NO, DON'T "LET THEM" - PART I

"For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong."
H.L. Mencken, Prejudices: Second Series, Chap.4, 1920

If you've ever wandered the aisles of an airport bookstore, you know the promises by heart: Transform your life. Simplify your relationships. Unlock your true potential – all before your boarding group is called. Mel Robbins' *"The Let Them Theory"* (2024) slots neatly into this tradition, upgraded for an age of viral captions and emotional outsourcing. *Let Them* has struck a chord: a two-word mantra that promises instant serenity in the face of other people's chaos, a sleekly packaged "philosophy" marketed as a life-altering revelation. But beneath its glossy cover lies a tangle of structural flaws and intellectual shortcuts, the kind that have become endemic to contemporary self-help publishing and podcasting.
This genre has always been an overgrown garden of slogans, but every so often one blooms with such algorithmic precision it feels almost engineered for virality. *The Let Them Theory* is the latest of these social media mantras, promising serenity and relational mastery in two brisk words: "let them".
This essay begins by interrogating Robbins' core claims and tracing their philosophical lineage. It asks what we lose when complexity is sacrificed on the altar of simplicity, and why ideas like Let Them flourish in a culture allergic to discomfort and nuance.

1. A BRIEF BOOK SUMMARY

The idea is seductively simple: let people do what they wish, stop trying to control their actions, and in doing so, reclaim your peace of mind. In Robbins' framing, our suffering stems from our futile efforts to control others: what they think, how they act, whom they invite, how they perceive us, etc.
Freedom, she insists, begins the moment we cease resisting and simply - you guess it - *let them*. The appeal is obvious: for anyone worn thin by over-explaining, over-pleasing, or endlessly managing other people's emotions, for those exhausted by relational conflict or burned out from over-functioning in a culture obsessed with productivity, the fantasy of complete detachment feels like a spiritual Aperol spritz (I've always been more a Negroni man, but you get the point).
One has to acknowledge, even begrudgingly, that "The Let Them Theory" has been a phenomenal success. The book has rocketed to bestseller lists - still no.1 in the NYT "others" list - Robbins has appeared on every major podcast in the country, and social media is flooded with reels and tattoos (yes, tattoos) of those two talismanic words. For millions, Robbins' idea feels like an act of

liberation, a release from the slavery of managing the moods and expectations of others. There's no denying her gift for distilling complex emotional experiences into crisp, viral-ready heuristics. Perhaps because we are living through an era of collective burnout, an age when the mere thought of one more interpersonal negotiation feels intolerable. In a culture that fetishizes "boundaries", but fears confrontation, Let Them offers an easy way.

2. WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

However, under closer scrutiny, Robbins' architecture simply crumbles. True to the self-help playbook, she misappropriates key philosophical, psychological and therapeutic concepts, simplifing everything to the point of distortion, and ultimately enshrining a version of autonomy that feels less like maturity and more like retreat.

This essay offers a rigorous critique of The Let Them Theory, in two separate parts.

I. In this first part we focus on the content of the "theory", placing its claims in conversation with established psychological frameworks: locus of control, differentiation of self, mature defense mechanisms, adult developmental theory, emotion theory.

II. In a second part – to be published separately – we will interrogate the fragile foundations of Robbins's bestseller, its anecdotal wisdom dressed up as theory, its tenuous claim to scholarly authority, and its fatuous search for the "right" answer. Here, these flaws are not examined in isolation, but as representative of the broader failings of pop psychology and self-help literature. Finally, we will also propose an alternative model, one that rejects the false serenity of disengagement and instead embraces the difficult, necessary work of relational courage.

In this context shall refrain here on commenting regarding the book's originality, which has been questioned. Cassie Phillips, a poet, claims that Robbins' concept closely mirrors her 2019 poem "Let Them," which went viral in 2022, just prior to Robbins' "discovery" of *Let Them.* Phillips alleges that Robbins adopted the idea without proper credit, leading to accusations of plagiarism. Robbins denies these claims, stating her book draws from personal experiences. It looks suspicious at best.

