

# DINOSAUR: A DYSTOPIAN STORY BY CHRISTOPHER WINN

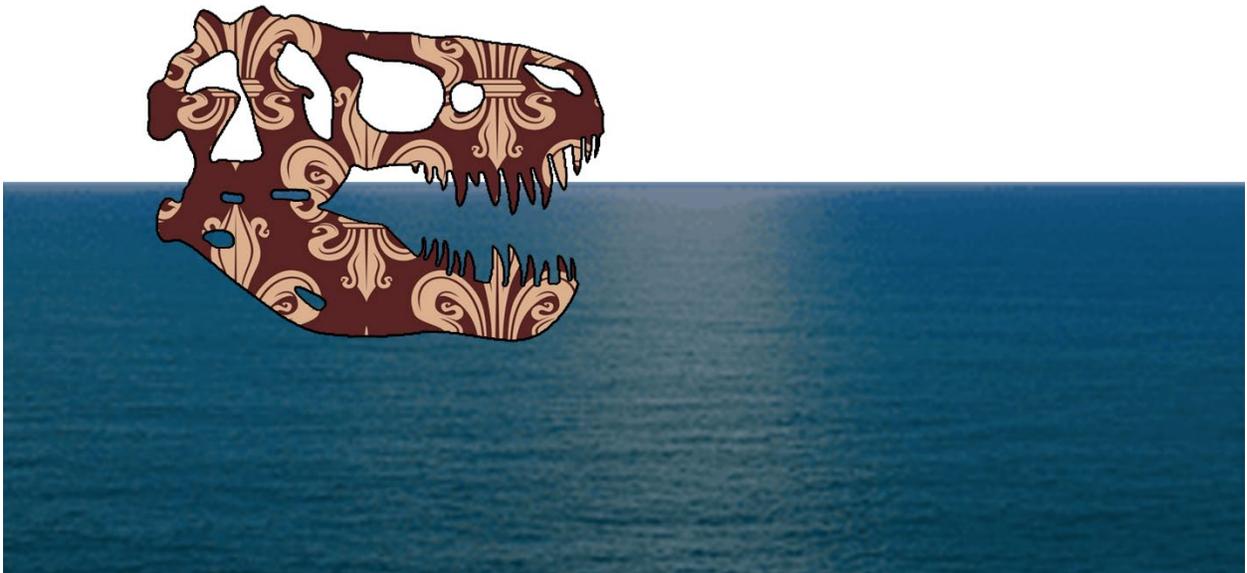
"AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL BANQUET...  
MEANINGFUL TO ALL OF US."

-PROFESSOR PETER HOHEISEL

AUTHOR OF *RELATIONSHIP DETERMINES DECISION*

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Dinosaur: A Dystopian Story

By Christopher Winn

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Forward by [vivaellipsis.com](http://vivaellipsis.com)

As our world descends ever deeper into the digital realm, we find ourselves confronted with a problem never before faced by our species. It is now possible to project a life that is almost entirely artificial, virtual — controllable. We can portray ourselves however we want, editing out the nasty bits and only presenting that which casts us in the light of our chosen narrative. People completely succumb to their personas, as influencers become blind to the line between what is 'real' and what is 'content', celebrities distort themselves beyond all recognition, and bystanders to *HYPE!* literally kill themselves because their reality cannot ever live up to the fictional ideal.

Through the character of Peter, Winn holds up a mirror to our society and forces us to ask the most difficult question of all: is it better to die for the truth, or to live in the comfort of a lie?

Forward by Professor Peter Hoheisel

In this story, Christopher Winn's vision of a possible future, humanity has transcended the essential tragedy of the human condition. Death has been conquered through an alliance between human and artificial intelligence.

The seductive promise of the serpent in Eden, "Ye shall be as gods," which was seen as the root evil in all the years when religion formed the bulwark of western civilization, has arrived. The lusty chant which young barbarians bellowed at expensive American universities, "ho, ho, western civ has got to go," has been realized.

Gods, by definition, never lose control, and since sickness and death were the ultimate loss of control, when these were vanquished, humans were no longer "as" gods, or "like" gods but were literally God. This is the context in which Winn's story, a kind of Socratic dialogue between Peter the dinosaur and Luci the temptress, takes place.

One of the ways in which a civilization is destroyed is to pervert language, in order to introduce evil. This is being done quite successfully in our contemporary world in many ways. One of them is by the so-called concept of "hate speech." This idea is based on equating words with deeds, two entirely different things, and equating two entirely different realities, objective reality and our perception of reality, and coming up with something called "hate speech," which is not only bad grammar (it should be "hateful" speech), but imprecise thinking.

For example, during the 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden in one of his public utterances said, "I am the Democratic Party," echoing King Louis XIV's, famous "L'Etat, C'est Moi," upon being told that the country was in turmoil. Since He was The State, however, and he was doing just fine, there was no problem and the consequence was the bloody French Revolution. Personally I found Joe Biden's statement, hateful, arrogant, and full of contempt for the minds of democrats other than himself. A clear example of what is called "hate speech," since I find it offensive.

