

What I'm About, Where I'm Going ... 2025 Edition



By Steven Yates

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"Men occasionally stumble over the truth but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened."
–attributed to Winston Churchill

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." –Viktor Frankl

"People think focus means saying Yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying No to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. [Success] is saying 'No' to 1,000 things." –Steve Jobs

"Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind." –Nathaniel Hawthorne

"What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others."
–Pericles

Every year, early in the year, I try to explain to readers – especially new readers – where I'm coming from. You can read the best version of last year's edition [here](#). It might be useful to have a look at that before reading this. Don't worry, I'll wait.

For those forging ahead, I isolated five principles that formed the core values where I've been hoping to have some level of impact:

- (1) Truth matters.
- (2) Freedom matters.
- (3) Human connections matter.
- (4) The shortness of life matters.
- (5) Focus matters.

There's a core value behind these: *the intrinsic value of all human lives*. I'll discuss this at the end.

Expanding on the five: (1) We're better off knowing what is true than believing falsehoods, to the extent we *can* know what is true (it isn't necessarily easy!). Acting, or designing policy, based on untruth is a path toward grief. But teaching or preaching truth must be qualified. Truth doesn't necessarily make us happy. As the saying goes, it doesn't care about our feelings. Still, a lot of people aren't ready for unpleasant truths. They have a hard time accepting that they've been lied to their entire lives. So, it can be useful to go slow and dispense what truth one believes one has in doses. While always testing it. Keeping in mind: future findings or events can always correct present mistakes. One might firmly believe one has the truth and be wrong.

(2) It's a common adage that most people don't want to be free. Not really. What they want is safety. They'll choose safety over freedom every time if given the choice. That said, those who consciously want to be free have to exercise it responsibly. Over the past year I've been working toward a concept and practice of responsible freedom. Its principles include: *recognize the choices you have; do others no harm; recognize that you're not God*.

(3) Atomization, which I wrote about last year, not only remains a problem but may be worse than it was a year ago.

What is bad about atomization is that we weren't designed for it. We are social beings, starting with familial interaction and going outwards. Atomization is made worse by a social media ecosphere which limits much of our sensory input to screens and presents us with pseudo-connections while siloing us into echo chambers. We're here to solve actual problems, for ourselves and for others – cooperatively – not fake problems presented by video games. I'm convinced that atomization, enhanced by social media, is a contributing factor to the upsurge of mental illness we've seen in recent years. So how do we forge connections? Start with those around you physically, build trust through consistent positive behaviors while avoiding negativity. Get others talking about their lives. Then be patient.

(4) and (5) are the ones I wish to emphasize in the year ahead:

(4) None of us is getting any younger, and we all waste a lot more time than we care to admit. As I observed last year, we are our habits. New Year's resolutions usually fail. There's a reason for this: saying something is one thing. Having the systems that will ensure follow-through is another. The first is easy. The second is much, much harder. We're all works in progress (even yours truly).

And so: (5) Focus. There's more noise out there than ever before, and so the battle to control your attention has never been fiercer, nor more important. You can try to focus on all the stuff that comes your way, in which case your life will consist of reactions and probably be filled with frustration and anxiety. Or you can choose to focus on just a few things, based on your best idea of leaving a legacy.

What will your legacy be? It doesn't have to be something that made you famous. A way to approach this is to ask, What would you like to have read, as a eulogy, at your funeral?

For most people, this is an acutely uncomfortable question. I get it. Even most Christians are uneasy with death, as only one Person has ever claimed He came back. But the question can be asked constructively, as a means of reflecting on how we're spending the days we have and whether we're doing something constructive or throwing away time we can't get back – ever.

It's up to us. We all have a potential legacy. We have to identify, nurture, and grow it to maturity. Most legacies aren't publicly visible. That's not the point. The point is to touch others, and leave the corner of the world where you lived a little better than when you found it.

So what will *you* be remembered for, gentle reader? Will you have founded a business that solves a problem, and in so doing, serves others while earning you a comfortable living? Will you have been a wise and good parent to your children, so that they grow into responsible adults (not having been neglectful, but not “helicoptering,” either)? Will you have been a good husband, or wife; or son, or daughter to your elderly parents when their time comes? Or a good employee or coworker?

All this is legacy material.

As I inch into my late 60s I've been thinking about such questions a lot lately. One of the results has been an education-focused project, which I've been sketching on paper, little by little. I've not settled on a name for it yet. Since there's a lot in a name, it's something to be chosen with great care, something able to draw in interested clients.

Nor have I decided quite how I will present it to the world – or even if I'm the right person to do it and ought instead to hand off my idea to someone more extroverted and talented at marketing than I am. I'm not exactly sitting on the millions of dollars that would be very useful in getting the word out about such an endeavor.