3. MISAPPROPRIATING THE "LOCUS OF CONTROL"

At first glance, Robbins' argument seems to nod in the direction of serious psychology. Julian Rotter's locus of control model, first proposed in the mid 60's, describes how individuals vary in how much they believe their lives are shaped by internal versus external forces. An *internal locus* emphasizes agency; an *external locus* attributes outcomes to chance, fate, or other people's actions.

But this is where Robbins' framework falters. She claims to promote internal focus, but in practice *Let Them* often encourages a passive disengagement disguised as self-possession. When a friend excludes you from brunch, *let them*. When a colleague undermines you, *let them*. When a partner violates basic expectations, *let them*. This isn't a deepening of internal control; it's a reflexive retreat from the relational field.

Psychology warns us of the dangers here. Persistent disengagement is not maturity; it's often a marker of learned helplessness and conflict avoidance, a defensive pattern where individuals stop trying to influence outcomes even when they could.[1] Studies show that such patterns corrode self-efficacy and reduce one's ability to navigate tension productively.[2]

Crucially, Robbins' framework collapses the distinction between strategic acceptance and habitual resignation. The former is an intentional, context-sensitive decision to step back for the sake of peace or perspective. The latter is an automatic reflex, a shutting down of engagement.[2] People often sustain "positive illusions" to preserve internal calm, but such illusions tend to fracture under the strain of real relationships.[3] It's a bit like locking yourself in a panic room and mistaking isolation for peace.

4. THE FALSE BINARY: "LET THEM" VS. "LET ME"

At the core of Robbins' framework lies a seductively simple distinction: *"Let Them"* versus *"Let Me."* Let others act as they wish, she tells us, and turn your attention inward to your own energy, time, and peace. This binary feels soothing—like finally dropping the heavy burden of managing other people. And again, the marketing is pitch perfect, the kind of Instagrammable elegance that all but begs to be printed on two sides of a coffee mug.

On first pass these two-stage practice echoes the well-worn Serenity Prayer of AA meetings: *"the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."* But where the Serenity Prayer insists on discernment - the wisdom to know the difference - Robbins sweeps that subtlety aside in favor of a generalized rule of thumb: start with *let them*. The result is a cognitive shortcut masquerading as depth. Robbins implies that personal peace is best achieved through

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[1] Roloff, M.E., Liu, E. *"Conflict Avoidance"* in *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication*, Wiley Blackwell, 2016
[2] Peterson, C., Maier, S.F, Seligman, M.E., *"Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control"*, Oxford University Press, 1993
[3] Taylor, S.E., Brown, J.D., *"Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health."* Psychological Bulletin 103, no. 2 (1988): 193–210.

disengagement, as if serenity correlates directly with the number of interpersonal entanglements one declines.
Serious psychology suggests otherwise. While selective non-reactivity can indeed foster well-being,[4] emotional maturity is not defined by a blanket withdrawal from the messy, unpredictable nature of other people. It's defined by the ability to discriminate: *when to engage, how to engage, and why it matters*. That seemingly insurmountable concept that context matters. A lot.

Even her supposed counterbalance - *"Let Me"* - is a rather hollow directive.

> *"When you say Let Them, you trust and empower others to handle their difficulties while understanding that facing hardship is a necessary part of growth. When you say Let Me, you focus on providing support without taking over while creating the environment and tools necessary for another person to get better for themselves."*[5]

Beneath its motivational tone, it resolves into recycled affirmations: protect your energy, guard your peace, focus on you. These platitudes are comforting, no doubt, but philosophically worthless. Robbins frames disengagement as liberation, but this is a shallow reading of maturity. And there are three major issues with this approach:

4.1. There is no fixed boundary: Robbins implies that discerning the boundary between 'Let Them' and 'Let Me' is a simple task, as though one could effortlessly sort what is controllable from what is not and redirect attention accordingly. But human affairs rarely conform to neat, binary divisions. Adult developmental psychology reminds us that we live in profoundly interdependent, evolving environments where our actions and another's are tightly woven together over time.[6] Meanwhile, systems theory emphasizes emergence, coupling, and permeable boundaries: you cannot understand or influence a subsystem (say, your behavior) without reference to the broader system in which it exists.[7]
Indeed, Human development occurs through reciprocal, dynamic interactions across multiple nested systems.[8] In short, life's crucial domains are not neatly parceled into your realm and someone else's; they are grey zones, continually negotiated and reshaped through multilateral engagement. Drawing a hard line between *Let them* and *Let me* flattens this complexity, it reduces richly connected systems of human interaction into a caricature of self-help simplicity.

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[4] Gross, J. J. "*The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review.*" Review of General Psychology 2, no. 3 (1998): 271–299.
[5] Robbins, M. *"The Let Them Theory"*, Hay House, 2024, p.99
[6] Kegan, R., *"In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life",* Harvard University Press, 1994
[7] Boulding, K.E., *"General Systems Theory: The Skeleton of Science,"* Management Science 2, no. 3 (1956): 197–208
[8] Bronfenbrenner, U., *"The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design"*, Harvard University Press, 1979

4.2. Relationships require interaction and integration: While prioritizing one's own emotional regulation can be useful at times - especially in minor, fleeting interactions (like a rude stranger in traffic or a late text reply) - it falls short in explaining or improving long-term, deep relationships. Even if one could separate Let Them from Let Me – and we have seen above that one can't – relational development emerges only as individuals recognize and integrate multiple perspectives and influences,[9] not by isolating themselves in a self-contained mindset.

Human relationships are two-way by nature; they involve ongoing mutual influence, communication, and negotiation between individuals.[10] By framing every situation in terms of "let them (do what they will) and let me (mind my own reaction, the book slips into a kind of one-person psychology, treating the other's behavior as a fixed reality to endure rather than a dynamic to engage with actively and constructively. But such individualistic lens is ultimately counterproductive as it discourages healthy conflict resolution: focusing only on one's own mindset can undermine the negotiation of differences that real relationships require. It also assumes one is always right, which is unlikely.

While brief mindset interventions have shown promise in altering how people appraise stress, research has found no sustained improvements in emotional, social, or psychological well-being without ongoing behavioral change.[11] In close friendships and family bonds, blindly "letting" the other person do whatever they want without response is often neither realistic nor desirable – it may even enable harmful behavior or create distance. For example, it's rarely productive to simply *let* your partner do something hurtful and only work on your own feelings; often, a constructive response might involve dialogue or setting boundaries, blurring the notion of total detachment. Indeed, effective adult functioning often means embracing complexity and ambiguity.[12] Over time, mature individuals learn that what *can* be changed versus what must be accepted is often discovered through trial, conversation, and mutual influence,[13] not through a simple dictum declared in advance. Deep relationships thrive on *interaction*, not unilateral detachment; they demand empathy, boundary-setting, and confronting issues rather than always stepping back. It's not mindset, but rather how partners engage - how they manage conflict, validate one another, and share small wins - that predicts relationship quality over time.[14] Daily relational well-being depends

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[9] Kegan, R., Ibid.
[10] Kelley HH, Holmes JG, Kerr NL, Reis HT, Rusbult CE, Van Lange PAM, "*An Atlas of Interpersonal Situations*", Cambridge University Press, 2003
[11] Schreiber, M., & Schotanus-Dijkstra, M. *"Do mindset interventions improve well-being? Results from two RCTs.",* BMC Psychology 12, Article 77, 2024.
[12] Loevinger, J., "*Ego Development: Conceptions and Theories*", Jossey-Bass, 1976, p.102–105;
[13] Baltes P.B., Staudinger U.M. *"Interactive Minds. Life-span Perspectives on the Social Foundation of Cognition"*, Cambridge University Press, 1996
[14] De Netto, J., et al., *"Communication, the Heart of a Relationship: Examining Capitalization, Accommodation, and Self-Construal on Relationship Satisfaction.",* Front.Psychol.12:767908. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.767908

on reciprocal patterns of responsiveness, whether in person or mediated by technology, not solitary affirmations or withdrawal.[15]

