

Connected Learning in a Time of Confinement

Week 3: Chaos and Order

April 20, 2020

This anthology has been prepared in draft form for use in a special seminar curriculum and are provided for private, non-commercial use in extraordinary times. Additional information about the seminar and this volume is available from The Aspen Institute, 2300 N. Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20037.

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Other resources,

including daily meditations, periodic podcasts, on-line seminars and discussions, and occasional on-line conversations about this week's curriculum, are available at:

aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/resources-for-living-and-leading/

How to Use this Curriculum

Connected Learning in Times of Confinement is designed to support people and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and networks by building upon the Aspen Institute's unique expertise in facilitating meaningful conversations in a seminar setting.

We envisage a weekly curriculum that can be used in pieces, or all at once, or in various combinations. Our hope is that these readings and guidance will allow you and others to reflect on fundamental human questions in ways that nourish our hearts, minds, and fellowship in a time of confinement. A curriculum (from the Latin *currere*, to run) is a path, an exploration, not something to be mastered but an invitation to discovery and wonder. These materials are curated to intrigue and delight you, and we invite you to reflect upon them on your own, and to share them—with family, friends, neighbors, teams, networks. In this, the journey itself is the destination, a call to thought, dialogue, and action.

In a journey it is often helpful to have a guide, and in this curriculum you will find three guides:

First, the authors themselves—

we do not need to follow the authors, but we do well to understand what they are saying;

Second, guiding questions—

for each reading, there is a set of guiding questions designed for individual and collective reflection; they are not the only (or even most important) questions, but a way of getting started; these may be found at the back of the packet and are best read after you have read the texts;

Third, general guidance—

for each discussion, participants and discussion leaders may want to remind themselves of some best practices; these may be found at the back of this packet.

We invite you to share these readings widely and encourage others to engage in conversation. As you do so, know that fellow seminar graduates and their families, friends, and colleagues are doing the same. We all contribute to a global chorus of conversation about ideas worth sharing and acting upon.

— **Todd Breyfogle, PhD**
Managing Director,
Aspen Executive Leadership

About Aspen Institute Seminars

The Aspen Institute Executive Leadership Seminars Department drives change through reflection, dialogue, and action in service of a more free, just, and equitable society. We do this by: curating brave spaces of shared meaning which help people become more self-aware, more self-correcting, and more self-fulfilling; deepening participants' humane sensibilities and capacities for moral judgment through an examination of the humanistic traditions; establishing meaningful connections among diverse people and organizations in service of a better society.

For more information, including information about customized programs for companies and other organizations, please contact Kalissa Hendrickson, PhD, Director, at Kalissa.Hendrickson@aspennst.org or 202-736-3586. [Learn more.](#)

Philosophical Basis

The Aspen Institute starts from an act of faith in the humanistic tradition: one must be reflective in order to insure that all human activity – political, scientific, economic, intellectual or artistic – will serve the needs of human beings and enrich and deepen their lives.

The Institute believes in the value both of the “Great Ideas” of the past as well as the importance of the sometimes inelegant and highly controversial ideas of the present.

The Institute is dedicated to the fundamental educational value of dialogue for mature men and women from different nations and cultures -- intercommunications between people of comparable competence from various backgrounds and specialized fields of experience.

The Aspen idea recognizes that the processes by which persons learn and develop or change their ideas are not mechanical or even purely rational. As there is a mystery at the edge of human thought, so there is a magic about human relationships, and the magic we attempt to invoke in Aspen is that of the sheer beauty of this area of the Rocky Mountains.

With Erasmus, we hold that “nothing human is alien” to the inquiring purposes of the Aspen Institute. The Institute intends to be, in sum, a place of excellence and excitement where men and women of the finest qualities of mind and spirit from all walks of life in the United States and abroad can meet to learn from one another through serious discussion of and work on significant problems facing society and the greatest ideas which have been expressed throughout history and today concerning these problems.

