

Finite & Infinite Games

By James Carse



Summary

1. There are at least two kinds of games. One could be called finite, the other infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play.

Key Takeaways

1. If a finite game is to be won by someone it must come to a definitive end. It will come to an end when someone has won. The spectators or referee may approve but the players must agree who has won the game. There is no finite game unless the players freely choose to play it. No one can play who is forced to play. It is an invariable principle of all play, finite and infinite, that whoever plays, plays freely. *Whoever must play, cannot play.*
2. A finite game also has a precise beginning and can therefore be said to have temporal boundaries, be played within a marked area and with specific players. One cannot play alone and therefore there are numerical boundaries as well. There can only be one winner and others are ranked
3. Infinite games are in sharp contrast except in that if one must play, they cannot play. Infinite players cannot say when their game began, nor do they care. They do not care for the reason that their game is not bounded by time. Indeed, the only purpose of the game is to prevent the game from coming to an end, to keep everyone in play. There are no numerical, temporal or spatial boundaries. They are internally rather than externally defined. Since each play of an infinite game eliminates boundaries, it opens to players a new horizon of time
4. Finite games can be played within an infinite game, but an infinite game cannot be played within a finite game. Infinite players regard their wins and losses in whatever finite games they play as but moments in continuing play
5. The rules will be different for each finite game. It is, in fact, by knowing what the rules are that we know what the game is. The rules of a finite game are the contractual terms by which the players can agree who has won. The agreement of the players to be applicable rules constitutes the ultimate validation of those rules
6. The most critical distinction between finite and infinite games is that the rules of an infinite game must change during the course of play. The rules are changed when the players of an infinite game agree that the play is imperiled by a finite outcome – that is,

by the victory do some players and the defeat of others. The rules of an infinite game are changed to prevent anyone from winning the game and to bring as many persons as possible into play.

7. No limitation may be imposed against infinite play. Since limits are taken into play, the play itself cannot be limited. Finite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries. Finite players are often unaware of this absolute freedom to play and will come to think that whatever they do they must do. All limitations of finite play are self-limitations.
8. Self-veiling
 1. Some self-veiling is present in all finite games. Players must intentionally forget the inherently voluntary nature of their play, else all competitive effort will desert them. The issue is whether we are ever willing to drop the veil and openly acknowledge, if only to ourselves, that we have freely chosen to face the world through a mask. Since finite games can be played within an infinite game, infinite players do not eschew the performer roles of finite play. On the contrary, they enter into finite games with all the appropriate energy and self-veiling, but they do so without the seriousness of finite players. They embrace the abstractness of finite games as abstractness, and therefore take them up not seriously, but playfully. They freely use masks in their social engagements, but not without acknowledging to themselves and others that they are masked. For that reason they regard each participant in finite play as that person playing and not as a role played by someone. Seriousness is always related to roles, or abstractions. Seriousness closes itself to consequence but everything that happens when we are playful is of consequence
9. Theatrical vs. Dramatic
 1. Inasmuch as finite games are intended for conclusion, inasmuch as its roles are scripted and performed for an audience, we shall refer to finite play as theatrical. Inasmuch as infinite players avoid any outcome whatsoever, keeping the future open, making all scripts useless, we shall refer to infinite play as dramatic. Dramatically, one chooses to be a mother; theatrically, one takes on the role of mother. Finite games are dramatic during their play as the outcome is yet unknown. The theatricality of it has to do with the fact that there is an outcome.
10. Surprise
 1. It is the desire of all finite players to be Master Players, to be so perfectly skilled in their play that nothing can surprise them, so perfectly trained that every move in the game is foreseen at the beginning. By surprising our opponent we are more

likely to win. Surprise in finite play is the triumph of the past over the future. The Master Player who already knows what moves are to be made has a decisive advantage over the unprepared player who does not yet know what moves will be made. Infinite players, on the other hand, continue their play in the expectation of being surprised. If surprise is no longer possible, all play ceases. Surprise causes finite play to end; it is the reason for infinite play to continue. Surprise in infinite play is the triumph of the future over the past. Since infinite players do not regard the past as having an outcome, they have no way of knowing what has been begun there. With each surprise, the past reveals a new beginning in itself. Inasmuch as the future is always surprising, the past is always changing. Because finite players are trained to prevent the future from altering the past, they must hide their future moves. The unprepared opponent must be kept unprepared. Finite players must appear to be something other than what they are. Everything about their appearance must be concealing. To appear is not to appear. All the moves of a finite player must be deceptive: feints, distractions, falsifications, misdirections, mystifications. Because infinite players prepare themselves to be surprised by the future, they play in complete openness. It is not an openness as in candor, but an openness as in vulnerability. The infinite player does not expect to be amused by surprise, but to be transformed by it, for surprise does not alter some abstract past, but one's own personal past. To be prepared against surprise is to be trained. To be prepared for surprise is to be educated. Education discovers an increasing richness in the past, because it sees what is unfinished there. Training regards the past as finished and the future to be finished. Education leads toward a continuing self-discovery; training leads toward a final self-definition. Training repeats a completed past in the future. Education continues an unfinished past into the future.

11. Titles, Death & Immortality

1. What one wins in a finite game is a title. Titles are public, they are for others to notice, it depends on its visibility, its noticeability to others. It is a principal function of society to validate titles and to assure their perpetual recognition. It is in connection with the timelessness of titles that we can first discern the importance of death to both finite and infinite games *and* the great difference between the ways death is understood in each. A finite game must always be won with a terminal move, a final act within the boundaries of the game that establishes the winner beyond any possibility of challenge. A terminal move results, in other words, in the death of the opposing player *as player*. The winner

kills the opponent. The loser is dead in the sense of being incapable of further play. Death, in finite play, is the triumph of the past over the future, a condition in which no surprise is possible. One can have death in life and for some this is regarded as an achievement, the result of spiritual discipline by extinguishing all traces of struggle with the world, a liberation from the need for any title whatsoever. Life in death concerns those who are titled and whose titles, since timeless, may not be extinguished by death. Immortality, in this case, is not a reward but the condition necessary to the possession of rewards. What the winners of finite games achieve is not properly an *afterlife* but an *afterworld*, not continuing existence but continuing recognition of their titles

