

## Epilogue

### Do Ask, Do Tell: Some Symphonies Have to End Quietly

Oh, no – not another preamble. Here it goes:

I've faced considerable pressure to conform to the demands of the "real lives" of others at some points in my life. I've created media trying to communicate my experience, and tried to maintain objectivity, avoiding partisanship or visible solidarity. I've preached the libertarian (and liberating) virtues of personal responsibility and competitiveness, and I tended to eschew playing victim.

I get some personal feedback, and some further looping in my own thought processes, about what seems like a lack of personal stake in the lives of others, especially in the future. I seem emotionally aloof and unresponsive to the needs of people. I can say that their problems did not (directly) result from my choices or actions, and that "public life" is more in tune with what can be done for people with special needs than it was when I was growing up decades ago. I also am sensitive to my past experience of social interaction as humiliating, to be eschewed if following my own agenda works (and it often has). But what seems most disturbing is that I am not immune to bad luck either (and may have had better economic support than many others), and if improving the life of someone else required some sacrifice from me, would I feel I had really accomplished something positive? The moral importance of social interdependence is becoming apparent.

It is not easy for me to step into situations requiring personal attention and "intimacy" (as it was not with my late mother) when I did not raise a family myself. Yet the lack of family could be viewed as reciprocal to a basic lack of interpersonal emotion, itself related to social and physical shortcomings. It feels as if my brain or soul did not have the capacity for what it wanted to do, and for the attentiveness to others that was demanded of it.

I often have to deal with other people's notions of what should be expected of me on some moral (or sometimes religious) grounds. Sometimes this (unsolicited) "advice" subsumes ultimately contradictory ideas. One can, however, through some inductive reasoning, develop a certain ethical philosophy over how people who are "different" are expected to behave.

This may be a shocking notion today, inasmuch as we try to celebrate diversity including the contributions of those with disabilities. But whether my problems, especially with male physical competitiveness, constitute disability (possibly in the autism spectrum) would provide a real question and put me on a sharp mountain "knife edge" indeed. What "different" people can do may be more critical today than in past generations because of globalization and technology, which leverages individual asymmetry.

So I think it's important to look at the question of "difference" through a moral lens, and relate it to issues of sustainability, which connect themselves (among environment, security, social inequality, and demographics) to make us really wonder about what the future brings. It seems morally important for people to have personal stakes in the future. It is also important to realize that it is impossible to achieve

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all policy goals perfectly and simultaneously, such as “equality,” privacy, security, and intergenerational responsibility. Trade-offs and choices have to be made.

Although the pressure on me came about at first with respect to self-expression and maybe limelight seeking, the “energy” transferred to concerns about my homosexuality early in the college years. I’ve never found “immutability” a completely satisfactory justification for modern ideas of open acceptance and equality, because the arguments don’t completely work in other areas where clearly destructive behaviors (directly impacting others) may occur. My own experience, influenced by physical issues with logical learning toward social upward affiliation, may not be as typical as I used to think. Still, I have always (ever since my first cultural skirmish at college in the early 1960s) wondered why others made my lack of heterosexual passion their business and would punish me for it. I think we know some of the answer: reproduction, and the whole familial social structure it maintains, is important to others (particularly if you’re an only child). In some families, especially if expressive individual opportunities are limited, it can become “the” issue. In my case, some people seemed distracted by my tendency to “notice” men and develop a lot of fantasy substance around it; others could fear that I was setting a dangerous example for individuals on the edge, perhaps discouraging some from having families at all, possibly promoting ultimately a new and subtly dangerous form of self-righteousness. But no boy grows up wanting to be “just” a father; something similar now holds for many young women today, too.

In some situations, men are expected to join in cohesion to protect women and children in a community, although that perspective has been largely defused. Religious authority, most of all the Vatican (as well as fundamentalism in many faiths) likes to emphasize openness to sharing the personal sacrifice and personal complementarity that comes in sustaining a community. One way to impress this was to articulate a rule that sexuality should be experienced only in the setting of permanent monogamous (heterosexual) marriage open to procreation as long as possible. That way, a lot of family responsibility was guaranteed to be shared by everyone “no matter what.” Such a rule affects persons of different emotional tempers very disparately. Yet, spiritual authorities say that variability of personal sacrifice required in a community is inevitable. Because of the entropy and sense of meaning in any community, no one should live without owning up to the need for complementarity or at least polarity. Such a theory sounds like it would maintain social stability and sustainability, but it obviously can facilitate an existing authoritarian religious, economic or political power structure, and it can remain to oblivious to existing injustices for generations (look at slavery and segregation, which used to comport with “family values”).

