

## “Mailbag: Life in Trumpland”

The best part about this job, other than being recognized in random bars by 50-year old financial advisors who are always good to buy me a drink (hey, you take your celebrity where you can), is the correspondence with readers. I began writing *Epsilon Theory* 3+ years ago from a pretty dark place, and it's still where I end up a lot of the time. But from the outset I started getting emails from really smart people, truth-seekers all, making their way in this world of mendacity and inauthenticity without succumbing to it, and it's given me — if not an optimism — then at least the occasional absence of despair about the world my daughters will inherit.

I try to respond to all the notes I receive, but what usually happens is that the really good ones — the ones that require more than a flip answer — end up being marked unread and shunted to the “need response” folder on Outlook, only to die a lingering death of inattention over the following weeks. Ultimately I just mark the entire folder as read and let them pass on to the Great Archive in the sky, as it's the only way I can live with the guilt. So to all of those Jacobs and Williams of the world ... I am truly sorry.

As a partial repentance, if not solution, I'm going to make a regular habit of what I always found to be the most enjoyable part of Bill Simmons' *Sports Guy* blog — the reader Mailbag. Geez, I miss the old Bill Simmons. Like Simmons of old, I'll try to keep it entertaining rather than pedantic, and to that end I'll sprinkle in some of the haters, as I find them occasionally fun when they're not threatening rape or murder (Bill Simmons never had to deal with the *Zerohedge* commentariat). As it happens, I got more than the usual quota of great emails from my most recent note “[The Evolution of Competition](#),” my take on the political and social polarization running rampant in Trumpland. So without further ado ...

I forwarded your note to my better half and she thought it was really good, BUT...

from your note: “...If you cooperate in a game of Chicken — i.e., you're driving your tractor straight on at Kevin Bacon's pick-up truck and you veer off from the looming crash...”

She needs you to rethink some things, and after she explained the facts to me, I thought it might be important for you (although I'm sure you have already heard from many of your 40-something-female-readers-who-have-watched-Footloose-multiple times!)

1) They were BOTH on tractors.

2) And this is the bender for your game analysis. Kevin Bacon tried and FAILED to jump off his tractor. He was FOILED by his shoe lace and thus WON the game of chicken BY ACCIDENT. Very interesting.

I'm gonna need some follow up from you on this one Ben, as she is leaning on me pretty hard to let you know that you're not done with this Footloose incident!!

– John

**A lot of games of Chicken are won by accidental (or intentional) incompetence. For example, if I see that Kevin Bacon is stuck on his tractor and can't possibly jump off *even if he wanted to*, then my only rational choice ... the only way to avoid MY death in a crash ... is to jump off my tractor. By limiting his competence and degrees of freedom, Kevin Bacon paradoxically becomes *more* powerful in a game of Chicken.**

**A variation on this theme is to convince your opponent that you're not necessarily powerless to decide otherwise, but that you're so mentally incompetent that you really don't care if you live or die. Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon famously played this "madman" strategy (in the form of being crazy enough to launch nukes even if it drew China and USSR into war) to get the North Vietnamese government to attend peace talks in Paris.**

Good piece. Decency and ability to stay above the fray is almost non-existent at this point. Not to be nerdy but I keep replaying the Star Wars quote "So this is how liberty dies - with thunderous applause" (About the only good thing that came from those terrible prequels.).

– Victoria

**That's a good quote! As for the quality of the prequels ... I mean, obviously you're right. I can't remember any of the Episode 1-3 quotes because I hear everything in a Jar-Jar Binks accent. And the acting ... well, let's be generous and call it *Godfather 3* Sofia Coppola-esque. But isn't it time for a bit of perspective on the entire canon? In meme terms, I think "Star Wars" is the functional equivalent of "Ronald Reagan", in that both have evolved into expressions of almost pure nostalgia. Fun fact: the word "nostalgia" derives from the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain). There's a wincing quality to so much about the *Star Wars* movies and the Reagan Administration, but it's completely trumped by some sort of warm fuzzy emotional balm. I'd like to figure out how to bottle that.**

Nice job. Were you pro Gaga or anti Gaga? Your readers deserve to know!

