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Honors College

Spring 2011

Armen

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Armen

USF Honors College Thesis

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Spring 2011

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Chapter 1: Tough Luck

‘God this guy is killing me.....’ is the reaction I experienced from a long drawn out lecture about how Creation is proof of all biological processes in this world.

Professor Criss continued his lecture, “And because of His creation, we are blessed with such biological diversity.”

‘Should I ask why?’ I thought.

“We are going to finish up the class with brief intro on photosynthesis.” He continued.

‘What if I make him mad?’ I continued thinking.

“Photosynthesis is the process in which plants turn carbon dioxide into organic compounds like sugar using energy from sun light.”

‘Eh the hell with it!’ I decided to question, “Excuse me, professor?”

“Yes how can I help you?” He asked.

“Why haven’t we gone over other alternative theories about the origin of life?”

“Why do you care about that? This is a Christian university. You will learn about our beliefs which have only truth to them.”

“Don’t you think it would be wise for us to know the alternative so that we can keep a decent conversation with a non-creationist?”

At this point the class is starting to break into small talks about this point.

“You can not reason with ignorance my boy. They have thick heads that are filled with the idea that something comes from nothing. Its insensible, so lets move on before we make ourselves dumber for even talking about evolutionist.” Professor Criss replied.

I didn't exactly care for his reasoning. Something definitely seemed both flawed and unsettling. I intended to find a more suitable answer for my question. It is not that I questioned my faith, at least not at this point, but it is more that I have always been one to learn every perspective before siding with one.

After class, I approached him again, “Professor if I wanted to learn about evolution outside of the class room, what would be your recommendation. Does our library have anything of use to me?”

“Son, don't concern your self with things of this world. Spend your time devoting yourself to God, because that will have a better pay off in the end.”

“But I have to admit I am intrigued by hearing the substantial amount of evidence on the other side. It just makes me curious about the possibility that we are misinterpreting something.”

“Why would genesis have been written this way if we were all going to misinterpret it? I don't think God would have allowed this to happen.”

“Could we entertain the idea that maybe it was just a way of explaining to these to people of a more primitive time?”

“So God is a liar?”

“No, its just that we may have not been advanced enough in his creation to understand his work, so it was explained a little differently?”

“So still you are claiming God is a liar.” He stated looking irritated.

“In a sense, I guess? But not really....” I said awkwardly and confused by his accusation, as if he didn’t comprehend what I meant.

“I think you need to go see Dean Jesup. He may be interested in your thoughts.” There was something in his eye that bothered me about the way he said that.

“Ok thank you professor.” I nodded and went on my way to the dean.

‘I wonder how the dean is going to take this,’ I thought. ‘Probably going to be just as stubborn as Professor Criss.’

I made my way up to the seventh floor of my Christian Academy and sat in the lobby waiting for the dean call me into his office. I could hear a frustrated tone coming from his office and a slamming of what sounded like a phone back on its charger. I have never met this dean so I didn’t know what to expect.

A few seconds later, a short rotund person opened the door and with a straight look on his face he said, “Mr. Armen Holmes please come in.”

I followed him into his office and sat in a chair that he directed me in. I was sitting right in front of him, on the opposite side of his desk. There was an awkward moment between us. Then he looked at me with a head tilt and proceeded, “Tell me now, why am I hearing that you are questioning your faith?”

“I don’t know if it is that I am doubting the validity of our beliefs, but I am looking for answers.” I responded carefully.

“What kind of answers are you in search for?”

“I don’t even know where to start honestly.”

“How about what started all this.”

“Well Professor Criss was just giving lecture on the origins of life and I noticed something he said that sparked my attention. I want to point out that I think he is a great teacher, and I know he is very knowledgeable.”

“Very good and he knows a lot more than you, so remember that he has good reasons for any methods that you may be questioning.”

“Well that’s the thing. For someone who is so knowledgeable on the subject, I would think he would have given better answers to what I was puzzled by.”

“So what then was the issue that bothered you so much?”

“How he teaches evolution in comparison with creation.”

“What is wrong with it?”

“It seems like the whole class has been so factual, indisputable, logical.... and then for some reason, this topic feels so irrational.”

“How is it.... irrational?”

“Well like there is so much evidence and examples for how the cell works and its physiology. There is so much observable details in the ecosystem in how the environment works....”

“Then what is wrong with this topic?” He interrupted.

“Well I don’t know any concrete evidence that is being taught for either of the topics for creation or evolution. I mean I have believed in creation my whole life, but it has taken a lot of faith. For some reason evolution seems so interesting to me, and this class hasn’t offered anything for it. Like I want to learn more about it and why is it so off limits here.”

“So you think there is credibility into evolution?”

“Well that is what I am saying, I just don’t know. I don’t believe that it is taught right here. Like there are facts missing on both sides. And until now there has been all experimental and observable education in biology. But for some reason there is not any with this debate. There is just faith in creation and intolerance for evolution.”

“Because evolution is just not true! You know what Genesis states about the beginning of time. Why do you need to concern yourself about all the worldly nonsense?”

“But why is it so bad to consider what they are saying? And if it makes sense then why can it not fit into my belief? I want to know why we accept certain views of science and why not for others. Who is responsible for this filtering? Is the only criteria is that it supports the bible? What if for once that it is the bible that should conform to science and not the other way around?”

“Blasphemy! That will never happen! Evolution has a fundamental problem in its self. It has lead to an increase in racism because of its promotion in differentiation and hierarchy. Immorality and disgust has been accepted in society and we must not follow the ways of the world! In addition there is no evidence that supports evolution!”

“I know what you are saying but I still think there is more to evolution that just it is evil and that it is of the devil. I don’t know why but I just do. I have a hard time believing that just because of evolution, people have become bad. I don’t think that an idea that is so heavily respected in the scientific community is the cause of any evil. What people do with ideas and how they manipulate these ideas to conform to an agenda is what would be the cause of any evil. I mean even Christianity has had some questionable moments in history.”

“Like?”

“The crussades? The salem witch trial perhaps?”

“I do not think that this kind of talk is healthy for your relationship with our God. Yes Christianity has had some bumps in the road but we must be faithful to our Father and continue our work to defend his glory.”

“So that is the reason I must forget about evolution is just because it doesn’t glorify God and, ultimately, because I will be punished eternally?”

“Not just because you will be punished, but because you are going to be harming other people along the way. By confusing them, making them question our God, and being

responsible for their own actions by being their first cause in a long chain reaction towards self-destruction. God watches everything!”

“I have a hard time believing that just because I question a detail means that I question the entire concept of God.”

“If you question one aspect of God, then you are questioning Him! And you are proving more and more that you don’t believe! You know where that will end!”

“So if then I am constantly reminded of the consequences and I am constantly scared into acting a certain way and living a certain way, do I truly believe?”

“The consequences are meant for us to prove our devotion to him, to earn his gift of eternal life. If you prove you believe then you will gain his wonderful gift.”

“Yes but I am having a hard time accepting that because these consequences are so often shoved into our faces, genuine belief is not possible. I mean it seems that genuine belief would be more obtainable if there were no consequences. Then people could actually come to a genuine fixation of beliefs. But it is more so of a forced conditioning in our minds, and we are constantly telling ourselves to ignore our reasoning.”

“God has better judgment than you in his methods, and you must have faith that he knows what he is doing with your life and all of ours. His system is perfect and if you doubt it, then you have placed doubt in him. This I cannot have people like you in this school. It is my job to protect the values of this educational system and to mold students only to glorify our God, but not to question Him.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I am saying I see a plague in this place and I must remove it before I have an epidemic!”

“Why that is absurd! I don’t see how abandoning someone just for questioning is very Christ-like! I mean I didn’t say I have abandoned my faith. I am just looking for clarity.”

“If you haven’t found clarity in this conversation nor in this educational system by this point then you have traveled too far down a path that we can not longer help. I am sorry son, but you will have to leave by tomorrow.” He stated shaking his head.

“Thanks for this valuable lesson. When a sheep gets lost in a storm, just keep moving and hope that it will find its way. I remember that story in the Old Testament! I am sure that is what David did.”

“Your sarcasm towards me and the Bible only proves my point. Here is a lesson in the Old Testament that you should remember, Respect for elders! I hope for the best.”

I walked out of there dumb founded. Literally blank as if I had no idea as to what just happened in there.

‘That guy couldn’t have been serious.’ I thought, ‘Did he really just kick me out?’

I started walking back to my dorm to pack up my stuff, thinking about everything that just happened. I didn’t even know what would be my next move besides going home.

About two hours later in mid packing, my mom called hysterically crying.

“Why son? Your dean just called me.....” She cried.

“I don’t understand mom, how one question lead to this.” I replied.

“This is serious Armen! You are in trouble son, not only in education, but with God!”

“Wait what?”

“I am so embarrassed, you are taking after your father!”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Your siblings look up to you and now what? What kind of example have you set?”

“I genuinely don’t think I did anything wrong.”

“Of course you don’t. Not till you are humbled!”

“...” there was a silence as I sensed something serious was about to be said.

“You are not allowed back in my house until you get your life with God straight. I can not have my children’s minds be polluted at their vulnerable age.”

“So that is how it’s going to be mother? Just like that?”

“I am sorry, you will have to call your father to help you out.”

“Yea thanks and have a good life!” I yelled and slammed the phone on my desk. Of course I didn’t mean for it to be the last conversation between my mother and I, but I was just so hurt and angry by her immediate reaction to abandon me during such a hard time.

For the remainder of that spring semester I moved in with my father, who was a very busy man. He was not too disturbed by the fact that I was no longer in a Christian university, but he was disappointed by the fact that this would delay my graduation some. He told me to basically get my life together, get into another university, and finish up my education. I always defined him as a strictly business personality. He never provided

much affection or cared to discuss what is going on with another person emotionally. He had a walk it off attitude with everyone; and when things got rough, he was the first person to say get over it and get going. So that is what I did for that spring; walked it off and got back to being productive.

