

2018 Week 13: The Week Ending Saturday, March 31st

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

For breakfast: bulletproof tea to start. I wanted to use up some of the Birch Benders gluten-free pancake mix, which we didn't find nearly as tasty as the Kodiak Cakes mix. But it turns out if you add frozen blueberries to it, they are pretty good! Then top it off with a couple of fried eggs, and that's a pretty good breakfast. The glycemic index isn't too bad since the main ingredients are cassava flour, coconut flour, and almond flour. And it's dairy-free, while the Kodiak mix isn't.

Afternoon: got a little writing done, including organizing some articles to talk about in the podcast. Busted open the new box of printer paper from Costco and finally I can print, although the printer drum is all screwed up and it really needs a new one (but they are expensive).

I got a check from E*TRADE: the account I had for years to receive a small monthly annuity payment from my mother's estate, over the course of the last ten years, is now closed and I took out the last of the money. It's \$134.70. That will probably go towards paying off the laptop I'm using for writing.

Recording the Pottscast

Grace and I recorded the podcast. It didn't go too badly, although I've been tired and feeling stressed. I wound up doing most of the talking on this show since I picked out the "lightning round" topics and had a little more time to highlight bits to talk about. Just as I was finishing up, I realized that I had forgotten a big topic that I had wanted to talk about. I wanted to talk about the start of the Iraq war 15 years ago, and quote some of my blog posts from that time.

The kids were not really ready to drive to Mass, despite laying out the schedule very clearly; most of them were in the car but Benjamin was still in the house, two were lacking coats, etc. So we were late to Mass again. At Mass, we sat in the vestibule and several of them were really on their absolute worst behavior. It was appalling. It was so bad that afterwards I was not willing to take them to a restaurant. So we ran an errand, dropping off some food for Grace's friend.

While she was doing that, I sat with the kids in the car and they spent 15 minutes screaming. Their behavior was just horrible on Sunday. I think this may have to do with what they've been eating. Not that they never fight or yell in a normal day, but this was off the charts.

We drove around for a while, while Grace and I engaged in a low-key argument about plans and expenses and the kids. We finally made them wait in the car while we got some takeout food from Haifa Falafel. The food was OK, but only mediocre. They are more of a chicken shawarma sandwich lunch place than a dinner place.

After we got home and ate our takeout, Grace joined me in the basement studio for about 30 minutes and I read some of my blog posts from March 2003. Then she went back up to get the kids on to bed and I started working on producing the show. I used backing music from my old song "Leaving Ann Arbor," which gave me a chance to listen to the tracks again. I can tell that I was rushed, because there are some parts where I had to reuse clips of ukulele and guitar, and they aren't quite the best. But that was just the nature of trying to write and record the whole thing in just a few days: you have to lay something down, get it as good as you can in those few hours, and then just move on. But at the risk of bragging, I'm still really impressed with some of the sounds I achieved. The vocal parts, heavily pitch-corrected, sound pretty bad. But the bass, guitar, and ukulele hit some really nice moments, when they blend.

I exported a backing track without vocals, but realized I should have also muted the kazoo at the end. With the kazoo, I had to start the clip I used for the podcast outro after the kazoo ended, which left very little time. It's something I would have liked to fix, but it was already almost midnight and I had to get the thing uploaded. I finished it all up about a quarter to one. I realized also that I had left off links to the old blog posts. That, at least, I can fix pretty easily. If I get a little quiet time, or can steal it, I will fix the outro music to use a longer clip.

Monday

I was pretty exhausted last night and so did not get out the door until about ten minutes to nine. I didn't make tea for Grace or eat anything. I'm not feeling great today. But I did manage to bring a container of leftover Indian food, which Grace was kind enough to pack up for me last night while I was finishing up the podcast. So I've got that going for me. I might take a trip to Meijer at lunch to deposit the check from E*TRADE.

Dinner was stuffed peppers and salad. The cleanup took so long that we didn't have time to watch a video or have a story. Before bed Grace trimmed my beard and mustache so I no longer look quite so much like Karl Marx.

