theater, which I did not visit. The main event was a performance by singer-songwriter Ziba Shirazi, entitled "Spring Love." Shirazi told the story of three women in different generations of a family, all of whom found love at first sight during sizdeh-bedar outings. The storyline, supposedly taken from a diary that Shirazi found in a park, provided the backdrop for her songs, a few songs from other composers, and a couple of comedy skits.

(3) These are real guns, not toys: Because cigarettes are dangerous to our health, we have outlawed marketing them to young people by depicting smoking as "cool" in ads. Toylike guns are even more dangerous and seem to be aimed at even younger demographics, [judging by the designs](#). Where is the cry of outrage?

(4) Grandma plays the knitting game. [[Image](#)]

(5) Giant landslide in rural Washington area kills 8, with dozens missing: Some families were trapped inside their homes. [Search for survivors](#) has been made difficult by unstable hillside.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Time decides who you meet in your life, your heart decides who you want in your life, and your behavior decides who stays in your life." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/22 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The promise of spring's arrival is enough to get anyone through the bitter winter!" ~ Jen Selinsky

(2) Most of us are part-Neanderthal: We use "Neanderthal" as a perjorative term in connection with unrefined or downright stupid behavior. [New findings](#) increasingly point to interbreeding between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals, explaining how up to 5% of the DNA of non-Africans comes from Neanderthals, previously thought to have split from the branch leading to modern humans some 270-440K years ago.

(3) Old-school texting. [[Image](#)]

(4) As graceful as nature. [[Image](#)]

(5) Haji Firooz is a racist tradition that we should abandon: One of the staples of Norooz and new year celebrations in modern Iranian culture is Haji Firooz, a dancer/entertainer (always a man) who paints his face black and dances to happy tunes on streets or in private gatherings. This is offensive on so many levels, especially coming from Iranians living in a country that abolished slavery 150 years ago (the 13th Amendment was adopted in 1865; though racial equality is still work in progress). I have posted about this issue on multiple occasions before, but yesterday I was reminded of it when a Facebook friend shared President Obama's Norooz message to Iranian people, using "Haji Firooz" in the post's caption. Some have tried to justify the racist Haji Firooz tradition by stating that the blackened face represents soot on the face of ancient Zoroastrian firekeepers, who were charged with keeping the temple fire going at all times. I don't buy this explanation. Firekeepers were respected, wise, priestly figures who wouldn't go around, performing clownish acts and calling passersby "arbaab-e khodam" ("my own master").

(6) Quote of the day: "A tree can be tempted out of its winter dormancy by a few hours of southerly sun—the readiness to believe in spring is stronger than sleep or sanity." ~ Amy Leach, *Things That Are*

2014/03/20 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Greetings and best wishes for Norooz and Persian new year:
For many years now, I have composed a traditional Norooz poem

that celebrates the arrival of spring, renewal of nature, and beginning of the Persian new year. Here is my poem for 2014 (1393 of the Iranian calendar), in which the initial letters of the first/second half of the verses spell the poem's title ("Norooz Khojasteh" = "Auspicious Norooz"). [Read it on Iranian.com]

(2) Inflation of early universe confirmed by observations: Radio astronomers report about seeing the beginning of the Big Bang, thus confirming [Alan Guth's hypothesis](#), known as inflation (which explains how the universe expanded so uniformly and so quickly in the instant after the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago).

(3) Iranian folk music: This kind of [happy, rhythmic music](#) is very common for celebrating Norooz and the arrival of spring.

(4) The kid who loved fried chicken [old joke, but good for a chuckle during these final hours of winter]: Our teacher asked what my favorite animal was, and I said, "fried chicken." She said I wasn't funny, but she couldn't have been right, because everyone else laughed. My parents told me to always tell the truth. I did. Fried chicken is my favorite animal. I told my dad what happened, and he said my teacher was probably a member of PETA. He said they love animals very much. I do, too; especially chicken, pork, and beef. Anyway, my teacher sent me to the principal's office. I told him what happened, and he laughed, too. Then he told me not to do it again. The next day in class my teacher asked me what my favorite live animal was. I told her it was chicken. She asked me why, so I told her it was because you could make them into fried chicken. She sent me back to the principal's office. He laughed, and told me not to do it again. I don't understand. My parents taught me to be honest, but my teacher doesn't like it when I am. Today, my teacher asked me to tell her what famous person I admired most. I told her, "Colonel Sanders." Guess where I am now.

(5) Final thought for the day: "You'd be surprised how far you can go from the point where you thought was the end." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/19 (Wed.): Keaton, Diane, *Then Again*, unabridged audiobook on 7 CDs, read by the author, Books on Tape, 2011.

I like Diane Keaton as an actress, so when I saw an audiobook of her memoirs on the library shelf, I decided to borrow it for one of my now-frequent long drives to/from Los Angeles.

Beginning with the third CD of this audiobook, however, I kept thinking whether I should continue listening.

Keaton reveals very little; in fact, much of what she writes is from the diary of her mother, Dorothy Dean Keaton Hall, which is quite good in some passages. It appears that Diane Keaton purposely wrote a joint memoir to show her affection for her mom. Woody Allen's "Annie Hall" is his take on the Hall family dynamics, with Keaton playing herself and winning an Oscar for the role.

Keaton's own observations are mundane. There are several long to-do lists and collections of motivational messages that feel and sound like fillers to make the book's length respectable. Keaton's crushes on several movie stars, including her subsequent boyfriends Woody Allen and Warren Beatty, and Gregory Peck, who brushed her off, are only marginally interesting, mostly because she holds back information that might have revealed the reasons for her serial attraction to celebs.

Keaton does confess that she cannot get emotionally close to people, so love for her is only a curiosity. We learn that Keaton was insecure and bulimic for much of her youth and that depression had a negative effect on her career throughout her life. She talks affectionately about her adopted children, but here too the reader/listener is left longing for more insights in lieu of descriptions of day-to-day routines.

Keaton's reading of her own words is flat and, at times, contains inappropriate pauses and emphases. So, why did I listen all the way to the end of the audiobook? I guess I was hoping to hear more interesting stuff as the book got into her years of fame and celebrity in her own right, rather than as the beautiful girlfriend of a famous movie icon. If you are an ardent fan of Diane Keaton, you may enjoy this (audio)book. Otherwise, there are plenty of better memoirs around.

2014/03/18 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "My sight, my heart, my life. All three words I have woven into one: LOVE." ~ Rumi

(2) Modern Persian music: Sign language is used in this video of the song "Zنده Moondan" ("Staying Alive"), performed [by Farzad Milani](#).

(3) Ziba Shirazi [sings about spring](#).

(4) Ukraine shouldn't be the only country that is split in two: "[The US] should peacefully break into two

نوروز خُجسته

نَمِ بَرانِ درختِ میوه را پُر بار کرد
 خاک را سبزینه داد و دشت را گلزار کرد
 وجد و لطف نو بهاران شد نوید زندگی
 جمله غم در خواب برد و خنده را بیدار کرد
 رختِ نوروزی چو بر تن کرد هر شاخ و گیاه
 سنبلِ نوری ز بویش مست را هشیار کرد
 وقت آن شد تا ز بغض و دشمنی دوری کنیم
 تازه چون شد روز ما، این راه را هموار کرد
 زین تحول قلبها نزدیک شد با دوستی
 همنوایی را فرود و کینه را دشوار کرد

بهروز پرهامی، نوروز ۱۳۹۳

countries, one made of red states and one of blue. The red one would still be called the United States of America, since it would otherwise have to alter the lyrics of every song its citizens know. The blue one would be renamed something racially inclusive and exceedingly long and hard to remember. ... Splitting the US in two will spur us on. We'll have the two biggest militaries, the two biggest economies and ... Israel will be thrilled to double its number of allies. ... While we work out all the paperwork to separate into two countries, we'll have to go back to getting along and agreeing to compromise." ~ Humorist Joel Stein, writing in *Time* magazine, issue of March 24, 2014

(5) A 3200-year-old-tree: This tree is so huge that it was never captured in one undistorted image. Until now. Here is [the image](#) and how it was put together from 126 separate photos.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Everyone says love hurts, but that isn't true. Loneliness hurts. Rejection hurts. Losing someone hurts. Envy hurts. Everyone gets these things confused with love, but in reality love is the only thing in this world that covers up all pain and makes someone feel wonderful again. Love is the only thing in this world that does not hurt." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/17 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Anger is never without a reason, but seldom with a good one." ~ Benjamin Franklin

(2) Flashmob in Morocco: I, for one, don't get tired of flashmobs, because they represent such unexpected gifts to passersby. You can see the delight in the faces of onlookers and in their hearty participation. [[Video](#)]

(3) The 4-tiered Mitchell Falls in Western Australia. [[Image](#)]

(4) UN Secretary General criticizes Iran on human rights: [Ban Ki-moon](#) cites continuing abuse, including executions, unfair trials, and bias against minorities.

(5) One World Trade Center: The engineering marvel that is 1 WTC is featured in the March 17, 2014, issue of [Time magazine](#), which includes a couple of breathtaking photos, one showing the new Manhattan skyline and another from the top of the 1776-foot, 104-story structure that is the third tallest in the world (following UAE's Burj Khalifa and Saudi Arabia's Makkah Clock Royal Tower). Safety features of the new building include bomb-resistant lower 20 floors, pressurizing capability for passageways to keep out smoke and toxins, and two separate wider-than-usual stairwells, one of which is devoted to use by emergency personnel.

(6) Final thought for the day: "No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow your progress, you're still way ahead of everyone who isn't trying." ~ Tony Robbins

2014/03/15 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Close some doors. Not because of pride, incapacity or arrogance, but simply because they no longer lead somewhere." ~ Paulo Coelho

(2) Advice: During spring cleaning, remember to also clean your heart, not just your house.

(3) A collection of [bizarre or unexplained accidents](#) involving vehicles: Some lucky, others not so lucky.

(4) The new Cosmos series: Here is the first part of "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" [on Hulu](#).

(5) Saving our movie theaters: With larger and larger screens at home and people's affinity for watching entertainment programs on the go, using tablets or smartphones, the demise of movie theaters isn't hard to envisage. Such an outcome worries both theater owners and romantic cinema-goers, who like their big-screen outings. But laser projection systems may come to the rescue by providing brighter images, improved resolution, higher frame rate, more vivid colors, and greater energy efficiency. [Adapted from the March 2014 issue of [IEEE Spectrum](#).]

(6) Final thought for the day: As children, we are characterized as "just a kid." Later in life, we are viewed as "young and inexperienced." When we get old, we are dismissed as "too old to understand." Only after we die, we become "wise beyond words." ~ Composite from multiple Internet sources

2014/03/14 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Everyone talks about leaving the planet a better place for our kids. We should also leave better kids for our planet." ~ Anonymous

(2) Titanic, before and after. [[Composite image](#)]

(3) All in fun: Iranian students mimic Ellen's Academy Awards night group selfie. [[Image](#)]

(4) Javad Zarif criticized for his human-rights snafu: Nargues Mohammadi, one of the women who were called names by Islamic Republic officials after they met privately with Catherine Ashton, [has written a letter](#) to Iran's foreign minister, accusing him of jumping on the conservative bandwagon by calling the human rights activists "sedition convicts."

[*Note added on 3/15:* It turns out that Zarif may not have spoken the words attributed to him by Mashregh, a news agency affiliated with Ahmadinejad's gang. It has been pointed out to me that the offensive words were used mischievously in the news story's headline and not in the text of the report.]

(5) Nude protest on the International Women's Day: There was a report in the news that some women's rights

activists undressed in front of Paris's Louvre Museum to protest the sorry state of women's rights in Iran. This protest created a range of reactions, from lauding the brave act to strong condemnation for using an offensive method that sets back the cause of women's rights. Even though I don't want to take a side in this post, something very interesting caught my eye in Persian reports of this incident. A couple of reports contained statements about the women exposing their "sharmgaah" (place of shame), a term that is quite indicative of a worldview that deems women inferior and unclean.

(6) Final thought for the day: "If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." ~ J. R. R. Tolkien

2014/03/13 (Thu.): Today, a memorial service was held for my ex-wife, Vida Daie Parhami, who passed away last week. The venue was in Los Angeles, where both of our families are concentrated. The gathering was quite moving and well-attended. After my introductory remarks and eulogy, our daughter, one of my sisters, and both of Vida's sisters delivered heartfelt and eloquent speeches. May her soul rest in peace and may her light continue to shine through our three wonderful children!

2014/03/12 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Don't break someone's heart; they have only one. Break their bones; they have 206 of them." ~ Anonymous

(2) Joke of the day: A man was arrested in Iran when he thanked God aloud (uttering "khodaya shokret") multiple times as he walked. He was charged with making fun of God.

(3) New SAT changes criticized: SAT is slated to become more directly relevant to the contents students learn in high school and also easier. **Much of the criticism** has been leveled at the second aspect of the changes that are seemingly motivated by financial considerations (because in recent years, ACT had become more popular than SAT).

(4) Restrictions on unpaid internships lauded: Companies have been abusing unpaid internship positions to get their work done at no cost. There are plenty of volunteers for such unpaid positions in the currently competitive job market, because listing the internships on a resume improves an applicant's job prospects. **Rules governing internships** state that they should provide an educational experience for the interns and not entail routine busy work, but these rules have been by and large ignored by the industry. Many colleges have taken or are taking steps to restrict unpaid internships that do not have any educational value.

(5) Photoshopping in the news again: Catherine Ashton, visiting Iran at the invitation of the Islamic Republic officials, met privately with a number of women activists. A news site, affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards, characterized her meeting with "sedition figures" as **meddling in Iran's internal affairs**. A photo accompanying the news analysis shows Ashton without the headscarf she wore to her meetings with government officials. Photoshopped out of the photo is the image of Gohar Eshghi, the mother of blogger Sattar Beheshti, who died while in the custody of Iran's security police.

(6) Final thought for the day: "We cannot bring to the world what we do not have to offer. Peace starts in our own minds and hearts, not outside of ourselves." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/11 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It doesn't escape me for one moment that so much joy in my life is thanks to so much pain in someone else's." ~ Lupita Nyong'o, supporting-actress Oscar winner for her role as a real-life slave

(2) A desperately hopeful poem: The poem "Our Generation," which on the surface conveys despair, made a splash when its image was posted to Twitter by the 14-year-old poet's brother. The highly unusual thing about **the poem** is that its sense changes from despair to hope when it is read backwards (bottom to top).

(3) A major outreach initiative for science: An updated version of the **"Cosmos" series**, originally made by Carl Sagan in the 1980s, is being promoted by Fox. Scientist and educator Neil deGrasse Tyson hosts the series, which will premier with an introduction by President Obama.

(4) Iranian women attempt to enter a soccer stadium from which they are banned: They chant the slogan "Our Share is Half of Aazadi," referring to the **largest stadium in Tehran**, whose name means "Freedom."

(5) Intercepted Iranian weapons headed for Gaza displayed: The advanced rockets were completely hidden in the ship's cargo area under bags of cement. [**2-minute video**]

(6) Final thought for the day: "Every true love and friendship is a story of unexpected transformation. If we are the same person before and after we loved, that means we haven't loved enough." ~ Elif Shafak

2014/03/10 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking." ~ Albert Einstein

(2) Brief joke of the day: The letter C was afraid of all the other letters, because they were not-Cs.

(3) Isla Vista's continue their recent crazy behavior: What is being called a near-riot broke out on Saturday 3/8

in Isla Vista, a community near UCSB, as [crowds defied police orders](#) to disperse. One person was stabbed and the suspect is in custody.

(4) Causeway over the Hormuz Strait: Shortly after signing an agreement to double the number of flights between the two countries, Iran and Oman have announced a plan to [build a bridge](#) between the two countries over the 40-km (25-mi) span of the waterway connecting the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf. Project cost is unknown at this time.

(5) Cell phones are not dangerous if used while being charged: Chain e-mails and chain posts on Facebook and elsewhere warn cell phone users that they [risk electrocution](#) if they take calls while their phone is being charged. Apparently, an Indian cell phone user was electrocuted in 2004, but no such incident has occurred since then, suggesting that there was a problem in the specific phone he used, rather than there being a general problem with cell phones. There is this advice that if it's too good to be true, it probably is. Perhaps we should add to the advice the following: If it's too horrible to be true, it probably is. Please do not share such warnings, or medical advice, without verifying their correctness. Typing a few words from the message/post, plus the word "snopes" into a search bar will generally lead you to a Snopes.com page, where known information about the truth or falsehood of the claims can be found.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Can you imagine the moment hugs were invented? The first one must have felt so awkward." ~ Anonymous

2014/03/09 (Sun.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Sad news and expression of gratitude: I thank all family members and friends on behalf of myself, my children, and our extended family for posted comments and private messages of sympathy for my ex-wife's passing on 3/7. As you can imagine, making final arrangements for a departed family member is a time-consuming and emotionally draining process for all of us. So, please accept our apologies for not being able to respond individually to your support and kindness at this time. Arrangements for Vida Parhami's funeral and details of her memorial service will be announced shortly.

(2) Brief joke of the day: The French have just one egg for breakfast, because that's un-oeuf.

(3) Dance performance: Japanese dancers use lights in their routine, with [hypnotizing effect](#).

