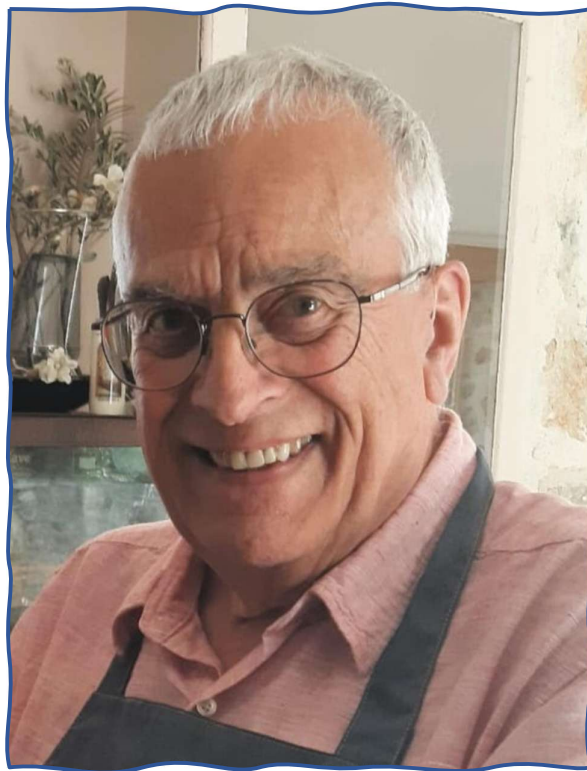


# **An Economist's Pithy Personal Prejudices**

**Apt Aphorisms in Various Forms on Various Topics**



**Anthony Culyer**

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## Why aphorisms?

Aphorisms (apophthegms is harder to pronounce) are pithy assertions, *dicta*, preferably memorable, that should provoke thought, but without engaging in dialogue, and that may amuse. They encapsulate a single thought. They sometimes employ linguistic schemes like assonance, paradox, alliteration, hyperbole, rhyme and spoonerism, and usually exploit the rhythmic possibilities of a language. The best aphorisms play with layers of meaning—simple at first glance but rewarding for those who dig a little deeper. Some are antiproverbs. Many intend to surprise. Some are designed even to shock. Most have a serious message to impart. Others may offer a whimsical angle on a serious topic or be explicitly educational. Yet others are light-hearted fragments of ideas. All are uttered with the relentlessly confident air of an unwarranted authority. A collection of aphorisms should be sampled like a collection of *amuse-bouches*: it doesn't include the main course.

ooOoo

Aphorisms do not abound in the work of economists, with notable exceptions like Milton Friedman ("If you put the federal government in charge of the Sahara Desert, in 5 years there'd be a shortage of sand"), Paul Samuelson ("Chicago's not so much a place as a state of mind"), Robert G Evans ("The tunnel at the end of the light", "The deception that rules the proof"), Alan Williams ("Cost-effectiveness analysis is an aid to thought not a substitute for it"), or Jack Wiseman ("What is the question? *That* is the answer!"). Nor are village organists famed for their aphoristic ambition. What follows is intended to make good these deficiencies. Most are about economics and economists but I have included some that apply elsewhere, not least to village organists, at least as well as they do to economics and economists. I have arranged them in groups which are, however, like the term 'aphorism' itself, far from watertight.

ooOoo

To explain any aphorism resembles explaining jokes to the uncomprehending, which always spoils the joke. I therefore refrain from any elaboration. To say it again, the idea is to provoke thought. Aphorisms may also provoke speculation about the reasoning that led the author to compose them in the first place. They may provoke mild or even major disagreement. They may provide useful mnemonics for students. They may, if I'm lucky, invoke "well said!", "spot on!" or "hear, hear!" Or they may simply puzzle one (work on it!). Best of all, they may provoke a smile. All such reactions are grist to my mill.

ooOoo

So far as I dare admit, these are all original, though subconscious borrowings can never be fully ruled out.

ooOoo



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# General

“The pen is mightier than the sword” – unfounded, ungrounded, unbounded optimism.

ooOoo

All generalisations are true save one; this is it.

ooOoo

Aphorisms are usually true, roughly speaking.

ooOoo

No true aphorism is a platitude.

ooOoo

Most authoritative assertions lack authority.

ooOoo

Analysis depends on making careful distinctions, which requires in turn the careful use of language.

ooOoo

If you poke most jokes diligently, you will reveal a concealed sliver of wisdom.

It's not whether the planet will survive. It will. We won't.

ooOoo

Dry land, fresh water, an equable climate: the ultimate diminishing necessities to fight and kill one another for.

ooOoo

Buying a house? Avoid low land.

ooOoo

There's not enough high ground for all of us.

ooOoo

Jargon's like a sphincter: it stops outsiders coming in while letting insiders pass out.

ooOoo

Good's good, better's better, but best's only as good as you *can* be.

ooOoo

Whoever stands for nothing will brown-nose for anything.

ooOoo

Freedom of speech is less about *what* you say than about *whose property* you're saying it on.

Why should speech be free?

ooOoo

Shout as loud and as often and as misleadingly and as poorly informed and as wrongly as you like. I will never ban your speaking (save in my house) but you must expect loud and frequent and well-aimed and possibly embarrassing rebuttals.

ooOoo

Give, don't take, yourself seriously.

ooOoo

Give, don't take, advantage.

ooOoo

Universities are the soil in which even small thoughts can be sown and grow. Till it.

ooOoo

Advertising your virtues lacks virtue.

ooOoo

Only the spectacularly successful should affect modesty.

To avoid future academic failure expose yourself early to friendly fire.

ooOoo

A well-chosen conceit does not deceive.

ooOoo

There's depth in legends.

ooOoo

Something for the overheated BBQ – mist for my grill.

ooOoo

Healthy laughter refreshes everything; weaponised laughter deadens all.

ooOoo

Hope's often the needless rejection of rational expectation.

ooOoo

A reasoned expectation enables reasonable hope.

ooOoo

Faith is abandoned reasonable expectation.

Sensible hoping enables sensible coping.

ooOoo

Never stack another's dishwasher.

ooOoo

Does 'there is no muster' pass muster?

ooOoo

I like to think I might risk dying if it were an effective means of saving a life or some lives, but never for an idea, mine or anyone else's, which will probably be wrong.

ooOoo

Is living worth dying for?

ooOoo

Patriots all: dying for your country by killing people like you who are dying for theirs?

ooOoo

To earn respect, first learn what it is. Never seek it directly.

