

Memorization Grid for Tallis Martinson's Meditative Method

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Tallis Martinson's template for his "meditative method for historical justice" consists of nine texts to be memorized (some quite long), four chapter titles, and the images of four paintings of birds by John James Audubon to be internalized in visual memory.

The meditation practice consists in memorizing all of these elements (the texts verbatim) and applying them in a disciplined way as needed to unprompted free associations that arise spontaneously in the meditator's mind during calm unhurried intervals of undistracted, undirected attention to the present moment. The texts themselves are not intended to be used as the focus of the meditation. Rather, following medieval practice, the texts are meant to have been previously memorized verbatim and stored in the practitioner's mind for easy reference. The object of Tallis's method is to record by hand in notebooks a daily record of the free associations that spontaneously feel most striking to the practitioner and seem importunate enough to be asking to be recorded. No judgment initially should be made as to what underlies these recorded free associations nor should they be dismissed as random and inconsequential no matter how insignificant and uninteresting they seem at first.

When the recording of the association stops—no matter how short or extended it turns out to be—the meditative task is to record below it where the practitioner spontaneously places their association within the template of Tallis's method. That is, the meditative task is to set one's own recording of their free association within the complex set of trajectories of thought and feeling

which the verbatim memorization of Tallis's "historical justice template" has set in motion within the practitioner's own thought and remembered experience.

1. Contemplate the juxtaposition of your recorded free association with Tallis's *Credo*, that is within Tallis's adherence to the poet Osip Mandelstam's 1934 statement of his commitment to poetry as a protean, unbounded, generative faculty of linguistic composition that possesses the potential to oppose and eventually overthrow the tyranny intrinsic to all states.
2. Transform your free association into a "three-note musical phrase" obtained by applying to it intervals that most naturally fit your recorded association's arc of thought. The three notes should be chosen as freely and spontaneously as possible from the eight-note diatonic "scale" of texts Tallis Template provides and which you have previously memorized verbatim and mentally stored for internal reference.
3. Assign your recorded association and its musical phrase to one of the four chapters whose titles are provided by the method. Choose the one that best fits your recorded association's sound and arc of narrative direction.
4. Assign to your association, its musical sound, and its narrative impulse to one of four designated paintings of American birds you have internalized in memory from among the 435 created and engraved by John James Audubon between the years 1821 and 1838 for inclusion in *The Birds of America*. The four paintings are 1) "The Great Egret" (1821) (intended but not used for *The Birds of America*); 2) "Wood Thrush" (1822); "Golden Eagle" (1833); "Arctic Tern" (1833). While painting the image of the arctic tern from a posed dead specimen Audubon had killed the day before, Audubon spoke to a young

medical student assistant. Both men had watched as the tern had lain stunned but unwounded on the ground while its frantic mate circled it within a few feet among the shooters' legs. Audubon is recorded as having said to his assistant, "You are there, he is scared, affrighted, he is looking up at you, you cannot help him."

With practice, assimilating your recorded free associations to the matrices of American history that the memorization of Tallis's template creates, I have found, begins to create the beginnings of a linguistic commons for a shared American history of reciprocity beyond the impossibilities of thought imposed by the exterminatory triumphalist imperialism of American liberalism.

What I record here are excerpts from Tallis's more than 60 notebooks written between April 2010 and December of 2025, in which he has recorded his practice of his own method. I juxtapose these with excerpts from both my practice of my brother's method and those of his daughter, Cary Martinson Winslow. For more than five years now, Cary and I have been doing this in our attempt to create a ground of common reference for our regular meetings with Tallis when we meet with him in the dayroom of the long-term psychiatric care facility where he now resides. Our hope is that these discussions and our reading aloud of our notebook

Credo

From the essay "Conversation About Dante" by Osip Mandelstam (1934)

