

Seventy Moral  
(and Immoral)  
Polarities of the  
Everyday  
Volume II



# Seventy Moral (and Immoral) Polarities of the Everyday Volume II

By

Frederic Will

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Seventy Moral (and Immoral) Polarities of the Everyday Volume II  
Series: Inside Selfhood and History

By Frederic Will

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Frederic Will

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2350-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2350-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction .....                           | vii |
| 1 Citified and Hickish.....                  | 1   |
| 2 Depth and Shallowness.....                 | 3   |
| 3 Ferocity and Gentleness.....               | 5   |
| 4 Known and Unknown.....                     | 7   |
| 5 Rich and Poor .....                        | 9   |
| 6 Old and Young .....                        | 11  |
| 7 Rough and Smooth .....                     | 13  |
| 8 Thick and Thin .....                       | 15  |
| 9 Sweet and Sour.....                        | 17  |
| 10 Darkness and Light.....                   | 19  |
| 11 Just and Unjust .....                     | 21  |
| 12 Absence and Presence .....                | 23  |
| 13 Well and Unwell.....                      | 25  |
| 14 Limp and Stiff.....                       | 27  |
| 15 Ornamental and Plain .....                | 29  |
| 16 Hunger and Satiety .....                  | 31  |
| 17 Abstraction and Concreteness.....         | 33  |
| 18 Pleasure and Pain.....                    | 35  |
| 19 Masculinity and Femininity.....           | 37  |
| 20 Conservative and Liberal.....             | 39  |
| 21 Gay and Straight.....                     | 41  |
| 22 Infinite and Finite .....                 | 43  |
| 23 Sleepiness and Alertness .....            | 45  |
| 24 Turbid and Pellucid .....                 | 47  |
| 25 Beauty and Ugliness .....                 | 49  |
| 26 Large and Small.....                      | 51  |
| 27 Lively and Lifeless .....                 | 53  |
| 28 Idealism and Realism.....                 | 55  |
| 29 Humility and Pride .....                  | 57  |
| 30 Determination and Readiness to Quit ..... | 59  |
| 31 Like and Dislike .....                    | 61  |
| 32 Love and Hate.....                        | 63  |
| 33 Happiness and Unhappiness .....           | 65  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 34 Courage and Cowardice.....                     | 67  |
| 35 Strength and Weakness.....                     | 69  |
| 36 Admiration and Scorn.....                      | 71  |
| 37 Anger and Calmness.....                        | 73  |
| 38 Boredom and Engagement.....                    | 75  |
| 39 Desire and Aversion.....                       | 77  |
| 40 Optimism and Pessimism.....                    | 79  |
| 41 Enjoyment and Dissatisfaction.....             | 81  |
| 42 Hope and Hopelessness.....                     | 83  |
| 43 Humor and Humorlessness.....                   | 85  |
| 44 Relaxation and Anxiety.....                    | 87  |
| 45 Willingness and Unwillingness.....             | 89  |
| 46 Militant and Pacific.....                      | 91  |
| 47 Obsessed and Indifferent.....                  | 93  |
| 48 Adoration and Desecration.....                 | 95  |
| 49 Gloom and Joy.....                             | 97  |
| 50 Bewilderment and Orientation.....              | 99  |
| 51 Tired and Bubbly.....                          | 101 |
| 52 Crabby and Amiable.....                        | 103 |
| 53 Moody and Equable.....                         | 105 |
| 54 Lambent and Lacklustre.....                    | 107 |
| 55 Mysterious and Obvious.....                    | 109 |
| 56 Ribald and Decent.....                         | 111 |
| 57 Moody and Calm.....                            | 113 |
| 58 Unstable and Stable.....                       | 115 |
| 59 Dissatisfied and Satisfied.....                | 117 |
| 60 Complainer and Non-Complainer.....             | 119 |
| 61 Conscientiousness and Carelessness.....        | 121 |
| 62 Neurotic and Stable.....                       | 124 |
| 63 Conscientiousness and Unconscientiousness..... | 127 |
| 64 Secretive and Transparent.....                 | 130 |
| 65 Dominant and Submissive.....                   | 133 |
| 66 Unimaginable and Imaginable.....               | 136 |
| 67 Noble and Ridiculous.....                      | 138 |
| 68 Tepid and Boiling.....                         | 140 |
| 69 Round and Flat.....                            | 142 |
| 70 Darkness and Light.....                        | 144 |
| How and Why to Use this Book.....                 | 146 |

