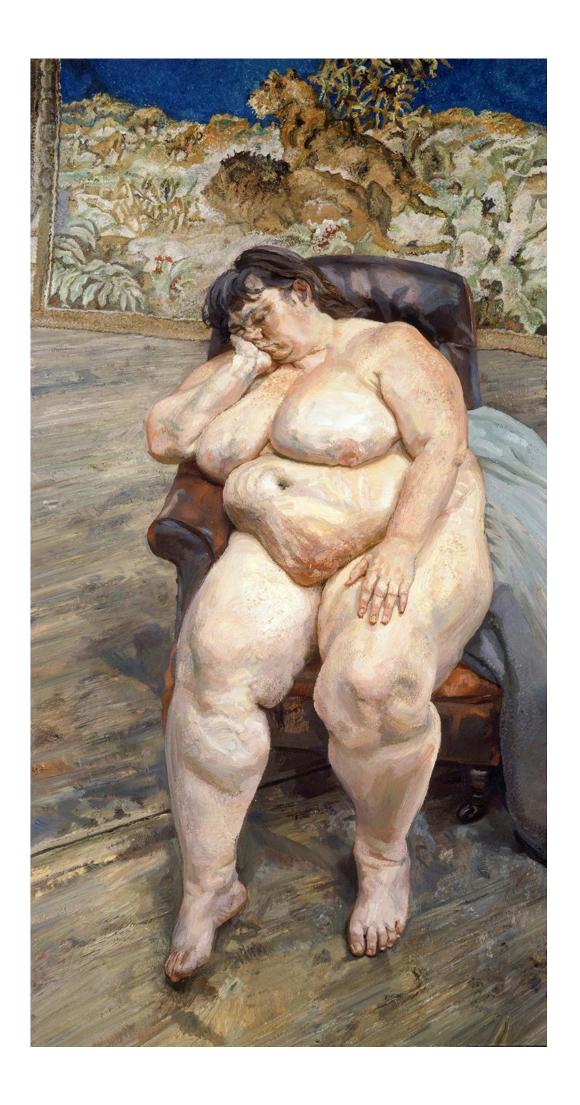
Social Security

by <u>Myles Weber</u> (April 2023)



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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Myles Weber is a professor of English at Winona State University in Minnesota. His work has appeared in the Kenyon Review, the Southern Review, the Georgia Review, the Sewanee Review, and many other journals. He is the author of Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don't Publish (U of Georgia Press).

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