I posted a "retroblog" post — one of my 2003 posts about the start of the Iraq war. Many of the original links were broken, but between Google and the

Internet Archive I managed to find replacements for most of them, which I put in footnotes. Some seem to be just gone. The URLs were just article numbers in some cases and I don't always have even a title and author to search on, in the hopes that the original article lives on at a new address. But still, it's encouraging to be able to find most of the linked articles. It's interesting to look back at just how much, and what, I was reading in 2003. Not all of it was online; I had shelf-feet of books, and magazines, and a lot of audio interviews. Unfortunately I have long since thrown out most of it for space. It would be neat if I had put the whole archive in boxes and been able to keep it like a time capsule.

Tuesday

Breakfast was a bulletproof tea Grace made for me. I had the last of the almond butter biscuits and I'm eating a little Barbacoa Sabor beef jerky. For lunch I have half of my leftover curry from yesterday. Today at work I have my annual review. I'm a little jittery about that. Months of illness haven't helped anything. I'm supposed to come up with notes and my mind is pretty much a blank.

Grace and I will go to a talk on campus tonight. It's so easy if you live there, and so hard if you have to drive in.

Update: my boss rescheduled my annual review. I'm all caffeinated and prepped and feeling like I need to take a walk around the block.

Wednesday

***Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* by Elizabeth Anderson**

Last night Grace drove out to meet me after work and then she drove us over to central campus to attend a talk by Prof. Elizabeth Anderson. Her topic was "private governments" in the workplace. I found her thinking on government and workplace to be fresh and interesting. It was a good talk. On the subject of prescriptions to increase workplace democracy, things get a bit difficult and complicated. This shouldn't be surprising; there's a lot of "path dependency" and there are some pretty hard boundaries on just how far a system will allow itself to be changed by working within it. I took a few pages of notes. I think we'll probably be talking about the talk on our podcast. She mentioned that she's been a guest on other podcasts, so if we can come up with some good questions, or read her book, maybe we'll invite her on ours and see if we can explore some of her ideas further.

After the talk we got dinner at Carlyle's, so I have some leftover pizza today. It's a pretty odd pizza: a "chef's special," made with Thousand Island dressing, sauerkraut, and corned beef. It normally comes with swiss cheese and that sounded very tasty, but I didn't want to be reacting to dairy. Grace got their poutine, made with braised short ribs and a fried egg, but she had them hold

the cheese curds. Both were quite tasty. I had a pint of Newcastle brown ale to go with it, and it was just about perfect.

When we got home, the kids had eaten dinner but not bothered to put away any food or finish cleaning up the kitchen, because they were so obsessed with spending time on the computer. So they ignored Benjamin when he sat at the leftover chicken pot pie and picked off all the crust. They left it out, and also left out the leftover stuffed peppers. Those had been sitting out so long that I had to throw them away for fear of giving people food poisoning. So at 10 p.m. or so I had to do a round of kitchen cleanup before I could get on to bed. It's disheartening, and wasting food is, to me, something more than just wasteful or obnoxious; I think of it as "sin," and I give my children sermons about this particular sin all the time. So part of my frustration is that the kids don't seem to have internalized this value. Or, maybe they just care about Scratch more.

I got up and out and had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café and got to work about 9:20. Today I have my rescheduled review.

The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump, Continued

I have read a little bit more of *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* and I have a few more thoughts on the book so far. The first is that this really isn't a book. At least, it isn't really a *monograph*. The authors feel, and rightfully so, constrained by the Goldwater rule, and so the professionals can't really offer diagnoses of our 45th president. And I don't believe they really had enough information to do so; in my view it's difficult to tell where 45 the person ends and 45 the reality-show star begins; how much is personality, and how much is persona?

The book is well-padded with tall line spacing and pages of footnotes after each chapter, so it's a pretty quick read. The chapters so far are more interesting for what they say that *isn't* all about 45. I've mentioned the first chapter, that talks about time perspective theory. The second chapter talks about the history of the Nixon administration. Nothing in it was really new to me, although it might be of interest to people who are younger or who know less about that famous presidency. The third chapter is by the ghost writer of *The Art of the Deal* and it's also pretty slight, as far as surprising new insights offered.

