

DINNER AT MORTON'S

Written by

Stephen B. Waters

6391 Karlen Rd.  
Rome, NY 13440  
315 225-2706 V7

INT. MORTON'S STEAKHOUSE IN WASHINGTON, D.C. - THE SUPREME COURT DID NOT DECIDE ROE V. WADE WAS WRONG. IT CONCLUDED, ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, THAT FEDERALISM LEFT JURISDICTION FOR SUCH CASES TO INDIVIDUAL STATES. ACTIVISTS WHO PREFERRED FEDERAL RULINGS FELT INDIVIDUAL JUSTICES WHO VOTED FOR THE MAJORITY SHOULD BE HOUNDED AT ANY PUBLIC LOCATION WHERE THEY COULD BE FOUND.

While protesters chant loudly outside in the background, a well-mannered protestor slipped inside to scout around, reconnoitering near a front table.

FADE IN:

Looking around, the PROTESTER talks into a cellphone to the protesters outside.

PROTESTER  
Justice Kavanaugh just left through  
the restaurant's back door!

The PROTESTER turns back around while talking to find one DINER has stood up in his way.

DINER  
(Deferentially)  
Pardon me.

PROTESTER  
Butt out! This doesn't involve you.

DINER  
(Speaking low key, almost  
embarrassed)  
It does. I recommended this  
restaurant to the Justice for a  
quiet dinner and, regretfully, you  
chose to interrupt.

PROTESTER  
(Arguing)  
Our protest is more important.

DINER  
(Calmly)  
You believe that, but beliefs can  
be mistaken, particularly when you  
don't check your work.

PROTESTER  
(Not sure what was said or  
meant.)  
I know we're right.

DINER

You believe you are, but,  
certainly, you have been wrong  
before and gotten hurt by it.

PROTESTER

That doesn't matter.

DINER

Bet you thought you were right  
then, too.

PROTESTER

(Dismissively)

I said, it doesn't matter!

HUMILITY FROM EXPERIENCE MAKES CIVIL SOCIETY POSSIBLE.

DINER

Of course it matters. Otherwise  
you'll keep stumbling into walls  
blaming everyone else for your  
blunders. You have no humility.  
Being humble is critical to you and  
to civil society. Where do you  
believe civil society come from?

PROTESTER

We're making it civil, right now!

DINER

How? By being belligerent, of  
course. You don't even know where  
society comes from.

Responding to the protester's quizzical look.

DINER (CONT'D)

Society forms fresh at the edge  
where any two people, or any two  
cultures, meet.

(Dismissively)

You wouldn't have learned that in  
school because teachers mostly  
teach what they are told. They  
neither know or care. Teacher  
colleges may prepare them to teach  
but state educationists tell them  
what to teach. Even so, you should  
have figured out by yourself about  
society by now.

PROTESTER  
(Turning and almost taking  
an interest)

How?

DINER  
From your own experience. What did  
your experience teach you? You  
admitted you have been wrong in the  
past. You just didn't learn the  
lesson from it.

PROTESTER  
You can't know that?

DINER  
Of course I can. You didn't  
consider why you have been wrong  
before. Despite it happening again  
and again, you never deduced that  
your brain, rather than mirroring  
reality, maps abstract detail as  
best it can. You make decisions by  
following your made-up map.

PROTESTER  
So?

DINER  
Do you like planning your future  
using a defective map?

PROTESTER  
You do, too!

DINER  
But, before I make decisions, I'm  
humble enough to try to make my  
mental map as accurate as possible.  
I learned to check my decisions for  
consistency and anticipate  
consequences. If you want to avoid  
unnecessary pain, why wouldn't you  
check your mental map. Doesn't that  
give you pause?

PROTESTER  
I haven't thought about it.

QUESTION: WHY DO SCHOOLS TEACH WHAT THEY DO?

DINER

Of course not. And shouldn't you be ticked at years of schooling that overlooked such a common sense lesson? What other essential lessons did schools leave out? What are they schooling you for?

PROTESTER

To care about others?

DINER

To be a good soldier for their cause. Even ancient Rome taught that a good citizen was an individual who thought clearly and spoke well. That's more than we do now. Besides. Who gets to define a good citizen?

