

The Heroism of Forgiveness



“Maybe they tricked me into fighting alone so that I, and everyone, would just lose.” – Stefan Molyneux

“We take but three steps from feathers to iron.” –John Keats

“Sometimes people need to be forgiven... but if you can forgive someone. Well, that’s the tough part. What can we forgive? Tough part of the job. Tough part about walking down the street.”–Jim Kurring (John C. Reilly), *Magnolia*

On Dec. 17, 1999 Paul Thomas Anderson released his film, *Magnolia*, depicting over the course of one day a vast array of characters scrambling around California’s San Fernando Valley. The film itself is a rather gripping visual and emotional odyssey topping-out around three hours and eight minutes; it is, thus far, Anderson’s longest and (seemingly) most convoluted of films, which turns out to be pleasantly simple. Up until the final three minutes of the film it’s unclear as to what the hell is happening, and why. I, for one, found myself helplessly engaged, rapt with attention, eager to follow each flashing frame but unsure as to why I was so invested. Each character, rich with nuance and three-dimensionality, equally sympathetic and loathsome; relatable in ways only fiction is capable of resonating, mirroring the best and worst of what a human being is: hopelessly flawed, indefatigably wandering, guilt-ridden—all while trying to move forward and do something meaningful. It isn’t until the very end where the ever-stellar and heartbreakingly human John C. Reilly, portraying a devoutly religious, pitiful, and incredibly real cop who just can’t get ahead but never blames anyone, gives his closing monologue, while sitting in his car, talking to himself, and his God, tears welling, synthesizing what all he was made witness to over the day, asking aloud —*what can we forgive?*— that this film crystalizes its purpose: the oh-so-human necessity of forgiveness.

In the advent of the #METOO movement and its initially well-intended beginnings—along with more recent events such as: Kevin Hart’s standing down from hosting the Oscars due to some

sentiments he tried to publicly render sensible a decade ago via comedic reasoning regarding his insecurities as a heterosexual father considering the possibility of his son not falling under the same sexual persuasion. Kyler Murray being castigated for the myopic and crude honesty of his younger thoughts spilled out on Twitter when he was a minor. Michelle Obama calling Donald Trump's mean-spirited, opportunistic, yet, ultimately harmless and misguided endeavor to prove her husband was not a natural born citizen as "unforgivable"—I believe the great weight of justice-seeking is crushing our heartfelt attempts to bring balance to an ineluctably imbalanced existence. Our ability to reason and respond has been supplanted by impulsivity and ready condemnation. David French at National Review put it rather aptly, "justice un-tempered by mercy grinds the human heart into dust." A merciless people are a forgotten people. The natural world is unforgiving. Life is, as Hobbes appositely put it, "nasty, brutish, and short." Forgiveness is essential. A human responsibility enacted on the individual level. It is our unique awareness of our wretched nature that that can be a tyrannical master. Our capacity to forgive is the great liberator; forgiveness is the fundamental mechanism of individual transcendence. The likes of you and me are perfectly suited for recognizing the redeemable qualities of the hopelessly flawed, for "not being unacquainted with ill, I know how to aid the wretched."

"—for whence
But from the author of all ill could spring
So deep a malice, to confound the race
Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell
To Mingle and involve, done all to spite
The great Creator?" -John Milton, Paradise Lost

I come from this line of reason. I *know* it was the rational side of the human mind that allowed us to conceive of the Devil.

"I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
And if I die, no soul will pity me:
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself." -Shakespeare, Richard III

I have studied on the depths of my own decadence; found and ruminated on what part of me could identify with the ills of mankind. Anyone who does this understands where the depravity of unforgiveness leads – volatile despair. Every time.

The silence of outer-space is the merciless sound of the forgotten. If there is forgiveness to be found in its icy soundlessness it's because we imbue it with such, through gratitude, childlike awe, and prudent curiosity.