# INTRODUCTION

## 1

Language is where we are social, where we orient, seek, and self-describe. By a benign trick of mental order, the generation of what we might call *polarities*, we can pair major concepts we extract from everyday language and life, and develop from them further laterally outspreading tree branches of association, by which concept locks into its opposite, and a language world is derived in the midst of which you find yourself all discovery and all confession, busy directing and shaping language traffic—the traffic that’s life. *You* become the center of a swirling cyclone of interlocked terms. *You* discover meanings, and implications, the never resting whole of which sweeps you along with it as rapidly as you sweep it, and which can fairly lay claim to representing your life.

Because language is what it is, a hurricane of phonemes touching down here and there, moving nations, igniting love affairs, dividing up the human cognitive sphere into discernible gestures, we seldom make time to parse language’s life-giving folds. We let language swamp us with the daily unless, as in linguistics or in structures like the present targeted selection of paired opposites, we analyze language itself and its richer convolutions, or let the language dog temporarily off leash, to play and become literature or rhetoric. We are, though, quite capable of stopping the train and taking a deliberate look at it. Here’s this concept there’s that, we say, and lo and behold things like category pairs organize each other; they seem to call on each other by their opposition. (Big-small; dark-light; black-white.) They, such paired opposites, were there long before Coleridge, Levi Strauss or Owen Barfield began to draw attention to such insistent structures, and a whole lot longer than that, when Heraclitus observed that everything is its opposite as well as itself: polarity pairs swim profusely over their crowded frontiers in a crush to represent just the right this not that—as you will see by googling the huge antonym selection for any adjective or noun in any language. We are in a devilish rush to clear away one word-sound so that we will have a place to plant another, its own opposite-generating opposite. Try saying big without first thinking away small.

In the following book we parade 70 paired concept profiles, polar opposites that hunker in the language we live ourselves as. We reach without premeditation to twin up this sally or that, to tie them with a bow, and then, because as you will see that is the mode of this book thing, to plant lateral sprigs throughout the pairing work, to let *ideas* build themselves which are invariably at sixes and sevens to one another, but at just (we hope) the angle of provocation. The opposed concept pairs generate little stories about themselves, introducing, dismissing, then flirting with one another. God forbid that the sum total of these dances in laterality might shake down into a way of naming the world; into a coherent truth. They don't. We're not in danger of becoming coherent. We are not doing a philosophy, and do not aspire to get anything straight. The world is not there to name; and thus to be known by being named. (Only by knowing the world, I suppose, would we be in a position to have a fixed world view, a philosophy.) The world is the name of the world, the writhing inter texture of words falling into the shape of what things were just the moment before we said 'what things were.' The most we can hope to be doing here is to be being the world, as it is us. Being polar opposite conceptual pairs is a good way of being the intermix the world makes us be.

## 2

In the following collection of 70 polarities, we explore a wide range of conditions in human selfhood, as they are reflected in everyday contemporary English. Masculine and feminine—it's just fun to *do* these pairings--thoughtful and thoughtless, impartial and biased: there is no end to these sets of opposed terms, or to the meanings of the competitions, and interlacings, and divagations they provoke, among usages to which they have access. Examples inexhaustible exist to characterize each pair of usages. By selecting, assembling, and exemplifying a cornucopia of such paired usages, usages often rooted in the author's intimate personal experience, we hope to widen our readers' appetites for the energy latent in ordinary language usage; and, in passing, for their attention to points at which polar language procedures morph into 'themes.' (Into what, speaking like a mediaeval Schoolman, could properly be called *philosophemes*, less integral and influential than themes; begun arcs moving in the direction of comprehensive thought structures, but arrested or diverted in mid-course. Philosophy in a developed sense we will not at all wish to achieve here—polarities don't aim at rounded comprehensiveness, or at easy conceptual interfaces, but at rich self-



obfuscation, like poems--and indeed this text as a whole may seem itself to have been rather a poem or a personal essay, despite our explicit interest in contributing to knowledge (see below, in *How And Why To Use his Book*) or at least to self-reflection. *Philosophemes* caught in the act, as it were, are the most intellectually dignified prey we will trap. Learning from philosophy cannot be easy, and we don't aspire to so noble a goal here, but if ever it is to permeate the life-game, philosophy may require living or doing by fits and starts. Or that, at any rate, is the perspective from which we allow ourselves, here, to look upon the philosophic act as a pragmatic experiment. Philosophy as a domain, we will be saying, has no privileged themes, rather privileged ways of reflective action, distinctive steps to take.