It seems important to me to look at “personal responsibility” systematically in a broader manner, about how individuals with such different temperament and capabilities share the more difficult risks (both physical and emotional) in a culture that faces real issues to its sustainability. I don’t see easy or perfect answers.

This closing essay, this main course, will be a bit like a sermon and something like a final exam.

It’s typical, especially in humanities courses, for a final to start with an enumeration of passages or incidents that are to be identified or woven together in a discussion.

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So I'll name or point to a few more "visuals" of incidents "from my life."

One (1998): On a late spring evening, a good friend, graduating from a nearby Twin Cities college, shows up in his shorts at Embers for dinner. During the dinner I show him all the Rosenfels literature. We have the discussion of the dichotomy between "winning converts" and "winning arguments." Even he wants me to try to "win converts" through ballot access petitioning drives, at least. The next day, the restaurant closes to make room for University of Minnesota expansion. Later, at a ballot access petitioning exercise in a small Minnesota town, the women do better than the men. It's summer, even up north.

Two (2003): Working on the "floor" as a debt collector, I remind a debtor that his bill is "only" \$65. He asks if I will pay it for him personally.

Three (2003): A recruiter for a company that will try to round up whole life policyholders and convert them to term says, "We give you the words." What? I am a writer already. He gets defensive quickly.

Four (2010): A chaplain from hospice reminds me of my declining mother's sense of humor.

Five (1961): When coming back to see me "at home" after my William and Mary expulsion, a high school friend says that with me, a handshake is like a kiss.

Six (1956): On a misty spring morning, I leave home for school with makeup on my hands. I will appear, with the mixed chorus, in the school operetta, *The Sunbonnet Girl*. I'm a little uncomfortable with lotions being put on my body. A few weeks later, I leave for school for "my short-sleeves debut."

Seven (1958): I hit a home run in my back yard and win a "league" softball game with a walk-off.

Eight (1968): On arriving at "tent city" in Fort Jackson, SC Basic, we're so shell-shocked that we urinate in a washbasin in a common latrine. Later, a "Special Training" (aka special education) company commander says we could be here six months, and recounts the story of a draftee who had said that morning, "I want a discharge from the United States Army." In three weeks, I pass the PCPT, running the mile in 7:18.

Nine (1977): A friend tells me how he was laid off from his teaching job in Brooklyn because he was single, and then about his weekend at a Moonie retreat as he looks for another job.

Ten (1972): A pastor at my parents' church preaches about "The Rich Young Ruler," after my own admissions in an encounter group. He says that none of us know who is "good." He equivocates, however, on the limit of unconditional love and compassion, saying it belongs to the world of motherhood.

Eleven (2007): Another pastor speaks about the "Parable of the Talents" (Matthew 25:14-30). All things come to mind: some people are given "more" than others, but are they supposed to use it just to win converts? (Mormon young men pay to go on their missions to proselytize).

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Twelve (1996): I have gotten in to a party at the House of Representatives. But I am asked if I would like to “serve food” to pay my dues.

Thirteen (1980): I find a “lost everything” message at MCC Dallas and take someone in. His being home will prevent one burglary later.

Fourteen (1968): A drill sergeant says my problem is “too much education” and then asks “Where you from?” Later, on KP, another EM asks how many jobs I’ve had and how many I’ve been fired from. Zero.

Fifteen (2010): A local outdoor market in Arlington has a “Be Brave and Shave” fundraiser for cancer. I decline to be shaved (I don’t need to), but blog about it.

Sixteen (1969): A fellow soldier at Fort Eustis mimics me by screaming, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” He recognized the core concept from Marx only at the policy, not local level. That soldier was fond of acting out Tiny Tim (“O, go way butterfly”) and of uttering the onomatopoeia “thmooth”. I don’t know that I had “recruited” the guy, but at least I “unconverted” him away from his genealogy charts.

