

# End of a Decade: What's Happened? What Have We Learned? What's Next?



Steven Yates

“Never let hard lessons harden your heart; the hard lessons of life are meant to make you better, not bitter.” – Roy T. Bennett, [\*The Light in the Heart\*](#)

As I write this, there are under two weeks left of the '10s. Time to take stock. What all has happened? What did we accomplish these past ten years? Have we learned anything?

A French philosopher, Alain de Botton, once said, “Anyone who isn't embarrassed at who they were last year probably isn't learning enough.”

How about who you were *ten* years ago? Oh, my!

If readers will indulge me, I'll say a little of where I was at the start of this decade, and the takeaways that have left me in a vastly different place than I was in at the end of 2009. As I'm the worst current events junkie, my experiences and thoughts will mirror events we've all witnessed in a world now in a far different place from where it was ten years ago. I hope this won't be seen as self-indulgent. I want to help readers see truths we will need in the decade ahead, even if

some are uncomfortable or barbecue a few sacred cows.

The present decade started for me on a sad note: my father had just passed away (Dec 23, 2009). William C. Yates Jr. was 86. He'd died in his sleep, which some say is the best way to go. I'd gotten the phone call every son dreads at 4:10 am.

My mother, Alice M. Yates, would pass away peacefully roughly 16 months later (1:30 am, Apr 14, 2011). She was 87. I was at her bedside, holding her hand the entire time.

The world changes qualitatively when your parents are no longer in it.

My takeaways are personal but applicable. Scripture says, honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12). Those aren't just words. If you have aging parents, honor them by recognizing they've had experiences you haven't had (yet). Learn from them. Spend time with them. Share with them. Appreciate them. Even if they are imperfect, as all of us are.

Whatever your line of work is, do it to the best of your ability not simply for the money but to make them proud. Many elderly people are living vicariously through their grown children because they have little else to look forward to.

Listen to [this](#). Try to see things from their point of view. One observation I made during my parents' final months getting round-the-clock nursing care was how many elderly people around them had family members, sometimes in other states but sometimes not, who'd simply abandoned them. Some were very lonely. Delight at talking to us was written all over their faces.

Maybe their grown offspring believed paying for assisted living or nursing home expenses was sufficient. Or leaving it up to Medicare.

Abandonment of elderly parents by adult children who have the

means to make regular visits seems to me immoral.

If you're alienated from your parents or other elderly relatives, fix the problem while you can. Always remember, when your parents are gone, they're gone. Time not spent with them is time you'll never get back.

Late in 2011, I published [\*Four Cardinal Errors: Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic\*](#). I went through a small collective (we amusingly called it) consisting of two South Carolina women and myself. The name *Brush Fire Press International* was mine. I wanted to avoid the self-publishing stigma, while learning how such platforms work. But we never got a website done, nor a promotional video made, and these probably hurt the book's credibility.

None of us had any marketing budget, moreover, and if I learned anything from that experience, it's (1) people weren't going to come to me; I had to figure out how to market the book with what resources I had. And (2) I didn't know beans how to market a book, with or without a budget.

This was during a period when the number of self-publishing platforms was exploding. Many self-published books are short-run tracts intended for very specific audiences. That noted, the blunt truth is that plenty of others aimed at John Q. Public begin at mediocre and go downhill from there.

A few, of course, are sacred-cow-barbecuing standouts that might never have seen the light of day if mainstream publishers were the only outlet.

I had to find a way to stand out, to prove mine wasn't mediocre. I had no idea how to do this, how to reach out and get endorsements, which is why there are none on the cover, or on the inside front matter, and just four five-star reviews on Amazon, two of them one sentence-fragment long. (Yes, people do read those.) Two draft copies sent to a particular person who might have endorsed it mysteriously vanished. To the best

of my knowledge – his secretary and I double-checked the address – they never did turn up.

