

Meaning in the Face of Annihilation

Even if at times I desperately grapple with the excruciating realization that 'all comes to naught,' I'd still say that the overwhelming nature of my post-existentially aware self is an ever-increasing joy in the opportunities my life has presented. I want to learn six languages, see Angkor Wat, be able to fix my bike and car when they break down, write passable poetry and masterful prose, and camp in the wilds. In short, if existential awareness should cripple, it has not crippled me. If anything, it has shown me, like the miraculous 'laying on of hands', that my handicaps are false, that I can walk boldly, and even run. And I am inspired, quite regularly, with the poignant joy which only a sense of tragedy can create, I savor a good cup of coffee, glass of beer, or lavender sunset. If I still have moments of pettiness and grumbling—and I do—I know that they are less now than they would otherwise be, and always diminishing.

When I read a good book or poem it becomes so much more involved when I briefly reminisce on mortality. Would I not do so, enjoy these things, just the same if I avoided all morbid themes? No, because the particular ring of the moment which signals how rare it all is—how strange that the poet and writer composed such fine and willowy emotions, how fine, even miraculous, it is that I was born and developed to the point where I could empathize in such a complex way as to appreciate these subtleties. Were the universe a bit different, or the planet a cosmic hair's breadth nearer or farther from our local star, or any other of an infinite number of infinitesimal changes different, these words, these emotions, me—they'd all be gone. That sense makes each moment unbearably precious and worthy of worship and human life a Promethean act of robbery from the cosmos.