I fear we are becoming an unforgiving people. I have never felt that way about the citizens of this country. I have always sensed a redemptive spirit amongst Americans. I used to sense there was a common purpose permeating Americans, even if severely misguided at certain periods, that eventually every individual would be viewed and, thus, act as an agent of pure creation, ingenious, forward thinking, essential, if only given the opportunity. A peculiar cynicism has infected and metastasized our cultural conscience. Action and activism over

contemplation and prudence. The dictum is “Vote!”, rather than “be an informed voter.” Condemn, rather than compromise. Dream, rather than manifest. Locked inside our own little fictions, heady and idiosyncratic, we become ornery, attention-starved children when our perfect subjectivity is inconvenienced by a very real material realm, where individual ideas, and actions according to those ideas, differ quite substantially from others. It seems the discord of reality and subjectivity has reached a crescendo, and its harsh tune now manifest in bad ideas, or resurfacing of old ones just as ill-composed, resulting in cacophonous actions—clumsy, unexperienced, jaded. The virago of the women’s movement and its ad-hoc hymns of injustice is a shrill note echoing from the retributive chorus of Identity Politics; the banshee wail of a people sundered from their ancient values, principles of reciprocity and hard work, how meaning can be found in personal responsibility, forthrightness in utterance, and humble pursuits of incremental progress.

“We take but three steps...”

There is something terribly shallow about Identity Politics; it contains no substance, provides no sustenance. It trades consistency for repetition; composure for pose; person for poseur. Eric Weinstein put it ever-so aptly as “Identity Politics is the great search for the cheapest possible constituency.” It’s cheap politics through cheap labor: unidimensional solutions to unidimensional problems understood through unidimensional thought. One answer for everything, what Solzhenitsyn described as “the vain hope that *revolution* can improve human nature.” It hems a simple tale out of the complexity of human history, woven falsely as the penetrative filament of Truth throughout all time: all of human history was the result of a deliberate, malevolent oppression imposed by a few men. It’s a terrible tune; the song of sophistry. It’s terrible because it’s purely destructive—it embraces, encourages unforgiveness. It is a religion disguised as a political movement; a belief system that only believes in power. Linguist John McWhorter during an Q&A with fellow linguist Steven Pinker crystalized this abstraction, stating thus “the reason that anybody would say that you’re not doing real intellectual work if you’re not addressing power differentials is out of a religion—that’s a religion that says that the only intellectually valid thing is to address power differentials.” For instance, in his article “Anti-Racism, Our Flawed New Religion” he points out the term “problematic” is now secular phraseology for “blasphemy.” He continues fleshing out the paradox of obsessing over power differentials and how it hurts the very cause it aims to ameliorate:

“Anti-racism turns a blind eye to most black homicide...to black people’s upward mobility...to doing the kinds of things civil rights leaders of 50 years ago considered ordinary, in favor of an inwardly focused quest for moral absolution that has, at best, a diagonal relationship to helping people who’ve been left behind.”

Later in the Q&A session, Pinker was questioned on the likes of Noam Chomsky and his now nearly-infallible standing amongst so many. Pinker simply put it that “you just cannot make intellectual progress when you have gurus; science doesn’t work with gurus.” The Founding Fathers of this country understood that the whispers of liberty, the murmurs of manifest destiny could only be heard and heeded if the fallibility of human nature were taken into great consideration when composing the song of individual sovereignty on humble paper. Dreams of a free people were incrementally and judiciously experimented, with care and a grave

understanding that a severing of tradition would alienate and, ultimately, enslave the very people it liberated; these traditions enshrined and protected by the words that make up our Constitution. Our Founding Fathers knew and respected the potency of dreams, their necessity, but they could be an intoxicating aberrant to the point of one's (and certainly a nation's) destruction. Lost in the euphoria of the lotuses. "Wrecked upon heathen dreams." The dreams of our Founding Fathers were shared and considered in deep cogitation, strenuous conversation and debate, healthily constrained by the reality of earthly elements and a constant, deliberate engagement with *what is* and what therefore must be done about it given the circumstances and limited applicable options.

