

LIGHT & CALCIUM:  
A UNIQUE APPROACH TO  
ALTRUISM AND THE FEAR  
OF DEATH

NOAH C.



All organic behavior is prompted by two evolutionary drives: the first being the preservation of the self; the second, of the species. The human understanding of these drives, however, has changed so drastically that they are nearly unrecognizable. Those actions which gratify or preserve solely the self we call “amoral,” while those which do so for the betterment of the species/civilization we call “virtues.” This polarization of ideals, this great debate, is the oldest we know. I argue that though this manufactured dichotomy has been bled over and wept over, whatever answer we procure from it, if there even is any, will be just that, and is inconsequential. Both concepts are, at their core, of the same purpose—this being the preservation of life, and an aversion to death. It is this mutual center of a fear of death that renders the refined, revised, and layered definitions we have added to them insubstantial.

This installation is a series of prints and proofs of a four plate copper etching to demonstrate this evolution. In printmaking, one must constantly refine and proof the work, while also layering images to create a final composition. The act of printmaking displayed as a narrative that rises both from the ground and into it, becomes a small performance by which the ideas I am trying to communicate are expressed. The image of the print is also relevant; two individuals face away from one another and, while different in appearance, are rendered a same tone by their mutual death or “loss of breath.”

Noah C

**s1: Altruism with Nature**

***What if Altruism is a Natural Characteristic in Organisms, Proving That Nature has the Capacity for Inherent Selflessness: A Heroic Story of Sacrificial Microorganisms to Lead You into the Following Section***

There is a species of soil-dwelling amoeba, *dictyostelium discoideum*<sup>1</sup>, which lives amongst the decaying leaves of deciduous forests. In most aspects, this amoeba is not unlike other detritivorous single-celled organisms, living in the earth and in general disregard towards other lifeforms. However, it is one singular aspect of this particular species of amoeba that is exceptional.<sup>2</sup> When there is a shortage of resources, when other amoeba may shrivel and die or make hasty abandon to save themselves, *D. discoideum* will send out chemical signals to their brethren throughout the forest. The thing to note here, is that *D. Discoideum* is a solitary creature, who does not rely on other amoeba in any way, except in crises such as these. The amoeba begin a long odyssey to find each other with a dedication that surpasses their microscopic size and general inability to move efficiently. Once they find each other, their single celled bodies join together, bond with one another in fierce, survivalist comradery, and now, as one being, create a single, multicellular organism.<sup>3</sup> In this form they travel together, until they find a high enough point in the forest with a strong enough breeze, one that inspires amoebic hope for a better future.

It is here that the true selfless altruism<sup>4</sup> of *D. discoideum* becomes apparent. The top 20% of amoeba in the slug will stretch themselves up in a stalk and harden their bodies, killing themselves in the process.<sup>5</sup> These amoeba, with no empathetic responses, nevertheless have the biological reaction towards self-sacrifice for the “greater good”. The resignation of life of these topmost amoeba creates a ladder which will allow the bottom 80% of the *D. discoideum* to climb up, and catch a wind to better pastures. The stalk of corpses is left behind, a microscopic pillar of salt amidst the inhospitable habitat to which the hopeful 80% should never return.<sup>6</sup>

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**s2: Fear in Men**

***What if Humans are Inherently Selfish, Casting into Doubt Our Ability to be Altruistic: A Short Essay with a Lot of Footnotes About Biology to Provide Reasonable Contradiction and Logical Tension***

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<sup>1</sup> *D. discoideum*, belonging to the phylum *amoebozoa*, infraphylum *mycetozoa*, a eukaryotic slime mold

<sup>2</sup> The study of *dictyostelium discoideum* has contributed greatly to the understanding of cellular motility, signalling and interaction. Studies in the following characteristic of *D. discoideum* have provided the first descriptions of a eukaryotic cell chemo-attractant and a cell-cell adhesion protein