– Ian

**I was anti-Gaga in the ET note "[American Hustle](#)" for what I saw as pretty profound inauthenticity around the U.S. election. But how about that SuperBowl™ performance, huh? I thought that was great. Seriously. And with game theoretic implications, too ...**

During the halftime show of the Super Bowl on FOX, after Lady Gaga's performance, they went back to the studio and had someone ready to report on what the reaction to the halftime show was on social media. My immediate reaction - 1) How could I possibly trust FOX to give me an accurate take on the social media reaction to the halftime show that they just broadcast? 2) I don't care. 3) Doesn't anyone who does care (and is therefore already monitoring social media for themselves) already know?

– Jay

Actually, I thought Fox was pretty brilliant in their coverage of Lady Gaga's halftime show. They assumed that we were incapable of determining for ourselves whether or not it was a good performance until we were told by others (Missionaries in game theory terms) whether or not it was a good show. And they're absolutely right. A classic example of [The Common Knowledge Game](#) in action.

I am a pretty competitive person/athlete and always lost at Chicken versus my brother. I am still trying to repair the Chicken self-image.

– Kim

**Me, too, and to my younger brother, to boot. Although I would bet he would say the same thing about me. It's amazing how these social competitions in a Chicken format stick with us for a lifetime.**

Spot on. I'm doing daily battle with my family and best friends back home, and getting nowhere.

– Drew

**It's the "back home" aspect of all this that's particularly difficult on our social lives, I think. Geography has simultaneously become irrelevant with modern communication technology and the only thing that matters with the balkanization of economic opportunity.**

This guy is just butt hurt that Trump won. He is a delusional asshole. He thinks that what his side did was about is cooperation.

His idea of cooperation is me giving him half of my money and my wife giving him a \*\*\* while my kids wash his car.

In exchange he will offer my family some constructive criticism on how we can become better human beings.

Suddenly when I grab him by the back of his neck and throw him out of my house he finds my behavior objectionable.

What a douche.

– BarkingCat

**Ah, the haters. I included this note because I think there's an important point here. The meaning of Trump to BarkingCat is personal empowerment. *Trump changes the story that this guy tells himself about himself, which is the most important story that we have!***

**In the mind's eye of BarkingCat, he is now the powerful one, able to grab me by the scruff of my neck and physically throw me out of his house. It doesn't matter that, in reality, the Takers and the Powerful are now more in control of his house and his real-world life than ever before. I mean, if you think we lived in a world of, by, and for the 1% before (and we did), you ain't seen nothing yet. But the real-world impact of Trump isn't what drives behavior. In politics as in markets, it's always the *story* that drives our behavior, particularly the story we tell ourselves about ourselves.**

**You know where I see this phenomenon a lot? In SEC college football. Some of the most virulent (and I mean that word in its clinical sense) fans of Alabama football have zero connection to the University of Alabama other than that they live in the same state as Nick Saban. But, like BarkingCat, they derive enormous personal empowerment and psychic benefit from a totemic connection to a powerful man. Roll Tide!**

The premise is that all cooperation habits we've developed, our ways of getting along, are breaking down to be replaced purely with competition. If the premise were right, the rest of his argument might well follow. But the premise is wrong.

Trump found a NEW COALITION. He often speaks of the LOVE at his events. Trumpsters may compete in business, but basically we like each other and won't tend to be all that cut-throat, most of us anyway. (Trump himself is more cut-throat than most of us. Look at how he's dumped Giuliani and Christie now that he's done with them. But that's beside the point.) Within this new coalition, we are able to slough off some of the strange bedfellows we were put with before, to treat them in a more arms-length way. We have an alternative to the old coalitions the social engineers had cornered us into.