I do know that whatever develops will attempt to unite Christianity with what is best in Stoicism. Stoicism was the leading secular philosophy in ancient Rome when Christianity was just emerging. I've made one attempt [here](#), to show Stoicism's relevance to the world we live in today and outline the possibility of its alignment with a Christian worldview.

The Christian worldview as I picture it tells us that God exists; the world is ordered because He created and ordered it; it is intelligible because He created us in His image, able to use our senses and reason to apprehend the world in our finite, limited fashion.

Stoicism sees a *Logos*, the Greek word from which we derive *logic*, *logistics*, etc. Stoicism may have little to say about the existence of a personal God, but it does speak of the "physics" of the world whole and the "logic" of our best thinking about how the world works.

Christianity could be thought of as taking a Big Picture approach to the world and to life ... starting with metaphysical postulates ("God exists") and working downward to our individual situations and lives. A variant on the Big Picture approach looks at civilization as a whole and tries to discern its trajectory, structure, key institutions, and the problems societies as a whole must face if their members wish them to continue. I've done this rather frequently.

Stoicism works in the opposite direction, beginning with persons and their situations in the world, and working upward, or outward. It counsels us, as persons, to focus our time and energy on what we can control. It observes, with Viktor Frankl above, that there is always that space in time between an event and our response to the event, and in that is freedom.

Stoicism is often seen as cold and emotionless. That misgrasps the philosophy. It is about controlling our emotions because these are among the things we can control. Stoicism counsels

recognizing the shortness of life – that our days walking this Earth are numbered – with an eye not to fearing the end of our lives but motivating us to make the best use of the days we have.

It is, finally, the perfect philosophy for fundamentally repressive societies. It doesn't counsel mere conformity with repressive structures, or systems. But it does discourage rash, irrational actions likely to be counterproductive – as opposed to patient investigations to find out what the truth about a situation is, who to communicate this to, and how to go about pursuing what change might be possible.

It thus is no more Utopian than Christianity is – insofar as *this* world goes.

While Christianity regards us as sinners in need of Jesus Christ's power of salvation, Stoicism sees us as works in progress, capable of sufficient self-improvement that we can learn this world's, or a civilization's, systems well enough to survive and possibly even thrive in them. Or escape the latter and live on the margins. The choice is ours. Note that we own the consequences.

Neither Christianity nor Stoicism permits us to sit on our duffs. Both invite us to ask if we are using to their fullest the gifts that we've been given, whatever those gifts may be.

The Apostle Paul discusses spiritual gifts at length in I Corinthians 12:4f.:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences in ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to

another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Paul's ensuing discussion draws a detailed analogy between the human body and the Church (the body of Christ), noting how the different parts of the body work together, all of them useful, none of them designed to reject any of the others. And that if one suffers, the rest suffer.

How does this apply today?

Some of us are extroverts gifted with people. Others are introverts with a greater aptitude for ideas. Likewise the differences between men and women, which enables us to reflect again on what is wrong with "gender ideology" and the attempt to obliterate the distinction between the sexes. That most men have greater upper-body strength than most women is clear; most men are probably better at abstract reasoning than most women. But there are things women are better at than men. They are better nurturers, and are probably more empathetic than men. They are probably superior at adopting what some call *emotional intelligence* than men.

To ignore these clear, biologically-grounded differences doesn't do either sex any favors.

I doubt I'll be teaching "introductory courses" on these matters, of course. At least not to those who just walked in the door. I'll be far more interested in helping them with pain points regarding health and personal finance – two areas where a lot of people need all the help they can get!

I'll be emphasizing facing important truths, because to *not* tell someone an important, immediately helpful truth is to devalue him or her. This brings us to intrinsic value, the core of education for those whose role in this world matters (because they have responsibilities and a legacy to leave);

encouraging them to use the skills they have, or that can be drawn out of them (etymologically, the word *education* comes from the Latin *educere*, “to draw out”), through leadership, of their potential, so they can be successful problem solvers. Solving problems is among the most important things we are here for.

This project will eventually take all of the time and energy I can pour into it.

Besides, I’ve heard the adage that God laughs at our plans!

But surely there is room to help fill, in some small way, the gaping hole that the *de facto* collapse of existing educational institutions has left in its wake.

I’m writing about it here so that anyone who cares can hold me accountable and call me onto the carpet if, by this time next year, I’ve only sat on my duff regardless of what God has done.

This will mean less time spent writing articles, though. Leaving article-writing aside will free my time for other things: learning, making new contacts, preparing. The future comes, and it is better to have prepared for it than not.

I keep coming back to the shortness of life. This makes me increasingly less patient with things I’ve written about dozens of times but keep seeing, whether in articles or in personal emails.

