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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 Seminars

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@aspeninst.org or 202-736-3586. Learn more.
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
Readings | Week 11

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9  Yasmine El Rashidi, “Cairo, City in Waiting”

13 Elizabeth Kolbert, “Welcome to the Anthropocene”

17 Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”
Exodus and Revolution
by Michael Walzer
(1935–)

In a poem dedicated to Joseph Brodsky, playing on the story of the biblical
Joseph, Anthony Hecht has a lovely line about “Egypt ... that old school of the
soul.”¹ The idea of Egypt as a school, or at least a kind of training ground, is
fairly common in the Exodus literature. Alternatively, Egypt is a furnace, the “iron
furnace” of Deuteronomy 4:20, which the rabbis explain as a cauldron for refining
precious metals: what emerges, presumably, is pure gold. This is an optimistic
view of the effects of oppression on ordinary men and women. Many years later,
Savonarola took the same view, expounding the text “But the more they afflicted
them, the more they multiplied and grew” (Exod. 1:12)—and thinking, I suppose,
of the Florentine people under the rule of the Medicis. The Israelites, Savonarola
explained, multiplied in numbers and grew in spirit. He went on in his next
sermon to talk enthusiastically about Moses’ killing of the Egyptian taskmaster,
an example of spiritedness, certainly, but not of a spiritedness bred by affliction.²
For Moses had grown up in Pharaoh’s court and never worked with brick and
mortar (he had probably never worked at all). We can find a more realistic account
of what was learned in “that old school of the soul” in a rabbinic interpretation of
the killing of the taskmaster. Recall the text:

And it came to pass ... when Moses was grown, that he went out
unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an
Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked
this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man,
he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. (Exod. 2:11-12)

We might think that Moses simply wanted to make sure that he was not
seen; killing a taskmaster would be a serious crime in the house of bondage. But
the prophet Isaiah takes a different view in a description of divine justice that
obviously echoes the Exodus text. Isaiah imagines God looking down on the evil
in the world and on the sins of Israel and waiting for, looking for, some human
response:

And he saw that there was no man, and he wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto [Israel]; and his righteousness, it sustained him. (59:16)

Building on these lines, some of the rabbis argued that when Moses looked this way and that way, he was looking for an Israelite ready to intercede and defend the beaten slave; he was looking for a real man, a proud and rebellious spirit. And when he saw no sign of resistance, when he saw, according to a midrashic commentator, “that there was no one ready to champion the cause of the Holy One Blessed be He,” he acted himself, hoping to arouse his people and to “straighten their backs.” This interpretation is the source, we are told, of the maxim attributed to Hillel: “Where there is no man, try to be one.”

(I should note that the word “man” is used here in the generic sense, for among the few men in the Exodus story are two women, the midwives of Exodus 1, who refuse Pharaoh’s order to kill the newborn sons of the Israelites.)

What the bulk of the slaves learned in Egypt was servitude and slavishness. They learned, as I argued in the last chapter, to imitate their masters, but only at a distance, in their longings, fearfully; they admitted into their souls the degradation of slavery. This is a possible meaning of the line, “there was no man,” and it is one of the major themes of the Exodus story and of the early and late interpretive literature. I shall work through a few characteristic passages before coming to the key passage, Exodus 32, the story of the golden calf. I want to suggest that there exists in the text an argument about the moral and psychological effects of oppression. The argument is remarkably like that of Stanley Elkins, in his well-known and highly controversial book about slavery in the American South. Indeed, Elkins would have done well to cite the Exodus rather than relying for his comparative material on the more extreme case of the Holocaust: for the South was more like a house of bondage than a death camp. There is, in any case, a long history of citation in which the slavishness of the Israelites is used to explain, first, the forty years of wandering in the desert and the reiterated attempts to return to Egypt and then, later on, the difficulties of revolutionary or liberationist politics.

I will begin with a story that has only the skimpiest of textual foundations, but that provides insight nonetheless into the realities of Exodus politics. When God, speaking out of the burning bush, commands Moses to return to Egypt, He tells him to gather the elders of Israel and go with them to confront Pharaoh (Exod. 3:18). And Moses and Aaron do gather the elders and tell them of the coming deliverance. But when they speak to Pharaoh, they appear to be alone: “And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go...” (Exod. 5:1). What happened to the elders? This is the midrashic account:

Our rabbis said: the elders went along at the beginning but stealthily slipped away, one by one, two by two, and disappeared. By the time
[Moses and Aaron] reached Pharaoh's palace, not one of them remained. This is witnessed by the text, “And afterward Moses and Aaron went in.” But where were the elders? They had slipped away.  

