

“...child, a man who dies for his country for his country dies because he likes it as surely as a man eats pickled cabbage because he likes it. It is a law of creation. If it were possible for men to prefer pain to pleasure the human race would have long since become extinct.”

- W. Somerset Maugham

For the sake of argument, let's say you are a man named Mr. Aldous. You, Mr. Aldous, are magnificent. You, Mr. Aldous, are unblemished — not a single evidence of tarnish on your body. You, Mr. Aldous, are intensely hungry. Much to your dismay, Mr. Aldous, you are a living being, and living beings need to fuel that dark and forbidden magic which propels what we might call existence — hence hunger (so they say). That fuel, that propellant (so they say) typically measures in “calories” — or so those witchdoctors, the so-called nutritionists, biologists, chemists and the like tend to claim. They will say to you, with a learned finger in the air and eyes sniffing through textbooks written by hacks just as unqualified as they, that the food you consume, the hunger you feel, are, as a certainty of fact, not a curse upon your soul. They will say to you with their shapeless faces and flat looks that hunger is a *necessity*, that it reminds the wants of the self to align with the needs of the body, that it is not a curse, that “sir, it's perfectly natural to get hungry, sir.” With no semblance of irony will they thrust upon you their diplomas and certificates — no doubt written and signed and presented by and to themselves — as an attestation of their learnedness and an indictment of your ignorance. They will look on at you and your hunger and say to you that you “must” eat!

One must consider it logically: it's simply a law of thermodynamics. The purpose of eating is merely the means by which the human body takes in the energy requisite to allow for the exercise of one's will upon it: if one wishes to run, one's body must first contain sufficiently the potential chemical energy that would allow for such an exertion. Humans are cars, for both need fuel. Such an impulse is necessary, therefore, for cavemen have no concept of thermodynamics or the laws therein, and thus must be prompted by some mechanism so that they may not fall victim to that which they cannot yet understand. It follows, then, that such impulses are outdated: they are relics, fossils, appendices, tailbones. It is not so unlike that human instinct for tribalism: that which protected sheepherding clans of nomads from foreign threat twenty-five thousand years ago now in the common era spills arbitrary blood in the name of race, nationality, religion, eye color, and shape of hand. Indeed, in the noble pursuit for progress, it is found that this animalistic hatred toward the “other” must be suppressed, for it stands an impediment towards the divinity promised the species you are blessed with membership of. You've found it curious, therefore, why this same logical framework is not applied to all of humanity's characteristics. Why are certain primacies suppressed, and others encouraged? Why is it that racists are vilified, but McDonald's is allowed — indeed encouraged by some —

to rape and pillage cow farmers (both the cows and the farmers) in places like Paraguay and elsewhere so that its supply of single-dollar garbage food remains accessible to those with constitutions too weak to resist? It is particularly curious when one considers that mechanisms exist for a continuous stream of the calories and nutrients necessary for survival, without submitting to that degraded and molesting urge to eat, and eat, and eat. You are not vermin. Divinity is the calling, and all of one's actions must be in that pursuit.

“With all due respect Mr. Aldous, I'm not asking. You need to feed your dog, sir. I'm obligated to call the appropriate authorities otherwise.” says the veterinarian, interrupting a certain train of thought. The world floods back in, and you process once more yet as if for the first time the white fluorescent bone-rattle of the lights in the office of the veterinarian whose oppressive presence offends your sensibilities so; he stands in front of you: arms as hostile and crossed as the expression on his short, stocky face. The dog in question, a fine creature of mixed breeding, sits poised and at attention, its elegance and refinement putting to shame the man there.

