

Excerpts from:

# THE VAMPIRE'S GUIDE TO AN ETHICAL LIFE

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**Fact 1:** *If you're reading this guide, you kill to live. You're a murderer. You'll be a murderer as long as you live.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** Vampires can't be vegetarians or vegans. They can't avoid killing humans.

The symptoms of withdrawal you've experienced when you've tried this are real warnings.

(Almost everyone tries abstention when first waking up.) Eventually you'll die if you keep it up, eventually you'll die in great agony. And not quickly. (Caged vampires have died in just this way. More than once.)

Near as we can tell, vampires are *designed* to kill humans.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** That you must kill humans in order to live, in order to avoid dying in great agony, doesn't justify your act of killing humans. Not all by itself, anyway. Maybe you *should* die in great agony, maybe that's the right thing for you to do. No overwhelming need to do anything ever makes doing it right. (Not all by itself anyway.)

If a man points a gun at your head and says he'll kill you if you don't choose whether to have Gloria or Matilda murdered, it doesn't follow that you are right to choose between Gloria and Matilda instead of letting him kill you instead. An unintelligent animal always kills what it kills automatically, without much thought, without making an ethical decision about the matter. An unintelligent animal never does anything right. Or wrong.

You are an intelligent animal. You are aware of the moral dimensions of your actions. You are aware of the differences between killing something insentient (like a plant), killing something sentient (like an animal), and killing something intelligent that plans its days and nights rather than moving through them like mindless weather. You understand the gravity of killing something that has fears and hopes and cares, killing something that understands the finality of death in ways that go beyond the animal panic that anything sentient will feel whenever it's threatened. (Bugs are *not* afraid of *dying*.)

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary on the third sentence:** Vampires *may* be immortal. (Who knows? No one *has* lived forever yet. We'll let you know as soon as we hear about anyone who does.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary on the third sentence:** Vampires aren't dead. And they're not "undead" either. Whatever could *that* mean? A vampire is a *transformed* human. And if we knew anything more about what it means to be a transformed human, we'd tell you. We suspect someone made vampires, that someone designed them. Starting with raw human material. We suspect that vampires are not the products of evolution like humans are. But we don't know. Whoever

designed vampires doesn't want any credit, whoever designed vampires is keeping very quiet about it.

Actually, we're not surprised. We'd keep quiet too. Real quiet. The people who designed hobbits on the other hand, they're very proud of what they've done. They've even put pictures of themselves on the web standing next to their patented hobbits. Everyone is smiling. Including the hobbits. That's because hobbits are legal. That's because hobbits are cute. That's because hobbits are vegans. That's because hobbits only eat mushrooms and truffles. Every last one of them.

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary on the third sentence:** Being a *transformed* human is not necessarily *not* to be a human. (Vampires may actually be a kind of cannibal.) We don't know how different from a human something has to be for it not to be human any longer. No one knows. Vampires are apparently designed *not* to be reproductively viable, they are apparently designed to be reproductively inert. (That's apparently why vampires like small dolls so much. Even the boy vampires. That's why every vampire has its own dollhouse. That it keeps next to its coffin. But this isn't enough to make vampires a separate species, that adult vampires like to play with dolls.)

**3<sup>rd</sup> Commentary on the third sentence:** Sometimes a human that a vampire thinks it has killed doesn't die. It becomes a vampire instead. This is extremely rare, and no one knows why it happens when it does. (We'll let you know if we ever find out.) This extremely rare event may be the source of the false rumor that vampires are dead or undead (whatever *that* means).



**Fact 3:** *Murder is a family of different acts.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** This is not a remark about a legal concept. This is a remark about an ethical concept. Murder is the deliberate killing of a human. When a vampire kills a human for its blood, it's not an accident. The vampire knows what it's doing, even if the killing isn't premeditated, even if the vampire is just impulsively having a quick lunch. A vampire deliberately takes the life of a human just the same way as when a human with a gun takes aim at a doe and shoots it. Were a doe to possess more of the properties that humans possess, were a doe conscious of itself, intelligent, a language user, concerned with the ethical implications of its actions, perhaps even humans would regard it as appropriate to describe killing a doe in this way as an act of murder.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** It's rare that *every* member of a family of actions is wrong. Therefore, we shouldn't assume that every murder is a wrong-doing by sheer virtue of it's being a murder, that every intentional killing of a human is wrong. There are cases of ethical murder. Our aim is to describe in a general way what the ethical cases of murdering humans look like.