They slipped away, says Rashi, “because they were afraid.” These words are probably meant to recall Exodus 14:10, where the Israelites find themselves trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea: “And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid .... “As the elders, so the people as a whole: all the Israelites were afraid of their masters, unwilling to challenge Pharaoh in his palace, overawed by the sight of his army. According to the biblical account, there were six hundred thousand men in the Israelite tribes that marched out of Egypt. Why should such a large number, asks the medieval commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra, stand in fear of their lives? Why didn’t they turn and fight? They were psychologically incapable, he says; they suffered from a slave mentality; for centuries they had not defended themselves-not, at least, by fighting. Indeed, they were the very opposite of spirited men....

So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The “door of hope” is still open; things are not what they might be-even when what they might be isn’t totally different from what they are. This is a central theme in Western thought, always present though elaborated in many different ways. We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:

—first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
—second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
—and third, that “the way to the land is through the wilderness.” There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.
NOTES

5 Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, 5:14 (p. 93); I quote the translation in Leibowitz, Studies in Shemot, p. 87
6 Pentateuch with Rashi’s Commentary, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silberman (Jerusalem, 57733 [1973]), at Exod. 5:1
8 W. D. Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1982) p. 60.
Cairo, City in Waiting

by Yasmine El Rashidi

(1977–)

What happened in the days following has been widely documented by the media—the April 6 Facebook page amassed 70,000 supporters in the space of a week, the ensuing protests were the largest the country had seen, and Esraa was detained and jailed for 18 days on charges of threatening the security of the State and inciting violence and anarchy. In her honour and as a statement of solidarity, a group of her friends formed the ‘April 6 group’ to lobby for her release. In many ways, that moment—her epiphany, the creation of the Facebook page, the conception of the April 6 Movement—was indeed the start of the revolution. But so is the date of the appointment of Mubarak, and so was the formation of the first movement for change, Kefaya, and so are the protests that escalated in 2005, and the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 2010, and the church bombing of the following month. And so was, too, the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser some five decades earlier. There is, in the end, no single moment, no single event, no single person. There are both events and predicaments—a cultural and social fabric, an economic reality, an urban landscape—that all came together in the making of the Egypt that has weighed down on many of us for years.

The new force of that movement for change became evident on Friday, 28 January 2011, just after midday prayer. It continues as I write this now—2 May 2011—and as I do, my one thought, the most significant factor amidst it all, is that my relationship with this city, with a culture, with my home, has forever been changed, and that my memories of the 18 days, the revolution, are mere fragments of a larger journey and search that I now wait to complete.

Those fragments—the memories of a revolution—are many.

There were the riot police, who pulled down their face masks and moved forward. Their batons were raised high, their shields above their chests. They charged, hundreds of them, grabbing people by the scruff of their necks, kicking them, beating them down hard. Many were dragged away, into narrow side-streets, disappearing. My friend Mohamed vanished, to resurface many days later.

There was the metal canister, which rocketed up into the air, exploding into volcanic fumes. It spiralled down, leaving a helix of trailing smoke that settled, eventually, over the square. It was followed by another, and another, and another.

Someone said they fired 50 in a row. Many people fell to the ground, choking. My own eyes were filled with tears that felt like blood. I wondered if I would be able to see again. If I would survive.

There was the young woman, whose body was limp. They carried her out, her blood on their hands, screaming for help. ‘Anyone, please, an ambulance, an ambulance.’ There were none, and a young man dropped to his knees by her side, sobbing. She was his sister. She had begged to go out that day, and he had promised his parents she would come to no harm.

There were the sounds of bullets assaulting the chants of the crowds. Two men came sprinting from around the corner, their faces gripped with terror. ‘It’s real, it’s real. Live ammunition, they’re using live ammunition.’ No one knew if it was true – we had heard this before. Minutes later, a procession with three bodies was carried into the square. One, of a young child. Thousands kneeled down in prayer.

There was the girl with braided pigtails and a pink dress who carried a flag twice her size. She must have been seven, and was happy that school had been closed. She begged her father for more popcorn, but before he had a chance to answer, she had already lost herself in animated chants. ‘Howa yimshi, mish hanimshi!’ (‘He should leave, we’re not leaving!’)