Being the properly disciplined person that you are, your mood is disturbed only minimally. You can see what you believe is righteous indignation on a pale face, and you decide to forgive the transgression — so blatantly it is written on the silly contortions his face makes that he utterly lacks the will to suppress such primitivities as anger and outrage. An indulgent one, this man — overly so — and not nearly as subtle. Such a man is exactly the type of person most offended by you, the most likely to reject violently even the mere mention of the idea of you; and here you have confronted him: it is pure inevitability he submits to the baseness of his nature. So you forgive the offense. Once more you restart your defense from the beginning, though naturally you understand that this particular make of person is not much deserving of this kind of effort from you, and you allow the exasperation in your voice to communicate as much. Perhaps it is pity of the parental sort that motivates you, or obligation or something — whatever it is one calls that inclination to vanquish the ignorance of children.

So you explain: you explain that, sir, you would hazard a good guess that the responsibilities of his profession do not include unsolicited outrage, and that perhaps he is better suited to remain in the realm of the physician, where he is likely most comfortable — how unseemly it is for a professional to break professionalism! An awful look, truly. You confess as well your belief that he must have neglected to consider, after all, that you came motivated by your duty as an animal owner to seek treatment for the leg your animal broke — you did not come for a lecture, certainly not from him. With a sternness you remind the short-thoughted veterinarian that you, a free man

of the anthropocene, personally reserve all the rights so largely agreed upon as standard in a civilized society like this one: including those guaranteeing man's right to own animals — provided, of course, one accepts that particular burden of responsibility. And had you not demonstrated as such? He, the veterinarian, the man of science that he is, said so himself: the dog is of a healthy weight; its coat shines galactically; elixirous vigor spills from its eyes. Only off-handedly was it mentioned that you did not feed the animal — never did, in fact. Had you withheld that information, it is almost a certainty that the good vet would have proceeded in treating the limp without delay — so what, then, could possibly be the matter? It is frozen fact that the dog is in top condition, what does it matter if it is not fed?

Almost imperceptibly, confusion invaded rage and drove it out. You can see that the veterinarian fancies himself an intelligent man, for his face seems uncertain in how to display stupefaction. He sputters, tripping over his words, “Mr. Aldous, I don't understand... you really don't... feed her?”

You confirm that, indeed, you do not.

He hesitates for a moment, “...this five-year-old dog... has never been fed?”

Not while in your possession.

His face twists in confused response. Poor man, he can't even tell if you're joking, if he's being had — though you clearly aren't and he clearly isn't. It's not often a man literally does not know what to think. He has lost entirely his logical bearings — a blind man in a maze spun round, and round, and round. You pity his simplicity almost as much as you are disgusted by it.

It's clear the vet is impeded entirely from moving forward with the task at hand, that is to say treating the animal's limp, by the paradox of the healthy-yet-never-fed dog. Prickling annoyance trickles out from some hidden crevice: God, how you abhor it when you are forced to justify and explain and legitimize yourself to the prying eyes of unthinking inhumans like this veterinarian — as if he would understand! And of course it's always those who lack a capacity for understanding in the first place who demand, absolutely and like a toddler, that you spoon-feed them that understanding and wipe their mouths and burp them too and rock them to sleep afterwards, no less, and when they wake up they'll bitch about how they hate the taste! But no matter, of course. Men like the veterinarian can seldom bear it when they fall into a circumstance that shatters a law they hold in inviolability — best to shatter as little as possible. Catching your annoyance by the tail, you place it under your boot and step on it.

In very plain terms (for his sake), you state that it's simply an IV drip — a formula, not so dissimilar to that which sustains coma patients, calibrated with discerning exactitude precisely to fit the needs of your animal and administered (to the utmost of humanness, of course) three times a day: 8am, 2pm, 8pm, specifically.

You observe no release in tension in the vet's — face scrunched as it is by confoundment — even after showing the hypodermic pockmarks on the animal's back left leg and your front right forearm. It may have scrunched further still, actually. But you're through explaining yourself; a silent standoff ensues. The bones still rattle in the lights.

