I turn 64 in just under two weeks – October 5. I have to admit, for most of this past year I’ve had Paul McCartney ringing in my ears, “When I get older, losing my hair, many years from now…. Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m 64”….

As I get older, I think more and more about what I value in life, often with regrets for not always valuing what I now, at this point, think is truly valuable, but – for years and years – sometimes throwing myself into things that now seem so ephemeral and rather pointless. It’s not that I’m a particularly regretful person; on the contrary, I tend to throw myself into the moment with an eye to the future, is i.e., dealing with things I can change/do now, rather than being eaten up with things I can no longer do anything about.

But most of the time I find myself narrowing my values and latching on to fewer things, things that I can truly relish. I suppose with age one naturally reflects on the limited possibilities and options, as opposed to when one was young and the future seemed almost completely open. When you truly realize you don’t have forever, you tend to choose better what you really want to focus on. Or at least I do.

For me that has involved putting lots more time and effort into things I truly value and less into what is simply mildly interesting. Everyone has their own lists, of course. But for me, it has meant cutting out TV almost completely; watching (almost) only movies that I know are going to be deep and meaningful and make me think and reflect (not just French drama! J A couple of weeks ago I saw the new A Star is Born, and thought it was *fantastic*); reading novels that are “classics” for a reason (not necessarily dour and dreary. Right now I’m reading Evelyn Waugh, whose Brideshead Revisited is absolutely stellar and I found incredibly moving, years ago now; but he has some terrifically funny and insightful other novels, and so I’m having a go at some of them: Vile Bodies just now) (even so, I’m regularly drawn back to the 19th c classics).

I do watch sports: that’s my one pure-entertainment-with-no-noticeable-redeeming value outlet (mainly football, college basketball, golf, and tennis – my wife thinks I’m nuts). But when I have free time, I spend the bulk of it walking, working out, or reading.

Most important, I have become much more invested in the things that really do matter the most to me: family and friends. These are investments with the biggest dividends, personally; but their value transcends my personal needs for satisfaction. They are good also for those I love and cherish.

With all that said, most of my life gets thrown into my research, writing, and teaching. Hours and hours, just about every day. Almost all of it I really enjoy, deeply. I realize that a lot of this is very weird indeed to anyone outside my little universe. When I’m at a cocktail party with non-academics, there’s simply no way I can talk about my deep life passions (“Yes, I spent this morning exploring how the underworld journey in the Acts of Thomas was influenced by Virgil”; “UH, right, sorry – I see my neighbor over there. Nice talking to you....”) But, on the other hand, so what? It’s my life, and I decided many, many years ago not to make it conform to what most of the people in our world like or expect....

One of the things I spend a good deal of time on is the blog, of course. Unlike so many of the other things I devote my hours to, I see the blog principally as a kind of service, a giving-back of the many good things I have to others – both the people on the blog and the people in need that the blog supports through its charities.

I obviously love the blog for all sorts of reasons. I love communicating what I know with
people who are interested in knowing, but who don’t have the technical training in my field
either to be at all interested in what the scholars in it say to each other or to understand it
in the ways they say it, just as I simply can’t generate any interest in – or come close to
understanding – what economists, analytical philosophers, or neuroscientists are talking
about in their own fields. As I have repeatedly said on the blog, most scholars in most
fields simply don’t know how to communicate with those outside of it about what it is they
do or why it is interesting. I seem to have that ability for some strange reason, and I think it
is important and useful to use it.

Moreover, I enjoy very much getting to know people on the blog who are interested in this
material and want to talk about it – getting 20-30 or more comments every day on things
I’ve said, many of them highly insightful and interesting; meeting folk at Blog Dinners; and
on and on.

So it’s all good. Which brings me back to my birthday, and to you, my blog members. I
repeatedly hear from blog members who find it extremely helpful for their own thinking
about things they are deeply interested in. Some appreciate it even more, finding it
liberating and – so they’ve told me – even life-transforming, not because of the messenger
but because of the message, information that challenges perspectives, views, and
understandings – sometimes downright harmful – that they had been raised to think simply
were true.

That is, of course, one of the principal reasons I do the blog in the first place. The other is
at least equally important to me personally: to raise every bit as much for charity as we
possibly can. As you know, every penny that comes in goes to charities to help those in
serious need. The funds come mainly from membership fees, but also from donations. The
donations have come in various amounts over the years, from $5 to $5000 (literally), always
from people who appreciate the blog and all that it does.

Are you in that group of people who value the blog for what it gives you? If so, would you be
willing to give back something to it to show your appreciation?

I’m suggesting you do so as a brilliant “When I’m 64” birthday present to me. I won’t get a
thin dime from it myself, so it ain’t gonna line my pockets. It would go to the charities we
all support. But in terms of person satisfaction, it would give me a very deep award indeed,
knowing that something I’ve done and am doing has helped out others who are not as
fortunate as I. I would appreciate it far more than that Lamborghini you were *thinking*
about giving me.

Again, it could be any amount from $5 (or less!) to $5000 (or more!). The point is not the
amount per se. We are all in very, very different circumstances. But if you want to make a
donation, now would be a great time. Please do!! Just go to the homepage and hit
“Donate” and go from there. It would make my (birth)day.

Why It Is Hard To Publish a Translation of an Ancient Text
My Conference on Pseudepigraphy