Many interviewers betray their stupidity by the nature of the questions they throw at you. Resist the temptation to show your contempt.

ooOoo

Witty talk's not much to hide behind.

ooOoo

Every silver lining has a cloud.

ooOoo

Someone else has surely already said this.

ooOoo

Better a thorn in someone's side than a pain in their arse.

ooOoo

The academic manager can do only two things: hire the one with fanaticism in their eye and give them the freedom to assuage their curiosity. Resources and salary come a poor third.

ooOoo

Don't encourage the ~~brass~~ crass.

ooOoo

Selling academic ideas is not the same as telling the truth; and royalties are not the measure of it.

Inter-disciplinary research is much too important to be left to those who have failed in the mainstream. So is multi-disciplinary research.

ooOoo

Setting the highest standards guarantees failure – but they are vital to measure your shortfall.

ooOoo

One's failure to be consistently outstanding does not absolve one from having a tough criterion for judging how outstanding one is.

ooOoo

Your voice will never be heard: it's too small, or anonymous, or absent.

ooOoo

Be analytical. Make careful distinctions. Don't be like Mark Twain's cat. She sat on a hot stove lid. She never sat on a hot stove lid again – but neither would she sit on a cold one.

ooOoo

Becoming curious about boredom's an antidote to boredom.

ooOoo

The bashful bully: full of bash.

If it's worth doing, it's worth doing as well as is required.

oooOooo

# Economists and Economics

There are three kinds of economist: those who can count and those who can't.

ooOoo

Economics is a difficult subject. So are economists.

ooOoo

Bad distinctions and rotten definitions: "Economics is defined as the branch of knowledge that deals with all the economic aspects of human lives, how goods and services are produced and manufactured, distributed and consumed. Sociology on the other hand basically deals with the social lives of human beings cultural, legal, and political aspects of human lives and the social interaction and relationship involved within it."

ooOoo

The first lesson of economics is scarcity: there is never enough of anything to satisfy all wants fully.  
The second lesson of economics is abundance: there is a numberless multitude not getting the implications of the first lesson.

ooOoo

Learning economics protects you against economists.

ooOoo

Economics provides a language for stating the various states of various states.

Economics is about more than the economy and the economy is usefully studied by more folks than economists.

ooOoo

Economics is not for the slow-witted.

ooOoo

Few economists try not to be boring; the few that do, fail.

ooOoo

If your research requires econometrics, team up with an econometrician.

ooOoo

Economics *can* make a dismal world smile.

ooOoo

Economics is a jolly subject about how to make lives worth living.

ooOoo

Economics is both a topic<sup>1</sup> and a discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> As when 'the economy' = 'economics'.

The only important questions for economists are: why? what if? and how? The first generates understanding, the second enables prediction and the third separates the feasible from the fanciful.

ooOoo

The complete economist understands much more than is to be found in 'the economy'.

ooOoo

Too much economics is written only for economists.

ooOoo

Too much economics is written by non-economists.

ooOoo

Popularised economics is usually a monstrous travesty.

ooOoo

The market's a phenomenon to be understood, not idolised.

ooOoo

The market has its uses.

ooOoo

The market has its abuses.

Economics explains trivia better than clairvoyance.

ooOoo

Australians drink higher-quality Californian wine than Californians, and vice versa, because for each high-quality wine consumed abroad is relatively cheaper thanks to transportation and tax expenses, which are of course the same for high as for low quality wine.  $P_H/P_L > (P_H+T)/(P_L+T)$ .

Straightforward demand theory!

ooOoo

Not all brilliant economists have brilliant political views.

ooOoo

You don't have to be right-wing to acknowledge the social value of markets.

ooOoo

Folks with attractive political views can usually make their views even more attractive with a decent understanding of basic economics.

ooOoo

Trading off is not about compromising, it's about making the best of everything.

ooOoo

The 'law of demand' has countless unexpected trivial implications, including the prediction that couples with children go to a restaurant rather than a pub relatively frequently compared with childless couples. Straightforward demand theory again!

When does a price rise become inflation?

ooOoo

Wise economists do not pretend to predict the unpredictable.

ooOoo

Paradox resolved: water, which is essential to life, is everywhere cheaper than diamonds, which are not. Why cheaper? Market values reveal marginal value in exchange, rarely do they reveal the full value in use. In this instance, the value of diamonds in exchange is much closer to their value in use than the (marginal) value of water in exchange is to its value in use.

ooOoo

Getting the right decision when the necessary data are not available requires intelligent guesswork informed by clear analysis. Helpless hand-waving is never right.

ooOoo

I met Milton Friedman only once. He won.

ooOoo

Gary Becker left Chicago for Columbia, thereby raising the average quality of both departments.  
Harry Johnson's judgment of the future Nobel Prize winner.

ooOoo

An economist will, on average, give you a better opinion than your taxi driver or your barber.

The theory of public goods, properly understood, complements the theory of markets.

ooOoo

A public good is one whose benefits, if there are any, are necessarily shared, like street lighting, the relief of poverty, and the King.

ooOoo

Is the King a public good or a private good?

ooOoo

Is kingship a public good or a public bad?

ooOoo

You run the country's public expenditure and you have £10m. Which is better: £10m extra spent on defence, or £10m extra spent on health care, or £10m extra spent on social care, or £10m extra spent on secondary education, or £10m extra spent on affordable housing, or £10m extra spent on law and order, or ... £1m spent on each of ten such activities? (The correct answer is none of these.)

ooOoo

The awfulness of the big state is not well measured by the share of public expenditure in its gross domestic product.

ooOoo

A rich country's debt is mostly owed to itself.

Public goods like defence and roads are not of their very nature to be publicly produced and paid for, but it usually saves a lot of bother if they are.

ooOoo

All pricing systems are costly and not always worthwhile. Toll roads work best when there are few entries and exits. As entries and exits increase, the road eventually becomes like the open sea and tolls impossible.

ooOoo

Transaction costs may prevent, not merely impede, actions.

ooOoo

Some mostly private goods are often better produced publicly, like trains and health care.

ooOoo

Why should utility-maximising managers maximise profit?

ooOoo

What, specifically, must utility-maximising managers do to maximise profit?

ooOoo

Why does competition fail to destroy much managerial incompetence?

Rational indecision: how long should a manager wait until they are satisfied whether a fall/rise in demand is permanent or temporary?

ooOoo

Fallacy: fresh air in the countryside comes free. Therefore, it's without value.

ooOoo

Good economic judgment's not the prerogative of grey hairs; nor rashness that of youth.

ooOoo

The idea that consequences don't matter is a folly that can turn the fruits of every good intention into a catastrophe.

ooOoo

Consequentialists don't say that consequences are the *only* things that matter.

ooOoo

If you can't imagine possible consequences, stay out of decision-making.

ooOoo

Confusion: supply falls, so price rises, so demand falls, so price falls, so...