4.3 *Let Them* does not make a "Well-Differentiated" Self

On the surface, Robbins' mantra of avoiding emotional reactivity faintly echoes the idea of "differentiation" from the Family Systems Theory, developed by the psychiatrist Murray Bowen. In Bowen's theory, a person with a well-differentiated 'self' has the capacity to show up in the storm, staying present in conflict without fusing or vanishing. They preserve their sense of self - who they are, or at least who they think they are[16] - without being pulled under by the emotional turbulence of others. It requires a continuous effort to hold tension with poise, much like Pilates, where true stability comes not from rigid stillness but from the subtle, deliberate engagement of opposing forces in a dynamic equilibrium.

Robbins never fails to mention the Family Systems Theory as a source of inspiration, but she simplifies the concept of differentiation so that it becomes unrecognizable, drifting toward detachment as a default. Again and again, her framework treats distance as synonymous with emotional health, as though disengagement were itself a virtue. Yet Bowen warns of precisely this trap: when "not reacting" slides into *not engaging*, it isn't autonomy, it's an emotional cutoff, which doesn't build stronger relationships, but it slowly starves them:[17] *"Relationships may look "better" if people cutoff to manage them, but the problems are dormant, not resolved."*[18]

[15] Corriero, E., Tong, S., Sopory, P., *"Behaviors, Perceptions, Responsiveness, and Presence: The Dyadic Model of Mediated Communication"*, Proceedings of the 48th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. January 5-8, 2015

[16] We have discussed the idea of self in a prior essay: https://www.federicomalatesta.com/newsletters/almost-everything-is-context/posts/the-myth-of-the-authentic-self

[17] Bowen, M., *"Family Therapy in Clinical Practice"*, Jason Aronson, 1978.

[18] https://www.thebowencenter.org/introduction-eight-concepts, The Bowen Center

5. THE FAKE SCAFFOLDING OF ANCIENT WISDOM

In a section called "Let Them: A Tool to Implement Wisdom", Robbins, without a hint of humility and self-awareness, writes that

> "*The Let Them Theory isn't just a mindset hack—it's rooted in ancient philosophies and psychological concepts that have guided people for centuries. If you're familiar with Stoicism, Buddhism, Detachment Theory, or Radical Acceptance, you'll recognize that Let Them and Let Me applies these teachings and turns them into a practical, everyday tool for improving your relationships and reclaiming your personal power.*"

Now, let's examine this statement more closely.

5.1. The Problem with Passive Stoicism

To prop up her framework, Robbins leans heavily on her interpretation of Stoic philosophy, both in her book and in her podcasts. Particularly, she focuses on the often (mis)quoted notion that we shouldn't waste energy trying to control what lies outside ourselves. But this, too, is a shallow reading. Stoicism, in his various versions, including the articulation of both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, is not emotional bypassing. It is a practice of active internal discipline, moral clarity, and rigorous responsibility to one's roles and obligations in the wider community. What most Ryan Holiday readers often forget, is the latter part.

Robbins, by contrast, distills it to this: if someone doesn't invite you, or acts in a way you dislike, *let them*. But Epictetus urges: *"What is not under your control, do not concern yourself with it, but act nobly in all that is yours to do."*[19] The key word there is *act*. Stoicism is not a philosophy of disengagement; it is a call to virtuous action (in a given context). It demands that we respond to the world with integrity, even when the world fails to respond in kind.