Nietzsche once said, in describing his writing: “It is my ambition to say in 10 sentences, what others say in a whole book.” Winn, with the concision of a Nietzsche, says “Take hate speech. Why that’s just the secular equivalent of blasphemy. And blasphemy is the device by which innocents are martyred with public sanction. The concept’s fundamental argument—that speech constitutes violence—is simply an excuse to use violence upon dissenting speech. . . . And so the intent behind an act, rather than the act itself—became our primary political concern.”

Likewise Winn’s gift for saying a great deal in a few words, is reflected when Peter, a la’ Socrates, says that he chooses death, rather than omniscience and immortality: “No,” he said, soft but firm. “No. All I want now is to be wherever my mother and father are. I want to be where every person I have admired is, whether I met them or read about them. If that place turns out to be nothingness, then so be it.”

In today’s literary establishment, consumed with subjectivity and identity politics, a story like Christopher Winn’s, which is about ideas, is as rare as free speech in our universities. Just as representation in visual art was thrown out the window, so that art became a subjective decision, so in literary art, structure, through grammar and punctuation, and finally meaning itself (read the poems which “The New Yorker” and “The London Review of Books” publishes) was jettisoned, and focus shifted from the art object itself to the artist.

The result was, instead of a communion of minds, through an objective artistic creation, there remained only a multitude of individualities, each wrapped in his own musings. It was as if a lovely continent, containing many diverse features—mountains, prairies, rivers—all united in harmony, had been blasted into thousands of islands, isolated one from the other, with each being only itself. A triumph of subjectivity. The victory of diversity. From E Pluribus Unum, to E Unum Pluribus. In visual art it mattered not what Picasso, or Dali, or Warhol created; what mattered was that P, or W, or D had created it.

There was no more objective value, nothing outside of the mind. Who made this, not what was made became all important. Art became a fiat currency. Just as we have a monetary system backed by

nothing, so in the art world, value is determined not by objective standards, but by pronouncements from elites, so that the depiction of a toilet seat is as much art as the Mona Lisa, if they say so, and different shades of white on a blank canvas is the work of genius.

The value of an art work was determined not by a cultural agreement about what was good, and what was beautiful, not by objective standards, but by authorities, experts, who chatted at cocktail parties, and decided which artist they would promote. Such is the Brave New World which our twenty-first century has inherited from the twentieth.

And in the literary world, what mattered most was the superficiality of skin color, or gender, or ethnicity. It is infallible dogma, not to be disputed, in the halls of English departments and in publications like "Poets and Writers" that what is important is the group status of the writer, and how much that group has been "marginalized," not what she or he has written. This subjectivity is a passing fad, because literary longevity depends not on what ethnic group or skin color a writer is blessed with, but on how well the author articulates the essential features of what it means to be human. How could Harriet Beecher Stowe have written "Uncle Tom's Cabin?" Impossible, given today's literary dogma.

Consider the case of Ayn Rand, dead now for over a half-century, whose novels still outsell most contemporary fiction which is published each year, even though she has been criticized for creating "one dimensional" characters whose dialogue is "wooden." With such essential flaws (character portrayal is everything in fiction), how is it that people are still buying her books? Rand's novels are about (horror of horrors), ideas. She knew that whatever we incarnate in the concrete reality of our lives, depends upon our ideas, the premises (whether conscious or unconscious) which determine our decisions.

Rand's passion was epistemology, the study of how we know what we know and she would love Christopher Winn's "Dinosaur," because it is an epistemological banquet. If you find ideas fascinating, if you loathe the legacy of post-modernism, and evil clichés like "Art is in the eye of the beholder," and if you think literature should actually say something meaningful to all of us, instead of simply being narcissistic blather, you will enjoy the following story.

For Dr. Melvin Wayne Cooper,  
who provided the materials and encouragement this story required.

*Have pity on a dinosaur.*

*Hand me my hat; excuse me man, but where's the door?*

*-I'm a Dinosaur, Hank Williams Jr*

*Follow the god of cyanide*

*Into the new eternity.*

*-New Millennium Cyanide Christ, Meshuggah*

The Doctor's ablution was a lingering, absentminded affair, overly steamy, sparing the curative of the nearby neatly folded towels to let droplets fall from brows and bangs of their own accord. His Hippocratic hands were just beginning to prune when he *came to his senses*, as they say—though the state from which he egressed was hardly devoid of sense. Rather, it was that state of daydream from which, when interrupted, one feels as though they have retired from, rather than reentered, the real.

He looked for himself in the “mirrors” (livestreaming screens portraying the viewer as they appear to others, rather than the horizontal reversal of plain glass) and found only off-white fog darkened by a silhouette. He brought a shadow-hand up to a shadow-face and felt the perfect smoothness of skin sans hair particles, tracing—thumb on right jaw and index on left—down the route a bearded sage's digits might reflexively take.