Your building burns down, catastrophe! Competition makes your building redundant, progress!

ooOoo

The value of property is determined by the uses to which one may and may not put it.

ooOoo

Capitalism's not really about capital; it's about private property rights, their distribution, and their exchangeability.

ooOoo

Moderate socialism can mix quite well with moderate capitalism.

ooOoo

It's not goods as such that buyers buy and sellers sell but *rights to use* things in customary or legally specified ways.

ooOoo

Who owns the right to fly over "your" house and garden? To mine below it? To blow smoke over it? To keep it free of neighbours' pets and their faeces? To hunt foxes and shoot pheasants on it? To paint it a garish colour? To build an extension? To be a noisy neighbour?

ooOoo

Property rights define how property *may* be used; markets define how it *will* be used.

Do you have the right to be annoying or I not to be annoyed? Does it matter which? What does the Coase Theorem tell us?

ooOoo

Fallacy: the number of houses bought and sold in any year is a tiny fraction of the number in existence so, regarding house prices, the tail (of traders) wags the dog (of owners).

ooOoo

It's amazing what you can do with supply and demand curves – so long as you understand what each is and what it is you're doing with them.

ooOoo

Economists generally mean well.

ooOoo

Show respect for aged economists: they've likely forgotten more economics than you've ever learned.

ooOoo

Economists are scary, always be wary. Doing battle on your own ground, most have found, is bound to be less hairy.

ooOoo

Economics has a Euclidian completeness, that's its beauty. Reality is unfinished business, that's its.

Beware of wealthy economists, their souls may have been sold.

ooOoo

Beware of poor economists, they're probably no good at anything else either.

ooOoo

Most economists make people yawn.

ooOoo

Must you like someone to trust them?

ooOoo

How long should anyone ponder before deciding?

ooOoo

Costs are not facts, available like jetsam to any diligent beachcomber.

ooOoo

A law of cost: the faster the planned change the greater the cost.

ooOoo

A law of cost: the sooner the planned change the greater the cost.

The long run can be made the short run – if you throw enough resources at it.

ooOoo

Don't take the 'long run' or 'fixed factors' literally. They're just convenient conceits recognising the truth that some factors of production take more time and resources to change than others.

ooOoo

In 1892, the 213 miles of the Great Western Railway's old broad-gauge track between Exeter and Penzance was changed to the standard narrow gauge in one weekend. 177 miles of it also had to be altered from the old longitudinal timbers to the familiar cross-sleepers. It took 4,200 platelayers to do it. So much for a 'fixed factor'!

ooOoo

Good applied economics needs vision more than description, imagination more than enumeration.

ooOoo

No one under eighteen should study economics. Cynical adolescents are not what we need.

ooOoo

TANSTAAFL – there ain't no such thing as a free lunch.  
For many there's no lunch  
of any kind  
anyway.

ooOoo

TANSTAAFM there ain't no such thing as a free market.

Free Market? Markets are very far from free – they require a detailed system of legislated private and exchangeable property rights, enforceable at law in the courts, costly mechanisms to facilitate transactions, elaborate subsystems of payments, payment collection, monitoring against fraud, and punishment.

ooOoo

The perfect market's a useful creation of the rational imagination. It isn't reality. It isn't meant to be reality.

ooOoo

Assumptions can never be completely true: simplifications never are. But they can clear clutter away and be fit for purpose, depending on the purpose.

ooOoo

Dr Pangloss was self-evidently right. If everything were *not* for the best, someone would have thought it sufficiently worth changing to compensate any losers. They haven't, so the status quo's always Pareto-optimal. (Haha!)

ooOoo

The optimal rate of a negative externality is never zero.

ooOoo

Economic efficiency is not intrinsically good. Whether it *is* good depends on what you're being efficient *at*.

A cost-effective extermination camp is an abomination.

ooOoo

There are two circumstances in which inefficiencies are to be tolerated: when removing them is costlier than retaining them, and when one pursues conflicting objectives.

ooOoo

The more persistent a change in price the more elastic the demand and supply responses.

ooOoo

What's the "extra" in extra-welfarism? Simply this: anything or any non-thing about which the principal has a preference. It might include, for example, procedures, communications, intentions, reassurances, states of the world, and values about values. It is always contextual.

ooOoo

Economic evaluation should never be an intellectual iron cage, rather an open landscape.

ooOoo

It's scarcely surprising that cost-effectiveness analysis, conceived loosely and conducted carelessly, is not cost-effective.

ooOoo

The framework of cost-effectiveness analysis is like a battery-operated light, it brings illumination only with insertions - of context and value judgments.

Clear thinking and clear procedures are dangerous. They may expose vengeful incompetence.

ooOoo

Eliminating every last inefficiency is inefficient.

ooOoo

The most damaging simplifying assumption made by some economists is that all adjustments to changing circumstances happen instantly.

ooOoo

The biggest barrier to trade is always the absence of exchangeable and enforceable property rights.

ooOoo

Low-income countries in the South may have low average income but it doesn't follow that their economists need the patronage of economists in rich countries of the North.

ooOoo

Measuring utility's like measuring anything else: assigning numbers, ordinal or cardinal, that indicate an order.

ooOoo

Measured utility gives an order of what: willingness to pay, preference, taste, desirability, goodness, choice, satisfaction, contentment, health, welfare?

Not every important fact is statistical.

ooOoo

Maximising human satisfaction has less ethical appeal than maximising human flourishing.

ooOoo

You can't flourish without a struggle. Mere contentment signifies nothing.

ooOoo

Cost is not merely a forgone alternative; it is the *most valued* of all *feasible* forgone alternatives.

ooOoo

Cost, in economics, is not blood, sweat or tears, which are undesirable consequences. Cost is the value of the most attractive opportunity necessarily forsaken.

ooOoo

Marginal cost and marginal value are the change in the cost or value of a change in the rate or date of an activity, or the size of a stock of something, like homes, horses or health, at a date.

ooOoo

Not all margins are small.

Not all unforeseen consequences were unforeseeable.

ooOoo

Not all unexpected outcomes are unforeseeable.

ooOoo

Without imagination, nothing is foreseeable.

ooOoo

What's feasible for a decision-maker depends on context: their position in a hierarchy, the rules that bind them, the information available to them, the discretion allowed them, and relevant law and custom.

ooOoo

That scientific evidence is generally context-free is at once a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that most confounding effects will have been removed so conclusions based on this evidence will have wide application. The curse is that those same confounding effects may be critical factors in any specific decision context and so need additional empirical investigation.

ooOoo

Scientific evidence, including economic evidence, is rarely complete, rarely completely devoid of controversy, and is never sufficient even if complete and uncontroversial.

ooOoo

Changing the decision *context* changes consequences and thereby changes both opportunity costs and benefits.