<sup>3</sup> A slug, 2-4 mm in length and a translucent pale white, wherein each amoeba takes the utility of a cell. They are still individual single celled organisms, but they, for all intensive purposes, become one lifeform, moving in a unit like a miniscule phalanx. Reminiscent of a living booger, really

<sup>4</sup> If I may be so bold as to anthropomorphize the characteristics of a slug

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth B. Raper (Junior mycologist, Division of Soil Microbiology, Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture) was one of the first to discover this phenomena

<sup>6</sup> There really is no connection between the 20% and Lot's wife, but I found the mental image of thousands of amoeba fleeing Sodom and Gomorra amusing

The fear of death is one that is prevalent to most all living things, especially those which are rational.<sup>7 8</sup> Fear itself is a ubiquitous characteristic when observing the way life moves and functions throughout the world, and many biologists have conjectured two things about the matter: one, all fears, whenever they are traced back to their source, stem from a fear of death or the inability to function fully;<sup>9</sup> two, that the fear of death, from which all other fears root, is no more than a greatly overdeveloped form of all living thing's desire to live.<sup>10 11</sup> We have a natural inclination to survive and reproduce, and that also means that we have a natural inclination to avoid dying and anything that would harm us or our ability to do so,<sup>12</sup> and there is no reason that we would choose the safety of others over that of our own.<sup>13</sup>

However, it is observed quite clearly that we do oftentimes act in altruism towards one another.<sup>14</sup> Humans, as incredibly social animals, succeed when the community in which it lives succeeds; and these communities succeed whenever each individual acts selflessly and generously towards others. There is a reason that it is said, "it takes a village to raise a single child".<sup>15</sup> Over time, just as fear became a physical aversion to a psychological condition, so too did altruism, selflessness, generosity, and courage turn from simple actions to better propagate a species, to virtues that we appreciate in our societies, and are taught to value from a young age.<sup>16</sup>

Richard Dawkins<sup>17</sup> however, would say that virtue never became so valued in the first place. While we are told to value these things, we are inherently selfish, and will sacrifice others to save ourselves in any situation that calls for it; this is because, though socially we are told that we must appreciate these ethics, evolutionarily we are still compelled to care for ourselves exclusively. Those who do not are "brainwashed by civility", but even they themselves are

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, most organism's adverse reaction to blood or death is mere cataplexy

<sup>8</sup> I remain in awe at the emotional capacity of sea-lions, swans, dolphins, killer whales, and elephants to grieve death and the loss of kin

<sup>9</sup> For instance, a fear of heights can be traced to a fear of death by falling; a fear of spiders or snakes to a fear of poisoning; and a fear of infertility to a fear of being unable to reproduce. Given, of course, that oftentimes fear, especially diagnosed phobias, are often greatly hyperbolized in the minds of whichever poor soul in whom they have taken root, the stream of logic is nevertheless evident

<sup>10</sup> As George R. Wilson would say, "The fear of death is one of the emotional forms in which we express this instinct [to live]. No matter how it may be modified by convictions relative to the life beyond- self-control brushes the instinct aside so that most men do not care, and would as soon face death as life, yet the fear of death is in the blood and in the bones of men and for a moment at least will out,- a startled shrinking from the cold, solitary, disintegrating grave."

<sup>11</sup> Also said by George R. Wilson, "But, generally speaking, the capacity for fear in the human mind is absurdly in excess of its utility."

