

2023 CUNY (City University of New York) Ethics and Morality Essay Contest Submission

Hope for a Better Tomorrow

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New York City stands as a true meritocracy; even Frank Sinatra said, “*If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.*” Although Sinatra encapsulated what it meant to live in New York City, the daily hustle has robbed people of their virtues. People are focusing on money rather than what they want out of life. As an aspiring attorney, I am constantly reminded of how much I can make rather than how much I can help. Getting caught up in this message of society causes me to forget my beliefs, why I wanted to be an attorney in the first place. I believe having virtues is crucial to our existence: they help us to become better people. However, there is one virtue that has vanished from New York City completely and is replaced by pessimism: Hope. Hope can be described as a force driving us to move forward regardless of what one might experience. Hope is something we trust because it grants us possibilities from uncertainty. I have faced many adverse situations in my life that challenged my resolve. However, my recent physical injury has changed my perspective on hope.

On July 5th, I discovered I lost my vision in my left eye due to an inferior retinal detachment. The day of my appointment, nothing was out of the ordinary, and I went about my day as if it were any other. As I stepped out of my house, I put on my Bose noise-canceling headphones and was greeted by the warm sun and vibrant skies. Something about this scene felt almost heavenly, which was unusual. Nevertheless, I went about my day and headed straight to my appointment. My optometrist was on Centre and Canal, so the commute was 30 minutes.

I stepped into the office and was immediately greeted by my optometrist. I then sat on the chair with the ophthalmoscope to my left. I closed my left eye first and looked at the projection with the decreasing size letters. As we moved on to my left eye, I realized I could not see the big letters. My optometrist was puzzled; although it had been a while since my last appointment, my

sight should not have changed so drastically. I told her I could not see, and she did a more thorough assessment of my left eye. Her face said it all; a friendly demeanor transitioned to utter fear. She rushed me to an optical surgeon on the floor above hers.

My Optometrist gave me papers, and on them were charts that came from Star Wars. There were my eyeballs, numbers, and words I had not seen since I took my SATs. As I walked into the optical surgeon's office, it looked like something from Tron Legacy. The whole room was glossy white, minimalistic yet functional, and a displeased emotionless receptionist awaited. The receptionist explained that the doctor was about to run to his scheduled surgery and the office was closing. Once she read the papers I handed her, her demeanor quickly changed. Someone who once appeared emotionless now had a sense of urgency in her step. She quickly got me situated and began running every test. When the tests were done, she instructed me to wait for the doctor's consultation.

I sat patiently in the waiting room, hopeful of my situation. As I was looking around, I noticed my doctor's credentials. This doctor holds three bachelor's and a master's degree from MIT, a MD from Stanford, and an OD from the UC Berkeley School of Optometry. With such a well-credentialed doctor, I had no doubt he would be able to resolve my situation. However, my optimism shattered when he explained my situation required surgery. I had two choices of surgery; one safer, and one more dangerous. The safer option, the Scleral buckle, would shift my eye up by a few millimeters and I might suffer from double vision. I also had to prepare for the likelihood of glaucoma because of the pressure change in the left eye. Yet despite that, he told me that he would try to save my vision in my left eye, but "*There are no guarantees in life, you may never get your vision back.*" As he said this, tears rolled down my face while my entire

world was ending. Nevertheless, I remained hopeful, and I agreed to the surgery the following week on July 11th.

Once my Scleral buckle was completed, my friend picked me up from Gramercy Surgery Center and took me back to my house in Brooklyn. The moment I got home, my memory of it was blurry, ironically, because the anesthesia was wearing off. All I can think of was: (1) having my nose facing the ground for the next 2 to 3 weeks even while sleeping (2) keeping up with the eyedrops (3) staying positive because the doctor instructed. Day after day I would wake up, put in my eyedrops, and sleep because I did not want to think. One thing that kept me awake was my optical surgeon saying, *“There are no guarantees in life, you may never get your vision back.”*

My next appointment was in early August with my optical surgeon to see the progress of the gas bubble in my eye. The gas bubble was to ensure that my retina was reattached to my eye. I made a full recovery with my retina reattached. However, there were two new problems: I still could not see well in my left eye. It looked as if someone’s greasy fingertips smudged a camera lens. Secondly, I started to suffer from double vision.

These two things almost drove me to despair. As I went on with life following my surgery, I realized that daily activities I did not have trouble with before became a million times harder. My physical capabilities and academic career became more problematic. My job requires me to do certain tasks like the placement of items on a shelf or looking at a screen to process transactions. Even walking became a problem because I started to run into things like the middle pole on the subway or doors. As for academics, reading was the absolute worst because I saw repeating words and I failed to understand ideas. When I focused on small things like words everything became wonky and distracting.

Yet, despite my new circumstances, I still had hope. Hope, like all virtues, is a skill that requires repetition. Ernst Bloch, the foremost expert on hope, explored the possibilities of a utopia. Unlike the common conception of a utopia meaning perfection, Bloch's idea of utopia is a force that propels human progression. For Bloch, everything has potential to be better or *Not Yet*. For us, human beings are becoming; not past tense or future, but in the present. Everyone is a walking book filled with chapters, with rich stories that get better over time.

Bloch's account of hope is extremely influential on me because my story is not over! Yes, I lost my left eye, but I still have goals, dreams, and potential that are not realized. Like all New Yorkers, our stories are rich and filled with the struggles of everyday life. Nonetheless, we have all dreamed and we should still dream. Hope is something that we should practice every day because living is not static but a progression. Life is complex and already difficult, why should we be tempted by pessimism?

Since losing my vision in my left eye, I have been taking a proactive approach. I use Adobe Acrobat to help read the documents and papers required for my classes. I am in the process of changing my diet and eating more healthy foods. I have also been reading and listening to a lot of research papers on macula and optic nerve regeneration because I am hopeful that one day there will be a treatment for restoring vision. My injury has not stopped me from continuing my hobbies as well. I still occasionally play video games, write, and cook. I have kept the same hopes and dreams I had before my injury. I still hope to learn more of philosophy and dream of becoming an attorney.

Another perspective on hope I recently discovered is defined as “*A commitment to live a meaningful and good life to the standards of meaning and goodness that we haven't created together*” (Robertson). It resonates with Bloch's because hope can only be understood by living.

Life has not been kind to me or others that have faced adversity. However, adversity is not the end all be all. Life is uncertain, but what I do know is that I cannot change what happened to me. I can only hope I have the strength to endure what lies ahead. The most important dream: I will grow old with my partner to see our children and their children are never exposed to the same hardships I have experienced. I will continue to hope for a better tomorrow.

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