The right answer always depends on the context – as well as the arithmetic.

ooOoo

The 'Nanny State'? Why slight nannies so?

ooOoo

Nanny knows best. Sometimes so does a democratic State.

ooOoo

Whose perspective should cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses adopt? In a representative democracy it is, of course, that of the representatives, or the representatives of the representatives, or the representatives of the representatives of the representatives. It should never be that of the analysts.

ooOoo

Economists, like other experts, are in general no more expert than anyone else at making, as distinct from identifying, value judgements.

ooOoo

Experts often pontificate on matters well outside their field of expertise. It's criminal that others rarely see through such pretensions.

ooOoo

Falsified predictions generate better theory.

Take pride in modesty.

ooOoo

Our most-to-be-hoped-for fate is to be taken for granted.

ooOoo

Your name may not be in the explicit list of authors at the back of the book but your work's probably implicit in many of the preceding pages. Take pride in anonymity.

ooOoo

Economists' academic morality consists chiefly in humility – offering no more to policy making than the elucidation of ends, the analysis of means, and the unpacking of difficult and polysemic ideas (but this is already quite a lot).

ooOoo

Economists, like Keynes' dentist, have a lot to be humble about. So do scientists and philosophers.

ooOoo

Advocating particular values is any person's right but it's not what any person qua economist ought to do (unless it's the value judgment embodied in this very assertion). Analyse yes, advocate no.

ooOoo

Good music, poetry, painting, sculpture – all last for ever; good economics is evanescent and only sometimes is it replaced by even better economics.

Economics works best in conjunction with other complementary disciplines.

ooOoo

There's much mileage in the idea that a little more of something of which you already have lots is probably not worth having.

ooOoo

To be a nice man and a creative practitioner of one's art – how higher might one aim? [prompted by the death of World Bank economist Adam Wagstaff]

ooOoo

It's been unfairly said that economists can prove anything with a wide enough piece of chalk.

ooOoo

Economics as a discipline is about much more than the economy.

ooOoo

Financial affairs are all economic but not all economic affairs are financial.

ooOoo

The economy as a topic's not there just for economists to mess with.

Too many economists are like jugglers – with equations for clubs. Clique entertainment for a clique.

ooOoo

The demise of economic geometry has diminished economic imagination.

ooOoo

He (anon) has the mind of an economist without the econo.

ooOoo

Poetical economics is economics beautifully crafted.

ooOoo

Political Economy's a great topic; Poetical Economy's even greater.

ooOoo

Few these days care for political economy. As for poetical economy, none do.

ooOoo

Nothing's worth achieving at *any* cost, let alone *all*!

ooOoo

Economists have never taken much interest in the history of their subject. Our destiny is for each to be forgotten. Fast!

Prepare to be forgotten.

ooOoo

Greed. Bias. Self-interest. Every bit of expenditure, public or private, total or incremental, is income for someone or other.  $E=I$ ,  $\Delta E=\Delta I$ . Remember your national accounting identities most especially when you hear impassioned advocacy for increased spending.

ooOoo

Advocacy, especially when impassioned, is usually masked self-interest.

ooOoo

Good economics hangs on the law and custom. The law and custom define the uses to property may be put and the contracts that enable exchange.

ooOoo

Voluntary contracting is the heart of a civilised society.

ooOoo

Transaction costs mean that not all contracts will be entered into.

ooOoo

Contracts often omit what's most important and specify no useful measure of compliance.

The most important characteristic of any contract is what it omits.

ooOoo

Is it greedy to want more for others?

ooOoo

Maximising utility can be selfless as well as selfish.

ooOoo

It's what's *in* your utility function, not merely that you have one, that defines you as selfish or unselfish.

ooOoo

Absence of price does not imply absence of value.

ooOoo

In international as in local trading, you may have both an absolute disadvantage and a comparative advantage.

ooOoo

The direct path in economic affairs, as in others, is usually not the right one.

Of whose time is all this a waste?

ooOoo

Economists can be dismal, economics never.

ooOoo

The best economist is always a rebel.

ooOoo

# Health and health economics

Some economists are bad for your health.

ooOoo

The early debate between "marketeers" and the "anti-marketeers" was initially centred on the question of whether health care was so very different from other goods and services that government provision and finance were necessary. The anti-marketeers said yes, emphasizing special characteristics; the marketeers attempted to show how markets could cope efficiently with each special feature in turn. However, neither side had satisfactory descriptions of the objectives of a health system. The former lacked one because in the never-never land of the perfect market, with which socialized systems of health care were usually compared, no such specification was needed: the outcomes would be whatever individuals wanted and were prepared to pay for. The anti-marketeers lacked such a description because they talked of world in which men and women of good will set about meeting the reasonable needs of their clients, avoiding such troublesome questions as the meaning of "needs," what was "reasonable," who the "clients" should be, and how such "needs" might best be met. Here, then, was an agenda for health economics.

ooOoo

The distinctive essential syllabus of Health Economics: health in the social welfare function; health as capital; the demand for health; the demand for health care; agency; supplier-induced demand; uncertainty, health insurance and the demand for care; moral hazard, adverse selection and cream skimming; professions and non-profit institutions; provider incentives and behaviour; production and pricing of pharmaceuticals; the health production function; measuring health and health gain; externality; publicness; efficiency; economic evaluation of health care technologies; determinants of population health; the health gradient; equity in health and health care. All else is either general economics, epidemiology or local description.

ooOoo

Health economics is not a special kind of economics, it's merely a special application of it.

Private finance and private provision, or private finance and public provision, or public finance and private provision, or public finance and public provision. An embarrassment of riches!

ooOoo

Learning health economics without learning economics is like learning to ride without the bike.

ooOoo

Health economics embraces two hard-to-reconcile cultures: one as a sub-speciality in economics, the other as a supplement to pharmacy or epidemiology. They have *some* things in common.

ooOoo

All health economists interested in technology evaluation should understand the difference between *sensitivity* and *specificity* in epidemiology.

ooOoo

All epidemiologists interested in technology evaluation should understand the difference between *sunk cost* and *marginal cost* in economics.

ooOoo

Mike Cooper and I were troglodytes. In those days we worked in an intellectual cave.

ooOoo

Maximising citations? Easy! Write a systematic review of the literature on a popular topic.

The most effective treatment is not automatically to be included in the publicly financed healthcare package; it must not be at the cost of alternatives that would deliver more or more fairly distributed health for the same money.

ooOoo

Why would utility-maximising health service managers seek to maximise the population's health?

ooOoo

Supposing appropriate and enforceable contracts could be designed, why not privatise the supply side of the NHS and social care?

ooOoo

A hypothecated NHS and social care share of the tax take, voted on by the public at general elections. What's not to like (setting aside self-serving objections by mandarins)?

ooOoo

Making a success of the NHS requires well-managed demand-side socialism, not supply-side socialism no matter how well-managed.

ooOoo

Ill-health can generate so many negative public externalities, physical and psychic, that health care can be treated as a quasi-public good.

ooOoo

In the early days of health economics, one had only to sneeze and they would publish it.