So, I think this book might be of interest, and even of value, to people who are younger than me, or who have spent little time reading and thinking about politics and psychology. But if you're already a political news junkie or know much about the history of recent presidents, I think you'll find this to be pretty lightweight: not a monograph, not very deep. But I'll continue reading, since this is a compilation. Maybe there are some essays later which are insightful enough to cause me to revise my opinion of the whole book upward. But I think that's unlikely.

***False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Rodham Clinton* Edited by Liza Featherstone**

I think I may have failed to mention one of the books I've drawn on repeatedly in recent months: *False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Rodham Clinton*, edited by Liza Featherstone. This is (obviously) a polemical book, a collection of essays written before the election by a number of feminist writers with quite different perspectives on Hillary Clinton. Different, but critical.

There's an review (and discussion with the editor and contributors) in *Current Affairs* here. In it, Margaret Corvid says:

In my own circles I have a lot of liberal friends, people who are saying to vote for Hillary and are extremely excited about this — representation is important to them. But I think the focus on representation is even worse than nothing at all because it closes out opportunities for us to say that feminism is about something more than representation. It's about systemic structural change that gives women from all areas, races, classes and nationalities more opportunities to be safe, more opportunities to have a good life and have their human rights respected. And so you can talk about Hillary being the first woman as a major nominee, but besides her gender, nearly everything else is against women.

She's talking about what Grace calls the “cynical abuse of identity politics” — identity as a cudgel to force voters to fall in line because of her identities and the identitarian ideas she promotes, while her actual policies and record were completely discordant with these ideals. It's real, and people all across the political spectrum felt this way about Clinton. And so Democrats who didn't vote for her are blamed for Trump, but I still believe it makes more sense to blame Democrats who refused to nominate Sanders.

You can find the publisher's page on the book [here](#).

I have not read the book from front to back or given a full review, in part because I just don't think of it as that kind of book. I think of it as a resource to dip into, a source of critical ideas on Clinton and Clintonism and neoliberalism, organized roughly by issue (for example, the carceral state, abortion rights, etc.) So I've been more interested in some of the contributions, and less interested in others. But I think all the contributions are worth reading and in general this book is more challenging, better grounded in matters of actual public record and policy, and a more worthy addition to the discourse, than *The Dangerous Case*.

Both books run the risk of dating badly, but I think *False Choices* makes a better case for relevance because the centrist-feminist-Democrat movement, aka “Clintonism,” doesn't seem to require Clinton, while whether “Trumpism” is even a coherent thing still, I think, remains to be seen. I don't think it is; sheer narcissism and unpredictability doesn't amount to a school of thought or policy, and corporatism behind different veneers is already the order of the day.

Thursday

Grace is down with a cold and Sam is apparently getting it too, so the family did not go out for Maundy Thursday Mass and our plans for Easter dinner and Easter Mass are hanging by a thread.

I have been feeling just a bit like I am fighting a virus, too, although it isn't too bad.

I stopped at Arbor Farms to buy some different kinds soup, and we had soup for dinner despite a refrigerator full of leftovers. It's getting colder and it is supposed to stay colder for several days. The predicted low next Wednesday, April 4th, is 21 degrees.

I lounged around with Grace and Elanor and watched music videos on my iPad and talked about covers. For example, "The Ghost in You," with covers by BT and Robyn Hitchcock. And what it would take to play a cover of a song and then incorporate it into a podcast episode. I know what sites I would use to pay the appropriate license fees, but I don't yet know what the cost would be for one song.

Part of the difficulty is that I have to estimate downloads. I don't really track podcast downloads. YouTube shows a play count, for all 31 current episodes in video form, of 129. A few of those plays are probably me. As for the MP3 files from our DreamHost server — well, I just tried to view site statistics, and couldn't even log in, so I'll have to play with that. I don't know what they currently offer.

***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 1: "A Long Expected Party"**

After dragging the kids all into the room and trying to get them to stop arguing and running around, I read them the first half of the first chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Of course I have read this several times before, and they are very familiar with the Peter Jackson film trilogy, but I have never tried reading the whole 6-book, 3-volume novel to the kids from beginning to end. Chapter 1 of *The Hobbit* is called "An Unexpected Party." Chapter 1 of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is called "A Long Expected Party."