There was a boy in a mustard-yellow Adidas hoodie who wore a circus-clown wig—red, white and black, the colours of the Egyptian flag. He also carried a sign telling Mubarak to ‘Get lost—we deserve change.’ He was 18, and said he cared nothing about politics, or his country, until then. Before this, he told me, his life was about studying and ‘getting the hell out’.

There was the moment when opposition party member Mounir Fakhri Abdel Nour navigated his way through the protesters surrounded by bodyguards. He wore a pale blue shirt and a tweed blazer. People wanted to shake his hand, to take his picture, to share with him ideas. ‘This is just the beginning,’ he told a woman in her seventies. ‘Everyone will have a chance to speak. All voices will be heard. I assure you of that.’ The woman’s eyes glistened with tears.

There was the man with missing teeth who sat on a sidewalk, writing. Page after sketchbook page of Arabic script. His slogans and poems and essays told tales of corruption and vice. He had been in that same spot for two weeks and said he would stay until the day he died. ‘I carry the emotion of a nation, not only my own.’

There was the novelist Ahdaf Soueif, who carried three bulging nylon bags, hanging on her arm. Cookies and small savoury pastries. ‘I come every day,’ she said, dipping into one bag. She wore dark sunglasses, but they did little to conceal who she was. Crowds gathered around her, all with stories of struggle. They asked her to give them voice. She listened, for hours, and promised to help.

There was always the mother of Khaled Said, who one day walked onto ‘Liberation’ stage in Tahrir Square. She held a picture of her son. ‘My son’s blood, and that of the martyrs of this square, will not be lost in vain. We will not give up. We will not give up. We will not give up.’ The crowd erupted into roars of
And then there were the friends.

A friend, long housebound, ridden with depression, said he felt reborn. I saw him every day in the square, marching, chanting, and when it was over, dancing in the streets, holding his head up high.

A dancer friend cancelled a performance in Europe to remain in Egypt and take part in the protests.

An artist friend cancelled a lecture series in New York.

A writer friend flew back from Los Angeles, and a filmmaker friend from DC.

A friend who fled Egypt 22 years ago vowing never to return, came back, on day eight. She decided it was time.

And there was my mother, a fragile woman who is uncomfortable in crowds and had watched the protests unfold with fear on TV, who told me one day that she wanted to come out and march as well. She had been moved to tears by the story of Google executive Wael Ghonim, and by the stories of those killed.

My father and I spoke at least three times a day in those days of the revolution. Ours had been a decade of strained contact. We reconciled, and then bonded, over a city—ours.

To look back on those days—to remember—is to reflect on 18 days that I sense we may live in the shadow of for years to come. I watched people fall to the ground, gasping their last breaths. I fell to the ground myself, choking on tear gas. We dodged bullets and ran from armed men. We taped our windows with newspapers and formed barricades around our homes. My mother’s porter attached a kitchen knife to a broomstick and took to the streets. He said he would die protecting her, with his spear. Many of us helped wipe the blood pouring from young men’s heads. For the first time in our lives, some of us saw dead bodies lying on the streets. I tried to pry out a bullet from beneath a friend’s skin. We ran for cover, from rocks, from Molotov cocktails, from thugs. We became paranoid. We no longer knew whose side a stranger was on. And might he be armed? I had seen many knives stuck in many belts and trouser pockets. I had seen many guns, too. It took us a while to get used to the sight of the army and men with weapons on our streets. For days, we didn’t know if they would shoot.

We waited, each day, for something to happen, for something to change. We waited, for hours, as well, for the President to speak.