– *Artichoke*

Coalitions are constantly reconfiguring themselves on the basis of shared interests. There are millions of people who have always despised the right but lo, in the past few months the right has popped up as the counterculture. It's now anti war and pro labour. It's all about free speech and diversity of thought. The left is now the establishment and is making a big effort to crack down on the counter culture that it brands as racist and attacks with violent thugs.

Amazing really, the right is now about peace love and togetherness and the left is angry decisive and hatefilled.

I don't hate my colleagues for having opposed Trump, but I dare not say I supported him or they would hate and ostracise me. That's why Trump is always speaking about love. Because hate is on the other side.

Strange days. Everything is the opposite of what it's supposed to be. People need to understand this.

– *Beijing Expat*

**I gotta say, this was the most unexpected thread in the comments and email I received, this notion that there's all this Love with a capital L embedded in Trump-the-man and Trump-the-movement.**

**I think what's going on here is an expression of the same emotions that you see in oral histories of any protest movement. Why do people go march in the streets and stop traffic and maybe break some windows (literally or figuratively)? Because it's FUN. There's an enormous sense of camaraderie and excitement derived from sticking it to the Man, whether you're in Berkeley, California in 1968 or Mobile, Alabama in 2016.**

**Just don't confuse tribal attachment with Love. Because your tribal leaders, whether you're on the left, the right, or wherever, will eventually sell you down the river. Every single time.**

I think he was trying not to offend and that's why he could never fully approach his point. He just took swats and glancing blows. I find it offensive.

– *IndyPat*

Blood alone turns the wheels of history.

– *IndyPat*

**Two brief comments from a guy who believes that "blood alone turns the wheels of history" but is offended by my tone in an email.**

You're delusional. You need to read, "The Art Of The Deal," and "The Art Of The Comeback" to get better informed about Trump. CNN and MSNBC are not good sources. For instance Trump fixed the Wollman Rink in NY City after the city gov't had screwed it up for 6 years at a cost of \$9M in tax payer money. Trump VOLUNTEERED to fix it. He did it under schedule (given 6 months) and budget (given \$3M). I would call that a win-win. It is more than a win-win, it was a game changer that traditional accounting methods don't credit Trump with the true impact. Traditional methods would say he saved a mere \$0.6M (his cost was \$2.4M) because traditional accounting does not include the \$9M wasted by the gov't not to mention the 6 years.

You no doubt see that somehow as a win-lose or a lose-lose. The Trump approach broke the status quo paradigm that just was not working and was very expensive. He brings that same game to the stifling U.S. gov't bureaucracies and international agreements. I anticipate change in those areas that you can't begin to comprehend and with your poor accounting practices of what counts as win and what counts as a lose you are way off base. Apparently you think it is a win-win to run the U.S. international policies through the Clinton Foundation where motives are clearly self-serving rather than out in the open via the State Dept.

The depth of your ignorance on the Trump business style is breathtaking. Your assumptions on how well the system was working pre-Trump is much like Mayor Koch who screwed up the Wollman Rink for 6 years. Koch thought things were just fine. And your assumptions on Trump being win-lose or lose-lose are equally naive.

– *Anonymous*

**The Wollman Rink. Ed Koch. Hilarious. This guy “knows” Trump by reading Trump’s books, and thinks I’m ill-informed.**

I’ve been reading Epsilon Theory for a while now. I find your material thoughtful, often brilliant, always entertaining.

Recently you have put forth a few ideas that to me seem biased and confuse cause and effect.

I think that the idea that this country has up to now been playing a politically cooperative game is quite simply wrong. For the last two presidencies there has been virtually no cooperation between the two political parties. Neither party has any inclination nor any motivation to play a politically cooperative game. This is what must be changed and this is the challenge for America. But I digress.