There are more books published today than ever before. There is more information flying around than anyone, anywhere, has ever seen. We are in a period of information overload. Sometimes I think this is purposeful. Other times I don't. Sometimes, after all, a cigar is just a cigar, and information overload may be nothing more than an effect of the kind of society we have now: an empire with the most advanced technology anyone has ever seen, ways of using it never before seen, and frenetically busy people who make time to write books and ebooks.

The biggest change in my life was moving to a foreign country in 2012: Chile, where I took up residence in Santiago, the capitol. I've learned a lot, and wouldn't trade this knowledge for anything.

Some of my observations have been about language (the official language of Chile being Spanish), and I won't wax at length about those here, except to say: I will never take English for granted again. A pure Romance language such as Spanish has a consistency English lacks. Letters of the alphabet tend to be pronounced the same. English pronunciation is all over the map, at least at first glance. The best way to appreciate this is to observe Spanish speakers struggling to pronounce English. There has been a push for Chileans, most of it coming from big business, to learn English. English is the language of global business, of course – in our hemisphere, at least. After a couple of decades, less than five percent of Chileans are fluent in English. It's taught in schools, but badly. Most don't have much reason to learn it.

You could say I was open to alternatives to a teaching career that was going nowhere. Probably everybody knows that books issued by microscopic presses developing conservative themes are useless in advancing a teaching career in the U.S.

Academia as a whole seemed to me on a long downhill slide. I've written about this numerous times.

Subsequent events proved that judgment correct. Campuses exploded in 2014, the most proximate cause being the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Black Lives Matter rose to visibility. Such movements rejected responses such as *all lives matter* as covert racism. I guessed lives with "white privilege" didn't matter. The old and all-too-familiar reversal, rationalized with charges of "false equivalence."

With identity politics the new orthodoxy on major campuses and in the culture generally, alongside a growing obsession with sexual minorities, those of us who considered it the worst thing since positivism saw an academic world with a limited future, a place of division and hostility to free dialogue, increasingly irrelevant, and useless at diagnosing the real problems of our era.

The '10s have been an era of collapsing narratives. Technology made this possible. When Bill Clinton signed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, around 90 percent of mainstream media came under the ownership of six corporate leviathans.

The leviathans did not own the Internet, which became fundamentally disruptive. We saw its potential when, in '98, Drudge broke Clinton-Lewinsky ahead of the leviathans who *loved* the corrupt Clintons and might have buried the story.

Alternative commentary sites, including this one, became places of refuge for those of us who had no chance at getting syndicated columns since our ideas ran counter to what served the global corporate state.

Fast forward to now. During the intervening years the mostly free flow of information online had exposed the corporate state's lies, be they about globalization, foreign wars, and much else. Support for professional politicians fell, and Donald J. Trump stepped into the spotlight.

At first I didn't take The Donald seriously. I briefly entertained the idea that he might be colluding with the treacherous Clintons to destroy the Republican Party. Trump had been a Democrat at one time, moving in some of the same circles as Bill and Hillary. He'd attended Chelsea's wedding.

No evidence for such collusion emerged, and I dropped it.

And given how Trump comported himself in the debates – how he stood out against a crowded field of insipid mediocrities and handled allegations thrown at him by the Megyn Kellys of the corporate media world with remarks like, “We don't have time to be politically correct” – I paid attention.

Trump correctly described U.S. foreign policy as a “complete and total disaster.” I'd thought all along that the Iraq War was the dumbest and most destructive policy decision any corrupt Bush had ever made.

Trump appeared during a time when those getting their news from alternative sources had hit a crescendo. The Republican base did not believe straight white Christian males were history's villains; they were divided about whether the U.S. military should police the world, but at least there was healthy skepticism. A large swath of the public doubted the official 9/11 narrative. They'd peered behind the curtain, swallowed the red pill, however you put it. The word *globalism* had crept from “conspiracy sites” into general discourse.

The idea of a corrupt globalist elite planning a technocratic world government had gained ground.

