The Triviality of Our Pale Blue Dot

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Purpose, the hopeful sense that drives us through the occasionally ugly and downright hideous chapters of our precious lives with the promise of an ultimate reward or universal meaning—adding a much-needed layer of optimism and belonging to everything that encompasses the abstractions that have come to define us, humans, and our ephemeral journey on this minuscule pale blue dot known as Earth. It is a mind-soothing concept so deeply embedded to our ancient roots that life without it becomes utterly meaningless, and beneath its shallow surface, lies humanity’s dearest fear in the form of existential triviality. Ergo, if we were to explore the darkest, most recondite confines of humanity’s throbbing heart, in a dark and god forgotten corner, we would find a jarring sense of purposelessness, so instinctively menacing that we have done our absolute best to distance ourselves from it for millennia, and will likely continue to do so until the end of our days, even if the alternative is not nearly as demoralizing or direful as it is commonly thought to be, due to the cathartic implications that come with it. This intriguing sense of human purpose is perfectly put into perspective by Carl Sagan’s Pale Blue Dot speech.

On February 14, 1990, at a distance of 6.4 billion kilometers (4 billion miles), the space probe launched by NASA, Voyager 1, turned around for one last look at its home planet and took a memorable picture of earth as it departed the fringes of our planetary neighborhood to fulfill its purpose of studying the outer solar system. The result? The historical image of a minuscule, pale blue dot suspended in the center of a sunbeam, as referred to by Carl Sagan. From our perspective, 6.4 billion kilometers seems like an astoundingly long distance, especially after considering the Earth’s equatorial circumference (24,901 miles/40,075 km), nonetheless this seemingly astronomical distance falls short when compared to the mind-boggling diameter of the cosmos, which loosely extends to 93 billion light-years; just one light-year is about 9 trillion km (6 trillion miles). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the most advanced and consequently most vain beings of such a tiny stage, located in a solar system that takes up an estimated 0.00000000000000042 % of the entire universal arena, have often sought to add a deeper layer of importance to their lives and achievements in the form of divine or universal purpose—an ancient practice that hints towards the precedence of a blinding superiority complex, since we even refuse to entertain the notion of having no higher biological purpose than the birds flying across the sky and the insects crawling beneath our feet. Why? Simply because this idea threatens the perception of our place in this minute planet orbiting around a minuscule solar system located in a tiny galactic group that is part of a relatively little, local supercluster that merely represents a small statistic of the observable universe.

If Earth, home to every warm sunset, pristine ocean, colossal mountain, and sweet flavor known to every single human being who ever lived, represents such an insignificant percentage of the ever-expanding cosmos, what does that make of our purpose, achievements, and everyday struggles? Does our exorbitantly small role in the grand scheme of the universal arena detract from our revered dreams and hopes? It does not diminish the greatness of our astounding accomplishments, ambitions, and inherent struggles, but at the same time, this cathartic realization does seem to suggest that we indeed are utterly trivial beings. Hence why the idea that our efforts, no matter how righteous or arduous, are leading up to something greater and that they ought to be reciprocated with equal reward is far too convenient, and even though the nature of our universe comprises many characteristics, convenience is not one of them. Yet, this notion also begs to argue whether a purposeless existence is as negative and direful as it is generally considered to be. Most would agree that a life without purpose can easily lead to societal indifference that ultimately indulges careless libertinism, leading to a hypothetical period time characterized by societal, scientific, and technological stagnation, directly caused by the lack of a universal purpose that has been part of humanity’s core beliefs for millennia. Many would struggle to see the point in bothering to make the valiant effort of progressing forward if nothing of higher, graspable value awaits our constant efforts, but even in my own pessimistic self, I truly believe that having no inherent purpose can certainly be a blessing in disguise, because it allows us to solace our lives with the acceptance of the greater picture, bestowing upon us the absolute freedom of mind and spirit needed to provide ourselves with our very own distinct and intimate purpose to fulfill.

Our curious nature has always forced us to constantly push the boundaries of the imaginable, which in turn has given us ground-breaking achievements beyond measure, and we rightfully bask in our many triumphs, but as a result, our minds have become clouded with exorbitant deliriums of grandiose that have subsequently prevented us from even entertaining the possibility of our precious existence merely revolving around triviality, but does the lack of divine or universal purpose encourage the idea of living a rather dreamless and dissolute life filled with societal indifference that ultimately indulges careless libertinism? Only if you truly want it to, because at the end of the day, our role in the grand scheme of the universe is so minor that every single thing and every single person roaming this world, including me and this essay, are only as consequential as you make them up to be. And even though it may seem like not everything is entirely up to us, due to the numerous social, economic, religious, and political factors that directly or indirectly affect our perception and decision making, we most certainly are the sole captains of our distinct ships voyaging through the relative vastness of a painfully meaningless, yet mesmerizingly wonderful pale blue dot.

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