“What matters in poetry is only the understanding that brings it about. Imagine something intelligible, grasped, wrested from obscurity, in a language voluntarily and willingly forgotten immediately after the act of intellection and realization is completed. The signal waves of meaning vanish, having completed their work; the more poetent they are, the more yielding, and the less inclined to linger. . . . The quality of poetry is determined by the speed and decisiveness with which it embodies its schemes and commands in diction, the instrumentless, lexical, purely quantitative verbal matter. One must traverse the full width of a river crammed with Chinese junks moving simultaneously in various directions—this is how the meaning of poetic discourse is created. The meaning, its itinerary, cannot be reconstructed by interrogating the boatmen: they will not be able to tell how and why we were skipping from boat to boat. Poetry is not a part of nature, not even its best or choicest part, let alone a reflection of it--this would make a mockery of the axioms of identity; rather, poetry establishes itself with astonishing independence in a new extra-spatial field of action, not so much narrating as acting out in nature by means of its arsenal of devices, commonly known as tropes. . . . Contrary to our accepted way of thinking, poetic discourse is infinitely more raw, infinitely more unfinished than so-called ‘conversational’ speech. Being raw material is precisely what brings it into contact with performing culture. . . . What is an image? An instrument in the metamorphosis of hybridized poetic discourse. Poets effect change by being the actual instruments in the metamorphosis of literary time, in the withholding and unfolding of literary time which we have ceased to hear but which we are taught is the narration of so-called ‘cultural structures.’ The usurpers of the Papal Throne could not but fear the sounds which Dante rained down upon them, although they could be indifferent to the torture by instruments through which he betrayed them in heeding the laws of poetic metamorphosis. However, the breach in the Papacy as a historical structure is envisaged in the

Commedia and acted out insofar as the infinite raw material of poetic sound—which is inappropriately offered to culture as proper, which is ever distrustful and offensive to culture because of its suspiciousness, and which spits culture out like water used for gargling—is revealed and brought to light. There exists an intermediary activity between the act of listening and the act of speech delivery. This activity comes closest of all to performance and constitutes its heart, as it were. The unfilled interval between the act of listening and the act of speech delivery is absurd to its very core. [Poetic] material is not [poetic] matter.” (Osip Mandelstam, from “Conversation about Dante,” and “Addenda to ‘Conversation about Dante’” (1934)]

Eight Musical Notes

Note 1. **Labor**: “Labor is the living, form-giving fire. It is the transitoriness of things, their temporality as their formation by living time.” (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), (1857-58) __)

Note 2. **Immediacy**: “Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she [*sic*] is commonly thought to be the symbol merely? . . . We are in danger of forgetting that language which all things and events speak without metaphor.” (Henry David Thoreau (1849, 1854))

Note 3. **Possession**: “Possession is preeminently that form in which the Other becomes the same by becoming mine.” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), 46)

Note 4. **Justice**: “To affirm the priority of *Being over existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent (the ethical relation), to a

relation with *the Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 45)

Note 5. **The State:** “Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the Other but suppression or possession of the Other. For possession affirms the Other but within a negation of its independence. ‘I think,’ comes down to, ‘I can’—to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which appears in the tyranny of the State. Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously. Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is another inhumanity” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 46)

Note 6. **Language:** “We shall try to show that the *relation* between the same and other—upon which we seem to impose such extraordinary conditions—is language. For language accomplishes a relation such that the terms are not limitrophe within the relation, such that the other, despite the relationship with the same, remains transcendent to the same. The relation between the same and other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation where the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an ‘I,’ as a particular existent, unique and autochthonous, leaves itself. A relation whose terms do not form a totality can hence be produced within the general economy of being only as proceeding from the I to the other, as a *face to face*, as delineating a distance in depth—that of conversation, of goodness, of Desire—irreducible to the distance the synthetic activity of the understanding establishes between its diverse terms, other with respect to one another, that lend themselves to its synoptic operation. The *I* is not a contingent formation by which the same and other, as logical determinations of being, can also be reflected *within a thought*. It is in order for alterity to be produced in *Being* that a ‘thought’ is needed and that an *I* is needed. The irreversibility of the relation can be produced only if the relation is effected by one of the terms as the very movement of transcendence, as the *traversing*

of this distance, and not as a recording or psychological invention of this movement. ‘Thought’ and ‘interiority’ are the very break-up of being and the production (not the reflection) of transcendence. We know this relation only in the measure that we effect it; this is what is distinctive about it. Alterity is possible only starting from *me*.