Okay, those are the 16, or even more numerous “parts” of my final exam question.

Let’s set up the train of thought. I have been motivated by what happened to understand what people wanted from me, why they wanted it, and why they sometimes interfered. “I wasn’t hurting anyone.” I have a sense that “they” thought I could become a burden on the group, slow it down, and jeopardize the survival of everyone. Now, I have to say what my own “goals” were. On one level, it was self-expression: first music, and then “giving others the words.” It was recognition, which isn’t the same as attention (despite what “they” say).

Others, it seemed, were determined that I would join their teams and play by rules that they had made. I was even expected to root for their purposes, to join in their song. In recent years, I have been particularly impressed by the way people want me to join in augmenting their social capital and even taking care of their children, when they don’t grasp that some decades back I would have been seen as morally and perhaps biologically unfit, and how recently I’ve managed to do pretty well by keeping a personal distance, observing, and treating the mainstream world of social ties and procreation as optional. The idea of expecting participation from someone like me in the social capital of others may come from focused religious precepts, but now “generativity” (as a moral requirement of everyone) seems to apply to sustainability for a whole civilization. We can’t afford to allow some “special” people to waste the futures of the unconceived as if nothing mattered once they are gone.

Practically all major religions, Abrahamic religions at least, place a lot of emphasis on “common good” and sustainable future for some group of people (such as “the Jews” in the Old Testament). All religions expect the individual to accommodate himself to and sometimes “sacrifice” (differently) for the needs of the group. Obviously, this can encourage abuse by the leadership of “the group.” There is a general impression that over time and generations, things get better for the individual, and ideas like

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equality and justice for the individual can germinate. But this always requires personal and “unequal” sacrifice. Eventually, a culture has to deal with its notion of the value of every human life. To deal with some of the inevitable contradictions that follow, Christianity introduces the idea of salvation by grace. It’s necessary. And individual people have to deal with it. Life has to be unfair to become fairer, eventually. (Think about those talents. And rent *So Dear to My Heart*.)

Now, my own “fundamental problem” – with how others perceive me and with my getting my message out – is my insistence of following goals I have chosen for myself. The writings of Paul Rosenfels showed how this is an attribute of an “unbalanced personality.” Over the years, that has gotten easier to do, but recently this became challenging for me again.

But over the years, three or four major aspects of my “problem” stand out and stitch themselves together.

The first of these is my use of “upward affiliation” in relationships. I explained this at the opening of Chapter 2. Now it can happen with either heterosexual or gay relationships, but in the context of male homosexuality it seems particularly sharp-edged. Remember, society was presented as a competitive enterprise to me when I was growing up. Those who did less well wound up with a lower “station in life,” serving others, or sometimes became cannon fodder in the military draft. Why, then, wasn’t it “logical” that people who “fail” are morally less worthy? In this sense, everyone is morally responsible for his own circumstances in life. But that makes a “relationship” with someone “below” less “worthy” of being experienced. This gets to be mapped to the area of physical attractiveness, where I would “feel” that the “superior” (and more “masculine” and more “perfect” young man was “mine,” with his body replacing (or even becoming) mine. In my mindset earlier in life, having a body that was more “feminine” equated with “moral inferiority” because it implied becoming a burden on the community, in line with right-wing mindsets common in the 1950s – or even today with right-wing authors like Joseph Nicolosi who speaks of “gender deficits” in counseling parents on “preventing homosexuality”. We won a war against this kind of thinking, and then embraced ourselves anyway, just out of human nature. Of course, that makes me vulnerable to rejection by the other person, and tends to lead to running around in circles.

In practice, a lot of this didn’t matter too much over the years when I lived in my own urban enclave and things went relatively well. As times got harder, after 9/11 and during all the other crises, I would more often hear people honored as “husbands and fathers” as if non-parents were less, and in line to make the sacrifices or ride in back of the bus. The gay marriage debate became as much about “equality” for the unattached as about equal “benefits” among different kinds of couples.

But what’s become apparent in recent years is that I don’t experience the emotion from familial experiences that others do. At first this seemed like a refusal to “join in” and be recruited (or do the tailgating myself). But now it’s clear it’s also a lack of readiness to take on family responsibilities from others (in areas like living habits) if needed, something other families experience (as with people raising siblings’ children after tragedies). But this all goes back to the teasing and physical humiliation (of not

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having a good enough “body”) in early interpersonal relations as a boy, all of which would make adult relationships with women a sham.