Fortunately, I was accepted in a university, to study biomedical sciences, three hours south of my dad's hometown for the fall semester. This opportunity had another perk; I had three friends that I knew fairly well from grade school that had an open room in their apartment.

Chapter 2: The Roommates

My excitement was immeasurable, as I walked up to the door of my new apartment. I opened the door and three old friends, who were eagerly anticipating my arrival, greeted me.

“ARMEN!” Acher screamed on the top of his lungs.

“What up buddy!” Jose said as he gave me a dap handshake.

“Yo!” Charles said as he came in for a brotherly hug.

“Alright gentlemen, what is the plan for this evening?” I asked to all of them.

“Well after you finish moving in, we can go down to the bar and introduce you to some ladies!” Acher suggested.

“Ha! What kind of ladies are you talking about?” Charles said laughing at Acher.

“Probably all them dime pieces he claims to hang out with.” Jose added sarcastically.

At that comment, I was thrown a little off guard, as I wasn’t too used to people referring to women in this manner. But it was an exciting time and I just allowed myself to be entertained by the conversation.

“Yea yea. You guys keep talking but come to think of it, I don’t recall either of you two having gotten any form of female attention in over two months.” Acher responded to both Jose and Charles.

“That is because we don’t bring back a pack of hyenas to the apartment after we go out to the club!” Charles laughed.

“Hey, a wise person told me once that sometimes you have to go through two fours to get an eight!” Acher exclaimed hysterically.

“What comedian did you steal that one from?” Jose said still laughing from Acher’s comment.

“I don’t remember, some comedian I watched last night when I was baked.” Acher responded.

“You are always baked Acher!” Jose claimed.

“Whatever, some people have a glass of wine every night, but I would rather hang out with Mr. Bubbles over here.” Acher said pointing to his bubbler on the coffee table.

Everyone laughed this conversation off and returned to their business. A few hours later, I finished settling in my new room and was ready for the night. We decided to go out to local bar since we weren’t planning on going too wild - due to the fact that it was Sunday and we all had classes the next day. As we sat down at table, all of us with our first round of beers, Jose sparked the conversation by asking, “So what happened with that other school you were at?”

“Ya know it was really a messed up situation. I was trying to get a well-rounded education and confronted one of my teachers about it. But it was taken the wrong way and one thing lead to another. Thus resulting in my expulsion.” I responded.

“Weren’t you at a Christian university?” Charles asked.

“Yea.” I nodded

“So what did you say to your professor? Did you tell him that he was full of shit?” Acher joked.

“Ha! No nothing like that. We were talking about creation and I brought up evolution and he didn’t really like it. So I was referred to dean and they thought that I would be a bad influence on others.”

“Pretty harsh man.” Jose replied.

“But you couldn’t have expected to get a decent education in biology from a creationist mentality school did you?” Charles inquired.

“Yea why not?” I asked.

“Well because most of science is founded on the premise that evolution is true. Other belief foundations would make modern biological science seem a little less credible.”

Charles answered, “Without evolution, biology is just a confused science.”

“I don’t think whether you believe in creation has any influence on science.” Jose interrupted, “ Just because someone believes in God does not mean they are any worse of a scientist.”

“Yea well in my book it does. I would never take a scientist seriously if he had that kind of belief set. Its just not a very scientific belief.” Charles said to Jose.

“You can’t say that just because a scientist believes in God means that they are a lousy scientist. That is quite the leap in judgment. That would be to say one lawyer is less credible than another based on the religious preference.” Jose reasoned.

“Lawyers and Scientist are not comparable.” Charles stated.

“Who gives a flying....” Acher said before getting interrupted.

“Would you guys like another round?” The waitress asked

“Yes and keep them coming!” Acher requested.

That night kept going on with, what was apparently normal to Acher, Charles and Jose arguing about who is correct in terms of what is a more credible scientist; either a person who believes in a higher being or a person that doesn’t. Being that Jose is a devoted Christian and Charles is a hardcore atheist, I was sure to expect that this would not be the last time I hear the end of this. As for Acher, well, he couldn’t really care less about any of this. He was at the lowest possible level conceivable for just not caring about any deity or non-deity based world. As long as he had a beer, a joint, or a woman around him, he was always content.

We made it from the bar around one thirty in the morning. Acher had made it obvious that he drank the most as he passed out in his hallway. Jose and Charles were still a little annoyed with each other but passed out shortly upon our arrival home. As for me, I laid down and thought for a moment about how the next day would be in this new university. I thought to myself that my expulsion might have been a good opportunity for me. Then I thought for a moment that I wished that I could really talk to my mom

sometime soon, but I figured all she needed was time. Not long after this thought, I was passed out for the night.

Chapter 3: A Door Opener

I woke up around 10:00am to get ready for my first class of the day. It was a philosophy class that fulfilled a general education requirement. I had never taken a philosophy class before and had no idea what to expect.

After getting to class I was anxious to hear what this teacher was going to lecture on. It was a small class of about thirty students. Our professor walked in and briefly went over the syllabus. He was clearly bored with this topic and rushed out of it. Afterward, he decided he was going to begin with talking about the different branches of philosophy. He briefly went over the definitions of metaphysics, existentialism, ethics, aesthetics, and logic. After this he dismissed class, but I wasn't entirely ready to finish our discussion. I was really intrigued with our conversation of ethics. From this curiosity, I decided that I would talk to my professor a little bit to find out more about what this class would entail.

“Professor, my name is Armen and I wanted to ask a little bit about what we are going over in class this semester.” I asked.

“Sure what would you like to know?” He responded.

“Well I never really had a class like this because I came from a Christian university, so I don't know what to expect.”

“Why did you leave?” He interrupted curiously.

From this point I knew he was fascinated by this fact about me. So as we walked outside of the classroom and into the hallway, I informed him of everything I went

through. I also included what happened between my mother and I. I gave him more of a short summary of what had happened and then he decided to inquire further.

“That is a pretty harsh sanction from both your dean and your mother for just asking some questions.” He stated in response to my recent dilemmas.

“Yea I know, and it just sucks that my mother is on their side too.” I added.

“I really am sorry for your hard times.”

“I wonder if I even really deserve this. I mean, should I just have kept my mouth shut? Were my questions not valid?”

“What were your questions? I have an idea since you mentioned your curiosity towards evolution.”

“Well I was searching for valid reasons in believing creation over evolution. The way they were taught was just awkward. ‘Evolution is just wrong because there is no clear evidence,’ and ‘creation is right because it is the only possible explanation of how we all came to be.’” I said mocking my previous professor and dean.

“I have heard of how they are taught in the class rooms in those types of universities. I too have similar concerns with their ideas of credible sources of evidence.”

“So what do you think on the matter?”

“I think both make interesting claims, but anyone who understands the principles of what is actual evidence versus what is not actual evidence would have to side with evolution.

Now whether God put evolution in motion or just created the universe, like stated in genesis, are two completely different situations.”

“Yea I guess that would make for different arguments.”

“I think we should focus on whether or not God did in fact put evolution into motion or whether there is no intelligent design that created our universe. For the other argument of Genesis, well... I guess we can say that isn't really worth our time considering right?”

“I would have to agree since I already know that argument.”

“Both arguments have their standpoints of what they claim to be scientific evidence and more beneficial to society. And by more beneficial to society, I mean that they offer a system of ethics and moral evaluation. So it is important to also consider how these beliefs influence our societies.”

“Right, so coming from the Christian background I feel as though I have much input to offer this conversation.”

“Then let's start with what the Creationist believes. And from now on when we say creationist, we are referring to the intelligent design theory that embraces the Bible as well as evolution, just so that we are both clear on what we are talking about.”

“Well the creationist would say they offer a system that is far easier to comprehend, God is the original cause, he made us in our image, and through his benevolence he offers us a chance to prove our worthiness through how we live; to earn our right into heaven. He cares for us, and constantly watches over us to offer his guidance and protection. He has established his laws, referred to as the Ten Commandments, of how man ought to behave.

Christianity and Islam have both evolved from these ten commandments, and offer a continuation of more specific types of moral responsibility. Both have their clarifications of how one would qualify for God's gift of eternal life."

"That sounds good so far. So then tell me, what is the reasoning for believing that God is the original cause?"

"I would suppose its because, it offers a definite answer to the question, 'How else did everything get into motion?'"

"Right because they offer certainty to society, which gives people security in their lives. Creation allows for us to accept that we are here because someone wanted us to exist. It gives some people a reason worth living a fulfilling life. Now based on a benevolent creator, explain the impact on a society in terms of providing an ethical system and a standard for moral evaluation."

"I imagine ethics and moral evaluation are quite clear. We must do so to please God, otherwise we are destined for hell. We must follow his word and govern our lives by it. So a society is expected to foster to be in accordance with God."

"Right, so as God commands it, we must do it. We must show appreciation for all his work and care for us. So to act moral for a creationist, would be keeping a consistency with God's word and would be to act towards one another with care and compassion. Working together as a society to live for God, is a necessity for creationists. So to behave ethically is to act as God would want us to act. Morality would come with keeping ourselves in check with the doctrine so that we are always aiming to be pious."

“I follow what you are saying.”

“So in summary of what creation offers: it is a value based system that offers an explanation of why we are here and how we ought to act. It is, for the most part, simple to comprehend. This allows for the possibility strong fellowships amongst communities and when people are lost, it allows for support systems to get them back where they belong.”

“Yea I can see how that is what it is intended to do. But we don’t always see it so utopian.”

“Hence why I used to phrase ‘it offers’ instead of ‘this is what it does’.”

“Fair enough.”

“So then let’s move on to the evolutionist.”

“Alright so what is their belief on original cause?”

“In evolution, the Big Bang theory is the most probable cause. Much scientific work supports this belief and it holds the most credibility amongst the scientific community. However, what was before the big bang theory is still uncertain.”

“So the original cause is unknown?”

“Yes, for the evolutionist not knowing the answer to this question is a reality that is in their face everyday. However, it is not a bad thing to them. It gives them something to work forward too. Through their discoveries and experiments, they offer advancements in society that allow us the luxuries that we have today.”

“Can you explain this concept of the big bang theory to me?”