To look back on those days, is also to look into a new archive of images and a reservoir of emotions that I never thought—until January 2011—I would ever bear witness to. Cairo, to me, was a city overwhelmed, a city so mammoth in its proportions. Into its sepia-toned landscape, its 20 million people would slip, through dark alleyways, to be forgotten by a world around them that seemed stark of possibilities. This Cairo that I lived in spared no one, and everywhere I turned, every corner of every street I knew, there were intimations of struggle. Even my house seemed to have grown weary, as burdened and sad and oppressed as a greying building can be.
In those 18 days that have come to be known as the ‘Egyptian revolution’, as I navigated my way between my grandmother’s house—which had become home again some four years before — and Tahrir Square, I watched something, very slowly, transform. The street-side vendor suddenly had an Egyptian flag; the taxi driver had an opinion; the young man on the street was no longer scared to say that there was something he didn’t like; the tree trunks were painted red, white and black; the youth, once skulking, were now handing out flyers, forming political parties and collectives, chanting, discussing, planning, hoping, for those better lives. For every emotion, every thought, every idea, now, there was an audience, and on the same street corners that were once host to dejection, possibility was being born. I watched, in the days of the Egyptian uprising and the months that followed, human emotion finding an outlet, and in tandem discovering its source. I witnessed, in the waiting time of those days until 5.56 p.m. on 11 February, dignity restored. In myself, too.

IV

I bumped into my neighbour at the supermarket the other day. A retired Gulf Air executive, he had been active on Facebook during the uprising when protesters occupied Tahrir Square. I hadn’t seen or spoken to him since, and his warnings, posted on my Facebook wall, were always left unanswered.

‘Yas,’ he said, taking my hand, shaking it.

‘You know,’ he said, half smiling, half serious, his face pale, ‘it was very risky what you did, by the way.’

I must have looked puzzled.

‘This business of going down to Tahrir,’ he offered. ‘Very high risk.’

I laughed.

‘You could have been killed. Your poor Mom. What were you thinking?’

‘Well, we got rid of the President!’ I retorted.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘let’s see if things improve. You know, the economy has taken a big blow, Yasmine. People need jobs. Life is hard.’

‘And I just hope you guys are going to take care of these Salafists and Islamists now,’ he continued, slowing down, taking in my own slight nod of acknowledgement.

‘You know, we’re all waiting to see,’ he said, closing the conversation and walking away.

Cairo
May 2011
Welcome to the Anthropocene
by Elizabeth Kolbert (1961–)

In 1949, a pair of Harvard psychologists recruited two dozen undergraduates for an experiment about perception. The experiment was simple: students were shown playing cards and asked to identify them as they flipped by. Most of the cards were perfectly ordinary, but a few had been doctored, so that the deck contained, among other oddities, a red six of spades and a black four of hearts. When the cards went by rapidly, the students tended to overlook the incongruities; they would, for example, assert that the red six of spades was a six of hearts, or call the black four of hearts a four of spades. When the cards went by more slowly, they struggled to make sense of what they were seeing. Confronted with a red spade, some said it looked “purple” or “brown” or “rusty black.” Others were completely flummoxed.

The symbols “look reversed or something,” one observed.
“I can’t make the suit out, whatever it is,” another exclaimed. “I don’t know what color it is now or whether it’s a spade or heart. I’m not even sure now what a spade looks like! My God!”

The psychologists wrote up their findings in a paper titled “On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm.” Among those who found this paper intriguing was Thomas Kuhn. To Kuhn, the twentieth century’s most influential historian of science, the experiment was indeed paradigmatic: it revealed how people process disruptive information. Their first impulse is to force it into a familiar framework: hearts, spades, clubs. Signs of mismatch are disregarded for as long as possible—the red spade looks “brown” or “rusty.” At the point the anomaly becomes simply too glaring, a crisis ensues—what the psychologists dubbed the “‘My God!’ reaction.”

This pattern was, Kuhn argued in his seminal work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, so basic that it shaped not only individual perceptions but entire fields of inquiry. Data that did not fit the commonly accepted assumptions of a discipline would either be discounted or explained away for as long as possible. The more contradictions accumulated, the more convoluted the rationalizations became. “In science, as in the playing card experiment, novelty emerges only with difficulty,” Kuhn wrote. But then, finally, someone came along who was willing to call a red

spade a red spade. Crisis led to insight, and the old framework gave way to a new one. This is how great scientific discoveries or, to use the term Kuhn made so popular, “paradigm shifts” took place.

The history of the science of extinction can be told as a series of paradigm shifts. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the very category of extinction didn’t exist. The more strange bones were unearthed—mammoths, Megatherium, mosasaurs—the harder naturalists had to squint to fit them into a familiar framework. And squint they did. The giant bones belonged to elephants that had been washed north, or hippos that had wandered west, or whales with malevolent grins. When Cuvier arrived in Paris, he saw that the mastodon’s molars could not be fit into the established framework, a “My God” moment that led him to propose a whole new way of seeing them. Life, Cuvier recognized, had a history. This history was marked by loss and punctuated by events too terrible for human imagining. “Though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world” is how Kuhn put it.