It’s apparent that the “hyper-competitiveness” demanded of young men (when I was raised) risked an unsurmountable contradiction. If I were to be humiliated and be brought low, I couldn’t be allowed to turn around and give other marginal young men in my cohort (as in college dorms) confidence that they could expect to be successful with women either, leading to a vicious cycle. The value system I grew up with desperately wanted this kind of reassurance from me despite my past competitive problems, and I could no longer give it to them.

It’s easy to “hide” behind supposed moral strictures in order not to feel unwelcome emotions, as for unattractive people. But does what you “feel” really matter? Is it what you do? You may not do enough for others if you don’t get an emotional reward. It remains more comfortable to stay aloof.

It may be Rick Warren (not Pat Robertson, in the last chapter) who “gets it right” when he says (in his book *The Purpose-Driven Life*) that people have to learn “it’s not about you” (or just about you) before they can put affection for and fellowship with others in the right place, and then be able to create and keep a marital relationship that can stand the tests of hardship and age – and then (without a sense of “humiliation”) be prepared to extend some of this to others even outside of a partnership relationship as needed by “living in a community.” My whole track in life could be seen as taking me away from the community resource pool if needed. I had my musical and partial intellectual gifts but, for whatever reason (epigenetics or maybe even boyhood measles), not enough room in my brain for everything, at least not without a lot of sacrifice.

The second part of my “problem” was that I tended to demand a high profile for my views (on “personal responsibility,” especially in areas like taking on too much mortgage debt) when I hadn’t taken on the risk or responsibility that others have assumed by marrying and having children. On my blogs, I have called this general problem “The Privilege of Being Listened To” and “Paying Your Dues.” It’s dangerous to depend on the unseen sacrifices of others, especially those who do risky or dirty jobs one can’t do oneself (money and bitcoins shouldn’t alone soften your hands). Yet, it seemed for years that I could be very effective by playing the role of “journalist – columnist – alien anthropologist”. It was my tendency for observation and transmission of what I witnessed that changed my own perception of personal freedom, away from just privacy and being left alone, and even from equality, to something much more tied to a common future where I really belonged. Sometimes I got feedback saying that my style of maverick public speech, outside the discipline of solidarity, could tempt less scrupulous politicians to take my dares, maybe overseas, or maybe in the US where I’ve even been told that my calling attention to largely unknown filial responsibility laws could cause them to be enforced!

Here comes the “Third Part”: All of this can be foreclosed by the possibility of major disruption by circumstances beyond my control. That’s become more apparent in the years since 9/11, with many natural and man-made disasters, including Katrina, financial crises, and the like. All of these invoke continuing questions of sustainability, and whether “hyper-individualism” is driving society to live beyond its means, or to antagonize potential enemies around the world and at least give them excuses

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to complain that they are “exploited” (in the matter of low-wage workers overseas, they certainly are). In this regard, earlier catastrophes like the sudden eruption of AIDS in the 1980s all seemed like examples of a basic principle: as patterns of social behavior change, huge and novel problems and threats can occur suddenly. One could say that about agricultural practices, international travel, and pandemics.

Personally, I have found that coercion or force does affect my thought processes. Coercion involves threat, and the possibility of giving up my own direction and accepting that of others. In the past, this could be avoided by care in my own work, because a lot of my work was done essentially alone and the premium was on accuracy and repeated dependability. (That raised its own issues, related sometimes to lack of immediate attentiveness and compulsiveness, but all of this relates back to earlier periods of coercion, I now believe.) Even if the circumstances of my mother’s passing have left me much better off than they might have, I can certainly imagine how catastrophe can occur. And I can imagine the forced bargaining that would follow – to step up and become a role model for OPC, other people’s children – when I was never competitive enough to have my own.