<sup>12</sup> Oftentimes there is delineation between physiology and psychology- the body from the mind. However, the evolution of fear, coming so far from a physiological response to a great psychological condition, is proof in itself that this is just not true

<sup>13</sup> I am not, of course, claiming that we must be completely selfless and unthinkingly altruistic- that is called stupidity. I am merely making a statement that those who fear oftentimes do so without the consideration of our equal capacity to do right

<sup>14</sup> Societal animals (geese, elephants, lions, deer, meerkat) benefit off of the mutual benevolence of their individuals. This characteristic is seen in the sharing of den space, the portioning of food, caring for young, and chasing away predators from those who are in danger, even if it means putting themselves in harm's way

<sup>15</sup> This reference makes more sense when referenced beside the stages of moral development I have created in the following section

<sup>16</sup> Mark Griffiths considered emotions as being essential to our moral response system, and subsequently our capacity for moral agency, and have an adaptive role in equipping individuals to act appropriately so that they might survive

<sup>17</sup> While I am referencing him to get my point across, it is worth noting to me that I really really really hate Richard Dawkins and think that he is a deplorable human being

naturally self-valuing.<sup>18</sup> We would be less likely, therefore, to act altruistically the older we get,<sup>19</sup> and the desire to look out for one's self is, in reality, the driving force of any living thing, any action they make, and any emotion or notion they feel, all throughout their life.<sup>20</sup>

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s3: *Morality from Age*

***What if Most All Human Beings are Raised and Nurtured to Value Morality, Proving That We At Least Have the Capacity to Overcome our Nature: A Reevaluation of Moral Development Stage Theory to Further Support My Point***

The development of morality is one that is greatly diverse from person to person, dependant on various aspects of an individual's sphere of influence at an early age. Many are taught from a young age to only look out for "number one", but few will actually sacrifice the kindness of others for their own means, without so much as a bat eye or twinge of guilt. Not to be said that there are none who would do so, certainly there are those on the sociopathic spectrum who really feel no empathetic responses and will be, for lack of a better word, humongous assholes to everyone, with not an altruistic bone in their bodies.<sup>21</sup> Some act so out of a general mistrust for the human race<sup>22</sup>- not a necessarily misplaced one, I am sad to say- and metaphorically slap away the outstretched arm of any benevolent soul out of suspicion, although these as well are a minority. Still more, and these are the most tragic because they did once love, and live, and give, but were hurt so badly by tragedy that they forsake the vulnerable path of the moral man.

Most of the human population is raised to value selflessness, generosity, altruism, and as a society, these we call virtues<sup>23</sup>, and applaud those who exhibit them with grace and ease.<sup>24</sup> And all who comply to this standard of virtue must first learn and accept their own system of belief by

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<sup>18</sup> In his book, "The Selfish Gene", Dawkins goes on to explain how everything "altruistic" action that anyone takes is really just survivalist at core, even though we tell ourselves otherwise. Kin altruism is an attempt to save the genes in ourselves that our family also has, while non-kin altruism is an attempt to preserve diversity within a species for the purpose of mating. For example, the damsel in distress is always incredibly beautiful, and the prince who saves her always ends up marrying her

<sup>19</sup> G. Stanley Hall said, "... those who have completely lived out every phase and stage of life to its uttermost and well on into the post centenary stage without becoming senile or falling into dotage, begin to feel the ebb of the tide of the will to live, as it a counter-will to die was beginning to take its place." This is because we are no longer able to reproduce, and in most aspects our existence now is superfluous, and we should die to make more room for the following generation. As such, because our own will to live is shrinking, we are less likely to help others because there is less in it for us. Likewise, we may also take rash actions of self-sacrifice in order to provide what we can in our last moments for the success of the species, as we now, in our old age, have less and less to lose

<sup>20</sup> Sociopaths find it very difficult to express emotion of any kind, and as a result are very accurate depictions of the moral model I am describing here- an individual who only looks out for themselves, regardless of the effects they may have in other's lives and with no guilt, shame, empathy, or altruism

<sup>21</sup> Fun Fact: Many CEO's of companies land very high on the sociopathic scale. Their lack of emotion and kindness has allowed them to flourish in the cutthroat world of business

<sup>22</sup> This is an exaggerated form of the selfish and isolated survivalism discussed in the previous section