Today our heathen dreams are a pleasing madness taken as more Truthful than the reality that surrounds them; reality is the world of cause and effect, its incompatibility with the desires of a growing number of American citizens, the likes of which Thomas Sowell called "the anointed", is driving our newer generations down cynical paths. We suffer an unfortunate human predisposition to take our creations, or the model(s)/process(es) that led to our creations as more real than the reality that surrounds them. This human foible is one in which the likes of science combats, if done properly – for, say, the scientific/mathematical models which one may utilize in order to reach a conclusion can also be perceived as more real than the reality within which the model/process exists; *the atmosphere doesn't match my model! The atmosphere must be wrong!* The fatal hubristic proclivity of mankind. Evolutionary Biologist Brett Weinstein during a discussion with fellow Evolutionary Biologist Richard Dawkins expressed a healthy, reasoned skepticism of mathematical models stating such:

"I have become a skeptic of mathematical modeling because it suffers from two types of errors that are pretty obvious: one is that it will sometimes give you an answer that is not viable in reality. In other words, if we were to mathematically model the way a sphere sits on a razor, as long as there are no other forces input into the system we will be told that a sphere will balance on a razor. But we all know that a sphere doesn't balance on a razor... so mathematical modeling has a way in which it can fool us into thinking that we have the right answer when we don't. And the other problem is that these mathematical models frequently have so many parameters in them that you can match any natural behavior even if the model isn't the reason that the natural behavior is what it is."

Climate Change, though very real, and enduring human contribution, is a highly misunderstood phenomena, underestimated and not something we should tinker with based off models designed by scientists competing for funds. The best we can do regarding Climate Change is continue subsidizing R&D and not tossing billions (trillions) of dollars in political, economic, and fossil fuel reform. Dismantling Capitalism in order to distend powers of the government to fund environmental science fairs that have immediate real-world consequences is not only stupid, it's dangerous. It also reeks of ulterior motive – look into all the proposals regarding taxation on any environmental policy, you will find financial redistribution loops to those who can't afford the taxation imbedded in every proposal. Rebates downward. Always read the fine print. It is a conspicuous move, yet most don't seem to see the blatant politics at work.

It's plenty as it is dealing with Identity Politics heaving their word salad of hermeneutics at your every utterance, top that with environmental alarmism using their art exhibit models to raise emotions and lower intellectual discourse and you have the bitter recipe for neuroticism—and

politicians, media/press, entertainment, and even academia are delighted to latch on to such neurosis. *Remember this*: politicians do not care about you, all they care about are votes. The media/press doesn't care about you, all they care about are viewers and subscribers. Entertainers do not care about you, all they care about are ticket sales. Academia doesn't care about you, it cares about tuitions and graduate rates. Your friends care about you. Your family cares about you. *You care about you* and the moment you lose that, you lose everything. You stop caring about and forgiving yourself, you will spiral down the well of nihilism, experiencing each ring of Dante's Inferno. I fear our country has been in a steady cultural descent for a few decades now (since the 60's) and within the past two years the descent has sharpened to a plummet. Life expectancy in America has declined two years in a row (2016-2018) due to overdoses and suicides. People are losing forgiveness of themselves more and more, younger and younger. The collective unforgiveness is tricking us, one fragile little life at a time, into thinking we should fight alone because we are uniquely wretched. And we are dying alone, plagued by a pestilential sense of individual inferiority relative to righteous collectives. And that's about as bad as it gets before we simply start tearing each other apart. It starts with the needle and the noose, it ends with enslavement and genocide.

"We take but three steps..."

An unforgiving populace is doomed to the predation of empathic opportunists, parasitic tyrants, and, paradoxically—and perhaps worse—idealists with good intentions; dimwitted but dangerous Ocasio-Cortez is just another example of the aspiring political figures to come – there is not one iota of forgiveness in her platform, it's all smiles and cheers in person, all bile and sneers in print. Plucking the discordant strings of idealism and entitlement. A devastating ignorance and susceptibility befall any and all who operate on a purely emotional and aesthetic frequency, lost in the quixotic dreamscape of idyllic self-obsession and wishful thinking. Another paradox, obsessive concern for the self turns the self against the self, (just look at poor Richard III, quoted above) every time, you will not find one happy narcissist on this earth, but you will find myriad rapt in fey abandon before the inevitable fall. If we dispense with the traditions that are part and parcel to the foundations upon which this country was built—within a decade it will be gone, and it will be each one of us that is to blame. Personal liberty is inalienable from responsibility. The responsibility is on that of each individual whom which liberty and the divine spark of consciousness is bestowed. This is why such dictums “to each his own ability, to each his own needs” sounds so alluring: it crafts the illusion of liberty without responsibility.