“Sure. The big bang is a belief that attempts to explain the origin of the universe. It states that super small, hot, and dense particles created a massive explosion that expanded and eventually cooled, leading to the creation of space, as we know it. The explosion is believed to have occurred over fifteen billion years ago.”

“So how did we come to be?”

“Well from this creation of our universe, elements interacted with each other allowing for planets to become as we know it. For our planet, the possibility of life came to be through the availability of massive amounts of water. From water, we had this next theory of the primordial soup, which states that atmospheric compounds allowed for the formation of organic compounds. From these organic compounds, basic components of life formed like amino acids, proteins, and carbohydrates. This allowed for the basic precursors for nucleotides and thus biochemical communities. As a result, the formation of the cells emerged, which formed communities to make basic structures and eventually more complex physiological structure, like us.”

“Wow, that is quite the process.”

“A lot to take in right?”

“Yea, it’s a lot to comprehend.”

“So now we can evaluate the implications of this beliefs on society. Evolutionists search for both ethics and morals in the natural world. The purpose of ethics and morality is a direct result of adaption in humans. To continue the survival of our species, we ought to behave with decency so that we may survive. Survival is a key theme in adaptation. The

main goal offered by evolutionist for the ethical system and moral evaluation is to increase the longevity of our species and improve the quality of our lives.”

“So then ethics and morality are the tools to reach these goals? These are the laws required to achieve them?”

“Yes, they are put in place to make mankind capable of attaining these goals. These are basic rules that allow for the increase in likelihood of our survival. There are no consequences outside of our physical life for abiding by these rules. The only thing that I can think of that makes people want to follow these rules are for simply to see what happens next with our species and to provide a better quality life for our offspring.”

“I don’t think those are bad reasons to follow these rules.”

“And they shouldn’t be seen that way either!”

“So fundamentally what are the actual benefits to a religious based society versus the cons?”

“Well religion offers certainty, easy comprehension, and attraction to those looking to belong to something. It can be quite comforting for individuals as it offers a sense of communalism. Religion is also very beneficial to the control of a society as every person living in it has a common purpose and belief. As for the converse, we have seen religion split into various forms causing uproar and war. People can often use religion as a tool to obtain goals that are not really supported by their actual belief. Some people actually convince themselves that it is part of their belief and get people to follow that ideology. One issue that I have noticed it that religion often gives people a sense of complacency.

For example, people don't really care to advance their society as much because they know something is better waiting for them when they die. So the material world is just a test to pass so that they can move on to the next thing. The time they spend worshipping and reading the bible, could be spent on advancement in education and elsewhere, but I guess that they see their dedication as education in their own sort of way. And that kind of mentality is passed down from generation to generation. I can go on for days about this. Lets focus on the pros and cons now of evolutionists.”

“Ok.”

“So the biggest pro is the demand for further education and competition from the evolutionist ideology. Societies become more useful in advancing the material world. In a society with no religion, you have the elimination of one giant reason for war. Tolerance for individuality will become more accepted as long as the study of genetics and psychology progress. And then comes the laundry list of cons for a society based on evolution fundamentals. There is absolutely no certainty when it comes to what will happen next, and our society will constantly live on the edge of their seats as advancements are made. And by the rules of Darwin on the topics of natural selection and survival of the fittest, we can agree that it would be a very poor society to live in. I can imagine it being very barbaric, and education not being put into good use as much as we would like it.”

“I can completely see that.”

“So it is important for a society that does base its ethics and morals in religion, to look at evolution and a ‘Darwinistic’ society to see what not to do. This is essentially evolution at its finest!”

“Is that what the creationist holds against the evolutionist?”

“Well they believe that a ‘Darwinistic’ society promotes racism, because of differentiation and hierarchy. They believe acts of selfishness to survive in this world are supported by this ideology.”

“So I guess an adaption for us would be that for our survival as a specie, we must not act selfishly as individuals because it does not contribute to our longevity as a race. We must only act in a way that would not harm our community, environment, and planet, because that will improve our likelihood of survival for many years to come: unless of course, a meteorite is on track to hit our planet in some odd years. But that would just be unforeseen, and it is not a good reason to not act with moral decency for many reasons.”

“Absolutely.”

“Wow, I think I have gained an expansive amount of knowledge here.”

“I am happy I could be apart of that! So it is hard to say which society would be best for our race ultimately, and there are very good reasons for both of them to be present.

Perhaps if we learned to work together to make the pros on both sides merge. Or maybe I am being too idealistic.”

“That would be a conversation for another time! I have a lot to think about now.”

“Yea I could go on and on about this. And I must be going because I have office hours in two minutes.”

“Ok I will see you Wednesday!”

“Alright see you then!”

This conversation seemed to have a great influence on me. I felt as though I grew from this and something was starting to bud inside me. It was something new and I didn't know what to think of it. I spent the whole day pondering about my conversation, even through my other classes since all we went over was the syllabuses in them.

When I got home that night, I spent some time doing a little homework and then hanging out with my roommates. They seemed interested in how my first day was, in what they considered a “normal” university. So I decided to share my conversation with my philosophy professor with them.

“I liked how he didn't seem to be unbiased towards the religious views.” Jose thought.

“I don't know Jose, I think he leaned a little bit on the non deist side.” Charles said.

“I think he was still on the fence, but leaning toward the non deist side.” Acher added.

“Either way he offered something that I have never experienced; a neutral prospective. He seemed to know what he was talking about, and was not intolerant.”

“That is because he is a philosopher, their breed tends to always be very liberal in their acceptance of others.” Charles stated.

“Maybe so, but even then I felt like he had good things to say.” I responded.

“Well I am happy you had a legitimate conversation with a neutral intellectual to help you out.” Jose said.

We all just kind of agreed and spent the rest of the night talking nonsense with each other until it was time for us to pass out. I laid in bed that night thinking about everything that was said with my professor and how it may redefine how I will think about ethics in the future.

Chapter 4: A Period of Recklessness

The rest of that week flew by for the roommates and I. It was now Friday and that meant only one thing for the guys: rage. They decided they wanted to take me out to a local bar, and of course they wanted to go because it was ladies night. So naturally being a college guy at the age of 21, I was down to rage at a bar during a ladies night. I didn't know what to expect being that this was all new to me. Regardless, I knew that I needed new experiences that would allow me to experience this new world.

When we got there, the first thing Acher and Charles did, was start their wingman escapade. This includes them two talking to every girl at the bar until they figure out whom they want to invest time and money on, assuming to take them home. It was like they forgot about the rest of us. Jose and I decided to take up post at the bar and order two shots, called jonny vegas, and a beer each. I glanced around at the bar and I remember thinking this place is crazier than anything that I am used to. Body shots, involving cans of whip cream, were being taken on the bar, women dancing on top of the bar, and the bar tenders were basically throwing the alcohol into the crowd. I didn't even understand how this was profitable, and after a few more drinks, I didn't care either. I was having the time of my life.

Shortly after both of us finished our third beer, two girls approached Jose and I. "What are your guys names?" One of the girls asked in a flirty manner.

At this question, I felt my knees go weak. This was out of my element and I became very uncertain. For some reason though, my mind reacted and I took the lead, "My name is Armen and this is Jose."

“Oh, do you guys go to school here?” The other one asked.

“Yes we do,” Jose answered. “You girls?”

“Yes. Well do you guys dance? Me and my friend here want to dance.” One of them responded bluntly.

I looked at them, trying to judge which one to dance with, but it was kind of dark so their faces were a little hard to make out. Jose and I decided to let them decide whom they wanted to dance with and so our night begun. After an hour of dancing, another hour of small talk, and more shots at the bar, the girls decided they wanted to after party back at our place. I was a little uncomfortable with this, but I was drunk and trying to keep an open mind.

We left the bar, took a taxi home to find Acher and Charles waiting for us to get home. They notice that we had brought girls home and we noticed that their wingman endeavor had failed that night. After a couple of hours after partying, I started to sober up a little and noticed that these girls in the light were not what I thought they really looked like. I decided to cease whatever intention I had with them, and Acher had no problem filling in my spot. This was a relief for me at the same time. I didn't comfortable yet with what I was doing, and I needed more time to adjust.

That next morning, the girls were gone and the apartment was a mess. Everyone kind of met on the sofa feeling the effects of a long night of drinking.

“So how were the girls Jose and Acher?” I asked with a smile, trying to keep a confident demeanor about my decision on those girls from the previous night.

“Oh you know. Entertaining to say the least.” Acher responded.

“I don’t know what I was thinking.” Jose said.

“You were in a primal state!” Charles added to Jose.

“Let me just say once I got home, I realized those girls were on this show on T.V the other day. It was a special on hyenas. Yea I think that’s where I saw them from.” I joked.

“Eh they weren’t that bad!” Acher responded.

“Yea they were both around a 4.” I said back to Acher.

“A wise man once told me that they all women look the same in the dark!” Acher said giving Jose a fist pound.

At that comment, we all laughed the night off with random stories that happened before we all got home. Acher apparently almost got into a fight for being a smart ass. Charles almost brought a girl home, but then she had one shot too many and couldn’t find her way to the bathroom before throwing up. This seemed to be a constant sequence of event for the next following weeks; where we would chill during the school week laying low and focusing on our studies, and on the weekends we had fun filled weekends entailing irresponsible behavior. During this time period, I spent a lot of free time focusing on my sciences and philosophy classes, which I noticed were contributing to the new me.

Chapter 5: A Random Enlightening Conversation

I was walking to class on campus during the middle of the week to take a test in my biology class, and I saw a guy quoting, loudly, scripture at people walking by. People were observing this man and some making fun at him. I didn't pay much attention to him on the way to class, but after I noticed he was gathering his stuff together and getting ready to leave. I decided to approach him, curious as to why he was doing this.

"Excuse me sir, why do you do this?" I asked as I walked up.

"Because I want to see you in heaven." He replied.

"But I mean why this method?"

"Well as a student here, this seems to me like an effective way to reach out to the most people possible."

"I guess I can see that. This seems to be a highly populated area."