Our hope is to derive from those *philosophemes* a rich if never to be comprehensive map of some conditions human being assumes in speech. The very amorphousness of these domain-categories shows how loose a fox hunt we are on. Our language, to be at all, is an infinitely flexible reflection of what we are and of ranges of our being we can recognize without always being deeply part of them. What we are as our language is not only amorphous and volatile, but is also what we are at a particular time, our momentary 'vocabulary' and its usages proving out as a markers for the fine limits of the human condition. What we can *say* today is what we can *be* today, and that is a lot. A total critique of our condition lies embedded in our language uses, and the internal mechanisms of human complexity are perfectly mirrored out in display as polarities, and nests of polarities enclosing one another.

### 3

Once again, what are *polarities* here, and what do they look like in practice? Let's try saying it again. Polarities are dynamic pairs of ways we exist, our 'traits'—selfish-generous, curious-disinterested, lively-lifeless—where *we* means all of us, wherever and whenever. Universally. We all contain all of the conditions embraced in the polarities outlined below. We exist them, in the distributive sense in which our bodies contain a little, very very little sometimes, of most of the chemical elements in the periodic chart. What matters in the construction of a personality is the emphases that give each of us our being-tone—*markedly stressed and hostile, introverted and a little bitter, terribly poor and moderately fierce, fairly loyal and not at all pugnacious*—and the infinite gradation of ingredients in each personality, a bit more of this, a bit less of that. The

narrative story of each of us will be wrapped up in the chemical personality-blend we offer history. In fact the meat of the present book will lie not only in its schematic picture of traits in action, but in the sub narratives, the examples, by which we illustrate the play out of this or that trait. These mini narratives, or *philosophemes*, are hooks in the flesh of lived reality, and are intended to emerge from the human repertoire dripping real blood. There is no abstract logic to the choice of examples that follow. The author drew them from the cache of life traits history has made of his own memory. Another author, another human being, would be an equally rich and totally different font of polar opposites.

This book is intended both as a springboard for research—into the languages and existential conditions inherent to us—and as an exercise book, to be used by any of us students of humanity.

In the first sense, as a research, the author hopes to generate inquiries into existential psychology, the relations of psychology and self-projection into language, and the nature of those *philosophemes*, which are born of language playing itself out into self-descriptions. We will rest with offering *materials* for research, rather than research in action. The author hopes to contribute to knowledge and to well being. We will say more about this programmatic intention in the retrospect that follows our 70 examples.

Then the *exercise book*. Human being might be viewed as an immense practice session, in which each of us plays a small role, against the backdrop of unwearying but corruptible mountain ranges, tropical forests, and sandblasted parking lots. Does practice and self-description make humanity perfect? No, but practice enriches people, and practice in being all we can as our language increases the uniquely private ways we can testify to having been here. Each of us is a tweak on the condition given and worked with as language, in the definition of that person's reality.

# 1. CITIFIED AND HICKISH

## Citified

*To be citified means to be blessed with urban sophistication. A citified young man, in the old days when such terms were used, might wear a bow tie, slick his hair back, even sport suspenders. You can be sure his shoes were polished and shiny. He was no sissy; he just had his shit together.*

## Citified

### *Examples*

1 At the County Fair, in these parts of Iowa, you still see cohorts of young men you might call countrified. It may still show up in an untamed fetlock, in a tee shirt sporting THE BIG APPLE, or simply in a look of pretty well concealed wonder at the ferris wheels. These kids are of course not genuinely country, as nothing is in an age and place where information spreads overnight, and the details of the whole world are familiar to all its residents, on a screen which makes the boob tube look like a scroll of holy scripture. But sort of countrified. And deep inside, where the machinery for processing the complexities of social life hides, real country.