Parallels Between Frodo and Gollum

We talked about the carefully constructed parallels between *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I had not, I think, previously noticed Tolkien's elaborate construction of parallels between Frodo and Gollum, going back to this very first chapter.

Consider: we learn that both Frodo and Gollum's lives were changed by murders, or at least alleged murders; both were exiled in different ways, both spent years in maze-like warrens, and of course both held the One Ring.

Frodo's parents, Drogo Baggins and Primula Brandybuck, are thought to have drowned in a boating accident, although Sandyman the miller says, of the accident, "...I heard she pushed him in, and he pulled her in after him." Hamfast Gamgee (the Gaffer) reminds the hobbits that "boats are quite tricky enough for those that sit still without looking further for the cause of trouble," but it's likely that in the community, the rumor of murder was the thing that traveled far and wide while the truth was still putting its boots on.

So, we are primed to consider that there *might* be a murder in Frodo's past. This sets up a One Ring-shaped hole in his life. And later we learn of the "cause of trouble" in Sméagol's own "boating accident." It was of course the Ring, found by Déagol, which led Sméagol to murder Deagol, a primal Cain and Abel-style jealousy killing which led to Sméagol's expulsion from his community. And of course Sméagol eventually found refuge in the caves beneath the Misty Mountains, living in secret among the Orcs.

We learn that Frodo was raised as an orphan in Brandy Hall:

...there was this Mr. Frodo left an orphan and stranded, as you might say, among those queer Bucklanders, being brought up anyhow in Brandy Hall. A regular warren, by all accounts. Old Master Gorbodoc never had fewer than a couple of hundred relations in the place. Mr. Bilbo never did a kinder deed than when he brought the lad back to live among decent folk.

So both Frodo and Gollum's lives were profoundly changed by an excursion in a boat, and a murder (or at least a suggested murder); they both spent years in "warrens," one full of orcs, one full of hobbits; and Bilbo is responsible for changing the direction of both their lives. Gollum and Frodo are both ringbearers, with Bilbo in between; Bilbo is able to give up the Ring, but it continues to drive the fates of both Gollum and Frodo.

Later in the story Gollum will secretly at first, but then not-so-secretly, accompany the Fellowship as they travel with the Ring, and eventually Frodo and Sam will meet Gollum; Frodo will offer him what pity, mercy, and even kindness he can along the journey, even if that kindness is severely limited by the circumstances, paying forward Bilbo's kindness to *him*.

This is set up in the Mines of Moria when Gandalf admonishes Frodo that it was Bilbo's pity and mercy that "stayed his hand" and led him *not* to kill Gollum when he had the opportunity. And so, later, thinking of Bilbo's tale, and what he learned of Gollum's past in Rivendell, Frodo may see in Gollum a dim reflection of his younger self, who was isolated and "stranded" in the "warren" of Brandy Hall, and then led into a different life. Although, I imagine, Frodo remembers his years in Brandy Hall much more warmly than Gollum remembers his time in the lightless caverns under the Misty Mountain.

And then of course there's the ironic setup for Samwise. The gaffer goes on:

'Elves and Dragons! I says to him. *Cabbages and potatoes are better*

for me and you. Don't go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you'll land in trouble too big for you, I says to him. And I might say it to others,' he added with a look at the stranger and the miller.

“Getting mixed up in the business of [his] betters” is, of course, exactly what Sam does, when he eavesdrops on the conversation between Gandalf and Frodo.

A Visitor on Business from Michel Delving in the Westfarthing

Who is the stranger, described as “a visitor on business from Michel Delving in the Westfarthing?” I think this hobbit may be on an errand to return Bilbo’s *mithril* mail shirt, loaned to the Michel Delving Mathom-house (museum). Later in the book, in Rivendell, Bilbo shows Frodo:

...a parcel which seemed to be rather heavy for its size. He unwound several folds of old cloth, and held up a small shirt of mail. It was close-woven of many rings, as supple almost as linen, cold as ice, and harder than steel. It shone like moonlit silver, and was studded with white gems. With it was a belt of pearl and crystal.