We need a pragmatic measure of health. I see it as a qualitative or even quantitative indicator of someone's physical and emotional capability. It's quintessentially multi-dimensional and should always be checked for acceptability in any given context.

ooOoo

There can be no right to health but there can be a right to health care.

ooOoo

As Alan Maynard used to say: "Yet another reorganisation of the NHS".

ooOoo

Screwdrivers for chisels: deforming the NHS with the wrong tools. (Of ignorant critics of the NHS)

ooOoo

A major disadvantage of charging for health care is that until there has been a diagnosis, what the patient needs is not known. A charge is a deterrent to finding out.

ooOoo

All health insurance systems must find a solution to the problem that health is, in aggregate, positively related to income, and premiums are related positively to expected demand, so those facing the highest premiums are those least able to afford them.

ooOoo

The NHS solves reasonably well the problem of how most fairly to pay for health care, but it still – and despite NICE – fails to address seriously the problem of what to include in the benefits package.

Cost-effectiveness analysis and its close relative, health technology appraisal, are both based on an often-overlooked fundamental assumption, viz. that their users are neither moral morons nor lacking in elementary critical faculties.

ooOoo

Need: the idea won't do - but we still need it.

ooOoo

Ill-health and disability are not the same as need. The need is for effective instruments to prevent or mitigate such bad things, together with their bad consequences. Ineffective instruments cannot, by definition, ever be needed (though the search for better ones may be). Investing in them wastes resources that could instead be used to employ effective ones (albeit for other people).

ooOoo

Granting fair access to ineffective medicine undermines true fairness.

ooOoo

Meeting needs is ethical only to the extent that the human states being served are themselves ethical and the means truly necessary, i.e. both effective and more effective than any alternative.

ooOoo

The NHS should provide cost-effective health care, and *only* cost-effective health care.

ooOoo

New interventions that reduce health inequalities are welcome – but only if they are cost-effective (a) at reducing the inequalities and (b) at increasing people's health.

Cost-effective medicine is needed by patients as well as by sellers.

ooOoo

Cost-ineffective medicine is needed only by sellers.

ooOoo

All medicine offered by the NHS must be effective - but so is much medicine it rightly does not offer.

ooOoo

To get medicine that's not cost-effective for the NHS go private.

ooOoo

The Secretary of State needs always to ask, "is it effective enough to be afforded?"

ooOoo

Not all effective medicine can be, or should be, afforded by the NHS.

ooOoo

Cost-effectiveness is only a necessary condition for the NHS to offer a benefit.

ooOoo

The question for NICE: if the NHS spends on something new, what is displaced?

Does it matter *who* gains and *who* loses from NICE's decisions (even if one lot is invisible)?

ooOoo

It's easy to recommend some new way of spending NHS money if the losers are anonymous and invisible. Easy but not right.

ooOoo

That the professional interests of surgical and medical clinicians may clash when resource allocation decision are being taken is a reason for including, not excluding, both in deliberative decision-making procedures.

ooOoo

The NHS Constitution: "We maximise our resources for the benefit of the whole community". A slogan, bless them, wholly empty of implications for the size or allocation of the NHS budget!

ooOoo

The NHS Constitution: "We maximise our resources for the benefit of the whole community".  
Another hopelessly untestable claim!

ooOoo

Platitudes protect the powerful from probing.

ooOoo

NICE was nice.

Inaugurating Health Technology Assessment in Indonesia – the life of spice.

ooOoo

Too high a Cost-Effectiveness Threshold means the NHS will be both inefficient and underfunded.

ooOoo

The more social scientists want to be on the side of the angels, the more those angels weep.

ooOoo

The idea that good health, like life, is to be sought for its own sake has stayed with me from the beginning.

ooOoo

Health and wealth are both capital.

ooOoo

The value of health rises when interest rates fall.

ooOoo

Some things – health's one – are good things both inherently and instrumentally.

ooOoo

Cost in health economics is primarily (but not only) someone's health forgone.

Utility-maximising theory's not a very good basis for predicting behaviour but a tolerably good one for prescribing it.

ooOoo

The idea that health *is* utility means you can't say, as I would prefer, that health, along with much else, can be measured *like* utility.

ooOoo

Utility's neither welfare nor health.

ooOoo

Aids to thought are useless to those who *will* not think.

ooOoo

The World Health Organisation, bless it, thinks that 'health' is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. An immensely immodest claim.

ooOoo

There's much mileage in the idea that the cost of squeezing the last bit of benefit from anything (like abolishing malaria) approaches infinity.

ooOoo

Many cancer drugs convey virtually no benefit at the cost of using health care resources that could transform others', including children's, lives.

Public health's a great protector of private health.

ooOoo

Prevention is better than cure *only* when it is relatively cost-effective.

ooOoo

I owe my life, but not my living, to the pharmaceutical industry.

ooOoo

# Teaching

A university ought to be an ideas factory; no less, perhaps more.

ooOoo

Learn how to learn.

ooOoo

Learn from laughter.

ooOoo

The immodest mark of the true educator – raising the quality of the taught to that of their teacher.

ooOoo

Expose weaknesses without humiliation.

ooOoo

Half of your lecture class are probably brighter than you.

ooOoo

Jack Wiseman's wisdom: what makes a good seminar? The students come in – confused. They leave – confused (but at a higher level).

Young economists are trained as gladiators and the main mark of a successful seminar was, and often still is, how much blood you leave on the floor.

ooOoo

“Audit that man’s course before taking it for credit” (advice circulating amongst graduate students at UCLA in the heyday of Armen Alchian, famous for his Socratic method).

ooOoo

There are *some* advantages to the intensive study of the works of the masters (both sexes) but there are huge disadvantages: you will feel small and inadequate, you will become derivative, tramlined, a mere interpreter, and you will have lost for ever any spark of creative originality.

ooOoo

To be memorable makes for better teaching. To be memorable by virtue of incompetence, or oversimplification, or gratuitous exaggeration, or bombast, or condescension, or bullying is, however, to abuse the innocent.

ooOoo

The wise shepherd piques the flock by engaging its curiosity.

ooOoo

To be engaging and shallow is all right but be ready at a moment’s notice to probe as deeply as you think they can bear.

ooOoo

Always think on your feet in front of a class.

