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PRONOIA or How the world is conspiring to shower you with blessings

The term ‘pronoia’ was originally coined by the Grateful Dead lyricist, John Perry Barlow. Pronoia is the opposite of paranoia. A ‘pronoiac’ is someone who believes that the world is conspiring to shower him or her with blessings.

So, why would you want to develop the symptoms of a pronoiac? Here is the conclusion to the ‘*Torrential Pronoia Therapy*’ list of recommended experiments and exercises taken from Rob Brezsny’s Free Will Astrology website:

“Creativity is like driving a car at night,” said E.L. Doctorow. “You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.” I would add that life itself is like driving a car at night. You’re often in the dark except for what’s right in front of you. At least that’s usually the case.

But for a few shining hours sometime soon, I predict you’ll be able to see the big picture of where you’re headed. It will be as if the whole world is suddenly illuminated by a prolonged burst of light; as if you’re both driving your car and also watching your journey from high above. Write about what you see.

The following readings are taken from Rob Brezsny’s book ‘*Pronoia is the Antidote for Paranoia*’ which he describes as a combination of humor, philosophy, self-help and alternative news, designed to help the reader “surrender to the conspiracy”. Rob Brezsny lives in Santa Cruz and writes a column called ‘Free Will Astrology’ which is the most widely syndicated feature in the nation’s free weeklies. In 2001 he founded the ‘Beauty and Truth Laboratory’, which is dedicated to balancing the unrelenting negativity in the news and entertainment media and exploring the possibilities of pronoia.

GLORY IN THE HIGHEST

Thousands of things go right for you every day, beginning the moment you wake up. Through some magic you don't fully understand, you're still breathing and your heart is beating even though you've been unconscious for many hours. The air is a mix of gases that's just right for your body's needs, as it was before you fell asleep.

You can see! Light of many colors floods into your eyes, registered by nerves that took evolution millions of years to perfect. The gift of these vivid hues comes to you courtesy of an unimaginably immense globe of fire, the sun, which continually detonates nuclear reactions in order to convert its body into light and heat and energy for your personal use.

Your home is sturdy and gigantic compared to the typical domicile in every culture that has preceded you. The floors aren't crumbling, and the walls and ceilings are holding up well, too. Doors open and close without trouble, and so do the windows. What skillful geniuses built this sanctuary for you? How and where did they learn their craft?

Amazingly, the water you need comes out of your faucets in an even flow, at the volume you want, and either cold or hot as you desire. It's pure and clean; you're confident no parasites are lurking in it. Someone somewhere is making sure these boons will continue to arrive for you without interruption for as long as you require them.

In your closet are many clothes you like to wear. Who gathered the materials to make the fabrics they're made of? Who imbued them with colors, and how did they do it? Who sewed them for you?

In your kitchen, appetizing food is waiting for you. Many people you've never met worked hard to grow it, process it, and get it to the market where you bought it. The bounty of tasty nourishment

you have to choose from is unprecedented in the history of the world.

Your many appliances are working flawlessly. Despite the fact that they run on electricity, which could kill you instantly if you touched it directly, you feel no fear. Why? Your faith in the people who invented, designed, and produced these machines is impressive.

It's as if there were a benevolent conspiracy of unknown people who are tirelessly creating hundreds of useful things you like and need.

There's more. By some improbable series of coincidences language has come into existence. Millions of people have collaborated for many centuries to cultivate a system for communication that you understand well. Speaking and reading give you great pleasure and a tremendous sense of power.

Do you want to go someplace that's at a distance? You can choose from a number of ways to get there. Whatever mode of transportation you pick – car, plane, bus, train, subway, ship, helicopter, or bike – you have confidence that it will work efficiently. Multitudes of people who are now dead devoted themselves to perfecting these machines. Multitudes who are still alive devote themselves to ensuring that these benefits keep serving you.

Let's say it's now 9:30AM. You've been awake for two hours, and a hundred things have already gone right for you. If three of those hundred things had not gone right – your toaster was broken, the hot water wasn't hot enough, there was a stain on the pants you wanted to wear – you might feel that the universe was against you, that your luck was bad, that nothing was going right.