In fact, a lot of the value of my writings goes beyond just “warning people” of how catastrophe could occur, to what we can do to prevent it. There are numerous dangers that have been little discussed – such as coronal mass ejections (from geomagnetic storms related to gigantic solar flares or “space weather”), or EMP attacks by indignant terrorists (events which don’t require nuclear weapons and can be targeted and localized, as pointed out as early as pre-9/11 2001 by *Popular Science* and in a 2013 book *A Nation Forsaken* by Michael Maloof), or lesser-known potential natural disasters like an avalanche in the Cumbre Vieja volcanoes across the Atlantic, possibly creating East Coast tsunamis several hundred feet high. There are things that could be done to prevent some of the possibilities, just as with pandemics. But I have to face the one reason that “doomsday” would be so problematic for me is that I don’t find much point in forming intimate relationships just so that a “family” survives. I have nothing to offer the world of “doomsday preppers.” The whole notion that we can presume stability and live out of “psychological surplus” (as developed by Paul Rosenfels, as I discussed in the first book) now seems unrealistic. In real life, adaptive needs drive a lot of need for real relationships.

Of course, there are personal dangers, too, mainly medical, as anyone gets older. In the past, we tended to accept that we wouldn’t live a long time once we had major problems. Now, we can treat things and keep ourselves alive longer, but only if we offer one another much more compassion than in the past. This completely transcends the highly personalized notion of “personal responsibility” developed in the past few decades. So I think my writings should prod people to reconsider our “social contract” – how we will strike the right balance between individual and common goals, without any more government than necessary. One of the most “obvious” challenges will be demographic – maintaining reverence for human life as people live longer and become dependent longer. That probably means that “responsibility for others” (both the elderly and other people’s children) becomes a positive expectation (as it once was), not just an avoidance of having babies outside of marriage.

As my own life experience started, I was struck by competitiveness, which migrated into a kind of expressive individualism, and a loss of sense that the point of a lot of these “sports” exercises in youth

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was to learn team play (even down to sacrifice bunts in baseball). I came to view people as I saw them physically, as did our culture. In more recent years, we have again been reminded that good or bad fortune makes a lot of difference, especially when the global climate that grows more unstable possibly because people don't cooperate to the extent necessary. Earlier generations accepted the inevitability of hardships as part of a family or community's evolution, and dealing with this was something parents expected to pass down through families; that process has held much less sway in recent years. Instead, my own life migrated into an exercise in preventing all possible mistakes, partly because I was "alone," but also because of the kind of work I did. Yet, I depend on the kind of people who can live on the Gulf Coast or in a wildfire zone, lose everything, and rebuild – together with others committed in a family.

I would even say that some scenarios (nuclear terrorism, to give an outlier example) could leave a society for which I have nothing to contribute and would not want to live in. And some medical scenarios, with extreme measures in terms of bypass surgeries and transplants to prolong life that may not be very "productive," would not be appropriate for me, as I cannot command or give familial affection very well in such novel circumstances. Is this a bad place to be?

One can ask again, however, what is the point of all this "talk" (or Pharisee-speech) if I am not prepared or "willing" to be close to people who "need" me or would actually benefit from my example. This fourth question is not easy to answer. I can suggest, however, that love or charity – in the best sense of the New Testament – is not something we ration by giving away our "allowance" or time online. We do the best we can with our own talents or "gifts of the spirit" and some of that time does need to be alone. It makes more sense, for example, to finish my music and get it into professional shape so that I or someone else could play it in an assisted living center program, than just to give up my time to others who really don't benefit that much, and never finish my own work. But if they do benefit from personal contact from me, I should get something rewarding out of the interaction.

Because of the experience of coercion, and the prodding sometimes to settle for selling other people's causes, I've come to understand the extreme negativity – even nihilism – in some parts of the world, even if I would condemn what some people actually do. I can imagine now the outrage someone could feel over the "contamination" of his religious heritage by foreign forces, enough to the point that, even if spoiled, he thinks the world is no longer "worth" living in. (Yup, sounds cowardly, doesn't it!) I can see how a psychopath could want others to "learn a lesson" about their own hidden exploitation of others, even at the cost of one's own freedom or life. I'm sane enough not to follow this kind of action myself, but I do see how it has happened to others, and it is frightening. And a lot of it happens because of aggression by others. Christianity has something to offer here (above the calls of other religions for some kind of collective focus under the authority of God): the necessity of grace, and forgiveness. For when people think they are completely on their own, they wind up paying for the sins of others anyway.