2. There is a contradiction here: If the *prize* for winning finite play is life, then the players are not properly alive. They are competing for life. Life, then, is not play, but the outcome of play. Finite players play to live; they do not live their playing. Life is therefore deserved, bestowed, possessed, won. It is not lived. This is a contradiction to all finite play. Because the purpose of a finite game is to bring play to an end with the victory of one of the players, each finite game is played to end itself. The contradiction is precisely that all finite play is play against itself.
3. Death, for finite players, is abstract, not concrete. It is not the whole person, but only an abstracted fragment of the whole, that dies in life or lives in death. Immortality is the state of forgetting that we have forgotten – that is, overlooking the fact that we freely decided to enter into finite play, a decision in itself playful and not serious. Immortality is therefore the supreme example of the contradictoriness of finite play: it is a life one cannot live
4. Infinite players die. Since the boundaries of earth are always part of the play, the infinite player does not die at the end of play, but in the course of play. The death of an infinite player is dramatic. It does not mean that the game comes to an end with death; on the contrary, infinite players offer their death as a way of continuing the play. For that reason they do not play for their own life; they live for their own play. But since that play is always with others, it is evident that infinite players both live and die for the continuing life of others. Where the finite player plays for immortality, the infinite player plays as a mortal. In infinite play one chooses to be mortal inasmuch as one always plays dramatically, that is, toward the open, toward the horizon, toward surprise, where nothing can be scripted. It is a kind of play that requires complete vulnerability. To the degree that one is protected against the future, one has established a boundary and no longer plays with but against others. Although infinite players choose mortality,

they may not know when death comes, but we can always say of them that they die at the right time. The finite play for life is serious; the infinite play of life is joyous. Infinite play resounds throughout with a kind of laughter. It is not a laughter at others who have come to an unexpected end, having thought they were going somewhere else. It is laughter *with* others with whom we have discovered that the end we thought we were coming to has unexpectedly opened. We laugh not at what has surprisingly come to be impossible for others, but over what has surprisingly come to be possible with others

12. Power and Strength

1. If finite players acquire *titles* from winning their games, we must say of infinite players that they have nothing but their *names*. Names are given but at a time when a person cannot yet have done anything. Titles are given at the end of play, names at the beginning. Titles are abstractions; names are always concrete. Titles point backward in time. They have their origin in an unrepeatable past, they are theatrical and each has a specified ceremonial form of address and behavior. Insofar as we recognize their titles we withdraw from any contest with them in those arenas – cannot compete with the Dalai Lama. The titled are *powerful*. The exercise of power presupposes opposition, a closed field and finite units of time. My power is determined by the amount of resistance I can displace *within given spatial and temporal limits*. The establishment of the limits make it possible to know how powerful I am *in relation to others*. Power is always measured in units of comparison. Power is a concept that belongs only in finite play. To speak meaningfully of a person's power is to speak of what that person *has already completed* in one or another closed field. To see power is to look backward in time. Inasmuch as power is determined by the outcome of a game, one does not win by *being powerful*; one wins *to be powerful*. If one has sufficient power to win before the game has begun, what follows is not a game at all.
2. One can be powerful only through the possession of an acknowledged title – that is, only through the possession of an acknowledged title – that is, only by the ceremonial deference of others. Power is never one's own, and in that respect it shows the contradiction inherent in all finite play. I can be powerful only by not playing, by showing that the game is over. I can therefore *have* only what powers others *give* me. Power is bestowed by an audience after the play is complete. Power is contradictory, and theatrical

3. We do not play *against reality*; we play *according to reality*. If I accept death as inevitable, I do not struggle against mortality. I struggle as a mortal. All the limitations of finite play are self-limitations
4. How then do infinite players contend with power? Infinite play is always dramatic; its outcome is endlessly open. Infinite players do not *oppose* the actions of others, but *initiate* actions of their own in such a way that others will respond by initiating *their* own. Let us say that where the finite player plays *to be powerful* the infinite player plays *with strength*. Power is concerned with what has already happened; strength with what has yet to happen. Power is finite in amount. Strength cannot be measured, because it is an opening and not a closing act. Power refers to the freedom persons have within limits, strength to the freedom persons have with limits. Power will always be restricted to a relatively small number of selected persons. Anyone can be strong. Strength is paradoxical. I am not strong because I can force others to do what I wish *as a result of my play with them*, but because I can allow them to do what they wish *in the course of my play with them*.
 1. *Power vs. Force and Hawkins ties in beautifully here*
 2. *Infinite players focus on others, in helping them grow and achieve. That is how they gain strength – you allow them to do what they wish in the course of my play with them. You raise them up, make them better, allowing the game to continue*

13. Evil

1. Evil is the termination of infinite play. It is infinite play coming to an end in unheard silence. Unheard silence is not the loss of the player's voice, but the loss of listeners for that voice. Evil is *not* the termination of a finite game. Evil is not the attempt to eliminate the play of another according to published and accepted rules, but to eliminate the play of another regardless of the rules. Evil is not the acquisition of power, but the expression of power. It is the forced recognition of a title – and therein lies the contradiction of evil, for recognition cannot be forced
2. Evil is never intended as evil. Indeed, the contradiction inherent in all evil is that it originates in the desire to eliminate evil. Evil arises in the honored belief that history can be tidied up, brought to a sensible conclusion. Your history does not belong to me. We live with each other in a common history. Infinite players understand the inescapable likelihood of evil. They therefore do not attempt to eliminate evil in others, for to do so is the very impulse of evil itself, and therefore a contradiction. They only attempt paradoxically to recognize in

themselves the evil that takes the form of attempting to eliminate evil elsewhere. Evil is not the inclusion of finite games in an infinite game, but the restriction of all play to one or another finite game.

14. Contradictory vs. Paradoxical

1. Infinite play is inherently *paradoxical*, just as finite play is inherently *contradictory*. Because it is the purpose of infinite players to continue the play, they do not play for themselves. The contradiction of finite play is that they players desire to *bring play to an end for themselves*. The paradox of infinite play is that the players desire to *continue the play in others*. The paradox is precisely that they play only when others go on with the game. Infinite players play best when they become least necessary for the continuation of play. It is for this reason they play as mortals. The joyfulness of infinite play, its laughter, lies in learning to start something we cannot finish

1. *Why the best leaders work themselves out of a job!!*

15. No one can play alone

1. No one can play a game alone. One cannot be human by oneself. There is no selfhood where there is no community. We do not relate to others as the persons we are; we are who we are in relating to others. Simultaneously the others with whom we are in relation are themselves in relation. We cannot relate to anyone who is not also relating to us. Our social existence has, therefore, an inescapably fluid character. This is not to say that we live in a fluid context, but that our lives are themselves fluid. As in the Zen image we are not the stones over which the stream of the world flows; we are the stream itself. As we shall see, this ceaseless change does not mean discontinuity; rather change is itself the very basis of out continuity as persons. Only that which can change can continue: this is the principle by which infinite players live.
2. It is this essential fluidity of our humanness that is irreconcilable with the seriousness of finite play. It is, therefore, this fluidity that presents us with an unavoidable challenge: how to contain the serious within the truly playful; that is, how to keep all our finite games in infinite play

16. We must learn the fine arts of war and independence so that our children can learn architecture and engineering so that their children may learn the fine arts and painting.” – John Quincy Adams

