

Never - Ever - Always

No Way - Anyway
Always

Never - Forever
Evermore - Nevermore
Everlasting
Whatever - Whenever
However
Everywhere - Nowhere
Nothing - Everything

Powerless - Powerful
Thoughtful - Thoughtless
Harmless - Harmful
Faithful - Faithless
Hopeless - Hopeful
Fruitful - Fruitless
Colorless - Colorful
Doubtful - Doubtless
Meaningless - Meaningful
Joyful - Joyless
Helpless - Helpful
Careful - Careless
Painless - Painful
Restful - Restless
Mindless - Mindful
Useful - Useless
Fearless - Fearful
Lawful - Lawless
Shameful - Shameless
Artless - Artful
Graceful - Graceless
Thankless - Thankful
Pitiful - Pitiless
Cheerful - Cheerless
Merciless - Merciful
Nevertheless

Comment

The above statement framed as a poem is probably not self-explanatory. So, I add this commentary. I am tired recently of hearing all the declarations on so many events of “Never Again,” “Never Forget,” and “Absolutely True.” Hyperbole at Best! Our language reflects the fact that as humans we love to carve up all aspects of our reality into opposites, either-ors, dichotomies, extremes: More – Less; Full – Empty; Long – Short; Fast – Slow; Rich – Poor; Strong – Weak; Good – Bad; Friends – Enemies; Right – Wrong, etc. Unfortunately, reality is Never so simple; it is Always composed of Entirely interlinked, interwoven continua. The dichotomies we impose conceptually and employ to communicate in oral and written language simplify reality and make it “easier” to manage. But these oppositions are in essence fundamental stereotypes that are Always getting in the way of full understanding and truly informed policies and actions.

As an example, consider our use of the labels “liberal” and “conservative.” We so easily toss people and groups into one or the other of these categories – often based on a single announced statement, commitment or action. Most likely that person or group is liberal on some issues, moderate on others, and conservative on still others, but we “know” them so superficially that we don’t recognize that our tendency to categorize leads us to “jump to conclusions.” This problem is especially dangerous in modern complex societies where we know only tangentially the vast majority of individuals and groups. Even our view of entire nations is clouded by these simplistic attributions: “China is a Communist country.” This, when modern China is a hybrid society more accurately described as having an expanding capitalistic economy significantly managed by an authoritarian government that projects itself as being democratic while it is mostly under the exclusive control of a very few leaders of one party – the “Chinese Communist Party.”

The poem above explores some of our opposites in English that get expressed as different suffixes are attached to the same root word. Of course prefixes accomplish the same thing – Unhappy, Prescribe, Foretell, Deconstruct, etc. As we bask in the wonders of our language capabilities, we need to Always recognize how Imperfect this instrument of thought and communication really is. Even in science, we rarely escape the fact that our tendency to gross conceptual simplifications in language are very influential in promoting an inaccurate view of reality.