At last, it's the veterinarian who breaks first, the under-disciplined mongrel that he is: "Mr. Aldous, I've practiced veterinary medicine for nearly fifteen years. In those fifteen years... I have never, ever seen a more... *miserable* dog," he says, accusation loaded and fired like a cannon. He shoots a horrified and quivering gaze at the coat that blinds in its opulence; at the vigor spilling from eyes that look but do not see; at the forced refinement and unnatural elegance. The dog, having moved an imperceptible inch in forty minutes, breathes shallowly, as if needless noise-making inspires within it a gripping nausea. Looked at too long one perceives it to be almost taxidermied, such is the depth of its freakish purity.

"Now I'll be honest I can't tell if this is some sick joke you're playing on me — in all my days, I've never heard someone joke about starving their pet — but you seem completely serious." He pauses to allow confusion to evict and firmness to enter his voice. The vet goes on, "It's beyond all my understanding, but as it is (and I can't even believe I have to say this) that's animal abuse," his face reddens as his conviction grows, and he explodes righteously, "and the *grossest* example of it at that! How could you possibly think that's acceptable? Where are you from? Is it acceptable to starve dogs there? I get that it's healthy, but have you looked at it? Ever? Do you look at your dog? For Christ's sake you don't even need to, you can feel the dog's pain, the poor goddamn thing..." He pauses, disturbed by the sight of the dog, its proximity to him. "Christ... it barely even breathes. I don't know what to say... I have never seen cruelty this criminal."

You feel the slapping, salted sting of insult on your cheek. Misery? Cruelty? Criminality? Is that what he sees? Is that *all* he sees? What a damned, sightless fool! What a dark and blinded existence he must lead! What poor and undignifying shallowness of mind! He would have cried "vulgar!" at the debut of the *Olympia*; he would have snubbed a Beethoven as a blasphemer; he would have indicted Prometheus for his sinful show of kindness to man!

What an implication! Rage hugs you; offense flashes scarlet and you go deaf — for you see his mouth move, yet they bear no words. Does he really think you that neglectful, that heartless? Are the efforts and the pains you take to sustain the animal's lifestyle not obvious? How sticky is the wax in his mind's ear that he cannot hear the yelps of pain three times a day when its leg is stuck with the hypodermic, though you try (God, how you try) to be gentle? When your dog sits and stares blankly at a wall for the entirety of its waking day — does he think you're not affected, that you feel no guilt? What does he think goes through your mind when it is late, late dusk and you are unable to sleep, held in cryogenic suspension only by the hoarse howling outside your bedroom door? How impertinent must one be to view the pursuit of a purity so deep as an indulgence of sociopathy? What of the nobility of it? This man whose worldview is razor-narrow, how thin must his skin be to condemn so fundamentally and on instinct all that lies outside of it? How dissonant is his cognition that he can admit a poverty of understanding and yet in the same breath attack so shamelessly that which he finds incomprehensible! How stupid is the ant that condemns the skyscraper! How stupid, how small!

But no matter. Stupid, small minds frighten easily, that's all. He doesn't understand, that's all.

The vague lifts from your eyes and you see thus the man in front of you; a rotten red complexion; a vacuum of the eyes; a silent, moving mouth forming words not by sound of throat but by shape of lip and flight of spit. Perhaps you might have heard had rage not deafened you. With a communist revolution of the will, you seize the anger you feel by the neck, and squeeze with your marble hands.

Calmed, your hearing is first to return. Gradually, like an approaching train, you make out the sounds of the words his mute mouth molds:

“...and I don't care! There will be consequences! It's unjustifiable... no, unacceptable! And you're in no position — you have no right to argue! I can't even belie—”

“Give him a treat.”

Your voice brakes the vet, the gelatinous fat under his skin lurching forward as it would in a violent deceleration. He looks at you as one does when another takes an unwinnable gamble; his eyes scrunch forth, squinting at the splayed bluff you've laid out before him.

