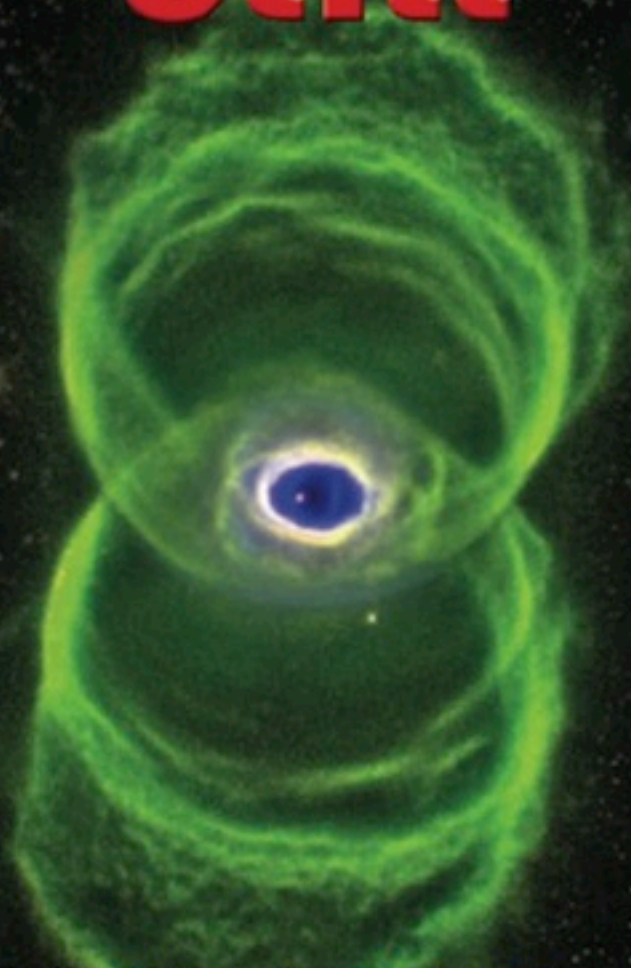
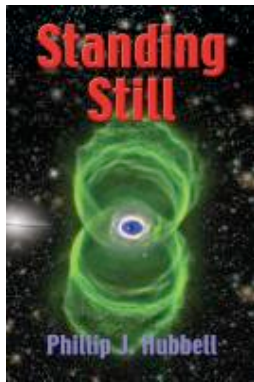


Standing Still



Phillip J. Hubbell



Looking toward the end of life, mankind has always had answers to what comes next. Some of our choices are Heaven, reincarnation, Purgatory or winking out of existence. These are all conjecture and faith. They have one thing in common. None is true. We stand still in space. We're given the memories of all who come before us. A new version of life begins where we experience free will without consequence.

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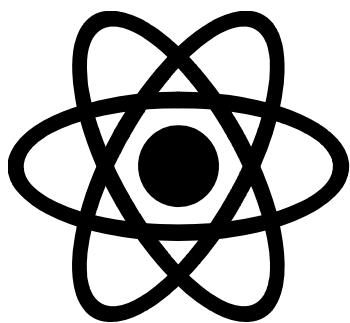
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LIVING IN THE BOX

"History is full of people who went to prison or were burned at the stake for proclaiming their ideas. Society has always defended itself."

Naguib Mahfouz

Referring to this place as the afterlife has been a tough habit to break. There really isn't an afterlife. There are stages of life and phases within stages. We make transitions within these stages as our level of confinement lessens. We're always surrounded by something, boxed in by something or constrained by something or someone. I think we're always on the road to being free with freedom being a journey and not a destination. I'm just further down that road than most. Others are ahead of me I'm certain.

Confinement has taken on a whole new meaning during my time in this stage of life. While I'm confined in the very strictest sense, time and space here is like an open lid and the downward pressure keeps expanding the size of the box and will keep doing so forever. It's daunting and the constant pressure of expanding space and an awareness of the burden of eternity leaves me aware of the big empty that looms ahead of me, behind me and out to both sides.