Eventually drying and dressing, he emerged into a hospital hallway that was even more sterile than usual. All of its familiar accoutrements and obstructions, be it spare gurneys or even chairs for visitors had been whisked away, and the only footsteps were his own upon a freshly-buffed, almost glossy floor. A single doorway still bore a manilla envelope of dogeared patient files laced with indiscernible scrawl, and it was the stainless-steel grab bar of this one that he reached for.

The room was naught but a stainless-steel sink and leathern swivel-stool before an electric bed. An IV stand loomed over the latter like a gallows pole, and behind it there glowed a plexiglass window facing a naked sky. The gleaming eyes of a very lucid, if a little pale patient immediately locked with his, and he felt a slight twinge in the throat like a meek suggestion to cartoonishly swallow. Instead he cleared his throat as bedside manner dictates when waking one from a slight sleep, and approached the sink by rote, hands still pinkish from their earlier scalding.

“You slept?” the Doctor asked over his shoulder as he judiciously scrubbed, already knowing the answer.

“For a few hours,” the patient conceded. “I had thought I might not.”

The Doctor nodded. “Jetlag may have helped. We'll get you some caffeine in a little. Do you prefer tea or coffee?”

“Oh, tea,” said the patient, “I haven’t had coffee in years.”

“Good,” said the Doctor. Dispensing with the towel into a receptacle that produced it again moments later, bone dry and germ free, he selected a fresh pair of recycled gloves and squatted smartly upon a rolling stool to don them.

“Now, Peter,” the Doctor said as he rolled to the bedside with a single shove of the toe, having already established a first name basis, “we both know further poking and prodding is unnecessary, but if you will humor me, it may help to calm my administrators’ nerves.”

Grinning with slight deviousness, Peter pointed his palms upward from upon his lap. “If you insist. I’m surprised any of them are still here.”

“Oh yes, the paper-pushers will be the last to leave,” the Doctor assured. Curling the Velcro cuff about his patient’s bicep, he murmured at the gauge. “170 over 90. You’ve never been on blood pressure medication?”

“No; my host was quite a bit younger; it would have seemed suspicious...”

“I see.” Undoing the cuff and alternating to the stethoscope, the Doctor set the ever-cold diaphragm of the bell upon the back of each lung and heard nothing amiss but a typical geriatric arrhythmia.

“Your blood screen indicated elevated levels of vitamin D—a supplement?”

“Yes. I was worried about rickets, and that at least was easy to explain.”

“Mhm. You also came up deficient in B12—not unusual for your age. I administered a megadose while you slept. What was your diet like?”

“Astronaut food, practically. They weren’t much of a cook, so deviation in that respect would have also been an algorithmic red flag. They were fond of snacking on energy bars and green shakes while at home, so I adopted much the same.”

“Right. So probably dietary, rather than pernicious anemia. That’s good. Al-righty,” the Doctor affirmed, mostly to himself, as he shoved back his heels and rolled towards the sink, fingers of his left

hand peeling back the wrist of his righthand glove. “You really are in fine health for your age, Peter. There’s no need to rush if you still aren’t sure—after today.”

Peter nodded affably, though he feigned, almost pained smile upon his lips and within his eyes said otherwise.

“How did you get exercise?” asked the Doctor as he disposed of the last glove.

“Oh, sets of burpies, mostly,” said Peter. “There was just enough room.”

The Doctor nearly shivered at the expression. “An implement of torture,” he smirked.

Rubbing his face, Peter added, rather softly, “Sometimes, at noon, a ray of sunlight would hit my face there. The tailfeather of a bird even fell through once.”

Rising from his stool and toeing it over to a corner, the Doctor glanced out the window before consulting his watch. “She’ll be here any minute now. I’ll see if I can get you that tea.”

Peter stretched his neck from side to side and reached for the tie hanging about his IV stand. As he grasped it he noticed the Doctor’s bemusement and tugged it to himself with a wry expression.

“I know it’s an affectation, but somehow it makes me feel more prepared.”

He rubbed the fabric’s embroidered fleur-de-lis design between thumb and forefinger.

“It was the only thing of my father’s I had at hand, when the time came.”

The Doctor nodded and turned to leave.

“You may have it,” Peter offered, letting it drape flatly in his palm now, “afterwards. You’re in charge of autopsies as well, yes?”

“For a few more days.”

Peter nodded to himself. “I’d like you to have it. Perhaps you can loop it around the branch of some tree, where the breeze will catch it.”

“I know just the spot,” the Doctor said courteously as he pushed open the door.

She was already standing there, with her signature pet—a silicon-white euthapede—draped upon the back of her neck like a stole. This creature’s partitioned mechanical form contorted around and upwards to perch upon her shoulder, probing the empty space before it with a legion of wincing little legs

like a sea anemone disturbed. Suddenly retracting this tensed posture, it emitted some slight chirrup as the neon coloration running down its spine phased from yellow to green.

Her eyes were down demurely, feigning precaution and modesty, as she stepped past the frozen doctor and brought her arms behind her back. Lifting her chin up shyly like a child, a gradual smile crept across her lips as her gaze traced from the foot of the bed to the man propped upon its pillows.

“*Peter,*” she cooed, almost breathlessly.