2 Citified can mean a junior at a consolidated high school—country schools are rare now—with a regular bus ride to and from a farm home. Given the chores still to be done on an Iowa farm, and the time to and from as well as in, school, and hopefully homework, a youngster hasn't much extra time to absorb fancy ways. Go a little south of us here, and you've got Amish territory, and that makes the whole point clearer. THERE citified ain't the word at all.

## Hickish

*To be hickish is to be countrified, but with an aw shucks tweak which is hard to find nowadays outside of a sitcom like Andy Griffith or the consolidated high school in Big Pine, California. It's there where localized groups, as on a Navajo Reservation, are isolatedly joined together with their own jokes and dreams.*

## Hickish

### *Examples*

1 I hide inside me a version of hickish. Merle Haggard is my prototype, and the Johnny Cash of Folsom Prison is his Vice President. I don't know from where I have unearthed this recusant archetype, which (in me) has its forebears in Wyatt Earp and Erlend Nikulausson in *Kristin Lavransdottir*, the man whose pride drives him into a suicidal and anti social retreat. Do I want to be alone? Do I want to be thought of as alone? Do I want to be begged to come down from the hill country?

2 Because I used to dress hick and shuffle along in scuffed boots and messy hair, I have now, in a later life sprint, become quite the citified dresser, never appear without a tie and ironed shirt, pay my bills and wash my face, and keep a desk you could eat off of.

## 2. DEPTH AND SHALLOWNESS

### Depth

*To be deep is to be privy to many inner layers of understanding and to be fully available at all those layers. It is to have discovery principles, within you, that even more intelligent people lack. It is to be, rather have, a plan that governs your practice in unfolding the meaning of texts, promises, and scores.*

### Depth

#### *Examples*

1 To say that I am deeper than I used to be, is to say that I am readier to handle challenges, enigmas, and liminal situations than when I was younger. I don't posture much. I kick butt, internally, and move ahead. I have less tolerance than ever for projects that don't have a goal. I try not to put up with too much shit from myself.

2 I am ever harder to impress, by myself or others. What I write has to (try to) crackle with the moment. What I eat has to be fresh. What smart people tell me, I listen to. Deep then seems to mean battle- ready.

### Shallowness

*To be shallow is to take everything at face value, to react quickly to it, and to make few connections onward from it. Shallowness is an effective cruising altitude for the young professional around the water fountain.*

### Shallowness

#### *Examples*

1 I have a gift for repartee, rapidly grasp phrases and can shuttle them back, and love the colorful surfaces of a thought, a dress, or a joke. I appreciate shallow relationships among people, as they appear to relieve the person of the burdens of choice and commitment.

2 Nothing animals do is shallow—although it would be hard to consider their behavior ‘deep.’ It seems shallowness must be a human, not an animal, category. Animals are just what they are, do their thing at a perfect level with themselves, balanced, alert. If there is a profound animal it is the elephant, which mourns its dead, and moves with planned dignity to its final resting point.

### 3. FEROCITY AND GENTLENESS

#### Ferocity

*To be ferocious is to present bared teeth to the world. It is easy to understand this condition in lions and tigers, which, when provoked to anger, can overwhelm with their killing power. Can humans be ferocious? An angry man, armed with a knife, can be as fierce as a lion.*

#### Ferocity

##### *Examples*

1 I was once ready to kill, as I verbally harassed the guy who had been making out with my wife. I followed him across a parking lot, cursing him. He scurried into his car and drove away at high speed. I was trembling afterwards. Had I not been an academic I would perhaps have killed. I was ferocious, though much of my anger was probably released by language, and eventually collapsed like a burned out star.

2 Ferocity plays a role in survival, when one animal needs territory or females in order to assure his strength. In countries of plenty, today, males rarely need to fight to prevail or survive—though plenty fight and kill for other reasons, like envy, jealousy, or robbery. Among the world's ocean-going migrant population, however, there have been examples of struggles for food, in the course of which a hundred people were killed.