There is an old Irish myth about the great warrior poet Oisín, son of Finn Mac Cool. One day while hunting deer with his father Oisín stumbled upon Niamh, daughter of the sea god Manannan Mac Lir. Spellbound by her beauty he instinctively takes up the request to follow her to her homeland, the land of Tir Na Nog, a bucolic paradise where all are young, or gradually become younger if they arrive late in life. Dancing, singing, feasting, free-reign of youth and dream-like perfection in every sense. Oisín in dizzying delight, witnessing pure freedom and elation loses track of time and weeks go by. He then grows weary, reminded of his home, his father and friends. He asks Niamh if he can go back to visit. She grants him his wish and lends him her horse, warning him not to dismount it and touch the grounds or he would not be able to return. He accepts and rides home to Ireland, where he finds that all that was familiar is gone.

His friends perished. His father too, whom everyone now thinks is simply a mythical figure. The few weeks that passed in Tir Na Nog turned out to have been three centuries in Ireland. On his way back to Tir Na Nog, Oisín comes across two old men near the foot of a mountain trying to move heavy bags, he lends a hand only to lose his grip on his horse, falls to the ground and ages 300 years in a blink.

William Butler Yeats' first collection of poetry consists of an epic poem made up of three parts, or "books", his own poetic interpretation of the myth. Each book, spoken from Oisín's mouth to St. Patrick about his endeavors over three centuries. Recounting three different islands he and Niamh ventured: one of capering youth. One of battle where a demon was guarding a woman held captive. And finally the island of sleeping giants. All fulfilling the wants but ultimately untenable, where wanting still remained.

I

... We danced to where in the winding thicket
The damask roses, bloom on bloom,
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom...

II

'But till the moon has taken all, I wage
War on the mightiest men under the skies,
And they have fallen or fled, age after age.
Light is man's love, and lighter is man's rage;
His purpose drifts and dies.'

III

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in loud streams,
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of bone.
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with creatures of dreams,
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone."
– W.B. Yeats, *The Wanderings of Oisín*

In Yeats' old age, one of his last poems, *Under Ben Bulbin*, of which the final verse is engraved on his tombstone, the same sentiment seems to have prevailed, only more focused, matured, experience-ridden.

"Michael Angelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof,
Where but half-awakened Adam
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattrocento put in paint

On backgrounds for a God or Saint
Gardens where a soul's at ease;
Where everything that meets the eye,
Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,
Resemble forms that are or seem
When sleepers wake and yet still dream.
And when it's vanished still declare,
With only bed and bedstead there,
That heavens had opened." – W.B. Yeats, *Under Ben Bulbin*

"We take but three steps..."

The dangers of spending one's life chasing elusive paradise on earth. Delving deep into the subjective experience, searching for purpose in glorious immortality, and finally coming to the reality that all we have is the existence we are given and what we do with it. Don't invest too much in dreams. Fulfillment is not found in excess or excellence. It's found by humble means and humble deeds. The "profane perfection of mankind" is that we tend to take our subjective experience too seriously, too literally, and can wind up wasting a lifetime trying in vain to put reality in harmony with our idea of reality, or what we think it should be. We have only our little breadth of experience here, a century, if we're lucky, and there isn't enough time to save the world, there never will be—we must forgive ourselves for that too. "Don't go expecting Plato's Republic, be satisfied with even the smallest progress and treat the outcome of it all as unimportant..." Marcus Aurelius told us. For what's important are the little gestures of kindness, genuine efforts toward education, love, gratitude and precious little time spent fully with loved ones – all achievable, and of real importance, if we adopt a forgiving perspective. This is what it means to strive humbly and realistically make a contribution, our Founding Fathers worked tirelessly to leave a little material behind for future generations to work with. "...purpose and the material, that's all there is." Aurelius claimed. Those who work with those materials to provide more sophisticated ones, along with those who don't, are all gone within a blink. "Close to forgetting it all. Close to being forgotten" as Aurelius says. And, yes, Aurelius is remembered now, by me, and a few others, today, but one day, his words and name will be lost too. "No lamentation. No hysterics."