And yet the vast majority of things still would be working with breathtaking efficiency and consistency. You would clearly be deluded to imagine that life is primarily an ordeal.

EVIL IS BORING

When an old tree in the rain forest dies and topples over, it takes a long time to decompose. As it does, it becomes host to new saplings that use the decaying log for nourishment.

Picture yourself sitting in the forest gazing upon this scene. How would you describe it? Would you dwell on the putrefaction of the fallen tree while ignoring the fresh life sprouting out of it? If you did, you'd be imitating the perspective of many modern storytellers, especially the journalists and novelists and filmmakers and producers of TV dramas. They devoutly believe that tales of affliction and mayhem and corruption and tragedy are inherently more interesting than tales of triumph and liberation and pleasure and ingenuity. Using the machinery of the media, they relentlessly propagate this dogma. It's not sufficiently profound or well-thought-out to be called "nihilism". "Pop nihilism" is a more accurate term.

At the Beauty and Truth Laboratory, we believe that stories about the rot are not inherently more captivating than stories about the splendor. On the contrary, given how predictable the former have become, they are actually quite dull. Obsessing on evil is boring. Rousing fear is a hackneyed shtick. Wallowing in despair is a bad habit. Indulging in cynicism is akin to committing a copycat crime.

How did it come to be that the news is reported solely by journalists? There are so many other kinds of events besides the narrow band favored by that highly specialized brand of storytellers. Indeed, there are many phenomena that literally cannot be perceived by journalists. Their training, their temperament, and their ambitions make vast areas of human experience invisible to them.

"Ninety-six percent of the cosmos puzzles astronomers," read a headline on CNN's website: proof that at least some of our culture's equivalent of high priests – the scientists – are humble

enough to acknowledge that the universe is made up mostly of stuff they can't even detect, let alone study.

If only the journalists were equally modest. Since they're not, we'll say it: The majority of everything that happens on this planet escapes their notice.

BLIND SPOTS

Galileo didn't invent the telescope, but he created a better version of the first, primitive model. In the early seventeenth century, he used his telescope to make astronomical discoveries that contradicted the Catholic Church's cosmology. The caretakers of the old guard were furious. "The earth is the center of the universe," they told him after he announced he had detected moons revolving around Jupiter. "What you say you have seen is impossible." They refused even to look through Galileo's new tool.

*In later years scientists adopted a similar attitude toward a variety of phenomena, including meteorites and dinosaurs. Until the 1800's, write Roy Gallant in *Sky and Telescope*, the scientific community scoffed at those who believed stones fell from the heavens, though meteorites had been seen to fall and had been collected since ancient times by the Chinese and the Egyptians. As stones continued to rain down from the sky, learned scientists explained them away as condensations of the atmosphere or concretions of volcanic dust."*

Similarly, until the nineteenth century, scientists didn't believe that large "reptiles" had once walked the earth. Throughout history people had found what we now know are fossils, but the experts decreed that they could not possibly be the remains of an ancient extinct species.

The moral of the story: As smart as we may be, and as much as we might know, there are truths we have become dead set against believing, let alone seeing.

WELCOME HOME

Let me remind you who you really are: You're a freedom fighter in service to universal love. You have temporarily taken human form in order to liberate all sentient creatures from suffering and help them claim the ecstatic awareness that is their birthright. You will accept nothing less than the miracle of bringing heaven all the way down to earth.

Your task may look impossible. Ignorance and inertia, partially camouflaged as time-honored morality, seem to surround you. Pessimism is enshrined as a hallmark of worldliness. Compulsive skepticism masquerades as perceptiveness. Mean-spirited irony is chic. Beautiful truths are suspect, and ugly truths are readily believed.

To grapple against these odds, you have to be both a wrathful insurrectionary and an exuberant lover of life. You've got to cultivate cheerful buoyancy even as you resist the temptation to swallow thousands of delusions that have been carefully crafted and seductively package by self-important people who act as if they know that they're doing . You have to learn how to stay in a good mood as you over throw the sour, puckered hallucination that is mistakenly referred to as "reality".

What can we do to help each other in this work?