17. Before I can have an enemy, I must persuade another to recognize me as an enemy

18. Society vs. Culture

1. In their own political engagements infinite players make a distinction between society and culture. Society they understand as the sum of those relations that are under some form of public constraint, culture as whatever we do with each other by undirected choice. If society is all that a people feels it must do, culture is the realm of the variable, free, not necessarily universal, of all that cannot lay claim to compulsive authority. Society applies only to those areas of action which are believed to be necessary. Society is necessary and finite, culture variable and infinite. The power of a society is determined by its victory over other societies in still larger finite games. Its most treasured memories are those of the heroes fallen in victorious battles with other societies. Heroes of lost battles are almost never memorialized.
2. The power in a society is guaranteed and enhanced by the power of a society. Because power is inherently patriotic, it is characteristic of finite players to seek a growth of power in a society as a way of increasing the power of a society. Society is a manifestation of power. It is theatrical, having an established script. It is in the interest of a society therefore to encourage competition within itself, to establish the largest possible number of prizes, for the holders of prizes will be those most likely to defend the society as a whole against its competitors. Because culture is infinite and has no temporal limits, a culture understands its past not as destiny, but as history, that is, as a narrative that has begun but points always toward the endlessly open. It is a highly valued function of society
3. It is a highly valued function of society to prevent changes in the rules of the many games it embraces. Deviancy, however, is the very essence of culture. Whoever merely follows the script, merely repeating the past, is culturally impoverished
 4. *Reminds me of Paul Graham and his point about great entrepreneurs bucking social trends, norms, expectations, working in what might be called the non-prestigious or embarrassing areas – deviancy*
5. Society has all the seriousness of immortal necessity; culture resounds with the laughter of unexpected possibility. Society is abstract, culture concrete
6. Because an infinite game cannot be brought to an end, it cannot be repeated. Unrepeatability is a characteristics of culture everywhere. Just as an infinite game has rules, a culture has a tradition. Since the rules of play in an infinite game are freely agreed to and freely altered, a cultural tradition is both adopted and transformed in its adoption. Properly speaking, a culture does not have a tradition; it is a tradition

7. Property must be seen as compensation for considerable labor given, as a restoration to the condition one was in prior to competition and must be seen as consumed. The more powerful we consider persons to be, the less we expect them to do, for their power can come only from that which they have done. Consumption is an activity so different from gainful labor that it shows itself in the mode of leisure, even indolence. We display the success of what we have done by not having to do anything. The more we use up, therefore, the more we show ourselves to be winners of past contests.
8. Those persons whose victories the society wishes never to forget are given prominent and eternal monuments at the heart of its capital cities, often taking up considerable space, diverting traffic, and standing in the path of casual strollers. It is apparent to infinite players that wealth is not so much possessed as it is performed
9. Infinite players have rules; they just do not forget that rules are an expression of agreement and not a requirement for agreement
10. It can be said that where a society is defined by its *boundaries*, a culture is defined by its *horizon*. A boundary is a phenomenon of opposition. It is the meeting place of hostile forces. Where nothing opposes there can be no boundary. One cannot move beyond a boundary without being resisted. A horizon is a phenomenon of vision. One cannot look at the horizon; it is simply the point beyond which we cannot see. There is nothing in the horizon itself, however, that limits vision, for the horizon opens onto all that lies beyond itself. What limits vision is rather the incompleteness of that vision. One never reaches a horizon. It is not a line; it has no place; it encloses no field; its location is always relative to the view. To move toward a horizon is simply to have a new horizon. One can therefore never be close to one's horizon, though one may certainly have a short range of vision, a narrow horizon. Every move the infinite player makes is toward the horizon. Every move made by a finite player is within a boundary. Every moment of an infinite game therefore presents a new vision, a new range of possibilities. The Renaissance, like all genuine cultural phenomena, was not an effort to promote one or another vision. It was an effort to find visions that promised still more vision. Who lives horizontally is never somewhere, but always in passage
19. It is essential to the effectiveness of every title that it be visible and that in its visibility it point back at the contest in which it was won. The purpose of property is to make our titles visible. Property is emblematic. It recalls to others those areas in which our

victories are beyond challenge. Property may be stolen, but the thief does not own it.

Ownership can never be stolen. Titles are timeless, and so is the ownership of property

20. Force and Storytellers

1. Only agreement establishes force, never the other way around. Only those who consent to a society's constraints see them as constraints – that is, as guides to action and not as actions to be opposed. Those who challenge the existing pattern of entitlements in a society do not consider the designated officers of enforcement powerful; they consider them opponents in a struggle that will determine by its outcome who is powerful. One does not win by power; one wins to be powerful. Rather than force, the more effective policy for a society is to find ways of persuading its thieves to abandon their role as competitors for property for the sake of becoming audience to the theater of wealth. It is for this reason that societies fall back on the skill of the *poietai* (storytellers) who can theatricalize the property relations, and indeed, all the inner structures of each society. While societal thinkers
2. While societal thinkers may not overlook the importance of *poiesis*, or creative activity, neither may they underestimate its danger, for the *poietai* are the ones most likely to remember what has been forgotten – that society is a species of culture. The deepest and most consequent struggle of each society is therefore not with other societies, but with the culture that exists within itself – the culture that is itself. Conflict with other societies is, in fact, an effective way for a society to restrain its own culture. Powerful societies do not silence their *poietai* in order that they may go to war; they go to war as a way of silencing their *poietai*.
3. What confounds a society is not serious opposition but the lack of seriousness altogether. Once warfare, or any other societal activity, has been taken into the infinite play of *poiesis* so that it appears to be either comical or pointless (in the way that, say, beauty is pointless) there is an acute danger that the soldiers will find no audience for their prizes, and therefore no reason to fight for them
4. Art is never in possession, art is dramatic, opening always forward, beginning something that cannot be finished
5. Artists cannot be trained. One does not become an artist by acquiring certain skills or techniques, though one can use any number of skills and techniques in artistic activity. The creative is found in anyone who is prepared for surprise. Such a person cannot go to school to be an artist, but can only go to school as an artist

21. War

1. For a bounded, metaphysically veiled, and destined society, enemies are necessary, conflict inevitable, and war likely
2. War presents itself as necessary for self-protection, when in fact it is necessary for self-identification. If it is the impulse of a finite player to go against another nation in war, it is the design of an infinite player to oppose war within a nation. Finite players go to war against states because they *endanger* boundaries; infinite players oppose states because they *engender* boundaries
3. Winning a war can be as destructive as losing one, for if boundaries lose their clarity, as they do in a decisive victory, the state loses its identity. A war fought to end all wars, in the strategy of finite play, only breeds universal warfare. The strategy of infinite players is horizontal. They do not go to meet putative enemies with power and violence, but with poiesis and vision. They invite them to become a people in passage. Infinite players do not rise to meet arms with arms; instead, they make use of laughter, vision, and surprise to engage the state and put its boundaries back into play. What will undo any boundary is the awareness that it is our vision, and not what we are viewing, that is limited
4. True poets lead no one unawares. It is nothing other than awareness that poets – that is, creators of all sorts – seek. They do not display their art so as to make it really; they display the real in a way that reveals it to be art
5. Metaphysics is *about* the real but is abstract. Poetry is the *making* (poiesis) of the real and is abstract. To separate the poeima from poiesis, the created object from the creative act, is the essence of the theatrical. Poets cannot kill; they die. Metaphysics cannot die; it kills

