

HARRIS ON THE PIG: PRACTICAL HINTS FOR THE PIG FARMER*

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Mr. Harris is saying grace. Perforce, I have to observe him from afar, for the hearsee, wondrous technology though it is, grants me only two intimacies: sight and sound.

The scene has the sensuous vitality of a Dutch still life: the lemon-yellow house, the Shaker elegance of the kitchen, the bay window with its checked blue gingham valence and the four humans arranged like set pieces around the scarred, dark-brown, wooden table. Then they begin to move, and the illusion is lost.

Junior, thirty-four years of age, is toying with his table knife. The edge of the knife clinks rhythmically against his dinner plate, punctuating his father's words.

Mr. Harris is not alone in his prayer. In addition to my own murmuration, his seven-year-old daughter, Hope, is lisping along.

His wife has already begun to nibble on the cornbread. She is not rude or irreligious, merely absent-minded. Perhaps she is thinking of a legal matter? She is a motherly looking woman with cobalt blue eyes and a friendly smile. They don't call her the Raptor for nothing.

Mr. Harris likes to keep his prayers brief. Soon the family is ladling and sharing, cutting and forking. Hope is trying to eat in the same manner as her father. Her hands, however, are still unused to the fork and knife, and Mr. Harris smiles as he watches Hope knock green peas hither-thither. He leans forward and slices the chicken cutlet for her.

"I heard more Koyaanisqatsi pamphlets were found at the farm today?" asks his wife.

"Yes," says Mr. Harris, snorting.

"Should we be worried?"

Mr. Harris shrugs. The shrug is that of a man who is used to predicting what he does not know, controlling what he cannot predict, and ignoring what he cannot control.

"Did the pamphlets give any indication why the Koyaanisqatsi are targeting *us*? We give more to charity than... than Santa Claus, for God's sake."

"Apparently, my kind is ruining the world with hog farming. The pamphlets were the usual mishmash of doctored pictures, fake stats, apocalyptic scenarios..."

* First published: *From The Trenches*. J. P. Haines & S. Henderson, eds. Carnifex Press. 2006; Reprinted *Apex Digest*, Dec. 2008. © Anil Menon. All Rights Reserved.

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the usual chest beating stuff.” Mr. Harris shrugs impatiently. “Anyway, I’ve got other things to worry about. There are some sick units that are beginning to worry me. New regulations, taxes, staffing hassles, thinning margins. . . *real* issues. I’ll deal with the Koyaanisqatsi if they get to be a nuisance.”

Mrs. Harris smiles and nods. “Of course. So what’s this about the Hog Farmer’s Friend wanting you to write for them?”

Mr. Harris bursts out laughing. “How on earth did you hear about— No, never mind. It all happened quite accidentally. I was next to Sharon at the Chamber of Commerce dinner, and we got talking about the challenge to the 2027 Act. I’m afraid I took off on a tangent about why we had to get a handle on the *philosophy* of unit farming— I was in fine form, honey— and Sharon said to me—”

“Why do you call them units?” asks Junior, out of the blue. “Why not pigs, sows, hogs, gilts, boars, stags, swine, or suoids? Why units?”

For a few seconds, there’s complete silence. Junior rarely volunteers conversation during dinner. Mr. Harris gives his son a sharp glance.

“You can call them whatever you want,” says Mr. Harris, “as long as you grant me the same privilege.”

Hope interrupts to tell about *her* day which, as I have often observed, consists mainly of running about, talking to herself, role-playing with her precious doll and longing for a pet. She is frantically alive, the very pulsing throat of a ruby-red hummingbird.

“Honey, your father was explaining something,” says Mrs. Harris. “You mustn’t interrupt people.”

I nod my head in approval. Parents are entirely too lax about this sort of thing.

“Well, there’s not much to add, really,” says Mr. Harris, with a wink at his daughter. “Sharon must’ve liked what she heard. Seems she talked to a friend who talked to a friend and, lo and behold, I was asked whether I’d be interested in writing a monthly column for the Hog Farmer’s Friend.”