I'd mention here a particular concept, **expropriation**. It's closely connected to sacrifice. The prospect of it, going unanswered, can be particularly galling. I would see the failure of the government or anyone else to pay a debt already incurred to me (and I regard most of my Social Security FICA contributions as a debt to me), and particularly its possible repudiation – as a kind of expropriation. I do not view reasonable taxes of an ordinary nature, or even an increase in them to meet the debt crisis, however, as



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“takings.” I differ from some in the “Tea Party” in this regard. But I regard crime as expropriation, particularly when committed by those with nothing to lose, and I would see conscription that way now. The political right sees “Obamacare” as a kind of expropriation or government-sponsored Robin Hood-playing, making the healthy pay more to help the unhealthy (whether by misfortune or misbehavior). But, in a society that values human life, the alternative is more pressure on individuals to sacrifice on their own to take care of others.

During the past decade, I have been surprised by the way others have served up interpersonal challenges as if they were knuckleballs. Since I am public, as noted, my “indifference” (unwillingness to pander) to some people, formerly not so noteworthy during those couple of decades where marriage and family had become a matter of “private choice,” and my tendency to reduce my view of people to moral computations, becomes viewed as aggression, and my speech sometimes comes across as intended to show others up, as if others really will fail if reminded of the possibility. I’d say, not really: I think there’s a lot we need to understand if we’re going to make it, after I’m “gone.” Yes, it would be easier to offer communal intimacies to others if I had generated my own family. Nature values diversity just as it follows (and then extends, in psychological areas) some basic patterns, so a family could come from a same-sex pairing, even if that doesn’t support a backup of someone else’s child’s “birthright” to a particular kind of family. But was I too self-absorbed with my own peculiar “talents” to have a family at all, and get back in the game in middle innings? Phillip Longman (*The Empty Cradle*) may have a point. The truth is, I need to accomplish my own thing, to be good for anyone “interpersonally,” and that means content creation, journaling, and music. Yes, I do like “keeping them honest.” I could even imagine doing this on my own show.

There’s one more thing about coercion: it seems to be part of our politics. It typically grows first in tribal or religious groups, to protect the sustainability of the group, and tends to spread as groups believe they need to impose their “motivation” on others. For a time it seems ineluctable, and tends to break down as more people become convinced of its irrationality. Nevertheless, the concept that individuals need to become attentive to others for some larger “common good” keeps alive the idea of what commitments need to be expected of everyone. The notion that non-conforming individuals could adversely affect other mechanisms in “the common good” has become more credible with the self-promotion that can occur with the Internet. You learn that compassion becomes more important than deciding what the “rules” (which could have come from a radical religious source) say. All of this makes up the “alternative minimum tax” in the world of karma and personal morality.

History teaches us repeatedly that authoritarian politicians often make a lot of “common” goals and like to scapegoat those who are “different” as moochers on tribal or national stability. Russia’s Vladimir Putin (actually willing to blame gays for national fertility, as if everyone – especially women – owes their potential procreation to society) is only the latest example. In the US, some “evangelical” leaders preach the “natural family” as a tool for the communal socialization of everyone, obviously to the advantage of the socially or politically powerful. Nevertheless, from an individual’s own moral perspective, the ability to meet the real needs of others, even when it compels an irregular sacrifice, matters. Some things need to get done, so if government doesn’t, individual people need to feel the necessary incentives to do them, sometimes motivated more directly within family groupings where real needs can be directly

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seen. True, there is a gap between taking care of your own and responding to real need beyond the family, and (historically) many families don't bridge it, but real caring probably has to be learned at home first before going on the road. "Your" own expression only means something when it reaches others, so by logic you would need to "love" them, whatever their immediate shortcomings. Lack of purpose, along with the threat of coercion from those who really need attention, tends to create personal problems in impulse control. True, it's wonderful not to experience jealousy or covetousness.

It is reasonable to say that "inalienable rights" go along with "unavoidable responsibility" for others – in part because there is so much entropy and luck involved. In recent years, there has been plenty of talk of "almost compulsory" national service, to give everyone a sense of what it is like to sustain liberty and share its risks – although that might sustain bureaucracy. You wouldn't have to restrict it to young adults (actually, even back in the 1950s, people sometimes spoke of "taxes on time," outside the monetary system). This would lead in a big way to more emphasis on complementarity in personal associations. This sort of thinking certainly reflects Rick Warren's "It's not about you" (or "purpose-driven") idea of ethics and values, as being much less about choice, personal expression, and our own individual identities than we have gotten used to believing in.