#### Gentleness

*To be gentle is to be yielding and caring for others; while we attribute the disposition especially to women, many men share in it. Animals too can be gentle. A lamb puts its milky nuzzle in your hand. A horse stands quietly while you stroke its mane. But are we correct to ascribe gentleness to these animals? Or is it just our human way of reading actions that are fundamentally self-seeking? Which have to do, above all, with the search for food?*

## Gentleness

### *Examples*

1 When I get up early in the morning and walk out into the lawn, my mood is gentle. I may already have looked at the internet and perused the latest accounts of human atrocities. But what I read slid off my back. I am whistling. I am eyeballing the azalea to see if it will bloom today.

2 One side of me scorns gentleness. I love the anti-human, the crushing geological strata around Deep Springs, and the horrible incoming waves off the Marshall Islands. Places and events like these turn me on. But the realistic human optic, touched with pity and compassion, is my ultimate turn-on. Dante has to be my pick for reading. He's plenty rough about the human, but he makes us see where grace enters the roughness.



## 4. KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

### Known

*To be known is to have been disclosed, declassified, laid on the table. The same thing that was unknown yesterday is known today. It is the same thing. The lie I told about having found the hundred-dollar bill on the street has been replaced by the truth; it has been disclosed and known. But it is still the same lie. I did not wipe away the lie by making it known. Is this a general truth about things that are known? We know how to remove some cancer cells robotically now. We did not know how to do this fifty years ago. What has happened in between? Has something unknown been converted into something known? Is there a sense in which innovations, like robotic surgery, are conversions of the unknown into the known? And if there is such a sense, can we step to the theological perspective in which the entire development of the cosmos can be envisaged as a replacement of the unknown by the known?*

### Known

#### *Examples*

1 I am now known by many people, in this small Midwestern town, but when I first came, twenty-five years ago, I was virtually unknown. That is, people saw me and talked to me, but didn't know where I was coming from or what I did. Was I unknown? I was more known here at that time than I was the previous year when I had never before been here. Then I was truly unknown here. What has happened to change virtually unknown into known? Is it mere familiarity? Is it that people have learned where I go, who goes with me, and how I behave when I go there? Am I not the same person as before? Have I changed? Or has what was once unknown changed into what is known?

2 *I know you* means many things, from knowing your name, knowing what kind of shoes you wear, to knowing—as a spouse might—what little things turn you on. To know somebody is to be able to foreground them, so you can look them over. Knowing is far from loving. I can know the

guy who robbed me, after seeing him several times on a mug shot, and then in court.

#### Unknown

*To be unknown is not yet to have been brought into the light, though it is a candidate for being disclosed. Not to have been brought into the light is to be hunkering in darkness. Is evil such a thing? Is evil the general term for what chafes to be known? Then is the good that which has been disclosed? Or can you imagine overturning this whole proposition, and thinking of evil as what has been disclosed, and the good as hunkering to be known?*

#### Unknown

##### *Examples*

1 I like to be unknown, and alone. With my first family I used to visit the rugged southern Maine shoreline at Ogunquit. After breakfast I would go down alone to the nearby inlet, which was carved out of the shore, and where many species of shellfish, crustaceans, and seagulls ruled. There were no people around or visible. Kelp was spilled everywhere, in rubbery sheaths. I would pick up strips of it, and feel it in my hands. I was unknown there. I liked that. I tried excavating down into where I was as little different as possible from the world around me.

2 The unknown soldier is honored by a monument in almost every country. Because unknown, this soldier represents all fallen soldiers, for whom he is a placeholder. Representative of a universal condition, he will never be known except as a possibility of others.

## 5. RICH AND POOR

Rich

*To be rich can mean to have much wealth, to be happy in spirit, or it can mean something different, as in the expression, 'that's rich,' where the word seems to mean 'pretty unlikely.'*

Rich

*Examples*

1 We are very conscious of the super rich in our country. These are people who have made large fortunes, or who have inherited large fortunes. The super rich have advantages. They can travel anywhere they like, eat or drink anything they like, and they can influence the course of social and political events with the power of their money. Are these people lucky? It depends on whether they can find a use for their wealth that makes them happy. And that of course depends on what makes them happy. If doing good makes them happy, they have ways to do good, but many and sometimes difficult choices among those ways. If what makes them happy is having fun they can also satisfy that desire. The thing is, though, that fun runs out faster than doing good—or even than doing evil; fun is not a project but an expenditure, and our capacity for it is limited.