—J. E. Slater, President, The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1972

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a Time of Confinement**

Readings | Week 3

- 5 Isabel Allende, *Clarisa*, selections
- 7 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, selections
- 11 Hafiz, *The Seed Cracked Open*
- 13 Wallace Stevens, *The Idea of Order at Key West*

Clarisa

by Isabel Allende
(1942-)

1 Clarisa was born before the city had electricity, she lived to see the television
coverage of the first astronaut levitating on the moon, and she died of amazement
when the Pope came for a visit and was met in the street by homosexuals dressed
up as nuns. She had spent her childhood among pots of ferns and corridors lighted
5 by oil lamps. Days went by slowly in those times. Clarisa never adjusted to the fits
and starts of today's time; she always seemed to have been captured in the sepia
tints of a nineteenth-century portrait. I suppose that once she had had a virginal
waist, a graceful bearing, and a profile worthy of a medallion, but by the time I
met her she was already a rather bizarre old woman with shoulders rounded into
10 two gentle humps and with white hair coiled around a sebaceous cyst the size of a
pigeon egg crowning her noble head. She had a profound, shrewd gaze that could
penetrate the most hidden evil and return unscathed. Over the course of a long
lifetime she had come to be considered a saint, and after she died many people
placed her photograph on the family altar along with other venerable images to ask
15 her aid in minor difficulties, even though her reputation for being a miracle worker
is not recognized by the Vatican and undoubtedly never will be. Her miraculous
works are unpredictable: she does not heal the blind, like Santa Lucia, or find
husbands for spinsters, like St. Anthony, but they say she helps a person through
a hangover, or problems with the draft, or a siege of loneliness. Her wonders are
20 humble and improbable, but as necessary as the spectacular marvels worked by
cathedral saints....

Clarisa had a boundless understanding of human weaknesses. One night when
she was sitting in her room sewing, her white head bent over her work, she heard
unusual noises in the house. She got up to see what they might be, but got no
25 farther than the doorway, where she ran into a man who held a knife to her throat
and threatened, "Quiet, you whore, or I'll slash your throat."

"This isn't the place you want, son. The ladies of the night are across the street,
there where you hear the music."

"Don't try to be funny, this is a robbery."

30 "What did you say?" Clarisa smiled, incredulous. "And what are you going to
steal from me?"

"Sit down in that chair. I'm going to tie you up."

1 “I won’t do it, son. I’m old enough to be your mother. Where’s your respect?”

“Sit down, I said!”

“And don’t shout, you’ll frighten my husband, and he’s not at all well.

5 By the way, put that knife down, you might hurt someone,” said Clarisa.

“Listen, lady, I came here to rob you,” the flustered robber muttered.

“Well, there’s not going to be any robbery. I will not let you commit a sin. I’ll give you some money of my own will. You won’t be taking it from me, is that clear? I’m giving it to you.” She went to her purse and took out

10 all the money for the rest of the week. “That’s all I have. We’re quite poor, as you see. Come into the kitchen, now, and I’ll set the kettle to boil.”

The man put away his knife and followed her, money in hand. Clarisa brewed tea for both of them, served the last cookies in the house, and invited him to sit with her in the living room.

15 “Wherever did you get the notion to rob a poor old woman like me?”

The thief told her he had been watching her for days; he knew that she lived alone and thought there must be some-thing of value in that big old house. It was his first crime, he said, he had four children, he was out of a job, and he could not go home another night with empty hands. Clarisa

20 pointed out that he was taking too great a risk, that he might not only be arrested but was putting his immortal soul in danger—although in truth she doubted that God would punish him with hell, the worst might be a while in purgatory, as long, of course, as he repented and did not do it again. She offered to add him to her list of wards and promised she would

25 not bring charges against him. As they said goodbye, they kissed each other on the cheek. For the next ten years, until Clarisa died, she received a small gift at Christmastime through the mail.

The Little Prince

by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
(1900–1944)

1 It was then that the fox appeared.
"Good morning," said the fox.
"Good morning," the little prince responded politely, although when he turned
around he saw nothing.

