

# Social Security

by [Myles Weber](#) (April 2023)



*Sleeping by the Lion Carpet*, Lucian Freud, 1996

I have a plan to save the retirement funds:  
fat acceptance.

Like smokers, overeaters die  
not at their peak but slightly post-prime  
as they near the end of careers.  
Contributing a chunk of their salaries  
each pay period,  
unhealthy citizens expire before the payout,  
leaving the principal to us.

Whichever tactic we settle on,  
you and I must solve this problem ourselves  
since, like Oedipus, we have cursed the polis.  
No foreign agents forced us to murder good sense  
and cower before our loudest colleagues.  
Europeans may have planted the seed  
with their sly, unreadable books,  
but the scowling mob who champion untruth  
arise from the domestic realm.  
It is they we capitulate to,  
not Muhammad, not Marx, not the Frankfurt School.  
We sold ourselves a bill of goods  
and paid top dollar,  
for who needs honor  
when indulgences can be purchased,  
consequences delayed?

Like doomed families, dying empires  
simmer in a stew  
equal parts wealth and self-deception.  
Too secure to fail, great civilizations  
cultivate fragility  
and topple just the same.

Abetting the slide is the intimidation factor.  
*I agree with you*, one undergraduate tells me,  
*but I could never cop to that in class.*

Child, please—stand your ground.

All I'd said was some areas of study  
benefit humanity more than others,  
our own field being a conspicuous laggard.

Those more useless than ours  
deserve special ridicule, I'd maintained.  
*That is spicy stuff*, the timid boy assures me.

He's been told so  
by an especially fetching female classmate.

But there's hope. Let's not forget  
how one of the leading lights of France,  
his intelligence beyond measure,  
died from the plague while dismissing  
the sexually transmitted virus as a cultural construct.  
He damaged the Enlightenment project and infected others,  
but his dishonesty took him out in middle age.  
The pension fund in Paris benefited.

As long as the most vocal advocates of devilry  
and their minions stick to their guns, there's hope.  
The brick wall of medical reality yields to no one.

Not everyone encouraged to  
will choose to overeat  
but other maladies threaten.  
Each lost soul is doomed by mendacity  
if karma catches men with no integrity.  
(I'm not so sure.)

When enough are felled  
by gluttony, addiction, or lust,  
solvency may intervene.

The payoff to seeing the walking wounded expire  
is fungible and exceeds mere schadenfreude.

What keeps the braying mob  
on track toward decline?  
The thrill of observing  
the gaudy pyrotechnics of mass destruction?  
Mere self-loathing? Not entirely,  
as there are immediate benefits  
to deceit—even friends of a sort, you could say.  
Intellectual crime pays handsomely.

Still, after witnessing older comrades suffer,  
might the brightest among the goon squad members  
redirect themselves on a path illuminated by the truth?  
For now, they're rats  
clamoring onto a sinking ship,  
having first chewed a hole through the hull  
with a promise of sufficient resources to buoy them.  
Will it be reward enough  
to witness the collapse of all we've built,  
at the cost of solvency, of life itself?  
Did the recollection of his orgasms comfort Michel Foucault  
as he lay on his hospital bed  
when he might have saved himself and others  
with self-reflection and a box of condoms?

Either way, we win.

Option One: The mob members barrel ahead  
until they suffer and die. (More for us.)

Option Two: They end their flirtation  
with auto-annihilation and preserve institutions  
through virtuous traits—duty, intelligence, thrift—  
all the while innovating at something beneficial  
and contributing more profitably to the public coffer.  
If the worst filled with passionate intensity  
are playacting because they believe for now  
a payout is guaranteed,  
perhaps we're not exhausted after all.  
Perverse, but not exhausted after all.

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