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Professor Petzold

Capstone

Essay #2

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My story is relatively simple. I grew up in Portland Oregon, to parents of small business owners, and lived a good childhood. I had everything that I needed, and most things that I wanted. When I turned 12, I got my first job so that I could have money to buy a few things that my parents didn't buy for me. I have worked continuously since then, with only a five month break from January 2016 until May when I was able to live off savings. Even when I didn't work, I had everything I needed, and many things I wanted. I have been able to go to college, and only taken on about \$30,000 in debt, less than the national average of \$37,000. I did this through help from my father, who paid close to \$50,000 towards the total cost of my education, as well as working to pay my bills and some of my tuition along the way. My family had garnered a significant amount of wealth through the generations of home and business ownership and my parents' own acquisition of property.

I think my experience of growing up with security and in good health, in a safe neighborhood, and going to good schools was directly a product of my parent's wealth. The people who did not grow up with wealth were probably unable to experience most if any of these good things that I had. The economic and political structure of the world is a calculated environment, which does not favor one group or another over the long course of events. Capitalism is at the heart of this.

I do not believe that it is possible to successfully walk out of an unfavorable or unsustainable situation and walk into a favorable or sustainable one. I think any attempt to do this will be ultimately regarded as failure by the metrics of science, philosophy, history, sociology, and other relevant measures. These attempts may be seen as successes in the short term, but ultimately will fail. Ironically, there are anecdotes of successful people who solved problems within the text by *not* walking out and walking on. What if the photographers who organized and turned around the problems in Joubert Park just decided that the park was not a suitable environment and just went somewhere else? They would not only have let Joubert Park crumble, but they would have shed their responsibility to their community, to themselves and to the earth. If Ubuntu is the model, walking out and walking on is not an option.

Many of the ideas throughout the text seem accurate, though the broad application of them is not. People often *do* have everything they need right in front of them. The tools of change are not necessarily developed, but the life sustaining forces and resources are almost always present. It seems to me that people who walk out of situations are giving up on something that they authors are simultaneously arguing could be fixed with the resources in that situation. I would say this is a contradiction in their book, and makes me question it. I believe that people almost always do have the things they need to survive through their situation. I think the problems come primarily from the mode of production of these things, and the subsequent mode of distribution.

There is a great story about one of my favorite Christian thinkers, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in an opportunity to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York, left Germany in 1930. He studied and taught for a year, and returned to Germany in 1931, mortified to see the impending

devastation the Nazi party was creating. His choice to leave Germany at that time was one of his biggest regrets until the end of his life. He returned, established two illegal German seminaries where he taught theology counter to the doctrine the Nazi party accepted. For his work, he was arrested in 1943, held in Tegel prison, and eventually the concentration camp Buchenwald, where he was executed.

I like Bonhoeffer's story because he was a Christian, and I identify with that. But I also like that he was committed to his situation, even if it meant sacrificing his life. He did not have to stay there. He did not have to go to prison. He did not have to lose everything, but that was where his faith led him. He did not walk out or walk on. Instead, he stayed right where he was and figured out how to help people who needed it most with what he had. That was his victory.

In my life, I face a similar situation. After I graduate, I would like to live overseas, but I know that the work I am doing here in Portland is essential. I also recognize that most of the people who have the option to walk out of unfavorable circumstances leave behind people who do not have that opportunity, often to the destruction of those people. I am, for now, settling on deciding to travel a month at a time, and only have one trip planned. I want to establish myself here in Portland, but I need to grow through what precious time I can afford in a foreign social environment. Once I am able, I plan to teach, and become established here in Portland as a union organizer. I will not walk out, and I will find ways to help solve the problems my community faces. This is the work of my life. To give up on it would be to give up on myself and all those who have made me.