22. Genius

1. The paradox of genius exposes us directly to the dynamic of open reciprocity, for if you are the genius of what you say to me, I am the genius of what I hear you say. What you say originally I can hear only originally. As you surrender the sound on your lips, I surrender the sound in my ear. Each of us has relinquished to the other what has been relinquished to the other
2. I am both the outcome of my past and the transformation of my past. To be related to the past as its outcome is to stand in causal continuity with it
3. Not allowing the past to be the past may be the primary source for the seriousness of finite players. Inasmuch as finite play always has its audience, it is the audience to whom the finite player intends to be known as winner. The finite player, in other words, must not only have an audience but must have an audience to convince. Just as the titles of winners are worthless unless they are visible to

others, there is a kind of antititle that attaches to invisibility. To the degree that we are invisible we have a past that has condemned us to oblivion. It is as though we have somehow been overlooked, even forgotten, by our chosen audience. It is the winners who are presently visible, it is the losers who are invisibly past. As we enter into finite play – not playfully, but seriously – we come before an audience conscious that we bear the antititles of invisibility. We feel the need, therefore, to prove to them that we are not what we think they think we are or, more precisely, that we were not who we think the audience thinks we were. As with all finite play, an acute contradiction quickly develops at the heart of this attempt. As finite players we will not enter the game with sufficient desire to win unless we are ourselves convinced by the very audience we intend to convince. That is, *unless we believe we actually are the losers the audience sees us to be, we will not have the necessary desire to win.* The more negatively we assess ourselves, the more we strive to reverse the negative judgment of others. The outcome brings the contradiction to perfection: by proving to the audience they were wrong, we prove ourselves the audience was right. The more we are recognized as winners, the more we know ourselves to be losers. That is why it is rare for the winners of highly coveted and publicized prizes to settle for their titles and retire. Winners, especially celebrated winners, must prove repeatedly they are winners. The script must be played over and over again. Titles must be defended by new contests. No one is ever wealthy enough, honored enough, applauded enough. On the contrary, the visibility of our victories only tightens the grip of the failures in our invisible past. So crucial is this power of the past to finite play that we must find ways of remembering that we have been forgotten to sustain our interest in the struggle. There is a humiliating memory at the bottom of all serious conflicts. Indeed, it is only by remembering what we have forgotten that we can enter into competition with sufficient intensity to be able to forget we have forgotten the character of all play: whoever *must* play cannot *play*. Whenever we act as the genius of ourselves, it will be in the spirit of allowing the past to be the past. It is the genius in us who is capable of ridding us of resentment by exercising what Nietzsche called the "faculty of oblivion," not as a way of denying the past but as a way of reshaping it through our own originality. Then we forget that we have been forgotten by an audience, and remember that we have forgotten our freedom to play

1. *I think a clear look into why top performers tend to be insecure, narcissistic, self-consumed. They fear being invisible more than anything else and have to continuously prove to themselves they are not losers*

23. Touching vs. Moving

1. Genius arises with *touch*. Touch is a characteristically paradoxical phenomenon of infinite play. I am not touched by another when the distance between us is reduced to zero. I am touched only if I respond from my own center – that is, spontaneously, originally. But you do not touch me except from your own center, out of your own genius. Touching is always reciprocal. You cannot touch me unless I touch you in response. The opposite of touching is *moving*. You move me by pressing me from without toward a place you have already foreseen and perhaps prepared. It is a staged action that succeeds only if in moving me you remain unmoved yourself. I can be moved to tears by skilled performances and heart-rending newspaper accounts, or moved to passion by political manifestos and narratives of heroic achievement – but in each case I am moved according to a formula or design to which the actor or agent is immune. We can only be moved by persons who are not what they are; we can be moved only when we are not who we are, but are what we cannot be. When I am touched, I am touched only as the person I am behind all the theatrical masks, but at the same time I am changed from within – and whoever touches me is touched as well. We can be moved only by way of our veils. We are touched through our veils.

1. *Reminiscent of Hawkins' "Power vs. Force"*

2. If to be touched is to respond from one's center, it is also to respond as a whole person. To be whole is to be hale, or healthy. In sum, whoever is touched is healed. The finite player's interest is not in being healed, or made whole, but in being cured, or made functional. Healing restores me to play, curing restores me to competition in one or another game. Being ill is to be dysfunctional; to be dysfunctional is a kind of death, an inability to acquire titles. The ill become invisible. Illness always has the smell of death about it: Either it may lead to death, or it leads to the death of a person as competitor. The dread of illness is the dread of losing. One is never ill in general. One is always ill within relation to some bounded activity. It is not cancer that makes me ill. It is because I cannot work, or run, or swallow that I am ill with cancer. The loss of function, the obstruction of an activity, cannot in itself destroy my health. I am too heavy to fly by flapping my arms, but I do not for that reason complain of being sick with weight. When I am healed I am restored to my center in a way that my freedom

as a person is not compromised by my loss of functions. This means that the illness need not be eliminated before I can be healed. I am not free to the degree that I can overcome my infirmities, but only to the degree that I can put my infirmities into play. I am cured of my illness; I am healed with my illness. Healing, of course, has all the reciprocity of touching. Just as I cannot touch myself, I cannot heal myself. But healing requires no specialists, only those who can come to us out of their own center, and who are prepared to heal themselves.

