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Paper #2

Growing up, I was raised catholic, I attended CCD, was baptized, received my first communion. I'm not sure that I ever really believed what I was being taught, perhaps I did, but its safe to say that by the time I was around fourteen years old I didn't hold any serious religious beliefs. I remember around this time I had two friends that would argue frequently about their faith. One was religious and the other was a staunch atheist. I would very intentionally sideline myself from the fruitless debates and refrain from contributing. I was always satisfied enough to internally declare that I was agnostic and go on my way.

And so much of my young adult life was spent in a state of distraction, and ignorance towards ultimate questions. This worked well during my high school years, which were regimented enough, but the transition to college life granted me a new level of freedom, and with it came a dreadful unease about my life. This unease fueled my anxiety, and I committed myself to a new set of distractions. I relentlessly dove into my studies, committed myself to the gym, and tried to eat healthfully. All these things look healthy on the surface, but they were fueled by my need to be in control. I thought that maintaining a sense of control was the best way to quell my anxiety and uncertainty. I spent my first three years of college very much in this way, constant striving and pushing. I tried my very best to remain disciplined, I even trained for and ran the NYC marathon. I remember walking into the bar to meet my family after that great accomplishment and receiving much congratulations and

praise, however on the inside I had never been more unsure of myself, that relentless voice in my head asked "what now?"

The summer before my senior year marked a change for me, I was working two internships, splitting my time between an engineering firm and a security firm in an attempt to gain some insight into what path I would like my life to take. All the while I tried to remain disciplined and continue going to the gym. But all of it soon began to wear me down. I was struggling to see the meaning behind any of my work or actions, what was the point? Did I really want to be doing any of this? I had no answers. My distractions were no longer cutting it; finally I was coming to terms with the fact that I had spent my entire adult life thus far ignoring ultimate questions. Thoughts of death and the uncertainty of it all plagued me. The immense uncertainty of everything was so daunting that I had always rejected considering it. Finally it was dawning on me that, try as I might to control my life, I was truthfully and totally at the mercy of the world. This was a lot to take on, and my own exploration into my own beliefs about death lead me to ponder certain ethical issues pertaining to life and death; One such was the issue of genocide.

Genocide I couldn't seem to wrap my head around, how could a race of beings who seem to have unanimously, *independently* decided that killing another human is most morally condemnable thing one could do, also be so addicted and prone to the mass extermination of each other. I had known of genocide, and thought of genocide before, but I don't think I had ever really embraced the gravity of it. I think my mind always kept the reality of genocide at arms length, for a good reason. Really accepting humanity's genocidal tendency meant a lot, it meant I had

to accept that life is delicate and can be cut brutally short. It also meant accepting that a certain meaninglessness and chaos is ingrained into our human experience, something my control-obsessed mind did not want to embrace. In the past when faced with such realities I would always ignore them and recommit myself to work, motivated by a solipsistic self-centeredness that I had built up as a defense mechanism. However this time around I was exhausted, and tired of my meaningless work. I vowed to look issues like genocide in the face, accept their immensity and ramifications, accept my very limited ability to do anything about it, and find a way to live a good life in spite of it all.

Pondering the reality of genocide helped me to surrender a bit to the world. It allowed me to accept that there are realities extremely far outside of my control. And that, try as I might to be disciplined and hard working, the only thing I can be certain about is that the future is totally uncertain. This was a hard, painful, and scary reality for me to accept, and so I turned to philosophy to help me with the process. I found the work of Aristotle, Sartre, Pema Chodrin, Hume, Montaigne and Camus to be particularly helpful in guiding me toward a healthier set of beliefs. Surprisingly enough Jim Carrey's recent work also proved helpful. This is not to say that I've figured it all out, its more to say that I'm getting more and more comfortable with the notion that I'll never figure it all out. I do feel that little by little I've grown more comfortable with uncertainty. And I feel this has had the result, little by little, of decreasing my natural human self-centeredness, and increasing my sense of empathy. And I think this has largely influenced my own morality. In the past the uncertainty of life left me fearful and anxious, and I scrambled for control

where I could find it. By instead now accepting this uncertainty and sacrificing my need to control things I have found a far greater sense of peace.

And so as far as my own moral philosophy goes I would put myself mostly in the Aristotelian camp. I feel that the choices I make tend to be the right ones so long as they are influenced by positive emotions such as empathy and courage as opposed to negative emotions like fear and anger. I find the best way for me to allow these "positive" emotions to shine through is to constantly strive for more and live my life outside of my comfort zone. I find that this eudemonistic approach towards life tends to increase humility, happiness and gratitude and quell envy and shame. My approach to life could be summed up as thus: strive to be perfectly okay with where I am, but still work to be better anyway. At this point in my life I have no grandiose plans for the future, no real conception of where my life is leading. Which is perfectly okay with me for now. As long as I continue to pursue my own goals that make me happy, I believe that I will tend to be a positive influence on those around me. I expect myself to do more for others sometime down the road; it's really just a matter of finding how I would best like to go about it. All I know for sure is that when I look back on my life, I want to have enjoyed it, I want to have given it my all, and I want to have been a net positive on the rest of the world. That is all.