Always challenge them – but always with a twinkle in your eye.

ooOoo

Make the first line of your essay poke the reader/listener in the eye/ear!

ooOoo

You can draw the reader's attention with either some striking opening content or a striking way of saying it. Ideally both.

ooOoo

If the essay's beginning led comfortably to its end, try making the end a new beginning. At least the beginning of a beginning. At least another question.

ooOoo

*Ceteris paribus* and *mutatis mutandis* separate partial from general equilibrium theory and educated economists from those who are merely trained.

ooOoo

The hardest thing to teach a non-economist is the idea and significance of opportunity cost. Not grasping this is poisonous when making investment decisions, especially in health care.

ooOoo

It's in thoughtful teaching that the most important research questions arise in economics, as in other subjects.

The hardest thing it seems for professors of economics is to let their students talk.

ooOoo

Never triumph over your students.

ooOoo

Does one live on through one's students? For their sakes, God forbid!

ooOoo

The impact one's had on one's students is not always good news.

ooOoo

"Great lectures, Mr Culyer. As a result, I have resigned from the Labour Party." "Thank you, dear boy, and no thanks!"

ooOoo

Embrace a student's flashes of intuition.

ooOoo

Your thesis must either answer the question or provide insights into why that has not been possible. Either way, the question comes first.

The trouble with a PhD in economics is that acquiring it usually involves forgetting the most important stuff you learned as an undergraduate.

ooOoo

Don't read the literature until you have started contributing to it.

ooOoo

CV writing advice – abjure adjectives!

oooOooo

## Politics and policy

Nothing's unthinkable.

ooOoo

Which is better: being right or winning the argument?

ooOoo

I used to think that "extermination camps are an abomination" was an uncontroversial value judgment. Today, I'm not so sure.

ooOoo

Being right is rarely the only option that's left. Try "don't know".

ooOoo

'Impact' doesn't always mean 'making a difference'; 'no change!' is sometimes the best kind of impact.

ooOoo

The most lasting impact you can have is on someone's way of thinking.

ooOoo

The problem with poverty is not just empty pockets, it's also empty lives.

Prejudice: the things we don't really know but think we do. The unknown known!

ooOoo

Explanation and prediction are much the same.

ooOoo

Admitted ignorance is a spur to knowledge.

ooOoo

The best libertarians are now all dead and their doctrines are vulgarised.

ooOoo

Modern libertarians peddle nostrums freely. Something of an oxymoronic paradox.

ooOoo

Freedom is good but it's not the *only* good.

ooOoo

The political right fails to understand how markets work just as comprehensively as the political left.

ooOoo

"Lessons learned" are rarely learned.

Innovative thinking is not to be found amongst only the intellectually aggressive.

ooOoo

All countries seem to be evolving bimodal political distributions.

ooOoo

In a democracy, taxes are the prices we pay for civilised living.

ooOoo

All taxation's evil. We'd all be much better off without borders, defence, public accountability, property rights, habeas corpus, police, fire engines, pollution control, climate control, safe buildings, drinkable water, clean air, sewage disposal, an accessible judicial system, public education, universities, libraries, anti-trust, museums, social housing, free health care, roads, street lighting, traffic lights, gun control, prisons, protection against penury, farm subsidies, the BBC, green pastures. Obviously!

ooOoo

If you want your policy to work, ensure that those who will have to implement it own it.

ooOoo

If a new policy is to work make sure those who will have to operate it are involved in its design from the start – not merely dotting i's and crossing t's at a late stage.

ooOoo

Judge a policy by whether it's likely to work, not by its advocates' hopes.

Discussion and debate are useful barricades against lazy and cosy presumptions, no matter how cherished by an elite.

ooOoo

Good policy guidance requires the combining of heterogeneous evidence, of greater and lesser relevance, qualitative and quantitative, reliable and unreliable, with known and unknown biases, oral and written... together with thoughtful stakeholder meetings, good briefing, good chairing, and opportunities for discussion and debate. That's all!

ooOoo

A functioning democracy must share information about values (what do its stakeholders believe in?) and facts (credible evidence). It must also have participation and deliberation at its heart. Establish these four and the crude voices of populism and tyranny are silenced.

ooOoo

A good debate's informed by evidence (but rarely complete), by expert witnesses (but rarely free of bias) and should involve all important stakeholders (especially otherwise disempowered voices).

ooOoo

Every electioneer should at least declare the basic values to which they adhere: sharing wealth and protecting health, or else admit they do not care.

ooOoo

Understanding why populists are popular is one of the great questions of our age.

Equality is not always equitable, and what's equitable is not always equal.

ooOoo

Vertical fairness usually requires inequality.

ooOoo

To be born with a harelip's a misfortune but not an unfairness. To have access to surgical closure of harelip only if you are white and middle class is unfair.

ooOoo

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green & pleasant Land.  
Two cheers for the Militants!*

ooOoo

When you hear 'equality' always ask "of what?"

ooOoo

It's easier to find out what's not the case than what is.

ooOoo

Consensus is not an especially worthy objective; to understand disagreement also matters.

A good leader respects dissent.

ooOoo

The test of a good leader is whether they're followed, not whether their direction's the right one.

ooOoo

Some good leaders are bad for you.

ooOoo

Does true political leadership lie in serving the *imagined* true interests of the majority or only those interests they have *in some way articulated*?

ooOoo

A majority is not more likely to get it right than a minority.

ooOoo

Factions speak louder than nerds.

ooOoo

Simple's good, lucid's better.

ooOoo

Back or forward to the drawing board?

Only an end can justify a means. What else could? [Thanks, Ovid]

ooOoo

Means do not offer themselves easily; some are waiting to be discovered.

ooOoo

Science without social values is like a bikini and no bather.

ooOoo

Never imagine that your algorithm embraces all possible cases. It doesn't, so make contingency plans.

ooOoo

Scientific evidence relates to the testing of hypotheses, uses recognised and replicable means of doing so and is analysed and interpreted using further recognised and replicable methods. Evidence lacking these features is worth little, even when it's the *only* evidence available.

ooOoo

Why do failed philosophers become ethicists?

ooOoo

Scientists, especially environmentalists, economists and physicians, invariably exceed their authority on topics where they have none. So do non-scientists, like ethicists. Preachers all!

Certitude's the most mortal of mortal sins - in economics and science as in religion.

ooOoo

All truth's probabilistic.

ooOoo

Seek credibility rather than truth.

ooOoo

Know-alls are usually strangers to truth.

ooOoo

It's neither religious faith nor political commitment but the unshakable conviction that you're right  
that's the greatest historical evil.

ooOoo

Doubt's the midwife of understanding.

ooOoo

Doubt itself is never to be doubted.

ooOoo

Airline pilots and hospital surgeons rely on lists. May an aphorist too?