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** If we include in the definition of "murder" that it's wrong, then of course there can be no ethical murders. By definition. But we are not doing this. We are attempting to delineate when it's ethical to intentionally kill humans. And we think "murder" is an excellent term for the act of intentionally killing a human. A soldier intentionally kills other soldiers. We don't see it as a mistake to describe such soldiers as engaged in murder.

To call a soldier a murderer is not yet to say whether the murders that soldier has committed are ethically justified or ethically unjustified.



**Fact 17:** *There is no afterlife.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** Proof. If there were, wouldn't we be the first to know about it?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** Proof. Sadly consider what we are made of, sadly consider what we are *really* made of. (We are made of tasty bites, soft chewable biological stuff that needs to be guarded from microbia, insects, and other predators. We are made of food that must be guarded from other hungry things—by skin, by our immune systems, by the many other tools of protection creatures have, like claws and weapons and medicine.) There is nothing in us that survives our death (unless we refrigerate it). And there is no soul. Where in the body could a soul possibly be hiding? Why *isn't* faith in an afterlife misguided?

(Despite appearances, bones are temporary. Skulls grin only for a while. Diamonds aren't forever, stars don't last. Even space isn't eternal: someday there will be no sky, someday there won't even be space for a sky to be in. Time, too. Time began like a mortal and it will end like a mortal.)



**Fact 24:** No one loses anything or gains anything by dying.

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** Proof. As long as that something is alive it hasn't lost anything by dying. Because it isn't dead yet. And when that something is dead, it isn't around anymore to have lost or gained anything in having died. (Epicurus was apparently on to this one, and he wasn't even a vampire.)

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** How do we judge losses and gains? Suppose you lose a lot of money. Recognizing that this is a loss requires comparing *you* before the event to *you* after the event. Before the event you were wealthy and after the event you aren't. We judge the losses and the gains that a person experiences because of an event by comparing a person's two states: the state of the person before the event and the state of the person after the event. But if there is no person after death, then there is nothing to compare the state of the person before dying. *It makes no sense to describe a person as having lost something if there is no person.*

It makes equally little sense to describe something that doesn't exist as being five foot four, or as liking chocolate ice cream. *What* likes chocolate ice cream? The thing that doesn't exist? (If something doesn't exist, we can't talk about *it*: there's nothing *to* talk about.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** Some people think: *If I don't exist anymore, there's so much I can't do. I can't talk to my children ever again. I can't go skiing anymore, I can't feel the sun on my face.* But this is confused. When there is no person, there is no "I" to regret what

that “I” cannot do. There’s nothing that can be said that’s true about that “I” other than: there’s nothing there, there is no “I.” And this isn’t something we’re saying about the nonexistent thing. This is something we’re saying about an empty space where a person used to be.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** People want to avoid dying more than almost anything else. People seem to want to live no matter what. How can this be if no one loses or gains anything in dying?

This natural question has a natural answer. A kind of animal that emotionally felt the actual value of living over dying is an animal that would go extinct. A kind of animal that didn’t blindly panic when it felt danger nearby is an animal that wouldn’t try to survive very long. Perhaps once upon a time there were many such calm rational animals. Once upon a time, perhaps, there were animals that serenely recognized the true value of living as they watched suns set, and that didn’t try so hard to survive each day that followed. Such calm beautiful reasonable animals died out long ago. Only crazy deluded animals are left: the animals that are left try to survive at any cost, no matter what.

**4<sup>th</sup> Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** Imagine someone (yourself) suffering in a hospital bed, (you’re) in constant pain, with no hope of alleviation, with no hope of a cure. You beg to die, you beg for an ending to all this. You think it would be better not to exist than to exist this way, in such constant pain.