3. Sexuality for the infinite player is entirely a matter of touch. One cannot touch without touching sexually. Aware that genuine sexual expression is at least as dangerous to society as genuine artistic expression, the sexual metaphysician can appeal to at least two powerful solutions. One is to treat sexuality as a process of reproduction; another is to place it in the area of feeling and behavior. The profound seriousness of such sexual play is seen in the unique nature of the prize that goes to the winner. What one wants in the sexual contest is not just to have defeated the other, but to have the defeated other. *Sexuality is the only finite game in which the winner's prize is the defeated opponent.* In the complex plotting of sexual encounter it is by no means uncommon for the partners to have played a double game in which each is winner and loser, and each is an emblem for the other's seductive power. Finite sexuality is a form of theater in which the distance between persons is regularly reduced to zero but in which neither touches the other. The most serious struggles are those for sexual property. For this wars are fought, lives are generously risked, great schemes are initiated. However, who wins empire, fortune, and fame but loses in love has lost in everything.
4. Sexual desires are usually not directly announced but concealed under a series of feints, gestures, styles of dress, and showy behavior. Seductions are staged, scripted, costumed. Certain responses are sought, plots are developed. In skillful seductions delays are employed, special circumstances and settings are arranged. Seductions are designed to come to an end. Time runs out. The play is finished. All that remains is recollection, the memory of a moment, and perhaps a longing for its repetition. Seductions cannot be repeated. Once one has won or lost in a particular finite game, the game cannot be played over. Moments once reached cannot be reached again. The appetite for novelty in lovemaking- new positions, the use of drugs, exotic surroundings, additional partners – is only a search for new moments that can live on only in recollection. As with all finite play, the goal of veiled sexuality is to bring itself to an end. By contrast, infinite players

have no interest in seduction or in restricting the freedom of another to one's own boundaries of play. Infinite players recognize choice in all aspects of sexuality. They may see in themselves and in others, for example, the infant's desire to compete for the mother, but they also see that there is neither physiological nor societal destiny in sexual patterns. Who chooses to compete with another can also choose to play with another. Sexuality is not a bounded phenomenon but a horizontal phenomenon for infinite players. One can never say, therefore, that an infinite player is homosexual, or heterosexual, or celibate, or adulterous, or faithful – because each of these definitions has to do with boundaries, with circumscribed areas and styles of play. Infinite players do not play within sexual boundaries, but with sexual boundaries. They are concerned not with power but with vision. In their sexual play they suffer others, allow them to be as they are. Suffering others, they open themselves. Open, they learn both about others and about themselves. Learning, they grow. What they learn is not about sexuality, but how to be more concretely and originally themselves, to be the genius of their own actions, to be whole. Moving therefore from an original center, the sexual engagements of infinite players have no standards, no ideals, no marks of success or failure. Neither orgasm nor conception is a goal in their play, although either may be part of the play. There is nothing hidden in infinite sexuality. Sexual desire is exposed *as* sexual desire and is never therefore serious. Its satisfaction is never an achievement, but an act in a continuing relationship, and therefore joyous. Its lack of satisfaction is never a failure, but only a matter to be taken on into further play.

5. Infinite sexuality does not focus its attention on certain parts or regions of the body. Infinite lovers have no "private parts." They do not regard their bodies as having secret zones that can be exposed or made accessible to others for special favors. It is not their bodies but their persons they make accessible to others. The paradox of infinite sexuality is that by regarding sexuality as an expression of the person and not the body, it becomes fully embodied play. It becomes a drama of touching. The triumph of finite sexuality is to be liberated from play into the body. The essence of infinite sexuality is to be liberated into play with the body. In finite sexuality I expect to relate to you as a body; in infinite sexuality I expect to relate to you in your body. Infinite lovers conform to the sexual expectations of others in a way that does not expose something hidden, but unveils something in plain sight: that sexual engagement is a poiesis of free persons. In this exposure they emerge as the persons they are. They meet others with their limitations, and

not within their limitations. In doing so they expect to be transformed – and are transformed

24. Looking vs. Seeing

1. If to look is to look at what is contained within its limitations, to see is to see the limitations themselves
2. To look is a territorial activity. It is to observe one thing after another within a bounded space – as though in time it can all be seen. Academic fields are such territories. Sometimes everything in a field finally does get looked at and defined – that is, placed in its proper location. It becomes increasingly difficult to find something new to look at
3. When we pass from looking to seeing, we do not therefore lose our sight of the objects observed. Seeing, in fact, does not disturb our looking at all. It rather places us in that territory as its genius, aware that our imagination does not create within its outlines but creates the outlines themselves. The physicist who sees speaks physics with us, inviting us to see that the things we thought were there are not things at all. By learning new limitations from such a person, we learn not only what to look for with them but also how to see the way we use limitations. A physics so taught becomes poiesis

25. Worlds

1. A finite game occurs within a world. The fact that it must be limited temporally, numerically, and spatially means that there is something against which the limits stand. There is an *outside* to every finite game. Its limits are meaningless unless there is something to be limited, unless there is a larger space, a longer time, a greater number of possible competitors. There is nothing about a finite game, in itself, that determines *at what time* it is to be played, or by *whom*, or *where*. We cannot have a precise understanding of what it means to be the winner of a contest until we can place the game in the absolute dimensions of a world. World exists in the form of audience. A world is not all that is the case, but that which determines all that is the case. An audience consists of persons observing a contest without participating in it. No one determines who an audience will be. No exercise of power can make a world. A world must be its own spontaneous sources. If the boundaries of the audience are irrelevant, what is relevant is the unity of the audience. They must be a singular entity, bound in their desire to see who will win the contest before them. The fact that a finite game needs an audience before which it can be played, and the fact that an audience needs to be

singularly absorbed in the events before it, show the crucial reciprocity of finite play and the world. There is an indefinite number of worlds

2. I cannot be a finite player without being divided against myself. A similar dynamic is found in the audience. When sufficiently oblivious to their status as audience, the observers of a finite game become so absorbed in its conduct that they lose the sense of distance between themselves and the players. It is they, quite as much as the players, who win or lose.
3. A finite game does not have its own time. It exists in a world's time. An audience allows players only so much time to win their titles. Early in a game time seems abundant, and there appears a greater freedom to develop future strategies. Late in a game, time is rapidly being consumed. As choices become more limited they become more important. Errors are more disastrous. We look on childhood and youth as those "times of life" rich with possibility only because there still seem to remain so many paths open to a successful outcome. Each year that passes, however, increases the competitive value of making strategically correct decisions. The errors of childhood can be more easily amended than those of adulthood. For the finite player in us freedom is a function of time. We must have time to be free. The passage of time is always relative to that which does not pass, to the timeless. Victories occur in time, but the titles won in them are timeless. Titles neither age nor die. The outcome of a finite game is the past waiting to happen. Whoever plays toward a certain outcome desires a particular past. By competing for a future prize, finite players compete for a prized past. The infinite player in us does not consume time but generates it. Because infinite play is dramatic and has no scripted conclusion, its time is time lived and not time viewed. As an infinite player one is neither old nor young, for one does not live in the time of another. There is therefore no external measure of an infinite player's temporality. Time does not pass for an infinite player. Each moment of time is a beginning. Each moment is not the beginning of a *period of time*. It is the beginning of an event that gives the time within it its specific quality. For an infinite player there is no such thing as an hour of time. There can be an hour of love, or a day of grieving, or a season of learning, or a period of labor. An infinite player does not begin working for the purpose of filling up a period of time with work, but for the purpose of filling work with time. Work is not an infinite player's way of passing time, but of engendering possibility. Work is not a way of arriving at a desired present and securing it against an unpredictable future, but of moving toward a future which itself has a future. Infinite players cannot say how

much they have completed in their work or love or quarreling, but only that much remains incomplete in it. They are not concerned to determine when it is over, but only what comes of it. For the finite player in us freedom is a function of time. We must have the time to be free. For the infinite player in us time is a function of freedom. We are free to have time. A finite player puts play into time. An infinite player puts time into play

1. *Agree and disagree. As long as you can course correct fast enough when you're young, most decisions aren't detrimental. But, if you get on a path early on which is taking you in the wrong direction, these early bad decisions can compound and have a far greater and longer-lasting impact than decisions made at a later time*
4. Infinite players can join the audience of any game. They do so, however, for the play that is in observing, quite aware that they are the audience. They look, but they see that they are looking
5. If the goal of finite play is to win titles for their timelessness, and thus eternal life for oneself, the essence of infinite play is the paradoxical engagement with temporality that Meister Eckhart called "eternal birth."

