

Verdict

By **John Young Myers**

October 4, 2024 - 8 minutes read - 1603 words

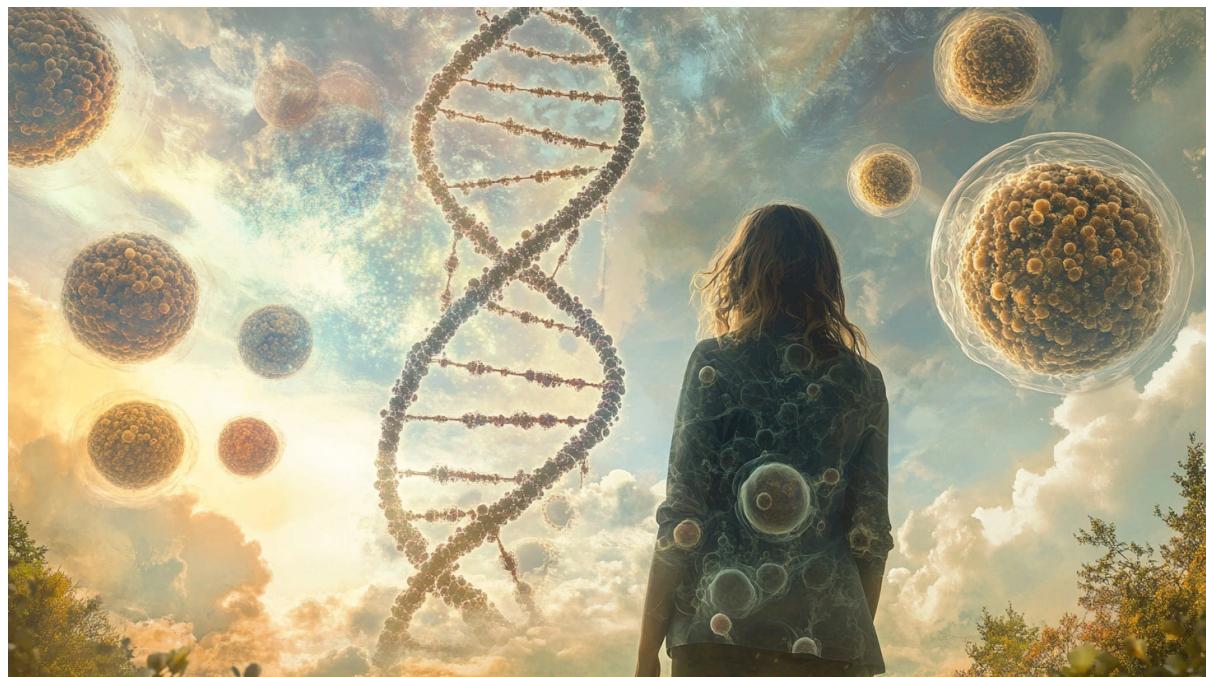
We, the Jury, duly impaneled and sworn, upon our oaths, do find the defendant, of her own free will, as to Count One, guilty of First-degree Murder. Four jurors find the Act premeditated. Zero jurors find the Act a felony murder. Eight jurors find the Act both premeditated and a felony murder. Signed by Jury Foreperson, Juror Number 12.

Remaining members of the Jury, I'm now going to ask you individually if this is your true and correct Verdict. Please respond yes or no. Juror Number 11, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

A singularity of infinite density and temperature unfolds. The Big Bang reifies the Universe. Spacetime expands. Subatomic randomness

paradoxically conceives causality, inescapable laws of nature. The Universe cools. Gas clouds, stars, galaxies form. Earth forms. Across the planet, various molecules, her ancestors, begin to self-replicate.



Juror Number 10, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

Earth's merciless environments destroy innumerable lines of self-replicating molecules. A handful endure and grow more complex. DNA, genes, bacteria, archaea, eukarya form. Her ancestors begin to have sex, further protecting their evolving genes from extreme environmental changes. Consciousness and intelligence boom among her predecessors to maintain warm bloodedness, regularly acquire nutritious food, compete for mates. Her ancestors select mates with genes that actuate high levels of violence.

Juror Number 9, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

Her ancestors begin to predict the consequences of their actions on the world, increasing the inclination for premeditated violence and mating success. The frontal cortex of her predecessors grows larger, capable of reason and developing convincing yet imperfect explanatory models and metamodels of the world. Her ancestors create superstitions to fill in gaps within these models when empirical evidence is either unavailable or

incompatible.

Juror Number 8, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

Her predecessors dominate the animal and plant kingdoms as nomadic pastoralists. They invent religions, moral codes, warrior classes. Her ancestral tribes compete for resources, begetting cultures of honor, retributive violence, clan vendettas. Tribal elders intuit the notion of free will to promote adherence to religious and moral codes, foundations of the societal values in which she is raised millennia later.

Juror Number 7, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She is a fertilized egg. The MAOA gene, the “warrior gene,” is passed down to her. It increases her propensity for antisocial behavior and disproportionate aggression. Her father abandons her pregnant mother, whose elevated stress hormones induce permanent epigenetic changes in her fetal self. Her amygdala, the “fear center” of her fetal brain, is more prone to excitability. She is destined to a life of overabundant stress hormones, chronic anxiety, easily triggered violence.

Juror Number 6, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She is a child, repeatedly abused by her mother’s partners. Her brain bathes in stress hormones. Her speech is delayed. She acts out feelings more than speaking about them. She routinely does not get enough sleep. Ineffective, unessential neurons and synapses are not pruned normally through apoptosis, making her brain easily overstimulated, prone to disorder. She bullies at school and is bullied at home. She naturally succeeds at sports and finds loyalty and belonging in her teammates.

