

New Poem by Eric Chandler: “The Path Through Security”

my family lived there before it was Maine
before this was a even a country

they still live there so we visit
we fly in and out of the Jetport

we place our shoes in a tray
empty our pockets on the way home out west

the guy asked which one of us was Grace
I pointed to the infant perched on my arm

she was selected for
enhanced security screening



it's possible that happened in the same tunnel of air
the hijackers passed through

the imaginary tube
the human-shaped ribbon through time

the permanent trace of their movement through space
I could see it all at once

we have repeatedly walked in
the steps of those men

the hotel manager where they stayed
had a nervous breakdown

I flew over the Pentagon and Manhattan
one year afterward

other deployments far away
that all blend together

we drove by that hotel again
as we left Maine this summer

we take off our shoes
in a new part of the terminal

and our departure gate is always next
to the old closed security line

little kids run around under a big toy airplane
that hangs over that spot now

a child-sized control tower and terminal building
instead of x-ray machines

we wait to go home
and I always look over

at the playground
in the path of destruction

New Poetry by Aaron Wallace



Blackhawk

Truck 2 is hit,
and they're calling
for the medic,
and I'm out of my truck
kneeling next to the driver –

I could hold his organs in my hands.

At the top of Stanley Road
Tim the Chip Man sings
steak and kidney pie,
steak and kidney pie, oh my my,
I love steak and kidney pie
to the deep fat fryer.

The lieutenant is mouthing
words over the radio as the rifles tap-tap-tap
like the pen in my hand signing the mortgage
to the only home I've ever had
and Cole is tap-tap-tapping a magazine
against his helmet to knock the sand out
before he reloads.

The lieutenant is mouthing
words over the radio as my wife
breaks the crest of the dunes
backlit by a burning ball of hydrogen on her way
to our altar on the beach,
while the driver bleeds in waves.

The lieutenant is mouthing words over
the radio while the VA doctor explains
that the war will kill us now
or some other time so I stick the driver
with too much morphine.

I walk with my wife and son
in Central Park. Trees are chirping—
the bird is on the way, the bird is on the way.

War Porn

After mission he sits covered
in sand, sweat, blood, then boots
up his laptop – listens to the whir of the hard

drive as he goes through folders and picks
his favorite girl, blonde with globular breasts
and gapped teeth, who bounces
her ass on the floor and looks up at him, her hands
braced against him while she moans

“Do it Daddy, give it to me, I need it.”

He turns away, uninterested, and thinks
instead about the woman from the village,
her supple voice babbling and crying
while he kicks over pots and furniture—
she eventually falls—reaching
for anything, everything, to throw at him,
cursing him, his family, his country, and he hears
Bucky outside urging him to do it, *just fucking do
her* – so he reaches down,
undoes his fly, spits on his hand, thinking
how lucky am I?

Photo Credit: Basetrack 18

Killing is Easy



Killing is the easiest thing in the world, easier than sex. Easier than raising a family or bringing a child into the world, or building a house. Easier than painting or writing or music. Killing is easier than sleeping.

Before November 13th I couldn't have told you how 9-11-2001 felt. Watching the attacks in Paris, the killing, I remembered helplessness and a physical desire for vengeance, like fourteen years were gone. As I texted, instant-messaged, and emailed friends in the affected zone, desperate for news of their safety, I felt alternately overwhelmed by great sadness and murderous rage. It was clear then, as it is now, who was responsible for the injustice. And I wanted payback.

For those who have not felt the call to kill in the name of humanity and justice, it is a godly thing. Reading through the initial reports, I choked back tears, heading—where else?—to the gym, hoping to direct this urgent compulsion toward the noble desire for blood somewhere, *anywhere* else. On the

stationary bicycle and then at the weight machines watching the President express solidarity for France, I fantasized about my phone buzzing with news from a friend in the military calling me back into service. In the interests of honesty, I must admit that this fantasy involved him telling me that the time had come to clean the Middle East once and for all. From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, and then the vast Atlantic Ocean off North Africa, we would impose the final, drastic justice this situation demanded. That's what I *felt*.

That's what the ISIS terrorists in Paris must have felt reading news of defeat after emasculating defeat for their movement in Sinjar, in Syria, and in Iraq. *We have to do something, and the time has come to martyr ourselves.* They must have believed that they were correct to act, and enjoyed the doing of the deed. Killing is the easiest thing in the world.

That seems to be what Francois Hollande was feeling when he implicitly committed France to military action against ISIS, [saying, among other similar things: "It is an act of war that was committed by a terrorist army, a jihadist army, Daesh, against France,"](#) and "we will lead the fight and it will be merciless." As the attacks in Paris unfolded, I felt the same way.

And that's the end of civilization. It's popular to joke about France and Europe being weak, now, being militarily incompetent in the aftermath of WWII, but things are stable in Europe and mostly safe as a result of progress, the horror our grandfathers felt when they saw the red gurgling aftermath of their deeds stain their hands, uniforms, and relationship with the natural world. Until 1945, Europe and Eurasia had been by orders of magnitude the most violent place in the world. Mechanisms for killing on an industrial scale never imagined anywhere else were [pioneered in the USA and perfected in Europe.](#) When it comes to violence, Europeans are not just masters—historically, they transcended mastery, elevating it

first to the realm of [art](#), then, later, incorporating it. It took us *seventy years* to suppress the natural European inclination toward violence on a level that would make even a hardened ISIS fighter's stomach turn and head spin—seventy years, which, in the balance, doesn't seem like enough by half.

