It is easy to assume that, because everyone’s life is different, everyone’s motivations and goals are different. But that is just not the case, we all want the same things out of life, and we all do what we think is reasonable to get there. We react to our environments as best we can given our perspective in the moment.

Imagine that you are with your significant other you have had a long day, you are hungry and tired and would like to decompress a bit. your significant other is likewise stressed because they just found out that they are making budget cuts is their department and might not have a job for much longer. so when they get home and you have not made dinner, even though is was your turn to do so and now you will have to order something, your spouse or girlfriend makes a slightly sarcastic remark like “And I suppose I’ll be paying for that?” not especially mean but you don’t appreciate her tone and it sets you off a bit, enough for you to want to retaliate. You respond by saying, “at least I have enough money to cover it” which is in part a reference to last time you order out and she couldn’t cover it, which was actually funny in that moment, but now it’s fighting words, and you just declared war. The conversation quickly escalates and while neither of you much cares if you order out for dinner, you are both now thoroughly invested in winning the argument. As the food arrives you are both still very heated and you being the one you has to pay for the food, go to the door and grab the food away from the delivery guy, slap a twenty in his hand which barely covers the cost and slam the door in his face. You don’t have time to figure in tip and your mind is still formulating the next blow you will strike in an effort to win the fight. As the delivery guys walks away he does the mental calculations and decides you are a prick and a cheapskate. As you both started to eat your mood improves and you begin to see how stupid the argument really was. Your spouse explains the situation at work and you realise that your comment about money might have struck a nerve. You both apologize make up and settling for a nice night eating delicious food and watching your favorite shows.

None of the behavior that I have described was unreasonable of hard to imagine, but take any thirty seconds of the situation and make it the core of someone impression of you and they might think you are, a bitch, an asshole, a cheapskate, a shallow person, an inconsiderate douche, an over sensitive jack ass, or any of a dozen alternatives you might think of. But the truth of the matter was you were having a moment and in the moment you were behaving just like anyone else would, you are not a monster, or some unfeeling jerk, you are a person with a life story and a reason for acting like you do. Just like everyone else.

There are no monsters in the world, just people, people trying to make their way through life as best they can. We are all the protagonist in our own life story. None of us are out to make the world suffer because we are heartless. But some of us are in a tough spot and feel like they are out of options, some of us have been taught that violence is an acceptable solution. Some people do believe that there are evil people in the world, and that peace comes at the sacrifice of those people. Even the worst of humanity acts in accordance with their own moral compass, their own ideas about what is right and wrong. The closest thing to an evil person we know of is a psychopath who has no or a lowered sense of empathy. And in most cases psychopaths don’t go on killing sprees that just go through life faking empathy, and the worst most of them do is manipulate the emotions of others, which is nothing that a normal person wouldn’t do given the opportunity. So in the end the best thing that you can do is use a different mental shorthand, instead of thinking that this person is just an asshole and going about your day, maybe you should assume that this person is just having a bad day and go about your day. The different in a specific instead is practically non-existent, you still get through the day and don't waste an excess about of energy worried about some stranger being rude, but the net effect is much greater, you will being to see everyone in a better light and feel a greater sense of optimism about you fellow man, and in the end you will all the happier for it.

**And that’s my take on the universality of empathy.**