"Well do you need any aid in your relationship with God, or need any reason to believe, before I leave?" He seemed to be genuinely willing to help me.

"Well I guess maybe I could use some guidance. On a more personal note, why do you believe in God?" I asked curiously.

"How else do I make sense of this life?"

"I mean there are other options to consider like scientific explanations."

“Science just doesn’t work for me. It doesn’t answer life’s tough questions or give us a purpose to keep living or being a good person.” He answered confidently.

“So what do you think science’s purpose is?”

“I mean it’s not a useless discipline. I am not arguing that, I think its purpose is to help us understand God’s work.”

“So why do you claim it to be God’s work?”

“How else do you think we got here?”

“Well there is the big bang theory?”

“Yea well there is no evidence to support that or evolution.”

“I am pretty sure that because of the basics of both the big bang and evolution, scientist further advanced their understanding of medicine, technology, and understanding of how this world works. At least that is the majority of what I have been learning during this semester.”

“See I don’t really agree with that. We have learned by mimicking God’s design. We watch how things are done in nature, and try to copy it. Think about a plane, we watched a bird fly and learned based off the physics God created, how to make a vessel that carries us in the air.”

“So then what about proton collisions and the evidence of natural selection.”

“I have failed to see sufficient evidence for either of those. Lets pick a topic, lets say evolution and hash this out and then on to the next one.”

“Ok so what’s wrong with evolution?”

“Well where is the evidence for it?”

“I mean there are museums and plenty of experiments done to prove it.”

“None of that is sufficient enough. I can yet find any thorough pieces of evidence that links humans to monkeys.”

“How so?”

“Well it never made sense to me if we really came from monkeys, why are there still monkeys that haven’t evolved yet, or why do I not see half monkey-humans in the process of evolution still?”

“Evolution doesn’t work like that. Species evolve from many different factors leaving behind the older common ancestor. Some species evolve at different rates too. We are not evolved from any modern type monkey on our earth today. We are more like cousins with them, more distant with some than others.”

“Eh yea I am still not convinced. Where are the links showing us this progression of lesser monkeys to us?”

“There are several museums showing them. They have been around for a while now.”

“But where is the link between their specific findings?”

“I don’t know if they have found any yet.”

“Well then my point is taken. Not sufficient evidence.”

“I mean we can keep searching for intermediates after more and more evidence comes out but eventually there is going to have to be a point where we come to accept it.”

“That day will never happen. And plus we are too complex for evolution to be true. There a certain structures, in the body, that if one part was missing in it then it would be useless.”

“Clarify your example.”

“Well think about the flagellum or cilia and how useless it would be without its protein motor. How can things evolve and then randomly come together and work? It’s like evolving with out a purpose and the crossing paths by just luck. That takes a lot of faith to believe, to me. So then we have this concept of a monkey where an evolved monkey would have to have crossed paths with another equally evolved monkey in order for it to be capable of reproducing. So for two monkeys, with the statistical unlikely hood of two random same mutations to occur, to cross paths and create; that sounds ridiculous to me.”

“I see how that interpretation of evolution could be very confusing to understand, but I have come to learn it a little differently.”

“How so?”

“Well let’s start with your example of the flagellum and cilia.”

“Ok sure.”

“So I don’t think evolution tries to claim that individual parts evolve separately. They evolve together in an environment. So we understand that both the flagellum and cilia rotates for various functions of mobility in the cell correct?”

“Yes.”

“So all the variation of flagellums and cilia come from a common ancestor that was probably less efficient but held the same basic parts. Through evolution, mutations allowed this part of the cell to develop for better or worse. Worse cases do not usually last long; therefore they kind of just disappear. However better advancements allow for an increase in longevity and this structure eventually branches into a new form.”

“So what I want to know is how did this common ancestor originally acquire its original propeller?”

“Well think of it like this. The eye did not just come from a lesser functioning eye out of nowhere; it came to be through interactions with its environment. I believe the eye evolved from light sensitive skins, seen on earth worms.”

“And where did this come from.”

“Probably an arrangement of chemicals that react with light and the first basic neurological systems were capable of using them as a form of sensation.”

“So why were the chemicals reactive with light?”

“Because of certain properties of each chemical structure.”

“And you think these properties are with out design? They just happened for no reason or purpose? God had to design this complexity. It’s the only way that this life makes sense? All this evidence points to God!”

“Who said their needs to be a purpose or that it has to make sense?”

“Huh?”

“I mean to say scientist are working right now to find out how this life makes sense, it doesn't need to have a purpose or reason right now for it to be true. We have a lot of empirical data outside of just reason that supports this.”

“But that says there is no creator.”

“Probably true but there is no evidence that support the idea of a creator.”

“The Bible and reason itself are some of the best pieces of evidence. And there is too much wrong with evolution or Darwinists for me to accept it.”

“Well then what else do you believe is wrong with evolution?”

“Look at what it promotes, a society with no morality or ethical code. A bunch of survival of the fittest mentality that will destroy life is not what I would want around me.”

“I think we can both agree that no society would function properly under basic concepts of natural selection.”

“We need the Bible to give us a sense of direction in life and to help us become good people. We need God's guidance in keeping morality in our communities.”

“Why does God have to be responsible or the cause for it?”

“Because we are here to serve him. That is our purpose so that we may join him after we die.”

“I am failing to see how you know this is our purpose. I mean I know its what the Bible says and this is the easiest belief to accept, but it’s hard for me to consider it as a valid reason.”

“Well not all people do but in the end you will have to choose for yourself what is worth it to you.”

“I guess so. But lets talk about some issue with the Bible.”

“Please do.”

“Let’s talk about this idea of a benevolent creator. My favorite is the book of Job.”

“Yea I haven’t heard this one!” He responded sarcastically rolling his eyes.

“Well then please explain it to me where this makes sense.”

“This book shows how dedication and trust in God will make us overcome anything.”

“Yes I can see how you would make that argument, but lets try to look at some underlying concepts here that are not so blunt.”

“Ok go on.”

“Well I don’t see how a loving individual would do something like that to another.”

“God works in mysterious ways.”

“But I feel like he is claiming that not all people are created equal.”

“How so?”

“Well let me ask you this. If I killed your family, and if I replaced them with a better family, would that be ok with you?”

“Who is to say what is better?”

“Exactly! I mean God takes Job’s family from him, and then gives him another family. I mean really? How does he suggest that this family is better than the one he had? How is that making everything all right or how is that suitable reward for passing God’s bet with Satan? Does that seem moral or ethical to you?”

“God had to make Job prove to him that he will endure what ever God throws at him and that he would stay faithful?”

“That is so hypocritical to how we describe God. Isn’t God all knowing? Isn’t he benevolent? Doesn’t he already know everything before it happens?”

“Yes.”

“So what was the point of that? There was nothing to prove.”

“But how could others learn from this if it didn’t happen?”

“Well that would be the only reason why it makes any sense. But still that seems like a very extreme measure to prove a point to others. If he could talk to Job surely he could talk to others to teach them the devotion that God expects from them.”

“I can see that.”

“Another issue: why do we do this? I mean why does God let us do this? He knows what we are all going to do with our lives? We don’t really have a choice if it is all ready

determined what we do. So he is allowing for people to born and continuing going to hell. We have an illusion of free will. But in reality it seems more like destiny is more likely in this belief.”

“I think you may be confusing the difference of knowing what is going on and destiny.”

“How so?”

“Just because he knows what is going to happen, doesn’t negate the idea of free will.”

“But if that’s the case, then we have already made the choices before we come to make them. Its kind of like we are watching a movie out of our eyes.”

“I guess so.”

“Yea it’s an interesting thought.”

After his response, I could see that he was still refusing to budge on this concept and I had homework to tend to.

“Well I am glad we have had this opportunity to talk, and I have to get going so thanks a lot!” I said thankfully.

“Well, even though I remain with my faith and you with yours, I also enjoyed hearing your thoughts and outlook.”

“Haha much appreciated! Thanks a lot and the feeling is mutual.” I said and went on my way.

I went home to start some work, and I walked into the apartment while Acher was smoking his herbal tobacco on the couch watching television.

“When do you ever study?” I asked him.

“Eh, I don’t feel like it right now.” He responded sluggishly.

“Because you are high.”

“What’s your point?”

“Just curious. How are your grades?”

“I am fine.”

“Not very talkative huh?”

“I am high, and this conversation is killing my buzz. The discovery channel is far more interesting.”

“What is it on?”

“The cosmos.”

“That is some thought provoking stuff right there.”

“I can’t decide if it’s a depressing science or what to make of it.”

“Why would it be depressing?”

“Because I feel like there is no meaning to life when I watch this, outside of some sort of abstract beauty and mystery.”

“Well this guy I was talking to earlier would say that this all proves the idea of god and how wonderful his creation is.”

“I would have laughed in his face. How could he just come up with that idea? I mean we have no evidence to even claim if there is or there is not any god.”

“So that is what you think?”

“I just don’t care to even think about it. It’s a waste of my time. I would rather watch the discovery channel.”

“As long as you are learning I guess!” I said laughing. He responded with a laugh and continued watching the discovery channel for the remainder of the night. After about three hours into my homework, I walked out and Charles was joining Acher in his smoking session, watching the discovery channel.

“What are you guys watching now?” I asked.

“Gorillas in high definition. Its awesome!” Charles yelled excitedly squinting his blood shot eyes.

“Haha! I may join, I could use a little break.”

As I was watching gorillas living in the their habitat, I started thinking about how incredible they seemed as a specie. They can clearly reason, show affection, and have a sense of humor. This just blew my mind and from watching this. I think this was the moment where I could say evolution became completely plausible to me. It was not just all the education that I have been learning about this semester that is what has sold me on

evolution; but rather just observing the way these gorillas interacted with one another, and how their behavior resembled that of ours proved everything to me.

Chapter 6: A Product of the Environment

A week and half had passed since my acceptance of evolution, and it was now the weekend. As usual, we decided to go out and celebrate after a long week of academic coursework. Since I had gotten A's in all my tests this week, I decided to go all out.