Mrs. Harris leans forward to kiss him. “I’ve always said you know more about units than any person alive—”

“Oh, I wouldn’t go *that* far,” says Mr. Harris, refilling his glass of wine. “The Pig is an inexhaustible subject; we’re all amateurs when it comes to that topic. It’s like arguing who’s closer to the moon.” He glances at his son, but Junior has sunk back into silence.

“Can I have a piglet as a pet? A small one? I’ll take real good care of it. I will, I really will,” says Hope. “We have so many. Can’t I have just one?”

“No, Hope. You may not. We will discuss getting a dog when you’re a bit older. And it’s ‘may I have a piglet,’ not ‘can I have a piglet.’ Try to remember the difference, dear.” Mrs. Harris turns back to her husband. “What do they want you to write about?”

“Well, I’ve a free rein, more or less. They want something along the lines of that old classic, ‘Harris on Pigs.’ They say they wouldn’t mind a ‘magisterial view,’ something that reflects the ‘concerns of the thoughtful pig farmer.’ Their words, not mine. I grew up reading the Hog Farmer; it’s quite an honor, even if I do say so myself.”

“You bet!” says Mrs. Harris, with a look that makes me wish *I* had a spouse.

Hearseeing them at dinner is making me hungry. I reach into my bag and retrieve my meal of nuts, fruits, lentil soup, and two slices of pumpernickel bread. Food is applied ethics. I eat my ethics, finding comfort in the rough love of the bread, the sweet altruism of the fruit, and the soup's humble truth.

As I eat, I think about my friend, Mr. Harris. The Koyaanisqatsi usually give three riddles – three hints really – for a person to redeem themselves. Or else.

Certainly, Mr. Harris will be given some hints.

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Excerpt: The Pig Is Not Just A Machine, J. Harris, "Harris on the Pig", *Hog Farmer's Friend*, 36(1), pp. 24 – 25, 2045.

...In his 1883 classic on pig farming, "Harris On The Pig," Joseph Harris, my namesake, commented with characteristic verve that, "the pig is a mill for converting corn into pork."

Less wittily, in the 1978 issue of the *National Hog Farmer*, L. J. Taylor, the export development manager of Wall's Meat Company, advised us that, "...the breeding sow should be thought of, and treated as, a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine."

The metaphor of the mill versus the metaphor of the sausage machine. The mill is a machine, but the sausage machine is something more specific; it is an automaton. In the nearly one hundred years that separate Joseph Harris and L. J. Taylor, the Pig has become the industrial Pig, and their metaphors reflect this progress. The pig used to be a machine, but it is now also an automaton.

It is a difference that makes a difference. Machines may be flexible, adaptive, unpredictable, and intentional. Automata are mostly constrained, programmed, predictable and instinctive. Machines may have rights. Automata have none.

It is because we have muddled the difference between these two words, that do-good activists have won one legal victory after another. The success of our challenge to the idiotic Animal Rights Act of 2027 hinges on educating the public (and more importantly, the Supreme Court) of this distinction.

So what exactly is the difference between a machine and an automaton? Take the common office printer: machine or automaton?

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Mr. Harris is at his antique slate-gray Biomorph computer desk. He is talking to Dr. John Lister from an agro-bio research lab in Athens, Georgia. More precisely, he is listening to the image of Dr. Lister.

"...Afraid we have some bad news. EMS examination of the barrow tissues revealed the presence of a designed ASFV deviate. Specifically, a cytoplasmic, icosahedral virus, containing a double-stranded DNA genome of about one hundred and eighty-four kbp. Most likely, a member of the Asfarviridae."

"In English, Dr. Lister," says Mr. Harris. "If you please."

"Sorry... basically, the unit and her cohort were infected with a designed variant of African swine fever–"

"Designed? You mean, sabotage?"

Dr. Lister fingers his bolo. "Yes. . . sabotage. This is a designer virus."

"Has the designer left a signature, doctor?" asks the Raptor; she, like yours truly, is hearseeing the conversation. "They frequently do, I'm told."

"Not so much a signature, more a certain style. We think it's the Koyaanisqatsi." Silence.

It is as if Mr. Harris were just told that he had leprosy (my simile is not fanciful; if one thinks about it, sin *is* a kind of spiritual leprosy).

