**Chapel Speech Draft 7**

*Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*-- Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night”[[1]](#footnote-0)*

 (Do a debate bit here while setting up the timer, 10:40 minutes)

Good morning. If you don’t know me, you don’t have to. I will not be talking about myself today, since I am not very different from you, or anyone else. We are composed of similar things; all humans are. An average, 70kg human body is composed of 45 kilograms of oxygen, 13 kilograms of carbon, 7 kilograms of hydrogen, 1.8 kilograms of nitrogen, 1 kilogram of calcium, 0.8 kilograms of phosphorus, and less than one kilogram combined of potassium, sulphur, sodium, chlorine, iron, and trace amounts of other chemicals. This means, as much as we may hate to think this way, chemically speaking, there is not a lot of difference between us and the inanimate objects surrounding us, for instance, this stand, or that chair. The only significant difference, besides the fact that we know a little more than them, is that we have agency of ourselves, the freedom to decide what we wish to do and not do with our time. Such an agency is limited and short-lived. In no more than 150 years, everyone in this room will have lost their agency. The abyss of death thus presses our conscience for an immediate answer to the central question of our very existence: what should we do with our lives, specifically, with the freedom we have in them?

Realize, panel, the unprecedented amount of power and freedom that have been allocated to us. As far as we know, there is not a single other species that is aware of its actions and able to determine what they wish to do next freely. For our peers in nature: animals, plants, microbes, etc., nature herself has determined the sphere of activity in which they should move, and they peacefully move within that sphere, without attempting to go beyond it. We, however, are given a choice regarding our activity. This choice is the great privilege of humanity over the rest of creation, but at the same time, it is a choice that can end in the destruction of individual life and even the human race. The choice is, therefore, hard and perilous. It demands an answer as to how we should spend our time and liberty, and our answer to it, despite its challenges, should be very clear: humans, you and me, instead of succumbing to the status quo, need to use our agency and precious freedom to actualize our beliefs and change the world. *This is what I believe to be true*.

There is a Chinese story, entitled *The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountain*, or 愚公移山, that goes something like this: a foolish old man in his 90s, annoyed at the mountains in front of his house, decides to remove it with nothing but his hoes and baskets. One day, a wise old man passed the mountain, and, seeing the foolish man at work, laughed at his foolishness. He mocked the old man, saying given how old he was, he could hardly move a spade of grass on the mountain before he died. But the foolish old man called him ignorant: “Although I only have a few years left,” he said, “my children, my grandchildren, their grandchildren, and so on until infinity will continue where I left off. So why should I be worried in the slightest?” Hearing this, the wise man laughed some more and walked away.

This short story, along with many others, such as the bird Jingwei that tries to fill up an entire ocean with pebbles, is extremely popular and influential in Chinese culture and has permeated thousands of years of Chinese history. It is so with a reason: not because the Chinese people are foolish and want to move geographical features around for fun, but because it shows how one should spend their time on Earth, how to utilize their precious freedom and agency. Whatever goal we truly wish to pursue, regardless of how absurd it may sound, even if it is to move a mountain or to fill up an entire ocean with pebbles, we should dedicate our whole lives and best effort to it. Sure, it is possible, in some cases, even likely, that we won’t be successful in such endeavours. However, if one chooses to spend their entire life to protect the leisure of life but compromise the pursuit of their true beliefs, at some point in that leisure, one must wonder: what is the meaning of living, spending all my time to and fro in this comfort, just to waddle towards death? And the answer is obvious: there is no meaning. If we spend our time idly with no intention to stand for what we believe is right, then our individual existence will amount to mere futility. We are the only creatures given the ability and freedom to not be driven by our desire for immediate leisure and pleasure, but to decide our actions regardless of whether such actions bring about immediate gratification. If we still choose to fall back and surrender that precious, miraculous gift of freedom just for the same leisure and pleasure, we are putting that privilege to complete waste. We have, therefore, as humans and as individuals, a responsibility, to both ourselves and the amount of freedom and power allocated to us by nature, to not be satisfied with the status quo, but actively struggle and agitate for a better world and a better self, one that satisfies our unique and varying beliefs.