2 My economic reality is a polite form of survival. I pay my bills and taxes, scraping a little off the top for travel and new home construction in another country, and eat and live well in my own middle class house. By world standards I have more than average wealth. Would I like to be rich? I would like to get my wife a new car. I would like to travel to the DRC. That's about it. We're having salmon for supper.

Poor

*To be poor is to have less economic power than needed for a comfortable life, and sometimes to lack even the essentials for food and housing. In every country there are large numbers of poor people who have lost their houses, have little to eat, and, in our moment, are in a condition of*

*dangerous and unsettling migration. Being poor in feudal Europe was one thing—one worked hard as a peasant, one kept a small hut, one ate a portion of what one grew. Being poor in Mali today may mean taking chances on building a new life in another country. This can lead to results far worse than poverty.*

## Poor

### *Examples*

1 There are many things my wife and I cannot afford, but those things are not necessities. I have a to-do list which includes visiting Russia and the Congo. Not sure if it'll come true. My wife is into constructing a new house in Lagos. That'll come true, but not until the cows come home. But salmon on the table? Archie Bunker and The Jeffersons to watch on TV? Books on the Middle East and a chance to read them? We can do those. Hey, we're not talking poor.

2 Even in my relatively comfortable corner, of the American Midwest, there are many kids who need school lunch support, and many families who need life support. We're not talking Sudan or Haiti but we're talking an edgy discomfort in daily life, probable medical consequences, and reduced morale. We do what we can, like many other parishioners at St. John the Baptist, to contribute a pittance. But we are inundated by claims on our small finances—claims from animal rights groups, refugee groups, and disaster relief organizations—and have to admit that we can do little more than pray.

## 6. OLD AND YOUNG

### Old

*Being old is relative. I am old in human terms, and even in elephant terms—average elephant lifespan in the wild 50 years—but I am younger than Mt. Everest, no matter how you measure it. I am much older than a fat mite will ever be. Being my age should mean having learned a lot. Don't we learn all the time, how to perform life better?*

### Old

#### *Examples*

1 Elephants in the wild can tell when the end is coming. Their molars grind off, they can no longer chew, and they start heading north—this in Kenya—to where the grasses are softer and easier to cut—and there they stay until they die. Human beings can also tell when their age has been completed—though of course events may interrupt the natural course of aging. They begin to surrender control over daily events, and sense that their energy curve is slowing. I am short of all that. Out of my way!

2 I can do certain things better now than when I was younger. I can enjoy simple quiet. I can try only to do what I can do best—in writing, caring, planning. I can take care of my body to the best of my ability. When I was young I wanted excitement, good stuff for ME, and a wide-open horizon. *Le dérèglement complet de tous les sens*, from time to time. I have no more desire to be young. Nor do I share Achilles' view that to be a hired man on earth is better than to be a prince in hell.

### Young

*To be young is to be at an early developmental stage of whatever you are. A young cow and a young man are both young. Both of them live from the present but exist partly as what is going to happen to them.*

## Young

### *Examples*

1 To be young is either to be young in age or to be young in spirit. These stages can coincide, as in the happy case of a young teen-ager who is also full of ebullience and taste for life. However, much in our quickly wised up internet culture militates against the kind of Tom Sawyer innocence I am talking about. Kids know a lot too soon, without really knowing it. I am too in that bind. I hear every moment about mayhem, though I never see it.

2 Young is easily confused with inexperience, but the facts tend to refute that equation. Quite young people, brought up early into the trades, can master manual skills, transfer that mastery to techne, and in their first twenty years place themselves among the creative forces of their culture. All that involves incorporating experience at high speed. Eyes open, mind ticking, body introjecting work procedures: that young person rapidly experiences a work world that will take a student of classics forty years to incorporate.