(4) The fox guarding the hen house: Iran's foreign minister met with his counterpart in Indonesia to talk about maltreatment of Iranian asylum-seekers in Australia. Javad Zarif has [told reporters](#): "The lives of our nationals are important to us and we did in fact issue a statement against the way Iranian nationals were treated by Australia." The jailers and executioners are now shedding crocodile tears over the fate of those who try to escape the brutal Islamic regime.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Let yourself become living poetry." ~ Rumi

2014/03/08 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Our attitude towards others determines their attitude towards us." ~ Earl Nightingale

(2) Brief joke of the day: Why can't Hellen Keller drive a car? Because she is dead.

(3) Comedy skits: The sons of Dr. Farhang Holakouee perform a comedy skit about his radio advice show, surprising him during the launch event for Radio Hamrah. [[Part 1](#), Persian] [[Part 2](#), English]

(4) Kurdish music: "[Mina Khanoom](#)"

(5) Happy [International Women's Day](#)! I am anxiously looking forward to a future in which we do not need a Women's Day, a Women's History Month, or a Black History Month. Meanwhile, I join my daughter and all of my female family members and friends in celebrating the achievements of women worldwide. It is fitting on the occasion of the 2014 International Women's day to mention that Iranian women have been at the forefront of the fight against the Islamic regime's dictatorial rule. I have been thinking about why it is so, and would like to share my findings with you. First, socially active Iranian women are highly educated and do a great job of formulating their grievances and responding to the regime's accusations that female intellectuals are fighting only because they want to be promiscuous. Second, the regime finds its hands tied in prosecuting and punishing female dissidents. This is, ironically, a result of the Iranian society's backwardness in the area of women's rights. Iranian families are doubly offended when one of their female members is arrested or mistreated. True, there are quite a few women in Iranian prisons, but men would have been treated much more harshly for the same "crimes" against the state. Third, Iranian women find themselves in a position of "nothing to lose"; they can't imagine their treatment and lack of civil rights getting any worse than they already are. Hats off to the smart and brave women of Iran!

(6) One more post in honor of International Women's Day: And God Created Women's Lib. [[Cartoon](#)]

2014/03/07 (Fri.): Gladwell, Malcolm, *What the Dog Saw, and Other Adventures*, unabridged audiobook on 10 CDs, read by the author, Hachette Audio, 2009.

[I have several completed (yet to be polished) or partially written book reviews from the past 2-3 months. Today, I decided to complete and post one of those. Hope you find it useful. More will be forthcoming.]

In this audiobook, Gladwell, the author of three highly successful books, *The Tipping Point*, *Blink*, and *Outliers*, is up to his usual head-scratching questions, such as why there are so many kinds of mustard but only one kind of ketchup, or what the late-blooming Cezanne did before producing his first significant paintings in his 50s.

The 19 articles of this volume, which were originally published in *The New Yorker*, are nearly equally divided among three kinds of subjects: (1) People who have become very successful through acquiring an eccentric skill, following a passion, or devising a brilliant advertising campaign; (2) Hazards of statistical prediction and the ensuing spectacular system failures, such as 9/11, the collapse of Enron, and lousy defense against Scud missiles; (3) Our inability to accurately predict the performance or success of individuals, be they artists, educators, athletes, or criminals.

Gladwell makes his ideas readily accessible to all readers. However, the process of watering down the material and making them more interesting invariably leads to oversimplification and loss of scientific rigor. Some reviewers have characterized Gladwell's work as setting up pseudoparadoxes and then proceeding to exploit them for making his points. For example, writing in *The New York Times*, Steven Pinker of Harvard University states that, "Readers have much to learn from Gladwell the journalist and the essayist. But when it comes to Gladwell the social scientist, they should watch out for those igon values."

Consider the following case in point. There is ample research on decision-making under uncertainty. We do know that there are trade-offs between the sensitivity of a test (not missing the presence of an illness, say) and incidence of false alarms. If you want to miss very few positive cases, then you must be prepared to live with many false positives. However, going into such details might soften the punch of Gladwell's populist message and disorient casual readers, who would be turned off by a message that contains shades of gray, rather than a black-and-white pronouncement.

I have personally learned a great deal from Gladwell's writings. However, as a scientist/engineer, I am rather immune to being misled by poorly reasoned decrees and overly general conclusions. If you read or listen to this book with a careful eye/ear, you will find it both entertaining and educational.

2014/03/06 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship." ~ Buddha

(2) Brief joke of the day: Did you hear that the stationary store has moved?

(3) A critic of capitalism visits Iran and gets a warm reception from conservative academics: I have no sympathy for **this guy's views**, but to be fair to him, he does say: "I can't control how people interpret me. I'm saying the U.S. is in decline and is weaker than it thinks, but I'm also saying Iran is weaker than it thinks, and everyone has to get realistic about how much power they really have in the world."

(4) Here is a partial list of **jobs that no longer exist**.

Bowling alley pin setter (sat behind bowling pins and reset them after each roll of the ball)

Ice cutter (cut ice from the surface of frozen lakes, giving pieces to ice delivery men)

Rat catcher (controlled rodent population to prevent the spread of diseases)

Lamp lighter (was charged with lighting and extinguishing street lamps)

Milkman (delivered milk to pre-refrigerator households; also, was subject of many jokes)

Switchboard operator (connected calls within telephone networks)

Lector at factory (read to those who worked all day, providing a form of entertainment)

(5) Oldest things in the world: According to *Time* magazine, issue of March 10, 2014, here are some of the oldest things in the world, in different categories.

Rock [4.28 billion years old]: Some rocks in the bedrock of Canada's Hudson Bay

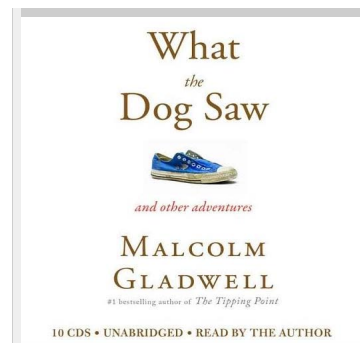
Skeleton [55 million years old]: The oldest fossil skeleton of a primate species, found in China

Fruit [52.2 million years old]: A fossilized tomatillo (from the tomato family), found in Argentina

DNA [400,000 years old]: Obtained from humanlike species (human ancestor) in northern Spain

Live tree [9550 years old]: The roots of a small tree in Sweden

(6) Final thought for the day: "Stop fighting over who created the world and fight against the people who are destroying it." ~ Anonymous

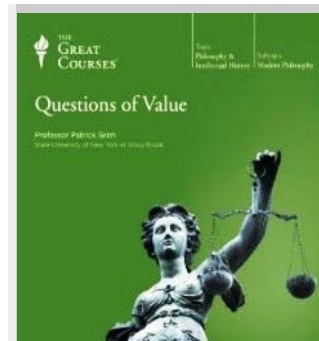


2014/03/05 (Wed.): Grim, Patrick (SUNY Stony Brook Philosophy Professor), *Questions of Value*, 24 lectures on 12 CDs, The Teaching Company, 2005.

In these 24 half-hour lectures, forming a part of the Great Courses Series in Philosophy and Intellectual History, Professor Grim tackles basic questions of our lives: "What is worth striving for, and what makes life worth living? Are there values that transcend cultural differences? Is ethics possible without religion? If the universe is deterministic, can there be genuine choice? Is all value subjective? Is anyone ever better off dead?" The course is well-prepared and intellectually stimulating, with an orderly and engaging presentation.

In what follows, I list the lecture titles, with a few notes about each, as a way of summarizing the contents of this highly recommended course.

1. Questions of Value: Course structure, objectives, the basic nature of values and challenges to them.
2. Facts & Values: Answers to questions of fact can be verified; the same isn't true of questions of value.
3. Lives to Envy, Lives to Admire: What makes a life a good life? What makes it an enjoyable life?
4. Foundations of Ethics—Theories of the Good: Ethical evaluation is more than simple "right" or "wrong."
5. Foundations of Ethics—Theories of the Right: What makes something ethically right?
6. Thoughts on Religion & Values: You can, and should, talk about values independently of religion.
7. Life's Priorities: If you have something precious that can't be held, like your life, you must spend it well.
8. Cash Value of a Life: Ford's decision not to fix the Pinto's gas-tank problem entailed cost-benefit analysis.
9. How Do We Know Right from Wrong? We derive our knowledge from premises such as human rights.
10. Cultures & Values—Questions of Relativism: Pure relativism may lead to dangerous ethical mistakes.
11. Cultures & Values—Hopi, Navajo, Ik: Seemingly opposite Ethical beliefs may be superficially different.
12. Evolution, Ethics, & Game Theory: Attempts to find an underlying structure for our intuitions.
13. The Objective Side of Value: Is a brain kept alive in a vat and fed positive sensory signals truly happy?
14. Better off Dead: We agree that lives have different worths, but can the worth of a life be negative?
15. A Picture of Justice: Societal ethics and how it differs from individual ethics.
16. Life's Horrors: Natural and unnatural evils and how they affect our outlook on life.
17. A Genealogy of My Morals: Nietzsche's claims on linguistic roots of moral terms have been discredited.
18. Theories of Punishment: Arguments for/against punishment, particularly morality of the death penalty.
19. Choice & Chance: The value of good will is independent of consequences, which may depend on chance.
20. Free Will & Determinism: A universe ruled entirely by causality and natural laws does not allow free will.
21. Images of Immortality: Immortality can be viewed as the ultimate reward or the ultimate punishment.
22. Ethical Knowledge, Rationality, & Rules: Ethics is much more than a list of dos and don'ts.
23. Moralities in & and in Change: Is a resolution ever possible between conflicting moral worldviews?
24. Summing Up: Summarizing the basic notions of values and the set of challenges to them.



2014/03/04 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Brief joke of the day: Nurse to doctor: "There is an invisible man in the waiting room." Doctor to nurse: "Tell him I can't see him."

(2) Taipei theater taken over by pandas: The World Wildlife Fund Pandas on Tour exhibition, started in 2008 to highlight the plight of the endangered species, has now made its way to Taipei, where 1600 papier-mache pandas (and one green tree frog) line the rows of the [Taiwan National Theater](#), each representing one of the few real-life pandas still in existence around the world.

(3) Sorry folks, but Sarah Palin is back in the news: Apparently, she could see Russia well enough from her house to have predicted [Putin's invasion of Ukraine](#) if Obama were elected president. In all fairness, she does have bragging rights, which she is happily using by writing blogs and appearing on TV shows.

(4) Traditional Persian music: [Homay & Mastan](#) sing about a village chief who has gone crazy, is clueless, and believes he is God. The political reference is lost to no one.

(5) Hercule Parrot solves a crime: A man in India found his wife dead at home and her jewelry missing. There were no clues, but the family's parrot became agitated when a nephew of the dead woman showed up or even upon a mention of his name. [Case solved!](#)

2014/03/03 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock." ~ Thomas Jefferson

(2) Brief joke of the day: A priest, a rapist, and a pedophile walks into a bar and orders a drink.

(3) A Canadian family in Iran: This [30-minute video](#) documents what members of a Canadian family saw when they visited different Iranian cities and rural regions before the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

(4) Freedom of the press in different countries: In a ranking of 180 countries by Reporters without Borders

(*Time* magazine, issue of March 10, 2014), Finland was placed 1st, USA 46th, China 175th, and Eritrea 180th.

(5) Sand art produced with only a rake: Apparently, this art form is quite popular around the world and there are even championship events for it. Here is a [6-minute video](#) showing the work of Andres Amador.

(6) The team that saved HealthCare.gov: A special report in *Time* magazine, issue of March 10, 2014, tells the story of how a group of young engineers and coders, who had helped build Obama's campaign databases for on-line fundraising, were brought in to save the broken technology on which his signature legislative achievement depended. The smart but unassuming team members were reluctant to take credit for their heroic deeds, which included an initial assessment of whether the system could be patched/improved to work or was in need of scrapping and starting over. Barely six weeks later, HealthCare.gov not only had not been scrapped, but was working well and proceeding on a path to even greater improvement.

2014/03/02 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) The Academy Awards: There were few surprises in the awards for major categories. "12 Years a Slave" won for best film, Alfonso Cuaron for best direction ("Gravity"), Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto for lead and supporting actor, Cate Blanchett and Lupita Nyong for lead and supporting actress.

(2) Brief joke of the day: Do you know why New Yorkers are so depressed? Because the light at the end of their tunnel is New Jersey.

(3) Large waves in Santa Barbara: Yesterday, my daughter and I took a stroll in the windy and wet weather to view the Hawaii-size waves (quite unusual for this area) on a beach close to our house. It turns out that one of these big waves [broke through a window](#) at Moby Dick Restaurant, sitting atop Stearns Wharf, at least 20 feet above the ocean level.

(4) Dustin Hoffman's moving 1979 Oscar [acceptance speech](#). [Begins at minute 4:00, if you want to skip the announcement of nominees and the winner.]

(5) Who killed Olaf Palme? According to *Newsweek* magazine (on-line post of 2/25), the hunt for the 1986 assassin of the Swedish prime minister has taken a new turn, much to the liking of conspiracy theorists, with the revelation that Stieg Larsson (1954-2004), blockbuster novelist of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy, had sent police 15 boxes of documents that he said linked the shooting to a former military officer with links to South African security services. The person named has denied any involvement and the police say he is not being pursued as a suspect at this time.

(6) A very smart principal (a lesson in education): At a private school in Washington, some 12-year-old girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. That was fine, but after they put on their lipstick, they would press their lips on the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints. Every night the custodian would remove them, and the next day the girls would put them back. Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the custodian. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night (you can just imagine all the yawns from the little princesses). To demonstrate how difficult it had been to clean the mirrors, she asked the custodian to show the girls how much effort was required. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it. Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror. [This is claimed to be a true story, but I'm not sure.]

2014/03/01 (Sat.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "I pretended to be somebody I wanted to be until finally I became that person. Or he became me." ~ Cary Grant

(2) Brief joke of the day: So, when is this 'old enough to know better' supposed to kick in?

(3) David Sedaris in Santa Barbara: Last night, my daughter and I went to listen to David Sedaris read from his recently published book, other essays, and diary entries. I have finished listening to his audiobook, *Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls: Essays, Etc.*, and will review it shortly.

(4) How some science illustrations are wrong: [Nine-minute video](#) discussing 15 common inaccuracies in scientific images.

(5) New biblical epics are coming to screens near you: Bible-based movies have mixed records at the box office. There have been huge hits ("Ben-Hur," "The Ten Commandments," and "The Passion of the Christ") and major flops ("The Last Temptation of Christ" and "The Nativity Story"). Three new high-budget movies are hoping to appeal both to the faithful and to those looking for Hollywood-style entertainment: "Son of God" (released yesterday), "Noah" (coming out in March), and "Exodus" (due out in December). [Info from *Entertainment Weekly*, issue of March 7, 2014.]

(6) Final thought for the day: The average work of philosophy has 300 readers worldwide, while top news articles have millions of readers. If we are dissatisfied with the current social scene (kinds of heroes/celebrities, people's priorities, societal values, etc.) we should put our efforts not into writing more philosophical treatises but into better and more meaningful news stories. [Based on a discussion I heard on NPR a couple of days ago.]

2014/02/28 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe." ~ Saint Augustine [I don't believe this circular statement was meant the way I understand it.]

(2) An daring act of protest: A young Iranian student attending a speech by President Rouhani used the back side of a poster showing Khomeini, Khamenei, and Rouhani to state her preference for equal rights, using the equation "Woman = Man." [[Image](#)]

(3) A heartbreaking photo: [This story](#) in *The Guardian* contains a photo whose caption identifies the crowd as men, women, and children awaiting food distribution by a UN entity in Syria's Yarmouk refugee camp, home to about 160,000 people. Damages to the surrounding buildings indicate heavy artillery fire or aerial bombing. Slightly puzzling is the presence of a few well-dressed people up front and the crowd's orderliness.

(4) London, now and then: A collection of [composite photos](#) of various locations in London, one side showing today's look and the other side London of yesteryear.

(5) Final thought for the day: [This crowd](#), so eagerly watching and photographing a public hanging in Iran, should remember the following quote from Pastor Martin Niemoller (1892-1984).

"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out; because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out; because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out; because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me; and there was no one left to speak for me."

2014/02/27 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Flags are bits of coloured cloth that governments use to first shrink wrap people's brains and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead." ~ Suzanna Arundhati Roy, Indian author/activist

(2) Female portraits in Western art, over the past 500 years: [Morphing images](#) of famous paintings, accompanied by music from Bach.

(3) Coleman Barks (translator of Rumi poetry) and David Darling (cello player) [will read/perform](#) at UCSB's Campbell Hall on Sunday, March 2, 2014. ["There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen." ~ Rumi]

(4) Farmers' market buys: Yesterday's farmers' market at UCSB was smaller than usual; apparently, some of the farmers/merchants were on vacation. Therefore, I was unable to find my favorite herbs, including mint.

Impulse buying led to the purchase of a maple-and-brown-sugar-flavored bag of popcorn (very yummy!) and a head of Romanesco broccoli/cauliflower, whose mathematically intriguing [fractal patterns](#) were hard to resist, even though I don't like cauliflower or broccoli much.

(5) Mohammad Nourizad beaten en route to interrogation: You may remember him as the man who kissed the feet of a Baha'i boy as a way of apologizing for the Islamic regime's mistreatment of this religious minority.