As I get older, and can see the "other shore of endless worlds" appearing, I do wonder what happens at passing. Why am I "me" and not someone else, maybe living in Somalia? Is it my karma? Even given mathematical arguments about the total number of people who have ever lived, it seems to me that the "soul" is a basic object in physics or cosmology, and cannot be destroyed. Maybe the laws of entropy and thermodynamics apply. As I already noted, I can say that I do not think I would try to survive certain catastrophes, or accept radical medical intervention of some kinds (like organ transplants or mutilative surgeries), and I may not get all the desperate medical care at end of life that others expect, especially those with kids. (My financial planners got me to purchase a "single premium" long-term care product, which sounds like a moral obligation on my part.) But it may be dangerous to "bargain away" my last period of life, as disheartening as I think my mother's experience was. We really don't know what happens at the end. Maybe one stays in one's last moment for eternity – as if the progress of space-time locks up – like a dream one cannot wake up from (that little top in the movie *Inception* keeps spinning). Or maybe I would wake up on another planet, maybe in this galaxy or maybe in another universe, in another world's equivalent of Somalia here. The climb back might be unattainable.

There was a curious irony about my distance from others. It fills a complete circle, starting with the disinclination to meet some real needs of others, in an environment that appeared driven by religious righteousness; yet my own need for upward affiliation was driven by my own extract of righteousness. Yes, helping others works when "what I do" works, but it should matter personally that a specific person ("living soul" as my father used to say) benefits or is affected or not. I don't tune into that because I didn't start my own family – or is it the other way around, the classic "chicken and egg" problem?

In sum, what are the "rules" for someone like me? Here's a compact take on the question. I wind up with a definite sense of what is expected of someone in my "position" or "situation." The rules are like this: Accept the fact that "you" depend on others in ways you don't see. Don't draw undue attention to

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yourself. Do what others want. Don't make too much of your own ideas or plans. (I wonder, if my own "purpose" isn't respected, why should I be around or be loved? But watch what happens next.) Since "we" loved you, then learn to love others whom you might otherwise perceive as "beneath" you – and find satisfaction in doing so. Don't look upward too much. Outside family or tribe, "ocelot" heroes have clay feet. (Well, I saw, I already learned to beware of the hairless man like Lance Armstrong.) Understand that people who don't look as good or who haven't done as well may have been genuinely unlucky, with regard to some circumstance that they had no power to prevent. Don't indulge in your fantasy or dream world, enter the world of real life. Learn to take care of others, using gender-appropriate skills as much as possible, and let it mean something to you (and be prepared to sacrifice, because others do, in their own ways). Eventually, even if you didn't grow up wanting kids, you'll be able to marry and have children and have a little Cape Cod-cottage domain around you (although maybe in someone else's model railroad!) Most of all, realize it isn't about you (out of Rick Warren), or that you may not matter as much as you want to – you may have to accept the idea that it will be your descendants who can amount to something publicly or globally. It "isn't about you," it's about "shared goals," governed in granularity by the "natural family." You can't remain an adolescent forever. You have to live through all your stages of life, like everybody else.

This sure sounds like swallowing (and not retching on) some humble pie. It is also an "alternate universe" of morality, the "other side" of a chemistry equation to be balanced, self-evident in older generations but rather forgotten today. Of course, it opens people to the abuse of authoritarian leadership, which may need to have some sense of earned or deserved superiority ratified. But it does recognize that you need cohesion and leadership, or your clan might not make it at all. "Societies," tribes, families, and countries are used to the idea that they need to demand loyalty from everyone in order to have futures at all. They see "freedom" in terms of freedom of their "tribes" from rules by overlords or bigger authorities above them; but within their ranks they expect altruism, eusociality, a kind of local "Marxism," and a willingness of the individual to maintain a bearing on the real needs of the group – all as a matter of ultimate "fairness" – everybody takes turns with the risk of personalized sacrifice. Their concerns can be legitimate, and place the "sensitive" individual in the position of being forced to give up self for the larger goal of survival of the group. An individual person – like me – might not want to continue living in such a situation. I can't imagine, for example, having wanted to survive the Holocaust to set up a Zionist state that seizes property based on Biblical claims, but I understand why some people think this is necessary. In my own life, I was able to make a separate peace or truce with this kind of demand – in large part by exiling for long times into a separate world and "watching" – but that isn't possible for everyone, and double lives are becoming experiences of the past. I can understand why some people, faced with such crises, choose not to go on.