As importantly, in the Greek and early Roman world, long before the advent of individualism framed by Augustine in Christian theology,[20] the individual only existed as part of the *polis* and the society at large. To live according to a mantra of *"let them"* - disengaged from civic and relational obligations - would have been seen not as wisdom, but as a kind of social death, grounds for exile. Ancient philosophy was never about private serenity alone; it was about shaping oneself *within* the collective order of society.[21]

Yet today, self-styled gurus sprinkle Stoic quotes like confetti at a wedding, often without having read - or understood - the texts they plunder. The Stoics

[19] Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book II, Chapter 5, in *"Discourses and Selected Writings"*, Penguin Classics, 2008.
[20] We discussed this in "The Myth of The Authentic Self": https://www.federicomalatesta.com/newsletters/almost-everything-is-context/posts/the-myth-of-the-authentic-self
[21] Galimberti, U., *"La casa di Psiche. Dalla psicoanalisi alla pratica filosofica",* Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore Milano, 2005

are reduced to mood-board slogans and Instagram carousels, their fierce call to civic duty hollowed out into aphorisms about cutting off "toxic" people and protecting your peace. Not surprisingly, this commodified Stoicism fits neatly with modern hyper-individualism, where detachment is framed not as retreat but as empowerment, and the self is approached as a brand to be curated, rather than as a citizen to be shaped through participation in a community.
If your friend disrespects you, a Stoic response is not to murmur *let them* and drift away. It is to pause, evaluate whether your expectations were fair, and then act with discernment: to speak, to set a boundary, or to withdraw with clarity. Robbins strips Stoicism of its rigor and repackages it as a Hallmark aphorism - a kind of algorithmic calm designed for Instagram reels with engaging graphics.

5.2. The Pseudo-Buddhism of "Protect Your Peace"

Western self-help loves to borrow from Buddhist philosophy, but in the process, it often mistranslates its most essential ideas. Even a casual reader of Eastern philosophy as myself, is fully aware – or should be – that central to Buddhist thought is the idea that suffering (*dukkha*) arises from craving and clinging (*tanha*).
The Buddha taught that liberation does not come from eradicating desire, but from releasing our grip on permanence and control. Non-attachment (anattā) involves perceiving the world as it is: transient, interdependent, and not owned, without grasping at it.[22] Far from endorsing emotional indifference, traditional non-attachment means being fully present while relinquishing the illusion of ownership or selfhood.[23] Zen teacher Domyo Burk warns against precisely this misunderstanding*: "Non-attachment does not mean turning away from life; it means fully engaging without being ensnared."*[24] Robbins, however, mistakes serenity for wisdom, framing withdrawal as the highest form of growth.
Indeed, in Western self-help anattā is often misrepresented as emotional withdrawal. It becomes a label for avoiding discomfort: protect your peace, disengage from conflict, walk away. This distortion is not unique to Robbins; it's endemic to the modern wellness industry. Contemporary mindfulness and self-help movements often prioritize individual serenity over relational responsibility, transforming Buddhism into a toolkit for managing stress rather than a discipline of transformation.[25] In this climate, slogans like *"let them"* feel at home: they flatter the individual's sense of control but avoid the difficult work of staying present in relationships and systems that rarely conform to our preferences.

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[22] Buswell, R.E.; Lopez, D., "The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism", Princeton University Press, 2013
[23] John Daido Loori quoted in O'Brien, B. *"Why Do Buddhists Avoid Attachment?"* Learn Religions, Aug. 25, 2020, >learnreligions.com/why-do-buddhists-avoid-attachment-449714
[24] Domyo B., *"What Zen 'Acceptance' and 'Non-Attachment' Really Are,"* Zen Studies Podcast, May 4, 2017; https://zenstudiespodcast.com/zenacceptance/
[25] McMahan,D.L., *"The Making of Buddhist Modernism",* Oxford University Press, 2008, 156–158.

5.3 The Simplification of Detachment Theory and Radical Acceptance

When it comes to both Detachment Theory and Radical Acceptance Theory, the same considerations apply.