It was a fairly entertaining night to say the least. Jose and Charles ended up behind the bar with the bar owner making shots for people. Acher managed to get into a scuffle with three security guards after making an inappropriate joke to one of the security guard's girlfriend. I had a more level head that night as I saw a girl in one of my classes, who I decided to talk with the whole night.

I left the bar at two in the morning and as I approached my door I heard a scuffle going on. A voice yelled, "It was all your fault boy! I wish you were never born!" "Yea go fuck yourself ya drunken piece of shit! Get out of here and don't let me tell you again to stay out of my life!" Another voice yelled in response.

As I turned a corner to see my door, I saw Acher with an older man punching each other on the floor. I quickly ran to Acher's aid and pushed the older man off of him. The older man collected himself and took off. I turned back to Acher and noticed him crying. He stood himself up and walked into the apartment, into his room, and locked his door. I stood there dumbfounded for two minutes and decided to check on him tomorrow about it.

In the morning I decided to go get a cup of coffee at a local coffee shop with Acher. While waiting in line of about thirty people an interesting conversation got me

through the duration of the line. Acher didn't want to talk about the last night, but rather he was more concerned with how people are shaped in society. It was a short-lived conversation between the two of us, and we had stopped right before it was time to order. When we sat down, a man approached us and said, "I overheard your guys conversation about ethics, and I think as a Psychologist I may be able to help you out."

"What kind of psychologist are you?" I asked.

"I am actually a Skinnerian psychologist." He said.

"So what does Skinnerian psychology have to offer in molding people?" Acher inquired.

"Well do you know who Skinner was?" The man asked.

"No not really." I answered.

"He was the creator of operant conditioning. This belief showed that both people and animals could be taught, through environmental stimuli, to give desired responses. As these responses are cultured, they are reinforced either negatively or positively. Now negatively does not necessarily mean punishment. Negative punishment is when something is removed to avoid an undesired event, but this still reinforces the desired behavior to avoid an undesirable action from the subject. This is not only useful in teaching desired behaviors of an individual, but also in a society." The man explained.

"Can you give an example of both types of conditioning?" Acher asked.

"Ok so negative conditioning would be something like a gentle leader for dogs. The gentle leader teaches the dog to walk nicely otherwise pressure from pulling on his leash will turn his neck toward you. This takes pressure off the person walking the dog, as the

dog pulls on the leash; he is forced into the direction of the person. So he learns to walk nicely with an individual to avoid an annoying consequence.” The man clarified.

“Ok I understand that. Kind of like forcing a person to wear rain boots to avoid getting their nice shoes wet when it is raining, after they had messed up their shoes before?” I asked.

“Yes. And positive reinforcement is where you teach dogs desired behavior by rewarding it with treats.” The man added.

“So you mentioned that this is useful in teaching societal behaviors.” I said.

“Yes and it is obvious how this is useful. Simply, if you don’t like people acting a certain way, you take away what enables them to act a certain way, and reward them for doing the desired action. An example of this would be the whole concept of having an education. If you have an education the chances of you getting a good paying job to buy nice things increase. If you have little or no education, the odds are very much against you. So often people try to avoid the consequences of no education to get the perks of having a decent job to raise a family. This is an over generalized example of course but suitable to make my point.” The man said.

“So who designs the conditioning for us to act desirably in our society?” Acher asked.

“Well it would be leadership of the country obviously. If we have better educated citizens, then our country as a whole increases in productivity. Then again this is their desired aim, and they too are trying to avoid something, which are things like national debt, depression, and so on.” The man answered.

“So then we are all naturally products of this operant conditioning?” I asked.

“In some way or form, I mean we are not completely conditioned in every behavior, but we are vulnerable to specific learned behaviors through the right reinforcement.” The man said.

“So then this is how we learn what is normal human behavior?” I again asked.

“Normative human behavior is taught initially from parent, then eventually combines with the education system, and from there they branch off to other forms like work. The parent teaches the basics of human interaction, sometimes socialization through pre-school and other types of under-five care. In school they learn what is expected of them, and how to become both useful comprehend simple concepts in their society. By high school some already have work experience, and college demands new forms of behavior. Then of course you have the other way of youth going to jail, joining gangs, and other source of what we would consider to be negative paths in life.” The man explained.

“So how are these conditioned paths?” Acher wanted to know.

“If you were to have raised a child to receive a doctorate’s degree, one could say you taught your child well by eliminating negative influences, starting your child with positive reinforcement to go to school and rewarded for good grades and time management skills. Your negative reinforcement would be keeping them within boundaries and eliminating the possibility for a deviation of their positive life track. And this example is in a perfect world, because most people do go through an experimental stage and either find their way back or not.” The man said.

“Yea I understand what you are saying.” Acher added.

“And so a person who raised a child that failed to reach these goals and lets say became a bum, or in a gang, or whatever along these lines; they would have failed in providing proper positive reinforcement that their child needed. This would have been done by not rewarding them for doing well, ignoring them, or being absent all together. Their negative reinforcement would have failed as well; by not making sure that their child was not placed in a proper environment.” The man continued.

“I get your point but don’t you think you are making a bit of a stretch of what skinner probably interpreted acquiring ethics and morals?” I asked.

“Absolutely. I mean what skinner did was analyzed how we he believed we learned, categorized different kinds of factors that influence our behavior, and used them more specifically on not just humans but on pigeons and rats as well. He even showed how operant conditioning worked on his own daughter.” He answered.

“That’s pretty intense!” Acher blurted out.

“Yea, but what I was trying to demonstrate earlier with the whole analogy of raising a child is show how Skinner probably looked at life and designed his experiments. I mean he believed we were all products of our environments, and being that every action we take is reinforced by some consequence that shapes our behavior.” The man went on.

“Ok, I get your reason. So how would an individual learn to except concepts of morality and ethics?” I asked curiously.

“Well in my opinion, I would say very much by the same positive and negative reinforcements we see in operant conditioning. I mean, simply, who was the person that taught you the basic core principles of sharing and playing nice.” The man responded.

“My mother.” I stated.

“And how did she teach you that?” The man asked as if to make a point.

“By allowing me to play with others and correcting me when I did not play well. So I guess in your words she provided positive reinforcement when I did play well.” I answered.

“And this correction would be considered as positive punishment if she slapped your hand or giving you a firm ‘No!’ when you acted undesirably. Negative punishment would be in the case your mother takes you away from your friends in the play pin.” The man went on.

“So this clearly evolves into additional reinforcement towards the different types of good behavior as time progresses.” Acher added.

“Exactly! So we learn ethics and morals through life’s conditionings and the effectiveness of our mentors.” The man

“Alright I agree with you so far.” Acher said.

“I mean I can go further on the different types of ethical behaviors we learn, like to not steal, lie, and so on; but you will see the same concepts continuing and I don’t want to sound redundant.” The man stated.

“Ok so let us move on to things like religion and society. What does this offer?” I asked.

“Well I think religion has proved why we need it as a society as much as why we don’t. Religion has one of the most effective ways of conditioning people with morals and providing a standard of ethics to communities all over the world.” The man claimed.

“But if we are conditioned to believe in something, wouldn’t that go against genuine belief?” I tried to make a point.

“I don’t know if you can say that because one is conditioned into his belief then they genuinely don’t believe it.” The man returned.

“How so?” I asked.

“If your environment shapes you into a specific belief, that is pretty much what you live by. Whether you genuinely believe something is really just a state of mind. You can genuinely believe something in one point of time and something else at another. All genuine believing means is that at some point of time this works for you. It’s not that you found absolute truth.” The man explained.

“Huh... well I guess you just disproved something I thought I had going for me in my brain.” I said dumbfounded.

“Sorry haha, but just because I think this way doesn’t necessarily mean its an absolute truth. I mean if I am proved that Skinner is wrong in his beliefs and Freud was right, then I will genuinely believe in Freud.” The man laughed.

“So you believe in something because it works for you at a certain point in time and your environment reinforces that belief? So then change your environment and you could see that you will believe in something different?” Acher inquired.

“Essentially but I would say there is more complexity than just that.” The man responded.

“Yes of course. So then this is how we are taught an ethical system and morality. I never knew such basic concepts that are in front of us all the time offer such a simple explanation. Let’s talk about religion and the individual.” I added.

“Sure what do you want to discuss?” The man asked.

“Why do individuals feel that it makes sense?” I asked.

“It’s the same simple theme we have been discussing this whole time. They have been conditioned that it is vital for their peace, afterlife, survival, or whatever. So they are taught that their commandments, scripture, or whatever it is they follow is how they should operate. Of course religion is very attractive to us because we are social beings. We like being around others and we are basically made that way from the womb. I am sure an evolutionist would be able to describe the evolution of man and how we became to be because of our nature to form communities.” The man claimed.

“Again so simple. Well I have to run. I really appreciate this talk and hope to get back to you sometime when I have some more answers to things I still have in question.

This way I can have a more knowledgeable talk with you on my part. Thank you so much though.” I said, as Acher and I were finishing up our drinks and ready to head back home.

“Yeah well hey no problem!” The man replied and went about his day.

From this conversation Acher seemed to be more opened up to talk about last night. Apparently the man was his father, who has blamed him for his the divorce with Acher’s mother. Acher’s father developed a drinking problem after their divorce and held resentment for Acher ever since this incident. Acher was only five when the divorce took place, so it has been a long time since he has had any decent relationship with his father. When Acher was five, he had apparently walked in on his father with another woman, and told his mother what he had seen. This seemed to have brought a lot of trauma to Acher growing up and I noticed that since last night, Acher has been a little shaken up by his father’s presence. I tried to respect his privacy for the rest of the day, and got back to my studies.

Chapter 7: Something a Little Different

It has been a couple weeks since Acher's incident with his father, and for the most part he has recollected himself. We were approaching finals week, which was about a week away. I had been studying intensely all day outside the fine arts building. I liked the sound of jazz saxophone that was usually playing around this time. This player really knew how to improvise with any rhythm or song genre.

