

OUT MY WINDOW
Stewart Hendrickson
June 26, 2020, Seattle

As I sit here by my computer reading my email or the NY Times, I often glance out the window of my third-story condo and contemplate a view of Ballard to the east. In the morning I can see the sky with the sun beginning to break through the clouds, or a dark sky full of rain clouds. This is a window to my small world. It looks very peaceful, even in the legendary Seattle rain. Igor-the-cat is sacked out on the floor by the door, tired of begging for food or wanting to play. And I've already turned off NPR, tired of hearing the woes of the outer world. I'm just a spectator in this world. Peace.



Now that piece in the NY Times jolts me out of my comfortable chair – race riots across the U.S. and beyond, the latest Trump tweet, the latest rise of the coronavirus, the climate crisis getting closer and closer...! What should I do? What can I do? Eighty-three years old, and fearful of catching a deadly virus, I'm more-or-less confined to these few rooms, except for my daily walks and a dear cat, which keeps me sane. Again, I glance out my window and feel safe.

All my days feel pretty much the same. My groceries are delivered, thanks to my grandson and Instacart. My cooking skills are improving – trying out new recipes or improvising from what's on hand. My music (fiddle, banjo-uke, voice) improves once I get inspired and motivated, the same for my writing, which comes and goes in spurts. Pretty soon it's time for reading and sleep – Igor on the other side of the bedroom door. The next morning I open my bedroom window to be pleasantly surprised or dismayed by what the weather might be that day.

I have an existentialist philosophy of life: there is no God (or there might be), there is no meaning to life, except for what we make of it ourselves – Igor agrees with me on that. During the German occupation of France during World War II, two men independently chose to confront the Nazis – Albert Camus, an aspiring but unknown young writer, and Jacques Monod, a young graduate student intent on studying molecular biology. They rose to the occasion and joined the resistance to liberate their country from the Nazis, with considerable risk to their existence. After the war, they both received Nobel Prizes in their respective fields, Camus in literature, and Monod in molecular biology. While the majority of Parisians tolerated the Germans, some even collaborated with the occupation to further their self-interests. However, these two young men risked their lives and academic pursuits to do things that rose above a rational desire to survive.

After the liberation, they became good friends as they found that they shared a common philosophy – Camus as a humanist and Monod as a scientist. Their existentialism led them to not follow their self-interests, but to work for the greater human good. Their remarkable story is told by Sean B. Carroll in his excellent book,

Brave Genius. The bravery and sacrifice that they exemplified is greatly needed in our broken world today if we are to come out of these times into a better world. As I see many of our young people and others move in this direction, I have hope. But time is of the essence. If autocracy and the climate crisis continues to grow it will be harder to succeed. There is a real danger of getting to a point where these things cannot be turned around.

On that dismal note, I continue to look out my window with hope. Igor has his windows, but he is intent on watching the birds and other activities below and sniffing the fresh air of his small world.

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