"My guys also found odd intron stretches," says Dr. Lister, clearing his throat, "our prelims indicate they are a coded reference; a pointer to a biblical passage."

At this distance, I can barely hearsee what Dr. Lister is saying (it's quite difficult to sample off of an image) but that's quite all right, for my interest is in Mr. Harris. His face is calm, but I see a vein throbbing at his temple.

"Which biblical passage?" asks Mr. Harris.

"We think it's a reference to Matthew 5 : 7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Silence.

"But I treat my units well! Hell, they live better than *I* do. And if the Koyaanisqatsi are for animal rights, then why sicken my units with a potentially lethal infection? What does that achieve? What sort of religion sanctions this sort of act?"

Strictly speaking, the Koyaanisqatsi are not religious. We have higher standards. But his questions are all excellent. I am quite proud of Mr. Harris. With luck, a second hint will not be necessary.

"The Koyaanisqatsi," says Dr. Lister, "specialize in personalized terror. They're not interested in targeting groups of people. They frame individualized punishments for individuals that they consider ethically reprehensible. The untargeted feel they've earned their exception, and thus the victim becomes a sacrifice. The basic idea is to isolate the victims, to prevent them from becoming martyrs or loci of resistance."

I like that phrase. Loci of resistance. But Dr. Lister is only partially correct. We're not interested in finding victims or in punishment. The first is unethical and the second, presumptuous. All we do is to provide hints. Helpful hints for people to resolve ethical conflicts in their lives.

"Should I call Homeland?" asks Mr. Harris.

"At this point, I'd advise against it. They'll probably want to quarantine the farm. Then there's the publicity."

"He's right," says the Raptor. Her round blue eyes were bright with calculation. "We could always get rid of the infected units. How many are infected? Only about two thousand, right? Have we sold any infectives?"

"I don't think so," says Mr. Harris. "Of course, guarantees are impossible; all of quality control is statistical after all. . . Trouble is, if we take measures to treat the infected units, they'll create ripples, leave traces. Even the detective work Lister's team has done so far itself—"

"Don't worry about *that*," says Dr. Lister, crisply. "Our conversation, and everything pertaining to it, is covered under privilege. But if we do create a cure, then it has to be registered with the Bioethics Office. Then there *will* be a permanent trace. And any attempt to alert the public will, of course, create many traces."

“So what’s the real risk here?” asks the Raptor. “A few sick people? They can be treated. Swine fever in humans is not fatal. We could probably handle the lawsuits.”

“And there’s a chance I am wrong,” reminded the doctor. “Genetic cryptography is a fool’s game. The units may have been infected with a naturally evolved virus. We can’t rule that possibility out.”

Mr. Harris’s wife and Dr. Lister are discussing something technical about limited liability, externality arguments, veil piercing and the Bainbridge defense.

There is an unnatural stiffness to Mr. Harris’s pose; at the moment, he’s more waxwork than man. He attempts to adjust his heads-up display, forgetting that it’s set to interpret his gestures. Funny things happen to the images of his wife and the doctor. They distort, stretch out, and their voices become deepened, guttural, monstrous.

Mr. Harris is new to the gestural language, Kanzi. I smile as I hearsee his short gel-encased fingers try, and eventually succeed, in regaining control of the interface.

I am holding my breath. Is there a poem as lovely as a decision tree? Two branches:

He could inform the USDA and Homeland, shut down his porcine Auschwitz, save his infected pigs, and join the human race. Or he could do nothing of the sort, murder his sick pigs, buy additional security for his farm, and silence the truth. I hope he’ll take the hint I’ve encoded in the genes.

“As you said, this is privileged. Right, Lister?” asks Mr. Harris.

Conveniently, Dr. Lister is also a lawyer. This call is a legal consultation and not a medical one.

“Yes. I already have the lab started on evolving a vaccine to prevent any further infection. Take us about a week, I imagine. We’ll register it as a precautionary measure and inoculate the uninfected lot; we register dozens of such patches every month, so it shouldn’t raise any eyebrows.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lister. I’ve no intention of capitulating to a bunch of religious fanatics. Keep Junior in the loop as well; no wait, scratch that. I’ll handle it personally. No need to get him involved.”

Alas, Solomon. You have divided opportunity’s baby between two false mothers: risk and return.