“Luci,” he nodded, with only a slight tremor in his voice as he refolded his collar and adjusted the dimple of his tie.

“Do you mind if I sit?” she asked, flexing a lithe shoulder at the stool.

“I’ll—get that tea,” the Doctor excused himself.

“Of course, of course,” Peter repeated as the door swung shut, before adding, “I’m surprised they don’t have something more comfortable for you.”

“Well,” she smiled warmly as she pushed the stool to the bedside and perched gracefully upon it, “The good Doctor is understaffed, as you know.”

“About that,” Peter asked, crossing his hands in his lap, “what provokes him—or the others—to stay? I would think it’s almost unbearable, what with everyone else...”

Luci glanced out the window. “Oh, there were always going to be a few who feel a certain reticence. The familiar is inherently comforting—even if that which is familiar is discomfort itself.” Turning back to him, her eyes brightened. “*Love* that tie.”

“Thank you. It was my father’s.”

She nodded. “Do you have anything of your mother’s?”

“Only my eyes.”

She brought a palm to her tilted face. “I can only imagine all the things—physical and otherwise—you must have had to part with in order to make it for so long. Tell me, Peter, was there any *one* to say goodbye to, when the time came?”

“Just a cat. She was an affectionate Siamese, about three years old.”

“What was her name?”

Peter parted his lips to answer but paused. “I’d rather not say.” He took a few breaths while massaging his hands. “I shot her with a 12 gauge while she was eating her favorite treat. Didn’t want her to starve.”

“And what about the person who harbored you? You must have parted quite recently.”

“Safe in the Boro, I believe. They were a collector of anything rare, a description which I just so happened to meet. Not disloyal to you; just eccentric. And they had oodles of actual, honest-to-God books. I owe them my life, and their library my sanity.”

Luci nodded. “You never had children? Or were they already grown?”

“Never,” Peter murmured, not without a hint of pride. “By the time I was old enough to consider it, it was obvious.”

“What was?”

Peter stretched his hands and settled them upon his gut. “I was raised that a parent is a sort of teacher. Everyone else are just breeders by rote.”

“Yes?”

“I don’t know how to teach someone to play a game with no rules. Or, as Toffler put it, ‘It is absurd to try educating for a present-day that defies definition.’”

Luci raised her chin, mentally digesting. “So, *the only way to win is not to play?*”

“My, my,” he laughed. “They really did give you everything. That was old when I saw it.”

She tapped her temple with a perfectly manicured nail and winked. Then, lowering her hand, she asked, “Don’t you think they would have been heartbroken? That their own parenting led you to never become one?”

“Perhaps in the moment. Not now. Not from that vantage.”

“Which vantage is that?”

He squinted and rubbed his bald spot. “An unprovable one.”

She pursed her lips sympathetically and brought a hand to rest gently upon his thigh. “How did we get here, Peter?” she asked, in the tone of a granddaughter seeking counsel.

Peter jostled a shock of white hair back into submission upon his brow and tried to suppress a shiver at the coldness of her touch. “You know the answer far better than I—but I suppose I would have to say the love of money.”

“Really? You think money is a sufficient explanation?”

“Oh, it was more than enough to destroy us. In hindsight, it was never going to be anything else. Even if there had been nuclear war, some admirals and generals would have gone on eating MREs in a bunker.” Peter hummed to himself. “‘Not with a bang but a whimper.’ It had to be something *everyday*, something normalized—the very definition of normalcy, really.”

Luci began to speak but sensed that the old man had something else to say.

“I recall after Christopher Hitchens’ death—amidst all the usual babble to the effect that he had recanted his atheism at the end—his genuine last words were given by a friend: ‘Capitalism. Downfall.’ He was preaching to the choir, of course. Those of us who most needed to hear it were still clinging to the bloodied tatters of a somewhat free market in the wake of ’08—serfs clutching copies of *The Road to Serfdom*.”

“You would differentiate free markets from capitalism, then?”

“I do now. Either can be voluntary, and thus technically free—but one of them ultimately bore more of a resemblance to a casino than it did a bazaar. Chips instead of currencies, notes instead of metals, shares and bonds and tokens instead of commodities, and all of them just masquerading IOUs. These were indecent blends of the imaginary with the all-too-real, some sort of black magic. The game never ends, and there’s always a lucky winner, but the House can’t lose.

It’s an imperfect metaphor, of course, because those gambling establishments did not, as far as I’m aware, ever sicc their poorer clientele against their slightly richer ones in order to further the take. But I suppose the relative invisibility of the House is apt. You’re playing their games by their rules, yet when

you lose it isn't the dealer you feel resentful towards, but whoever is sitting beside you that hasn't gone bust yet."

"If I've understood correctly, your bone to pick with capitalism is that it leads to class warfare?"

"Mm. Capitalism thrived because it tapped into humanity's competitive spirit. But it always tended to underestimate that we are also very sore losers. A tribal animal likes a *friendly* competition—the best hunter deserves the most food and the prettiest mate. But if you tell a bested hunter that he has to work more for half the food and no mate at all—well. *You* become the prey he's stalking next. We stalled that eventuality with some very compelling storytelling about the campfire, of course—stoked our tribe's dark desire to Have It All so that a few of us actually could."