I believe that there are two distinct and opposing views for the future direction of the country. Let’s call these agendas. One agenda is to move toward a “Great Society”, now probably more correctly termed a “Global Great Society”. The other agenda is to remain an autonomous country with the personal freedoms, rights, and responsibilities we have always expected as Americans.

Trump is not a great divider who somehow maneuvered his way to the presidency and is ushering in political non-cooperation. Trump is the effect, the pushback against one agenda by voters with a different agenda who have come to realize that this is indeed a non-cooperative political game. The election of Trump simply illustrates that voters have come to realize that we are already deeply entrenched in a non-cooperative political game.

– *Bill*

**I get your point, but I disagree. Trump didn’t just stumble onto a non-cooperative political game in full bloom. He’s a remarkable political entrepreneur who recognized, accelerated, and transformed the zeitgeist. I mean, look at the Republican primary. This wasn’t some grand struggle between globalist Great Society oligarchs and hardscrabble defenders of liberty (and if it were, you’ll have a hard time**

convincing me that Trump is the latter rather than the former). Trump rolled the field of fellow Republicans because he played the game differently. His gameplay was *always* Defect and *never* Cooperate, which was totally new, totally effective, and totally irreversible. It's like Napoleon (another remarkable political entrepreneur) and the levée en masse (mass conscription). Once Napoleon invented the draft and put a couple of hundred thousand troops on the battlefield, every other country had to follow suit, transforming the game of international conflict *forever*. One thing I've noticed among both Trump haters and Trump lovers: they usually don't give him enough credit. He's more than a symptom.

You should go back to writing about investments. Your biases continue to direct you.

The move from Cooperation to Competition (in this case) has proceeded from two conservative realizations:

1. That the veneer of cooperation maintained by liberals is false; that the Left has been competing all along. 'Nice', cooperative public television is about as even-handed as Pol Pot, and just as willing to dictate your life.
2. That there CANNOT be a balance in benefits arising from the arrangement of cooperation, because of fundamentally different values.

Trump is their big F U to the perceived hypocrisy of continuing to cooperate (even if they don't like him).

Many Europeans are arriving at the same conclusion.

– *Anonymous*

**What was the pro-Trump “conservative realization” in the Republican primary? That he was tougher on conservative shibboleths like public television or Planned Parenthood or Great Society programs than his competitors? Please. This notion that Donald Trump is somehow the great flowering of the conservative movement is just pure revisionist hokum.**

I've enjoyed reading your column over the years but you are seriously disappointing me lately. I can understand your left leanings make it difficult to grasp how at least one half of your readers feel, but to put something in writing as vile as the statement “So, for example, if you voted for Clinton as an affirmation of a personal identity that **rejects the racism and sexism you see in Trump**, your natural assumption is going to be that anyone who voted for Trump similarly did so as an affirmation of a personal identity, but one that accepts racism and sexism.”, is totally uncalled for and extremely offensive not just to President Trump, but to all of us who supported a change from the Elite Class we've been forced to stomach for the past 20 years.

I'm sorry you're not comfortable now. Welcome to my world for the past twenty years.

– *John*

**You've totally missed my point. I wrote this note because I am so effin' tired of being called a racist or a sexist because I *don't* think that Donald Trump is evil incarnate. There are MILLIONS of people in this country who think that I am a bad human being because I don't hate Trump. And by the same token, there are MILLIONS of people in this country who think that I am a bad human being because I don't think that Hillary Clinton is evil incarnate, either. *That's* why I wrote this note.**

**I didn't vote for Trump (nor Clinton ... left prez line blank) because I think he takes us from the frying pan into the fire. But I do understand that we've been in a frying pan for 24+ years.**

I don't see Hitler.