<sup>23</sup> Brian Rappert and Michael J. Selglid would call these pre-existing cultural folkways. These (national, ethnic, economic, religious, social, and technological) values are huge factors in the consideration of how individuals reach maturity in their ethical and moral lifestyles, in both domestic and social spheres

<sup>24</sup> I would be more than happy to go through the history of morality and virtue throughout human history, but I'm afraid that would add way too many pages onto my already superfluously long paper

which they may appreciate the virtues of others. This moral development<sup>25</sup> I follow through eight stages.<sup>26 27</sup>

First is the infantile stage of reliance and trust.<sup>28</sup> Here, the newborn is unable to have any understanding whatsoever of good and evil, nor even a sense of self. Thus, the child comes to rely completely on their parents. The infant is entirely dependant on their parents for survival, and as a result trusts them completely. This is the cornerstone stage, for if complete trust is not built with the child's caregivers, the infant will be unable to reach further developmental stages.

This is best illustrated by describing the second stage of moral development. Once a strong trust is built within the child towards their parents, they will then conform to the levels of pleasure or discontent exhibited by their parents in response to their actions.<sup>29</sup> This positive/negative reinforcement educates the child about the rightfulness, or inversely the wrongfulness, of their actions. Although they are still unable to determine an understanding of right and wrong, the child learns what brings their parents pleasure, and what brings them discontent, and learns to repeat those actions which elicit a positive response. During this time, the infant will seemingly act out- i.e. the "terrible two's"- a stage that is actually much like a scientific experiment performed by the baby, complete with variables and empirical evidence.

For example, an infant continuously pitches their spoon over the edge of their high chair, watching it fall to the ground, only to be retrieved by their parent and placed back on the table for the cycle to resume. However, when their parents are not present, the spoon remains on the ground for an extended period of time, until one of the care-givers returns and allows the spoon-throwing to continue. Although this exercise is mindless, if not borderline exhausting, on behalf of the parent, it is, in fact, quite informative to the child. They ascertain an understanding of gravity, and learn that things have a tendency to go downwards when flung. They also learn that when they are in a high chair, anything pitched over the edge will be returned to them, with varying amounts of success. However, the flung item will not be returned unless an adult is present, and therefore the reappearance of the object is not reliant on the object's inherent ability to come back, but upon an adult's inherent ability to span the distance between ground and chair, and transport objects across that gap. Lastly, the child will learn that, if repeated enough times, their caregivers will become visibly irritated, and the spoon may or may not be taken away, causing discomfort, and therefore one should not pitch their utensils over the high chair. In the same way, near every action taken by a child during this stage, and the reaction that it elicits, is informing the child of an understanding of the universe, and of which actions are to be repeated, and which are to be left undone. This is the most crucial stage in reference to the development of one's actual morals.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The etymology of the word "moral" comes from the Latin word "mores", which refers to the traditions and customs practised by specific groups

<sup>26</sup> These stages of moral development have been created by myself using both Lawrence Kohlberg's View of Persons and Stages of Moral and Social Development, and Erik Erikson's Social and Moral Developmental Stage Theory as a framework for my analysis

<sup>27</sup> I don't pretend to speak for everyone's experience in their own moral development. I am merely making conjectures based off of my own experience (to only a certain extent) as well as the research I had previously done

<sup>28</sup> Kohlberg calls this stage "Bling Egoism", where there is no view of persons, and only the self is recognized, while Erikson would call it "Basic Trust vs. Mistrust", where the infant appreciates interdependence and relatedness

<sup>29</sup> This stage is a meld of Erikson's "Autonomy and Shame" stage, and Kohlberg's "Rational Egoism". In both, an individual will either conform or deviate radically from norms in order to gain a general sense of order

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, a child can inversely learn to be cruel or unfeeling or amoral through these same means