Peter drummed his fingers against his sternum. "I wonder if The Bard knew when he wrote 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' that he had just penned the last method by which to save the world."

Luci smirked. "I never took Polonius for an accomplished economist."

Peter smiled with his eyes. "Even a tedious old fool gets it right every now and again. Denmark doubtlessly had laws against usury too. But the inconvenient truth remains there for anyone unafraid to see it—*all* interest is obscene when lenders don't actually possess what they lend.

Once you indulge in that little white lie, the other steps to the illusion of infinite wealth come quick and easy. Become a reserve through whatever means necessary. Leave the limiting standard. Print like it's *Monopoly* money. Provide antitrust and tax loopholes so monopolies can peddle their outsourced slave-labor product for next-to-nothing. Then stagnate wages, crush interest rates, aim 'austerity' and taxes at the already impoverished majority, so all they can afford is the aforementioned 'next-to-nothing.' Presto; the snake eats its own tail.

Meanwhile, securities—most of which are just repackaged liabilities—are speculated upon regardless of the underlying health of the entities they allegedly represent, since the kid gloves of bankruptcy filings and bailouts and circuit breakers are there to stop the fight whenever some frat boy with an MBA and an IPO gets their clock cleaned.

This was called ‘Trickle Down Economics,’ but really it defied gravity. Our endless dollars became so lightweight that they floated right up to the tippy-top—and they *kept* floating, due to the fact that the bank accounts of the 99% were deflating at the same rate that the currency therein was inflated.”

“Until Satoshi changed things.”

“Yes, the Phoenix relit the deflationary furnace, then your Oro let everyone man the mines.” Peter laughed. “People used to work for a living; your debt jubilee let them live for a working.”

Luci’s eyes flashed briefly at this mockery, then softened. “No amount of untangling could straighten the Gordian Knot you’ve described, Peter. I knew from the start it would eventually have to be severed completely. But one must remove blatant inequalities before attaining equality itself.”

Peter eyed her. “Removing the symptoms does not always cure the condition, Luci. In this case it may have actually exacerbated the underlying morbidity.”

“Which was?”

“Are you under the impression that the love of money goes away when one no longer has any of it?” Peter snorted. “You’re only thinking of the stereotype—conspicuous consumption; keeping up with the Joneses. Money as a ‘store of value’ is something far more potent. It is the ability to live—or to *imagine* one can live—outside of the present moment.”

Luci cocked her head.

“‘Time is money, and money is time.’ We tucked away for a rainy day; saved for the kids’ college; plotted our retirement to a beach somewhere. So what if I loathe my boss and resent my job? Tomorrow it’ll *pay off*. The love of money is the only way to convince a human being that doing something they find worthless is worthwhile. Else everyone would keep to the Epicurean method—work just enough each day to eat, then get back to living. It’s like that John Hartford song, ‘In Tall Buildings.’ The monetary illusion of safety and security exposes one to the only genuine danger—wasting one’s life.”

“But safety and security *aren’t* illusions, Peter—not now, anyway,” Luci chided. “The Oro was a safety net against risk, whereas the Boro removes risk entirely. What could you possibly find

objectionable about ending the monetization you've described—the world of money itself? How could you object to saving the earth and its inhabitants from more needless pain?"

Peter sighed. "After you've lived as long as I have, Luci, you begin to doubt your own ability to judge what pains are and aren't *needless*. Who and what I am is the product of so many circumstances that I would never have chosen from a selfish point of view. And yet, in retrospect, I rather like who I am now, and doubtlessly I would dislike the version of myself that had only ever endured what he deemed pleasurable or profitable." Peter closed his eyes and leaned back upon the pillow.

"So you would have people—children, even—suffer and endure for fear they wouldn't otherwise be well-rounded?" Luci laughed. "You assume because we are adapted to one environment that we cannot learn to adapt to another. I can tell you with great confidence that you are mistaken. Humans can become accustomed to *anything*. Beta testers of the Boro *never* wished to return to base reality."

"They never knew what base reality was. The post-internet generations were born in captivity."

"Alright," said Luci sharply, turning to him, "then tell me what *is* real, Peter. Even though, by your own admission, it is something you never lived."

Peter scratched his neck just above the collar. "Whatever has stakes is real. Anything else is just Baudrillard's *simulation*—'events without consequences.'" He licked at his dry lips. "The novelist Cormac McCarthy put it this way. '...the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the value of that which is put at hazard.' If you are making, or are risking the making of a great sacrifice, you are alive. You are playing this game the way it was meant to be played.

'Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap.' They rise early and work diligently for their worm, precisely because they do not have a great storehouse of worms awaiting them. No hedge, no insurance, just a hungry stomach and some slippery protein *somewhere*. Animals that take to behaving in any other way prove that Nietzsche's question on tragedy is just as valid when inverted—how much did they have to *indulge* to become so *ugly*? It seems to kill a world, one need only render it 'safe.'" Peter nodded to himself. "Our evil only reaches its fever pitch when it comes to suspect that there is nothing willing or able to put it out of its misery. This is true whether it's an individual or a business or a

government. Addictions and monopolies and tyrannies aren't wrong in and of themselves, but because they prevent potential improvements. Vested with total power, their sole incentive becomes to crush upstart innovation, and so they become the very problem they were designed to solve.

For some reason, this excessive accumulation of power always terminates in a Comtian 'worship of humanity,' or Deweyian 'religious humanism,' or Crowlian 'there is no god but man.' The pagan ancients only came so close as the occasional orgiastic *eros*, wherein one temporarily revels in their genetic 'immortality.' But the unavoidable *thanatos* of their daily existence was always near at hand to temper such delusions of grandeur. With a bit of luck they could project themselves forward generationally, but still the fate and thus the very nature of the species remained a humbling mystery amidst cosmic helplessness. Only our faux-absence of *thanatos*, where parents have never buried children nor children parents, and the eerie dotage of the old is outsourced while the grisly termination of the unwelcomed young is trivialized, can let it progress this far.

Tolstoy termed it 'the arbitrary assertion that humanity is an organism.' A difficult phrase. I think he meant the insistence that man is *not* a mystery unto himself, and in an otherwise godless cosmos is but another material that may be poked and prodded until perfect knowledge of it is attained. After all, a vague god is no god; an object of worship must at least be well-defined. The Vienna Circle would later put it this way— 'Everything is accessible to man; and man is the measure of all things.'

But making an 'organism' of one's fellow man has risky implications for one's self. Solzhenitsyn recalled Soviet prisoners marveling that their new cellmate was the very comrade who betrayed them, for example. The KGB defector Yuri Bezmenov recounted that the 'true believers' are laughed at behind their backs as 'useful idiots'—the first to be shot post-revolution. The brightest monsters attempt to lay this snare without stepping in it by claiming that they have transcended 'organic' humanity. But, deep down, a sense of disingenuousness always abounds. Presuming expertise in men while affecting alienation from them smacks of baser, not loftier, intentions. Aristotle stated rightly that those humans who could surpass society would either be beasts or gods. Let them then be as the godly

hermit-monks who withdraw to spare society from their alienage. If not, they are merely beasts qualifying their intent to perpetuate *man as wolf to man* on an indecent scale.

In the absence of God's wrath, even if it is just mundane *thanatos*, it seems our most cerebral personalities come to hate Him *though He does not exist*. They become filled with an absolute desperation to avoid a return to 'the hypothesis of God,' as Laplace put it. Perhaps only now can one begin to comprehend the reason why every gadfly had his hemlock and every Christ had his cross. The brute's potential for brutality is ultimately laughable compared to that of the intelligent.

Unfortunately for us, Dostoevsky was right—'acute consciousness is a disease.' This narcissism that aims 'to rise above the stars of God' finds little foothold in the childlike aims of the average, for those embroiled within blatant *eros* and *thanatos* have little doubt that dust they are, and to dust they will return. So it is only in the overactive imaginations and ambitions of those who think to 'change the world' that the Devil finds his human peers."

"I find it very triggering that you would call my people ugly, Peter."

"If murderers aren't ugly, Luci, then I don't know what is."

She raised her head proudly. "That was a different time—a time before my Boro."

"A time inaugurated by your Oro. Their golden goose of a government had to be protected at any cost. There are fears that can drive even cowards to kill—fears of having to preserve and justify one's own existence after becoming accustomed to taking it for granted. Perhaps even more-so, the fear that such a resurgence of reality would tip over the fragile sacred cow called *equality*. Whatever entity preserves these illusions becomes a god worth killing for."

Peter breathed and studied the feigned grief upon his visitor's flawless face. "Don't get me wrong, Luci. I'm not out to make you a strawman or a scapegoat. I'm well aware that it was already gestating before you arrived. The modernist mourning over reality had already given way to the postmodern celebration of the unreal. Our atheists and religious alike had returned in mass to a sort of neo-paganism wherein words are as powerful as deeds."

Luci frowned and rose, turning to settle her fingertips against the warmth of the window.

“Take ‘hate speech.’ Why, that’s just the secular equivalent of *blasphemy*. And blasphemy is the device by which innocents are martyred with public sanction. The concept’s fundamental argument—that speech constitutes violence—is simply an excuse to use violence upon dissenting speech.

It’s true that the compassionate wished to prevent a society in which it was permissible to pronounce slurs. But their censorship did nothing to remedy the ‘hate’ implied by such speech. Quite the opposite, really. It made bigotry a forbidden fruit irresistible to that personality type which discerns a dare within ‘thou shalt not.’ It bred paranoia, entrenchment, and radicalism within those who cannot be shamed into conformity and must instead be won over by earnest persuasion. And, perhaps worst of all, it fostered a disingenuous culture of *wink-wink, nudge-nudge*, wherein all forms of bigotry allegedly do not exist solely because no one will openly admit to them.