“That one there. With the bacon. Give it one. Go ahead, test your convictions.” You point at an excited, yappy-looking dog, smiling proudly in mascotic representation of a certain cheese-and-bacon-flavored comestible

glee. The cheap plasti-blue packaging, on which the animal lives out its depiction, wails out “Canine Carry Outs” in red print. Repulsion sweeps you; you make no mistake of it, that playing-upon of those emotions of pet-ownership, the faux and see-through reassurances. You can imagine with clarity some immiserating and negligent half-human — with a similarly neglected and miserable mongrel at their side — resting easy in the paralyzing comfortable complicity of a LA-Z-BOY recliner; skin stuck to leather; legs in atrophy; eyes, immobile, in rapture, glued to a flatscreen; the rot-and-mold miasma of old pizza and hot garbage circumambulating; plagued — by lethargy, by undiscipline, by mindlessness. You imagine them turning a swollen face to gaze upon their wen of an animal, a ballooned hand outstretched for the petting of it. You imagine the contentedness they must feel then, running their paws through mats of fur, the little body shivering beneath from the piss and shit it must hold in until that time in which its owner finds the drive to open a backyard door.

“There’s a good boy,” you hear the blob of flesh say to the other, “there’s a good, *good* boy.”

The crinkle of package resounds as it’s snapped open and a morsel of greasy, powdery meat is extracted.

“Does good boy want a treat? Yes? Treat? Treat for good boy? Treat?” whines the infantish intonations of the half-human, the gleaming meat nugget held by clumsy thumb and forefinger. You see the animal’s nose perk up, embraced by the warm sick-smell; and you see too the half-human, drooling in retrogressive greed, its appetite adjacently stirred by the observed ravenousness with which their dog eyed the treat. You note the weighing of a decision in the light lit behind the eyes. Though before the seed of that thought could germinate, the animal had quickly devoured the brownish lump. At last the face softens; content with satisfaction.

“Yeah you like that treat don’t you? You do, don’t you, good boy? You do, don’t you?” the mass mutters monotonously. Pride conquers the face. Eyes droop, heavy with the morphine of charity. You shudder at the filth.

“These?”

“Yes.”

The pachydermic doctor looks at you, eyes still in suspicious scrunch.

“Here, then. You give her one. Prove it.”

A hand outstretched, pregnant with the perditious package, offers itself to you.

You did not expect this. A wave of bilious disgust overcomes you. You smell the stench of shame and degradation, avarice and immodesty, rot and mold and fear — blind, inexplicable, paranormal fear. You grasp finally the blue pack, feeling through the plastic the uniform meat grommets contained within. Humiliation mounts you, your breath stertorous, for your mind cannot process the dirt of the situation you now find yourself in. A hand, uncontrolled by the mind, cracks the ziplocked opening of the bag and a strong, hurricane wind seemed to wave away the nausea, and you happen upon equanimity breathtaking and incredible; a nirvana of the type you are certain is shared by none other than Abraham as he laid his son upon the butcher's table, the cleaver held in tension above the neck — but only for a moment, for you lost your senses the instant that rose odor foisted itself upon you. Your hearing runs away, the sound of the crinkling plastic and humming lights seeming now to come from round a distant corner. A numbing of the body pervades, akin to that preceding sleep's loss of consciousness, so that it's not so long until you cannot even decipher the position of your limbs. Your sight — choppy and pixelated. In actuality, the only thing you *can* feel is the deluge of the mouth of sticky, thick, salty syrup of saliva, and the pounding, pounding, pounding atavistic wails of hunger welling up from deep within and its violent pressing-on of your skin, your skull, your chest, your genitals; the hulking hand of starvation hoisting you by the spindliness of your gut. Between a thumb and forefinger you grasp a meaty morsel. Tension in your forearm exerts a pressure on the greasy thing as you extend it in offering to your mutt, and a knob of oil slides down the side of your finger, spores of hungry sweat sprouting like weeds around the path forged. Worms and parasites overwhelm your cognition, and all that occurs to you — all that *can* occur to you — is their satisfaction. You fantasize illicitly, arousedly, erotically the bite, the chew, the swallow, the flavor, the aroma, the texture. You could eat it. You could. It would be easy too — pretend to drop it, perhaps, and stuff it in your mouth before that primate in front of you notices, and then in a sleight of hand take out another from the bag and make as if you'd simply plucked it from the ground for your dog. Ah, the dog!