This is confused. The sufferer is imagining death as a cool dark quiet, as a peaceful absence of pain, as a neutral state that's far better than what the sufferer is feeling now. But no one can imagine what it's like not to exist. So that's not what it's like not to exist. (It isn't like anything not to exist.) And no one is better off not existing because there is nothing there to compare themselves to. They aren't better off when they're dead, they aren't at all.

(It's never better to be something rather than nothing, or nothing rather than something. It makes no sense to compare something to nothing, or nothing to something. *What* are you comparing the something to?)

Everyone thinks they can imagine their own death. Falling off a bridge, slowly falling into a coma while smiling at loved ones around the bedside, suddenly being smashed by a bus; and then blackness. (In each case.) But this isn't to imagine being dead, this is to imagine the living moments before death, this is to imagine the dying process while there is still a person left who is going through the process. When the person ceases to exist there is nothing left to imagine. The blackness of death isn't a blackness we can imagine. Death isn't the act of metaphysically closing your eyes tightly, and then looking around at all the nothing with your eyes closed, making comparisons between the nothing that is now and the something that was then. And deciding which is better.



**4<sup>th</sup> Commentary:** If you are agnostic about whether there is an afterlife (if you deny Fact 3), and you are agnostic about what kind of afterlife anyone can expect, then you must be agnostic about the ethical status of murder—at least as far as whether it’s a wrong that’s committed against the murdered person. That’s because if you’re agnostic about an afterlife then you can’t know whether the person you’ve murdered is better off or worse off by virtue of being murdered. (You don’t know whether the person you’ve murdered is going to heaven or to hell—as it were.) Religions that promise wonderful afterlives to its believers and at the same time condemn murdering those believers are intrinsically irrational. Such religions should condemn the murder of nonbelievers. Out of sheer pity, out of the deep sadness believers feel because believers believe murdered nonbelievers are going to have such a bad time from now on. Believers, on the other hand, should be happy to be murdered as soon as possible. They should invite murderers into their homes, offer them scones and tea. Recommend suggestions for how the murderer should off them. Because, after all, some ways of being offed are nicer than other ways of being offed.

A vampire should never forget how irrational humans are about metaphysics. A vampire cannot afford to be irrational the way humans are. (A vampire has too many enemies to be irrational about metaphysics; a vampire has too many enemies to be irrational about anything.)



**Fact 39:** *Only the people who still exist and who are affected by the death of someone lose or gain by the sheer event of that someone ceasing to exist.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** The dead person doesn't cry at a funeral. Not ever. That's what everyone else does. Suicide isn't a wrong done against oneself, it's a wrong done against the other people who have survived. (Or it's a benefit, if someone else benefits from someone's suicide.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** Some people gain from the death of someone else, some people lose from the death of someone else. The ethical murder is the one in which everyone else gains from the death of that person, or at least that no one loses anything from that person dying. The ethical predator has to make sure no one is harmed by its kills.

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** Hermits that no one cares about are an example. (It doesn't matter whose fault it is that no one cares.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** A small group of people that exploit everyone else, and that no one else likes are a second example. (If such people have pets they are kind to, then the pets lose something.)



**Fact 54:** *Although no one loses or gains anything by the sheer fact of ceasing to exist, anyone can certainly lose or gain a great deal by the **manner** of their dying.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Commentary:** The state of mind the person is in while dying is extremely important. Some people die peacefully while asleep. Others die in great agony. Suffering is always a harm to the person suffering, it's always worse for a person to suffer than for that person not to suffer. Suffering is a harm we sometimes accept because it's mitigated by other factors. If someone undergoes an unpleasant medical procedure in order to be cured of something, that suffering is mitigated. But any suffering immediately preceding a death isn't mitigated by anything—not as far as the dying person is concerned.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Commentary:** A woman panicked by your face, soil-streaked and bloody, a woman shrieking and struggling as you tear open her throat with your teeth. You have harmed her just by this. *Does it matter if she dies a few seconds later? It does matter.* She lost nothing in dying. But her panic and pain *before* she died are harms she experienced. Because of you. Those *are* experiences she had. Her *dying* is an experience that she had, but not her death. An ethical predator makes her dying a *good* experience.