Conversation, from the very fact that it maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical separation asserted in transcendence which prevents the reconstitution of totality, cannot renounce the egoism of its existence; but the very fact of being in a conversation consists in recognizing in the Other a *right* over this egoism, and hence in justifying oneself. Apology, in which the I at the same time asserts itself and inclines before the transcendent, belongs to the essence of conversation. The goodness in which (as we shall see further) conversation issues and from which it draws signification will not undo this apologetic moment.

The breach of totality is not an operation of thought, obtained by a simple distinguishing of terms that evoke one another or at least line up opposite one another. The void that breaks the totality can be maintained against an inevitably totalizing and synoptic thought if thought finds itself *faced* with an other refractory to categories. Rather than constituting a total with the other as with an object, *thought consists in speaking*. We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established between the same and other without constituting a totality.

But to say that the other can remain completely other, that he enters only into the relation of conversation, is to say that history itself, an identification of the same, cannot claim to totalize the same and other. The absolutely other, whose alterity is overcome in the philosophy of immanence on the allegedly common plane of history, maintains his transcendence in the midst of history. The same is essentially identification within the diverse, or history, or system. It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other.” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 39-40)

Note 7. **Desire:** “Desire is absolute if the desiring being is mortal and the Desired invisible. Invisibility does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea. Vision is an adequation of the idea with the thing, a comprehension that encompasses.

Non-adequation does not denote a simple negation or an obscurity of an idea, but, beyond the light and the night, beyond the knowledge measuring things, the inordinateness of desire. Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, the senses one allays, metaphysics desires the other beyond satisfactions, where no gesture by the body to diminish the aspiration is possible; where it is not possible to sketch out any known caress or invent any new caress. A desire without satisfaction, which precisely *understands* [*entend*] the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. For desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. It is understood as the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High. The very dimension of height is opened by metaphysical Desire That this height is no longer the heavens but the Invisible is the very elevation of height and its nobility. To die for the invisible—this is metaphysics. This does not mean that desire can dispense with acts. But these acts are neither consumption, nor caress, nor liturgy.

Demented pretension to the invisible, when the acute experience of the human in the twentieth century teaches that the thoughts of men are borne by needs which explain society and history, that hunger and fear can prevail over every human resistance and every freedom! There is no question of doubting this human misery, this dominion the things and the wicked exercise over man, this animality. But to be a man is to know this is so. Freedom consists in knowing that freedom is in peril. But to know or to be conscious is to have time to avoid and forestall the instant of inhumanity. It is this perpetual postponing of the hour of treason—infinitesimal difference between man and non-man—that implies the disinterestedness of goodness, the desire of the absolutely other or nobility, the dimension of metaphysics” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 34-35)

Note 8 (Octave). **Lucidity:** “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality. Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in

catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives. In advance its shadow falls over the actions of men. War is not only one of the ordeals—the greatest—of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means—politics—is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté.

We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency or the truth, of the real. In war reality rends the words and images that dissimulate it, to obtrude in its nudity and in its harshness. Harsh reality (this sounds like a pleonasm!), harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its fulguration when the drappings of illusion burn, war is produced as the pure experience of pure being. The ontological event that takes form in this blacklight is a casting into movement of beings hitherto anchored in their identity, a mobilization of absolutes, by an objective order from which there is no escape. The trial by force is the test of the real. But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. Not only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It establishes an order from which one can keep his [*sic*] distance; nothing henceforth is exterior. War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same.

The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality and dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside the totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective

meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes beings into themselves. They are what they will appear to be in the already plastic forms of the epic.