You are made aware suddenly, as if you had heard the drop of a pin in a silent room, of the presence of the animal. You can see its outline, and, though unclear by sight, you make out by feel the hating ice-fire of the animal gaze, that freezer-burning stare burrowing a hole in your spine, in your heart. A gaze that drags your hypocrisies out into the sun for you to scorch your eyes on; a gaze that melts. You observe clearly the light of understanding, and you hear the mockery implied. It is the mockery that gazes, and it gazes upon *you*; the ignoble, sad, deluded man who feels the shameful desire to eat not just food but the food of animals; the hiding hypocrite no holier than the



half-human; the pouty overgrown child clinging to his puerile notions and absurdities; the cat-in-heat; the slave of urge — indeed, it sees you. Locked in that leer, its sight is fixed — it makes no movement towards the meat, though centimeters from its mouth it may be. Drool does not run down its jowls; its nose does not sniff the air; a cold stare only — exactly per its training, and with a greater mastery than you could ever practice. Its coat blinds galactically, its eyes vomit vigor; and it hates the blasphemer. Though you cannot see, shame forces down your gaze back onto the food, and you're deafened by the wailing skirls.

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The drive home is a manic affair.

The veterinarian, twenty minutes before, had not perceived that bout of hysteria. He had not perceived anything out of the ordinary, as a matter of fact — your body, divorced from the turmoil of your mind, did not behave in a manner reflective of that panicking. He only saw thus the dog and its un-reaction to the food offered, judging therefore his wrongness and your rightness. For the evidence was clear: the dog is healthy, its misery existent in appearance only — its owner (“real fuckin’ weirdo” as he will so relate to his wife) claims to not feed it, but you surely must have been rambling, he reasoned, or it was a miscommunication of some absurd sort, seeing how it refused flatly what so many of its species go mad over. Didn’t even sniff the air around it. So, he concluded then the existence of a non-threat — nothing to invoke the tacit tattling privileges of the healthcare provider. You were sent on your merry way not so long thereafter, for it was found that the dog had merely bruised its leg — and not very seriously at that — explaining therefore the teetering limp you’d flagged for inspection.

Oh, but that drive home... Never before had your mind been so *knocked* as it had then, not even during that time in which you lived like that half-human you had envisioned in that office. Ten minutes from your house, it occurs to you that, since the moment you’d sworn them off, you’d not thought about wallowing in those sins of consumption — until that terrible scene at that office. It occurs to you too, two minutes thereafter, that even in those black times whence you had indulged regularly those urges, never before have they plunged you down to depths so hollow as they did a few minutes before; not even the commonman drools over dog food, for all their filth. Seven minutes away, the vague feeling of pride at having resisted the temptation wisped away as a weak fog would in a stiff wind; because it occurs to you that, had the vet not spoken when he did, you would have stuffed your face. You would have distended your cheeks — like a rodent — like a dog — with five of the goddamned things. You were

saved by the bell — by the grace of a laughing god — and nothing else. It was inevitable like suffering. The train had run away and you, the intemperate invertebrate, believed your standing on the tracks as force sufficient to stop it. And oh, God, the agony of having to put that stinking radioactive lump back in the bag! It could've killed you — indeed, you curse your constitution that it did not.

Three minutes away, you notice your dog staring a pitiless stare, that of the beaten son gazing upon the unconscious figure of his drunkard father.