I fear I’m increasingly impatient with those who don’t “get” something. Here’s an informal list of what tests my patience these days. Some I’ve written about at length; others not so much. If I sermonized on them all, important tasks wouldn’t get done. So here we go:

- Anyone who goes on and on about “conspiracy theories” as a category, as if all are the same.

- Anyone who can't distinguish intelligent conspiracy claims (e.g., "the coronavirus was made in a lab through gain-of-function research") from stupid ones ("the Earth is flat, and the entire scientific community has been hiding this for going on 500 years").
- Anyone who tells me Jesus Christ never really existed; or if he did, he was just a "good man and teacher."
- Any Evangelical who believes he/she is going to be "raptured" off this Earth (in accordance with the Darby-Scofield-dispensationalist heresy and its misreading of Matt. 24 and I Thess. 4:13–5:4).
- Anyone proposing to treat children as if they were miniature adults and adults as if they were big children, not realizing that the most likely result is unruly children and childish adults. (I think Thomas Szasz beat me to this one.)
- Anyone who trusts government numbers about job creation, inflation, and unemployment. (The first, after all, is *always*)
- Anyone who thinks the economy is "booming" or in great shape because the Dow is over 40,000.
- Anyone who goes on and on about the "deadly insurrection" of January 6, 2021 and still says Trump was responsible.
- Anyone who goes on about the "convicted felon."
- Anyone who says Trump is a Russian agent, or babbles about "Russian disinformation" or "Russian propaganda."
- Anyone who still thinks Hunter Biden's laptop was "Russian disinformation."
- Anyone who says Russia's invasion of Ukraine was "unprovoked."
- Anyone promoting "gender ideology" holding that there are more than two "genders."
- Anyone whose words imply they believe Israel can do no wrong and sees "antisemitism" as a priority problem.
- Anyone who says "the Jews" are behind it all. There are much deeper layers of the onion.

- Anyone who sees *misinformation* as a priority problem.
- Anyone who uses the words or phrases *systemic racism*, *patriarchy*, *misogyny*, *toxic masculinity*, *homophobia*, *transphobia*, etc., as if anyone who denies these is a bigot.
- Anyone who uses the phrase *white privilege* for people struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, while praying for no health or car emergencies.
- Anyone who thinks being preoccupied with the rise of the billionaire class, and of a state of affairs in which the top .1 percent controls more wealth than the bottom 50 percent, is some kind of closet communist, or Marxist.
- Anyone who attributes the rise of the first to a free-market meritocracy.
- Anyone who still thinks *socialism* is a bigger threat nowadays than *techno-feudalism*.
- Anyone who uses the word *authoritarian* or *protofascist* for foreign leaders (or domestic ones, for that matter) who place their countries and peoples first, deny globalism, and have reined in the cultural left in their societies (example: Hungary's Viktor Orbán).
- Anyone who thinks *populism* (undefined) is a mere product of *xenophobia* (undefined) and leads to dangerous "right wing extremism."
- Anyone who believes Big Pharma has something to do with public health.
- Anyone who believes leviathan food corporations care about healthy eating.
- Anyone who believes social media corporations have our best interests at heart.
- Anyone who believes the move towards a subscriptions-based economy is good for us.
- Anyone who believes AI is going to save us, as opposed to throwing tens of millions more people out of work and causing history's next big wave of technological

unemployment.

- Anyone who thinks online writing makes money (though a few are making a killing *designing courses* or *building subscription-based communities* persuading buyers that they can make six figures writing online).
- Anyone to whom I've made an *offer* to solve a problem, using writing or something else, responding to a public advertisement, who can't be bothered to reply; they get a follow-up a week later, and if that receives no response I'm done, as I don't cooperate with the rude and unprofessional.
- Anyone who comes to me with a problem they want my help solving but doesn't want to pay me for my time.

I think that will do it for this year. See you around.

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Steven Yates is a (recovering) ex-academic with a PhD in Philosophy. He taught for more than 15 years total at several universities in the Southeastern U.S. He authored three books, more than 20 articles, numerous book reviews, and review essays in academic journals and anthologies. Refused tenure and unable to obtain full-time academic employment (and with an increasing number of very fundamental philosophical essays refused publication in journals), he turned to alternative platforms and heretical notions, including about academia itself.

In 2012 he moved to Chile. He married a Chilean national in 2014. Among his discoveries in South America: the problems of the U.S. are problems everywhere, because human nature is the same everywhere. The problems are problems of Western civilization as a whole.

As to whether he'll *stay* in Chile ... stay tuned!

He has a Patreon.com page. Donate [here](#) and become a Patron if you benefit from his work and believe it merits being sustained financially.

Steven Yates's book *Four Cardinal Errors: Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic* (2011) can be ordered [here](#).

His philosophical work *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* (2021) can be obtained [here](#) or [here](#).

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