I had finished studying around seven o'clock that evening and he was still playing. Then it clicked that I was curious on what an artist's views on morality and ethics would be. So I approached him politely and asked him, "Sir, can I ask you a couple of questions?"

He put his saxophone down and looked at me confused and said, "Sure."

"Are you a graduate student or undergraduate?" I asked.

"Finishing up my DFA."

"Does an artist care about ethics or find himself reflecting on the topic?"

"Why not?"

"Uh...How would an artist approach this topic?"

"Well think about what an artist does."

"They express themselves or objects in many forms?"

“Not just things, but feelings and opinions, and morality! Art has a very powerful history in the spreading of moral codes and ethical behavior.”

“Like Greek tragedy?”

“Yes that is an example, and think about all the art work that went into the Christian crusades, Hiroshima, or the Holocaust and even the war on terrorism. They all work to show how society views these scenarios or how the artist tries to show their opinion on the subject matter.”

“I guess I really never looked at it like that?”

“Most people don’t, but art truly plays a vital role in expressing morality and ethics.”

“So art can be used express aesthetic representations on how we ought to behave?”

“Yea and art really doesn’t have a set moral code, it has more to do with subjectivity of individuals. Sure there are more expressions in art that more people tend to agree with but art has uniqueness too. This uniqueness is that two viewers can look at an artwork and one may find it offensive and wrong while another may find it peaceful and beautiful.”

“So then if there is no set standard on what is moral or ethical for an artist, then what would an artist say is a good reason to behave with morals and ethics?”

“Simply because it is beautiful.”

“Really, that’s it?”

“Yep.”

“.....but beautiful is subjective....”

“So are ethics and morals.”

“I guess so.”

“Its an easy concept: art is limited by human nature no more than ethical systems and moral beliefs.”

“Hm.... So we should all act with decency towards one another because it is aesthetically pleasing, otherwise I will live a life full of disgust.”

“Right.”

“I guess a life full of disgust would be miserable.”

“Of course it would. It would be like you were constantly living in a war and constantly experiencing situations that would disturb your mind permanently.”

“I don't think we would survive very long.”

“So then to act beautifully is also to preserve our life.”

“I think I like this reason. It is the simplest one yet. However, what about the scenario where people find war and violence aesthetically pleasing?”

“Fortunately society doesn't usually agree that those topics are generally beautiful. I agree that some individuals do, but those that make this kind of art don't really intend on this being accepted as beautiful. Again some maybe have this perception, but it doesn't really get accepted as so in our community. Think about horror movies, no one would say

that they are genuinely beautiful and the actions that take place are morally acceptable. In fact it's more on the intention to get people to feel disgust or horror. That is why it is created. Often we find the horror movie ending with at least some person surviving. In the event that this isn't the case, the intention, that is still to place a certain emotion in the viewer, is still present."

"So what about movies like 'Saw' which involves a graphic setting where the killer tries to show moral reasoning?"

"I think those movies often try to show the psychology of a serial killer and educate their viewers on their rationale. I don't believe the creators of 'Saw' truly believe their intentions were to say that the killer is morally right. They are just showing the mindset of an unstable individual as entertainment."

"So entertainment can be both the products of disturbance and beauty?"

"Absolutely, entertainment has more to do with occupying emotions. Both material that is disturbing and beautiful are capable of doing that."

"Hm.. I think I get it now, thanks for your time sir. Ill let you resume your practice."

"Glad I could help!"

That conversation was not like any conversations that I have had. We didn't even talk about the ethical foundation of those who believe in a deity or not. I imagine they could both be beautiful in their own respects and there are no right or wrong choices to the artist.

After getting home that night, I decided to call it an early night after messing around for two hours. Acher and Charles were up to their nature television shows ritual and Jose was in his room studying.

Chapter 8: A Freak Accident

Finals week was four days away. The roommates and I were really in crunch mode and decided that we would only go out one night this weekend. After we finished up our classes for the day, we decided to go to a local lake to do some studying there and hang out some. We put on our bathing suits, grabbed our studying material, and started driving to the lake.

“How much do you think we are actually going to study?” Jose asked us humorously.

“It depends on how many girls are out there.” Acher grinned.

“I don’t know man, I got a mean biology test for my first final on Monday.” I said.

“Yea I don’t know how much I can afford to mess around when I have a genetics, organic chemistry, and physics midterm this week.” Charles added.

“Again I said it depends on how many girls are out there. You know you two will crack if mad women are out there.” Acher laughed.

“Yea your probably right!” Charles exclaimed.

We arrived at the beach and chose a spot under a large tree; next to a long extended deck that went well into the lake. Fortunately there were no girls out there and we were able to get about two hours of studying done. Jose decided he was getting a little hot and he wanted to run off the deck and into the lake. As he was running he made an awkward fall and rolled off the deck into the lake.

Acher busted out into laughter, but Charles seemed concerned. We stood there and waited for Jose to resurface but after a couple of seconds we grew worried.

“Guys I think he is messed up. Lets go grab him!” I said frantically. We all ran into the lake and pulled Jose on to the land. He was unconscious and his body was completely limp. Charles was able to get all the water out of his lungs and we got very little breathing out of him as a result.

“Lets get back in my car and go to the hospital!” Charles said. Acher and I put Jose in the car and we were off. We pulled in the emergency entrance and got Jose into a room right away. We left the doctors to him and after about three hours of waiting, one of the doctors came out.

“Its seems that Jose had a heart attack before falling into the lake, but the cause of the heart attack at his age is unknown. He has only lost a small part of his heart tissue and will be fine. However he still is unconscious and will need to stay here for a while. If you guys want you can come see him. We have called his family and they will be here shortly.” The doctor informed.

“Ok thank you doctor.” I said and followed him to the room Jose was in. Charles and Acher looked in shock as to the news they received. Acher was probably feeling guilty for laughing at Jose when he fell.

“One other thing,” the doctor said, “Jose’s family has asked for a priest to pray over him until his family gets there.”

We sat in Jose's room for a little while and Charles and Acher decided to head back to the apartment. I wanted to wait until Jose's family got there, and Charles agreed that he would come back and pick me up. I decided to talk to the priest a little just to help the time pass by.

"Are you a friend of Jose's?" I asked.

"No, I just volunteer here." He said.

"Why do you choose to do this form of volunteering?"

"Because it is peaceful and makes me feel as though I am making a difference."

"Do you go to school around here?"

"Yes actually. I have a dual undergraduate degree in mathematics and chemistry. I am in grad school now."

"Wow that is admirable! But how do you have time to do this?"

"Well I guess I am just good at time management."

"So you are both a Christian and a scientist?"

"I guess you can say that."

"I have been spending much of my time this semester on a side project evaluating how our education and life experiences define our ethical foundation. I would like to hear yours since I find our your educational standing and personal beliefs almost controversial."

“Well I am a Christian, but because of my education I take genesis to be taken metaphorically.”

“So you are both a Christian and a believer in evolution?”

“That is correct!”

“How does this belief system work out for people with such interesting perspectives like you?”

“Well we look at evolution and believe that this was an incredible creation by God.”

“So if God created evolution, then you are saying that he is the first cause of causes for our existence.”

“Essentially.”

“How does this work out in terms of the Bible?”

“Well I take the Bible to be a wonderful book of how we ought to behave but it wouldn’t make sense to take it all literally. I mean that is how you get extremists that would blow themselves up.”

“So then how do you interpret all of Jesus’ lessons along with his disciples and prophets in the new testament?”

“I think they have a degree of truth to them but at the same time I think some of it is more poetic. I mean also we have to understand that what they were talking about then was pragmatic for that day and time. Things are much more complex now and have evolved so much, like life, and our morals have to as well.”

“So then evolution is a central theme to your belief system?”

“Of course! It is God’s tool for our creation and we must use it to understand the world that he has blessed us with.”

“So then you accept the evidence of evolution completely then, it’s just that God has placed this all in motion. Is he still present in our day to day life?”

“Why not? I don’t know to what extent but I am sure with time this could be answered as to how he does it.”

“So you admit some things are still unknown waiting to be discovered.”

“Absolutely, I am a scientist after all.”

“How is it that you come to the conclusion that God is the first cause?”

“How else do we explain this world and its purposes? It fills a void to many unanswered questions pertaining to why we are here.”

“Why are we here?”

“Same reasons any Christian will give you! To serve God as a token of saying thanks for all his creations.”

“Lets talk about miracles then. Do you believe in miracles?”

“If in fact I accept miracles in the Bible as valid, then I would say it is divine intervention from God. He manipulated his material creation to act desirably for his purpose.”

“So how do you come to believe that he decided to intervene?”

“Well I am a follower of the Bible , and I believe that just because I am a scientist does not mean I do not need that kind of faith which other Christians have. I have faith in God’s work, I just choose to acknowledge evolution as God’s tool.”

“What about the great flood?”

“I don’t believe it covered the whole earth. I don’t think that would be possible, rather more of an isolated area of the world.”

“With divine intervention, would it be possible?”

“Sure but there is no evidence to support that the whole world was actually submerged in water by rain.”

“So you really do think like a scientist, in the sense the realism applies to the operations of our material world.”

“Absolutely.”

“And faith is needed to accept that God is still the creator of all this, and he acts as the initial cause of causes for life as well as a divine intervener.”

“That is correct.”

“So are the ethical systems consistent with the Christian doctrine?”

“To an extent. Sure I use the ten commandments as the foundations of what we ought to act like in most situations, however, like I said our society is more complicated than it was when the ten commandments were written so obviously more attention to the evaluation of moral conduct needs to be reconstructed from time to time. Think about

grammar, vocabulary, and poetic devices. These all are not the same as they once were in the past. Then think about systems of government and communities. These all are also not the same currently in relation to the past. These things had to evolve to improve themselves for the benefit of humanity. So does our belief system in moral evaluation to establish a reasonable and less confusing ethical code.”

“That makes a lot of sense. Now what about the free will that God has supposedly given us? I mean if he created evolution to have a purpose, then how would that tie in to our lives?”