PROTESTER

Good citizens value community above self. They think of others. Think of the common good.

DINER

Who gets to specify what "good" is common? Now, the decision is conveniently top down rather than bottom up. They want to mold you to match their needs, not yours. They want to dull your individuality. They actively fight your individuality.

SECOND LESSON: RECIPROCITY OPENS DOOR TO CIVIL SOCIETY.

PROTESTER

You're the one who is selfish. You don't value others.

DINER

You're mistaken. You overlook the other requirement for civil society: That other people live their lives as acutely as you live yours.

PROTESTER

Show me.

DINER

Why do people shake hands?

PROTESTER

I don't know.

DINER

Historically, that was to show each other they were unarmed. That was the first sign of peaceful intent. Both sides reciprocated. Reciprocity means you don't do to others what you don't want done to you.

PROTESTER

Reciprocity?

DINER

Expressed as a negative, that's the practical reverse of the Golden Rule. Respect others the way you want returned. A sense of otherness is the realization that they live their lives as acutely as you live yours.

PROTESTER

(Curiously)

Where did that come from?

The diner pushes out a chair inviting the protester to sit.

DINER

It gets reaffirmed every day from anywhere people get nudged to figure it out for themselves.

(Pause)

At least it comes when you re-validate what great thinkers across history figured out for themselves when they turned their keen intellect to solving the simple daily problems of living.

PROTESTER

I didn't know that.

DINER

Of course not. Why is it not in state approved curricula? They don't teach the lessons of history. They don't nudge you to develop your own character.

(MORE)

DINER (CONT'D)

They don't want you to know. In essence, the fewer useful lessons you extract from the hamburger of history, the easier it is to mold you to do their work.

The Protester sits in the offered chair.

PROTESTER

They? Who?

OBSERVATION: THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO THINK FOR YOURSELF.

DINER

Those people who politically herd cattle for food don't want belligerent animals on their farm. They want you schooled but uneducated—unable to defend against words, and ignorant of the past and of your own long-term self-interest.

(Changing the subject)

Words matter. Notice how they dismiss words of history, leaving you ignorant of it? Notice how they dismiss the words of others, but reject challenges to their own words. Notice for those with whom they disagree, words are "racist" but their own accusations are not.

PROTESTER

How should I take that?

DINER

Take it seriously. Author William Gass said people use words to club the living into food.

Protester adjusts his body language to focus squarely on what is said.

PROTESTER

You have my attention.

DINER

Good. Their postmodern politics works best against those don't pay attention. Unfortunately, today, that's almost everyone.

PROTESTER

Postmodern?

DINER

Radical philosophers and historians coined the word in the 1950s, not caring one bit that slippery word meanings drew laughter back in 1872, when Lewis Carroll wrote *Through the Looking Glass*. In the book, Humpty Dumpty looked down his nose to say, "Words mean what I say they mean, nothing more." Readers laughed, but today, postmodernism is a serious political tactic.

PROTESTER

How so?

DINER

Activists expect you to assume they use the common meaning of words until it's too late to stop them. You see their "Woke" damage everywhere: schools, universities, government, business. Their calls for "Diversity" set quotas based on superficial identity, Their "Equity" puts a thumb on the scale to reach inequitable outcomes, and their "Inclusivity" policies impose control over what is "right". All words with slippery meanings, and they call it "Social Justice".

PROTESTER

That's not fair.

DINER

They don't want fair. Your individuality is inconvenient for them. They want to rub out your individuality. They take control to decide what is fair. Their privileged words decree that words of others don't mean anything. And, magically, you accept their radical and anarchist claim that the words of others caused every known failure in the country.



WHAT IS THE REAL GOAL?

PROTESTER

What's your point?

DINER

(In a voice focused and  
steely)

They lie. No getting around it.  
They lie. They shape-shift words to  
manipulate you. They don't want you  
to notice. They don't respect you.  
They never have.

The Diner moves closer for emphasis.

DINER (CONT'D)

Who gave you 16,000 hours of public  
schooling that failed to arm you to  
defend against words? You never  
learned to identify some 52  
different kinds of logical  
fallacies used in everyday  
conversations that students in the  
Middle Ages knew by heart. Who uses  
words to march you off to protest  
against others for them? Who uses  
you to gain power for themselves  
and then creates social pressure to  
keep you docile?