Liberals, libertarians and social democrats have in common that they abhor the concentration of power, they differ in coping with the unpalatable truth that it takes a concentration of power to prevent it.

ooOoo

Must the power to do good always be neutered by the same power to do bad?

ooOoo

Survivors should be honoured not for being right but for having survived.

ooOoo

Sound logic + valid evidence = convincing argument.

ooOoo

Fourteen Tests for news fakery:

- *Is your source noted for honesty and integrity?*
- *Does your source have known biases?*
- *Does your source have relevant experience and/or qualifications?*
- *Has your source ever let you down in the past?*
- *Do your source's arguments have obvious logical failings?*
- *Does your source cite credible original sources?*
- *Is your source a relevant expert or a reliable quoter of experts?*
- *Is your source's evidence scientifically grounded or merely casual observation?*
- *Does your source candidly identify and share weaknesses in their information?*
- *Does your source respond appropriately to criticism?*
- *Is your source an advocate for causes relevant to the matter to hand?*
- *Does your source have any conflict of interest in the matter to hand?*
- *Have you cross-checked against other sources?*
- *Are you unable to answer any of these questions regarding your source of information?*

Ambiguity stretches the mind.

ooOoo

Ambiguity generally brings two responses: a frown then a smile.

ooOoo

If you really want to 'follow the science' first understand it sufficiently well to interrogate the scientists.

ooOoo

Never be guided by science; learn instead how to interrogate it.

ooOoo

Never be guided by scientists; learn instead how to interrogate them.

ooOoo

Our politicians, left or right, are too incompetent in even basic scientific method to evaluate scientific advice.

ooOoo

Politicians rarely know how to ask the right questions of scientists.

Don't commit yourself before the balance of probabilities is favourable.

ooOoo

Public ownership of the means of production's not an end; it's a means, to be tested for its cost-effectiveness.

ooOoo

The critical difference between public and private ownership is the freedom to buy or sell one's part of it.

ooOoo

Never let the perfect become the enemy of the merely good. [Thanks Voltaire]

ooOoo

You may have integrity but you may also be wrong.

ooOoo

Equity and efficiency are not sworn enemies.

ooOoo

If you become more efficient at creating fairness you can create more fairness.

George Washington may or may not have said he couldn't tell a lie. My beautiful beech tree certainly can't. Should it be president?

ooOoo

Deliberation's participative meditation.

ooOoo

Evolution too slow, revolution too quick; is a participative democratic constitution a tolerable solution?

ooOoo

I hear the Rwandan government's planning to send its unwanted population to the UK.

-ooOoo-



# Religion

Find time to be still.

ooOoo

Don't just wonder. Speculate!

ooOoo

The Christian pathway is littered with stumbling blocks, most of them man-made (Yes, made by men).

ooOoo

If only Christianity (and all other religions too) were to shed its Bronze Age vision of humans and the universe, and likewise its addiction to magical mysteries, the masculine dominance of its institutions, their hierarchical character, its terror of sex, and its certainty about everything ... that might herald a truly Christian revelation.

ooOoo

People expect altogether too much from religion.

ooOoo

A broad church embraces kindly scepticism.

Faith does not spring from miracles (Dostoevsky) but science does (why? How?).

ooOoo

Religion's histories and religion's dogmas founder on the rock of plausibility but can survive - perhaps prosper - in the romantic imaginations of those who dare.

ooOoo

The mystics are very wrong – but in the right way.

ooOoo

Don't try to make religion do the work of science.

ooOoo

Kindly scepticism lies at the heart of the English soul.

ooOoo

Early Christian history contains too much biased guesswork.

ooOoo

Every clause of every creed requires a qualifying footnote.

ooOoo

Religions over-promise certainty.

“Why am I here?” is either an answerable question of geography and ancestry or an unanswerable question of non-causation.

ooOoo

To be a Christian’s absurdly ambitious. Might trying to be one do?

ooOoo

Don’t ask religion to answer questions that are for science, nor science those that belong to religion.

ooOoo

Much harmless religion consists in giving an anthropomorphic character to moral virtues.

ooOoo

Beauty exists in both science and religion but is appreciated in different bits of the brain, as poetry and prose may be, or music and painting.

ooOoo

Magic in religion is as absurd as it is in science.

ooOoo

Zealots generally create evil, alike in theology and economics.

Evil allows in what a healthy imagination keeps out.

ooOoo

There's a figurative or metaphorical meaning for every article of faith.

ooOoo

The Christian myth's very attractive – does it matter that it's a myth?

ooOoo

Surviving myths are not equally worthy.

ooOoo

Don't confuse 'God' with 'the idea of God'.

ooOoo

Competitive Christianity: some are never happier than when destroying the art of their fellow Christians; others delight in destroying the golden calves of non-Christians. Both weaponise beauty.

ooOoo

A jealous god will always have its worshippers destroy the artwork of other gods, or of none.

ooOoo

'Their' beautiful statues are idols. Destroy them! 'Ours' are art. Protect them!

Mary and Joseph must have done some pretty heavy petting.

ooOoo

Feeding the 5,000 – the first recorded example of the miracle of meal sharing.

ooOoo

Water to wine – the charismatic leadership that persuades the comfortably tipsy to accept that the wine (despite having no colour) is rather good.

ooOoo

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The imagination god, the love god, the reason god.

ooOoo

Only weak religions need to be authoritarian.

ooOoo

Where did the disciples of Jesus hide their womenfolk?

ooOoo

Finding and reassembling all my atoms poses problems for yours.

ooOoo

A creed may correctly state what you believe but incorrectly state other relevant facts.

Good liturgy limits the expression of emotion and enhances the expression of beauty.

ooOoo

The purpose of pews: making kneeling more comfortable than sitting.

ooOoo

What's worship if not the cherishing of the ineffable?

ooOoo

Most hymns are bad poetry.

ooOoo

If Heaven's not on Earth, where is it?

ooOoo

Secrecy sanctifies sin.

ooOoo

So many religions, each claiming truth. Logically they can't all be true. Logically, however, they *can* all be false.

ooOoo

I suppose I'm a lapsed atheist.

## Music and organists

I shave in E and have breakfast in A.

ooOoo

Janet Baker's and Emma Kirkby's voices will long outlive that of any defunct English economist.

ooOoo

Most hymns don't deserve the tunes they've been given.

ooOoo

Some hymns get the tunes they deserve.

ooOoo

There are but a few good modern Catholic hymn tunes – and both are by Richard Runciman Terry.

ooOoo

An organ's just a contraption. It needs an artist to make it sing.

ooOoo

An organ always invites the organist to show off. Decline the invitation!