“Well God can alter the course of any action just like in the parting of the sea. He can foresee what we will become and what we will do. He does not control what we do but can look at things as they are coming and going and see what influences they will make on us.”

“So performing a miracle does not make him a cheater in ‘not controlling’ then?”

“Well no because Jesus had to perform miracles to get others to believe, then faith following after.”

“But those people did not have faith, they saw with their own eyes!”

“Sure they saw with their own eyes, but how often can a magician fool you? These days we don’t claim that he really has mystical powers. It is all a trick! It still took a degree of faith to believe that it was the cause of the big man himself.”

“I guess so... So then you would also say Adam and Eve are just a metaphoric representation of the first humans?”

“That’s right.”

“Then would you also say the story of Cain and Abel were metaphoric too?”

“Yes, it was probably a representation of two brotherhoods fighting one another. Perhaps it was the first war like scenario. I cannot say one hundred percent, but that’s how I would interpret it.

“What about the book of revelation?”

“Yes that is an interesting book of the Bible. One I have read many times, but it is still hard to confirm what everything is symbolic of. I mean yes I believe it is another prophecy of some time, but the literature itself is still metaphoric as are most apocalyptic writings.”

“So then how does your scientific investigation believe in an after life, or a heaven?”

“It doesn’t so far. I have faith that there is one to keep me going on this quest for proving God’s existence.”

“I guess you would need it to take on such a hard opposition from the rest of the scientific community.”

“I sure do.”

“Well I wish you the best of luck out there!”

“Yes I do appreciate it. Oh, Jose’s family is coming in right now.” He pointed out.

Jose's family came in and I told them everything that had happened at the lake. They thanked me for taking care of their son and I left shortly after. Charles took me home as planned and I continued studying for finals week. I was a little distracted from studying due to my concern for Jose. Jose came back on the Sunday before finals, with no understanding of why he had a heart attack. The doctors couldn't find an answer. But he had to change his life-style in order to make the best with his life. He had to follow a strict diet and exercise program. Fortunately his finals week was not too rigorous and he was able to catch up on his studying.

Chapter 9: A Final Touch

Acher seemed to be very helpful and supportive of Jose. It was different because it was very unlike him to care for anyone. Jose was a little bitter about why this happened to him, but at least he still maintained a sense of humor about his luck.

It was now finals week and everyone was almost completely antisocial. I was headed to my biology final at two pm that day. The final was not bad at all since I felt really prepared for it. The test took about an hour and a half to complete. As I was turning my test in, I asked my teacher if I could follow him to his office afterwards to talk about a letter of recommendation, for when I apply to graduate school. He agreed to it and so I followed him. We sat in his office talking about my ambitions for the future and how well I did in his class. I had received all A's on his tests and if I kept consistent with this final, I was to expect an A as a final grade.

“Well it looks like you will be getting a strong letter from me,” He said happily to me,

“Anything else you need from me?”

I thought for a minute and figured that I would ask him something, “Professor how would a scientist approach human behavior in comparison to the other disciplines?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well I have spent much time this semester thinking about how ethical evaluations are viewed from different perspectives.”

“Ah well, interestingly enough, as science grows, so will our understanding of human nature. You see attempts from many disciplines, where they all try to explain human

behavior and why we do the things we do. The problem that I have noticed is where these disciplines often try to keep each other separated.”

“How so?”

“As you travel up the level of life’s complexity; most experts try to place their own ‘two cents’ where they are involved, but they are also limited by their relative areas of concern. The scientist will often chime in on the basic sub units of life to the physiology of humans. The psychologist will take on behavior and society. The anthropologist will take on culture. There are other professions that claim their ranges as well. But I think they are all necessary in defining how humans ought to behave. We need to tear down the borders and explore the connectivity between all disciplines.”

“So in your discipline what is the foundation of your ethics and beliefs of human behavior?”

“Well in the world that I have submerged myself in, the area of chemistry and biology, I have sided with evolution and what we accept to be the origin of life. That is the foundation of my beliefs, and both human behavior and ethics stem from it.”

“So concepts of the big bang, natural selection, and other various naturalistic theories that govern our life are our starting point?”

“Precisely, but more so than just concentrating on our species so selfishly-in which us humans like to do so frequently- we must focus on the smallest and simplest component of life itself and build up. Then we can work our way into human behavior and ethical systems.”

“So would an electron be a good place to start?”

“I mean we have tapped into the understanding of things that maybe smaller than the electron that leads to the formation of life, but for the purposes of this discussion, the electron will be a suitable place to start.”

“Alright”

“So if you understand chemistry, you understand that the electron is a component of an element that interacts through electrical interactions, and in harmony with the neutron and proton, it also determines the chemical characteristics of the element?”

“Of course.”

“And in chemical reactions, what is basically the currency for most interactions between elements and compounds?”

“The electrons.”

“And what makes up prokaryotes and eukaryotes?”

“Organic compounds.”

“Well that is a very over generalized approach at defining both simple and complex life.”

“How so?”

“Well we know that it is more than just organic compounds surrounding each other that constitute simple cells. Just examine organelles and the chemical interactions are involved in the functioning of lets say for example a mitochondria, or the chloroplasts or

even the nucleus itself. And we even know for these things to function, it is not just carbon-based molecules that are involved in the reactions that are necessary for life. We have metals such as iron and magnesium that play vital roles as catalysts and other functions, as well as halogens like chlorine which set up the electro-chemical concentration gradients that function in these cells.”

“Point taken.”

“So there is this diverse harmony between the compounds and their behavior that constitute the living structures that makes life possible and more complex.”

“Behaviors? How is that term related to something like an electron or a chemical compound that is not living?”

“Haha! There is a limit to our expression and how we can describe the way life works. Often the scientist is limited by language and has to personify nature through these types of terms. But I guess I can define behavior in this sense to be the observable tendencies in which these electrons, elements and chemicals act in nature; by forming bonds and exchanging electrons and chemical properties with each other to make a new product of some sort.”

“Yea, I guess that makes sense.”

“I must admit it is abstract, but maybe as we continue this discussion it will clear up.”

“Sure.”

“So anyways we can appreciate the complexity of how our nature works at the micro level, from the electron to the element, from the element to the compound, from the

compound to the organelle, from the organelle to the cell. Now we must look at how cells work together in a community to allow for the functioning of an organ or an organism. All cells signal to one another for many things such as environmental factors or needs. Therefore communication is essential to life just as it is for the cell as it is for us. But let me ask why do cells express this habit of communication?"

"For survival?"

"Yes and if they don't communicate then their chances of survival and reproducing will decrease."

"So everything that happens in nature is to ensure survival and is that the point of this science lesson?"

"Basically, and what has lead us to continue behaviors that benefit our survival are in every gene in our cells."

"How does this account for people out of the norm, lets say serial killers?"

"Well every organism has a way of fixing something that goes wrong in its environment. The cells have organelles that clean up waste and corruption in the cell, much like how we have police and judicial system. And just like our legal system, not every malfunctioning part of a cell, organ, or specie gets fixed right away..... Or even ever!"

"Like terminal illnesses, or cancer playing the role of a criminal sentenced as innocent or a the emergence of a gang?"

"So my analogy makes sense?"

“Yea I think so.”

“Sometimes it can be hard for the scientist to explain his concepts in metaphoric words.”

“Well, so we have this preliminary foundation that our behavior should be in the aim to ensure survival of both our specie and ourselves. So how do we account for human nature? Complex methods of communication? Or emotions?”

“Allow me to answer these to the best of my abilities one at a time!”

“Sorry! I just got a little excited.” I laughed.

“Human nature is really similar to that of primates, with several advancements. Each primate in its society has its own personality and role in the group but they all function together in a society. They even have their own hierarchy as a communal structure and the individual has its own personal preferences. We even have similarities to bees in the complex formation of networking and working as a whole to benefit the community. Even bees have a form of judgment.”

“How so?”

“Well when bees decide to leave their hive to create a new one, they have a specific set of working bees that are responsible to search for new locations. They compete in finding the best of all possible locations to begin their society. Once a bee lands at a possible destination, they have sort of a ritualistic dance that has a specific duration, which rates the location. Lets say one bee thinks the place is mediocre, then he will perform his dance for a few seconds, where as the bee who finds the best of all locations, then he will dance for a significantly longer duration.”

“That’s incredible!”

“If there is a tie, I imagine they chose the more convenient location to travel.”

“That makes sense.”

“That as a side note, back to the nature of species! We often try to specify what our nature really means, but I really think that it is weighing possibilities that aim to continue survival. I mean yea we make the choice in which I can choose to swat a fly or not..... or so I believe I do, however if I choose to do so, I probably did it because it annoyed me and disturbed my quality of life in terms of comfort.”

“Not to sound wicked, but I believe I have killed a fly just to kill it, with no intentional purpose.”

With a grin he continued,“ I would assume you did that because subconsciously you wanted to demonstrate your power over the fly to prove something to yourself, or maybe you were entertaining the dark side in which we all have, both assumptions leading to satisfying yourself to give you the perception of a better quality of life.”

“So we pursue actions to either prolong survival and to improve the quality of our life?”

“Yes. It makes sense since we always show growth in technological advancements.”

“How would this hold for animals other than humans?”

“Well, consider primates. Some primates are capable of utilizing tools to serve what ever purpose of their will.”

“For example?”

“Lets say there is a seed in a shell or something under the dirt. Some primates will use a rock or something similar to obtain the nut through the act of smashing or digging. There are even videos of a monkey using a stick to find out how deep a body of water is. This shows where we get our instincts from to make life more convenient.”

“What about another animal, not so closely related to humans?”

“Try a canine! Perfect example, through domestication, canines have learned that life is much simpler to rely on humans to provide for them, unlike hyenas. Dogs have learned to please their owners so that they may live full and joyful lives without having to actually work and hunt, which can be endangering to their own lives.”

“And we too have learned to appreciate their companionship because of their ability to train them for miscellaneous work.”