## 7. ROUGH AND SMOOTH

### Rough

*To be rough is to have obtruding textures, lumpy edges, and ways of abrading. We are all rough in some ways, and our worlds are rough in many ways—from potholes to dirty deals. Yet the rough and even the tough in us has its place. We are animals dressed in suits. We write love poems and fly to Mars, true, but to survive we accept a rough world, in which people fall down and break their femurs, ignorant religious zealots destroy ancient works of art, and prostate cancer operations result in incontinence.*

### Rough

#### *Examples*

1 I had a rough time of it when I was younger. Once my first marriage went astray, and third parties shoved open the door, my second marriage was compromised. We're talking twenty-five years of Buster Keaton comedy, and mountains of lies. Had to keep everybody happy. In my third marriage I walk the narrow, as Johnny Cash says. It's what I wanted.

2 The porch where I read has a rough textured floor. That is because the paint is chipping off, and revealing the pine boards beneath it. We will have this repaired. Now, though, I enjoy this rough texture. It is process, like reading. Things are going on on the porch; there is a bridge—*natura non facit saltum*—but there are also stubbly snarky textures in the bridge. Reading is like that. There's print against light. There's eyes, with a little junk in them. There's 'the history of the middle east,' whatever that is. You paste them together.

### Smooth

*To be smooth can be to be a smoothie—hey babe, have a look over here! Being a smoothie suggests a seamless self-presentation, perhaps a gift of the gab. There is also the popular drink called a smoothie, which goes*

*down soft and easy. These two things, the drink and the person, have something in common.*

## Smooth

### *Examples*

1 The gym floor at Cornell College is very smooth. The custodians polish it, wash it, and watch it. That's why I like to walk there. Nothing ever trips me, nothing keeps me from the self-absorbed processing of fragments of ideas which I call thinking. Every now and then I stop walking and stretch on the mat, or lift weights. I do the same thing every time. I do it on the weekends, when there is no one else there.

2 My life has been a shattered ridge spine of barely connected, barely constructed events, but now, as I am older, I try to give organic wholeness to those events. I see them as a smooth river flowing to where I am as I see them. This is benign self-deception, I think. It's part of the desire we all have, to be represented by a narrative.



## 8. THICK AND THIN

Thick

*To be thick is to be broad and dense in girth or obtuse in mind. Is there a connection between the two senses of the word thick? It takes time for cell growth to extend across the girth of a tree trunk; it takes time for an idea to penetrate from one side of a brain to another. Is thickness quite the right word for slow movement of intelligibility in a brain? Suppose the idea trying to enter the brain is the idea that  $e=mc^2$ . There will be a sense in which the formula instantly transcourses the brain. But if the thinker is not prepared to unpack and sequence the formula, then the passage through the brain may only result in the ability to repeat the formula.*

Thick

*Examples*

1 Sometimes we speak of a person as thick. Sometimes I have been viewed that way, for my inability to grasp instruction manuals, or to set up a machine. It is a just characterization, provided it has a specific reference. Fred is stupid because he can't set up a printer. But what about across the board stupidity, being thick all the way through—not handicapped but thick—so that whatever one turns to is a little too much for him? Are such people really thick through and through? Or is there always light in such a thickness? Will the person in question love hens and chickens and be a master at planting them?

2 A thick body is a strong body. It is not fat, it is thick. Its parts are tightly stitched together. It's like mediaeval mail, interlocking phlanges, tight as a well-thatched roof. One likes that. One likes the compaction. Why? Do we hate looseness? What comes apart? Us, fractured? I have a trim, thick colleague, whose chest is chesty, whose eyes are burning. Keep it that way!

## Thin

*To be thin is to be lean and ready, like a good knife, or a well trained logical mind. We all want to be thin. Our age of plenty, in the West, is beset by the horror of fat. Fat reminds us of corruption. Fat forms around our upper arms, our lower belly, our thighs. It creeps over us like leprosy.*

*Examples*

1 To be thin is of course relative. I am thin compared to my neighbor, who is obese. I am heavy compared to my anorexic cousin. I value any sense of thin. I like to be lean and ready, just as I like to be thick and compact. There are places in the mind for these categories. Are our bodies nothing but desires?

2 We live in an age where to be fat is immoral. Technocrats tell us that the cost of fatness as a source of illness is high, and that the community as a whole pays for the individual's fatness. Thinness, on the other hand, is cheap and costs no one, except the thin person's expenditure on carrots and onions. Is it, though, fair to take one's thinness as a badge of community honor? Am I supporting democracy and the commonweal by being thin?

