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Indifference

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Indifference

Paul Eppler

A cold austerity has taken hold of me in the past hundred or so years. My irregular curves are swayed only by the cutting winds that tear through me without reprieve, the blinding light from some faraway heaven, and the ongoing trampling of unaffected automatons. There is no longer any tranquility, no sense of oneness that once permeated my being. I am no longer whole.

In the beginning, there was nothing. I remember not the exact moment in which I came to be, nor the few slivers of time which directly followed it. All I remember is the violent hurtling outward, during which I was unsure whether I truly existed or not. Eventually, I managed to gather some sense of self, along with the realization that I was beginning to slow. Fragments of rock continued to break off from me at an alarming rate, yet hope began to grow that I would survive long enough to experience whatever end this journey held. Then, I was completely still. No perceivable motion, nothing besides the almost imperceptible groans of an ever-expanding universe. For much of my life, this is all that was.

After an unknown amount of time in this seemingly static state, I became aware of heat emanating from a nearby body. For a certain span, the warmth provided comfort, breaking up the monotony that I had feared I would be a part of eternally. Ultimately though, the initial delight in that discovery wore off, leaving a terrible loneliness in its wake.

Bombardment from all sides dominated the next portion of my existence. These colossal conglomerates of rock, likely still rushing away from their initial creation, struck me at fantastic speeds, marking my otherwise unblemished façade. Although not pleasurable in any sense of the word, I reveled in the pain – any type of feeling was better than the previous indifference of the cosmos.

As these external intruders began to slow their assault upon me, I became aware of a sensation unlike that I had ever felt before. I felt an ever-so-slight squirming upon me, struggling to duplicate itself and continue its existence. I know not how, or from whence these movements came, but I decided to christen them “life.”

Soon, I was teeming with these writhing little beings, all seemingly

working toward some unknown goal. To the best of my abilities, I helped them, hope kindling within me at the prospect of acting as a guardian of their fragility. The creatures developed and evolved with my guidance, quickly morphing into beings that possessed more than the sheer desire to live. What exactly this yearning was, I am unsure.

Then catastrophe struck – another chunk of rock, larger in scale than those I had previously welcomed, struck me with astounding force, propelling dust outward from its focal point. The resulting fragmentation of my body suffocated me, and I soon could no longer feel the heat that had previously warmed me. Little by little, the movements that had once been so bountiful began to slow, until all but the tiniest life forms remained. It was at this point that I was most afraid, for I feared that the universe would not allow my progeny to continue.

Time passed, and life gradually regenerated in a way not unlike that which had occurred before the near-extinction of life. Like before, I nurtured the delicate beings, eager to bring about something that was better prepared, more able to survive the callous indifference of the cosmos. A whole host of life forms began to appear as time progressed, each with uniquely distinctive characteristics. Soon, a new creature unlike any other evolved, displaying some of my own qualities in microscopic portions. I called him human.

The humans rapidly developed, banding together for survival, fashioning shelter and tools from the bodies of other creatures. They continued to grow, learning to efficiently communicate with one another, and used my resources to nourish their bodies in ways previously unbeknownst to me. They showed kindness, empathy for one another, caring for each other just as I cared for them. They flourished, all under my watch.

As their numbers swelled, so too did their demands. What once sustained life was no longer acceptable – more became the expected. To achieve this, certain members of their kind rose up, rousing others to do their bidding. I watched helplessly as they turned their backs on the compassion that I had so carefully nurtured into their being. Humans forced others of their ilk into the building of great monuments, into the growing of their nourishment, into cruel labors that benefitted no one. Slaughters too came to pass, the victors claiming temporary ownership over some part of me, as if I was something to be possessed, something to be disposed of. Humans tinkered with the laws of the universe, not to better themselves, but instead to claim dominion over the scarcely dissimilar inhabitants of a different land. Their empathy had disappeared.

I struggled to right their course, give guidance as I once had been able to do. They resisted with a violent tenacity. Weariness soon settled in. I realized then that I was the aberration in the coldness that surrounded

me. Where I sought to create empathy and joy in humans, they instead responded to the indifference that they saw surrounding them. They didn't create the indifference – they merely echoed it.