Under the so-called "moderate" presidency of Hassan Rouhani, Nourizad was roughed up before being taken for interrogation by the Islamic Republic's security police. In this [Persian letter to Nourizad](#), Mohammad Maleki praises his courage and resolve.

(6) Final thought for the day: "The stand-your-ground law is like bleach; it works miracles for whites but ruins your colors." ~ Quip heard on the Daily Show

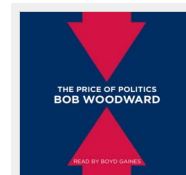
2014/02/26 (Wed.): Woodward, Bob, *The Price of Politics*, abridged audiobook on 7 CDs, read by Boyd Gaines, Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Bob Woodward's 17th book sketches the vast struggle between the US president and the US Congress over the first 3.5 years of Barack Obama's first presidential term. Using his access to top-level officials and insider sources, Woodward adds interesting details to the national blame games that worried and infuriated us over the past few years.

Unfortunately, the monetary figures cited and details of posturing by the various sides of the conflict soon become dizzying and repetitive. The terms "revenue," "cuts," and "sequester" are used so many times that they tend to create a gag reaction. The listener is left with a sense that these words are used not to portray economic realities, but for settling scores and as justifications for ramming through various political agendas. Woodward does not do a good job of providing the big picture, opting instead to describe the process of negotiations on a week-by-week, and sometimes day-by-day, style of a diary. This style makes it difficult to get the overall message when one is not reading, or listening to, the book in one sitting.

During one of the breaks, as I was listening to the audiobook in the course of long car rides over several days, I chanced upon the following sentiment expressed on an NPR program (reproduced here from memory): We talk about reducing the deficit through trillions of dollars in cuts, much of which will go into effect 10 or 20 years from now, and then seem befuddled by none of our actions improving the jobs situation. All these financial agreements and budget talks maintain the status quo in the immediate future; no wonder they don't change anything.

Near the end of the book, conceding that President Obama was handed a faltering economy and faced a stiff



Republican opposition, Woodward maintains that "presidents work their will—or should work their will—on the important matters of national business. ... Obama has not. The mission of stabilizing and improving the economy is incomplete." Whether or not you accept this verdict depends on your political leanings. At one extreme, you might think that President Obama really didn't have a choice and had to play a weak hand the best way he could. At the other extreme, you might blame his inflexibility for the stern opposition he has faced in enacting his legislative agenda.

Despite the shortcomings cited in my review, I still recommend the audiobook (or the longer hardcopy version) to anyone who wants to learn some of the behind-the-scenes antagonisms which, in my opinion, have resulted primarily from mainstream Republicans trying to simultaneously please their support base and the Tea-Party hardliners.

I found an audiofile for [part 1 of this audiobook](#) on YouTube. However, there is a chance that the file will be removed if it is deemed to infringe on the publisher's copyright.

2014/02/25 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love is like an hourglass with the heart filling up as the brain empties." ~ Jules Renard, French writer (1864-1910) [I saw this statement attributed to Albert Einstein, but because I doubted that Einstein would say something like this, I searched the cyberspace and found the source.]

(2) [Acoustic-guitar rendition](#) of "Ey Iran" anthem, "Nazanin-e Maryam" folk song, and other music.

(3) Dolphine comes to undersea diver, seemingly [asking for help](#) in removing a fishing line.

(4) Tehran, circa 1956: [Nine-minute video](#) of sights around Iran's capital city.

(5) Incident in Isla Vista: Crime can occur anywhere, but it is particularly unsettling when it's literally next door. A [gang-rape and severe beating](#) incident over the weekend in Isla Vista, a community through which I walk or bike to get to the UCSB campus, has left local women fearful. Suspects are still at large. Local friends should be extra vigilant for the next few days. Even though women face greater dangers, if this proves to be a gang-related incident, men are also at risk.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters." ~ Anonymous

2014/02/24 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity." ~ John F. Kennedy

(2) Nature videography at its best. [[4-minute video](#)]

(3) Oscar winners are older today compared with the mid 1950s: The average age of the lead-actress Oscar winners has gone up by 5 years, from 33.2 to 38.2 between the 5-year periods 1954-1958 and 2009-2013. In the same interval, the average age of lead-actor Oscar winners has gone up by about 14 years, from 36.6 to 50.4. [Info from *AARP magazine*, issue of February/March 2014.]

(4) The world's top problem: According to a Gallup poll (reported in *Time* magazine, issue of March 3, 2014), 21% of 66,806 people polled in 65 countries identified corruption as the world's most serious problem. Other problems named included the rich-poor gap (12%), unemployment (10%), environmental issues (7%), and religious fundamentalism (2%).

(5) Angry virgins: "Don't even think about it! We are 72 virgins and we're gonna stay that way." [[Cartoon](#)]

(6) A very interesting debate on whether Arab men hate women: At 48 minutes, [this video](#) may be too long for some of you, but I really enjoyed it and learned quite a bit from it. Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy argues a "yes" answer to the question.

2014/02/23 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Judge Rouhani by how he treats his political prisoners, not [by] how he conducts his foreign policy." ~ Headline of a news analysis piece on Iranian.com, using the parallel of advice given to women who date to judge a man by how he treats people to whom he doesn't have to be nice

(2) Brad Spencer's [brick sculptures](#).

(3) Egypt's first female political party leader: The [slow pace of change](#) is sometimes frustrating, but I guess any avalanche begins by a snowflake or two moving.

(4) Concluding performance at a live concert by Yanni: [It's magical!](#)

(5) Jesus and the generals: Alarming to know that people like this [Bush-era general](#) are still prominently represented in the US military.

(6) Final thought for the day: "If the US National Security Agency really monitors all Facebook posts, one-third of their stored security database should consist of pictures of cats and dogs." ~ Anonymous

2014/02/22 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Worry is a weighty monster with poisoned tentacles. It clutches at us, grabs at our minds, steals our breath, our will. It lurks. It pounces. It colors how we perceive the world." ~ Mary DeMuth

(2) Six should be the new four (public education): After World War II, high school education transitioned from optional to mandatory in the US. Now, many educators believe that it is time for the next step. "A four-year high school degree these days guarantees only a \$15-an-hour future, if that. ... [It is projected that] the U.S. economy will have created some 47 million job openings in the decade ending in 2018, and nearly two-thirds of them will require some postsecondary education." An experimental P-Tech (short for Pathways in Technology Early College High School) program, leading to both a high school diploma and an associate degree in 6 years, is already in place in several states. These programs are sponsored by various business/industrial partners that also provide mentors, but in scaling them up, cost will be a major factor. [From *Time* magazine, issue of February 24, 2014. The article isn't available on-line to nonsubscribers.]

(3) Afghan engineering schools regain their footing: Aided by faculty in the US, Japan, and elsewhere, Afghan engineering schools take steps to regain normalcy for their staff and students, women included. According to *Prism* magazine, published by the American Society for Engineering Education (issue of February 2014), "[at] the new engineering school at Herat University, a rebuilt 74-acre oasis of relative tranquillity in a region still plagued by insurgent violence ... 900 students are enrolled in civil engineering, architectural engineering, and mechatronics courses revamped and streamlined by University of Hartford professors, who also provided master's-level training to many of the school's 20 engineering faculty."

(4) Belgians love their beers: You probably have heard that there are more than 300 kinds of cheeses in France. Other countries have different priorities. Poland produces more than 600 brands of vodka. Belgium proudly exhibits samples of its 1400 beer brands in a special museum, where they occupy some 142 meters of shelf space along the walls. [From *Engineering & Technology*, issue of March 2014; in case you are curious why *E & T* magazine would cover such a topic, the information is part of a column by a Russian columnist, who reviews the fairly sophisticated beer-making process in Belgium and reminisces about his youth in Russia, where drinking beer was a luxury.]

(5) The beautiful nature of West Texas: [Five-minute slide show](#) of Wyman Meinzer photographs, with beautiful music by Doug Smith.

2014/02/21 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Highest-paid public employees: This map shows the inverted priorities of most US states, where college athletic coaches are the highest salaries among public employees.

(2) Excellence in design: Stairs and ramp are combined in this [functional and beautiful design](#).

(3) Convincing proof that elements of nature are interconnected: When wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995 after a 70-year absence, remarkable changes in the composition of animal species, growth of forests, and paths of rivers were observed. This kind of chain reaction is known as **"trophic cascade."**

(4) The impostor syndrome: A panel discussion at UCSB, to be led by a successful female college president (Monday, February 24, 3:30-5:00, Corwin Pavilion), prompted me to look up "impostor syndrome," a feeling experienced by 2 out of 5 successful people, on Wikipedia. Here is the article's introduction: "The impostor syndrome, sometimes called impostor phenomenon or fraud syndrome, is a psychological phenomenon [not a disorder] in which people are unable to internalize their accomplishments. Despite external evidence of their competence, those with the syndrome remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved. Proof of success is dismissed as luck, timing, or as a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more intelligent and competent than they believe themselves to be."

(5) Explain this mind-reading trick: A mind reader asks a volunteer woman to think of a number from 1 to 9, multiply the number by 9, and subtract the result from 10 times her age. He then asks the woman to tell him the result and proceeds to identify both the woman's age and the number she had chosen. [Caution: If you are inclined to perform this trick once you have figured out how, make sure your volunteer is very young, in order to avoid potential trouble.]

(6) Kiev's Independence Square: Before and after the recent unrest. [[Composite image](#)]

2014/02/20 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "We cannot let the haters of this world define us. Or frighten us into no longer being ourselves." ~ Mary E. DeMuth



(2) University of Tehran's conservative president replaced: This [news story](#) (in Persian) reports on students' reactions to the university president's ouster and their takes on academic freedom, quality of scholarship, repression, and discrimination.

(3) Rape victim may be stoned in Sudan: An 18-year-old rape victim who is 9 months pregnant faces possible [death by stoning](#) for adultery. She was 3 months pregnant when violently gang-raped by 7 men.

(4) The friendship trap: This title, followed by the subtitle "Are our social lives sabotaging our love lives," begins a [Time magazine piece](#) (issue of February 24, 2014) on the extreme demands of modern friendships. "Our 24/7 social connectivity means we're swimming in a constant stream of urgent texts from our closest friends, punctuated by Likes and comments from our more casual acquaintances on social media. ... But even as our friendship obsession distracts us from the dating game, some millennials end up hoping their platonic relationships will turn into romantic ones."

(5) How Facebook knows [you are in love](#): The number of Timeline posts shared between a romantic couple increases steadily before the relationship is cemented and declines sharply afterwards. However, the posts become happier afterwards, with a sharp spike in sentiment over the first two days of the relationship.

(6) Final thought for the day: "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense." ~ Buddha

2014/02/19 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "A healthy attitude is contagious, but don't wait to catch it from others. Be a carrier." ~ Tom Stoppard

(2) Top philanthropists of 2013: The honor goes to Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan, who donated \$992M to charity in 2013. [From *Time* magazine, issue of February 24, 2014.]

(3) Sochi digital building offers giant 3D selfies: Pixels on this [giant screen](#) protrude or recede to display 3D selfies taken with special cameras. The "3500 times" claim in the associated description is incorrect. Even if we assume that a face is only 15 cm long, the height of the display should be more than 500 meters for the claim to be true. Perhaps there is a 60-fold linear enlargement, with 3500 referring to the area enlargement.

(4) Scenes from Rasht, located near the southwest corner of the Caspian Sea: This [1-minute film clip](#) shows parts of the northern Iranian city in the mid 1960s.

(5) How your personality may reveal your politics: Data collected from more than 220,000 people who took a *Time* quiz shows strong correlation between certain personality traits and political leanings. Examples of traits and attitudes that show strong correlation with liberal politics include interest in fusion cuisine and liking cats more than dogs. Traits/attitudes that predict conservative politics include keeping workspaces neat and believing children should respect authority. [From *Time* magazine, issue of February 24, 2014.]

(6) Final thought for the day: "You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequences of your choice." ~ Anonymous

2014/02/18 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Sepandarmazgan, the Persian day of love: This annual celebration (close to the American Valentine's Day) is dedicated to Spanta Armaiti, the feminine angelic spirit of the Earth. It was originally held on the 5th day of Esfand in celebration of mothers/wives, including Mother Earth. According to Wikipedia, the festival's currently popular date of Bahman 29 (coinciding with February 18 in 2014) emerged after multiple reorganizations of the Persian calendar, beginning with the work of the Persian philosopher/poet Omar Khayyam. Happy Sepandarmazgan to you all!

(2) Quote of the day: "Depression can seem worse than terminal cancer, because most cancer patients feel loved and they have hope and self-esteem." ~ David D. Burns

(3) Joke of the day: Therapist: "Do any of your relatives suffer from mental illness?" Patient: "No ... they all seem to enjoy it."

(4) Googoosh supports gay love: In a first for a mainstream Iranian artist, Googoosh's new [music video](#) entitled "Behesht" ("Heaven") features a lesbian couple.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one." ~ Malcolm Forbes

2014/02/14 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Happy Valentine's Day to everyone! Remember that V-Day is about appreciating love in all its shapes and forms, and not just about romantic love. This year, Sepandarmazgan, the Persian day of love, falls on February 18. I will offer another blog post on that day for the occasion.

(2) Quote of the day: "We choose our joys and sorrows long before we experience them." ~ Khalil Gibran

(3) Guess who can see the Sochi Winter Olympic games from her house?

(4) Would you like to be one of four people on a one-way trip to Mars in 2024? Is there anyone crazy enough

to pay a fee and fill out a long application for a chance to travel to Mars and spend the rest of his/her life there? Well, there are 200,000 such people. Joel Stein (writing in *Time* magazine, issue of February 17, 2014) met some of these volunteers and found them to be "Average good-looking for Los Angeles, but insanely hot for Mars. They had jobs and didn't seem like they were running from horrible families, massive debt or oxygen." I guess being good-looking and interesting is a must, given that part of the \$6 billion cost of the mission is to be raised by airing the training and mission as a reality show.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Advice is like snow—the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it sinks into, the mind." ~ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

2014/02/13 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "All the knowledge I possess everyone else can acquire, but my heart is all my own." ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

(2) A woman's advice to her peers: I chanced upon this [10-minute video](#) "lecture" (containing tips for women about how to handle their men) because a Facebook friend had commented on it. The advice may resonate with some people, especially men, but there are a lot of things wrong with the message and how it is worded. Let me not be more specific up front about what I think, so as not to taint what you take away from it. I know that 10 minutes of time is a big investment in this day and age, but thinking about the issues raised may make it worth your time, especially if you are in a position to counsel younger women.

(3) Quantum computing explained: The February 17, 2014, issue of *Time* magazine contains a cover story on recent advances in quantum computing, including the introduction of D-Wave's 512-qubit machine. Unfortunately, this highly informative article isn't available on-line to nonsubscribers. So, I searched and found this [17-minute interview](#) covering the basics.

(4) Mahmoud turned into Hassan: "[Mahmoud Hassan Shod](#)" is the title of a Persian poem by satirist Hadi Khorsandi. The refrain implies that other than a name change from Mahmoud to Hassan at the top, things remain pretty much the same; or, as we say in Persian, "the same porridge, the same bowl."

(5) Final thought for the day: "Dreams are today's answers to tomorrow's questions." ~ Edgar Cayce

2014/02/12 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quotes of the day: "To do is to be." ~ Nietzsche | "To be is to do." ~ Kant | "Do be do be do." ~ Sinatra

(2) Selfies aren't new: Here is a [group selfie](#), from 1920.

(3) Quadruped robot demo: [RoboSimian](#), exhibited on our campus yesterday, is being developed as part of the DARPA Robotics Challenge Program by a team that includes my UCSB colleague, Professor Katie Byl, and Caltech/JPL scientists. It has a great sense of balance and can be fitted with special arms in front, to be used for experimentation and object manipulation while sitting on its hind legs.

(4) Most popular condiments in the US: According to *Time* magazine, issue of February 17, 2014, America's most popular condiment, judged by the total amount of money spent on them each year, are Mayonnaise (\$2.0 billion), ketchup (\$0.80 B), soy sauce (\$0.73 B), and BBQ sauce (\$0.66 B).

(5) Hamid Karzai is far from crazy: If you are puzzled by the Afghan president's seemingly erratic behavior, consider that he is only heeding the lessons of a history he knows too well. The British-installed puppet king during a 19th-century invasion of Afghanistan was assassinated after their withdrawal. The Soviet-installed puppet president ruled for a short while after their 1989 withdrawal and managed to stay safe for many years, but he was eventually captured by the Taliban, castrated, dragged through the streets, and hung (as was his brother). No wonder Karzai is reaching out to the Taliban! [Adapted from Fareed Zakaria's column in *Time* magazine, issue of February 17, 2014.]

(6) Final thought for the day: "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." ~ John Dewey

2014/02/11 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it." ~ Confucius

(2) Mount Rushmore, from the other side. [[Image](#)]

(3) Fish goes into suspended animation to survive out of water for years: The [lungfish](#) develops a crude lung that allows it to survive.

(4) Mudskipper is the name given to a [fish that can live on land](#). It rolls in mud to keep itself moist and cool.

(5) Simulation shows Iran attacking Israel and a US warship: This crude [propaganda film](#) by the Islamic regime visualizes armed drones attacking Israeli cities and a US aircraft carrier.