It seems that "social conservatives" imagine a moral development process that begins with learning to "**step up**" for others as a sign that you are part of the group (especially family) as well as your own person, even when variable sacrifice results (especially relevant for the constitutionally or even biologically "different"). Moral normality requires that everyone have their own "skin in the game" of the whole group. The process might well be driven as much by market and informal social pressures as the law. That leads, in their minds, to the need to have a marital relationship complete with one's own

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kids. In fact, by contraposition, refusing to participate in continuing the family is seen as tantamount to treason. It's easier for everyone to make the painful growth steps of socialization if everyone else has to – but there's no way to enforce such a notion without hypocrisy. Back around 1996, in an early online essay, I had written that "honor" is morality's "Third Normal Form." But the "lower numbered" normal forms certainly involve shared goals, sacrifice, and motivation by complementarity. If you don't step up when your bungee jump line drops, you forfeit the right to ever be recognized as a victim.

What I'm really cogitating is how those of us who think we are a bit "special" should behave, even when "nobody is looking" (that was "honor"). This is not a call for more laws or court opinions, but of course these concerns can affect policy (such as the marriage issue). They can also warn us to take better care of our infrastructure (including the environment of this planet). I think we are in a world where **asymmetry** matters more than it ever did before, and what normally obscure and previously "powerless" individuals do on their own really "counts." Failure of some of us to do so can further provoke social disorder and indignation, leading to seeing more people unwilling to play by the "rules" (because they don't think anything is "fair" and don't see others "paying their dues") and lashing out in ways that amount to declaring war on decent civilization. I even have to contemplate the idea that becoming crippled by the criminal, combative, or indignant violent acts of another could be harder to take than failing at my own hand, which is of course possible. I have thought that, at least in my case, were my end to come because of someone else's indignation or warfare, personal commemoration and celebrative reception would not be appropriate; it would not be a time for others to make themselves feel "all right." In a sense, loss is exactly what it is, and there are no victims, just casualties. As I noted in the previous chapter, my own life of experience on this planet is finite, and it is certainly beyond half over.

I do have the impression that people believe that lifelong "marriage" and concomitant personal investment in children and future generations is essential for everyone and is supposed to require sacrifice from absolutely everyone, even if for someone like me the "sacrifice" would be unusual. There is a certain resignation in such a belief; but I have always felt that others assumed that if I stood back and watched while somebody else "did it," I would leave something inherently challenging for others to do and therefore was taking advantage of them.

Over the past 15 years, since I wrote my first book and entered into self-publishing, there has developed enormous progress in "equal rights for gays" in an abstract sense (capitulating in President Obama's 2013 Inauguration Day speech when he equated Selma to Stonewall). Sometimes, my own life went in a backwards direction, toward less freedom, as during the eldercare period. I had to face the idea that I don't believe in "**victims**," even if I am one. And I had to accept the idea that sometimes I cannot save "you" physically or competitively, even if that makes me look like a social coward. My own personal experience, even since entering publishing, is to get the impression that I'm "supposed" to give up my own voice, and use my own "professional" background now to sell things in order to support others, and face the same risks and stake as everyone else, even if I have much less inner passion. I cannot bring myself to hawk someone else's goals just to prove my humanity. It does strike me that the idea of "common good" is predicated on a notion, "I can do the right thing if I know everybody else

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does.” That may build solidarity and stability – but what about character and innovation? Maybe the character does depend on loving in both directions after all.

It’s true, my tendency toward scrutiny and fantasy could lead me stranded, or perhaps in the position of Doubting Thomas. But I have never been jealous. I do need to learn to accept forgiveness. But I still resist inception from anyone else. So, “*Je ne regrette rien.*”