How we end

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“Age, contemplative nature of it. Something where there’s an accumulation of detail, anal detail of everyday life, that ultimately add up to a life that you have to leave.”

—Martin Scorsese [1]—

There are two memorable scenes in *The Irishman* (2019):

A

B

In Picture A, a notorious mob boss was having a meal with his young recruit. The mob boss was gaining more power, while the younger man was about to enter a life of utmost wealth and sin.

In Picture B, the same two people, but now, just two older men experiencing the last days of their lives. The mob boss cannot even chew a little piece of bread but have to suck on it with his shaky hand. Meanwhile, you can see pity in the younger man’s eyes.

The movie was made when the core team: Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, and Joe Pesci, are all in their seventies. They did not have the physique to show off their masculinity like they used to. There is no boiling anger, no burst of violence, and definitely a lot less “fucking.” The overall mood of *The Irishman* is meditative, especially toward the end. The closest scene that has brought me the same feeling is the last scene in *The Godfather Part III* (1990), just an old Michael Corleone sitting there, then falling to the ground.

Is this how we all end?

These works were usually made when the director and the actors were all at the twilight of their times. Indeed, some of my mentor's dearest works were produced in the past three years, in his late 40s and early 50s [2-5]. A paper seems like a summation of his years as an economics advisor [2]. Meanwhile, some works even stretched further, back to his childhood with fairy tales and folktales [3,4]. One work feels like a surprise; however, it also took several years of watching the scientific publishing system closely [5].

On the other side of the spectrum, there are physicists or mathematicians, whose prized works come in their 20s or 30s. How can you explain the thought process behind Einstein's works [6] or Godel's [7] or Ngo Bao Chau's [8]. It does not mean that time does not have a central role in their findings. Indeed, time is crucial in one [6].

These are all anecdotal evidence, so I cannot draw any conclusion. However, approaching my late 20s, there is just a feeling of wistfulness for all the things I could have done better. During the production of *The Irishman*, there was one minor detail that feels aged. The phone that was used in the movies, they were so heavy that it made the younger actors surprised [1]. Think about it, who could have remembered that phone was once really heavy too.

In the same way, certain works, especially in social sciences, need both intelligence and experience. Without one, they are just incomplete. Thus, they can only be conceived by certain people when they are at a certain stage in their life. So, let all the accumulation of detail of everyday life adds up. In the end, who wants to leave an unexamined life?

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