"I saw Adam leave the Garden with an apple in his hand
I said "Now you're out, what are you going to do?"
"Plant some crops and pray for rain, maybe raise a little cane.
I'm and orphan now, and I'm only passin' though.

Passin' through, passin' through.
Sometimes happy, sometimes blue,
Glad that I ran into you,
Tell the people that you saw me passin' through." -Leonard Cohen

Do not be mistaken, dreams are important, they serve us well if we don't dwell on them. As a child, and in my teens, I would have a recurring dream tintured in colors that I couldn't quite identify. These mysterious colors actually became central to the dream – for I would

acknowledge these colors with no name to myself or the other shifting figures therein. The dream became about the colors. I wasn't quite sure what that meant. I puzzled on them during sleep as well as when awake. Nothing came. Years later, my late twenties, 28 to be precise, that dream began recurring. And this time it dawned on me what that dream was trying to say: the nameless colors were potential. That's what dreams are: abstractions of idiosyncratic potential. Potent hallucinations. Conjured abstractions of what one could strive to bring into reality. This epiphany came to me during my first reading of James Joyce's, *Ulysses*. I was reading this strange story that had me utterly fascinated but unsure as to why. Then, one day, laying in bed (ironically) as I read, I came across page 160, paragraph six, line three where it's revealed that a central character who was only hinted at up to that point in the novel had the same birthday as I. This character *tinctures* the entirety of the book. The book itself is littered with words for colors, every color imaginable. The story itself culminating with her soliloquy at the end as she drifts off to sleep. Her husband made a request that he hadn't made in years and it sends her mind into a frenzy of images, past, present, and (potential) future; the soliloquy is littered with words for all sorts of colors. Through the daydream of reading I understood the fruitful psychedelia produced in slumber: the colors with no name were unreached potential. Since this revelation I have yet to have that particular dream. Now I have far stranger ones but I find them wellsprings of imagistic wisdom, working to reveal some new aspiration. Signs and dreams. They are yours. Keep them to yourself. Mark them in your pursuits. Carry on. They are divined *to you* by whom, or whatever you believe, whether it be God, Consciousness, Nature, or Happenstance. Once those signs and dreams are interpreted, forgive yourself for not having known sooner, and forgive yourself for not being able to bring it all to fruition, as pristine as it is in your mind. Forgive yourself the compromise. Find that matrix of fact and significance. Carry on.

"I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I? Twentyeight I was... Can't bring back time. Like holding water in your hand. Would you go back to then? Just beginning then. Would you?" – Leopold Bloom, *Ulysses* (page 160, paragraph 2).

"You can never go home again" Thomas Wolf told us. That's what the myth of Oisín means too. It won't be the same after the moment passes. So, forgive yourself for having let some pass, not having embraced them all fully.

True leaders know this. True leaders have a fundamental understanding of compromise and thus they have a better handle on leading effectively. Take the Bush funeral: it didn't become anything, unlike the unfortunate spectacle the McCain funeral *became*, ridden with political jabs, unfriendly digressions, childish sandbox territoriality; a soap-box for empty, mean-spirited messages. Bush Sr., having witnessed such display of bad theater, took the reins and told his family he didn't want that. He chose who would speak, and for how long, because he knew the tone he wish to set—the mark of a true, natural leader indeed. The result was a candid, caring affair filled with genuine sentiment, effortless humor, and forgiving hearts. Leave it to the Bush family to make a funeral a more lively event with more class and hope than the Royal Wedding. The love and forgiveness that family exudes is nothing short of remarkable; edifying, even. Even the cantankerous Allen Simpson managed to kick-up some laughs while keeping the class, even articulating some rather profound sentiments: "humor is the universal solvent against the abrasive elements of life... hatred corrodes the container it's carried in." That's damn right. If

you don't have a sense of humor about something, you don't understand it. If you have hatred in your heart, it's wearing you down, little by little.

"We take but three steps..."