(6) Final thought for the day: "We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are." ~ Anais Nin

2014/02/09 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It's so much more fun to watch FOX when it's someone else being blitzed & sacked!" ~ Hillary Clinton, tweeting about Fox Network's Superbowl coverage

(2) Beached dolphins pulled back to safety: [This group of dolphins](#) got lucky, because they were beached where there was a big crowd.

(3) Serving the Lord in a \$6M mansion and \$20M jet: Questioned in a hotel lobby by a reporter, Kenneth Copeland responded: "My lifestyle follows the scripture; we give, we believe, we're hoping." The lavish lifestyles of TV preachers are exposed in this [5-minute report](#).

(4) How many squares do you see? [[Puzzle image](#)]

(5) Visit to the Queen Mary and the Scorpion: Today, my daughter and I visited the retired luxury oceanliner RMS Queen Mary and the Russian submarine Scorpion. The Queen Mary, which is now a museum and hotel, had its maiden voyage in 1936 and was used for transporting troops during World War II because of its high speed. Its final cruise in 1967 took it to Long Beach, where it has been ever since. Queen Mary is now featuring an extensive exhibit on Princess Diana, but the highlight of our visit was a walk through the engine room, with gigantic turbines and dual drive-shafts connecting them to the propeller in the back. The Cold-War submarine Scorpion was completed in 1972 and decommissioned in 1994. One year later, it was sold to a group of private businessmen, who had it displayed in Australia for a few years and subsequently moved it to its current location next to the Queen Mary. Scorpion was one of the quietest submarines of its day.

(6) Final thought for today: "Don't judge someone just because they sin differently than you." ~ Anonymous

2014/02/08 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "What is love? Love is the absence of judgment." ~ Dalai Lama

(2) Modern Persian music: [Music and video](#) by the 2006 entering class at the Mazandaran University of Science and Technology in Babol, Iran. The lyrics convey the sorrows of parting with friends upon graduation and the challenges of beginning a new life.

(3) A Grammy salute to the Beatles: I am very sorry that I will miss the all-star [Beatles tribute](#) on CBS tomorrow, 3:30 PST, fifty years to the date when they were introduced to the US audience on the Ed Sullivan variety show.

(4) Okay, I have watched enough Facebook movies already: I will try to ignore them from now on, but of course this will be hard to do in the case of good friends! The following post about the movies resonated with me. You may [do this](#) after you've completed your FB movie about your FB."

(5) Final thought for the day: "My great hope is to laugh as much as I cry; to get my work done and try to love somebody and have the courage to accept the love in return." ~ Maya Angelou

2014/02/07 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Love is not a habit, a commitment, or a debt. Love is not what we hear in romantic songs or see in movies. Love simply is." ~ Paulo Coelho

(2) Heartwrenching and heartwarming at the same time: Storefront display mannequins are replaced with ones showing various [deformities and disabilities](#).

(3) Iraq's first female university president: Good to see that Iraq is decades ahead of Iran (at least the Islamic version), where only Shi'i men are qualified to head a university by law. Hoping for the day when such an appointment is no longer news. [[News story](#)]

(4) Oppression of Baha'is continues in Iran: If Islamic Republic officials had no other sin than their inhumane treatment of Baha'is, formation of an international tribunal to investigate their crimes against humanity would be in order. Now add the systematic oppression of women, marginalization of nearly all religious and ethnic minorities, and the harsh treatment of political dissidents, and the need for action intensifies. It is hard to understand, then, why Foreign Minister Zarif and other high-level Islamic Republic officials are not asked during their foreign trips whether they personally approve of the treatment of Baha'is in Iran. The latest [hate-crime incident](#) reported from Birjand (a city in Eastern Iran) is the stabbing of three members of a Baha'i family at their own home by a masked intruder.

(5) Final thought for the day: "Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance." ~ George Bernard Shaw

2014/02/06 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand." ~ Neil Armstrong

(2) Farmers' market on the UCSB campus: Every Wednesday, we now have a small farmers' market on our campus. Yesterday, I visited it for the first time and bought some fresh herbs/vegis; will make this a habit. One of those small joys in life.

(3) Proposal for two free college years in Tennessee: With the cost of higher education continuing its out-of-control rise, the [proposal by Tennessee Governor](#) (already favored by the state's legislature) to make 2 years of community college education free for everyone is a breath of fresh air.

(4) On waking up early: Yesterday morning, my clock radio awoke me at 6:00 AM with a song whose lyrics included: "You've got a bad tattoo. I think you should sue." I have placed my clock radio out of arm's reach and tuned it to a station that I cannot stand for more than a couple of minutes.

(5) CVS to stop selling tobacco products: The national chain says that tobacco products do not belong in a health-related business. This is a great development. I hope other businesses follow suit.

(6) Final thought for the day: "A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle." ~ Khalil Gibran

2014/02/05 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It's humbling to start fresh. It takes a lot of courage. But it can be reinvigorating. You just have to put your ego on a shelf & tell it to be quiet." ~ Jennifer Ritchie Payette

(2) California man [pulls gun on Girl Scout](#) selling cookies: Please stop saying "we don't have a gun problem"; the gun culture is killing people, not to mention the spirit of amity and neighborliness, in the US.

(3) The worsening economic gap in the US: Writing in *Time* magazine (February 10, 2014), Rana Foroohar notes that the median US household income has declined by 7%, from \$56K in 1999 to a tad over \$52K today. Around 40% of Americans self-identify as lower- or lower-middle-class, compared with 25% in 2008.

(4) Haram band: In Arabic, the word "haram" means "sinful" or "forbidden." The Vancouver-based band of 10 musicians mixes traditional Arabic music with jazz and other styles in order to make it accessible to the world. The diversity of the band members and their musical approaches is a reflection of the inherent diversity of Arabic music. This [Web page](#), from which I learned about Haram after hearing some of its music on NPR, contains audio samples of the band's work.

(5) Jokes about the Superbowl: (a) "Was there a football game at the Bruno Mars concert?" (b) "I tried to throw in the towel, but it was intercepted." ~ Peyton Manning

(6) Honest company slogans: Here is a compendium of [modified company logos/slogans](#) to make them (more) honest. Following are some examples:

"Urban Outfitters: Pay Money to Look Homeless."

"Altoids: Used for Holding Anything but Mints."

"Apple: \$2000 Facebook Machines."

"Hidden Valley Original Ranch Dressing: Makes Vegetables Bad for You."

"Gillette: We're Just Going to Keep Adding More Blades."

"Hummer: Firmly Plant Your Carbon Footprint."

"LinkedIn: Connect with People for No Reason at All."

"Red Lobster: You're Here for the Cheddar Biscuits."

2014/02/04 (Tue.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "As you waste your breath complaining about life, someone out there is breathing their last [breath]. Appreciate what you have. Be thankful and stop complaining. Live more, complain less. Have more smiles, less stress." ~ Anonymous

(2) Long view of life: A painting that looks flawless from a distance may appear as a collection of color patches up close. Perhaps you should take a long view of life to avoid seeing just spots.

(3) Tour of the Space Station: A thorough exposition of life aboard the International Space Station, where absence of gravity makes every day a bad hair day! [[25-minute video](#)]

(4) Ethnicity and Religious Minority Politics in Iran: This is the title of an [article by Nayereh Tohidi](#), published as Chapter 10 (pp. 299-323) in *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (ed. by Ali Gheisari). It begins thus: "Contemporary Iran, somewhat similar to its pre-Islamic Persian empire, is a heterogeneous, multiethnic (if not multinational), and multilingual country. Many Iranians, scholars among them, are hesitant to acknowledge or even talk about the reality of the ethnonational diversity of Iran, either out of ignorance, prejudice, or chauvinism, or from the fear of a potential movement for separatism and cessation." It ends by recommending "A decentralizing process in distribution of national resources and political power on the one hand and strengthening of the civil society to observe the civil rights and national identity of its citizens, on the other, ... as a most viable strategy for fostering national and territorial integrity." I had previously written a review of the said book and had used its chapter 10 as one of the two focal points in [my review](#).

(5) Art vs. humanity: Philip Seymour Hoffman, who died of heroin overdose in NYC, is being idolized on CNN and elsewhere as a great actor (which he was), with no mention that his death should be categorized as suicide. Drug users, particularly those who are educated or well-off, put the stuff in their system with full awareness of the dangers of overdose, or of regular use for that matter. Elsewhere in the news, we read that the genius director/screenwriter Woody Allen has been accused of sexually abusing his daughter. While this is still an unproven allegation, it matches his past pattern of behavior. Convicted child abuser Roman Polanski is now living in comfort and is beginning to get accolades for his work after a period of shunning by mainstream media.

What is going on here? Why is humanity taking a back seat to artistic production, cum box-office profits?

(6) Final thought for the day: "The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play." ~ Arnold J. Toynbee

2014/02/03 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for 10 minutes [and] come out wrinkle-free and 3 sizes smaller?" ~ Anonymous

(2) Hangings as entertainment: [Photo of a banner](#) announcing the locations and times of two future executions by hanging in Ahwaz, Iran.

(3) Chess endgame. [[Cartoon](#)]

(4) The 4th Parhami family reunion planned: At the previous events in 2011, 2012, and 2013, we focused on the family history (our ancestors and how we got from Iran's Kurdistan province to the US and a few other countries). This year, we'll get to know the 4th-generation family members (67 of them, at last count).

(5) Republicans are waging war for women, not against them: This preposterous claim comes from Mike Huckabee (of the failed-presidential-candidacy fame). **He elaborated that** the Republicans want to empower women "to be something other than victims of their gender." The democrats, on the other hand, "want to insult the women of America by making them believe that they are helpless without Uncle Sugar coming in and providing for them a prescription each month for birth control, because they cannot control their libidos or their reproductive system without the help of the government." And Huckabee isn't even among the most conservative Republicans out there! Apparently, alienating half of the voters is the Republicans' new strategy for winning votes. And if 'Uncle Sugar' is seen by women as a combination of 'Uncle Sam' and 'sugar daddy,' which is a reasonable interpretation, then Huckabee has it coming!

(6) Santa Barbara International Film Festival (January 30 to February 9, 2014): A few years ago, I resolved to try to see some films at the SBIF, which happens within a very short driving distance of where I live. Implementing this resolution proved very difficult, given that the tickets are sold as passes (too expensive for the number of films that I can see) or in sets, which do not provide guaranteed admission: you have to wait in line for a chance to get an available seat. Alas, I have to wait for DVD releases in order to see my favorite films.

2014/02/02 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Amazing [3D pencil drawings](#) by Ben Heine.

(2) Fast-food chains have been trying to warn you to stay away for years, so listen! [[Image](#)]

(3) The many forms of the "Happy Birthday" song: Prompted by a video clip of "classical variations" of the birthday song posted on my Facebook timeline by a friend yesterday, I found a number of other interesting interpretations. [Victor Borge's performance](#) in the style of various composers is particularly interesting. This video is part of the "YouTube Mix—Happy Birthday" which are played in sequence once you get to one of them, with the list of options showing on a sidebar to the right of the main window. Other examples include the Beatles version, Blues (B. B. King), Chinese style, Jazz (the Muppets), Mozart style, Pink Panther style, Rachmaninov style, and Tango.

(4) President Obama's veto threat effective: US Congress backs off [Iran sanctions bill](#).

(5) Superbowl's possible dark side: Does sex trafficking get worse during Superbowl and other big sporting events? A number of groups have suggested over the recent weeks that **it does get worse** due to the large influx of male fans attending such events and the attendant wild parties. New Jersey, in particular, which hosts this year's Superbowl, has a very poor record in apprehending sex traffickers, thus raising additional worries. Others have called these warnings overblown and disruptive of real anti-sex-trafficking efforts.

(6) Three prominent bankers committed suicide within the past week: Reasons aren't yet known.

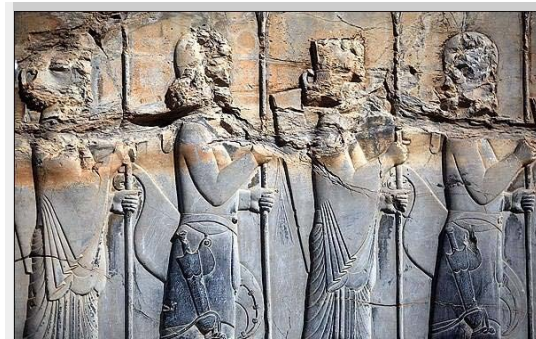
Jan. 26, William "Bill" Broeksmit, 58; former Senior Manager at Deutsche Bank; found hanging in his home

Jan. 28, Gabriel Magee, 39; Vice President at J. P. Morgan Chase London; jumped from a bank building

Jan. 29, Mike Dueker, 50; Chief Economist of Russell Investments; jumped off from a bridge ramp in Tacoma

2014/02/01 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Persepolis in a dire state: If the current level of neglect continues, one of the oldest, best known, and most important heritage sites of ancient Iran will be gone in a generation or two. The neglect, leading to unprecedented erosion of the artifacts of our ancient civilization, is deliberate on the part of the Islamic Republic officials, because it is occurring as many millions of dollars are spent on rebuilding and adorning religious sites with gold.



(2) Quote of the day: "A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special." ~ Nelson Mandela

(3) Ads within ads: I watched a few **interesting ads** that will air during tomorrow's Superbowl. It turns out that you have to watch another ad before each of the selections!

(4) Addendum to yesterday's post about a 2000-year-old tree: Being curious about whether that tree is the oldest on earth, I consulted the Wikipedia article "**List of oldest trees**" and was surprised to learn that the record is held by a 9550-year-old tree in Sweden. The visible portion of the tree is only 4 meters tall and is very new. The root system, however, is thought to have lived since the end of the last ice age. The oldest known fully living tree is in California and is 5063 years old. I am sorry to report that the tree whose picture I posted does not appear among trees that are at least 1500 years old. Perhaps the original poster of the photo did not check his/her facts, or maybe the Wikipedia article is not complete and up to date.

(5) Celebrating my 67th birthday: It isn't much fun turning 67, especially after a rough patch in my life over the past few months, so I consulted math sources to see if 67 has some fun properties. Well, it does! It is the 19th prime number (so, if years passed according to the sequence of primes, rather than the natural numbers, I'd be only 19). It is the sum of 5 consecutive primes ($7 + 11 + 13 + 17 + 19$). Since $18! + 1$ is divisible by 67 without 67 being $1 \pmod{18}$, it is a Pillai prime. The hexadecimal representation of 67 is 43, which is much more agreeable to me. Elton John's song "**Old 67**" is hardly a comfort, although he is really referring to 1967. I won't go into discussions of 67 being a mix of evil/misfortune (6) and goodness/luck (7), or of its digits adding up to 13.

2014/01/31 (Fri.): Here are seven items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Education is the movement from darkness to light." ~ Allan Bloom

(2) Correct and questionable ways of pushing a truck. [**Image**]

(3) The tree of life: Amazing 2000-year-old tree in South Africa. [**Image**]

(4) The puzzle of motivation: An enlightening **19-minute TED talk** by Dan Pink, who argues that the carrot-and-stick reward system, prevalent in our organizations and businesses, is ill-suited to 21st-century tasks.

(5) Noah's Ark reimagined: Life-size **sculptures of animals**, mostly in pairs, installed around an indoor pond by artist Cai Guo-Qiang.

(6) Computational photography: Snapping a picture on a digital camera is just the beginning of a long process of producing a final photo, with some steps performed in the camera itself and others done with photo-editing software on a computer. The trend is towards having the camera do much less: just capture the entire light field, with no worries about focus, lighting, or exposure. Everything else is done computationally, creating images that are sharper and more vivid than ever before. The raw data comprising the image is obtained from large, high-resolution sensors, making it possible to produce any number of versions of a photo using different algorithms. This approach will lead to changes in camera design, including body shape and built-in circuitry.

[Adapted from *Communications of the ACM*, issue of February 2014.]

(7) Happy Chinese New Year: Welcome to the **year of the horse!**

2014/01/30 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Reading does for your mental fitness what dancing does for your physical fitness.

(2) Explaining acronyms: DIET = Did I Eat That?

(3) Pink Martini music: This **72-minute video** contains the band's 2006 Portland concert. If you want hours of easy-listening jazz/Latin music, this **YouTube channel** featuring Pink Martini is for you. Enjoy!

(4) Ben Kingsley to play the Shah of Iran: UK-based and American production companies will collaborate to make a **\$40M film** that will tell the backstory of Iran's Islamic Revolution. The producers claim that the movie won't be a lopsided account but will set the record straight on the lead-up to the occupation of the US embassy in Tehran.

(5) Meryl Streep can make even the phone book sound interesting: At least her ardent fans think so. Ellen



DeGeneres **puts the actress to the test** by asking her to read a recipe, a traffic report, and a Wikipedia article, and she does not disappoint.

(6) Tips for mindfulness: *Time* magazine, issue of February 3, 2014, contains a feature on the art of being mindful, subtitled "the science of finding focus in a stressed-out, multitasking culture." In addition to a 5-step process for mindfulness meditation, the article offers three simple tips: (a) Wear a watch, so as to avoid possible distractions from picking up your phone to check the time. (b) No phones in bed, and no dealing with devices before you are fully awake and out of bed. (c) Get into nature, and resist the urge to Instagram everything as you hike.

2014/01/29 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quotes of the day: The three quotes below are from Margaret Mead.

"What people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things."

"It is utterly false and cruelly arbitrary to put all the play and learning into childhood, all the work into middle age, and all the regrets into old age."