After this empirical but still amoral stage is the first form of accepted morality.<sup>31</sup> At this point, the child has turned the pleasure/displeasure reactions from their caregivers into an elementary understanding of good and bad. As they enter relationships with their peers, they begin to judge their ethical models upon the actions of their classmates and may start to either change their behavior, or be concerned about the behavior of others. It is the first time the moral systems set in place by our parents are being questioned.<sup>32</sup> We have a sure understanding that adults know best, and we begin to emulate those around us, but most specifically those adults within our growing sphere of influence, and oftentimes, children play “grown-up”, with caricatures of what they believe adult life to be like. They also begin to ask the pivotal question of “why?” in response to things that we had never questioned before. As our caregivers are no longer our sole influence, we identify with social roles, and begin to make alterations to our moral understandings.

This next stage is a great step up in terms of the social involvement of our peers.<sup>33</sup> It is during this period that a child will begin to have an understanding that adults are not always right, and are not always reliable. By now, the child has a basic understanding of right and wrong as concepts, and not just as parental affirmation. With their caregivers unidentified, children will bond with each other, and the foundry of their personal identity will be based about the affirmation of their peers.<sup>34</sup> It is during this period that their moral identities are thrown headlong into question, as what is “cool” is no longer synonymous with what is “right”.

The attributes of this stage are only further exaggerated in the next one, which takes place in adolescence.<sup>35</sup> As they go through arguably their most dramatic change, physically, mentally, and emotionally, the now teenager will begin to further question their parents and their moral code. They may greatly struggle with “discovering themselves”, and relationships with their peers. Because their identity has changed at such a drastic rate, they may feel the need to reevaluate their own moral beliefs, and begin to understand the difference between what society dictates as right and wrong, and their own personal beliefs on the matter. Because of the nature of that age, these personal views have a tendency to be irrational or unrealistic. Relationships and social interaction is crucial during this period.

The need for relationships continues into this next stage<sup>36 37</sup>. Not for many relationships and diverse social interactions however, but for meaningful relationships and a drive for romantic intimacy. In many there is either the desire to “settle down” and start families, or to delay entrance to familiarity and accept themselves in solitude. By this point, an individual is confident in their personal morals and adheres to them with varying degrees of success. They also see the value of adhering to societal moral systems as well, as well as the unspoken moral

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<sup>31</sup> Here I combine Kohlberg’s “Social Relationship Perspective”, and Erikson’s “Initiative vs. Guilt”, wherein there is great identification in social roles, and can recognize good and bad intentions

<sup>32</sup> Next to parents, children are taught to trust their teachers, and so they also have a great amount of influence over a child’s development

<sup>33</sup> This is taking attributes of Erikson’s “Identity vs Confusion” and Kohlberg’s “Social Systems Perspective”, wherein we expand our spheres of influence to others and begin to make alterations to our own moral systems.

<sup>34</sup> The fear of loneliness often manifests itself in this stage, as those who are in solitude are unable to reproduce. This is an example of that innate aversion of that which disallows us to function fully within our communities in the most animalistic sense

<sup>35</sup> This stage combines the “Identity vs. Confusion” with “Industry vs. Inferiority”, and “Social Systems” Perspective” This is the stage I am currently in

<sup>36</sup> It’s worth noting that I can’t testify from personal experience as to the accuracy of the following stages. From this point I am only really making conjectures based on my research

<sup>37</sup> This stage mixes Erikson’s “Intimacy vs. Isolation”, with Kohlberg’s “Contractual Perspective”

“contracts” that allow persons to increase the welfare of both parties by making allowances of multiple moral beliefs without major conflict.

After this stage, an individual’s moral development slows<sup>38</sup>, as they begin to change less and less, settling into a groove with families or being satisfied with living on their own. They begin to gain perspective from life. Greater shifts may occur later when children leave the home, careers change, or marriages fail. This can upset an individual’s stability, and they will lean on significant relationships to support them.