Nothing can supplant forgiveness. There is no surrogate. Nothing will fill your life with meaning if you do not have forgiveness in your heart. I feel this is why politics has gained center-stage; people are no longer seeking to forgive in order to work together. Those who have dispensed with forgiveness have filled the void with the barbaric yawp of political activism and the robotic aloofness of Marxist thought, replicated and fueled by Identity Politics. A self-replicating doom-widger, Marxism is. One of the very few living titan minds that recognizes the dangers of political worship and systems built around the Marxist model—with its incapability to sustain a people who operate on a principle as colossal as forgiveness—is Camille Paglia.

"But politics cannot fill the gap. Society, with which Marxism is obsessed, is only a fragment of the totality of life. As I have written, Marxism has no metaphysics: it cannot even detect, much less comprehend, the enormity of the universe and the operations of nature. Those who invest all of their spiritual energies in politics will reap the whirlwind. The evidence is all around us—the paroxysms of inchoate, infantile rage suffered by those who have turned fallible politicians into saviors and devils, godlike avatars of Good versus Evil.

My substitute for religion is art, which I have expanded to include all of popular culture. But when art is reduced to politics, as has been programmatically done in academe for 40 years, its spiritual dimension is gone. It is coarsely reductive to claim that value in the history of art is always determined by the power plays of a self-referential social elite. I take Marxist social analysis seriously: Arnold Hauser's Marxist, multi-volume *A Social History of Art* (1951) was a major influence on me in graduate school. However, Hauser honored art and never condescended to it. A society that respects neither religion nor art cannot be called a civilization."

Religion, Education, and Art are the canaries in the coal mine. When they begin to decline the rest is soon to follow. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn addressed this resurfacing intellectual disease directly in his Templeton Prize lecture, circa 1983:

"Teachers in the west are brining up a younger generation in a spirit of hatred of their own society. Amid all the vituperation we forget that the defects of Capitalism represent the basic flaws of human nature, allowed unlimited freedom together with the various human rights we forget that under Communism (and Communism is breathing down the neck of all moderate forms of Socialism, which are unstable) the identical flaws run riot in any person with the least degree of authority; while everyone else under that system does indeed attain 'equality'—the equality of destitute slaves."

He continued with regards to how there can be no art in a hateful, unforgiving society because there is no call to a higher being, there is only headiness bogged down by cynicism and fury:

"This eager fanning of the flams of hatred is becoming the mark of today's free world... This deliberately nurtured hatred then spreads to all that is alive, to life itself, to the world with its colors, sounds, and shapes, to the human body. The embittered art of the 20th Century is perishing as a result of this ugly hate, for art is fruitless without love. In the East art has collapsed because it has been knocked down and trampled upon, but in the West the fall has been voluntary, a decline into a contrived and pretentious quest where the artist, instead of attempting to reveal the divine plan, tries to put himself in the place of God."

Unforgiveness is an etiolation of the soul.

"We take but three steps..."

Unforgiveness dispenses entirely our ability to discuss, or even argue. Argumentation is literally all that stands between us destruction. When reason, conversation, and argumentation are thrown out the window, war kicks in the door. "I am not afraid of what I can talk to if I see his eye. Retaining the perpendicular" Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *Ulysses* utters to Bloom, drunkenly unaware he's being encircled by an equally drunk and blindly enraged mob of Dubliner's who misheard him and think he has said something offensive to a woman. This is what unforgiveness turns people into: a mob of furious, easily triggered tribes drunk on their own self-righteous indignation. You are no longer looking into the eye of another, but simply staring at dilated pupils that can't see past the form of your privilege—unforgivable offense is all they register.