We can conspire to carry out the agenda that futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard names: To hospice what's dying and midwife what's being born.

Here's another way we can collaborate: We can inspire one another to perpetrate compassionate tricks and healing mischief. What do tricks and mischief have to do with our quest? Isn't America in a permanent state of war? Isn't this the most militarized empire in the history of the world? Hasn't government paranoia about terrorism decimated our civil liberties? Isn't it our duty to grow more serious and weighty then ever before?

On the contrary: I say this is the perfect moment to take everything less seriously, less personally, and less literally.

Permanent war and the loss of civil liberties are immediate dangers. But they are only symptoms of an even larger, long-term threat to the fate of the earth: The genocide of the imagination.

I have identified pop-nihilist storytellers as the vanguard perpetrators of this genocide of the imagination, but there are other culprits as well: the fundamentalists. And I'm not referring just to the religious fanatics of Islam and Christianity and Judaism and Hinduism. Scientists can be fundamentalist, too. So can liberals and capitalists, atheists and hedonists, patriots and anarchists, hippies and Goths, you and I. Those who champion the ideology of materialism can be the most fanatical fundamentalists of all.

Every fundamentalist divides the world into two camps: those who agree with him or her, and those who don't. There is only one right way to interpret the world, the fundamentalist believes, and a million wrong ways. All fundamentalists take every thing way too seriously, and way too personally, and way too literally. For them, the untrammelled imagination is taboo. Correct belief is the only virtue. Every fundamentalist is committed to waging war against the imagination and enslaving it to his or her belief system.

And here's the bad news, we all have our own strain of the fundamentalist virus. Ours may not be as dangerous to the collective welfare as, say, the fundamentalist strain of Islamic terrorists, or right-wing Christian politicians, or CEOs who act as if making a financial profit were the supreme good, or scientists who deny the existence of the large part of reality that's imperceptible to the five senses. But still we are infected, you and I, with fundamentalism. What are we going to do about it?

I say we practice taking everything less seriously, and less personally, and less literally. I suggest we administer plentiful

doses of healing mischief, friendly shocks, compassionate tricks, blasphemous reverence, holy pranks and crazy wisdom.

SACRED UPROAR

Pronoia is closer than your breath and older than death. It dreams like a mountain, laughs like a river, prays like the sun and sings the way the animals think. It's always as fresh as the beginning of time.

Life is a vast and intricate conspiracy designed to keep us well-supplied with blessings. What kind of blessings? Palatial homes, attractive lovers, lottery winnings, successful careers? Maybe. But just as likely: interesting surprises, unexpected challenges, gifts we hardly know what to do with, conundrums that force us to get smarter.

Novelist William Vollman referred to the latter types of blessings when he said that “the most important and enjoyable thing in life is doing something that’s complicated, a tricky problem that you don’t know how to solve.”

Pronoia asks us to be awake to the shifting conditions of the Wild Divine’s ever-fresh creation. It encourages us to be quite happy about regularly divesting ourselves of the beliefs and theories that guided us yesterday so that we can see clearly what’s right in front of us today.

As much as we might be dismayed at the actions of our political leaders, pronoia says that toppling any particular junta, clique, or elite is irrelevant unless we overthrow the mass hallucination called “reality” – including the part of that hallucination that we foster in ourselves. The revolution begins at home. If you overthrow yourself again and again, you might earn the right to help overthrow the rest of us.

WALKING UPHILL BACKWARD

It was my final day of work on this book. I had to send the manuscript to the printer in a few hours. There was one problem: the last page was still blank.

I decided to take a hike in the hills, hoping I might drum up an oracle on the way. Nothing interesting appeared for an hour. Then, while rambling down a trail from the top of the ridge, I spied the back of a man moving toward me. It took me awhile to realize he was walking up the hill backward. As he passed me, I heard him giving himself a pep talk. When I got home, I told a friend about this scene, seeking her insight about what motivated him to engage in such an odd mode of travel. My friend said she'd done it herself. It's a psychological trick that helps make a steep ascent easier: you stay focused on how much you've already accomplished rather than being overwhelmed by the heights that are ahead of you. Why not try it yourself?