Juror Number 5, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She is an adolescent, still bullied, still bullying. Except for her frontal cortex,

her brain is fully developed. She craves peer approval. She instinctively feeds into the culture of honor and tribalism among her soccer teammates, who motivate her to perform better in school but introduce her to drugs, stifling the development of her frontal cortex. She receives awards for her athletic talents and achievements, as if due to controllable circumstances, her apparent will to work hard, succeed, stand out. She is diagnosed with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder, as if due to uncontrollable circumstances, her biology, upbringing, environment.



Juror Number 4, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She attends university on a soccer scholarship. Her team qualifies to compete for the College Cup. She celebrates at a party. Her date drugs and rapes her. She goes to the police, but because they are dating, her evidence is insufficient. Charges are dropped. She is pregnant. Abortion is illegal. Her mother cannot afford to send her money for an out-of-state abortion. She will likely not graduate on time, if at all. Her frontal cortex atrophies in response to heightened trauma and stress hormones. Her amygdala enlarges, exacerbating her mental disorder, anxiety, detachment from reality, retributive tendencies. She purchases a legal everyday-carry knife to keep in her pocket.

Juror Number 3, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She realizes her teammates' loyalty and friendship are largely contingent on her soccer performance, which suffers from being pregnant. Her teammates do not alienate her, but their support, at first strong, dwindles. Her mother, her only reliable source of comfort, suddenly dies of a heart attack. All-consuming grief engrosses her reality. Her amygdala is at its most excited state during her life. Testosterone secretions increase, teetering her psyche between fear and overconfidence. Her frontal cortex becomes further sluggish, dulled, weakened. She conceives an imperfect explanatory model of her current world and fixates on the false origin of her misfortune: him.

Juror Number 2, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She writes in her journal about what she would do to him if she could get away with it. She considers Machiavellian methods to manipulate and ruin him, public humiliation, beating him, even stabbing him to death. She regularly forgets to eat, sometimes vomiting when she does eat. She finds her favorite foods, simple joys, repugnant. She begins to walk to class and sees him entering his apartment with a woman. Her malnourished, cortisol-soaked brain immediately triggers hormonal imbalances, intensifying antisocial tendencies, disproportionate aggression, old-world senses of violated honor and retribution. His apartment door is unlocked. She enters.

Juror Number 1, is this your true and correct Verdict?

YES.

She witnesses them kissing in the kitchen. Her amygdala automatically flares and shoots rapid-fire signals to her hypothalamus, exciting her adrenal glands and filling her veins with adrenaline. She is fury embodied. He is stunned to see her. She hollers at the confused woman to leave, to save herself, to trust her. He hollers back and pushes her toward the door, underestimating his own strength. She trips over her feet and falls backward, hitting her head on the door. The pain strengthens her genetically amplified resolve for retribution. She stands to confront him again and pulls out her pocketknife. His lover screams, runs to the bathroom, dials 911.



Members of the Jury, is this your Verdict? So say you one, so say you all?

YES.

She slashes him with the blade of her knife. He falls. She relishes in his fear, his scream, his apparent loss of control, his clumsy attempt to scoot away. She jumps on him, stabbing him wildly and repeatedly. He attempts to block the stabs with his hands to no avail. She continues, even after he loses consciousness. Her fantasies written in her journal are actualized. Thousands of years of warrior culture, honor codes, clan vendettas are winds at her sails. She can no more stop her stabs than she can stop her adrenal glands from secreting adrenaline, stop the connectivity in her frontal cortex from weakening, stop her mother from dying, stop her insatiable craving to win, stop her father from leaving her mother, stop her insidious MAOA gene from expressing, stop her ancestors from violently competing for mates and resources, stop the dominion of multicellular over unicellular organisms, stop the first self-replicating molecules from proliferating, stop Earth from forming, stop the stars from shining, stop causality from beginning. Not once do her actions break causality. No neurons fire unprompted. No causes occur causelessly. Her brain, her mind, her behaviors are governed by the same laws of nature that govern the Universe, because she is the Universe—the Universe experiencing Itself. One perspective among an infinitude of Its own perspectives. She uncontrollably watches, hears, smells, tastes, feels the unrewindable movie of her life as she stabs her rapist, her Self, Itself, to death.

Members of the Jury, I find that the Verdict, as read, reflects the will of the Jury and will be filed accordingly. I have to thank you on behalf of the people of the State for your Jury service, for determining the culpability of what the convicted has done according to her own free will. I am supremely disappointed in what this young lady, this talented and promising athlete, has chosen to do with the gifts that were bestowed upon her. May she serve as an example, a warning, to her peers who may feel even an inkling to travel down the same path of barbaric envy, wrath, and evil. May God have mercy on her soul. I now ask you to follow the deputy back to your usual room. I will join you in a few minutes to advise you further. All rise for the Jury.



John Young Myers is the managing editor of the Journal of Patient-Centered Research and Reviews. While his professional life has focused on biology, scientific literacy, and medical publishing, his leisure time is often spent grappling with the free will problem, the hard problem of consciousness, and the problems of personal identity. John loves going

through life with his astronomer wife, fun-loving son, and comically fluffy dog and is grateful to have joined the Daily Philosophy family. He can be reached via johnyoungmyers at gmail.

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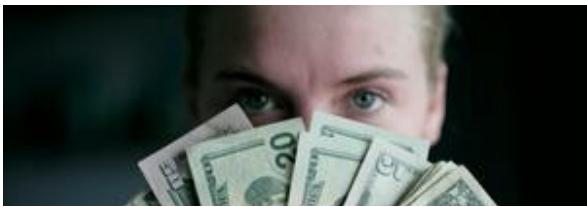
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