As they grow older, their by now stalwart moral beliefs become respected as wisdom. At this point, an elder becomes less active and is involved more with reflection. As such, they may either feel a sense of despair in not completing all they may have wanted to in life, or making peace with what they had accomplished. They may begin to fear death and tie off ends that they had left loose in life. As older adults, their moral beliefs are no longer developing at any kind of notable rate. They have reached the fullest form of what they are to be, and generally feel mutual respect as a universal principle.

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#### ***s4: Regret in History***

### ***What if, Despite What We Know We Should Do, We Still Act Like Cowards for Fear of Death, Bringing into Question the Human Capacity for Moral Strength: A Tragic Interpretation of a True Story to Remember and Get You Righteously Indignant***<sup>39</sup>

A woman is hurrying down the street at night, driven both by the cold and by excitement-tonight is her first anniversary with her girlfriend<sup>40</sup>, who is waiting for her in their apartment. It’s late<sup>41</sup>, and she had just gotten off of a double shift.<sup>42</sup> She bustles down the empty street alone. The only ones watching Kitty Genovese<sup>43</sup> right now are the stars and the man who is sitting in his car about a hundred yards back. Steeling his nerves, he tightens his grip about the blade of a serrated hunting knife and begins to follow her. The stars carry on in silence. Stoic observers, they watch in celestial apathy as Winston Moseley<sup>44</sup> runs up behind his prey. Kitty hears the quiet slap of his worn sneakers on the pavement, but is too late to acknowledge their rapid gain, their frantic pace that shuffles to a quick stop right behind her. Her eyes open wide in panic, and she tenses like a doe who senses a dog mid pounce, inches away from his kill. The doe tenses in the instinctual way that prepares her to run, but she knows already that it is too late. The dog’s

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<sup>38</sup> The following two stages are, with varying degrees of exaggeration, Erikson’s “Generativity vs. Stagnation” and “Integrity vs. Despair”, with Kohlberg’s “Mutual Respect as a Universal Principle”

<sup>39</sup> This is the hard hitting truth. It is also fit to note that some small details of this story are artistically fabricated for the sake of righteous indignation and poignant narrative. However, this is in fact exactly how the situation played out. No made up action, no fabrication to the plot

<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann Zielonko. The two had met one year prior in Swig Rendezvous, an Underground lesbian club in Greenwich Village, quickly fell in love, and moved in with each other

<sup>41</sup> 3:20 am, 13 March 1964

<sup>42</sup> She did this quite often. As a bar manager at Eve’s 11th Hour, she often quoted to her father, who was constantly trying to find her a husband, that “No man can support me because I make more than a man.”

<sup>43</sup> Catherine Susan Genovese, born 7 July 1935 to middle class Italian-American parents. As a child she was always identified by her unmistakable zest for life. She was pretty, popular, athletic, and smart, and was voted in high school as the “class cut-up”

<sup>44</sup> This was Moseley’s first murder. He would go on to commit two more before turning himself in to the police



mouth is pressed to her neck, and she will cry out in shock anyways when she feels the blade enter through the small of her back, but she knows.

And when he thrusts upwards, sending each serrated tooth sawing through her lumbar, her scream will be more sincere. The bite of his knife is duller this time as it enters again, through her side, but Kitty screams ever the louder, less out of pain; this time it is a cry for help.<sup>4546</sup>

Robert Mozer is sitting by his apartment window, reading through articles of the paper that he had not perused so thoroughly that morning. He makes a sincere attempt to read the paper every morning before work, but if he is running late, and this morning was one of those, sometimes he cannot read as he would like. He is one of thirty-eight to hear her plea, but is the only one to do something, that something being to look up over the sports, scream down into the street for that man to let the girl alone and slam his window shut in panic. Had he known what he would have to read in the papers that morning, that article that he would certainly not read quite so thoroughly as the rest, which he would cringe to see every time the twenty four eyes of Kitty Genovese looked at him from newsstands all over New York and the surplus of press the story would get and the interview with the Times he would have to make because he needed the money. Had Robert Mozer known all that, he would have done something more, perhaps one of the things he tells himself he cannot do, because he has told himself that he has already done all that he can. Assuredly somebody else has already called the police, and it would do no on any good for him to run down five flights of stairs because the girl would already be dead by the time he got there and he remembered what his father used to say that when a man helps a lady, he should always treat himself to a drink or two. For all that Robert has convinced himself of, he's just saved a girl's life, and so he rations his alcohol accordingly.