An increasing number of those left behind by globalization, moreover, questioned *its* narrative of economic benefits – they didn't see any! And it had never seemed realistic to expect degreeless former manufacturing workers in their 50s to “reinvent themselves” as software designers or online entrepreneurs selling apps. Those Hillary Clinton would stupidly call “deplorables” had every reason to support

someone promising to stop the outsourcing of jobs to cheap labor countries, as well as the insourcing of migrants willing to work for corporations for a pittance so CEOs could line their pockets.

The year 2014 had seen the appearance of French economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. I've not read the book, so I neither promote it nor pan it. What I've read about it seems like a Rorschach test. When it came out, free marketers saw it as another quasi-Marxist attack on capitalism. Sympathizers noted how it drew attention to something that was/is undoubtedly real: economic inequality the world over was/is increasing. The increases were/are accelerating.

Ten years ago, the libertarian in me wouldn't have been bothered by this.

The financial elite, centered in banking titans like Goldman Sachs, was reaping windfalls from a "recovery" that had created two economies: the visible one of Wall Street and Silicon Valley; the other of Main Street and Flyover Country. The latter were mostly ignored by the elite-owned mainstream, which also ignored the millions of people considered "not in the labor force" and hence not counted as unemployed in the official U-3 BLS number.

With Republican mainstream narratives on trade, open borders, and unemployment having collapsed outside urban enclaves and elite mouthpieces, and with Donald Trump's vastly superior command of all media including social media, there was no stopping him from wresting the nomination from the ownership class's fair haired boys (Jeb Bush was their initial favorite).

The Democrats faced their own elite-vs-populist divide: between the Clinton machine and a grassroots that favored Bernie Sanders. The former brazenly stole their 2016

nomination with “superdelegates.” With the corporate state and mainstream media solidly on Hillary’s side – debate moderators didn’t even try to disguise their bias – the 2016 election was hers to lose.

And she did, as the “deplorables” pulled levers in sufficient numbers in key states to give put Trump in the White House.

The Establishment has been trying to nullify the 2016 election ever since. It began with its “Russian collusion” narrative which fell apart following a two-year circus act.

Now it’s Ukraine-gate, based entirely on a loose interpretation of a couple of sentences exchanged between Trump and Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky.

What should be clear is that the corporate state and its owners are still very much running things. Sadly, Candidate Trump and President Trump have proved to be two largely different people. As I’ve observed before, I don’t think the former understood the magnitude of what he’d taken on. He compromised to survive in a resolutely hostile environment, and out of that compromise came the latter.

Meanwhile, returning to the inequality issue, the extremely rich are still getting extremely richer gaming the same systems. They could even credit President Trump whose 2017 tax cut allowed them to buy back their own stock and drive the Dow into the stratosphere.

The “swamp,” meanwhile, is as deep and wide as ever. The Afghanistan quagmire continues. The war machine is bogged down, however. It seems substantially weakened. Earlier this year it was unable to engineer a coup against Maduro in Venezuela, in its back yard.

Trump recently became the third U.S. president to be impeached, and the first to be impeached while planning a reelection campaign.



I keep encountering claims that he was never more than controlled opposition. While I'm reluctant to dismiss such claims out of hand – his commerce secretary Wilbur Ross does have Rothschild connections, after all – I find it hard to believe that the Deep Establishment would go to the lengths it has gone against someone they didn't perceive as an existential threat disrupting their plans.

Again, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar....

And I doubt we would have seen the not-so-subtle effort to control the online world. This began in November 2016 with the infamous unsourced and evidence-free [PropOrNot allegations](#) of "Russian propaganda" in the elite-controlled *Washington Post*. This was the first shot fired in the war on "fake news," i.e., alternatives to the dying mainstream narratives. Big Tech began consolidating technology-based dominance. Examples: Google changing its search algorithms to reduce access to so-called "conspiracy sites," censorship on Google-owned YouTube (where the prolife-themed film *Unplanned* was recently taken down, illustrating Big Tech's dislike of conservative voices), deplatforming people like Alex Jones, bans on Twitter and Facebook, and other signs that the elites were working overtime at narrative control.