In his *Recherches sur les ossemens fossiles*, Cuvier listed dozens of espèces perdues, and he felt sure there were more awaiting discovery. Within a few decades, so many extinct creatures had been identified that Cuvier’s framework began to crack. To keep pace with the growing fossil record, the number of disasters had to keep multiplying. “God knows how many catastrophes” would be needed, Lyell scoffed, poking fun at the whole endeavor. Lyell’s solution was to reject catastrophe altogether. In Lyell’s—and later Darwin’s—formulation, extinction was a lonely affair. Each species that had vanished had shuffled off all on its own, a victim of the “struggle for life” and its own defects as a “less improved form.”

The uniformitarian account of extinction held up for more than a century. Then, with the discovery of the iridium layer, science faced another crisis. (According to one historian, the Alvarezes’ work was “as explosive for science as an impact would have been for earth.”) The impact hypothesis dealt with a single moment in time—a terrible, horrible, no-good day at the end of the Cretaceous. But that single moment was enough to crack the framework of Lyell and Darwin. Catastrophes did happen. What is sometimes labeled neocatastrophism, but is mostly nowadays just regarded as standard geology, holds that conditions on earth change only very slowly, except when they don’t. In this sense the reigning paradigm is neither Cuvierian nor Darwinian but combines key elements of both—“long periods of boredom interrupted occasionally by panic.” Though rare, these moments of panic are disproportionately important. They determine the pattern of extinction, which is to say, the pattern of life....

Obviously, the fate of our own species concerns us disproportionately. But at the risk of sounding anti-human—some of my best friends are humans!—I will say that it is not, in the end, what’s most worth attending to. Right now, in the amazing moment that to us counts as the present, we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will
forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy. The Sixth Extinction will continue to determine the course of life long after everything people have written and painted and built has been ground into dust and giant rats have—or have not—inherited the earth.
Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

by Wendell Berry
(1934–)

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.
So, friends, every day do something
that won’t compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus

Listen to carrion—put your ear close, and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come. Expect the end of the world. Laugh.

Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts. So long as women do not go cheap for power, please women more than men. Ask yourself: Will this satisfy a woman satisfied to bear a child? Will this disturb the sleep of a woman near to giving birth? Go with your love to the fields.

Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head in her lap. Swear allegiance to what is nighest your thoughts. As soon as the generals and the politicos can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail, the way you didn’t go. Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction.

Practice resurrection.
Didier Massard, *Le Sphinx (Sphinx)*, 1996
Guiding Questions

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

Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*
- Do you think of suffering as a training ground or a refining fire? What are the strengths and limitations of these metaphors from Exodus?
- How are we to understand the story of Moses killing the taskmaster?
- Walzer contrasts Moses’ action with the inaction of the elders. Why do some revolt and others don’t?
- In what ways does the Exodus story shape our own understanding of politics?

Yasmine El Rashidi, “Cairo, City in Waiting”
- When do revolutions begin?
- What experiences does El Rashidi document? Do you see yourself in any of those experiences?
- Was what happened in Cairo a revolution?
- What allows or prevents a revolution from enduring?

Elizabeth Kolbert, “Welcome to the Anthropocene”
- What is the experiment? How do you respond to disruptive information?
- What is a paradigm shift? Have you ever had a paradigm shift in your own thinking?
- Kolbert highlights the environmental and evolutionary implications of human action. Are we destined to a revolution or a renewal in our relationship to nature?
- “We are deciding…which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed.” Is this true for society as well as the environment? What social and ethical pathways are being determined at the moment?

Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”
- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- What parts of the poem’s advice do you want to heed? What advice makes you uncomfortable?
- What does the last line mean for you?

Didier Massard, *Le Sphinx (Sphinx)*, 1996
- Set a timer and look at the image for 3 minutes: What do you see? What feelings does the image evoke?
- Is the image one of decline or renewal? Of power or weakness?
- What does the image suggest about the intersection of time and space?

General questions for the week
- Are we (you, society) in a period of revolution or renewal?
- Against what are you inclined to rebel?
- Must there be a revolution for renewal to occur?
- What has your allegiance?
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)

Some helpful tips to keep the conversation going:

- “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?”
Connected Learning in a Time of Confinement

Notes