"It is an open question whether any behavior based on fear of eternal punishment can be regarded as ethical or should be regarded as merely cowardly."

(2) Persian music: The song "Bordi az Yadam" ("You Forgot Me") was originally performed by Delkash, a popular singer of the mid 1900s. **This version** (voice & guitar), by Narges Abdi, is well-done. I couldn't find the names of the songwriter and lyricist.

(3) Diet fork and knife: Or, if you are into ethnic jokes, guest utensils in Isfahan. [[Image](#)]

(4) Way better than a selfie: **The Japanese company Neurowear** is making a sensor that uses your brain signals to detect your level of interest in whatever you are seeing and directs an iPhone, attached to the same headband as the sensor, to snap a photo or record a video clip.

(5) The Muslim man who commemorates the Holocaust: Haunted by pictures of mass graves in concentration camps he saw as a kid, Mike Ghouse is dedicated to building bridges between diverse cultures and educating the world on the horrors of **Holocaust and genocides**.

(6) Praying robot: Claiming educational applications, an Iranian inventor has built a robot that recites the Quran and prays. [[2-minute video](#)]

2014/01/28 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "It isn't the mountain ahead that wears you out; it's the grain of sand in your shoe." ~ Robert W. Service

(2) Why thinking outside the box is overrated. [[Image](#)]

(3) Google to buy DeepMind: **According to Reuters**, Google continues on its path of becoming a major player in robotics and artificial intelligence by acquiring a leader in general-purpose learning algorithms.

(4) Sports misinformation of the month: The following alleged fact and other versions of it naming different sports are making the rounds on Facebook and elsewhere in cyberspace. "In ice hockey, the first testicular guard, aka cup, was used in 1874 and the first helmet in 1974. So, it took 100 years for men to realize that their brains were also worth protecting." It is funny that men would have inverted priorities, and it may well be true, but the dates cited in the statement do not check out. My searches aimed at confirming the dates led to [a blog](#), where it is claimed that the statement started as a joke, with certain individuals, not content with making fun of men in jokes, later deciding to circulate it as a fact-based jab.

(5) Tunisia approves new constitution: The country that began the Arab Spring is now set to serve as a model of democracy and peaceful transition in the region. **The new constitution**, signed after months of deadlock, designates Islam as the state religion but protects freedom of belief and gender equality.

2014/01/27 (Mon.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Go often to the house of thy friend, for weeds choke the unused path." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

(2) Optical illusion of the day: **Pepsi truck**.

(3) Sturgeon's Law: "Ninety percent of everything is crap." ~ Geeky reference to the fact that, while there are gems among status posts, blogs, and other social-media content, you have to sift through a lot of crap to find them. The law is named after American sci-fi writer Theodore Sturgeon [1918-1985], who defended sci-fi by saying that while he agreed that 90% of the genre was crap, so was 90% of everything else

(4) Ridley Scott's **"Exodus" in 3D**: In the first Bible epic filmed in 3D, Iranian-born actress Golshifteh Farahani acts alongside Christian Bale (as Moses), Ben Kingsly, and Sigourney Weaver. The film, which is now in post-production, will be released in December 2014. Farahani's role seems to be a minor one and remains unspecified on IMDB.

(5) Pink Martini (band): Here are four beautiful songs, with two different lead singers. The band has also

performed Elaheh's "Omid-e Zendegani," which, even though musically superb, is rather unsatisfying due to the difficulty of singing in Persian without knowing the language (Dinah Shore's version of the song years ago suffered from the same problem).

"Amado Mio" "Ninna Nanna" "Una Notte a Napoli" "Let's Never Stop Falling in Love"

2014/01/26 (Sun.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The only sure weapon against bad ideas is better ideas." ~ Alfred Whitney Griswold, American historian and educator [1906-1963]
- (2) Optical illusion of the day: [Honda commercial](#).
- (3) Aerial photo of an enchanting old Spanish town. [[Image](#)]
- (4) Very lucky people: Parts of this [5-minute video](#), depicting near-fatal accidents, are difficult to watch.
- (5) Dangers of driving on snow/ice: What are these drivers thinking when they drive on a snow-covered, barely visible road the same way they do on a dry road with full visibility? [[Video](#)]
- (6) Indian woman's indiscretion punished by gang rape: In a sickening turn of events, village elders ordered the [gang-rape of a 20-year-old woman](#) because she carried out an affair with a Muslim man from a neighboring community and did not pay the fine imposed on her. Thirteen men have been arrested and are being questioned about the assault.

2014/01/25 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) KENKEN puzzle example: In this puzzle, invented by a Japanese math teacher (Tetsuya Miyamoto), the numbers 1-6 should be placed in the squares of each row and each column without repetition, in such a way that the operations and results within the heavy boxes hold. For example, if a box of 2 squares contains the clue "9+" (add operation, resulting in 9), then the two squares should contain 4 and 5 or 3 and 6, in either order.
- (2) Quote of the day: "Running away from a problem only increases the distance to its solution." ~ Anonymous
- (3) Facebook's oldests user: [She is 106](#) now, and still kicking! Will any of us beat her record?
- (4) Iranian a cappella group: [Damour Band](#) performs "Sway." Iranian youth seem bent on testing the regime in light of the official ban on depicting musical instruments on state-run TV monopoly and other media.
- (5) Households should be run according to a rigid hierarchy: This bit of "wisdom" comes from the memoirs of [Steve Pearce](#), New Mexico's Republican congressman. He envisages men heading the chain of command in ideal households. "The wife is to voluntarily submit, just as the husband is to lovingly lead and sacrifice," he writes. Talk about being out of touch with the modern world! I see Democrats rushing to buy the memoirs of other Republicans to prepare for the next elections.

6x	16+	4-		7+	
				48x	
9+	3÷	2-	1-		
				60x	8+
1-	2-	3÷			
			4-		

2014/01/24 (Fri.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee and I'll forgive Thy great big one on me." ~ Robert Frost
- (2) Driftwood horse sculptures: [Amazing art](#), by James Doran-Webb.
- (3) Master of video effects: At 8 minutes, [this video clip](#) may be a bit too long for some people, but I found it worth watching. In it, a young man performs various neat trick using video editing tools.
- (4) A very strong computer password: A novice computer user had chosen the password "MickeyMinniePlutoHueyLouieDeweyDonaldGoofySacramento." When asked why he chose this password, he replied: "Because I was told it had to include no fewer than 8 characters and at least one capital."
- (5) A full-color pastel drawing: [Time-lapse video](#) of a portrait, as it is drawn from start to finish by Chloe Grace Moretz.
- (6) Ban Ki-moon's aides admit that he was played by Iran: Javad Zarif privately told the UN Secretary General that his government would back a [power-sharing agreement](#) in Syria, but Iran refused to publicly commit to this promise; same old story of Iranian officials making statements and the Supreme Leader undermining their credibility by deciding otherwise.

2014/01/23 (Thu.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "I don't like when people say, 'I pray for you.' What? So, basically, you sit at home and do nothing. You do nothing, while I struggle with a situation? Don't pray for me. Make me a sandwich or something." ~ Hannibal Buress

(2) Entertainment quote of the day: "Fifty-six percent of Americans said rude moviegoers are the worst part of going to theaters. The other 44 percent said, 'Shhhhhh! Will you stop asking questions during the movie?'" ~ Entertainment Weekly's "The Bullseye" look at the pop culture

(3) Future rocker: **Baby emulates Bruce Springsteen**, as dad plays the guitar and sings.

(4) Grim fact of the day: **The top 85 individuals worldwide** have as much money (\$1.6 trillion) as the poorest half of the global population. Those in the top 1% have 65 times as much money (\$110 trillion) as the poorest half.

(5) *Total Wellness Magazine*: A student-led commission at UCLA publishes this magazine devoted to health and wellness topics. My daughter Sepideh, a writer with the magazine, has published a **research article**, with 16 references, entitled "Namaste: Promoting Mental Wellness through Yoga" in the winter 2014 issue, pp. 16-20. The article focuses on how yoga improves both physical fitness and mental wellness (by reshaping the mind). She will be writing a cover feature in a forthcoming issue.

(6) Musical instruments overtly shown on IRIB: Until a few days ago, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting organization did not show musical instruments on its programs, even though certain kinds of music were allowed. Now, a **news story** out of Iran celebrates the fact that a morning TV program has shown members of a band playing their traditional Iranian instruments live. Forgive me if I don't jump up for joy, because IRIB has decided to show musical instruments on its programs after 3.5 decades. Perhaps in another few decades, we will see a woman singing (with her back to the camera). And decades after that, the female singer's lips will be shown moving, with her body restrained to prevent unseemly movement.

[*Note*: **Updates on this story** indicate that the producer of the program has apologized for erroneously broadcasting the show and indicated that he will accept the consequences of his mistake. Ouch! I take back my projected timeline about when a woman will be seen singing on Iranian TV.

2014/01/22 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Toronto: Where the rappers are polite and the mayor smokes crack." ~ From last week's "Saturday Night Live" monologue

(2) Traditional Persian music: Sepideh Raissadat sings "**Farvardin**" and plays the setar.

(3) Video message from **Nasrin Sotoudeh**: Speaking in Persian (with English subtitles), Sotoudeh thanks all those who fought during her 3-year imprisonment to secure her freedom. She requests support for other attorneys who have been imprisoned for defending dissenters.

(4) Dangers of liking Facebook posts: I am not talking about posts by your friends and other people you know and trust, but posts of beautiful images of nature or heart-wrenching photos of sick children. In the latter case, the posting entity (likely a business masquerading as an individual or a benevolent group) often implies that your liking the post will help the sick child financially or spiritually. Please don't fall for this. Please read **this article** all the way to the end to learn about the potential harms.

(5) A new beginning in Tehran: This is the title of a 6-page special feature in *Time* magazine, issue of January 27, 2014, reporting on the openness that has come about in Iran as a result of progress in nuclear negotiations. The positive tone of the article is restrained by the observation that "Key levers of power remain beyond Rouhani's reach. Both the judiciary and parliament are still dominated by hardliners, as are the politically powerful Revolutionary Guards." The first two pages of the report are devoted to a large picture of Tehran, viewed from the top of a hill, where young men and women are shown talking and socializing (a man's hand is shown around the waist of his companion).

(6) Purdue University shooting: In what is said to be a **targeted killing**, a gunman who served as a course TA in electrical engineering shot and killed a TA for another course taught by the same professor. No motive is known at this time.

2014/01/21 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Because I think I'm making progress." ~ Cellist Pablo Casals, when asked at age 90 why he continued to practice

(2) Entertainment quote of the day: "Gravity is nominated for best film. It's the story of how George Clooney would rather float away into space and die than spend one more minute with a woman his own age." ~ Tina Fey, at the 2014 Golden Globes

(3) Noteworthy political tweet: "When IRIB airs the birth of a panda in China but nothing abt unpaid workers protesting, obvious that ppl & youth will ignore it." ~ Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani, in a jab to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting organization, which is controlled by hardliners

(4) My controversial book review: Yesterday, I posted a comment on Iranian.com as my final input to the extensive discussion there on **my review** of the book "History of Iranian Jews." The comment follows.

In my final post on this article, I thank all those who commented. As I write this note, the review has garnered 3883 views, 58 comments, 33 Facebook shares, and 3 tweets. As usual for this site, we see a mix of comments

by those who try to enlighten and add to the discourse, alongside hateful/irrelevant musings. The latter group, perhaps unknowingly, confirm some of the points made in the book and my review of it. Two useful sources mentioned in the new comments are [Iran Nameh](#) and [Iran Shenasi](#). The latter has an article entitled "[Judeo-Persian Communities of Iran.](#)" (see the third link).

(5) Exciting space news: The tiny [Rosetta Spacecraft](#) has woken up from its 2-year slumber on route to a comet deep into the Solar System. Scientists are hoping to make it land on the giant comet and hitch a ride back to earth.

2014/01/20 (Mon.): Here are six items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "If physical death is the price that I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive." ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

(2) A thought for today: "What if they close Facebook tomorrow? You will see disoriented Facebook users on the streets, showing pictures of themselves and notes they have written in people's faces and screaming, "DO YOU LIKE THIS? DO YOU?" ~ Anonymous

(3) Mr. Haloo's [video clip 166](#): Mohammad Reza Ali Payam recites a poem by Parvin Etesami, followed by his poetic response to it, entitled "Street Children."

(4) A bold new direction in neuroscience and physics: A new theory gathering steam suggests that consciousness is a state of matter (like solid, liquid, or gas) and is thus amenable to mathematical formulation and analysis. I can't say that I understand [the arguments](#) offered, but I do feel some excitement over the new developments. Even if the theory ultimately proves wrong, a rigorous dialog on it is bound to improve our understanding of consciousness.

(5) More people liking the Affordable Care Act: Over the past few months, we have been inundated with numerous reports of Web site problems and sob stories about how some people lost their health insurance. In a [Time magazine article](#), Steven Brill presents the positive side, which has been way under-reported. Among other examples, he relates the story of an Ohio family earning \$40K per year who had to borrow money and max out their credit cards to pay the cancer treatment bills for the husband, despite carrying an insurance policy that cost them \$469 per month. Their new policy under Obamacare costs them only \$17 per month and it covers the treatments that previously resulted in an \$83,900 bill. This is clearly an extreme case that will not apply to most people, but it makes us pause when faced with all the negativity coming from Obama-haters and special-interest groups.

(6) Wireless phone companies are beginning to play nice: Don't be surprised if the 2-year service contract goes the way of dinosaurs. With 90% of US adults having cell phones, the focus has shifted from attracting new customers to keeping the existing ones satisfied and providing incentives for switching (including payment of your termination penalty with another carrier). Exclusive deals with phone manufacturers are also dying out, making switching easier. [Adapted from *Time* magazine, issue of January 27, 2014.]

2014/01/19 (Sun.): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "As a Briton who lives in France, I see how each nation selects its own causes, and edits them convincingly into its own version of history. In Britain, Napoleon's name is synonymous with tyranny and a small comic man's delusions of grandeur. In France, au contraire, he is a revolutionary who stood up for the new Republic against the hostile monarchies of Europe. The puffed-up Napoleon with 'small white hands,' as depicted by Tolstoy [in *War and Peace*], is, of course, a Napoleon from the Russian perspective." ~ Daniel Tammet, in *Thinking in Numbers: on Life, Love, Meaning, and Math*, a book that I am reading and will review shortly

(2) Silhouette dancing: Intrigued by a video I saw on Facebook, I did a search and discovered that there is a world of performances in which dancer silhouettes form not just human characters but also animals, buildings, and much of the background scenery. Here is an example from Shadowland. [[6-minute video](#)]

(3) Making things up: The cyberspace is full of made-up things and hoaxes. We should make it a habit not to accept anything we read on-line or receive via e-mail, unless we know and trust the source, or else do some checking of our own before forwarding or reposting. I decided to write about this when an acquaintance informed me of a fake translation of the text of the Cyrus Cylinder, making it seem like the Cylinder contains statements about human rights, as we understand them today. In fact, it contains no such statements.

Unfortunately, the forgery has assumed some legitimacy by being published in *Rahavard Magazine*, No. 105 (winter 1392). The person who sent me the e-mail has contacted the magazine publisher and asked for a retraction of the fake translation. Here is an [on-line slide show](#) based on the forgery.

The following are links to three authoritative translations of the text of the Cyrus Cylinder.

English translation by Irving Finkel of the British Museum [[Web site](#)]

Persian translation by Shahrokh Razmjou of Tehran University [[PDF file](#)]

Persian translation by Abdolmajid Arfaee, in a book devoted to the Cylinder [[PDF file](#)]

2014/01/18 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Don't be afraid to be open-minded. Your brain won't fall out." ~ Anonymous
- (2) Back to biking to work: The current heat wave in southern California and the attendant 100-year record drought have made wildfires a real danger during January, which is normally several months past the fire season. Over the last couple of days, the sun felt like midsummer sun on one's skin. The up side for me has been the ability to bike to work more often. Yesterday morning, I arrived on campus during a class transition period (which begins at 10 minutes to the hour). Navigating the bike paths, while watching for passing and oncoming bikes, as well as pedestrians, who thought they'd make it across in the fraction of a second before a bike arrived at the same spot, was quite a challenge. Next time, I'll leave home 10 minutes earlier or later.
- (3) Producer Harvey Weinstein takes on the NRA: In a bold move, that most politicians avoid for fear of being kicked out of office at election time, the co-founder of Miramax plans to make a major [anti-NRA movie](#), starring Meryl Streep, in which a political novice takes on corruption in Washington.
- (4) Human rights in Iran deteriorating under Rouhani: Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, the current Minister of Justice and the presiding judge during sham trials of political prisoners in 1988 that led to thousands of executions within a short period of time, [has criticized Ahmad Shaheed](#) (UN's Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran), calling him corrupt and a political operative.
- (5) Update on my January 14 book review: My review of a book on the history of Iranian Jews, published on-line at [Iranian.com](#), has generated a lot of discussion (3000 reads, 41 comments, 32 Facebook shares, 3 tweets). Predictably, some of the comments are anti-Semitic and a few bear little relationship to the review. There are also some enlightened comments and responses to anti-Semitic comments by other readers of the article. Three noteworthy pieces of information I gained from the reader comments are: (a) A Persian-language history of Iran, by Parviz Natel Khanlari, refers to a Hebrew document in the pre-Achaemenid Iran; (b) According to [Wikipedia](#), there is a 13th Jewish Tribe, a name for Khazar converts to Judaism, who moved west to Eastern Europe; (c) There is a book titled "Jadid al-Islam," that chronicles the forced mass conversion of Mashhadi Jews in the 1800s. I will pursue these in the near future.