26. Nature

1. Nature is the realm of the unspeakable. It has no voice of its own, and nothing to say. We experience the unspeakability of nature as its utter indifference to human culture. The Master Player in us tolerates this indifference scarcely at all. Indeed, we respond to it as a challenge, an invitation to confrontation and struggle. If nature will offer us no home, offer us nothing at all, we will then clear and arrange a space for ourselves. We take nature on as an opponent to be subdued for the sake of civilization. We count among the highest achievements of modern society the development of a technology that allows us to master nature's vagaries.
2. It is as though, by learning nature's secret script, we have learned to direct its play as well. There is little left to surprise us. The assumption guiding our struggle against nature is that deep within itself nature contains a structure, an order that is ultimately intelligible to the human understanding. Since this inherent structure determines the way things change, and is not itself subject to change, we speak of nature being lawful, of repeating itself according to quite predictable patterns. What we have done by showing that certain events repeat themselves according to known laws is to *explain* them. Explanation is the mode of discourse in which we show why matters must be the way they are. All laws made use of in

explanation look backward in time from the conclusion or the completion of a sequence. It is implicit in all explanatory discourse that just as there is discoverable necessity in the outcome of past events, there is a discoverable necessity in future events. What can be explained can also be predicted, if one knows the initial events and the laws covering their succession. A prediction is but an explanation in advance.

3. Because of its thorough lawfulness nature has no genius of its own. On the contrary, it is sometimes thought that the grandest discovery of the human genius is the perfect compatibility between the structure of the natural order and the structure of the mind, thereby making a complete understanding of nature possible. This is as much as to say that nature does have a voice, and its voice is no different from our own. We can then presume to speak for the unspeakable. This achievement is often raised as a sign of the great superiority of modern civilizations over the many faded and lost civilizations of the ancients. While our great skill lies in finding patterns of repetition under the apparent play of accident and chance, less successful civilizations dealt with the threats of natural accident by appealing to supernatural powers for protection. But the voices of the gods proved to be ignorant and false; they have been silenced by the truth. There is an irony in our silencing of the gods. By presuming to speak for the unspeakable, by hearing our own voice as the voice of nature, we have had to step outside the circle of nature. It is one thing for physics and chemistry to be speaking *about* nature; it is quite another for physics and chemistry to be speaking *of* nature. No chemist would want to say that chemistry is itself chemical, for our speaking cannot be both chemical and about chemistry. If speaking about a process is itself part of the process, there is something that must remain permanently hidden from the speaker. To be intelligible at all, we must claim that we can step aside from the process and comment on it "objectively" and "dispassionately," without anything obstructing our view of these matters. Here lies the irony: by way of this perfectly reasonable claim the gods have stolen back into our struggle with nature. By depriving the gods of their own voices, the gods have taken ours. It is we who speak as supernatural intelligences and powers, masters of the forces of nature. This irony passes unnoticed only so long as we continue to veil ourselves against what we can otherwise plainly see: nature allows no master over itself. Bacon's principle works both ways ("Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed"). If we must obey to command, then our commanding is only obeying

and not commanding at all. There is no such thing as an unnatural act. Nothing can be done to or against nature, much less outside it.

4. Unveiled, aware of the insuperable limitation placed against our looking, we come back to nature's perfect silence. What we learn from this silence is the unlikeness between nature and whatever we could think or say about it. But *this* silence has an irony of its own: far from stupefying us, it provides an indispensable condition for the mind's own originality. By confronting us with radical unlikeness, nature becomes the source of metaphor. Metaphor is the joining of like to unlike such that one can never become the other. Metaphor requires an irreducibility, an imperturbable indifference of its terms for one another. At its root all language has the character of metaphor, because no matter what it intends to be about it remains language, and remains absolutely unlike whatever it is about. The unspeakability of nature is the very possibility of language

1. *A name of something is not that something*

5. We control nature for societal reasons. The control of nature advances with our ability to predict the outcome of natural processes. Inasmuch as predictions are but explanations in reverse, it is possible that they will be quite combative as explanations. Indeed, prediction is the most highly developed skill of the Master Player, for without it control of an opponent is all the more difficult. It follows that our domination of nature is meant to achieve not certain natural outcomes, but certain societal outcomes
6. Our attempt to control nature masks our desire for power over each other
7. Just as nature has no outside, it has no inside. It is not divided within itself and cannot therefore be used for or against itself. There is no inherent opposition of the living and the nonliving within nature; neither is more or less natural than the other. This is not an expression of an order so much as it is the display of a perfect *indifference* on nature's part to all matters cultural. Nature's source of movement is always from within itself; indeed it *is* itself. And it is radically distinct from our own source of movement. That is not to say that, possessing no order, nature is chaotic. It is neither chaotic nor ordered. Chaos and order describe the cultural experience of nature – the degree to which nature's indifferent spontaneity seems to agree with our current manner of cultural self-control. A hurricane, or a plague, or the overpopulation of the earth will seem chaotic to those whose cultural expectations are damaged by them and orderly to those whose expectations have been confirmed by them.

