

Parallel Provisioning

The idea of how to relate a few chapters of *Creative Confidence* had come together in my mind, along with my morning coffee. Driving across town from the east on Santa Monica Boulevard, a convenient place to park along the street came into view, as the car encircled the downtown neighborhood around the Santa Monica Public Library. The library is one favorite place to inhabit, when trying to write out my thoughts on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. The expansive halls are graced with large windows, fine natural lighting, and high ceilings. The furnishings endorse a clean, solid integrity and simple functionality. There are occasional distractions to permit diffuse conceptualization, apart from focused and purposeful commitment to pen and paper.

Cruising just past the open parking space and settling just beside the next vehicle parked ahead, the car was poised to move backward into the destination slot. The right turn signal was set to be blinking. Most meters on the street are not enforced on Sunday, parking is free. Glancing into the rear-view mirror, a large sports utility vehicle is crossing over Wilshire Boulevard and driving quickly toward me in the same, rightmost lane. Normally it is customary to wait for a vehicle approaching from behind to change lanes and to move past, since it is necessary to swing out into another additional lane with the front of the car when parallel parking. Instead of swerving to go past, the young driver of the sports utility vehicle exercised a surprise maneuver. He abruptly moved out and then in, headlong into the open parking space, awkwardly posturing at a perpendicular right angle to the street and the adjacent sidewalk. It was apparent that the young driver intended to take the parking space for himself, and he intended to force me to leave – even if it would be difficult or impossible for him to maneuver his large truck without the ability also to move forward. My car remained in place as it was.

As the car remained deliberately still, the arrogant young driver spent what seemed to be about five minutes, to inch backward and forward and eventually to capture the parking spot successfully. Then, I drove my car ahead about two or three car lengths, where another open space could be easily secured. It had been available all along. Circumstances had happened to demonstrate how selfishly and thoughtlessly the young driver may have behaved.

All of this is again on my mind, because the theme for what I was planning to write concerned the traditional civil notions of fortitude and temperance. A display of strength, or courage, or fortitude – through forcefulness – will potentially become distorted, without a respect also for balance of character or a well-tempered regard for the situation of other people, as well as for one's own situation. What had just occurred was a spontaneous acting-out of exactly the principles I had been meaning to convey in my writing at the library on that one Sunday afternoon. Actually, with day-to-day work at a large office, it is not uncommon to see employees and managers assert themselves forcefully, without much real care or concern for those around them, whatever their roles or responsibilities. Instead of feeling annoyed at any inconvenience caused by the parking incident, it was possible for me to feel grateful and rewarded. A kind of resonance had appeared almost as a spontaneous acknowledgement of my own immediate intentions, poetic justice of a sort.

That same afternoon, a few hours later, my writing was progressing well. Near me in the library, a few young people apparently had been busy with their studies for school. Then, the same young man, who had parked the big sports utility vehicle on the street, arrived and sat down with the group. They were clearly all familiar friends. The serendipity of the situation seemed to me to be funny, as it was evident at one point that the young driver had looked over and had seen me sitting and working quietly nearby. No talking needed to occur. The young man even seemed slightly embarrassed and sheepish, through accident or karma, finding me close-by, there in the library. Toward closing time, I quietly collected by laptop computer, my books, and my writing materials. Returning to my car, the drive home was direct and uncomplicated and uneventful as normal.

Somehow it seemed compelling to record that incident for myself. This morning, yet another compositional Sunday, my day started at a local Starbucks. Intently involved with a long interesting article on the Internet, somehow no concern was given for the table next to me. A young woman, with her books and her computer interrupted me to ask if anyone was using the table. As she had already put down her things, I was unaware what might belong to whom. Several people and come and gone from that table while I had been there reading. She left to stand in the long line. Shortly afterward, a middle-aged man came over, and he insisted that he intended to have the table. Finding the young woman in the crowd, he demanded that the table rightfully belonged to him. Apparently, his sweater had been placed on a chair next to the table. She respectfully apologized and removed her possessions.

She found a chair by the big window at the front, and she worked with the computer on her lap. The middle-aged man occupied the table alone, even though he had brought no work, no book, and nothing to occupy his attention. With all due respect, there was no need for him to claim a table, if all he planned to do was to drink his coffee alone and to watch the crowd. He might just as well have given the table to the young woman and used the cushioned lounge chair by the window for himself. Again, strength and temperance come into play. The first person to place a claim on a resource may not always feel legitimately righteous in enforcing a demand, especially when other alternatives are easily available. Here, in front of a considerable audience, he simply looked stubborn and mean-spirited. Context may condition the most appropriate accountability.

Yet there is yet another funny side to all of this, too. The gesture of the SUV driver resembled an attack scenario from a video game. Maybe the virtual world invades the real world, in the mind of the instigator, a lesson in awareness of context. Dogfighting fighter jets resemble acrobatic parallel parking battles, an exercise in free association.

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