I have reports to file, people to contact, actions to undertake, and by the time I get done, it is late in the afternoon.

Mr. Harris is still at his desk, still laboring away at Kanzi. There is a knock on the door. It is Hope. Cautiously, she says that she knows Daddy is busy. But she’s just cut her finger and wishes to show off her talking gel bandage. Mr. Harris tries to be stern, but it is useless. Useless. The man is putty. His face softens; he inspects the annoying talking bandage, and a full eight minutes lapse before he is able to shoo his satisfied daughter out of his office.

For a few seconds, Mr. Harris looks nowhere in particular. Then, with an almost inaudible sigh, he again starts to gesture through the day’s remaining workload.

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Excerpt: A Tea-Leaf Called Kanzi, J. Harris, “Harris on the Pig”, Hog Farmer’s Friend, 36(8), pp. 24 – 25, 2045.

...there is little doubt that the keyboard is going the way of the steam car, multiplication tables and the slide rule. Increasingly, most devices are not just Kanzi-enabled but are also Kanzi-exclusive. Until recently, I resisted learning Kanzi. There were too many gestures, the extended Stokoe notation was too complicated, and it just felt ridiculous after a lifetime of being told not to talk with one's hands.

So what changed my mind? At the recent Iowa agro expo, I was shown a Kanzi-enabled unit, the so-called 'myPig.' The 140lb, old large white was made to march, sit, root, and strike a pose for a whole ten minutes.

The process is called 'rationalization,' and it is to domestication what Go is to chess. Currently, rationalization is an invasive surgical procedure, and hence, infeasible for the practical pig farmer. But, pending approval from the Ethics Department, genetic templates may soon be available. The recent striking down of the 2027 Animal Rights Act gives me every hope that the Ethics Department will make the right decision (yes, call me an optimist).

What all this means is that we may soon be able to breed Kanzi-enhanced pigs. If so, I predict the days of fences, happy drugs, prods and sheep dogs may soon be a thing of the past. Our pigs will be happier for it, a consideration at least as important as efficiency and economy. . .

#

The theory and practice of Hell is all around me. How spotless the floors, how stainless the steel, how quiet the hollowed room, and how wild the pigs' eyes. My hands tremble as I adjust the hearsee. I ache for a God to spit at.

There is a small crowd at the open door. Junior, Hope, a few of the technicians (as they like to be called) and, of course, Mr. Harris.

I have become weary of watching and listening. To see and not be seen. To hear and not be heard. Perhaps I no longer exist, so long have I dwelled at the undetected rim of perception. These poor, broken creatures around me cannot gift me the recognition I need; the murmur of their moans, shrieks and grunts are like fall's leaves on my self's dark forest floor.

"You exist," I murmur, over and over, fondling the rosary of sounds. Reify me, keep me whole, even in this hell, where the very meaning leeches out of incarnadine words.

A fuss of words.

"What's this about Hope finding a pig?" says Mr. Harris, his face furious. "Is it one of ours? How did it get out? And where is it now?"

Virgil is not an 'it.' Virgil is a 'he.'

"His name is Virgil," insists little Hope. "And I'm going to keep him as a pet. Please, daddy? Please?"

"We don't know who gave it to her, sir," says Mr. Roberts, one of the technicians. "She told us that she was trying to pet it when it bit her and then ran away. The cut doesn't look serious, sir. And the robotriever finally found the pig lying in a ditch. We have it in a container. It's, um, not one of ours. Definitely. We think you should take a look. It's pretty far gone—" Mr. Roberts puts a brake on his words as he notices Hope's eager face.

“Virgil didn’t mean to bite,” says Hope. “He didn’t. I picked him up, and he was very frightened. And I’m not hurt at all.” She holds up her bandaged finger. “Please daddy, may I keep him?”

“Who gave it to you, honey?” Mr. Harris’s face is creased with anxiety.

Hope tries to describe me, for it is I who handed Virgil to her. She attempted to pet Virgil, but he wriggled, twisted, squealed and nipped her forefinger. A conflict of natures: human nature and pig nature.