The moral consciousness can sustain the mocking gaze of the political man only if the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war. Such a certitude is not obtained by a simple play of antitheses. The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore to the alienated beings their lost identity. For that a primordial and original relation with being is needed.

Morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superpose itself upon the ontology of war. Philosophers distrust it. To be sure they profit from it to announce peace also; they deduce a final peace from the reason that plays out its stakes in ancient and present-day wars; they found morality on politics. But for them eschatology—a subjective and arbitrary divination of the future the result of a revelation without evidences, tributary of faith—belongs naturally to Opinion.

However, the extraordinary phenomenon of prophetic eschatology certainly does not intend to win its civic rights within the domain of thought by being assimilated to a philosophical evidence. In religions and even in theologies eschatology, like an oracle, does indeed seem to ‘complete’ philosophical evidences; its belief-conjectures mean to be more certain than the evidences—as though eschatology added information about the future by revealing the finality of being. But, when reduced to the evidences, eschatology would then already accept the ontology of totality issued from war. Its real import lies elsewhere. It does not introduce a teleological system into the totality; it does not consist in teaching the orientation of history. Eschatology institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present. Not with the void that would surround the totality and where one could, arbitrarily, think what one likes, and thus promote the claims of a subjectivity free as the wind. It is a relationship with *a surplus always exterior to the*

totality, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as through another concept, the concept of *infinity*, were needed express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality, and as primordial as totality.

This ‘beyond’ the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. The eschatological, as the ‘beyond’ of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility. Submitting history as a whole to judgment, exterior to the very wars that mark its end, it restores to each instant its full signification in that very instant: all the causes are ready to be heard. It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants in time, when the living are judged. The eschatological notion of judgment (contrary to the judgment of history in which Hegel wrongly saw its rationalization) implies that beings have an identity ‘before’ eternity, before the accomplishment of history, before the fullness of time, while there is still time; implies that beings exist in relationship, to be sure, but on the basis of themselves and not on the basis of the totality. The idea of being overflowing history makes possible *existents* [*étants*] both involved in being and personal, called upon to answer at their trial and consequently already adult—but, for that very reason, *existents* that can speak rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history. Peace is produced as this aptitude for speech. The eschatological vision breaks with the totality of wars and empires in which one does not speak. It does not envisage the end of history within being understood as a totality but institutes a relation with the infinity of being which exceeds the totality. The first ‘vision’ of eschatology (hereby distinguished from the revealed opinions of positive religions) reveals the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of the totality, the possibility of a *signification without a context*. The experience of morality does not proceed from this vision, it *consummates* this vision; ethics is an optics. But it is a ‘vision’ without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type—which this work seeks to describe” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 21-23).

Chapter Titles

Chapter I: “The Complicity of Presence”

Chapter II: “‘As Soon as Thought Dries Up’”

Chapter III: “Universal Equality is a Historical Accomplishment”

Chapter IV: “The State is a Necessary but Insufficient Instrument of Historical Justice”

The title of Chapter II, “As Soon as Thought Dries Up,” is a phrase borrowed from a passage in Nadezhda Mandelstam’s *Hope Abandoned* (Atheneum, 1974), p.10. The entire passage reads: “As soon as thought dries up, it is replaced with words. A word is too easily transformed from a meaningful sign into a mere signal, and a group of words into an empty formula, bereft even of the sense such things have in magic. We begin to exchange set phrases, not noticing that all living meaning has gone from them. Poor trembling creatures—we don’t know what meaning is; it has vanished from the world. It will return only if and when people come to their senses and recall that we must answer for everything.”

Four Paintings of American Birds by John James Audubon

1. “The Great Egret” (1821)
2. “Wood Thrush” (1822)
3. “Golden Eagle” (1835)
4. “Arctic Tern” (1833) “You are there, he is scared, affrighted, he is looking up at you, you cannot help him,” John James Audubon, early spring [date?], 1833