One minute out and your doubts grow existential: what is the point in the life that you lead? What is the point in the manner by which you lead it? What is the point in shackling yourself to this ascetic hell, if you are yet still shackled too by that urge to subhumanism? You were promised release from the needs of the material — control of them, at the very least; mastery of your primacies, you were promised, would imbue you with a control of the will and of the mind total and absolute. But now your stomach grumbles insanely, haunted by hollow hunger, quaked by that which lies beyond you and your sense, your sight, your purview. And what is the point of that seeing and sensing, that being and living, if you cannot use them to kill this simple hunger and its kin, those that grow further still like a weed, rapid and exponentiating, this pittedness that plants its roots in your skin and grows from the crevices of your body? What is the point in strength if it cannot overpower weakness? Thirty seconds away, you're awash with forbidden fantasy. You fantasize about eating: the grass on the sidewalk, the pebbles next to them, the bark on the trees, the cement of the bridge you're on, the river mud beneath. With each flashing image of fancy grows the certainty of your indulging in them. Where has all that abstinent strength abandoned you? You know the answer: it was never there. Temptation is not resisted, you realize, it is avoided. Is that not why you cancelled your TV, bolted your windows, and shunned your societies — so you can avoid what you know you cannot resist? And not just that which must be resisted itself, but anything that might have to do with it — its mention, its depiction. That is not strength, that is cowardice. You are not pure, you are a pig. The instant you exit the car, twelve seconds from now, you will feast on clods of dirt like an earthworm — just as blindly, just as blankly.

No, actually. You're done now. In the fifteen seconds remaining as you pull into your driveway, you find a new steel of resolve, one forged in spite. You *will* be king, the sole dictate of yourself, and if not you, then no one else. You will not submit, like some common whore. You are the Red Army, and by God you will incinerate every last town, village and city if it means the fascists starve to death in their advance.

But how? Do you cut off your hands? So that you cannot feed yourself? Hack off the lower jaw, make impossible the indulgence of it all? There are pliers in the flat, somewhere, could you take them to your teeth? Would that work, you wonder? Perhaps it would not be painful enough — though you doubt the existence of suffering sufficiently penitent. If that's the case, then, you'll have to make do. Seven seconds, and you're pulling into your driveway, plans swimming in your head.

But what if, after the fact, nothing is fixed? What if, after the fact, you're still plagued by those perversions? After all, that is what you're endeavoring to neutralize, that is where your suffering lies, that is the object to be castrated — not your jaw, not your hands, not your teeth. That kind of suffering is a hunter of persistence, it follows the human condition whether it be mutilated or complete. No, it is that sad sack of tissue found behind the eyes that is to blame; that impure, poor, slow stone machine, obsolete since agriculture's advent. That unfinished prototype of a prototype of a prototype — *that* is what must be controlled, and if not controlled then spayed, and if not spayed then annihilated.

It is the hypothalamus, in particular. Located at the center of the object called the brain, it is the central command for desires primitive and unclean — those of gluttony, sex, wrath; it is Satan inherited, and the manifestation of his seven sins.

It's settled then. This is what must be done. In two and a half seconds you will take it upon yourself to rid the world of another of its great evils. You spot the brick wall you will smash your head against, the immovable brick wall that will stop the merelessness of your sprinting head-first at it again and again, your skull denting, your vision hazing, your consciousness slipping, your hunger dissipating — it's a euphoria. You can see bits of brain hanging in silent decoration already.

How curious it is, though, the characteristic rapidity with which feelings of that type vanish. Into thin air, as if they had never existed. Stepping out of the car, you feel at absolute ease. A gentle breeze blows. The wails in your stomach quiets, the racing of your mind slows, and for all that is practical it is as if the events of the last hour had never transpired. You search and find your asceticism right where it always is, as rigid as it ever was.

A dull crack reverberates through the air.

So does another.

And a third. And a fourth, and a fifth — and then a silence, coming from the wall of bricks.

A gentle breeze blows, your stomach does not wail, your mind does not race, there are bits of brain  
decorating a brick wall, and the dog is the muralist.