“A stranger, sir,” says Mr. Roberts. “Slipped away unnoticed. We’ve contacted the police—”

“A stranger? Alone with Hope?” interrupts Mr. Harris. “Wait.” He turns to Junior. “Junior, take her to the clinic. I want to make sure she’s all right.”

“I already did,” says Junior sullenly. “The clinic said she’s fine.”

“Then check again,” shouts his father. “A stranger hands her a pig, and you’re not worried?”

Hope is in a panic. She again begs her father to let her keep poor Virgil. But Mr. Harris is immune to all pleas. He is a good father, as I have observed time and time again.

Junior leaves with a tearful Hope. He is clearly aggrieved with his father but with Hope, he is gentle, even tender. He is a good brother, as I have observed time and time again.

Mr. Harris watches them leave, and then turns to Mr. Roberts.

“This is serious, Roberts,” he says. “We can’t have strangers running about. Did you say you called the cops?”

“Yes, Mr. Harris. They should be here shortly. But you’d better take a look at the unit, sir. It’s, um, not exactly a pig.”

Through the closing door, I see that it is late in the day, with an evening sky that hangs tiredly as if it, too, wanted to rest its forehead. Mr. Harris strides toward the container, followed by his coterie of technicians. They keep a certain distance from him, perhaps out of habit, perhaps out of respect, and perhaps out of prudence.

How can Mr. Harris not see the nightmare that is his dominion? He walks past Nina; she is kept perpetually pregnant. He walks past Samuel; the boar’s mind has unraveled long ago. He walks past Vanity; she gnaws incessantly at her artificially flavored skin. He walks past Distraught; she moans tunes no living thing should ever compose. He walks past it all, my Dante.

“Here it is, Mr. Harris,” says Mr. Roberts, “we can’t tell if it’s a pig or, um, something else.”

True. That is the nature of the chimera. The self-referential other. In a barbaric time, it takes a refined mind to find the right paradoxes. The fourteenth century logician, John Buridan, wrote in his *Sophismata*: “This noun ‘chimera’ signifies nothing.” He meant it as a puzzle. If ‘chimera’ signified nothing, then why does the word exist? If it signifies something, then why don’t chimeras exist?

Now, a different puzzle mews in the container. Pigs exist, but they don’t signify. The chimera signifies, but it shouldn’t exist.

Was Virgil a pig or a baby? Difficult to say. A pig-like baby? Or a baby-like pig? The Koyaanisqatsi artisans outdid themselves with Virgil. A genetic tapestry of Porcine woof and Human warp.

"What in heaven's name is this... this monstrosity?" asks Mr. Harris in a hoarse voice.

"We don't know," says Mr. Roberts. "It's some kind of gene synth. Looks like the Koyaanisqatsi did a number on this one, Mr. Harris..."

"What makes you so sure that it's them?" asks Mr. Harris, suspiciously.

"Well, sir... We got those pamphlets... and the pigs with swine fever. No one around here can do anything on this scale."

His face is sympathetic. The other technicians look around uneasily. Are they counting their blessings? Are they relieved that their families have not been targeted? Are they edging away from Mr. Harris? Will he infect them with his misfortune?

"I can't believe Hope handled it," whispers Mr. Harris. "That she got bitten by this... this..."

"Mr. Harris, it's gesturing, sir."

The Kanzi symbol for 'help' is simplicity itself: the cupped palm. One of the men laughed.

Virgil mews. The voice box was one of the hardest things to transfer. The sound makes the men edge back from the container. Their breathing is strained, superstitious. "It's a pig," insists Mr. Harris. "Just a synthetic freak. I saw one at the expo. Never mind the features. What I can't understand is how someone could even contemplate such a monster. It's unconscionable."

The men clear their throats. The bright fluorescent lights throw shadows on their faces; the hearsee attempts to correct but bungles it further.

"Someone has free access to our farm," says Mr. Harris, slowly, reflectively. "That'll have to stop."

"What do we do about this creature, sir?" asks Mr. Roberts.

Thank you, Mr. Roberts. My question exactly. Think, Mr. Harris. Think carefully. Consider what is being said here. What does the chimera signify? I am aquiver with hope and excitement. Awake Dante, and listen to your Virgil.

"Looks like it's dead," says one of the men, prodding Virgil with a metal rod.