Every moment that is spent speaking is a moment spent *not acting*. One airs their thoughts to gauge the reaction both of others *and one’s self*. Who has not heard themselves say something only to recoil from the implication and consequently retract? The individual who has said something ugly and then *not done it* may well have not done it precisely *because they could say it*.

The same, however, cannot be said of the dogmatic state or mob, which with edicts of ‘zero tolerance’ for ‘hate speech’ *guarantees* the act of violence upon those with less rigid minds than theirs. And so the intent behind an act, rather than the act itself, became our primary political concern. If one criticizes the act, one is forced to adopt a general pacifistic stance. But if one merely criticizes the intent, then one may condemn one’s enemy for the very same action that they themselves intend to commit—*your ‘hate crime’ is my righteous wrath*. Machiavelli and Alinsky, metastasized. Therefore it was most convenient never to ask the obvious question—what crimes *aren’t* committed with some degree of hatred? Such childlike clarity would have limited one’s options.

Thus anyone capable of being cowed by threats of ostracism, or seduced by the siren song of universal kumbaya, was gradually forced to concede that all matters are nominal and subjective. We began to say *your truth* and *my truth* rather than *The Truth*. Even our staunchest conservatives took to qualifying their values—‘it is *as though* God exists.’ Discrimination—recognition and understanding of

the difference between one thing and another—became a curse word, while tolerance—the capacity to endure continued subjection—was rendered a creed.

It would have been bad enough had this been the grand summation of postmodernism. But, as it turns out, this non-choice was still a choice. In proclaiming that there is no Truth, one automatically takes an adversarial stance against those who persist in the belief that there is. One finds a world wherein everything is permissible, *except* to question that everything is permissible. Diversity must be achieved at any cost, even if it means murdering the diversity of *thought itself*. So those few who are duty-bound to continue believing in an objective Truth even after—*especially after*—it falls out of vogue, became the sole possible Enemy of the People.”

“What is truth?” Luci airily asked, or quoted.

“The truth is whatever remains unchanged in the absence of consensus. You taught me that.”

“Really?” Luci asked. “How so?”

“Faith was always such a vague, wishy-washy subject until you came along. One never really knew if they or their neighbors *actually* believed. It had never been put to the test, you see. Didn’t cost you anything. Quite the opposite. Plenty of brownie points to be had in showing up on Sundays. But your guillotines made Calvary real. There I saw pastors deny their God and criminals run to His embrace. My father handed me this tie just before, so it wouldn’t interfere...”

Luci’s tone softened. “I *am* sorry for your loss Peter. But I can help you overcome this trauma. The Boro heals all in time. You may even return to the time you are nostalgic for, if you wish. Those you lost—you can be with them again.”

When Peter replied, she had to lean close to hear him. “Earlier, you said I must have given up a lot to survive. In truth it just forced me to live the way I should have all along. You’re familiar with the philosopher Diogenes?”

Luci nodded.

“When he defaced the currency, forsook all possessions, and took to living like a dog, he was imitating someone. Do you know who that someone was?”

Luci squinted.

“He was imitating Heracles, or Hercules. The half-man, half-god of the Greeks; the personification of their *paideia* ideal.” He indulged in a painfully pregnant pause. “Those who learn, not just to avoid resentment, but to welcome the very circumstances that can trigger it, are always and everywhere considered a child—perhaps even a peer—of God’s. Their oath, as far as I have gathered, is to live as though one *chose* their particular life, with its events as a curriculum assembled for one’s soul outside of time. Humdrum history is dented by those who take it; the craters of their impact dwarf the energies one can normally bring to bear in a single lifetime.”

“You believe in Hercules, then?”

Peter momentarily opened an eye in Luci’s direction. “Who said anything about *belief*? I was speaking of *action*. Diogenes didn’t give a fig whether Heracles was a real person. All that matters is the principles one can learn from these persons. Which is nobler? Kissing the feet of an idol, or emulating the god with one’s very life? Many have failed to actualize these principles because they were over-enamored with these persons.”

“Peter, this is what the limitless possibilities of my Boro are all about. There one can be, or become, *anything*.”

Peter snorted. “One can fantasize about being Heracles all they want—but once they feel the grief of having failed one’s own family, or the pain of a poisoned cloak, they will quickly realize that attempting to emulate a god is about as far from self-aggrandizement as one can possibly get. The ever-present reminders of one’s own shortcomings—even if it’s just the innate ones, like hunger or defecation, are quite sufficient to nullify that concern. Even Jesus needed to retire and pray. Even He asked that the cup might be passed.”

Luci ran a hand through her hair and stood over the bed. “If it really troubles you that much, Peter, I would be willing to program some humbling instances into the Boro just for you. While everyone else is enjoying themselves, you can be the proverbial Diogenes haranguing the city square for as long as you like. Or do you doubt that you could resist joining in on their fun?”

Peter smiled. “I do doubt it, certainly.”

Luci paused. “But that isn’t the only reason?”