“Best example is a sheep herding dog: a symbiotic relationship that is derived from simpler organisms in nature that share this relationship. What is interesting is that there is nothing that first comes from a religion that tells us to be a self-controlled society and not to harm one another’s. I believe it is already transcribed in our DNA and was in nature before any religion or the idea of a deity was considered. All our habits and judgments resemble things that occur in nature before homo sapien was a specie. Ours are really just further evolved.”

“That makes sense. But what about concepts like business and economy?”

“That is still continuing the same theme, all that is derived from situations in nature. Consider that in all chemical exchanges, the currency is the electron. All chemicals

involved change a feature about itself after the reaction is complete, much like the person making a bank transfer to buy something. Like the law that states matter can neither be created nor destroyed, the net reaction between the two people in a transaction is constant in the grand scheme of the net reaction. Where one person decreases, the other person increases in money in the bank. None of the money was destroyed or lost. Back to the analogy, when the consumer buys something he gains another property that defines him. Much like the chemical reaction in which chemicals can both lose and obtain new properties.”

“I can see that. But money is created and matter is not so how does that analogy hold relevant fundamentally?”

“The original source of what makes money is what?”

“What do you mean?”

“Money is really a simple representation of property. Previously it represented how much gold was owned. But it is inconvenient to haul gold around so it became represented by paper. So now I ask what are properties of gold made up of?”

“Matter..... So now I get your reasoning. But what for the economy?”

“Same principles really. But in nature lets look at how the cell operates. You have the golgi apparatuses, which exemplifies the factory of the cell due to the import and export of products. We have carrier organelles, which transport products all over the cell to and from the golgi apparatus. We have the nucleus, which acts like the regulation of every process through using the endoplasmic reticulum and other proteins as ways to relay

messages all over the cell in the form of proteins. All of which use each other to make what ever the cell needs. The cell represents the entire idea of economy, in which many factors play their role in being a part of productivity for the cells and keeping it alive. All a harmonious effort, which like everything else has its hic ups.”

“Very true!”

“So I guess basically what I am saying, is what most religions try to preach on how we ought to act is seen already in nature. Nature already programmed us to act with decency, live within moderation, and not to harm others unless necessary. There is nothing in a higher realm with a big guy up in the clouds looking upon you about it!”

“So then why do you think religion evolved?”

“Honestly as a form of control. It is easier for a simple person to understand religion then even care to understand about science.”

“So deception then is also coded in us?”

“Sure! Consider animals that can play injured to capture its prey or the chameleon deceiving its predator.”

“So would you say we are equally coded to be good and bad?”

“I don’t know if we can quantify in terms of equal, more, or less. But I do think it is situational based. It will be determined based on the influence on the quality of life or survival whether we will chose the action that will be qualified as good or bad. People believe that it is wrong to lie, but I bet if your life is in danger, more than likely you will lie. If you are starving to near death and an opportunity comes to steal a piece of food,

your natural instincts, to take what you need, will kick in more than likely. What is more interesting is how we come to believe that we actually know what is good and bad.”

“And how do you classify that?”

“Here is the major deference between the scientist and the religious person. We are not afraid to say, we are not at the point yet to be capable of offering an answer as complex as that. In time I believe we honestly will, but right now not so much. That’s how we try to motivate our youth. To be the next brains to further advance our society to further define life’s boundaries, to answer the unanswered, and to continue our evolution. But one thing is for sure, what is good and bad only exists in our minds but nature doesn’t consider anything as bad or good. Things just happen and are limited only by the laws of nature. One can never break these laws unlike the laws of man. If the world was destroyed we would say that is a bad thing, but how can nature give such properties?”

“We are a product of nature aren’t we? And if we are capable then maybe that is nature’s way of defining how things ought to be.”

“That is an interesting point and is exactly what you youth are supposed to do! Utilize the knowledge from the predecessor as in right now as a stepping-stone. Go and prove your claim. Show us the error in our logic, if capable, or improve the knowledge we have today and make society better! That is the aim of all scientists, to improve our society through the understanding of the universe we exist in! And that is what I will leave you with today!”

“Fair enough. Thank you for sharing your knowledge with me and for writing a letter for me too.”

“No problem!”

I believed I left on a good note with my professor and walked happily back to my car to go home. The rest of the week I finished up my exams, and felt pretty good about the rest of them too. Interestingly I woke up the morning before I was to return to my dad’s for a week, I woke up to a voicemail. It was from my mother. She said how guilty she felt for walking out on me and would like to see me before the summer semester started. She also added that my siblings were very excited to hear from me too. This made me feel a little emotional in the sense that I was very happy and relieved. I figured I would save this conversation for the drive home tomorrow. Now it was time for a long due night out with the roommates as finals were now over.

In a summary of events that happened on that night; Acher was actually more responsible than usual in terms of controlling his smartass remarks, Jose was our designated driver, and Charles was the blacked-out obnoxious fool. As for me, I just played it cool, due to the fact that I wanted to remember this night before I went back home for a while. I am not saying I didn’t have several drinks, but I was still more than functional. The night ended with a few followers staying over after a little after party back at our place. A very good ending to this semester to say the least!

Chapter 10: All My Work Shattered?

That next morning I woke up around eleven to finish up some packing. I got on the road by twelve and called my mom shortly after I got on the interstate. She was happy to hear from me and invited me over for the next day. I happily agreed and she then told me some family would be over. I talked about my educational experiences during this semester and also a little bit about my personal side project. She agreed that it was very interesting, and wanted to hear about what I have learned. I mentioned the different disciplines that I had talked with, though she couldn't understand why I cared so much about the topic, she still was happy that I was happy with my discoveries.

About an hour after I finished my phone conversation with my mom, I arrived home to my dad's place. He was happy to hear about a successful academic semester and he noticed something more mature about me. He claimed that he could tell that I did a lot of growing up that semester. We went out to eat that night in celebration that I was home and spent the whole night talking about my side research. While he thought that it was a meaningful quest, he also thought it was never going to be concluded. And maybe he was right to think that, but nonetheless it was all worth the while.

That next day I drove to my mother's house, which was about an hour and a half away to see the rest of my family. My little sister rushed through my family to give me a hug, and following her were my two brothers. We all ate and talked on the front porch, catching up with each other's lives. I couldn't have been happier to be here. Around the time everyone was starting to leave, it was just my uncle and I on the front porch smoking a cigar.

“Tell me Armen, with getting kicked out of one university and doing so well in another, what did you learn most from it?” He asked curiously. My uncle had never been to college and so he was always very curious about things like this that he had missed out on. He was also the more open-minded person of my family.

“Well I am not too sure what would be considered the biggest thing that I have learned. I guess you could say that it was tolerance of other people’s perspectives.” I told him.

“In what way?”

“Well I came to believe that we all have reasons for believing what we do, which in turn are the reasons that we believe what is the right way we should act.”

“Such as?”

“Well there are those that believe there is a high power governing us, and others that simply don’t. Both perspectives give people different reasons for behaving with morality.”

“Sure. So what reasons are there for those who don’t believe in a higher power?”

“Simply to continue survival and to see what happens next.”

“And for the person that does believe in a higher power?”

“Simply to serve God for all the blessings they feel that He has given them?”

“Doesn’t seem like you need much of an education to come to these conclusions.”

“Well sure it doesn’t, but what we have to understand is that the foundation of our beliefs are necessary to be questioned, otherwise we don’t really understand why we believe them. I have learned that most people are conditioned into their beliefs and that all beliefs must grow as the person does.”

He kind of looked awkwardly at me after I had said this, “What do you mean?”

“Well I mean that the reason why most people have the same beliefs they did growing up, such as the idea of a benevolent god, is because it was conditioned into their heads as they were maturing. Conditioning can be so effective for some people that they never question it past a certain age. They just block other views permanently out of their heads.”

“So then what do you believe?”

“I believe that my ethics stem from a naturalized perspective. As of right now at least, I still have my questions though.”

“What does a naturalized perspective mean?”

“That every reason why I should behave with moral decency are right here in this material world.”

“Material world?”

“Like Earth. There is no divinity or concepts like spirits that take part in anything.”

“Hm...So you are one of ‘those something came from nothing’ followers now. Eh I love you either way.”

“Thanks I appreciate that.”

“So tell me more about your naturalized ethical theories.”

“Well what do you want me to talk about?”

“Why should I accept it as a valid theory?”

“Because every evidence for it is right here in this world. You don’t need to have the same kind of faith that you need for lets say Christianity.”

“How are these faiths different?”

“Well the Christian faith is more like a blind faith, and the naturalized faith is more like a guided faith.”

“What is this guided faith?”

“I guess it would be something like I could say that I have direction or more of a map to use as guidance. Like I have more foresight with it, and I can play with it more. Where as blind faith has no side rails on its stairs.”

“Hm... It sounds to me as if blind faith is simpler.”

“And maybe so.”

“So then what is a good act in a naturalized system?”

“Isn’t much different then in a deity based system. The bigger difference is the motive. Both beliefs lead to righteous acts, it is their motives that make the acts different.”

“Motives?” He asked looking puzzled.

“Well a person who believes in God would say his motive for acting good is to receive God’s reward of eternal life. Where as the person who does not believe in God would say their motive is just to enjoy this life and make it better for their next generation, and ultimately make it better for the survival of mankind.”

“Huh. I guess that makes sense? But I don’t know I guess I am just an old dog now days. Can’t teach me anything new.”

“Yea but I am sure you some of this can get you questioning a little bit right?”

“Why do I want to question anything? I am completely content with my beliefs.”

“Well as long as you are I guess.”

“Life as I know it doesn’t really concern itself with any of this. As long as you pay your bills, taxes, and debt, your are morally fine in this country. And also as long as you don’t go killing people for no reason.”

“Huh?”

“What I am trying to say is that the real world doesn’t care about any of this.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because even if the top intellectuals spend their time in their ivory tower rooms, they aren’t going to convince the rest of the ninety nine point nine percent of the population very well.”

“I guess I never really considered that thought of how this mindset could be unappealing to the rest of the world. I just figured everyone kind of cared.”

And I will end this story with my uncle's last sarcastic comment to me of the night, "And I figured you wasted a lot of time and money in college!"