8. The *paradox* in our relation to nature is that the more deeply a culture respects the indifference of nature, the more creatively it will call upon its own spontaneity in response. The more clearly we remind ourselves that we can have no unnatural influence on nature, the more our culture will embody a freedom to embrace surprise and unpredictability. Human freedom is not a freedom over nature; it is the freedom to be natural that is, to answer to the spontaneity of nature with our own spontaneity. Though we are free to be natural, we are not free by nature; we are free by culture, by history. The *contradiction* in our relation to nature is that the more vigorously we attempt to force its agreement with our own designs the more subject we are to its indifference, the more vulnerable to its unseeing forces. The more power we exercise over natural process the more powerless we become before it. In a matter of months we can cut down a rain forest that took tens of thousands of years to grow, but we are helpless in repulsing the desert that takes its place. And the desert, of course, is no less natural than the forest

1. *Prepared, adaptive, robust, honoring the possibility of black-swans*

27. History

1. If nature is the realm of the unspeakable, history is the realm of the speakable. Indeed, no speaking is possible that is not itself historical
2. Since history is the drama of genius, its relentless surprise tempts us into designing boundaries for it, searching through it for patterns of repetition. Historians sometimes speak of trends, of cycles, of currents, of forces, as though they were describing natural events. Historians who understand themselves to be historical abandon explanation altogether. The mode of discourse appropriate to such self-aware history is *narrative*. Like explanation, narrative is concerned with a sequence of events and brings its tale to a conclusion. However, there is no general law that makes this outcome necessary. In a genuine story there is no law that makes *any* act necessary. Explanations place all apparent possibilities into the context of the necessary; stories set all necessities into the context of the possible. Explanation can tolerate a degree of chance, but it cannot comprehend freedom at all. We explain nothing when we say that persons do whatever they do because they choose to do it. On the other hand, causation cannot find a place in narrative. We have not told a story when we show that persons do whatever they do because they were caused to do it – by their genes, their social circumstances, or the influence of the gods. Explanations settle issues, showing that matters must end as they have. Narratives raise issues, showing that matters do not end as they must but as they do. Explanations sets the need for further inquiry aside; narrative

invites us to rethink what we thought we know. If the silence of nature is the possibility of language, language is the possibility of history

3. Explanations succeed only by convincing resistant hearers of their error. If you will not hear my explanations until you are suspicious of your own truths, you will not accept my explanations until you are convinced of your error.
Explanation is an antagonistic encounter that succeeds by defeating an opponent. It possesses the same dynamic of resentment found in other finite play. I will press my explanations on you because I need to show that I do not live in the error that I think others think I do. Knowledge, therefore, is like property. It must be published, declared, or in some other way so displayed that others cannot but take account of it. So close are knowledge and property that they are often thought to be continuous. Those who are entitled to knowledge feel they should be granted property as well, and those who are entitled to property believe a certain knowledge goes with it. Scholars demand higher salaries for their publishable successes; industrialists sit on university boards.
4. One is speechless before a god, or silent before a winner, because it no longer matters to others what one has to say. To lose a contest is to become obedient; to become obedient is to lose one's listeners. The silence of obedience is an unheard silence. It is the silence of death. For this reason the demand for obedience is inherently evil. The silence of nature is the possibility of language. By subduing nature the gods give it their own voice, but in making nature an opponent they make all their listeners opponents. By refusing the silence of nature they demand the silence of obedience. The unspeakability of nature is therefore transformed into the unspeakability of language itself.
5. Infinite speech is that mode of discourse that consistently reminds us of the unspeakability of nature. It bears no claim to truth, originating from nothing but the genius of the speaker. Infinite speech is therefore not *about* anything; it is always *to* someone. It is not command, but address. It belongs entirely to the speakable. Because it is address, attending always on the response of the addressed, infinite speech has the form of listening. Infinite speech does not end in the obedient silence of the hearer but continues by way of the attentive silence of the speaker. It is not a silence into which speech has died, but a silence from which speech is born. Infinite speakers do not give voice to another, but receive it from another. Infinite speakers do not therefore appeal to a world as audience, do not speak before a world, but present themselves as an audience by way of talking with others. Finite speech informs another about the world – for the sake

of being heard. Infinite speech forms a world about the other – for the sake of listening. The contradiction of finite speech is that it must end by being heard. The paradox of infinite speech is that it continues only because it is a way of listening. Finite speech ends with a silence of closure. Infinite speech begins with a disclosure of silence.

6. Historians become infinite speakers when they see that whatever begins in freedom cannot end in necessity

28. Machine vs. Garden

1. Machine is used here as an inclusive of technology and as an example of it – as a way of drawing attention to the mechanical rationality of technology. Garden does not refer to the bounded plot at the edge of the house or the margin of the city. This is not a garden one lives beside, but a garden one lives within. It is a place of growth, of maximized spontaneity. To garden is not to engage in a hobby or an amusement; it is to design a culture capable of adjusting the widest possible range of surprise in nature. Gardeners are acutely attentive to the deep patterns of natural order, but are also aware that there will always be much lying beyond their vision. Gardening is a horizontal activity. Machine and garden are not absolutely opposed to each other. Machinery can exist in the garden quite as finite games can be played within an infinite game. The question is not one of restricting machines from the garden but asking whether a machine serves the interest of the garden, or the garden the interest of the machine.
2. The most elemental difference between the machine and the garden is that one is driven by a force which must be introduced from without, the other grown by an energy which originates from within itself
3. A plant cannot be designed or constructed. Though we seem to give it "fuel" in the form of rich earth and appropriate nutrients, we depend on the plant to make use of the fuel by way of its own vitality. A machine depends on its designer and its operator both for the supply of fuel and its consumption. A machine has not the merest trace of its own spontaneity or vitality. Vitality cannot be given, only found.
4. To operate a machine one must operate like a machine. Using a machine to do what we cannot do, we find we must do what the machine does
5. When we use machines to achieve whatever it is we desire, we cannot have what we desire until we have finished with the machine, until we can rid ourselves of the mechanical means of reaching our intended outcome. The goal of technology is therefore to eliminate itself, to become silent, invisible, carefree. For example,

a perfect radio will draw no attention to itself, will make it seem we are in the very presence of the source of its sound. When it is most effective, machinery will have no effect at all

1. *Seeing this play out today with airpods, smart devices, etc. Becoming increasingly and seamlessly integrated into our lives*
6. To be at home everywhere is to neutralize space
7. If to operate a machine is to operate like a machine, then we not only operate with each other like machines, we operate each other like machines. And if a machine is most effective when it has no effect, then we operate each other in such a way that we reach the outcome desired – in such a way that nothing happens
8. If indifference *to* nature leads to the machine, the indifference *of* nature leads to the garden. All culture has the form of gardening: the encouragement of spontaneity in others by way of one's own, the respect for source, and the refusal to convert source into resource
9. Gardening is not outcome-oriented. A successful harvest is not the end of the garden's existence, but only a phase of it. As any gardener knows, the vitality of a garden does not end with a harvest. It simply takes another form. Gardens do not "die" in the winter but quietly prepare for another season. Gardeners celebrate variety, unlikeness, spontaneity. They understand that an abundance of styles in the interest of vitality. The more complex the organic content of the soil, for example – that is, the more numerous its sources of change – the more vigorous its liveliness. Growth promotes growth. So also in culture. Infinite players understand that the vigor of a culture has to do with the variety of its sources, the differences within itself. The unique and the surprising are not suppressed in some persons for the strength of others. The genius in you stimulates the genius in me. One operates a machine effectively, so that it disappears, giving way to results in which the machine has no part. One gardens creatively, so that all the sources of the garden's vitality appear in its harvest, giving rise to a continuity which we take an active part.
10. Inasmuch as gardens do not conclude with a harvest and are not played for a certain outcome, one never arrives anywhere with a garden. A garden is a place where growth is found. It has its own source of change. One does not bring change to a garden, but comes to a garden prepared for change, and therefore prepared to change. It is possible to deal with growth only out of growth. True parents do not see to it that their children grow in a particular way, according to a