Kitty Genovese, for one, is not appreciating her neighbors' excuses.<sup>47</sup> She lies in a pool of her own blood. Her legs are cold and unmoving. She has dragged herself to the front steps of her apartment building. The door is locked,<sup>48</sup> and so she bangs on it with what little strength she has, but either no one inside hears her, or everyone is too afraid to unlock it. The throb of pain pulsating from her back and side fall into rhythm with the lazy circuits run by moths about her head and she dances on the cusp of consciousness. Her blood seems to be getting heavier and heavier as the cold cement kisses every inch of her body, being pulled to the ground, surrendering of her blood an ever giving stream, feeding the earth. She sinks to her back and looks up at the incandescent light bulb that bathes the front steps with a warm hue which from her ever darkening vignette appears to her as a star, glimmering, watching. That bulb would be the last thing Kitty saw before she died, and for many many weeks that same bulb would illuminate the bloodstains that marked the front steps of the apartment building, marked that

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<sup>45</sup> Witnesses report that she cried out "Oh my god he stabbed me! Help me!"

<sup>46</sup> Given the NYPD emergency response time, if someone had called the police at this moment, law enforcement and ambulances would have arrive in time to save Kitty's life. They were called half an hour later

<sup>47</sup> Thirty-eight witnesses would come forward. After the criminalizing press that the story received however, twenty-six of them would recant their witness, claiming that "they didn't even really see much", or otherwise claiming to not have seen it at all. The twelve that remained admitted that they did not come down for fear of being harmed themselves, and all twelve made excuses to try and justify that decision

<sup>48</sup> The door would later be unlocked by Mary Ann, awakened by the commotion of the following attack, and who would cradle Kitty's head as she bled out. After the murder, she would be interviewed constantly by the police, who badgered her about her sexuality and relationship to Kitty. For all that they were told, Mary Ann Zielonko and Kitty Genovese were simply roommates

moment of utter apathy and what did not have to be, before it was smashed by a gang of teenagers playing stickball in the street.

The only ones watching Kitty Genovese now are the stars, thirty-eight witnesses, and Winston Moseley, who sits in his car about a hundred yards back. Despite the help that he is sure is coming, Winston can't help but stay at the scene.<sup>49</sup> This is his first taste of blood, his first hunt, and send him to hell if he didn't finish what he started, with his kill injured and helpless and begging to be ended.<sup>50</sup> He waits. He waits, and is surprised when, after ten minutes of silence, the quiet street stays just that. No sirens, no first responders, just a helpless girl, bleeding to death. Winston's heart starts to race again, and with animal-like fervor he leaps from his car and runs down the street to finish his hunt. Perhaps, he thinks to himself, he is not so alone as he once thought.<sup>51</sup>

The papers that came in on March 27, 1964 had the whole story.<sup>52</sup> Kitty Genovese, 28, was brutally stabbed to death and raped by a 29-year-old Winston Moseley, a business machine operator with no previous record. When he turned himself in however, Moseley confessed to three murders, and numerous burglaries and rapes. The body of Kitty Genovese was found outside the locked door of her apartment building, and knife wounds on her hands and forearms indicate that she was trying to defend herself while being raped and murdered in an ordeal that lasted about thirty-five minutes. Thirty-eight of her neighbors came forth as witnesses. However, though the attack lasted for a considerable amount of time, none of them made any attempt to help Genovese, save one neighbor who reportedly shouted out, "Let that girl alone!", ending the first attack. The individual failed to help the girl in any way after that. The police were not called until fifteen minutes after the attack, and Genovese was reported dead on the scene. The murder was labeled as a prime example of the further impersonal, further apathetic, further cowardly direction in which America was moving.<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> The article was scoured and analyzed, torn apart by every eye in New York, and every copy of the Times was thoroughly read. All but one, which found itself in Robert Mozer's trashcan as he heads off to work. Today, he arrives early.