In psychological terms, Detachment Theory refers to a healthy, flexible ability to separate one's emotional state from external turbulence without withdrawing from relationships entirely. It's about regulating one's reactivity while staying engaged in the relational field, a rather far cry from Robbins' suggestion to simply "let them" and retreat whenever conflict or discomfort arise.

Similarly, Radical Acceptance, rooted in Marsha Linehan's work in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), is not about passive disengagement or emotional cutoff. As Linehan emphasizes, radical acceptance means acknowledging reality as it is - even painful, even unjust - so that you can respond intentionally and skillfully.[26] It is an active practice, not a justification for avoidance. Robbins, however, dilutes this into a slogan for protecting one's peace at all costs, missing the relational and behavioral work at the heart of acceptance.

In summary, both Detachment Theory and Radical Acceptance assume that growth happens in relationship to others and the world, not in isolation from them or in solipsism.

[26] Linehan, M.M., "DBT Skills Training Manual", 2nd edition, The Guilford Press, 2014

6. THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP DEPTH

One of the most troubling features of *The Let Them Theory* is its wholesale absence of leadership thinking. Robbins positions herself as an authority on relationships, personal growth, and influence, yet her framework wilts in the face of adult responsibility within complex relational systems. If you are a leader, coach, parent, or partner, you do not always get to *"let them."* More often than not, you are called to intervene, to assert, to challenge, to hold accountable, whether it feels serene or not.

Leadership has also been described as the art of "disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb."[27] It is the painstaking act of holding tension between competing needs: yours and theirs, the present and the future, comfort and growth. *The Let Them Theory* dissolves that tension in the name of inner peace. But peace purchased at the expense of relational courage is often a counterfeit currency.

7. WHY EMOTIONS ARE NOT THE ENEMY

Robbins' statements about emotions in the book read like the exaggerated musings of like a minor figure in Jane Austen: melodramatic, shallow, and unintentionally comic in their simplicity: *"you can't let your emotions drive your decisions", "my emotions would have gotten the best of me.", "you can stop being ruled by emotions"*. They echo a familiar self-help trope: emotion as an obstacle to clarity, a saboteur of reason. It's a belief baked into Western thought since Plato's charioteer allegory, in which rationality must whip and steer the unruly horses of passion.[28]

Contemporary neuroscience, however, has long realized that this narrative is preposterous. In his seminal *"Descartes' Error",* Antonio Damasio documents patients with lesions in areas of the brain integrating emotion and decision-making. These individuals retained logical reasoning abilities but were paralyzed when faced with even trivial choices - what to eat for lunch, which pen to buy.[29] Why? Because emotion provides important elements that allow us to weigh options and assess risk. Strip these away, and cognition collapses into sterile, endless calculation. Funny enough, Robbins (or her researchers) include Damasio's book in the bibliography.

Neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett goes further: emotions are not primitive impulses disrupting higher cognition; they are cognitive creations, predictive models, shaped by interoception (the sense of the body's internal state), that prepare the brain for action.[30] To exclude emotions from decision-making would be like trying to solve an equation while omitting half the variables.

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[27] Heifetz, R., Linsky, M., *"Leadership on the Line"*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2017
[28] https://www.theculturium.com/plato-phaedrus-charioteer/
[29] Damasio, A. *"Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain",* Putnam, 1994.
[30] Barrett, L. F. *"How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain",* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

8. WHAT "LET THEM" GETS RIGHT, AND STILL MISSES

To be fair, *The Let Them Theory* can offer genuine relief to those locked in cycles of chronic emotional over-functioning. For the over-givers and people-pleasers, Robbins' mantra can land like a revelation: other people's feelings are not theirs to manage. For many, this is an overdue awakening. Women, especially, are socialized to internalize others' needs and to disown their own boundaries.[31]