We must remember conversation leads to communication, and neither of those things will ever commence if we are breeding an unforgiving attitude to a difference of opinion. You can't eradicate racism and bigotry. You can't abolish discrimination. But you can inspire forgiveness. You can remind people of their inherent ability to forgive. That's literally the American way. Expressing aloud a sentiment such as, Open borders or Closed borders is not a real (political) conversation but the compromise between those two poles, (i.e. that which is applicable in the realm of constraint (reality)), is. And that shouldn't be a career-ending stance—but it has become so. I take the Ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell's position on matter's of border security and the necessary concern for the massive influx of asylum seekers that have manifest at the southern border: "This is not about not having a heart, this is about not having a plan." It's not that our country is mean and elitist, it's simply not prepared for this new wave of people wanting to cross our borders. A country with no borders is not a country. A country that doesn't respect the borders it's set is a liability, particularly to its citizens. We need a plan and in order to do what is most effective. A serious, lengthy conversation is required, and to do that we need to be able to talk to one another, *about anything*, and in order to do that we need to see each other as individuals making an effort to come up with an efficient plan that works for the most people and results in the least amount of damage possible in the likelihood that things don't go according to plan, or the likelihood that we screw it up—which is a very likely likelihood. In order to do all of this we must recognize that our nation was founded upon basic, ancient, deeply ingrained principles and traditions; we should start there.

"We take but three steps..."

America is built on two fundamental traditions: Judeo-Christian values married to Greek reason and democracy. Two geographies: Athens and Jerusalem. The Judaic message of the Old Testament being the fear of God due to the fall of man and thus answering his call to redemptive adventure supplemented by the Christian New Testament message of Forgiveness are integral elements to the undergirding structure of our nation. Without them everything crumbles. Forgiveness is synecdoche of civilization. Part for the whole. Our founding fathers built this nation out of long-discussed, arduously crafted ideas of liberty, morality, and hard work. “Our Constitution was made for a moral and Religious people. It is *wholly inadequate* to the government of any other” John Adams wrote. The American culture is one operating within the context of an external morality, a nation literally under God. Our morality is not something found within. It is outside of us, beyond the realm of material, yet, strangely, within that realm of *what is*, and not what we dream. Our inner moral compass is governed not by our heart—which, at times, is nothing but greatly confused and easily overwhelmed—it is instead drawn True North by something just beyond our shared material world that seems deeply oriented in forgiving reciprocity; *in* this world, but not *of* it. This nation rose because relationships were developed, differences overcome—through an understanding that we are dealing with one another despite our wretched default states. It doesn’t work any other way. In that sense unforgiveness is not only inhuman, it is fundamentally anti-American.

In Paul Thomas Anderson’s film it takes an act of God to bring everyone to their senses, reminding them that forgiveness is the universal binding agent, our salvation. Exodus 8:2 pops-up sporadically all throughout the film’s runtime and the act of god that befalls them is a truly remarkable environmental phenomena. Hopefully we won’t have to fling ourselves into contrived environmental alarmism in order to unify the West, particularly this nation. What this nation has done for the world under Capitalism is nothing short of a miracle, one that has manifest over millennia, particularly over the past two centuries; and this 21st Century has seen between 2000 and 2012 poverty and hunger cut in half world-wide.

At the film’s end nothing is particularly solved, a few things come to a close and new complications arise. However, each of the characters are given a new redemptive call to adventure, to accept it and realize their potential they must forgive. Their potential beckoning them. And I believe that’s the point. That’s the beauty of this little experience we get to experiment with as we’re merely passing through this particular realm of consciousness. If we can forgive ourselves and those we think or feel have wronged us, forgive this world for not harmonizing with our little ideas of it, the reward is *purpose fulfilled*: a meaningful life: salvation via actualized potential. And that’s the hard part. It’s not easy, not in the least. It wouldn’t be worth it otherwise, and in the end, we fail rather miserably. It is in this sense that I believe I understand Jordan Peterson’s sentiment that “It could be, in some sense, the Mercy of God that keeps him hidden from us.” An encounter with the pure face of divine, ultimate reality, the end of all means, would cripple us fallible, wretched beings and our pathetic attempts to redeem ourselves. But despite our wretched nature we can chime our own songs of redemption. “Real love, compared to fantasy, is a harsh and dreadful thing” Dostoevsky once remarked. Sounds like a task worth spending a lifetime understanding, leaving things a little less harsh, a little less dreadful for those within earshot of the echoes of our footsteps. If nothing else, maybe we can contribute to making the question—*what can we forgive?*—a little less complicated, though no

less complex. Our dreams an internal screen to visualize that next step – forgiveness being the path upon which we take such steps.

And you, there, what of your colors with no name?