It's hard to look forward. It's like looking down from the highest peak as a person who's afraid of heights. There is really nothing to look forward towards, no real goals or plateaus to reach. So I do two things, I look at the present and I look at moments in the past. I use

them for entertainment, reference, recreation and distraction. I'm backing up into eternity just as we backed into old age as biological humans.

So far, this existence has been divided into two very unequal parts, a few decades of the original biology, living from one moment to the next and many millions of years exploring each of those moments in excruciating detail. Both episodes seem brief in retrospect. Both have aspects of confinement. The interesting part is the other people's lives. We live a singular life in parallel with all the other singular lives and then have all of them brought together at the end to give us a broader perspective of our biological race as a whole.

Having the lives of all these people heaped within the conscious present gives me a good understanding of just how confined I was as a biological being. We lived in the box. The box defined the limits we had to have in order to survive as biological beings in a social setting. We were completely alone then too. I was one of the lucky ones. I lived parts of life outside the box. I knew the fear that drove us into the box and kept us there but I was allowed to ignore it for a time.

In my years as a human, there was always a lot of talk about freedom. To be free was the goal of most people and some whole societies. Lots of us wanted to be free from worry, responsibility and uncertainty. A few wanted the freedom to succeed or fail based on our own abilities. I alone eventually understood that the kind of freedom from the limitations imposed on us by

our humanity was coming. That is the freedom from consequence for any action. It is breathtaking.

"You know that feeling you get when you lean way back and are about to fall over in a chair? I feel that way all the time."

Steven Wright.

That's the sensation of living outside the box. It's on the razor's edge of certainty and uncertainty. It's the expectation of both knowing and not knowing. It's the suspicion of catastrophe lurking at the border with the calm assurance that everything is going to be all right. Every moment is at the apex and we could fall in any direction but we have an expectation of balance. We get used to it and ignore the sensation. Eventually we forget that the sensation is even there and it just feels normal.

From the beginning of consciousness, it took me about 14 years to successfully climb into the box and become a person of limits. Limitations are the glue that society imposes on itself. This joining with the people of the box allowed me to live in the same world as the people around me. I still had the memories of the past. Those followed me into the box.

I still discerned patterns, saw faces in the clouds and counted stuff; just not out loud. I remembered everything about living outside the box. I made comparisons to the world of absolute freedom and the world of absolute confinement. I couldn't really talk to others about it because they had no frame of reference. The world thought me strange but they had

no sense of scale. Strange didn't even begin to define me. If the truth were known, people would have drawn their curtains and locked their doors at my approach. It wasn't because of anything I would have done. It's just that there was chaos living in my head.

In all honesty, the chaos that I could recognize within me surrounds us all. Society's restraints are an illusion. We all live in a bubble that allows us to pretend things are under control. Just for fun, next time you are out in public around lots of people, stop what you are doing and take an objective look at what's going on around you. It isn't calm and it isn't safe. That is just something we tell ourselves to get through the day without dashing off in a panic. It is our internal dialog describing the box. I felt the panic all the time.

It was as if I was an explorer or maybe more like a visitor from another planet in the box. I found myself in an alien landscape. In the back of my mind, I always had a spacecraft standing nearby to take me back home. There was temptation to just jump in and go. (The spacecraft is metaphorical not actual.) I don't want anyone thinking I'm not of the Earth. I'm everything a human should be...and isn't.

I wanted to be in the box. I wanted to be with other people. Even those of you with a detached type personality want to belong. The world outside the box was beautiful and without perceivable boundaries. The boundaries were there though. The two worlds co-exist. The people in the box make a concerted effort to

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exert control over those outside the box even as they refused to acknowledge they were there.

It's complicated, like a child who doesn't want to play with a toy but doesn't want another child to play with it either. Being outside meant that there was recognition of a need for control by those who saw control as normal. The more uncontrolled they saw, the more force they could justify in bringing it to heel. Society is like an inverse of gravity. The further away from the center you get, the greater the force pulling you in. If you come in easy enough, they will make allowances for your quirks. They just have to feel in control.

In the place I am now, I can create the circumstances of social interaction. I get to design and build the 'fitting in' parts and live fully in the world. When I was 14 years old and had just started to participate in the world around me, fitting in was an effort. It wasn't an effort for those who had been raised in the box because they weren't aware there was an outside. They were just encountering each moment as part of their normal day. They weren't startled as I was by normal events. That, I think is the essence of being outside, being startled by the normal and sometimes terrified by it.