But emotional rebalancing is not the same as emotional wisdom. Robbins' framework - despite its nods to neuroscience, psychology and ancient wisdom - lacks the developmental scaffolding to move people beyond the first exhilarating steps of reclaiming self-focus. There is no map for the next stage: how to re-enter the relational field with clarity, integrity, and the courage to stay present in discomfort. There is no distinction between appropriate detachment and necessary confrontation, no nuanced model of conflict, and no language for mutual transformation, only the hollow refrain: *let them, let me*. Can you imagine someone starting to whistle as Mel Robbins is recording an episode of her successful podcast? Do you really think she would "let them" whistle? Or would she intervene, politely, firmly, but unmistakably, to protect the integrity of her work? The very success of her brand depends on her capacity to draw boundaries, not float above them. Imagine a toddler scribbling on the walls or an employee repeatedly missing deadlines? Would any responsible parent or leader simply let them? And in the end, that two-word refrain risks becoming its own kind of prison - a philosophy of withdrawal dressed up as liberation.

[31] Lerner, H., *"The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships",* William Morrow Paperbacks, 2014

9. AN ABSURD OVERREACH.

One of the most egregious moments in *The Let Them Theory* arrives when Robbins applies her mantra not just to interpersonal relationships or workplace dynamics - but to war. With an astonishing rhetorical overreach, in a passaged titled “Life is not fair”, she writes:

> *“It’s not fair that your sister looks like a supermodel and everyone flocks to her at the bars, while you’re sitting there off to the side buying your own drinks.*
> *It’s not fair that your supervisor keeps giving you the crappy shift at work.*
> *It’s not fair that your country is torn apart by war.”*

The ridiculous parallel between having a hot sister and living in a country at war suggests an attempt by Robbins to universalize a cognitive self-regulation tool into a quasi-metaphysical worldview, one that naively assumes psychological boundaries can neutralize structural violence. Your country is torn apart by terror? Don’t worry, *let them, let me*.

But war is neither dinner party gossip, nor a friend who didn’t return your text. It is the domain of power, territory, history, statecraft and, especially, violence and horror. It is governed by realpolitik, not reframes. No serious ethical or political theory - not just in international relations, but in philosophy, law, or psychology - would propose *detachment* and *reframing* as the appropriate response to invasion, genocide, or military aggression: “It’s all in your head”. Really?!

By extending a private emotional heuristic into the realm of public ethics, Robbins blurs personal equanimity with civic or moral responsibility, a confusion that has no place in mature leadership or social reasoning. As Hannah Arendt might have said, this is not just simplification; it is a form of thoughtlessness posing as peace of mind.

10. CONCLUSION – PART I: A VERY SIMPLISTIC REPRESENTATION OF REALITY

In summary, the fundamental critique of the conceptual underpinnings of the *Let Them* approach is its solipsistic focus on the individual's own mental state and reactions, to the exclusion of the relational context between individuals. As Charles Taylor observed,[32] much of modern self-help collapses moral reasoning into mere boundary-setting, stripping away any higher-order account of what we owe each other in community. Unfortunately, this is the nature of the beast. At its core, this genre trades in one-size-fits-all solutions, blind to the intricate dynamics that define actual people and their connections.

In the case of *Let Them,* withdrawing and pulling up the drawbridge may offer temporary relief, but real growth lies in stepping into the vulnerability, connection, and accountability of sustained engagement. Adulthood is a continuous balance of self-regulation with active participation in complex social systems. An idea that should be familiar to self-help gurus that gush stoic citations like a jammed hydrant flooding the street with tepid water.

PART II - COMING SOON.

In the second part of this essay, we will turn a more critical lens on the fragile structural foundations of Robbins's bestseller: its anecdotal wisdom dressed up as theory, its tenuous claim to scholarly authority, and its fatuous search for the "right" answer. We will also propose an alternative model, one that rejects the false serenity of disengagement and instead embraces the difficult, necessary work of relational courage. Because leadership, in any domain of life, is not about floating above tension but about staying in it, discerning when to step back and when to lean in. To lead is not to *let them,* but to hold complexity with integrity, even when it demands accountability and the courage to face the consequences of engagement.

[32] Taylor, C., *"Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity"*, Harvard University Press, 1989