preferred pattern or scripted stages, but they see to it that they grow with their children. The character of one's parenting, if it is genuinely dramatic, must be constantly altered from within as the children change from within. So, too, with teaching, or working with, or loving each other. It is in the garden that we discover what travel truly is. We do not journey to a garden but by way of it. Genuine travel has no destination. Travelers do not go somewhere, but constantly discover they are somewhere else. Since gardening is a way not of subduing the indifference of nature but of raising one's own spontaneity to respond to the desire regarding vagaries and unpredictabilities of nature, we do not look on nature as a sequence of changing scenes but look on ourselves as persons in passage. Nature does not change; it has no inside or outside. It is therefore not possible to travel *through* it. All travel is therefore change within the traveler, and it is for that reason that travelers are always somewhere else. To travel is to grow. Genuine travelers travel not to overcome distance but to discover distance. It is not distance that makes travel necessary, but travel that makes distance possible. Distance is not determined by the measurable length between objects, but by the actual differences between them. What is truly separate is distinct; it is unlike.

11. A gardener, whose attention is ever on the spontaneities of nature, acquires the gift of seeing differences, looks always for the merest changes in plant growth, or in the composition of the soil, the emerging populations of insects and earthworms. So will gardeners, as parents, see changes of the smallest subtlety in their children, or as teachers see the signs of increasing skill, and possibly wisdom, in their students
12. Society regards its waste as an unfortunate, but necessary, consequence of its activities – what is left when we have made essential societal goods available. But waste is not the *result* of what we have made. It *is* what we have made. Waste plutonium is not an indirect consequence of the nuclear industry; it is a product of that industry. Waste is unveiling. Because waste is unveiling, it is not only placed out of sight, it is declared a kind of antiproperty. No one owns it and no one wants it. Waste is the antiproperty that becomes the possession of losers. It is the emblem of the untitled.
13. Since the attempt to control nature is at its heart the attempt to control other persons, we can expect societies to be less patient with those cultures which express some degree of indifference to societal goals and values. It is this repeated parallel that brings us to see that the society that creates natural waste creates human waste. Waste persons are those no longer useful as resources to a

society for whatever reason, and have become *apatrides*, or noncitizens. Waste persons must be placed out of view – in ghettos, slums, reservations, camps, retirement villages, mass graves, remote territories, strategic hamlets – all places of desolation, and uninhabitable.

14. We see nature as genius when we see genius. We understand nature as source when we understand ourselves as source. We abandon all attempts at an explanation of nature when we see that we cannot be explained, when our own self-origination cannot be stated as fact. We behold the irreducible otherness of nature when we behold ourselves as its other.
15. For the infinite player, seeing as genius, nature is the absolutely unlike. The infinite player recognizes nothing on the face of nature. Nature displays not only its indifference to human existence but its difference as well. Nature offers no home. The homelessness of nature, its utter indifference to human existence, disclose to the infinite player that nature is the genius of the dramatic.

29. Myth

1. Myth provokes explanation but accepts none of it. Where explanation absorbs the unspeakable into the speakable, myth reintroduces the silence that makes original discourse possible
2. Few discoveries were greater than Copernicus', for they projected an order onto the heavens that no one has successfully challenged. Many thought then, and some still think, that this great statement of truth dispelled clouds of myth that had kept humankind in retarding darkness. What Copernicus dispelled, however, were not myths but other explanations. Myths lie elsewhere. To see where, we do not look at the facts in Copernicus' works; we look for the story in his stating them. Knowledge is what successful explanation has led to; the thinking that sent us forth, however, is pure story
3. That myth does not accept the explanations it provokes we can see in the boldness with which thinkers in any territorial endeavor reexamine the familiar for a higher seeing. Indeed, the very liveliness of a culture is determined not by how frequently these thinkers discover new continents of knowledge but by how frequently they depart to seek them. A culture can be no stronger than its strongest myths.
4. A story attains the status of myth when it is retold, and persistently retold, solely for its own sake. To tell a story for its own sake is to tell it for no other reason than it is a story. Great stories have this feature: to listen to them and learn them is to become their narrators. Our first response to hearing a story is the desire to

tell it ourselves – the greater the story the greater the desire. It is as though the story is itself seeking the occasion for its recurrence, making use of us as its agents.

5. Great stories cannot be observed, any more than an infinite game can have an audience
6. Stories that have the enduring strength of myths reach through experience to touch the genius in each of us
7. As myths make individual experience possible, they also make collective experience possible. Whole civilizations rise from stories – and can rise from nothing else. We come to life at their touch. Myths, told for their own sake, are not stories that have meanings, but stories that give meanings.
8. We resonate with myth when it resounds in us. A myth resounds in me when its voice is heard *in* mine but not heard *as* mine.
9. Myths of irrepressible resonance have lost all trace of an author. Even when sacred texts are written down by an identifiable prophet or evangelist, it is invariably thought that these words were first spoken to their recorders and not spoken by them. Moses received the law and did not compose it. No myth, therefore, exists by itself; neither does it have a discoverable origin.
10. Myth is the highest form of us listening to each other, of offering a silence that makes the speech of the other possible. This is why listening is far more valued by religion than speaking. *Fides ex auditu*. Faith comes by listening, Paul said
11. The opposite of resonance is amplification. A bell resonates, a cannon amplifies. We listen to the bell, we are silenced by the cannon. When a single voice is sufficiently amplified, it becomes a speaking that makes it impossible for any other voices to be heard. We do not listen to a loudspeaker for what is being said, but only because it is all that is being said. Ideology is the amplification of myth
12. If it is true that myth provokes explanation, then it is also true that explanation's ultimate design is to eliminate myth. This is the contradiction of finite play in its highest form: to play in such a way that all need for play is erased
13. It is not necessary for infinite players to be Christians; indeed it is not possible for them to be Christians – seriously. Neither is it possible for them to be Buddhists, or Muslims, or atheists, or New Yorkers – seriously. All such titles can only be playful abstractions, mere performances for the sake of laughter. Infinite players are not serious actors in any story, but the joyful poets of a story that continues to originate what they cannot finish.
14. There is but one infinite game.

What I got out of it

1. Wow. So much here to mull over and digest. Serious vs. playful. Play for the sake of ending the game vs. playing for the sake of play. Playing within boundaries vs. playing with boundaries. Contradictory vs. Paradoxical. Machines vs. Gardens. Thoughts on nature, war, genius, myths, and more

**“Finite Players Play
Within Boundaries;
Infinite Players Play
WITH Boundaries.”**

James P. Carse.