5 "I am right here," the voice said, "under the apple tree.
"Who are you?" asked the little prince, and added, "You are very pretty to look
at."
"I am a fox," said the fox.
"Come and play with me," proposed the little prince. "I am so unhappy."
10 "I cannot play with you," the fox said. "I am not tamed."
"Ah! Please excuse me," said the little prince.
But, after some thought, he added:
"What does that mean— 'tame'?"
"You do not live here," said the fox. "What is it that you are looking for?"
15 "I am looking for men," said the little prince. "What does that mean— 'tame'?"
"Men," said the fox. "They have guns, and they hunt. It is very disturbing. They
also raise chickens. These are their only interests. Are you looking for chickens?"
"No," said the little prince. "I am looking for friends. What does that
mean—'tame'?"
20 "It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. It means to establish ties."
"To establish ties'?"
"Just that," said the fox. "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy
who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you.
And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox
25 like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each
other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all
the world..."
"I am beginning to understand," said the little prince. "There is a flower... I
think that she has tamed me..."
30 "It is possible," said the fox. "On the Earth one sees all sorts of things."
"Oh, but this is not on the Earth!" said the little prince.
The fox seemed perplexed, and very curious.
"On another planet?"

1 "Yes."

"Are there hunters on this planet?"

"No."

"Ah, that is interesting! Are there chickens?"

5 "No."

"Nothing is perfect," sighed the fox.

But he came back to his idea.

"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life . I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat..."

15

The fox gazed at the little prince, for a long time.

"Please—tame me!" he said.

20

"I want to, very much," the little prince replied. "But I have not much time. I have friends to discover, and a great many things to understand."

25

"One only understands the things that one tames," said the fox. "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me..."

"What must I do, to tame you?" asked the little prince.

30

"You must be very patient," replied the fox. "First you will sit down at a little distance from me—like that—in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day..."

The next day the little prince came back.

35

"It would have been better to come back at the same hour," said the fox. "If, for example, you come at four o'clock in the afternoon, then at three o'clock I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier and happier as the hour advances. At four o'clock, I shall already be worrying and jumping about. I shall show you how happy I am! But if you come at just any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you... One must observe the proper rites..."

"What is a rite?" asked the little prince.

"Those also are actions too often neglected," said the fox. "They are what

1 make one day different from other days, one hour from other hours. There is a
rite, for example, among my hunters. Every Thursday they dance and I should
never have any vacation at all."

5 So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew
near—

"Ah," said the fox, "I shall cry."

"It is your own fault," said the little prince. "I never wished you any sort of
harm; but you wanted me to tame you..."

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

10 "But now you are going to cry!" said the little prince.

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"Then it has done you no good at all!"

"It has done me good," said the fox, "because of the color of the wheat fields."

And then he added:

15 "Go and look again at the roses. You will understand now that yours is unique
in all the world. Then come back to say goodbye to me, and I will make you a
present of a secret."

The little prince went away, to look again at the roses.

20 "You are not at all like my rose," he said. "As yet you are nothing. No one has
tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are like my fox when I first knew him.
He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my
friend, and now he is unique in all the world."

And the roses were very much embarrassed.

25 "You are beautiful, but you are empty," he went on. "One could not die for you.
To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—
the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the
hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she
that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind
30 the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two
or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened
to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing.
Because she is my rose."

And he went back to meet the fox.

35 "Goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is
only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

"What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeated, so that he
would be sure to remember.

40 "It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important."

1 “It is the time I have wasted for my rose—” said the little prince, so that he would be
sure to remember. “Men have forgotten this truth,” said the fox. “But you must
not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed. You are
responsible for your rose...”

5 “I am responsible for my rose,” the little prince repeated, so that he would be
sure to remember.

Notes

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The Idea of Order at Key West

by Wallace Stevens
(1879–1955)

1 She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
5 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
10 The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard.
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
15 But it was she and not the sea we heard.