Bilbo tells Frodo:

I got it back from Michel Delving before I started, and packed it with my luggage: I brought all the mementoes of my Journey away with me, except the Ring.

So that’s my theory: the stranger from Michel Delving is in Hobbiton to return Bilbo’s “mementoes.” But I admit there’s not much detail in the text to support it. The text is in fact full of loose ends like this, that aren’t entirely tied up. This is part of the way Tolkien gives the impression that we are in the midst of a convincing world. Later, Sam will report that the Gaffer was talking to a “stranger” who has “come up the Hill.” *That* stranger might be part of Bill Ferny’s network of informants, or he might not. We just aren’t sure.

Friday

I woke up feeling, still, a bit like I might be fighting a virus, but I was not obviously feverish and not coughing or sneezing, so I went to work anyway. I might make it a short day. I got paid, and I have to make a trip to Costco tonight, and that’s about it.

LabVIEW

At work, I’m trying to get up to speed with LabVIEW. I had some training in LabVIEW back when I worked briefly at Dow in Midland, but I didn’t wind up using it for a real project, and so don’t consider myself an expert. And now I’m trying to patch up a legacy program written in LabVIEW 6, which makes elaborate use of a database. It’s not working and I’m being reminded of why

I don't really like LabVIEW very much. The visual paradigm is cool. I can imagine that it might be a nice way to learn programming. It's a quick and effective way to build user interfaces. But the paradigm becomes pretty unwieldy when you are working with large programs that use a lot of library calls.

It's as if you were writing a Pascal program with every function in a separate file. You can set breakpoints, but it's hard to *see* what is happening; you have to probe each "wire" to see what data is arriving on that wire, the equivalent of which parameters are being passed to a function. And the "call stack" (or hierarchy of "virtual instruments") can get quite complex. Threading error-checking through every call level is just as awkward in LabVIEW as it is in a language like Pascal or C. There's no equivalent of exception-handling or "maybe" monads; everything must be explicitly built in to the code that's in your face as you debug. And in 2018 you still can't zoom in on the diagrammatic representation of a VI. I'm staring at tiny dots, and icons with text drawn on them to label sub-VIs.

It's honestly pretty ridiculous that this is still the LabVIEW state-of-the-art. But I suppose people could say that about my use of C as well.

Tonight I went to Costco after work and spent \$264.08 on groceries. That included a Blu-Ray, *The Last Jedi*, which the kids are watching now, and a set of books by Roald Dahl, 15 paperback volumes for \$25.00. Dinner was salmon, some of the new Lundgren organic short-grain brown rice, and a salad kit that includes baby kale and shredded brussels sprouts. Very good. With the rice, I added cashews and sriracha, which is the best way to eat brown rice ever invented.

Grace is still fighting a nasty cold, so she's taking a long soak in the bathtub. It sounds like we probably are canceling our Easter plans, at least most of them.

I brought my acoustic guitar up from the basement and tuned it up and I'm working on Billy Bragg's song "Between the Wars." The transcriptions I've seen are in G, but it sounds like he plays it with a capo way up at the 7th fret, which would bring it up to D. I think it works a little better with my voice if I put the capo on the 5th fret, which puts it in C. But I'm still experimenting. I can still finger these basic chords pretty well, but my fingertips are very soft, so they are getting sore quickly.

I ate all the rest of the salad, which no one else seemed to want to finish.

Saturday

I made breakfast: bacon, hash browns, pancakes, tea. Grace and a couple of the kids are still sick. Joshua's feverish. Grace canceled all of our Easter plans. So we've had a very low-key day. More guitar practice. This evening I'll be trying to come up with a podcast topic, although I'm not sure if we are going to get it recorded in the studio. If Grace is not up to it, I might just bring a portable recorder upstairs, and we can sit in bed and talk. We'll see.

Books, Music, Movies, and TV Shows Discussed This Week

This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.

- *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* by Elizabeth Anderson
- *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President* by Bandy X. Lee et al.
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 1: “A Long Expected Party”
- *False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Rodham Clinton*, edited by Liza Featherstone

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

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