2014/01/17 (Fri.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper." ~ Eden Phillpots
- (2) Make sure this epitaph does not appear on your tombstone: "Died from not forwarding that e-mail to ten people." [[Image](#)]
- (3) A history of kabob in Iran: [This Web page](#) is in Persian, but you can enjoy the mouthwatering photos, even if you can't read the narrative.
- (4) Academy Awards nominees announced: Here is [the complete list](#), which includes very few surprises. There are 9 selections in the Best Picture category. Exclusion of Robert Redford in the Best Actor category is the biggest surprise, followed by the complete shutting out of "Saving Mr. Banks."
- (5) US Air Force [cheating scandal](#): Missile defense officers used text-messaging to cheat on periodic tests intended to gauge their readiness for making critical decisions about advanced weapons systems.

2014/01/16 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month." ~ Theodore Roosevelt
- (2) Bonus quote of the day: "Attack the evil that is within yourself, rather than attacking the evil that is in others." ~ Confucius
- (3) Comedy short film: This [5-minute video](#), entitled "The Mustache," is sure to make you smile.
- (4) Coin-counting puzzle: A woman has \$1.00 worth of change in her purse in exactly 50 coins. A random coin falls out to the ground. What is the probability that the dropped coin is a penny?
- (5) Iran's judiciary slams Rouhani's government: In an [interview with Aljazeera](#), Ali Jannati, Rouhani's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, is asked whether he wants to see changes in Iran's judiciary in line with his country's new political developments. He indicates that changes in the judiciary are inevitable and will be forthcoming. Later, the spokesman for the judiciary characterizes Aljazeera's question as entrapment and indicates that smart Islamic Republic officials would not be duped into answering such questions.

2014/01/15 (Wed.): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "Maybe we're not supposed to be happy. Maybe gratitude has nothing to do with joy. Maybe being grateful means recognizing what you have for what it is. Appreciating small victories. Admiring the struggle it takes simply to be human. Maybe we're thankful for the familiar things we know. And maybe we're thankful for the things we'll never know. At the end of the day, the fact that we have the courage to still be standing is reason enough to celebrate." ~ Rumi

(2) Bonus quote of the day: "Some people come in your life as blessings. Some come in your life as lessons." ~ Mother Teresa

(3) Coin-tossing puzzle: A magician has three coins, an ordinary quarter, a quarter with both sides showing heads, and a quarter with both sides showing tails. She picks a random coin unknown to us and tosses it, coming up heads. What is the probability that the other side of the coin is tails?

(4) The current status of Iran's student movement: [This analysis](#), in Persian, notes that activist students in Iran are in a honeymoon period with Rouhani and his government, much as they were with Khatami in 1997. Students lost confidence in Khatami's ability to deliver his promised openness and reforms, becoming hostile toward him in his final years as president. The author ends with the hope that Rouhani does not commit the same mistakes as Khatami. In my opinion, however, there is no logical reason to believe that Rouhani will be more successful than Khatami in bringing openness and reforms. If anything, the hardliners have become bolder and more entrenched in the intervening 16 years.

2014/01/14 (Tue.): Levy, Habib (1896-1984), *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora*, abridged and edited from the 3-volume 1960 Persian version by Hooshang Ebrami, translated into English by George W. Maschke, Mazda Publishers, 264 pp., 2005. [ISBN 1-56859-086-5]

[You can also read this item on [Iranian.com](#), where the formatting is somewhat better.]

In this review/summary/analysis, I have tried to give the reader a sense of the book's content and how it relates to other sources on the subject. The review is much longer than my usual ones, primarily because the subject matter is of immense interest to me.

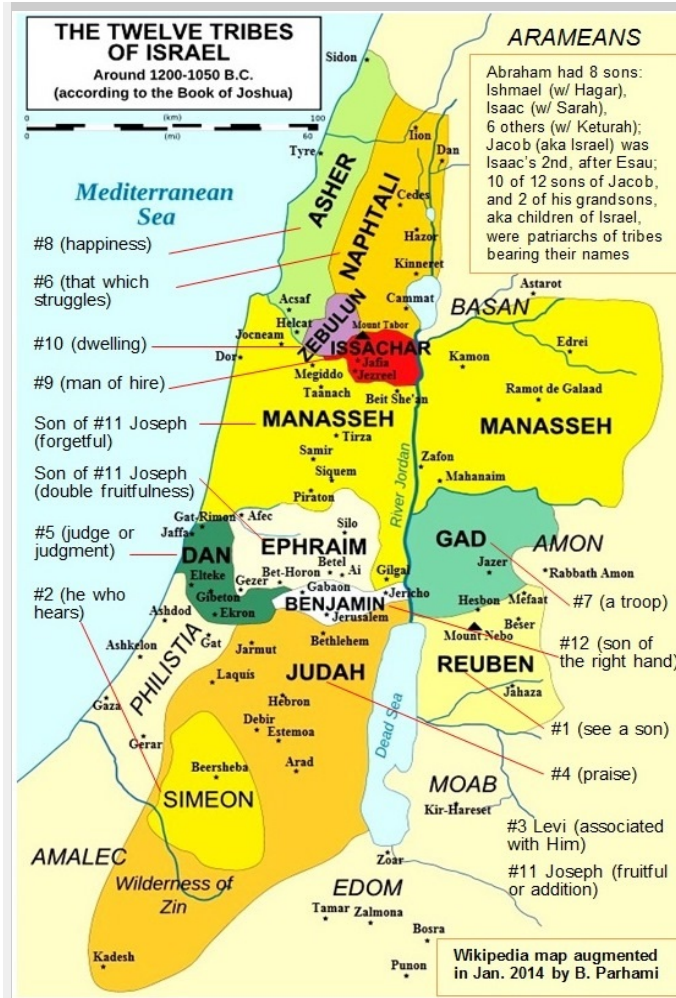
I started reading the book, which covers the history of Iranian Jews up to and including the Pahlavi era, with the aim of learning about where Iranian Jews came from and how/when they settled in Kurdistan, the land of my ancestors. I also wanted to discover the root causes of anti-Semitism in Iran. The recent history of Iranian Jews during the Qajars and Pahlavis, where historical documents are abundant and thus the events are less open to speculation, wasn't of as much interest to me. Therefore, I read the second half of the book, covering the latter eras, much less carefully.

Other than the book under review, sources for exploring the history of Jews in Iran are quite limited. One such source, which also cites other sources, is Wikipedia's "[History of the Jews in Iran](#)". Among useful pieces of information provided by the latter article are estimates of the number of Jews in Iran at various times. For example, a 2012 census indicated a population of less than 9000, down from more than 100,000 in the late 1940s and 80,000 in the late 1970s, just before the Islamic Revolution.

Anti-Semitism in Iran has had its ups and downs, with periods of ethnic cleansing at one extreme and tolerance (particularly over the last century) at the other, but deep down, anti-Semitic feelings persist in a vast majority of Iranian Muslims. For example, over my own lifetime, educated Muslims have been outwardly tolerant of, and even cordial toward, Jews. But in private, where Jews are absent or unrecognized, many behave quite differently. In Iran, the politically correct terms for a Jew are "Kalimi" and "Yahudi," but "Johud" is used to denigrate Jews (the latter, which came to be used during Shah Abbas II's reign, is to the former as "nigger" is to "negro" and "African-American" in the US). Many Iranians use the politically correct terms in public, but switch to the denigrating term in private, particularly when telling jokes about Jews.

As a believer in the power of graphical aids in all fields of human communication, I was very disappointed with the total absence of maps and timelines in this book. The 16 pages of images, inserted between pages 348 and 349, are inadequate for a book of this size and scope, especially since most of them are inconsequential photos of individuals and social groups.

Thus, to make things clearer for myself and for the readers of this review, I have put together the accompanying diagram that shows the geographic distribution of the Israelites, my ancient ancestors of some 3100 years ago, alongside a timeline that I have constructed from the book under review and some external sources. Please bear in mind that dates associated with ancient history are approximate, as various sources tend to disagree. I tried to reconcile the dates on the timeline with *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, a book about which I posted a review in late March 2013, but there were a number of irreconcilable differences; I chose to use dates from the current book in such cases.



Joint Timeline of Jewish History and Iranian History

- Israelites enter Egypt: ~1490 BCE -----
- [750 yrs] [1300-550 BCE] Early Jewish history
- Jews leave Egypt after 210 years: 1280 BCE -----
- [180 yrs] [1200-1020 BCE] Judges' rule
- [16 yrs] [1020-1004 BCE] King Shaul's rule
- [39 yrs] [1004-965 BCE] King David's rule
- [37 yrs] [965-928 BCE] King Solomon's rule
- [230 yrs] [928-698 BCE] Rule of 19 different kings
- Assyrians attack Jews (10 lost tribes): 720 BCE -----
- [128 yrs] [678-550 BCE] The Medes
- Caldean army burns the first temple: 586 BCE -----
- [220 yrs] [550-330 BCE] The Achaemenids
- Cyrus liberates the Jews of Babylon: 539 BCE -----
- Alexander burns Persepolis: 330 BCE -----
- [80 yrs] [330-250 BCE] Seleucids (Greek rulers)
- [250 yrs] [250-1 BCE] Parthians [total of 476 yrs]
- **Beginning of the Common Era** -----
- [226 yrs] [1-226] Parthians (cont.); aka the Arsacids
- Romans destroy the second temple: 70 CE -----
- [416 yrs] [226-642] The Sasanids (-nians)
- [205 yrs] [642-847] Rule of the Caliphs
- [191 yrs] [847-1038]
- [464 yrs] [1038-1501] The Seljuqs (Turks)
- The Crusades: 1095-1270 -----
- Mongol invasion of Iran: 1219-1221 -----
- [221 yrs] [1501-1722] The Safavids
- [72 yrs] [1722-1794] The Afsharids and Zands
- [113 yrs] [1794-1925] The Qajars
- Iran's Constitutional Revolution: 1906 -----
- World War I: 1914-1918 -----
- [54 yrs] [1925-1979] The Pahlavis
- World War II: 1939-1945 -----
- Iran's Islamic Revolution: 1979 -----
- [35 yrs] [1979-2014] Islamic Republic (under 2 leaders)

Let's start at the very beginning, when Israelites settled in the Holy Land (today's Israel). The Israelites, who entered Egypt some 3500 years ago and were delivered by Moses in 1280 BCE, were descendants of Abraham, who was born near Basra 3600 years ago and migrated to Canaan at age 75. Abraham had 8 sons and a daughter, Dinah. His first son, Ishmael, was from Hagar; his second son, Isaac, was from Sarah; the other 6 sons were from Keturah. Isaac had 2 sons with Rebekah: Esau and Jacob. The Israelites were in Egypt for 210 years (some accounts, that appear less reasonable, indicate 430 years by adding the lifespans of Jacob's son Levi, his son Kohath, his son Amram, and Moses, but this does not account for overlap between generations). The 12 sons of Jacob, nicknamed "Children of Israel," are said to have been patriarchs of tribes which were distributed in today's Israel/Palestine according to the map. In actuality, it seems, the 12 tribes were not led by the 12 sons of Jacob, but by 10 of his sons and two of his grandsons whom he adopted as his own. Ten of these tribes, residing in the northern region of the Holy Land, later became known as the "lost tribes," when they disappeared from the face of the earth around 720 BCE. Two of the tribes residing in the southern Judea region were captured and taken to Babylon. Babylon, the former hub of Judaism, was a province of Persia for more than 1000 years.

The 10 lost tribes were captured by the Assyrians and were taken, or were forced to go, to Samaria, Aleppo, Ninevah, Kurdistan, Azarbayjan, then to Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan, and Khorasan. The Judah and Benjamin tribes were captured by Babylonians and were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, Elam, Shush, Stakhr, and Pasargadae, and later to Yazd, Kerman, Kashan, and Isfahan, and points further north and west. A traveler's account around 1165 CE notes that Jews of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan speak the Syriac language, a dialect of Middle Aramaic. Benjamin of Tudela, the 12th-century traveler who visited Kurdistan in 1170, found more than 100 Jewish communities. Many Afghan Muslims are from the tribes of Israel who settled in the area during the reign of Cambyses and later converted to Islam.

The accounts in the preceding paragraphs provide some clues as to the origins of Kurdish Jews, but details are somewhat at odds with the information in Wikipedia's "[History of Jews in Kurdistan](#)," which associates Kurdish Jews with the tribe of Benjamin. According to Wikipedia, genetic studies have shown that Kurdish Jews and Kurdish Muslims have common ancestors, which may indicate significant religious conversions in one or the other direction. Kurdish Jews, now mostly relocated to Israel, spoke a dialect of Aramaic that was at one time prevalent in today's Middle East region and subsequently influenced Arabic.

The history of Iranian Jews during the Achaemenids is better documented than the periods before and immediately after, thanks in part to the account in the Old Testament and partly owing to extensive archeological discoveries from the period. Prophet Daniel's role during the Mede's rule (he is buried in Iran), Cyrus the Great's liberation of Jews from Babylon, rebuilding of the Second Temple, and the story of Queen Esther (also buried in Iran, alongside her uncle Mordecai) are well-known.

According to Chapter 6, Iranian Jews lived in obscurity for 5.5 centuries, spanning the Greek rule and 470 years of Parthians. When Alexander destroyed Persepolis in 330 BC, the area's Jewish inhabitants fled to nearby cities, possibly settling in Shiraz and Lar. Macedonians ruled both Judea and Iran; at that time, Jews adopted a new calendar, known as the Shetarot (covenant), whose starting point was 331 BCE, the year the Seleucus' rule was firmly established. Under the Greek rule, Jews of Judea were divided into two factions: most of the well-to-do supported the Greek culture, which was violently opposed by the Hasidim.

With the fall of Judea, many Jews migrated toward Arabia, settling in an area that later became Medina. Iran's western border during the Parthian period was the Euphrates River, making Iran and Judea not very far from each other. Many of the western provinces of Iran had large Jewish populations. In Mesopotamia and Babylon, there were regions where the entire population was Jewish. During this period, Iranian Jews constituted a council that was recognized by the Iranian state. The Jews had some level of autonomy in their affairs. A leader, "resh galuta" (head of Jewish affairs), presided over the Jewish-Iranian community.

With the end of Arsacid dynasty, the Jews also abandoned their struggle for independence and freedom. During the reign of Anushirwan (531-579 CE), who was a fanatic Zoroastrian, some religious minorities, particularly the Mazdakites, were persecuted. During the Sasanid dynasty (400+ years), the Jews lost the broad freedoms they had enjoyed in the past. In 456, a decree was issued to ban the observance of Sabbath. A list of Jewish community leaders during the Sasanian period, from 210 to 520 CE (15-16 leaders, with average tenure of about 20 years) is provided on p. 131. The peak of the Sasanid persecution of the Jews occurred during the reign of Peroz (457-483). As Jews of Mesopotamia fled to Arabia, Jews of Eastern Iran fled to India and some went as far as China.

In 614 CE, Jerusalem was freed from the grip of the Byzantines by Iran. Later, Arabs ruled both Iran and Judea, so, in a sense Iran and Judea were part of the same empire. Early during the Islamic period, Zoroastrians mistreated Jews, because they considered followers of Muhammad and Moses of the same creed; so, when Muslims mistreated them, they retaliated against the weaker Jews. When Imam Ali conquered the city of Peroz Shapur, local Jews greeted him in drones. Ali accepted the Jewish community leader position and preserved it. During the Islamic caliphate, Jews pursued trades such as weaving, dye casting, goldsmithing, pharmacy, shopkeeping, and trading in spices and antiques. Continual reinstatements of dress codes for the Jews are indications that the codes were not uniformly enforced.

During the first six centuries of the Islamic Iran, the country's Jews expanded eastward. There were significant populations of Jews in Nishapur, Balkh, Kabul, Sistan, Marv, Samarqand and Bokhara, stretching as far as China. The supremacy of Arabs over Iran lasted about two centuries. Afterwards, Iran was divided into 3 parts: One part was ruled by the caliphs of Baghdad, another by independence-seekers, and a third part by Iranian patriots. Khorasan and other eastern parts of the country remained beyond the Arab influence. From the advent of Islam in Iran, Jews were caught in the middle. They were required to pay jizya (an exorbitant annual poll tax) to Islamic rulers and whatever rebel group happened to be in their area also forced them to pay large sums of money for protection.

The Mongols were a brutal bunch, but I was surprised to learn that before attacking Iran, Genghis Khan sent a 100-person commercial and political delegation to Iran's Sultan. The entire delegation was massacred before reaching the Sultan's court, as was a group sent later to investigate the incident. These events enraged the Mongol Khan, and he unleashed his rage on Iran. Genghis died in 1227, leaving Iran in disarray for several decades. Genghis' grandson Hulagu Khan attacked Iran in 1256, seizing land as far as Baghdad.