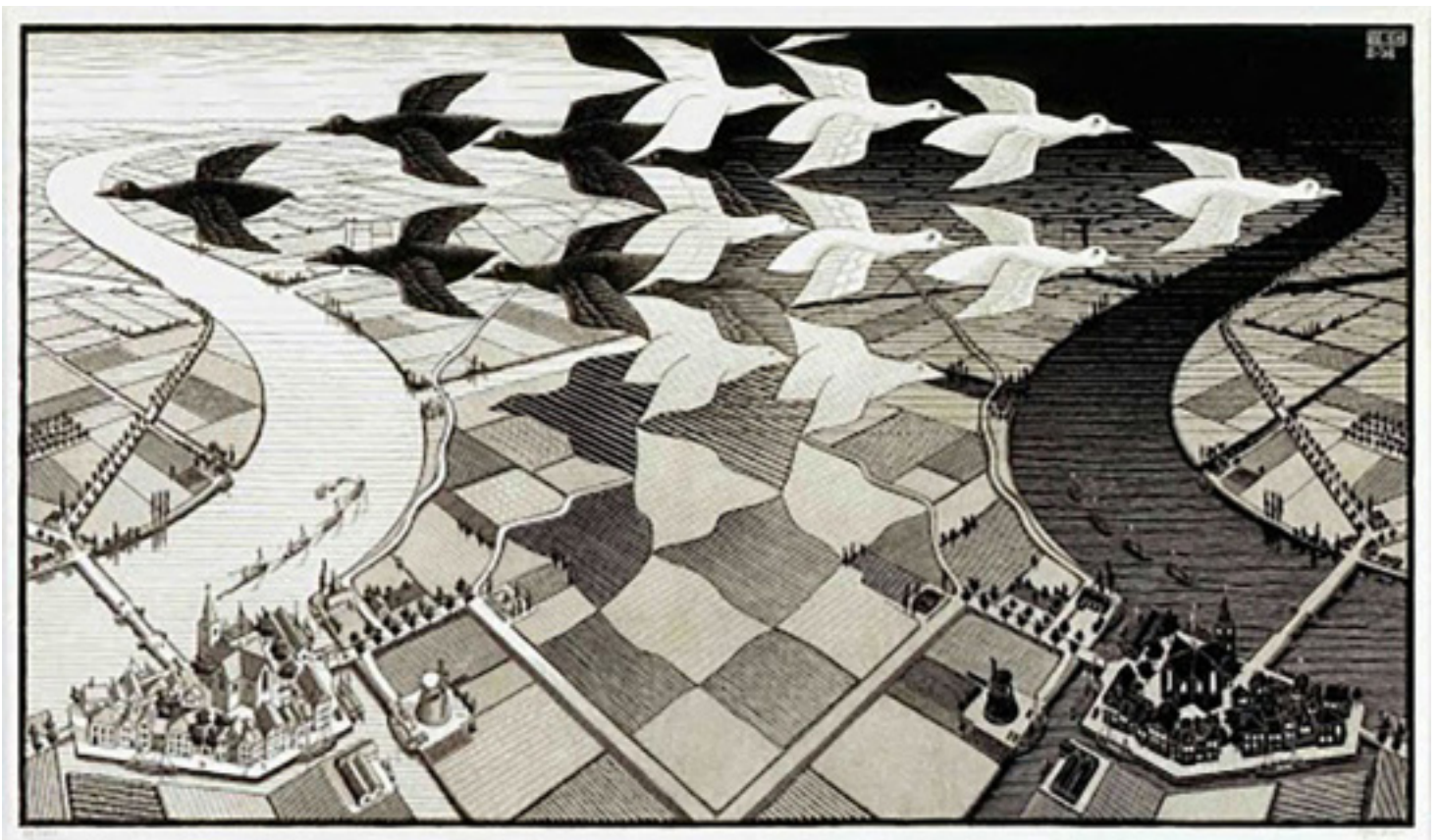
For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
20 Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
25 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound

1 More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
5 Of sky and sea.
It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
10 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
15 Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
20 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.
25 Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

Image of the Week



M.C. Escher, *Day and Night* (1938)

Notes

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Guiding Questions

The best questions arise from careful listening (to the author, oneself, and others), and from the spontaneity of wonder

Isabel Allende, Clarisa

- What are Clarisa's distinguishing characteristics? Do you like her? Why or why not?
- Do you know anyone like Clarisa?
- What is Clarisa's tolerance for order and disorder?
- What qualities do you bring to what is unfamiliar? What qualities would you like to acquire?