It's difficult to describe to an audience the feeling of walking through your day and being completely aware of two parallel universes surrounding you. You are trying to ignore the most vibrant and embrace the most alien. All the while, the normal people don't recognize the universe you come from or notice your

amazement at the mundane. The feeling is like a physical pressure, an almost total awareness of the surrounding air. You have to struggle to look casual while everyone else is watching to see if you really are casual. It is important to be casual.

Self-consciousness could take up an entire day. Innocent conversation, offhand comments and overheard phrases I scrutinized for meanings that may or may not have been intended. A simple greeting became filled with innuendo and hidden context. It made every moment awkward.

As a result, I became a student of behavior. What I learned from all that study is that the people in the box, even as adolescents, are completely acclimated to their world. They are part of it. I started thinking about the envelope of socialization and cultural evolution that had led people to the place where familiarity became genetic. This kind of awareness makes being 14 years old hard. It was self-consciousness to the nth degree.

I wasn't the first person who thought about mankind in this way. I may have been one of the few who looked at it from the outside in. As I've always maintained, man's nature, given a view of something he cannot explain, demands the forming of an explanation based on imagination and plausibility. Reason, logic and rationality have never been requirements for proof of anything in the box.

Proof is never about facts. Proof is what everyone believes true or not. With proof comes scripture. With

scripture comes dogma. With dogma comes authoritarianism. Authority demands conformity. Conformity becomes normalcy. Man pretends his adherence to civilization's rules is voluntary even as the inquisition drags his family away for fiery attitude adjustments.

Of course, I didn't live in those times. I was a teenager beginning in 1968. I lived in a little town in Texas and the hardest thing confronting me was fitting into the junior high school clique. I was confused. I thought part of the decision to belong was mine to make. I thought I could just put on the uniform and assume the attitude. It was bad enough that I was so weird. My body didn't fit the popularity mold either.

I was so much taller than the other kids. I was also painfully thin. I looked like a praying mantis in high waders. I was fixated on the idea of being one of the cool kids but I just couldn't pull it off even with the Levi's jacket and the proper shoes. I might have beaten it with just one or the other issues fighting me, but being weird and weird looking overwhelmed any chance of acceptance. Teenage humans are a discerning lot.

They say that all kids that age are self-conscious. Perhaps they are right but I can remember standing in front of a mirror every morning trying to make myself look normal and running out of time before I had to leave for school. I knew at the start of each day that I had failed. I was assured each moment of each day that something about me wasn't ever going to be okay in the eyes of others when looking okay in the eyes of

the others was essential. Girls were the Holy Grail and just as out of reach.

When I looked around me, I saw others who had it worse. There is small consolation in a drowning man's awareness of his shipmates squirming below him. Man's instinct for survival is very strong. Without it, high schools all over the world would be littered with the bodies of those whose self-worth was determined by their standing in the social order.

Imagine the box I have described as a pool of water. What I was really doing was lying outside the pool with my head over the ledge submerged in the water trying to play Marco Polo with the kids in the pool. Misery would have been a welcome respite from the typical day. So, I retreated to books. I still couldn't focus on what the teachers were telling me but I could lose myself in a novel.

Reading allowed me to sit in a corner of the box pretending I was invisible. Imagine; I had moved from a place where I was reveling in the very essence of the universe, to trying to narrow focus into the box and finally down to a place where I was hiding in the box pretending that I couldn't be seen. Everyone could see me though. There was little I could do except continue to look away. I could even pretend I didn't hear the laughter.

UTOPIANS

"It was the year when they finally immanentized the Eschaton."

Robert Anton Wilson, Robert Shea

Government is a consequence of a perceived need for civility and order whether in a home, community, state or on a planet. This need for civility and order apparently must be imposed, as the mass of humanity haven't the capacity to behave or manage their own affairs. The vast majority of people insist on organized governance and even deadly consequence for noncompliance.