During the rule of the Seljuqs, religious tolerance came to an end in Iran and regulations, similar to those previously instituted by Umar, were put in place for non-Muslims. The restrictions and the extent of their enforcement evolved over time, but they included bans on praying aloud or living in houses that were higher than those of Muslims and requirements for special clothing and footwear. Many members of religious minorities converted to Islam during this period to escape denigration and persecution. In 1026, wine taverns were closed, an action that would be repeated some two centuries later, causing Hafez to write: "They shut the doors of the tavern—God be not pleased / For they shall open the doors of the house of falsehood and hypocrisy."

[In transliterated Persian: "Dar-e meykhaneh beband, khodaya mapasand / Keh dar-e khaneh-ye tazvir o riya bogshayand."]

The vizier Nezam al-Mulk, in his book *Siyasnameh* ("Book of Politics"), wrote that non-Muslims should not be appointed to state offices, although he maintained cordial relations with some Jewish financiers. Property confiscation from Jews was widely practiced during this period, causing Iran's Jewish population to further decline due to migration and conversion. A prominent Jewish merchant, Banu Sahl al-Tustari, who migrated to

Egypt during this period, attained high office there and became highly influential in the Egyptian government. The Crusades took place from 1095 to 1270, devastating Iran and other lands in today's Middle East. A false messiah appeared and became very influential in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. Some of his followers remained loyal to him even after his death. A novel based on these real-life events was published by Benjamin Disraeli in the 1830s.

Traveler Benjamin of Tudela provides much information about Iranian Jews, including estimates of their numbers in Hamadan (30K), Shiraz (10K), Tabaristan (4K), Ghaznin (80K), Isfahan (15K), Amadiyah (25K), Susa (7K), and Samarqand (50K). For Azerbaijan and Rudbar, his estimates are in terms of communities (100 and 4, respectively), rather than populations. Another Jewish traveler, Petahiah ben Joseph ha-Lavan, gave an estimate of 1.2M for the total number of Jews. Even if not quite accurate, these large numbers indicate that from that day until Iran of the Pahlavi era, many Jews must have fled Iran or converted to Islam to escape mistreatment. In addition, many Iranian Jews were killed in the east by the Crusaders and in the west by the Mongols.

At times during Iran's history, such as during the Ilkhanid period, Jews rose to high offices. One well-known Jew of this period was the Judeo-Persian poet Shahin who put the Torah and Jewish tradition into verse in the style of classical Persian poets. The Safavid era (1501-1722) brought with it a revival of the arts and great achievements in architecture, but it also opened the country's doors to European spies and intensified anti-Semitism, which climaxed amid religious wars among Sunnis and Shi'is, as well as among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Persecution occurred in some very weird combinations: Priests called Muslims and Jews infidels, while Mullahs in Spain declared Jews and Christians infidels. Ottomans killed Shi'is and Christians, but protected the Jews (the Ottoman Empire was one of the few remaining safe havens for European Jews); Iranians killed Sunnis and Jews, but not Christians. Anti-Semitic ideas were spread by European spies in Iran. The colonial powers of Europe also fueled the Shi'i-Sunni conflict, which occupied the Sunni Ottomans with the Shi'i Iran, preventing them from harboring expansionist thoughts toward Europe. The Ottoman, who initially protected Jews, eventually started to kill them.

Many Jews in Iran led dual religious lives, praying as Muslims in public and following Jewish traditions in private. Lack of leadership due to the Iranian Jews being cut off from their religious center in Baghdad contributed to the problems. The Safavid had a special bureau, Administration for Taxes on Non-Muslims, and other tools to coerce Jews into spying on their communities for the government. All these difficulties led to mass migration of Jews eastward and westward.

It is interesting, and disheartening, that the clearest descriptions of religious rituals and social traditions in the Middle East come from travelers, rather than local writers. One such traveler wrote about the king participating in Ashura ceremonies to make a public showing of his piety, and then holding private drinking parties with beautiful female dancers. Music was totally banned during the last years of the Safavid era.

Shah Abbas delegated domestic policy to Shi'i clerics and foreign policy to European agents, especially the Sherley brothers. He wanted to eliminate all Jews but the Shi'i clerics opposed this idea, convincing him to instead sign a 70-year contract with the Jews, compelling them to convert to Islam if the messiah did not appear during this time. Jews, who saw this contract as their only hope for survival, accepted. Sure enough, at the end of the 70-year period, a false messiah appeared, claiming to be the son of Solomon, who ruled the lost tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Mannaseh in the wilderness of Khabur. Desperate Jews embraced the messiah. He amassed such a large following that the Ottomans felt threatened, arrested him, and forced him to convert to Islam. This turn of events left the Jews heartbroken and drove them toward mass conversion to Islam to save their lives.

Anti-Semitism climaxed in Iran during the reign of Shah Abbas II. The mullahs were always busy devising regulations and restrictions against Jews. A list of 45 such restrictions, on pp. 293-295, shows the depth of anti-Semitism. Some of the most demeaning (not necessarily the most serious) examples include: (#3) The oath of a Jew is not admissible in court; (#10) Jews may not wear matching shoes; (#15) If a Muslim curses a Jew, the Jew must remain silent and bow his head; (#25) Jews may not buy fresh fruits; (#45) Jews must bow their heads when addressing Muslims. Safavid era anti-Semitism was so strong that it persisted even after that dynasty's end.

Baba'i ibn Lutf was a Jewish poet who wrote in Persian verse, transcribed in Hebrew alphabet. He wrote about lives of Iranian Jews during the Safavid era, including their sufferings, forced conversions, and dual existence—living outwardly as Muslims and privately as practicing Jews. A grandson of Baba'i Lutf also versified the plight of Iranian Jews.

There were quite a few vengeful mullahs who wanted to make Jews suffer above and beyond the official Safavid policies. Jews on occasion went to government officials or the king himself to complain about their treatment by local mullahs, but they were often ridiculed or given the run-around. On the positive side for Jews, a few provincial rulers refused to enforce some of the more absurd restrictions in appearance and clothing, but they

still favored distinguishing Jews from Muslims in some way. Shah Abbas II traveled to Kashan in 1659, where he lusted for a Jewish boy whom he saw briefly before the boy disappeared. The king's men set out to find the boy, but to no avail, as his family hid him from sight. As a result, the king intensified his persecution of the Jews in Kashan, putting 150 to death in a single day. The boy was eventually found, and Shah Abbas II left Kashan with him.

The end of Safavid dynasty is often taken to be 1736; 1722 was the end of the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn. The four centuries since then have been tainted by many of the same policies that remain in tacit existence, even though they are no longer on the books. Nader Shah's reign eased anti-Semitism to some extent, so that some Jews who had fled into mountains dared to return to their hometowns.

The Qajar's rule constitutes one of the darkest periods of Iranian history. Agha Muhammad Khan blinded tens of thousands, allowed his soldiers to rape women, and even killed or blinded some members of his own family. Shameful treaties were signed that gave away land and treasures to foreigners, especially Russia. Iran effectively became a colony, operated by Russia from the north and the British from the south. The kings, meanwhile, indulged themselves, while letting foreigners run the country. Fath Ali Shah had 157 wives. Clerics had unchecked powers, remnants of which allowed them to seize power after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The appearance of a Shiraz youth toward the end of the reign of Muhammad Shah caused quite a stir. The youth later became known as the "Bab" (literally "the gateway" to the Rightful Commander) who later founded the Baha'i faith. The Bab was initially arrested and exiled, and was eventually executed, after which his brothers took his place.

Late during the Qajar rule, what started as a revolt against giving the British the rights to cultivate and market tobacco in Iran turned into a full-blown Constitutional Revolution, with the constitutionalism decree issued by Muzaffar al-Din Shah in 1906.

During the Qajar period, clerics were again given free reign over domestic affairs, leading among other things to a renewal of anti-Semitism. Some forcefully converted Jewish groups, who had gone back to Judaism during the Afsharid dynasty, were forced to undergo a second wave of conversions. Late in the reign of Nasser al-Din Shah, however, European Jewish organizations intervened on behalf of Iranian Jews, leading to cosmetic improvements in their lives. During the reign of Fath Ali Shah, the pressures on, and mistreatment of, Jews reached inhumane levels, with Jewish women routinely violated and Jewish residences pillaged. Fath Ali Shah, meanwhile, selected attractive Jewish maidens and boys for his seraglio. Nasekh al-Tavarikh supplied the names of no fewer than 8 Jewish wives. Despite closing their eyes to the persecution of Jews, the Qajars did use the skills of Iranian and European Jews, who served as court physicians and musicians.

Other than mandatory conversions to Islam, there was one incentive that caused voluntary conversions: eligibility to inherit the wealth of close and distant relatives. To escape persecution, many Jews converted to the Baha'i faith, a branch of Islam that purportedly showed respect for minority rights. During periods of greater religious extremism, when Muslims wouldn't dare play music for fear of repercussions from the mullahs, Iranian Jews played a big part in preserving the country's classical music.

Ephraim Neumark provided estimates of Iranian Jewish populations around 1883. According to him, there were around 6000 Jews in Tehran, 5000 in Shiraz, 2400 in Mashhad, 250 in Kermanshah, and 80 in Borujerd. He named other Iranian cities with Jewish communities, without referring to their populations. Based on these figures, it is unlikely that there were more than 50,000 Jews in Iran, about the same number as in the latter years of the Pahlavi dynasty. It is indeed a sad indication of Iran's backwardness that we have had to rely on observations by foreign travelers to learn about our own historical facts.

Tabrizi Jews were massacred in the late 1820s. At the start of the Qajar period, an estimated 7000 Jews lived in Tabriz. A number of Christians and Muslims conspired against Jews by killing the child of a Muslim religious scholar and hiding his corpse in the house of a successful Jewish merchant, with help from one of his Christian employees. As a rule, when a Jew committed an offense, all Jews were accused of wrongdoing and suffered punishment. As rumors of the Jew's crime spread, mobs set out to kill all Jews, with the massacre later spreading to other cities in Azerbaijan. Similar events would later take place in Mashhad and Tehran, with the latter incited by fabric merchants connected to Qajar royalty who did not want competition from many Jews who had chosen to trade in fabrics.

Jews of Tehran, like other cities, lived in a ghetto in cramped and unsanitary conditions, with water delivered to them only once every 6 months. Jews endured these awful living conditions, and the insults hurled at them by Muslims surrounding their ghetto, by resorting to their faith and sense of community. Riots against, and massacres of, Jews continued in many cities throughout the Qajar period.

Jews in Iran were in decline as European Jews prospered following the French Revolution. Establishment of the Universal Israelite Alliance (known briefly as "Alliance," and pronounced in French by Iranians) raised hopes for Iranian Jews and provided them with practical assistance in various domains. For example, Alliance schools were built in Iran (first one opening in Tehran in 1898) and Qajar kings, who were under the influence of their European advisors, were persuaded to protect Iranian Jews, but the kings had little sway over the anti-Semite

mullahs.

Bigotry and anti-Semitism in Iran formed one of the major discussion foci of the Alliance in Europe. They brought up these matters with Nasir al-Din Shah during his visit to Paris and via a continuous stream of correspondence later on. The same topics were discussed with the king during his London visit. To ensure that the king would not renege on his promises to protect Jews, and to inform Iranian Jews of their rights, the Alliance published all its correspondence with Iranian authorities and distributed them (with Hebrew translation for those who did not read English or French) among Iranian Jews.

The Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919 placed all military and financial affairs of the country under the control of British advisors. In a 1921 coup, Reza Khan seized the command of the armed forces. In 1925, Ahmad Shah was deposed and was replaced by Reza Shah, who ruled Iran until 1941. He sidelined the clerics and allied with Germany during WW II. When Reza Shah refused a proposal to build a north-south railroad to help the allies, the British and Russians attacked Iran and deposed him in 1941, replacing him with his young son Mohammad Reza, who ruled until 1979.

Official persecution of Jews stopped during the Pahlavi dynasty, even during the final years of Reza Shah, when his German advisors exerted a great deal of influence in Iran. However, roots of anti-Semitism were too strong to die out. So, Jews continued to suffer in the hands of anti-constitutional clerics and their thugs/mobs.

When Jews were given the chance of having a representative in the parliament, they failed to elect leaders who would work to improve their condition, opting instead for conservative yes-men, who did not believe in rocking the boat. Enemies of constitutionalism portrayed the liberation movement and the secular justice system as a plot by Jews and Bha'is.

The embattled Jews of Shiraz came very close to being completely wiped out, but intervention by Alliance officials saved them. In those days, anyone could accuse a Jewish man of having relations with a Muslim woman, thus getting him killed, his relatives abused, and his house looted, all without a need for any proof. This was a common way of blackmailing Jews. With the slightest excuse, the mullahs called for riots against Jews in Tabriz, Tehran, and other cities, killing many and plundering their houses and shops. According to the author, many of the riots against the Jews were incited by European agents to scare off American investors, by portraying Iran as highly uncivilized and unsafe.

In 1895, mass immigration of Iranian Jews to Jerusalem began. In the 20th century, Iranian Jews continued their immigration to the Holy Land in large numbers, particularly after the establishment of the state of Israel. The history and troubles of Kurdish Jews were of particular interest to me, given that my ancestors lived in Kurdistan. An anti-Semitic attack in 1950 killed a dozen Jews in Kurdistan. The government was quick in quelling the disturbance and in helping Jews to move to Tehran or immigrate to Israel. The group included a number of farmers, who are considered the last Iranian Jews to be employed in agriculture.

Even though Jews of Iran faced many common problems, they were also disunited on the question of leadership and on whether Jews should try to influence national politics. Involvement in politics was against the tradition of cautious conservatism. Several Jewish representatives to the parliament were elected term after term, despite being highly ineffective in performing their function.

Chapter 30 about two opposing community leaders, Shemuel Haim and Loghman Nehurai, is too detailed, describing every disagreement and name-calling. There is no overall analysis of the underlying causes, although the reader gathers that this was a left-versus-right dispute. Perhaps one reason for the distracting details is the author's personal involvement in this part of the history, which makes some of the assertions a tad suspicious. Because Reza Shah sidelined the clerics who incited ignorant masses, the status of Iranian Jews generally improved during the Pahlavi era, although sporadic incidents persisted. Given their suffering prior to the Pahlavi dynasty, Jews remained loyal to Reza Shah and his son, which increased the suspicion and distrust of the religious masses in the period leading to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Shortly after the rise of Hitler to power, the newspaper *Kushesh* published anti-Semitic articles that blamed Jews for all economic and social ills in the country. These articles, published on September 4 and 5, 1933, marked the beginning of a destructive propaganda against Jews.

When Hitler's forces pushed into southern Russia, a number of Jewish children were rescued and brought to Tehran (the so-called "Children of Tehran") for eventual resettlement in the Holy Land. This episode might be viewed as an omen of the future relationship between Iran and Israel, beginning in the 1960s.

Educational and other opportunities increased for Jews after the end of WW II, but their disunity persisted, causing many of their common problems to remain unsolved.

Iran began diplomatic relations with Israel in 1950, but in 1951, Mosaddegh, who was seeking Arab support for his nationalization of the oil industry, recalled Iran's representative. The support did not materialize and later Egypt began an anti-Iranian campaign in the Persian Gulf. Finally, in 1960, Iran's king recognized Israel and affirmed its right to existence, infuriating Egypt and other Arab countries. Economic cooperation as well as cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries ensued.

Jews began leaving Iran en masse in the years leading to the Islamic Revolution and for several years afterwards.

Currently, it is estimated that fewer than 9000 Jews live in Iran, predominantly in Tehran, but also in Isfahan, Shiraz, and a few other cities. Iranian Jews have been scattered all around the world, with a great majority residing in Israel and United States.

2014/01/13 (Mon.): Here are three items of potential interest.

(1) Fariborz Lachini's music competition: The winning selections are performances by Farhad Makiabady, Iman Alizadeh, and Ryan Foster. The [YouTube video](#) automatically moves to the 2nd- and 3rd-place selections once it ends.

(2) City of Mice kids: My Iranian friends who grew up with the animated children's show "The Mice School" will like this [3-minute music video](#) performed by the Pallett Group and kids from the City of Mice.

[Also, listen to Pallett Groups songs "[Naro, Beman](#)" and "[A Thousand Tales](#)," if you like their unique style of traditional Persian music, fused with Western music.]

(3) The Golden Globe Awards set the stage for the Oscars: There were several surprises among the major movie awards.

Best motion picture: "12 Years a Slave" (drama); "American Hustle" (musical or comedy)

Best director: Alfonso Cuaron

Best actress: Cate Blanchett (drama); Amy Adams (musical or comedy)

Best actor: Matthew McConaughey (drama); Leonardo DiCaprio (musical or comedy)

Best supporting actress: Jennifer Lawrence. Best supporting actor: Jared Leto

2014/01/12 (Sun.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Southern California winter storm 2013; we will rebuild! [[Image](#)]

(2) High-tech LED ring watch: It seems that electronic watches are moving in two different directions. At one extreme, they are becoming smartwatches that can communicate with cell phones, tablets, or laptops. Such watches are still too bulky for most people's taste. At the other extreme, we have the recently introduced ring watch, shown in [this video](#). I will likely buy a ring watch, once they become a tad smaller.

(3) Persian language rap: Rap music has become one of the primary channels for political protest within Iran and among Iranian diaspora. Here is a song entitled "[Pishe Ghazi, Mallagh Bazi](#)" ("Facing a Judge, Doing Somersaults") by Shahin Najafi, featuring Navid Zardi.