– *Brendan*

**Neither do I. I think Trump is a narcissist and an ass, not a Fascist. Like most people in the financial services world, I deal with narcissists and asses every day ... they're not Hitler clones because the only thing they're really true-believers about is their own self-aggrandizement. Steve Bannon? There's more than a little Big Lie and Fascism in his self-avowed "economic nationalism", but he can't front the band, so he's no Hitler. Elizabeth Warren? I dunno. More the Madame Defarge type, knitting by the guillotines. Mark Zuckerberg, though, now embarked on his 'listening tour" through America? Bears watching. Yes, I went there. Big Brother tech plus smiley-face billionaires scare me that much.**

There is an old saying that really applies these days. I believe it was from Benjamin Franklin or my mother. "Believe none of what you hear, and only half of what you see." Unfortunately people don't let facts get in the way of the Truth.

– *Anonymous*

**Agreed (although I thought it was MY mother).**

Your note describes what happens to society, including the best educated, when philosophy disappears. And when 95 million+ people are boycotting the workforce.

Too much time on your hands? Then pay attention to Drudge, ZeroHedge, Huffington Post, etc. Or Ashley Judd, Madonna, Rosie O'Donnell. Or Hannity. Supposedly smart, educated people react what's going on as if they are watching pro wrestling.

No schooling in or acquaintance with philosophy? Then react to all these mindless, emotion-laden messages like a puppet on a string, unable to resist any impulse to react or comment. We should be dropping *Meditations* from helicopters.

– *Orville*

**Helicopter *Meditations* instead of helicopter money? Yes, please.**

Once again another good piece. I have seen the same in myself, the question I've been thinking is how does it end? or what comes next? You used car crashes, good analogy. I hope society is not using Takata airbags.

– *Anonymous*

**I'm totally stealing that line.**

Well done on a tough topic. I am reminded a bit of the religious discussion, where you believe that anyone who doesn't agree with you burns in hell forever. Somehow, we have to find a way to discuss "my truth" while recognizing "your truth".

– *Mick*

**Yes, there are clear parallels between what we're experiencing as a society today and any religious schism. Not sure what the equivalent of the Peace of Westphalia will be for us, but that's what it's going to take for us to get out of this.**

Started re-reading *Virus of the Mind* at 4:00 this am. Some dangerous “memes” are replicating themselves.

– *Mike*

***Virus of the Mind* is a 2011 collection of essays on memes, including (perhaps confusingly) the Richard Dawkins essay, “Viruses of the Mind,” that pretty much started the conversation. Required reading.**

It seems to me that the Trump phenomena (there are many) are moving us towards the kind of crisis outcome that Neil Howe and William Strauss write about in *The Fourth Turning*. We only have to wait till the mid-20's to see the rebuilding of the national and international organizations to allow the next flourishing. Sadly, the crisis usually culminates in a war - if it has to happen this time, let's hope it is a small one with no big bangs!

– *Neil*

**I get more questions and comments about *The Fourth Turning* than any other book. It's also required reading, although I remain ... not suspicious ... but unconvinced that demographic and super-cyclical transitions are investable ideas in any meaningful way. Meaningful to me, anyway.**

Something I wanted to share about Trump. He is the antithesis of orthodoxy. And this makes him dangerous given that all issues seem to be structured as binary choices between two different orthodoxies. Globalist v. Nationalist, Progressive v. Conservative, Anti-this v. Pro-that. It's everywhere. But what I realized is that the Republican v. Democrat is not one of them. They are the same in fact.

– *Sal*

**Spot on. I've written about this polarization and shift in political identification in a couple of notes. It's not so much the growing distance between the median Democrat and the median Republican that's worrisome for stable policy in a two-party system. It's that voter self-identification is becoming more and more distinct from party self-identification, so that “Democrat” or “Republican” is no longer shorthand for a wide range of behaviors. The last time we saw this (and not just in the U.S.) was in the 1930s.**

About 10 days ago, marveling and laughing at how everyone back home was going absolutely nuts, I had a Eureka moment. I realized that Trump viewed his Presidency as the biggest and most complicated turn-around in the history of the world. He is following the turn-around playbook exactly. Looking at what he does and how he does it, using this prism, everything falls into a logical pattern. It even becomes logically predictable.