Too many insist that governance must exist to protect them from the ravages of self-reliance. I have noted that the stronger the influence of dogma the more power can be exerted by government without fear of reprisals from the people. This is true as long as the government purports to represent the dogma. I can extend that to ideology as well. We love the tyranny that is on our side.

I suppose ideology and dogma is the same thing. Of course, I generally place dogma with deities and ideology with tyrants. A lot of tyrants attempt to create purely secular governments but the people of Earth are superstitious for the most part and aren't having it. Stamping out a tyrant is a lot easier than stamping out God. Just as I was leaving, there was a new view of tyranny that used the subtlety of the fear of terror to justify the loss of freedoms.

The government must also hold to the orthodoxy of how the most powerful groups in the society view the dogma or ideology. It also helps if they agree to persecute the unorthodox even to the point of banning their existence. Only collectives have the power to ban other collectives and only collectives want to. Individuals who stand in the open against the collective generally lose. It is always better to resist from within.

People will allow themselves to be subjected to oppression as long as it doesn't get in the way of their expectation of day-to-day survival or doesn't contradict their belief in God. Everyone has a god, even those who reject the notion of a supreme being. God takes on many forms, from the kindly father figure gazing down from heaven, to the concept of an all-powerful society steeped in mythical compassion and the common good.

God can demand anything of the people through the agents of the government with a high expectation of compliance. As I have pointed out from time to time, God was the invention of the controllers. Imagination was the main ingredient and ignorance the catalyst. I will go so far as to say that imagination added to ignorance equals superstition. It was all reinforced by universal education both religious and secular.

Throughout the history of mankind, there have been seekers of the perfect existence for collectives. It starts from the premise that freedom is dangerous. Freedom is a threat to order. Order is the desire of those who are rewarded by the existence of controls.

An individual is free. Two people is an argument, three a lover's quarrel, four and you have sides, five creates discrimination, six is oppression, seven central control, and with eight you have a war for that control. The majority almost never rules and in most cases shouldn't.

Even so, it never fails that someone out there is looking to tame the beast of human nature and so they all start out with the same goal...the common good. Before I go any further let me just state categorically and for the record, there isn't one. The common good is as mythological as the unicorn yet we still have lots of stories about unicorns and few of them end well for the unicorn. Coincidentally few tales of the common good end well for the common man.

The common man is yet another myth used by people like me to describe people like you. Most of us are members of someone else's group definition of the common man. It is how we look at one another. It is very normal as we're all individuals and so oddly enough individualistic. There is nobody as individualistic as the collectivist leader who demands we listen to his ideas about how to control individuals for the benefit of the collective.

The leaders of collectivist movements come from within the body of artificial groupings of individuals as anomalies. These people believe that the common man cannot possibly make it through another day without having the definition of the common good showered upon them. This is to be done whether you (the common man) wants it, needs it or can survive it. It's

for your own good as well as everyone else's. "The good of the many outweigh the good of the one." This is thinking essential to good governance from the view of the governing body or the individual leader. It is a rule not a law. The leader who sets aside power is the exception that proves the rule.

The typical first act of these potential 'deliverers of mankind' is to find someone or preferably a group of someone(s) who agree that the common good has indeed been discovered and are willing to become true believers in the cause. (Wild-eyed pistol wavers). Unfortunately, since mankind is steeped in both ignorance and dogma, finding people willing to believe almost anything isn't that difficult. Finding people who will both believe anything and who desire to have someone else make the decisions is easier still.

There is a fine edge here. As I said, people are individuals. If you can convince them that your vision of world domination is in their best interest, they will walk into machinegun fire on the nearest beachhead. If they survive with their beliefs intact, you own them.

I have created a lot of scenarios of world domination. It is sort of a hobby of mine. For the longest time I watched as every experiment in collectivism that I tried, collapsed into misery and chaos. Generally, the economic system collapses first. You can prop up starving people with force a lot easier than you can force prosperous people to obey the rules. From the perspective of the collectivists, poverty is an essential element.

Best I can tell there is no workable utopian societal structure that can be maintained without changing either man's nature or the nature of "actions and consequences". Here, I can create a utopian existence based on individualism even if the environment has sparse resources. People will make the effort to survive if they understand from the outset that there is no model for dependency on the efforts of others.