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**s5:     *Declaration of Worth***

***What if We Could Overcome This War Between Nature and Nurture, Proving That Though We Are Selfish, We Can Also be Selfless: A Free Verse Poem to Ask You Whether or Not We Are Worth Saving [meant to be read out loud, with great dedication]***

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<sup>49</sup> Austin Street, Kew Gardens, Queens, New York. For years to come, the murder of Kitty Genovese would brand America, with greater specificity towards the aforementioned inscribed areas, as a place of apathy, where neighbors no longer help one another, and one would just as soon shout down to the street and slam the window as to down half a bottle of scotch and return to the sports section

<sup>50</sup> Moseley would later testify that "I came back because I knew I had not finished what I set out to do." While on trial, he would plead not guilty for reason of insanity and, after seven hours of deliberation, would be convicted guilty anyway. He died just this past March, in prison, at the age of 81

<sup>51</sup> Moseley would stab Kitty several more times, rape her, and make away with \$49 he stole from her wallet

<sup>52</sup> This story would be the big break in the career of Martin Gansberg, who wrote the article for the New York Times

<sup>53</sup> It would also be the poster image of the common sociological phenomena soon to be known as the bystander effect or the "Genovese Syndrome"

<sup>54</sup> The murder happened soon after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and served only to stoke the flames of the already hot tempers of many Americans

And what if we aren't. What if our cowardice has already become, and has long since been, the quiddity of whatever it was we were trying to be in the first place. What if, no matter how long we deliberate, our verdict will always come out into the courtroom in a flowery dress and plastic jewelry and a strained voice that masks quite poorly its insecurities, stating to all who sit that we have been found guilty of a great lack of virtue, for which we shall pay with our lives and livelihoods. What if the human race is doomed, has always been so, and that only once our children's children's children watch the earth implode from its own internal stress will it be decided that we could have should have saved it, had we not cowered so, had we not ignored the needs of one another, had we not sacrificed what was necessary to pursue for ourselves what is not only inconsequential but also temporary. What if, what if, what if. Had we not, had we not.

But we haven't. Not yet. In spite of the fear, in spite of the doubt, we continue to push forward and strive to figure out why we are here today. That great human tenacity, the will to live that has brought us to this moment here, and not without our bones alone. We own these virtues and applaud them with reason. Yes we fear, yes we act, in spite of our better nurture, selfishly. But this mess to be beauty is still not without hope, for no other reason than that we are self-aware enough to recognize our faults and want to be better versions of ourselves. We are not moral so that we can add justification to decorate bookshelves spilling with the works of absurdists. I don't believe that we can ever change our nature, and the failure to do so over the course of our existence is, I should think, enough evidence to prove that it would be a waste of time for us to continue trying. That's fine. What we can do though, is change who we want to be, emulating those who reply to that understating notion that courage is a lion worth killing for its honey. That generosity is a good enough wind to fly a kite on and that self-sacrifice does not always mean that you come out short.

That is why we love the altruists, those well versed and fluent in the language of living well without compromising that hand-formed humanity. The only thing that mankind has in common with itself is inevitable fatality and that is why we choose to be. Kind. Patient. Generous. Faithful. Let pain brim full in our hearts and let us embrace it, knowing that isolation and suspicion are empty things in themselves. We do not have time enough to think only of ourselves. If we are to make any kind of impact, we must revel in each other as though we are angels, especially because we are, in light and calcium alone, men.

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