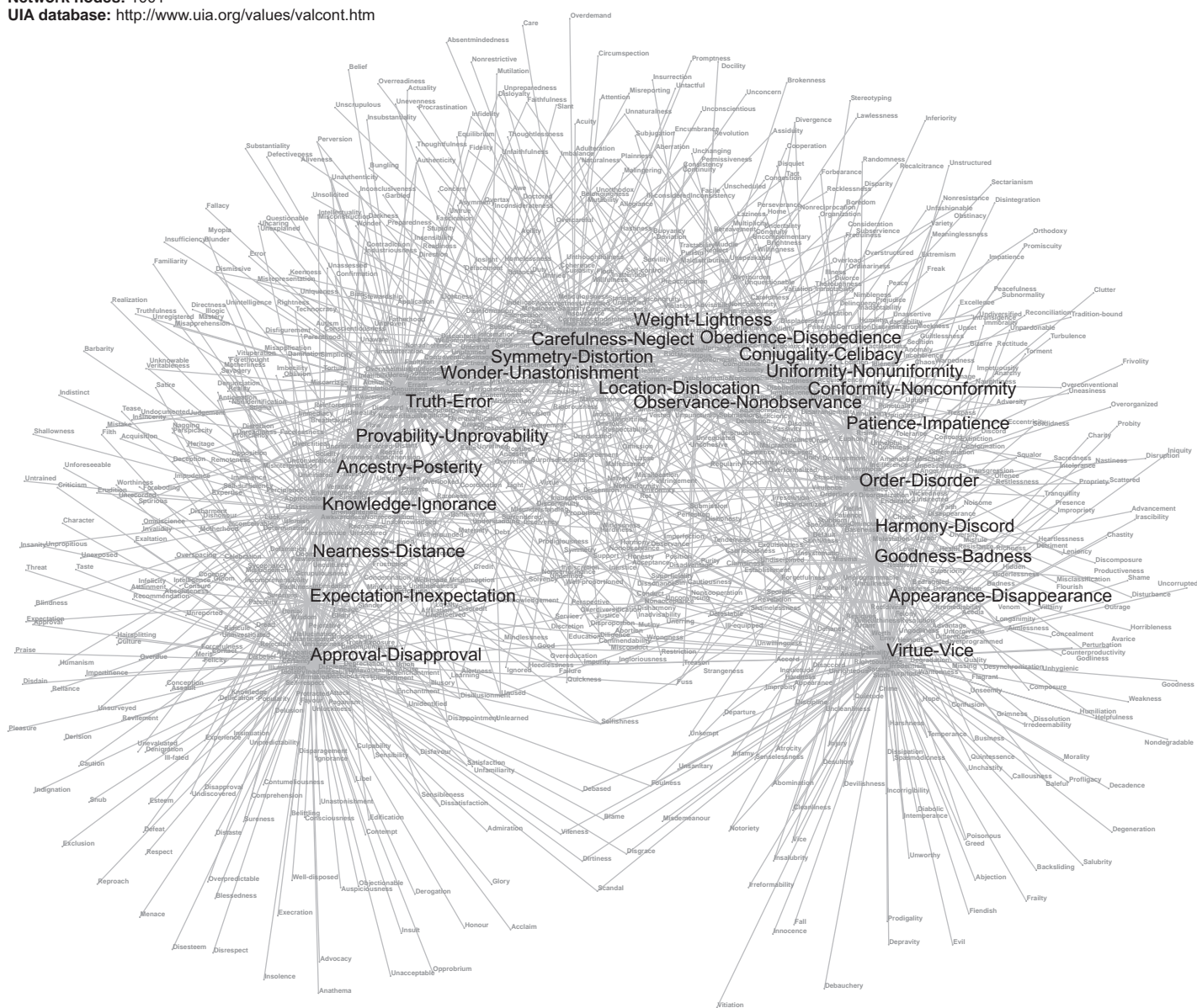


Figure 10.4.2.
Random selection of value polarities

Database: Human Values
Link type: narrower values
Network nodes: 1001
UIA database: <http://www.uia.org/values/valcont.htm>



Most values can be grouped within value polarities. In the work on values in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, some 230 value polarities were identified: beauty-ugliness, peace-war, strength-weakness, etc in order to cluster some 3,000 value terms (both positive and negative, constructive and destructive). A great deal of human activity involves responding to value polarities – navigating between the extremes they represent. Whilst a polarity may, at first sight, appear to suggest that one or other pole is the more appropriate, the experience of it eventually demonstrates its limitations and the need to relate to the other as well. Learning how to do this may be extremely painful and take many years. Political systems demonstrate the continuing pulls between "left" and "right". Religions are fundamentally concerned with embodying abstract principles challenged by the proclivities of "human nature" and wisdom is acquired through learning to balance the tensions between them. It is however striking that in many social settings, organizations and programmes are designed as though one value of a polarity could be maximized and the other minimized. So for example, systems of "care" tend to downplay the ways in which they "neglect" people under certain circumstances – and are obliged to do so to avoid encouraging abusive freeloading. Those whose mode of action is essentially violent are eventually obliged to seek relief in peace. Understanding the conditions under which the opposite pole may be a more appropriate point of reference is far from obvious. When should the switch from peaceful to violent response be made? When is it appropriate to switch from left-wing to right-wing political principles? Understanding the conditions which call for such change is especially challenging if one has been brought up, educated or trained to favour one pole over another under all circumstances. There is ambiguity and uncertainty in deciding in favour of a contrasting value pole. There is little formal education or training possible concerning how to navigate between value poles. This is because institutional, belief and philosophical systems tend to be organized around particular poles – usually in opposition to their contrasting poles (favoured by others). It tends to be only through life experience that the need to do so becomes apparent.