

***I will
survive . . .***

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I struggle with a simple question.

I struggle with the vision of my mom slowly being eaten alive by a being, a force, that was once part of her.

I struggle with knowing that time, space, the inner body and the outer world conspire against us daily.

Our genes are flawed, our minds are limited, our bodies frail and incapable of withstanding the ravages of time. And, as part of our inheritance, we are given just enough 'mind', just enough awareness that we know what comes next and can do nothing to prevent -- everyone will die.

As children we experience time as near infinite. The ride to Seattle, 60 miles, 1 hour, forever.

As children our parents are guardians (if we are lucky) and they shelter us from the world.

As young men and women, some of us learn the truth of life (and death), but most of us in America live in a relative and blissful ignorance of death while we are young. We see people living to 90, a 100, a 120 (I think someone has made it to 120 and if not we can't be that far off), we see people creeping towards immortality and we let ourselves believe that this life can go on. That maybe -- death can be killed. Our consumer culture of the last 100 years reached a pinnacle in the 90's, expressing the most silly, most ridiculous, most infantile aspects of human existence. We even let ourselves believe, for a short time, that the spirit of infinite youth would make the universe our playground forever. Our nation was a teenager in the 90's.

Our youth makes us fearless and quite stupid. The fear of death is rarely on the minds of the young.

But, this fear of death, the fear which generates dictators and gods, is a fear of nothing.

What surface of our existence is 'us'? What particle contains my mind or awareness or consciousness? If I dig, I see billions of neurons (in clumps and clusters) networked together to solve the riddle of adaptive problem solving. I dig deeper still, I see cellular metabolism, the flow of blood, oxygen, I see the tiny world of 'heterogeneity' working together in concert -- orchestrated by luck, genetics, physiology and the CNS (central nervous system). I dig and dig and I find proteins being synthesized to produce the structure of cells and other biological materials which are the smallest building blocks of my 'biological' self. The 'strategic and operational plans' of our micro biological existence is written in billions of lines organic chemical bonds -- a.k.a. DNA. And we could stop, and we could say (as parsimonious thinkers often do), that this is the limit. No further, its just not necessary. But deeper we can and should go. The world of biology gives way to the world of physics, of electron bonds, of chemical reaction, of atoms, of particles, of quarks, of ($1/n$ as (n) approaches infinity).

And so, if we reached the infinitesimal, it would tell us no more than we already know.

If we look out, beyond ourselves, we see other people. We see a community. We see mammalian life forms living a balance (as best they know how) of personal freedom with civic responsibility. We want to be 'seen' and we want to 'participate'. We want freedom and individuality, but our freedom often translates (in fact almost always translates) into some 'good' that changes the lives of other people. We are a unity and a marvelous thing by ourselves, but we know that is not the natural state of humanity.

We are influenced by forces we understand and (much more likely) millions of other forces we do not yet understand. We effect each other. We impact upon the other persons life.

So, I say, where in this chaos of the small, large, medium, microcosm, mesocosm, macrocosm, do we find our 'self'?

Where is the 'I' I am afraid of losing? This is not an argument for connectedness. Please, do not place this there. I think the finiteness of our selves is more than enough to avert the hell of no unique self. Yes, we are in some trivial sense connected to everything -- we cannot help it, we exist, we are here. But this holistic connectedness seems more like wishful thinking than hard nosed reason.

Where is the 'I'? Is it in some one set of neurons? Is it in all my neurons? My arms and legs? Where is this protected self?

We think it exists, as we ponder our own existing. We see the reflection of the answer in our mind's eye and we know reflections can be misleading. We think, ergo we are (sorry for the misquote Descartes), is the argument and the proof all in one. Is it a perfect proof? Of course not. But it is an compact and elegant argument.

I think the world surrounds me. The small or the microcosm cradles my existence, while the large (the macrocosm) holds sway. I think the cradle, the small, can be mean and callous and does NOT care. If some small thing, a radioactive compound, a toxic chemical, a poison, a germ, a cancer cell, gets inside of me it really is not personal. And yet, I impact those things too. My existence shapes their existence, it is not a one way street. I may not split atoms, but i do carry them around, ready for the splitting. My 'new cancer' (if it were new) gets tested,

sampled, analyzed and categorized. That new infection (if it is new), goes through a similar process. The poisons, the death, it all gets classified -- as with the 'big book' of mortality in 'Double Indemnity'.

The world impacts 'me' and 'I' impact the world. There is a tension, a dance, but it is real and it is the immortality.

Immortality surrounds us. If we are willing to listen, we can here the echoes of the past. Others have 'lived' before us and in some strange sense (that requires no 'supernatural' explanation) they do continue to live. Even if we don't know of their existence -- we do turn on that light and see the effects. The works leave an imprint.

The works of many surround us. Their imprints are everywhere - if we are willing to look.

The roads we travel on, the books we read, the parents whose lives were saved, the impacts of the trivial and the silly -- they all leave impressions upon the universe. Even the fantasy, the lie, the self-deception, the inner world is not hidden in some super-klein-bottle-like-farraday-cage. We are not shielded in fantasy or dreaming - that world is connected too. In our dreams and fantasies, we practice, we pretend, we play with ideas and these ideas impact our decisions about the world. I watched a documentary recently on the salt water crocodile and how scientists have studied the fact that they seem to have a 'frontal lobe'. It explains, possibly, their complex stalking behavior -- how they have 'staked out' human camp sites in the past and spent days observing the humans before the attack. Maybe 'the salty' dreams (he/she likely does) and my guess, in his or her dreams, he/she is dreaming of the 'best strike', of the 'best kill' - as preparation for the hunt. Even in dreams we do not elude the world.

It is simply no more than this: Dasein (my being, my self) was thrown into an already existing world (thank you Mr. Heidegger) and as such it has no choice but to impact the world and those other beings within it.

I have no fear. Well, that may be a bit strong.

I will try to live fearlessly (within reason) - many fears are there to protect us. But I can remove the fear of death at least, or I can try.

I have no choice, at least not with respect to 'existence'. I can choose to shorten my stay, but I cannot choose to have never been (at least not yet).

The immortality surrounds me.

My mom is here.

My dad is here.

They (my parents) are both dead.

Their friends and family surround us, as your ancestors surround you.

You are not cradled in the microcosm, you are not threatened by the macrocosm. Evil is weak, weaker than good, and evil can be swept away by the winds of time. Good hangs on -- a good reason for making the most of one's life.

You do not need to be afraid, because you will survive and those you loved (and hated) will live with you.

We are mere thoughts in the mind of God, and God plays the long game - a game of GO on an infinite board.

And, therefore, I will not be afraid...

Because I will survive.