The war on alternative news sources continues. It is sometimes a *personal* war against those who have exposed real and sometimes deadly fakery of Deep Establishment war machine actions, as with the persecution of Julian Assange, intended to serve as an example.

Among the things that should have hit home during the '10s is how little truth matters to the Deep Establishment, or to its pawns in dominant political parties across the Western world, or in well-heeled "think tanks" or its corporate media mouthpieces. What matters are the only two things that matter in materialistic cultures: money and power.

This is the real source of the “post-truth” mindset.

Money, of course, *is* power to the elites. Your value as a person is proportional to your purchasing power: wallet, bank accounts, credit cards, assets such as real estate.

Here comes the skewering of sacred cows. We are *beyond* “capitalism” and “socialism.” The “debate” between them is theater, because the power elites are neither capitalists in any standard sense of that term; nor are left populists such as Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez really socialists unless their plan is to *abolish* the private sector as opposed to taxing and regulating it (*socialism* meant *abolition of private property* back when words had fixed meanings). They may be social democrats: not the same thing.

Yes, the ownership class is the class of capital (which today consists of accumulated financial digits exceeding the actual physical wealth on the planet), which they use to control governments, as they’ve done since before Soviet Union collapsed.

Result: conditions for “free markets,” such as unrepayable loans to governments, privatization (i.e., the selling of public assets to corporations), austerity for the masses, etc. You could call this socialism for the superrich and capitalism for the middle classes and the poor, I suppose. Those who have tried to resist this system have paid for it with a descent into poverty. Ask the Greeks.

Its called *neoliberalism*, a word that wasn’t in my vocabulary ten years ago. What is neoliberalism, exactly? It’s been called “capitalism with the gloves off” – perfect for a materialist world. But that’s not quite it. It’s about power and privilege for the few, while the masses are encircled by and struggling within a money economy encouraging irresponsible consumption and debt. It has spread across the world because growth is a condition of its existence. It is

beloved of many economists, who point to its supposed benefits in terms of massive construction projects, GDP growth, etc.

Is neoliberalism *voluntary*, though, when local agrarian economies not based on monetary transactions are destroyed, so that declining to participate sinks you into deprivation? Is it strictly speaking correct to say that neoliberalism has "raised prosperity" all over the world when monetization is its sole standard, local systems are gone, and swallowed populations are induced to spend on credit, i.e., go into debt?

This is the system that began to be imposed on Chile during the Pinochet years, and which has been credited with creating the "Chilean miracle": The Chicago Boys, having studied under neoliberal founding father Milton Friedman, brought it here. Chile came to be described as the most prosperous and stable of any Latin American nation. And when I arrived in 2012, it definitely seemed to be.

Such descriptions lured many expats here. Some have now returned home, or are contemplating doing so, given how the neoliberal narrative in Chile has crumbled since October. Defenders of the status quo blame Communist influence, and there has certainly been some of that. They can point to the hundreds of stores and public facilities destroyed by hooligans, many clearly influenced by forces from outside. Over 100,000 jobs have been lost or destroyed. Capital flight has badly damaged Chile. The central bank has struggled to stabilize the peso against the dollar. Moneyed investors do not like political instability, and this is how sincere demands for reform are systemically punished.

Chile had become the most unequal of Latin American nations. Roughly 15 elite families control the country, answering to outside influences no less than local Communists. The average wage in Chile is less than \$700/month. The private pension system has been blatantly ripping Chileans off for years (a

Chilean friend walked me through the math). Chileans have faced the same things U.S. residents have faced for going on 30 years now: a rising cost of living – rising costs of food, housing, utilities, gasoline, health care, education, etc. – with no compensating rise in wages.

What we should be learning – what I've learned during this ten year period – is that whatever moral arguments we might make, corruption and worsening inequality are fundamentally destabilizing, again once everyone is online, knows about it, and can share information about it, sometimes internationally.

A new Chilean constitution is now on the horizon. Sadly, there are no James Madisons here. Not that those exist elsewhere. Chile's overthrow of neoliberalism without anything to replace it constructively leaves the country's future in peril.