## 9. SWEET AND SOUR

### Sweet

*To be sweet is to be delicious on the tongue, to the eye, or to the touch (a kitten.) While it is true that too many sweets wreck a youngster's teeth, it is also true that sweet thoughts and sweet dreams are wisely recommended.*

### Sweet

#### *Examples*

1 I think it is sweet of you to have remembered our anniversary. To whom could I deliver this sentence, with its sweet? My aunt? I have none. And that's about all. It is not sweet of people to do things for old guys; it is generous, or kind. To do what is sweet to me is to disregard my complexity. No way. I want my complexity. I want to be of interest. Why should I want to be sweet?

2 Sweet people are wonderful. They anticipate your needs, without foregrounding their own. They give themselves pleasure by giving you pleasure. If they are saccharine and churchy so what? A gentle lift when you're down is one of life's pleasures. A Hallmark card can tell me just what you think of me.

### Sour

*Sour is the opposite of sweet. If something is sour it makes the mouth pucker or the heart pucker. A person who is sour does a job on your day. This downer is different from depression, which sucks your energy out. Depression is below the level of statement. It is not a philosophy, but rather a condition. If a person is sour they are making a statement. You could even disagree with them. Depending on the size of their wound, they will soon be negotiable.*

*Examples*

1 I have met a sour person recently. She is a coach, and has a job that obliges her to interrelate with her young colleagues and mentees. I believe she can just barely do that. But when she passes me on the track, walking to her office, her face is a stony wall, and there seems anger behind her eyes. I have no idea what her problem can be. In fact I am deprived, by her face, of my normal neighborly instincts. Is it possible that I am myself being made sour, by the eye contact with the woman?

2 I am never sour. I sulk defensively when I want to protest. I withdraw my sense of humor when you have minimized me. I ignore you when I am really angry. But sour never. Not through virtue, but through fear of dying. Sourness is dying. It is wrecking the world with your eyes and your face.

## 10. DARKNESS AND LIGHT

### Darkness

*Darkness is the absence of light, or, positively put, the deep color of night. Depending where we live, we spend at least a third of our life, possibly much more, in darkness; unless we are blind, in which case, we spend most of our life in a degree of darkness.*

### Darkness

#### *Examples*

1 Children tend to fear the dark. In the dark you don't know what's in the closet, though to be precise you don't know what's in the closet even when it's light. A child of seven or eight knows what's in his Dad's study, downstairs, and could name the items—even from his bedroom upstairs. He is familiar with the study. But if he enters it in the dark he or she may be afraid. In the dark you can't tell what's in the place. New things could have been added. Old things could have been left out.

2 Darkness is often understood as a moral condition. He has a dark mind. She is thinking dark thoughts. Does this usage depend on the identification of the dark with evil? Is there a sinister implication to the dark? The devil is plunged into the dark nether world. Sinners are cast into the outer darkness. In these formulae darkness is in itself an evil place. Does racism feed off the association of darkness with evil?

### Light

*The light is traditionally the place where the true, the beautiful and the good are at home. Lux et veritas says the Yale banner, the light of reason runs the old saw, they saw the light, runs the missionary's report on an expedition to the Ubangi.*

### Light

#### *Examples*

1 As an asthmatic from childhood, I am used to sitting up awake during the hours when the night begins to lighten, and the first birds begin to chirp. This is a magic time for me, associated with the reduction of mucal phlegm, the lightening of the chest, and the promise of a heavy sleep setting in around five-thirty. I cannot think of that early morning light in physics terms, for it is a light my soul leaps up in. And right there, of course, the two kinds of light—light waves and spirit waves—offer themselves as competing ways to stay even with the phenomenon.

2 In Iceland, where the dark can at its strongest dominate the light for twenty hours a day, there is an inwarding of culture. People carry on, but are inside cafes, around coffee in living rooms, and in streets which though intended for human affairs are even in early evening almost empty. On such an evening I walked through a mid sized Icelandic town to the end of a residential street, to find myself facing open Atlantic. There were shaggy strips of kelp along the road, and ahead of me it was dark.