However if there is a slot into which people can slide where they can curtail their effort and count on the collective to equalize the results, some will. Then more will. Eventually more ride than push and the society continues via inertia in a downward spiral until the resources are expended. Then the mob appears and they turn on one another eating the strong first, then the seed corn and then it collapses into chaos. Anywhere along the way where blame is accessed, fingers point towards the successful individual.

I have discovered that if the experiment is limited and the society is isolated, it never recovers. The remnants are too ill equipped to survive once the structures they depended on are gone. The population sinks into despair and the last member starves alone. Survival may be an instinct, but it can be conditioned out of people.

Utopia always runs up against that one thing that mankind is completely bounded by, but has spent thousands of years denying the existence of, and that is reality. In the reality of any community of man, we don't share. Sharing is something we teach our kids so

they will get along on the playground. At the end of the day, everyone knows who brought the ball.

The clamoring for fairness, the demand for equality and the quest for justice are ideals insisted upon by people with absolutely no intention of letting any of those ideals into their sphere. Fairness is one of those words like "change" or "tolerance" that cry out for definition. Look at any community where "fairness" has currency and then look where the actual currency resides.

Equality seeks to make equal that which is inherently unequal. It was never meant to be about results. Very few were ever my equal on either end of the spectrum. True equality would suggest some sort of sameness. We hate that. Someone will always be faster, smarter, braver and more focused. Without suppressing these attributes by stifling the competitive nature of the community some will obtain more either by working harder, inventing more, coercing you out of yours or by you simply handing it over having been convinced by their superior persuasiveness.

Eventually force can be used to stop them from working harder or dis-incentivizing them from creating anything by taking away the reward for doing so. Eventually we can hobble the winners to make the losers competitive. What we create is governance by those who would tear down instead of those who would build up.

"Justice" is a word that we often modify that needs no modification. As soon as someone attaches a modifier

to it, justice...isn't. Economic justice and social justice are just definitions of force to be used by someone to inflict the common good. Modified justice is the excuse we use to confiscate property, create pogroms and build concentration camps. Actual justice is something those who would impose equality on the rest should fear. Every person in any society should get down on their knees and thank the deity they worship that justice isn't prevalent.

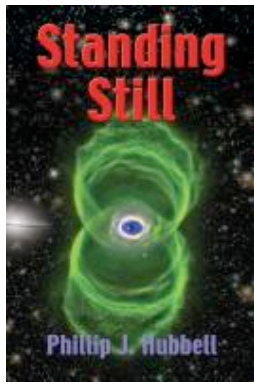
There is only one workable utopia. I say it is workable but only from the position of total control and knowledge of every action of every individual by an invisible and benevolent force. Therefore, like all utopias, outside of imagination, it cannot exist. For utopia to flourish, all actions would have to be met with measured and opposite consequences. Opposite to guide your actions and measured to temper their nature. If you do good, good things happen and if you do bad, bad things happen. That is justice. It's just not reality.

What this means is that the industrious, hardworking, smart man would receive the fruits of his effort. The slothful, lazy and dull man would receive the fruits of his and neither would have claim over the efforts of the other. Each would have to live with the outcomes because force would no longer be a means to even things out. Such a system is fair, tolerant and just. It would be an artificial construct. The majority of mankind would hate it.

The reason they would hate it is because the purveyors of utopias, of fairness, of tolerance or

modified justice are not interested in any of these things. It is and has always been about control. The trick to actually making things better for the majority of humanity isn't really a trick at all. It is removing as much centralized control as possible and allowing people to succeed or fail of their own volition.

The real common good is freedom. It is about being left alone. Our lives don't belong to the ruling class and results cannot be doled out to force equality. Force can only be used to oppress innovation and line the pockets of the purveyors of that force. The owners of the force are always more equal. Force is a cancer. Most people should be very grateful that life isn't fair. They would hate that too.



Looking toward the end of life, mankind has always had answers to what comes next. Some of our choices are Heaven, reincarnation, Purgatory or winking out of existence. These are all conjecture and faith. They have one thing in common. None is true. We stand still in space. We're given the memories of all who come before us. A new version of life begins where we experience free will without consequence.

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