Though they have keyboards they are fundamentally different. The organ is a wind instrument, the piano is percussion, the harpsichord is plucked. Legato in each is done differently.

ooOoo

It's less important how an organist presses a key than how they release it.

ooOoo

Even a small organ can spellbind.

ooOoo

Big organs also have tender stops.

ooOoo

An organist's mistakes are rarely imperceptible.

ooOoo

A big acoustic's a godsend to the unpractised organist.

ooOoo

Buxtehude's easier than Bach and almost as good.

ooOoo

The organ's contribution to liturgy ought not to be a 'performance'.

Clapping the postlude's unseemly.

ooOoo

With a scrumptiously reharmonised last verse of the last hymn the organist sends them all out with  
springs in their steps.

ooOoo

The older the organist, the easier toe-toe than toe-heel-toe.

ooOoo

For conductors of amateur choirs, catching a chorister's eye's like catching a floater in one's own.

ooOoo

It's not true that children can't appreciate the classics; on the contrary, they appreciate all music of  
quality and all performances that strive to do well. They do not appreciate the second-rate,  
whether classical or pop.

ooOoo

I hear that Wynton Marsalis can play the trumpet version of Paganini's moto perpetuo under water.

ooOoo

Any organist who can hide a cypher while playing a piece can teach politicians a thing or two.

What child ever aspired to play the organ pianissimo?

ooOoo

The village organist, playing with both feet and both hands on two or more keyboards, conducting the choir at the same time, while also standing in for the missing tenor and counting the hymn's verses, is the ultimate multi-tasker. What a hero/heroine!

ooOoo

Counting the verses of hymns is an overwhelming challenge for many organists.

ooOoo

The problem for organists with counting the verses of hymns is that you get no clues from the whispers in the nave.

ooOoo

From the organ bench, a great advantage of church choirs is that they minimise the risk of miscounted hymn verses.

ooOoo

When I say "forte" to the choir I usually mean 'quieter'.

ooOoo

I've broken two strings on my harpsichord. Does that make me a Beethoven?

ooOoo

Organists tend to live for ever. It's a form of cryopreservation - all those practice hours in ice-cold churches.

ooOoo

Being a village organist involves more practice and preparation than anyone thinks (or is willing to pay for).

ooOoo

Pulling out all the stops does no service to the vox angelica, the dulciana, or the voix celeste.

ooOoo

Hot air is the stuff of poor sermons - and puts the organ out of tune.

ooOoo

For three reasons<sup>2</sup>, Widor's F major Toccata from the 5<sup>th</sup> symphony sounds better played by Francis Jackson on York Minster's organ than by me for a wedding in Barmby Moor.

ooOoo

"...and the organ played". Wow! What did it play? And what did the organist do?

ooOoo

Genius: Mendelssohn sticking that F# in the A minor chord that opens the Wedding March.

---

<sup>2</sup> The acoustic, the organ, the player.

I lent my organ shoes to Peter Hurford for his Barmby concert<sup>3</sup>. They have played much better ever since.

ooOoo

Immediately after the Dismissal they'll start talking and you'll start playing, they'll talk still louder, you'll play still louder, they'll ...

ooOoo

The loudest voice in the congregation resembles a tuba mirabilis and we all know who owns it.

ooOoo

A church organist's dilemma. The postlude: to be listened to (and therefore practised) or talked over (and therefore anything goes) or for God alone (and therefore practised). Therefore practise!

ooOoo

The greatest music ever written? Undoubtedly Bach's Mass in B minor and Mozart's 40th symphony in G minor.

oooOooo

---

<sup>3</sup> 1984.

## Language and editing

Publish and relish.

ooOoo

The trouble with written English is that they can't see the English twinkle in your English eye.

ooOoo

You'll say what you mean only if you mean what you say.

ooOoo

A good idea badly expressed is a bad idea.

ooOoo

A bad idea, no matter how well expressed, is still a bad idea.

ooOoo

You may not have much to say but at least give joy by saying it well.

ooOoo

The adverbs 'better' and 'further' are reliable editorial pointers to a split infinitive.

The trouble with the pathetic fallacy is not that it's fallacious but that it's usually utterly pathetic.

ooOoo

Any one of 'many', 'several', 'lots of', 'repeated', 'innumerable', or 'countless' will usually be much better than 'multiple'.

ooOoo

Alarm: academic authors are always absolutely awful at authoring abstracts.

ooOoo

Journal editors often fail in their moral obligation to protect their reviewers from manifest garbage.

ooOoo

Journal editors have a professional duty not only explain their decision procedures but also to list and explain the criteria they use in decisions about publishing and not publishing. Few do.

ooOoo

Academic journal editors ought to have at least a basic understanding of the disciplines for which their journal caters.

ooOoo

Journal reviewers should not pull their punches. That's what editors are for.

Authors should never tell their readers what they *must* do.

ooOoo

Whoever's careless in English is probably careless in science.

ooOoo

Everyone misplaces the modifier 'only'.

ooOoo

Try 'only' in place of any dot.  
· she · smacks · her · child · occasionally.  
Location, location, location!

ooOoo

Controlling subordinate clauses needs virtuosic writing skills. Keep your sentences short!

ooOoo

A definition must always imply what it excludes.

ooOoo

Pedantry's fun!

Pronouns in English, as in other languages, exist to liberate the listener or reader from an irritating repetition of nouns. Please use them.

ooOoo

Grammarians don't *have* to be po-faced.

ooOoo

Kids and young people generally actually *enjoy* negotiating linguistic potholes.

ooOoo

Are things different to or similar from?

ooOoo

Should one practise regularly or frequently – or both?

ooOoo

LNER trains never arrive *at* York station<sup>4</sup>.

ooOoo

To further communicate anything, it's better not to carelessly split infinitives.

---

<sup>4</sup> They arrive 'into' it.

To rebut is not to refute, nor is to refute to rebut.

ooOoo

Not all rules are verbal but all can be oral.

ooOoo

Metaphorical's not literal, nor literal metaphorical.

ooOoo

To forgo is not to forego.

ooOoo

What's accurate may not be precise; nor what's precise, accurate.

ooOoo

'Key' rarely opens the door to anything.

ooOoo

Some things are less and others fewer – but which?

ooOoo

Less worry and fewer worries.

Some things are frequent and others regular. Some are both. Neither implies the other.

ooOoo

The speaker implies; the listener infers.

ooOoo

Where do 'people like us' put the stress in adversary, comparable, contrary, contribute, contributory, controversy, formidable, homogen(e)ous, irreparable, irrevocable, pastoral, reparable, research?

(Am I the last one standing who likes: adversary, comparable, contrary, contribute, contributory, controversy, formidable, homogeneous, irreparable, irrevocable, pastoral, reparable, research?)

-ooOoo-