Observe, panel, the demand of our society for those who carried through with their belief regardless of objective conditions. Many of you might be familiar with the reformist efforts of Martin Luther against the Catholic Church, but few would be as familiar with Thomas Muntzer (pronounced Moon-tse), a pupil of Luther. After Luther decided the reformed church was good enough, Muntzer continued to push for what he believed in with all his might: a complete transformation of the church and, as a result, a more just society. Millions followed him in this pursuit, starting the German Peasants War, and, despite his arrest, the torture he endured, and even death, Muntzer did not sway from his belief. Similarly, Valery Sablin, a navy officer on the USSR warship Storozhevoy, disillusioned with the state of his government, staged a mutiny on the warship and broadcasted his speech to land with hopes of making others aware of the level of corruption in the central government. Despite his arrest, torture, and execution, he, too, did not falter for a single second from his goal of creating a better world. Then there was the Chilean President Salvadore Allende, who, facing a coup against him led by a dictator backed by the United States, decided to die in battle and fulfill his duty instead of accepting the offer proposed by the dictator to resign, surrender, and survive. Without exception, these men all died brutally. Some argue they died for nothing, and they would be technically correct: the cause that these men died for, the cause of equality, freedom, and democracy, to this day, remains largely unrealized. However, without people like Muntzer, Allende, and Sablin, who carry on with their beliefs at all costs, our society will simply grind to a halt. If everyone turned away from their beliefs due to the risk they may bear from perpetuating them, there would be no improvement, no progress, and no betterment of humanity. Therefore, when it comes to us, our choice of how to spend our agency impacts not only us but also the entire society. Of course, I am not rallying you to actively seek self-destruction. I am, however, positing to you what was once asked of me: what do you believe to be true? Once you have an answer, and you’re certain of it, I ask you to follow the spirit of Muntzer, Allende, Sablin, and so many others. Have the courage and determination to stand for what you believe to be true regardless of the cost and danger that you may face and use the agency allocated to us by nature to do what you believe to be the right thing. Perhaps you think climate change is a big issue. If so, then make it your life’s work to spread awareness and bring about action to protect the environment. Perhaps you believe everyone should be equal, then devote your life to struggling for those less fortunate than you. The list goes on. Depending on your answer to the question, you may act very differently, but one thing is universal: you should use everything you possess to fulfill your dreams and to do what is right. The world, we, need you to do this. Those who gave their lives before us are watching us. They want to know what became of the hearts they gave, what we are doing to continue their legacy. But, more importantly, you, yourself, need to do this, so that decades later, when you inevitably lie on your deathbed, you will not be troubled by a petty past, but can proudly declare that all the liberty and privilege entrusted to you by nature was spent properly and with dignity.

Now, I want to thank some people who have affected me greatly and positively in my life.

To General Chuck McEvoy: Thank you for all these years as my debate coach, advisor, and history teacher. I struggle to find appropriate diction that matches your importance and influence in my life. Your influence gave me most, if not all, of my positive traits, shaped my ideology, and contributed to, I regret to say, a large portion of my sense of humour. Your care, humility, and wisdom are what made me, me. Without you, I might not even be able to stand here today to give this speech. I cannot express my gratitude properly, but I will never in my life forget what you have done for me.

To Mr. Gummeson: Although you might never hear this, I still have to say thank you for all you have done for me. Your faith in me changed my life completely. You not only taught me music but also that if I truly put my mind to something, I can always make progress. I cannot emphasize enough how important that is.

To all my friends here at RNS and around the world: I was going to read a list of names, but I realized that would probably extend this speech to the opening night of the musical at 6 pm today. You are the very reason I believe a better world is possible. Thank you for all you have done. Without you, there is no me. Especially, I have to thank Cole and Shreyas for being my role models. And to Shreyas, thank you for taking the time to come here today.

To Jessica Pei: Thanks for doing my quote and supporting me through the past years. Surviving HL math would have been impossible without you.

To my family - and pardon me for delivering this next bit in my native language:

爸，妈：我想过几百种感谢你们的话，但是真临了头我反而不知道该说什么。从我出生到现在，我生命的每一秒都是你们用生命，时间，和金钱堆砌出来的。我欠你们的实在太多太多了，而我能做的又太少太少。谢谢。我能有今天，能活到今天，全靠你们。

阿爷，奶奶：从小我就崇拜你们。我奶奶一个人能有八个分身，世界级厨师，阿爷是什么东西都精通，我现在学的物理，数学，历史，地理，语文，政治，经济加在一块儿和他比都是九牛一毛。你们永远都是我的榜样。你们嘱咐的我都记着呢。其他的我不敢保证，但是我一定不愧对你们给我的良心。千万照顾好身体等我回去。谢谢，我爱你们。

I would like to end my speech with a quote from a poem celebrating the Roman soldier Horatius Cocles (pronounced Coak-clees), who, alone, defended the Sublician bridge against the entire Etruscan army, and it goes like this:

“Then out spake brave Horatius, / The Captain of the gate: / ‘To every man upon this earth / Death cometh soon or late. / And how can man die better / Than facing fearful odds, / For the ashes of his fathers, / And the temples of his Gods.’”

So proud to propose. Thank you.

**Runtime: 9:18**

1. *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, New Directions Publishing. 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)