PROTESTER

You lost me.

DINER

(Making the point)

No, they MADE you lost, and if you  
don't pick up the pieces, they are  
going to force you back down into  
the jungle with the rest of the  
animals.

PROTESTER

Wait a minute? They're not the  
oppressors. We are protesting  
against the oppressors. We are  
protesting systemic racists. They  
oppose social justice. They fight  
democracy.

USE LOGIC TO CHECK YOUR WORK.

DINER

You see the words, but not the evidence. You never learned how to analyze premises, or whether the conclusions they offer necessarily result from them. You took what they said at face value because it felt right. You never nailed it down so you could check it for consistency. And the so-called journalists you hired to alert you never did either. You were led into a trap you could never expect.

PROTESTER

Wait a minute! How did we get from having once been wrong to sweeping claims about threats to culture and society?

DINER

We started with humility and reciprocity. Let's go back there. Humility is one of two threads that hold civil society together. When we recognize our brains only map reality, it humbles us. Only then does self-interest push us to make our mental map as accurate as possible.

PROTESTER

I can see that.

DINER

The other thread is Reciprocity—the sense that many other people live their lives as acutely as we live ours.

PROTESTER

Why care about those threads?

DINER

Those threads are society's warp and weft. Underneath the pile of every rug, warp and weft threads hold everything together. Pile of a rug consists of individual threads, short or tall, of any color, thickness or pattern, made of cotton, wool, or any other fiber.

(MORE)

## DINER (CONT'D)

Pile is like the variety of individuals and cultures who join together in society. Without warp and weft threads underneath, holding them together, you have, well, just a pile of fibers.

## VALIDATING VIRTUES COMPELS HOW YOU ACT.

## PROTESTER

How do we get from there to the problems we are protesting to solve?

## DINER

Some problems are real and some are manufactured. You need to develop the overall picture to distinguish which is which.

## PROTESTER

How?

## DINER

Virtues are those habits that allow individuals to grow, develop, and flourish with each other. Virtues solidify individual character. We have deduced two virtues. Humility is a virtue. Reciprocity is a virtue. Virtues are habits that nurture quality of life. What is more, if you try, you can deduce most other virtues from these two.

## PROTESTER

Who cares?

## DINER

You do, if you don't want to blindly follow others. You need to revalidate for yourself what they claim. Every generation does, and, frankly, recent generations haven't revalidated much of anything. Hell, we were never told we had to. Instead, those before us simply repeated by rote what their teachers taught. Their "Appeal to Authority" does not lead to understanding. It leads to the kind of mess we now find ourselves in.

PROTESTER

Why?

DINER

They didn't know we had to revalidate them. We mostly ignored the dispute between warring factions because neither seemed right. Traditionalists said, "Because I said so!" And radicals said, "No rules!"

PROTESTER

Give an example.

DINER

You're too young to recall the 1950s when two sides argued over Elvis Presley's Rock-n'-Roll gyrations on television. Similarly, 1960s demonstrations were another example. Conservatives and liberals battled over what they claimed were principles when neither side really understood the principles they were fighting for.

PROTESTER

(Imploring.)

But, what we're doing here is important!

DINER

(A socratic lesson begins.)

Is it important because they say so or because you say so?

PROTESTER

We both do.

DINER

But you never checked for yourself. Virtues that develop character are a more useful way to figure what is important.

PROTESTER

That's too abstract for me.

DINER

Okay, say "Two plus two equals five" and say it like you really mean it.

PROTESTER

But it doesn't.

DINER

Of course it doesn't. When you master simple arithmetic, it masters you. When you know something is true and useful, it becomes compelling.

PROTESTER

Where are you going with that?

DINER

When you master logic, it masters you. That's where real courage comes from. Understanding makes real virtues and civil society compelling. It's why 300 Spartans stood up against 6,000 Persians at Thermopyle. They had the courage to die fighting for principles that were stronger than simple beliefs, rather than cave under oppression.

PROTESTER

But this is today.