– *Anonymous*

Interesting piece. I think you may be missing a subtlety with regards to Trump's negotiating style. He tends to be a “hard out of the gate” negotiator. His process is to push the other side to the mental and emotional breaking point, then back off to assure a “deal” gets done. He has a certain intuitive ability to find out exactly how far he can push, then back off. He's been operating this way for almost 50 yrs. in the most competitive real estate environment in the world – NYC. It's not a game of chicken where he doesn't care if the deal gets done, then he walks away leaving the other party so pissed-off that they refuse to ever do business with him again. If that were true, he would have pissed off everyone in NYC by now and would never get a deal done. His brash outward appearance is quite paradoxical when compared to his

pragmatism. He is not a very ideological person. His ultimate goal in any transaction is to maximize efficiency. To make that omelet, you gotta break a few eggs

Now does that make him a likeable character? Hell no! I personally don't like the guy, but I believe he is the right agent of change that was needed for the current context. In any complex dynamic system, change is only born out of extremes. We were at a point in time where the extreme of Globalism had run its course. As always happens, a counter-vailing force was introduced to send the persistence of Globalism into a bout of turbulence. Hopefully this leads to a new trend in the opposite direction, but that hasn't materialized yet. We will deal with some anti-persistence (turbulence) for a while. That's a good thing. Change (turbulence) is messy both intellectually and emotionally, but it's a necessary pain we must transcend. As the turbulence subsides, a new trend will emerge and gain some of its own persistence. It's a wild ride living on this rock hurtling 1,000 mph through space. Best bet is to hold on, and try to enjoy the ride/view.

– Mark

**These are both smart emails. I put them together because they touch on the run-America-like-a-business meme. I get the appeal of that idea, and I think these readers are correct in that this is a big part of the story that Trump tells himself. I'm also sure that his negotiation style is very effective in business, particularly the NY real estate business (as Mark says, it's straight out of a Roger Fisher "Getting to Yes" class). But I think it's both an ineffective and highly damaging negotiation style when it comes to Madisonian political institutions, particularly when coupled with Big Brother tech and enormous concentrations of private wealth. That's my big problem with Trump, and that's what I mean when I say that he breaks us.**

I suppose that the men we have elected as President are generally representative of our Zeitgeist. It may be at times that spirit is not very strong or clearly defined resulting in a sort of caretaker President. At other times, like now, it is pretty strong and sharply defined. Trump is a very real individual occupying the White House — and Mar a Lago, Trump Tower and whatnot. He also is the result of some sort of cumulative consensus about what matters, what should be done and how it should be done. This Zeitgeist concerns me more than the man because it amplifies him and possibly would continue on even if he doesn't.

My fund of historic knowledge isn't sufficient, but it is all I have. I've thought about how other so called developed nations that marched into totalitarianism moved back to more civil and pluralistic states. The only examples I've come up with where this happened peacefully are Spain and Portugal. And that took about six decades. Some might suggest Burma but I think that jury is still having lunch. Otherwise it seems that a comprehensive social collapse usually brought about by international or civil war has been required to exhaust the spirit of the totalitarian ghost and thoroughly discredit the ideas it promulgated. Germany, Italy and England (Cromwell) come to mind. Most of the others are still totalitarian.

I hope my paucity of historic information has obscured many shining examples of societies that awoke from their paranoid dreams of universal competition to remember the benefits of being nice and cooperative. I hope I've dramatically exaggerated the fix we are in. I hope.....