The end of civilization is when one acts based on feeling, and especially that low, barbaric feeling to hurt or murder. I know, because I felt it last night—can still feel it in waves. In Afghanistan, over 26 months, the two infantry units I was with killed hundreds of Taliban, Haqqani and Al Qaeda operatives (over 1,000?), taking 15 deaths in return—killing is easy. But what gives me and people like me our reason for being in the liberal West—the evolution of liberal arts education, pioneering human and then civil rights, the components that make us superior to ISIS terrorists, dogs, spiders, and lizards, is that we aspire to be *reasonable*—we are capable of thinking out the logical conclusion of our actions, and acting differently given different stimuli, acting generously and altruistically although our bodies may tell us that killing or hurting would be more satisfying. This was the lesson the West drew in the aftermath of World War II, on the bodies of so many Germans, Russians, Japanese Ukrainians, Polish, French and more—enough bodies to make Syria again three times over. This is the lesson I drew from war, as well. Killing is easy, but it only leads to more killing. And there's always more blood than you know. Blood that's sticky, and gets everywhere.

No, people who believe that France and Europe are weak because they do not act sufficiently violently for their tastes (a) don't [know the region's extraordinarily bloody history](#), and (b) don't believe in [biology](#). Civilization and modern western society—cultural constructs that encourage cooperation and altruistic behavior—are fragile things, to be nurtured and protected at all costs. They're the product of peace—in times

of war, people become callous, cease caring about others, wantonly indulge in the brief satisfaction of vendetta. Small acts of humanity and grace become acts of heroism.

After finishing my time at the gym and hearing from most of my friends, I returned home, showered, and headed out to dinner with a photojournalist friend to discuss the night's events, process what I was feeling. Fielding phone calls on the drive into the city, drinking beers over Turkish kabab, then calling other friends on the way back home, I was able to stabilize the urge to hurt and hate, to ameliorate it with that greatest benefit of living in a developed, safe, modern country—generosity.

Even though it feels now like hurting the people responsible will provide satisfaction, will solve the hurt, logic as well as a brilliant, counterintuitive moral imperative unearthed by Christianity instruct us that the answer in this situation is to open our arms wider, to “turn the other cheek” to the despicable insult, rather than to deliver injustice for injustice, which other cultural traditions and tribal societies would demand. The parasites that are ISIS feed on blood and violence. Let us, by our actions, demonstrate our moral and intellectual superiority. History instructs that we can go down a very different path—we could, if we desired, exterminate them—but then, wouldn't we just be descending to their primitive, animalistic level?

Some reactionaries in European and Western society would have us do precisely that—would turn Europe back into the brutes they were 70 years ago, or would indulge America's more recent penchant for “shock and awe.” This is a popular anti-intellectual idea on the right: we should do what feels good, and to hell with civilization. To beat the thugs we must become thugs ourselves. Here's [one such confused hot-take](#). Suffice it to say, if someone is advocating for violence, that person is not civilized, nor do they support humanistic values like charity, magnanimity, and (ultimately) the precious

elements that separate humans from apes or lower forms of animals. They are the enemy.

On the other side are people who over-intellectualize the problem, and would stifle any action—those of the extreme left, who have already begun stating their belief that one should experience a similar emotional reaction to the bombing of Baghdad as one does to the terrorist attack on Paris. As a humanist, I am more sympathetic to a call for widespread empathy than I am to kill (empathy is harder than killing), but it is unsympathetic at best (and inhuman at worst) to claim before the bodies are cold that one must feel for all humans or for none at all. It is a truism among this group that Westerners don't react to tragedy outside their community (this type of reaction is already common on Facebook and Twitter), as though feeling for anyone besides oneself were a bad thing if one does not immediately think to feel for everyone. Insisting that others should have to always feel empathy for everyone all the time (that they should behave like bodhisattvas or saints) or never at all (that they should behave like sociopaths) exhibits an interesting symmetry, but doesn't seem like a useful or productive philosophical or human stance, although I suppose it must make the claimer feel satisfied on some level or they wouldn't do it.

For the 95% of Westerners affected by the tragedy who aren't on the extreme left or right, it is okay to feel something about this tragedy without needing to take on the problems of the world. If you have a personal connection to Paris, as many do, rage or grief is perfectly natural. If you don't have a personal connection to Paris but do to the event, rage or grief is perfectly natural. And in either case, regardless of how one's natural and appropriate feelings on the subject (I certainly felt like exerting violent vengeance on behalf of a city in which I have lived, visited often, and to which I have longstanding and deep cultural ties), the next step is to divorce thought from feeling, and to act in keeping with our

cultural, humanist heritage: reasonably.

This means collectively and individually helping other humans (the refugees of war, the migrants, the aspirational and the cursed), because it's within our power to do so. We of the developed world are not infected with that ideological disease one finds so often among the mad, the disaffected, and those living in chronic poverty—the cultural *imperative* to kill—as are these ISIS psychopaths. No—let us this once demonstrate our laudable willpower and the unquestionable superiority of our civilization by letting the sword fall from our hand—let us show our strength by not doing what is easy, and easier for Americans and Europeans than anything else (for we are the best at that easy task of killing)—let us show the world mercy. Otherwise we risk losing what was bought with an ocean of our own blood.