NEW YEARS DAY: THINGS I HAVE LEARNED IN THE LAST TEN YEARS

For this first day of the 2020s I would like to share with you some of the frustrating, hopeful, and baffling things I've learned over the last decade about humans and the planet we share. Most of what anyone learns in any decade isn't particularly useful for others, and this is as true for me as anyone, whether it's the fate of benthic foraminifera in the Paleocene—Eocene Thermal Maximum (bad) or advancements in the treatment of HIV, spinal conditions, and Ebola (quite good!) This is an update on what I learned in the first 10 years of the 21st century, and I hope to keep the trend going as long as I can manage.

May you come by this knowledge easier than I did.

- The human capacity to heal and grow and move on is amazing, and comes with no dependable limits beyond death.
- Luxembourg is a country between Germany, France, and Belgium.
- You can't do good for the world if you can't do good for the people in front of you, and you can't do good for the people in front of you if you can't do good for yourself.
- Most of the things people call self-care are in fact self-indulgence. Self-care

comes with an annoying amount of self-discipline, high fiber foods, and socially inconvenient bedtimes.

- Awareness raising only helps to a point, and that point is reached almost at once in the modern media environment. After that it's often a fight against your own side to make people understand that fear isn't a motivator or a teacher, and that anger isn't advocacy. The things that feel righteous and build the feeling of righteous unity in activism are often destructive not only the the cause, but the people in it.
- Harnessing your emotions, organizing your calendar, and getting the right data are the high fiber diets and early bedtimes of activism.
- Being part of a mob can be euphoric, but is often damaging. Most dangerously, it is often both at once.
- Computers are a deep part of the human story, like books and music before them, and like any part of the human story they repeatedly scream their flaws into the endless void of things humans just

don't want to deal with.

- Almost all bugs and security flaws are solved problems, but our systems aren't set up to care about creating safe or good software, or a safe or good internet.
- The men from the government are as incompetent and clueless as anyone else, what really makes them dangerous is how often they don't know it, and it's no one's job to tell them.
- Both of these are choices we've made as a society and we could unmake them.
- The problems we face in managing our planet, from climate change to pollution to food supply to biodiversity are like software — largely solved at a technical level. We know what to do, we even know how to do it.
- Humanity rarely has technical problems for long, be they computer or civil engineering or resource management. What we generally have, (and have in spades when it comes to climate change) is governance and coordination problems.
- Despite there being only 7.6

billion people on the planet, there's an infinite supply of asshats on the internet.

- Leaderless collectives are easy for governments and other traditional sources of power to quash and co-opt. But as soon as they do, the leaderless collective problems get much stranger and more widespread. I hope to learn what this means in the next ten years.
- Anything you say, do, or are, can and will be used against you and against your loved ones in order to weaken and destroy you. These people are not playing, and they are scared of everything.
- We like larger-than-life and badly written superhero movies because we all have super powers now, which we treat with the maturity of a 13 year old that just got bitten by a radioactive mobile phone.
- The constant media cycle has made us far too tolerant of mixed metaphors.
- Do one thing at a time.
- No matter how strong you are the world will find a way to break you, this goes for

nation-states as well as people.

- Representative democracy is in the process of failing. I don't know if it's new media forms, or just 7.6 billion people, but it's time to invent new political forms that balance between the imposition of common values and comprehension of people's hopes and desires. Figuring out how to coordinate and act on that information at scale is the point of a polity, and representative voting systems aren't doing that anymore.

- Redemption is going to be the most important story in the 21st century, so we ought to get started on that.

- You have to watch the line, not the obstacles. What's true in extreme sports is also true in politics and planetary coordination for the 21st century. If you look at the obstacles, you hit them. If you look beyond the obstacles to where you're going, you have a chance of getting there.

- In this past decade we've lost any idea we might have

had about where we're going, and we're just aggressively driving into one obstacle after another. We should change that.

- People often think when disasters happen they'll all start eating each other. But in truth, mostly, they start feeding each other. When the chips are down, this is who we really are.
- You should feel pretty good about that.
- Reasoning with children works beautifully, whatever their age, but as with anything, it takes a lot of practice. Reasoning with adults works almost as well.
- We give up on reasoning too fast. Imagine if we gave up on rollerblading or playing the piano as fast as we give up on reasoning with people.

Be good to each other, and see you again in another ten years.

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