I don't think such observations make a person a Communist, or sympathetic with Communism, although I have come to the realization: there is an intelligent economic left with something to say about structural elements at work in advanced civilizations. Neoliberal political economy *automatically* funnels wealth into the hands of a tiny elite, while serving some interests of a small, cooperative middle class that adopts its value system (making money is the end-all, be-all of human existence). It furthers globalist interests no less (and probably more) than any preceding system masquerading as prosperity-promoting, especially when much of the prosperity would be impossible without a population willing to go into debt to sustain it.

Making a better Chile will mean scrapping the dominant neoliberal ideology and embracing some social safety nets, free-market absolutists notwithstanding.

Again, *no*, this is *not* some sort of "soft" Communism. It is human nature. It may just be human nature to resent those who are better off economically. You can criticize this all you

want, but there it is, and economics lectures aren't going to change a response that is fundamentally emotional.

Whatever the case may be about what Nietzsche excoriated as *ressentiment*, it surely *is* a righteous human response when a tiny empowered elite, invariably tied to globalism, cleverly games systems of their own devising at the expense of everyone else without giving back anything in return.

Globalism, of course, stands behind the rising tide of inequality all over the world. A kind of neo-nationalism, or "populism" if you prefer, has been the response of peoples all over the world when they are allowed to speak at the ballot box. If we have a "crisis of democracy," as it is sometimes called in elite-controlled presses, maybe it is because we haven't seen much real democracy, as opposed to plutocratic oligarchy passed off as democracy simply because rigged elections can be held between two or more vetted candidates.

Returning to the personal: unquestionably the biggest plus *for me* of being in Chile was meeting my wife-to-be, a Chilean woman whose devotion to building a solid relationship on Christian values has been total (even if her Christianity came filtered through a hazy and lukewarm upbringing in a family of mostly nonpracticing Catholics). There are two distinct marriage ceremonies in Chile: *civil* and *ecclesiastical* for those that want the latter. Our civil matrimony was Aug 1, 2014; our church wedding was Nov 22 that same year.

In some respects the whole thing was literally miraculous. My Spanish was shoddy; her English was almost nonexistent (we've both picked up a lot of key words and phrases of each other's language, obviously). Our backgrounds were very different. Mine was academic; I was a writer. She'd had to drop out of college when due to her father's passing away unexpectedly suddenly there was no money. She never went back. I'm a schedules-obsessed introvert; her personality and way of working is quite opposite.

And yet we clicked. It was as if an outside force cemented us together. Maybe one did. Within four months we were inseparable. I think what made me realize that this was for real was the week in August 2013 I was in bed sicker than a dog with a virus. She made a six-hour bus ride from her hometown, somehow persuaded the security people to let her into my apartment, after which she got me to a doctor. Then she cleaned my apartment from stem to stern. Having nursed me back to health, two weeks later, I asked her, "*¿Quieres ser mi novia?*" (Translation from Chilean Spanish: "Do you want to be my fiancée?")

Not that the ensuing months were smooth sailing. There were times when neither of us thought we would make it. But we did. We are, of course, still married, and should I return to the U.S. she will be at my side, learning English as I continue my Spanish studies. We could conceivably serve as liaisons between the two kinds of communities, Anglo ones and Hispanics – during a period (the coming '20s) when such liaisons will be imperative!

This may be God's plan for us.

For another huge upside to living in a foreign country and interacting with locals at all levels, is actual exposure to other cultures – seeing them from the inside even if through "gringo" tinted glasses. One of the things I learned is that Chileans are considerably friendlier to *estadounidenses* (Spanish for a U.S. citizen) than the latter are to Spanish immigrants in the U.S., many of whom are just there to work and have fled bad situations in their homelands – situations often caused by the Bully to the North.

Not all are from Mexico. When my wife and I were in the U.S. in 2015 we met Spanish speakers from Guatemala and Honduras. Latin Americans, I've learned, are more diverse than English speakers.