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince

- What are the fox and the boy searching for?
- Why does the fox want to be "tamed"? What does it mean to "tame" according to the text?
- What gets in the way of "taming"?
- What is a "rite" according to the text?
- What rites have you discovered, or lost, as you've tried to establish ties at a time when things are untethered?
- What is the fox's secret? And what does the boy learn?
- Does this chapter change the way you think about chaos and order?

Hafiz, The Seed Cracked Open

- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- What two questions frame the poem?
- How are we to understand Hafiz's discovery of "two of us" and "we"?

- What keeps your inner instruments in harmony? What disrupts your inner music?
- What "love-mischief" can you/we do today?

Wallace Stevens, The Idea of Order at Key West

- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- What are the words and images of order and chaos within the singing and the sea?
- What are the words, stories, images that you use to bring order out of chaos? Chaos out of order?
- What words would you like to bring to the cacophony or silence of your world?

M.C. Escher, Day and Night

- Set a timer and look at the image for 3 minutes: What do you see? What feelings does the image evoke?
- Is this an image of clarity or of the obscurity of transitions?
- Do you find the image limiting or expansive?
- How comfortable are you with the ambiguities of dusk and dawn, as opposed to the starkness of day and night?

General questions for the week

- How have you been bringing order out of chaos? How have you been resisting order in search of greater freedom?
- What in your sphere of action is inviting you tolerate greater chaos or greater order?
- Is there an opportunity to "tame" yourself or others, or to be "tamed"?

Short Guide to Leading a Discussion

General Principles for Participants

- Read the text(s) to be discussed in their entirety (ideally twice)
- Make notes about what you understand, don't understand, agree or disagree with
- Focus comments and conversation on the ideas expressed in the shared text(s), not on outside
- knowledge
- Seek to understand your fellow participants, not to persuade them
- Be freely authentic and morally present
- Listen to the text, to others, and to yourself

General principles for discussion leaders:

- Hold the space for honesty and vulnerability: be honest and vulnerable yourself
- Ask questions, don't teach: the aim is shared understanding and meaning, not agreement
- Be attached to the conversation: avoid rigidly following your planned order of questions
- Make sure every voice is heard: don't move too quickly to fill the silence
- Start and end on time: end not with conclusions but with questions you're taking away

Format:

- Match the texts to the time allotted (*Each text can productively stimulate 20-40 minutes of discussion, and can be read discussed individually or together in one sitting, depending on the time available; it is better to end with more to be said, rather than straining to fill the time*)

- Begin with introductions:
 - name (if not everyone is well known to one another)
 - what is on your heart and mind?
 - the person speaking chooses the next person
- Set the frame:
 - remind participants to enjoy the gift of time and conversation by avoiding other
 - distractions
 - revisit the key general principles above
- It always helps to read a passage aloud
- Layer your questions: be patient, each layer builds upon the next
 - What does the text say? (sometimes we read the same thing different ways)
 - What does the text mean? (sometimes we interpret the text differently)
 - What does the text mean to me? (sometimes we apply the texts to ourselves differently)
 - What does the text mean for us? (we may have different understandings of what the text means for living in community)
 - What does the text mean for society? (we may have different approaches to what the text implies for action in society)

Some helpful tips to keep the conversation going (for discussion leaders and participants):

- "say more about that"
- "where do you see that in the text?"
- "how is that related to what N said earlier?"
- "do you think that's true?"
- "do others see it the same way?"
- "what did you see in the text that we haven't addressed?"

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