DINER

During the Battle of Gettysburg, General Joshua Chamberlain, a simple teacher of rhetoric, his men down to fighting with bayonets, managed to hold Little Round Top against a larger army wheeling around their flank because they found the courage from understanding what mattered and why.

PROTESTER

You're challenging me to understand what matters and why?

DINER

I'm challenging you to find both the courage and the habit to think for yourself—to discover that rational self-interest creates community with others without surrendering yourself to the mob.

PROTESTER

What mob?

DINER

The mob calling for democracy.

PROTESTER

Democracy isn't a mob, it's a principle.

DINER

Not really. It's a process. Your schools never taught you the history that Athenian democracy killed Socrates for daring to ask who gets to teach. He dared challenge government control over individuality. Activists today forsake sensible checks and balances to race toward democracy they use to legitimize undemocratic policies that oppress individuals, covering up understanding with a vote.

PROTESTER

I feel cheated of an education.

DINER

When you hear their drumbeat for "democracy," underneath it all they are busily disassembling the checks and balances of our constitutional republic to incite enough pressure to impose their will without regard to the justice of it.

PROTESTER

But the current court went too far.

DINER

Did it? It restored an important check and balance. The Constitution considered that courts were too powerful to make law, so the founders restricted judicial process to only decide whether federal laws were constitutional or should be left to states to decide. Some Justices in the past overstepped their authority and tried to make law. It's important to re-establish the Constitution's restraints on judicial power.

PROTESTER

I guess when you don't know history, and don't think things through, there are consequences.

DINER

You don't want to be like the hundreds of Jim Jones' followers in Guyana in 1978 that committed suicide drinking poisoned Kool-Ade because Jones claimed he had a message from God. If you can't explain clearly why something is important, ignore the message.

PROTESTER

Okay, so more is required than a simple chant. But, you said something else was important.

RECURSION IS A TOOL TO CHECK CONCLUSIONS.

DINER

We have better tools today to validate than ancient Greek philosophers and, historically, major religions had. One tool is called recursion.

PROTESTER

Recursion?

DINER

It's the process of thinking about thinking about thinking. To make it clearer to understand, consider M.C.Escher's drawings that visually looped back on themselves. Or consider the feedback loop of a sound system that can feed back upon itself sounding a loud, piercing squeal.

PROTESTER

That matters?

DINER

Feedback can be either positive or negative, constructive or destructive. Positively used, you can project possible scenarios into an imagined future to anticipate obstacles to success.

PROTESTER

How does feedback help?

DINER

It makes us more cautious and more receptive to weaving what others observe into our own conclusions. No one can claim a lock on wisdom. And we know enough to defend ourselves against any who claim they do.

(Pause)

If you read about the broken clay tablets of lost knowledge after Nineveh was destroyed in 632BC, you realize that some cultures are builders while others are destroyers. Sensible cultures learn from others and assimilate what they find worthwhile. Today cultures are being assaulted by destroyers. They don't accept feedback. They don't learn from it. They don't want to learn from it. They are destroyers.

PROTESTER

That's sad.

DINER

Logic isn't necessarily how you think. Actually, by experimenting, two Nobel Prize winners found that conclusions can rise from the subconscious. So, you use logic when you are humble enough to check your work. Validate for yourself that the need to check your work came from the lifetime of your own personal experience, not from your cultural lessons. You don't want someone claiming you were a victim of cultural indoctrination. People all across the world and across history, have had their own personal experiences of thinking they were right only to later discover they were mistaken.

PROTESTER

But what is so important about that?



DINER

Common lessons learned not from shared experience, but from similar experience, allow us to build society across what would otherwise seem an impenetrable cross-cultural gulf. Others, even of a different culture, can deduce they are in a similar situation.

WHY BUILDING A BRIDGE ACROSS CULTURES MATTERS

PROTESTER

Why do activists toy with us?

DINER

Those who would farm people don't see how fragile civil society is. You cannot value what you cannot see. They don't care how fragile civil society is, and won't until it comes crashing down on them and on everyone else. They will find out the hard way that there is no guarantee "good guys" will win. In fact, push it far enough and there is no guarantee that anyone will be left alive to win.

(Pause.)