**Value 19:** The ethical vampire must pleasure its prey. Or at least not allow its prey to suffer in any way as a result of the vampire's imposition upon it.

**Ethical Corollary 1:** You must already know how to do this. If you don't, you are not ready to kill anyone. The prey must want to die, the prey must want to die *the way you are going to kill that prey*. Or: the prey must not see the event coming. The prey must be engaged in whatever it would have been doing *up to the very moment of death*. These are two ways the vampire ensures

that the prey loses or gains nothing during the dying-event. (We aren't claiming that these are the only two ways to manage this.)

The murderer who slams his victim in the back of the head with a rock, so that the victim immediately goes unconscious without realizing what has happened, and then dies, that murderer has done no harm to his victim. (This is not to say that this murderer has done no harm at all. There are still the wrongs done to others to worry about.)



### **Allegory 6**

Once upon a time, there was a park that was magic. Because life came to be in this park. Deer that were conscious came to be in this park. And deer had values: they wanted the park to be different for deer than it was when deer first became conscious. Because there were coyotes and wolves in the park. Because deer-children died from diseases that were in the park. Because deer suffered so much.

Deer thought that it was wrong for coyotes and wolves to kill deer, to eat deer. Deer hated disease. Deer dreamed of a park where there was no disease, no ills, no enemies for deer to be scared of. Deer dreamed of a future time when deer would be immortal, when deer would have plenty to eat, when deer-families everywhere would be happy and snug. Deer dreamed of heaven on Earth (deer dreamed of heaven parking itself on Earth at last).

And then deer learned so much. Deer learned to exterminate their predators (deer banded together, trapped coyotes and wolves, killed them all). Deer cured all their diseases. (Deer had labs, deer developed science.) Deer ended war between deer. Peace everywhere. Deer everywhere too. And that was the problem.



### **Coda**

Humans want long lives, good lives, humans want happy families of more humans. Humans want no predators, no diseases, no suffering. Humans are deer in a park.

We don't know what our designer was thinking. The designer of vampires. Perhaps the creator was just playing around like most creators do. *I wonder if I can I make one of those?* That's what the creator was wondering one day. While looking at some DNA in a flask. Or wherever they keep the stuff. And it happened: there we were. Made. But another possibility is that the creator was serious. There must always be a balance between an animal and its environment. That's why every animal needs its parasites, its diseases, its predators. To keep its numbers down. Maybe that was what the creator was thinking. Because otherwise there will be rabbit plagues in Australia. And cane toads all over the roads. Because these things don't have predators in Australia. Or parasites. So they're all dying like apocalypses, crowds and crowds of dying animals. And no matter what anyone says, it's always worse to die when all your friends around you are dying with you. Dying is never fun as a group event. For some reason. When you're the

only one dying, it's a lot more peaceful, it's a lot nicer to be the only one dying in your family, among your friends, among your confederates. All things considered, anyway.

*Humans are different*, that's something humans like to say. And it's true. Humans *are* different. They are the only animal that's numerous enough to melt the Earth. But that's not how humans think they are different. Humans think: *We are rational. We can command ourselves in ways no other animal can. We can set our own boundaries, we can follow our own orders. We're very sensible, we're very organized, we're very smart. Even in groups.* And perhaps this is what the creator of vampires was thinking: Humans are wrong about *this* because no animal can do that, no group of animals can do that. So he made us.

We'd like to think the creator was a human. But we don't know.

We like thinking this about ourselves. That our creator gave us a purpose, a higher purpose. Unlike humans who are only an accident of history and climate and evolution. Unlike humans who are only an accident of cosmology, a flip of the coin, a throw of the dice, a bit of dumb luck splashed onto a planet for a while. We don't know if this is true about vampires, that we were a planned birth, that we have a point to being here. But all intelligent creatures with ethical aspirations want to think they exist for good reasons, that they exist because there is something good out there that they are supposed to do, that they are designed to do. If they only try.

--End--