In retrospect, Trump was not fair to them at all when he called them “criminals and rapists,” singling out a few atypical cases. He was, of course, talking to his base. His base – like everyone at times – gets some things wrong.

Many Latinos are decent and loving people who deserve half a chance.

As opposed as I remain to the idea of globalism as leading inevitably to world government, what I’ve learned over the past seven and a half going on eight years is the value of internationalizing one’s mind and thoughts. It’s a big and very diverse world out here, and I’m not using that word as the politically correct use it. Out here, peoples are too busy just solving workaday problems to worry about what bad old white guys are doing.

At the same time, they’d prefer to live their lives without constant outside interference.

The fundamental problem with world government is that peoples are too different from one another to live under it voluntarily. Such an entity could not be anything other than a surveillance police state based on economic coercion and, when that fails, brute force. Prison populations would swell beyond what they are now.

The difference is between vertical arrangements that are created and imposed from the top down, products of unwanted interference, and horizontal and lateral ones that come out through the kind of communication that builds friendships from the bottom up.

All peoples tend to resent the imposition of top down, outside forces on their communities. But most will be nice to you if you are nice to them. That, too, is human nature – to seek out allies and build communities.

I’ve made friends who are not Americans, have never been to

the U.S., have little interest in the way things are done in the U.S. Many are Chilean, but some are from other parts of the world. Our international (English-speaking) church in Santiago held an event a few months back that stands out in my mind, in which eight people read Scripture in eight different languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Korean and Filipino.

In other interactions, often at language-exchange events, I've met people from Hungary, Poland, Singapore, and the Middle East (a very articulate Kurdish woman fluent in four languages).

Technology used wisely enables us to communicate and share ideas all around the world. There's a variety of internationalism that's worth wanting, and even treasuring: the kind of horizontal internationalism that reaches out and learns about other cultures while respecting them instead of trying to overwhelm them, that shares ideas rather than imposing them, and might serve as a vehicle for building voluntary, problem-solving collaborations.

Thus a summing up of what I've learned and become that makes me different from who I was ten years ago, perhaps mirroring where our world could go during the next ten years if we can get on track.

The world is much more divided and hostile than it was ten years ago. There has never been a time when bridge-builders were more needed.

Never has there been a greater need to work outside the boxes supplied by the global corporate state and its appendages.

I'd like to think I am more empathetic with people (and peoples) than I was ten years ago.

People (peoples) matter.



We are all made in the image of the Creator – even those worshipping a different god(s).

We all have intrinsic value. So yes, *all lives matter*.

We still have quite a ways to go to work out what this means in practice, although I would begin by reading Biblical New Testament works from the Gospels to Hebrews.

Maybe there are other sacred texts that have something foundational to contribute. I don't know. I'm not an authority on comparative religions.

But I'd check them out before I'd rely on economics textbooks and treatises implying that all these peoples should eagerly embrace Western materialism and just learn to consume.

Trade is, obviously, a valid form of interaction, but the choice is not to conduct it absent a worldview, but rather which worldview(s) we are going to use to underwrite all our interactions, including trade.

And how we are going to respond when others want to preserve the worldview of their choice instead of being encircled by ours.

A few remaining loose ends here:

Do we want fewer mass migrations that lead to involuntary and sometimes hostile interactions with native and local populations?

Then let's fight to end the foreign wars that destroy peoples' homelands and send them fleeing, while lining corporate-state pockets! Let's also end the economic domination that also destroys what gives people's lives meaning, impoverishes them until strip mining their resources and removing the profits from their countries breeds revolt.

Do we want fewer enemies?

Then let's recognize peoples the world over as potential friends, if approached in the right way – as men and women who also value family, culture, and who find meaning in their connection to principles of a transcendent reality.

People different from us but alike in being human.

Steven Yates's latest book manuscript entitled *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* has been accepted by Wipf and Stock, and will be published in late 2020 or early 2021.

© 2019 NWV – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Steven Yates: [freeyourmindinasc@yahoo.com](mailto:freeyourmindinasc@yahoo.com)