"Good," says Mr. Harris. "I would have had it killed. It was an abomination. Who are these beasts to judge us?" Then his face hardens, and it acquires that characteristic certitude. "Roberts, go see what's keeping the cops. I'm going to have Junior call in some extra security. Nothing should move without us knowing it. And furthermore..."

Alas. I have failed. So be it.

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Excerpt: A Pig's Worth, J. Harris, "Harris on the Pig", *Hog Farmer's Friend*, 37(2), pp. 24 – 25, 2045.

My recent article on the Kanzi-enabled pig brought in a truckload of bouquets and brickbats. For some, the myPigs are a dreadful mistake: why give the pigs a Voice? For others, it is as progressive as Disraeli was. A few abused me for pushing every new-fangled tech I encounter, while others wanted to know why I was wasting my time with an outdated tech like Kanzi; didn't the future lie in phenomenology?

At the root of all these responses is a concern, I think, about the kind of world we wish to live in. Or, to put it another way, a concern about ethics.

So let me consider this ambitious question: all things considered, what exactly is the worth of a pig?

#

Hope is a very sick little girl. Her human body has the experience of a million years of war, but this is a new kind of enemy; a Trojan horse designed by humans for use on humans. Betrayed by her species, Hope burns. Her defenses crumble and strange fevers wreck rack and ruin.

I hearsee everything. The anguish of her brother; the worry on her father's face; the dissolving composure of the Raptor, now merely a frightened mother.

I am moved to pity, even regret. I voice my disquiet to the Koyaanisqatsi. I'm referred to three passages. Exodus 20 : 5, Exodus 34 : 6 – 7, Deuteronomy 5 : 9. They all say the same thing: the sins of the father are to be visited upon the offspring. What is said three times must be true.

I reiterate: the Koyaanisqatsi are not religious. I am merely being reminded that considerations of innocence are subservient to the obligations of blood.

But all is not lost. Mr. Harris can still save the day. His daughter might yet live to laugh, flower and multiply. At this very moment, the third and final hint is being offered to Mr. Harris.

The Belousov-Zhabotinsky reaction – BZ to its admirers – is a spatio-temporal chemical oscillator, a clock of colors. A solution of citric acid, acidified bromate and a ceric salt can be made to oscillate periodically between yellow and clear. The leopard's spots, the zebra's stripes, the whorls of sea shells – the examples could be multiplied indefinitely – are basically first, second, or third cousins of the BZ. So is the pattern forming on Hope's forehead.

It asserts, in the extended Stokoe's notation for Kanzi: *Nullum gratuitum prandium*. To wit: there are no free lunches.

To wit: Would you be willing, Caiaphas, to lose your one daughter but keep your piggery? If so, oh brave new world that has such men in't.

What is the worth of a child? What is the worth of a daughter? What is the worth of Hope, beloved daughter, reach and grasp of her father's heart?

I mutter to myself, unable to look, unable to turn away. Do I not stand with Camus? Had he not written: "But what does that mean – 'plague'? Just life, no more than that." Why will Mr. Harris not see?

There is a crowd around Hope's bed. Mr. Harris is shouting; Junior's rushing from the room. And the mother?

She's screaming: "What does it mean? What does it mean? Do whatever it takes, I don't care, Idontcareidontcareidontcare." Her steel blue eyes are full of tears. Why, she's human, after all.

It will soon become too dangerous to use the hearsee, so I remove the attachments. Soon, there will be all sorts of uniforms in that yellow house with the checked blue gingham valence. Soon I must give my Caiaphas a choice he already knows.

Soon, I will make a call. Soon. It must be soon. Hope depends on it.

– The End –

Notes:

1. The title is from Joseph Harris's eponymous book, published in 1894. I happened to see a copy at the Twice Told Tales bookstore in Seattle. As far as I can tell, Harris's book is the first clear account of how to treat livestock as automata.
2. According to the infallible web, "Koyaanisqatsi" is a Hopi word meaning "life out of balance" and/or "a state of life that calls for another way of life."
3. It is probably worth mentioning that I find the tactics of extremist organizations like PETA and Earth First both abhorrent as well as counter-productive. Means matter. I also like steak. Medium well.