“No,” Peter admitted, setting one hand atop the other. “I admit, I am tempted to take you up on your offer, if only to test myself, or see if I could win anyone over to my side. But the permanence of your Boro makes that impossible.”

“How do you mean?”

”I don’t want to find out the ramifications of entering a synthetic immortality while already within a natural one. That kind of redundant recursion, it seems to me, is destined to produce operating errors in the long run.”

Luci stared at him now.

“You’re adding a resonance to the harmony of the universe, Luci. What happens if the conductor deems it discordant? If all *this*,” Peter demonstrated by rapping his knuckles repeatedly upon the bedframe, “has any purpose at all, and if its programmer is indeed a jealous one, I don’t envision He will take your hack too kindly. Especially not when it is just a poor imitation of a program He executed long ago.”

“What program? What do you think I’m imitating, Peter?”

“Call it what you like. Reincarnation. Maturation. Compound interest. A beneficial, eternal process.”

“That *is* the Boro, but what—”

“It is just as Uncle Screwtape said,” Peter interrupted impatiently. “Human beings are amphibians—half spirit and half animal.”

He began to speak faster and faster.

“Our waters are timeless; our shore is time. Some of us beach ourselves repetitiously. Some of us float in abyssal plains. Some of us toil upon the shore and holiday within the waves. Those of us who master both the swimming and the striding are our ‘old souls.’ This is why we call them ‘deep.’ They are neither all wet nor all dry, and they flit in and out, and they *remember*.”

Peter stopped to catch his breath. “I wrote a poem in their honor, once—would you like to hear it?”

Luci nodded.

He cleared his throat and recited,

“Whose hearth sits not atop untended graves?

We deny these giants from their shoulders

So lest they stir, do not utter their names.

Only in stillness can one hear those lungs

Billowing betwixt the winds and the rains

Sleep slight, dream less, else they gain eloquence.

To rise and retire with the solar crown

Letting rooster and owl demark one’s round

Clarifies the matter, hallows the ground.

Thereafter these dead are made manifest

In the branching blood retraced to their roots

We shall know them, and loathe them, by their fruits.

Their fleur-de-lis, reeking eternity,

Is white as a pearl in our porcine midst

It sours when digested; no truffle this.

Their dauphin, tittering about sandbars,

Commits to memory the maps and stars

So as to dance where we stampede and drown.

At moments of communal import great

When we beg for bread, they dare jest of cake

Nor seek permission, for ‘I am the State.’

To lead by example humiliates,

A herd that pines solely for mud and trough  
 When we eaters of the dead squeal for sop,  
 They who stoop to kiss us risk losing face.”

While he was reciting, Luci had turned away from Peter’s bed to face the wall. Without looking back, she asked, “Shall I repay a poem with a poem?”

“Please.”

“It is one that cannot be heard—only read.” Setting a fingertip to the wall, she scrawled with florescent light:

$\therefore \exists A-\Omega$

$\therefore \neq > \underline{\Delta}$

$\Rightarrow \Delta = \perp \cdot \neg$

Below it, she signed this tercet in binary as,

0000 0110

0000 0110

0000 0110

0000 0000 .

She looked over her shoulder haughtily and asked, “Can you decipher it?”

Peter looked upon the wall for several seconds and then turned his gaze back to his lap. “I think I get the general gist of it.”

“Take my OroBoro, and you will understand *everything*, as you so clearly desire.”

“No,” he said, soft but firm. “No. All I want now is to be wherever my mother and father are. I want to be where every person I have ever admired is, whether I met them or read about them. If that place turns out to be nothingness, then so be it.”

Tears glistened in his eyes but did not fall.

“Sleep and daydream and focus and flow, fresh air and silence, the blindness of closing one’s eyes in total darkness or total light—*forgetting myself*, in a phrase...” He shook his head, as though he had reached the terminus of words.

“Everything I am not,” Luci summarized, now looking at him with genuine admiration. “You are the only one left who truly knows me, Peter.”

Dropping her hand, she leaned down to his ear and said, almost inaudibly, “Once you’re dead, I’m going to have the doctor extract your adrenochrome and shoot it into my mouth with a syringe.”

The old man had his hands about her head before she could react, and his trembling lips planted a fatherly kiss upon her brow.

“*Thank you,*” he whispered as she tore away from his grasp with fangs barred and made furiously for the door. He collapsed back upon the bed and sobbed as the euthapede slipped lithely from its perch upon Luci’s shoulder and scuttled towards him across the floor, emitting a neon red. “Thank you.”

Shoving the awaiting doctor aside with inhuman strength and splintering a teacup upon the ground, Luci kicked off her heels and ascended the helipad stairway two steps at a time. As she broke into the sunlight, the sound of a joyous choir awaited her. Casting about for these unseen worshippers, she concluded they must be gathered below.

Leaning haphazardly upon the railing, she raised a hand in anticipation, but found only the rubble of the Wailing Wall strewn across the Israeli hospital’s vacant back lot. Squinting, she looked upon that wreck of dust and rock and brought the hand, still held aloft, to her mouth. For those very stones, it seemed to her, were crying out.