(4) A rare event: A friend of mine posted a photo and a chain of names on Facebook to announce the arrival of the great great grandchild of his mother: Fatemeh Zahra Maryam Mohammad Salman. It is interesting that the Persian language has a single word, "nabireh," for "great great grandchild" ("natijeh" stands for great grandchild and "nadideh," meaning "unseen," for great great great grandchild). This reminds me of a very interesting book I am reading now (*Thinking in Numbers: On Life, Love, Meaning, and Math*, by Daniel Tammet) that says some indigenous people of Sri Lanka have words only for the numbers 1 and 2. For them, three is "two and one more," four is "two and one more and one more," and so on.

2014/01/11 (Sat.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Niagara Falls freeze over on the US side: The Canadian side flowed normally during the polar vortex that brought record lows to the region; the Canadian side has not frozen over since the 19th Century. [[Photos](#)]

(2) Deep freeze chills the US. [[Boston.com pictorial](#)]

(3) The state of Silicon Valley and 5 other Californias: A pie-in-the-sky [ballot initiative](#) being pushed by venture capitalist Tim Draper would divide California into 6 different states, in part to have Californians better represented in the US Senate, which, according to the US constitution, has 2 Senators per state. Alas, his proposal lumps Santa Barbara County with Los Angeles County.

(4) A day in the life of a warehouse robot: About a month ago (2013/12/06), I posted an item about Amazon.com's chaotic storage concept and how it allows efficient inventory management and processing of shipping orders. [This video clip](#) shows the warehouse robots in action and explains their workings.

(5) The tragedy of a Kurdish girl: Her name was Sheler, Kurdish for "wild tulip." She was abducted by the Islamic Republic security forces the day after Ali Khamenei spoke at Razi University, where she was a student and one of the 80 signers of a petition that characterized the Islamic regime as old and fragile. Five months later, her father was contacted and told to go take Sheler home from the notorious Evin Prison. The father was shocked to find his daughter thin, feeble, and unable to walk. She recovered her physical strength in time, but did not dare leave home for fear of suffering the same fate and of having to explain what happened to her in prison. When Evin Prison authorities contacted family members, giving them 3 days to return Sheler to the prison, she couldn't bear the thought of going back and [killed herself](#) with her grandfather's hunting rifle. The [Persian version](#) of this story first appeared on Iranian film director Mohammad Nourizad's blog.

2014/01/09 (Thu.): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) Japanese men and women [wear special scarves](#) to show support for breast cancer research.
- (2) Smoke-free campuses: As of January 1, 2014, the entire University of California system has become smoke-free. Hurray for UC management!
- (3) Live jazz performance in Tehran: Sardar Sarmast (arrangement and piano) and Hamzeh Yeganeh (keyboard) play ["Caravan."](#)
- (4) Codeword puzzles: I like all kinds of puzzles (crosswords, Sudoku, Jumble, KenKen, and so on). A recent favorite of mine appears daily on [this Web site](#) and in some newspapers. A crossword grid is given, whose squares are filled with the numbers 1-26, each number standing for a different letter of the English alphabet. You must figure out which letter each number represents. Give it a try!

2014/01/08 (Wed.): Here are six items of potential interest.

- (1) Thought for the day: The most beautiful rainbows come after the harshest storms.
- (2) Canadian archaeologists at work, [digging cars out of snow](#).
- (3) The Rock of Guatape: If you need some challenging stairs for exercise, take a look at [this 10M-ton rock](#) in Colombia. The rock rises 200 meters from the surrounding plain, providing anyone who braves the 649-step masonry staircase a rewarding view of its surroundings.
- (4) Germany's Miniature Wonderland: Many cities and landscapes of the world are represented among the exhibits of a must-visit [theme park in Hamburg](#), which includes a miniature airport and the world's largest model railway. A 5-minute video takes you on a quick tour of the park.
- (5) The negative effects of too much positivity: There is a huge industry catering to underperforming, low-self-esteem, and broken-hearted people that makes billions from fees and ad revenues by telling these people that they are better than what they really are and deserve more than they are dealt. Positive thinking is very important, and I am a practitioner myself (see the first item for today, e.g.), but the following article warns us about the negative impact of overdoing it. A [University of Waterloo study](#) found that positive messages are effective on some people but can have the reverse effect on insecure individuals with negative self-image.
- (6) Chatting between unrelated men and women is un-Islamic: [Al Arabiya reports](#) that Iran's Supreme Leader has issued a religious edict (fatwa) against on-line chatting between unrelated men and women. Taken at face value, the edict seems to confirm that same-sex chatting is allowed.

2014/01/07 (Tue.): Here are five items of potential interest on science and technology.

- (1) Low-speed chase: High-speed police chases lead to hundreds of deaths per year. A new minicannon installed on police cars can fire a GPS-enabled bullet that sticks to a suspect's car, allowing it to be tracked remotely. Fleeing suspects often slow down when no one is pursuing them, thus reducing collision risks. [From *ASEE Prism* magazine, issue of December 2013.]
- (2) Power station doubles as urban ski slope: [The ultimate in green technology](#) is a Copenhagen power station that is fueled entirely by the city's garbage and hosts many skiers on its rooftop, preventing a number of car trips to ski slopes.
- (3) Crash-happy flying robot: EPFL researchers in Switzerland have built a flying robot that can bounce off obstacles and continue to fly, the way insects do. The robot was tested by having it fly through a forest by giving it only a direction; no obstacle avoidance schemes were needed. [[2-minute video](#)]
- (4) Hubble ultra deep field in 3D: This [4-minute video clip](#) shows how scientists discovered thousands of galaxies that are mind-bogglingly far from us (light from them has traveled 13B years to reach us; that's only slightly less than the age of our universe) by pointing the Hubble Space Telescope at a seemingly empty area of the sky close to the Big Dipper. Towards the end of the video, a 3D animation of these far-away galaxies is presented, with the distance to the galaxy determined by its measured red shift.
- (5) Happy unions correlate well with disparate friends: [A paper about to be published](#) by Lars Backstrom (Facebook) and Jon Kleinberg (Cornell Univ.) offers and experimentally verifies the hypothesis that happy unions and relationships correlate well with the degree to which two people's mutual friends are not well-connected among themselves. The researchers set out to answer the question of whether a person's romantic partner can be deduced solely from his or her friends list and no other cues. This is an instance of the more general problem of determining important people in someone's life from connections lists.

2014/01/06 (Mon.): Here are four items of potential interest.

- (1) Quote of the day: "The small eraser at the end of a long pencil is a reminder that you will have a second or maybe a third chance, but the number of chances is limited." ~ Anonymous
- (2) Bonus quote of the day: "The greatest gift you can give to somebody is your own personal development. I used to say, 'If you will take care of me, I will take care of you.' Now I say, 'I will take care of me for you if you will take care of you for me.'" ~ Jim Rohn
- (3) Posh religious school in Iran: While traditional schools in remote parts of Iran, and even in many Tehran

neighborhoods, are starving for resources, the **latest religious school** ("madresseh elmieh") bearing the name of grand ayatollah Mohammad Bagher Khansari was recently opened in Qom with much fanfare.

(4) *Life's Little Instruction Book*: A selection of advice from the book, some pages of which are captured in images on this [Web page](#).

Don't believe people when they ask you to be honest with them.

Every person that you meet knows something you don't; learn from them.

Resist giving advice concerning matrimony, finances, or hairstyles.

A successful marriage depends on finding the right person and being the right person.

Give yourself an hour to cool off before responding to someone who has provoked you.

If it involves something really important, give yourself overnight before responding.

2014/01/05 (Sun.): King, Barbara J., *Roots of Human Behavior*, The Teaching Company, 2001; audiobook on 6 CDs, containing a series of 12 half-hour lectures by a Professor of (biological) anthropology at the College of William and Mary.

I learned a great deal from this wonderful lecture series, presented in a very accessible way. The best way to give my reader a sense of what the lectures contain is to present a lecture-by-lecture summary.

(1) *The Four Facets of Anthropology*. The lecturer begins with a review of the field of anthropology, along with its archeological, cultural, linguistic, and biological subfields. The focus is mainly on the fourth subfield, which deals with the evolution of human species in terms of both behavior and anatomy, using related species to enhance understanding of the human development.

(2) *Social Bonds and Family Ties*. Anthropoids (monkeys and apes) live in complex social groups that are not randomly formed for the sole purpose of improving the chances of survival (access to food and mates). Strong social bonds are in evidence.

(3) *The Journey Away from Mom*. Because anthropoid infants are born relatively undeveloped compared to most mammals, the mother-infant relationship and the subsequent separation behavior carry important clues for anthropologists.

(4) *Males and Females: Really So Different?* The cultural stereotyping regarding the different characteristics and roles for men and women used to drive anthropological studies until a few decades ago, but such differentiations are now discredited.

(5) *Sex and Reproduction*. Reproductive and sexual behaviors in the animal kingdom do not always coincide. Male and female anthropoids do have different reproductive interests and strategies, but their sexual activities aren't that different.

(6) *Tool Making: Of Hammers and Anvils*. Tool-making was considered a strictly human activity, but now we know that our closest relatives among anthropoids also make and use tools (to crack nuts or extract termites, for example).

(7) *Social Learning and Teaching*. There is some evidence that monkeys and apes learn from each other and engage in teaching. Because teaching and learning are tied to culture, results of such studies are important for understanding human behavior.

(8) *Culture: What Is It? Who's Got It?* Is culture unique to humans or possessed by other animals as well? The answer depends on how we define culture: from mere social learning at one extreme to the transmission of complex ideas/beliefs at the other.

(9) *Dynamics of Social Communication*. Once we have recognized that anthropoids are both thinking and feeling creatures, it is natural to ask whether they communicate their knowledge and desires, and, if so, how?

(10) *Do Great Apes Use Language?* Great apes raised in enriched captive environments can master the use of symbolic systems. Human language, however, is qualitatively different, in that it allows us to talk about the past and the present.

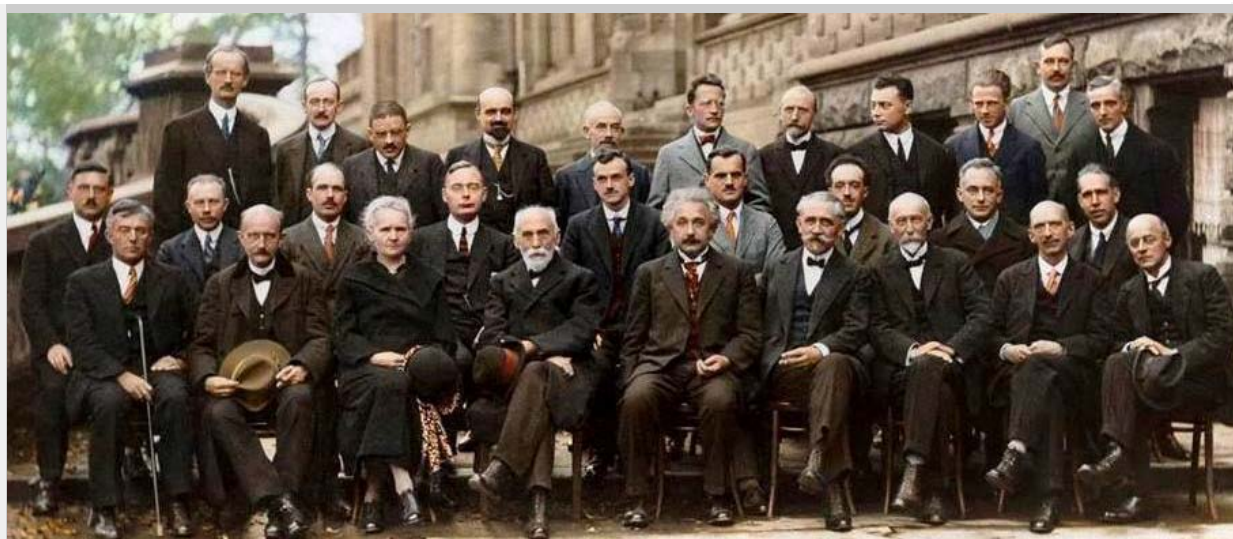
(11) *Highlights of Human Evolution*. We know more about the anatomy than the social behavior of hominids. The Homo genus was marked off from the earlier hominids around 2.5 million years ago, at about the same time as the appearance of stone tools.

(12) *Exploring and Conserving a Legacy*. Studying humans as anthropoids helps us understand our past.

Humans are biocultural beings whose behavioral roots (particularly with regard to behavioral flexibility) are seen in monkeys and apes.

2014/01/04 (Sat.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) An epic photo for science and scientists: The most striking feature of this photo, taken at the 1927 Solvay Conference, is the presence of so many giants of modern science in one frame. Another feature is that the photo is the colorized version of a black-and-white original. An unfortunate feature is a single female scientist representing half of humanity, alongside 28 scientists from the other half. The legend goes from left to right.



Back row: Auguste Picard, Emile Henriot, Paul Ehrenfest, Edouard Hersen, Theophile de Donder, Erwin Schrodinger, Jules-Emile Verschaffelt, Wolfgang Pauli, Werner Heisenberg, Ralph H. Fowler, Leon Brillouin
Middle row: Peter Debye, Martin Knudsen, William L. Bragg, Hans A. Kramers, Paul Dirac, Arthur H. Compton, Louis de Broglie, Max Born, Niels H. D. Bohr

Front row: Irving Langmuir, Max Planck, Marie Curie, Hendrik A. Lorentz, Albert Einstein, Paul Langevin, Charles-Eugene Guye, Charles T. R. Wilson, Owen W. Richardson

(2) Quote of the day: "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." ~ Plato

(3) Bonus quote of the day: "Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children." ~ Charles R. Swindoll

(4) Surreal nature photos that appear to have been Photoshopped. [\[Pictorial\]](#)

2014/01/03 (Fri.): Here are four items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas." ~ Marie Curie

(2) Bonus quote of the day: "Clear thinking requires courage rather than intelligence." ~ Thomas Szasz

(3) New robotics advance: Inspired by eagles, the design of these [quadcopter robots](#) includes talons capable of grabbing objects swiftly.

(4) Controversy of the year over human evolution: Studies of human evolution routinely lead to controversies, so this one is no exception. A 2013 paper in the 18 October 2013 issue of the journal *Science* offers the observation that skull variations within a particular single population of *Homo erectus* matches the range of variations observed among African fossils ascribed to the 3 species of *H. erectus*, *H. habilis*, and *H. rudolfensis*, raising the possibility that perhaps the latter weren't distinct species after all. The jargon-laden *Science* paper itself is nearly impossible to understand by the nonspecialist, but this [BBC news story](#) is very accessible.

2014/01/02 (Thu.): Here are five items of potential interest.

(1) Quote of the day: "Don't explain. Your friends do not need it, and your enemies will not believe you." ~ Paulo Coelho

(2) Santa discriminates: He gives posh, expensive presents to rich kids and crappy, cheap ones to poor kids. [Paraphrased from a Jimmy Kimmel monolog.]

(3) Christmas gift guide: You may have missed it for the 2013 gift-giving season, but please watch this hilarious ["As Seen on TV" compilation](#) for gift ideas at the end of 2014.

(4) Joke of the day: Billionaire Iranian businessman Babak Zanjani, as he is led into Evin Prison on charges of financial crimes (mostly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency): "Hey, how much for this complex and the hills behind it?"

(5) Iranian woman [beaten to death](#) by husband in Michigan: A sad story for the beginning of a new year, but it has to be shared as a warning to all women. She got acquainted with her husband over the Internet. As she lay dying in the hospital, her family watched her, and caressed her via the attending nurse, on a computer screen, because it would have been impossible for them to obtain travel visas on short notice. There are many positive stories regarding on-line connections, but caution is in order nonetheless. The article has biographical info on the woman (see also [her Facebook page](#)), but little is known about the man ([his Facebook page](#)).

2014/01/01 (Wed.): Old blog entries for 2005-2013 have been archived and a new Blog & Books page begins today with five items of potential interest.



(1) On this first day of 2014, I wish everyone a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year. May we all be empowered to keep our New Year's resolutions!

(2) Quote of the day: "The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate." ~ J. B. Priestley (British broadcaster and novelist; 1894-1984)

(3) The de facto New Year's song: I never liked "Auld Lang Syne" (whose title means "old long since" or "long, long ago") but changed my mind when I heard [this rendition](#) by the incomparable Julie Andrews.

(4) Hafez featured on last night's PBS Newshour: A [7-minute interview](#) with Dick Davis about his book, *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz* (Mage, 2012).

(5) A dozen one-liner jokes about science and scientists, for your enjoyment in this new year:

An experimental scientist had only one of her twins baptized; she kept the other as control.

What is a physicist's favorite food? Answer: Fission chips.

What does DNA stand for? Answer: National Dyslexia Association.

A blowfly goes into a bar and asks: "Is that stool taken?"

Psychiatrist to patient: "Don't worry, you're not deluded; you only think you are."

Why can't you trust atoms? Answer: Because they make up everything.

Where does bad light end up? Answer: In a prism.

Why did I divide sin by tan? Answer: Just cos.

Cop: "Do you know how fast you were going?" Heisenberg: "No, but I know where I am."

Wind turbine's reaction when asked about renewable energy: "I am a big fan."

For a biologist, multiplication and division are the same.

I put my root beer in a square cup; now it's just beer.

© 2009-2014 Behrooz Parhami

Adapted from an original design by Andreas Viklund