Feeling protected by their unchallenged convictions, they will wake up to discover themselves thrown into the middle of the Law of the Jungle with no tools to cope. In their purposeful ignorance of history they thought they had the power to shed laws without consequence.

PROTESTER

What consequence?

DINER

"Where do you turn for protection when the devil turns back on you, the laws all being flat?" Sir Thomas More said that in *Man for all Seasons*. "Yes, I'd give the devil benefit of the law, for my own safety's sake." They toy with others like its a video game. You can reboot games, but not life.

(MORE)

## DINER (CONT'D)

Play games and you may suddenly wish you had real schooling, wish teachers pushed you to think, wish you could comb history for useful lessons of what works and what doesn't. You may wish you had time, and wish you had help. But, in your hubris you will have cut yourself off from it all. In the end, there is no one who can save you but yourself. You are in a race to convince others to figure it out, too, for their own safety's sake.

WHILE EVERYONE IS ALONE, THEY NEED COMMUNITY.

## PROTESTER

That makes me feel alone.

## DINER

You are alone. Every individual is. You can't squeeze a friend tight enough not to be alone. Alone and adrift in a sea of sense experience, sifting with limited skills, required to fashion safe relationships with others before you sink. Deal with it. Your hubris is your own. Hubris. The over-weaning pride that cometh before the fall. You have done it to yourself. You let other people use you and you didn't learn to think for yourself—to defend against their words. You better find others who recognize the situation and with whom to partner. It's the only way.

(Looks directly at  
protester)

You got screwed out of understanding how much you need Justice Kavanaugh. You thought he was your enemy. I hope you can see it differently, now.

## PROTESTER

That's not gonna happen!

## VALUE THE UMBRELLA OF PEACEFUL PROBLEM RESOLUTION

DINER

Think about it. The Supreme Court, flawed as it might be, holds up an umbrella of peaceful problem resolution that protects you from me, and from anyone else for that matter.

PROTESTER

How?

DINER

What did I say when I interrupted your "peaceful" protest against the Justice?

PROTESTER

"Pardon me."

DINER

What if, instead, I got your attention by whacking a two-by-four across your head.

PROTESTER

That would have been against the law!

DINER

Law? You pushed the letter of the law, not understanding of it. You disturbed the peace. I stood up to restore it. When you chose justice by intimidation, you chose the battlefield, not me.

PROTESTER

You changed the rules!

DINER

No, you did, because you didn't think about why the rules were created.

PROTESTER

Those rules were unfair!

DINER

You feel the justice system is unfair because someone claimed the culture was biased. You never checked for yourself.

(MORE)

DINER (CONT'D)

Do you stop at a stop light even when no cars are approaching the side road?

PROTESTER

Yes. But what has that to do with the Justice?

DINER

It has little to do with the Justice, but everything to do with law. Confucius answered your question 2500 years ago. He answered why law exists.

PROTESTER

Writing so long ago he knows nothing about today!

DINER

Ideas are timeless, but you have to validate if old ideas still apply to today.

PROTESTER

What ideas?

DINER

He described three ways to live your life: Saints, he said, intuitively understand The Way. A second group, in which he considered himself, could be nudged to learn to deduce The Way to act.

PROTESTER

That says nothing about laws.

DINER

You don't have to be dogmatic and strident. Just think! The Harvard Law professor who wanted "more aggressive" protests and those at Georgetown law who protest law that they claim pretends to justice, fairness, and public welfare, though unable to define them. Those who call for people to "accost [justices] every time they are in public" may teach law, but have not mastered why law exists.

(MORE)

DINER (CONT'D)

Laws were created for the third and last group that didn't know how to figure The Way to live for themselves.

PROTESTER

Laws substitute for understanding.

DINER

Which is why, when you push to protest to the limit of the law, you probably don't understand the reason behind the law in the first place.

PROTESTER

I might be able to figure this one out.

DINER

Try.

PROTESTER

The sense that others live their life as acutely as I live mine, means if I were him, I'd like to eat my dinner quietly, too.

DINER

So you are protesting a justice whose sole crime was to try to keep you from slipping back into the hazards and uncertainty of the Law of the Jungle. How do you feel about that?

PROTESTER

Shit!

FADE TO BLACK.

**THE END**