– Tom

**I don't think you've exaggerated the fix we're in. Not at all. I think we're more likely to see 21<sup>st</sup> century totalitarianism delivered with a smiley-face than a jackboot, but only because the technology of persuasion is that good. And I also think that the ultimate winners in this struggle for control is less likely to be Trump and his apologists than whoever leads the [Thermidorian Reaction](#) against Trump.**

I have increased my conversation-avoidance skills (something as a libertarian / monetarists / Classical economics-leaning guy I had to learn to do to live in NYC) since the Trump election. As you note, today, everything is a trip wire.

Many years ago, I realized (1) you very, very rarely change people's minds even a little bit, (2) I don't really care that much if I do and (3) even if I did, it would not have any impact on changing anything in the world. Hence, I try not to talk with anyone, but a very small number of people, about, to be honest, anything that means anything as - probably should have started here - I'm tired of arguing (see points 1 - 3 as to why).

Hence, my day to day, which was always a bit of topic avoidance, has been in full-on topic-avoidance mode since the election.

I fear my exhaustion is only going to increase.

– *Anonymous*

People are quick to take offense (where none was intended) at the slightest indication I am not on board with their political or economic leanings. Not nearly as much "give and take", but more "take it or leave it". I find myself having to explain that certain economic/investment principles I hold dear are not an endorsement of Trump (or any political stripe) and that because I happen to eschew identity politics doesn't make me a lesser human, it just means I hold that certain unintended consequences happen when following certain paths of behavior. Hard to believe that such innocuous sounding phrases can be "trigger words" for those who are seeking redress for slights no matter how small or unintended.

I've been called many names by people who either refuse to have rational discussions or refuse to consider views that are alternative to their own. When I explain the situation we are currently in, nationally, in terms of economic consequences (game theory is generally too far out there for the average citizen) and how I am trying to make a buck (no different than under the previous six administrations) for myself and for clients, I'm treated with borderline loathing and disdain.

There is a feral quality to the angst experienced by those who lost in this election, something I've not experienced before. Trying to maintain a level head and an even-handed view of the world has become its own challenge. My response has been to start at home (getting things straight with my wife about what a Trump presidency does and does not mean, news media hysteria to the contrary), then work on our circle of friends, all well-educated but deeply biased to the blue side of the ledger, both socially and politically. The experience with our friends was interesting in that they know and like me, personally, but it took a three hour dinner party and some follow up, to finally get through to them that Tweets do not policy make and reactions to same do not make good bases for decisions, economic or otherwise.

Thanks for the lucid and erudite essays. They help more than you know.

– *Anonymous*

**I've anonymized these two emails as best I can because they speak for me and, I think, lots of others out there.**

The last two lines in your piece, "**Know Thyself**" and "**Treat others as you would have them treat you**" are the essential wisdoms from two traditions - Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism attempts to guide a person seeking a true understanding and relationship with themselves and Christianity seeks to guide people toward a true, healthy relationship with others.

A minister I heard last summer (he was an old Episcopalian who formally taught at Harvard Divinity) lamented that we, our culture, has sunk toward the "morbid pursuit of advantage". Which I find to be

such a brilliant phrase that I have frequently recalled it. That is the Competition Game in a nutshell. Morbid - because it is ultimately deadly. Deadly to the soul and deadly to the culture.

– Jon

**The “morbid pursuit of advantage”. Yep, that’s our zeitgeist.**

Thanks for this. It is exactly what I’ve been experiencing and have tried to formulate into words, and the words into actions.

Good lessons for us and our children, and sooner or later we will all be forced to hear it. Like it or not.

*They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.* Isaiah 40. Keeps me focused on perseverance.

– DL

**Words into actions. Perseverance. Sounds like a plan.**

Thank you for taking the time to write this and share your thoughts. After having read it only once, I don’t know what to say, but I do know what I am going to do. I am going to share this with my 14 year old daughter. I am certain that it will foster a meaningful discussion and teach us both a few things.

– Natalie

**As many readers know, I have four daughters. I write Epsilon Theory for them. And now for Natalie’s daughter, too. This is how we keep the darkness at bay. One daughter at a time.**

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