

Everything Collapses into Now

Kevin Griffith

a pecha kucha

Jesus is wrestling Nietzsche. Don't ask. Actually, do. Nietzsche seems to be winning, yet he is extremely sweaty, the beads dropping from his face like pebbles painted Yves Klein Blue. And he seems to have confused Jesus with an abused horse. Actually, he is not wrestling at all, but trying to hug Jesus, who, of course, is having no part of it. Jesus glares at the assembled crowd as if to say, enough martyrdom for me, people.

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I am wrestling myself as a grandfather. My grandfather me smells like bacon and old urine. "When did you last take a bath?" I ask, trying to get him into a headlock. "You should know, mister," he snuffles back. I always knew I would be a disappointment as a member of the elderly class.

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It's all the fault of the Wittgenstein. A Breakthrough in the Field of Time Travel. Instead of bringing you to the past or future, we bring the future and past to you! Now is forever!

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My wife is dying of cancer. She has died of cancer. I have cured her of cancer, using a cheaply manufactured drug developed forty years from now that costs \$8,500 per pill, yet is completely covered (minus the \$15 co-pay) through the UN Universal Healthcare Protocol and Security Act. Which doesn't exist. That's why my wife died. We will have dinner together tonight at 7:00 at Haiku Nirvana, the new sushi place in the Wine District. We are not married yet. She is beautiful. She is Death, the Mother of Beauty.

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The Wittgenstein. A clear Lucite device. Block of glass really. You arrived at Now by staring at it. The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. 6.521

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The 1968 National Champion Ohio State Buckeyes are now playing the 2002 National Champions. Not even close. Such a difference in the quality of safety equipment. The quarterback's ribs shatter on the first impact. The game ends before it begins. Yes, it does.

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My own son, who is old enough to be my father, takes me fishing at a stream near my childhood home. We catch a few gorgeous rainbow trout and listen to the sound of water, which never seems to change. That's a good thing. My own father joins us. He's such a young man, now that he's

been dead for over twenty years. He hasn't shaved, a normal indulgence for a Saturday. That little freedom to let yourself go. "I remember when I used to take my son to this very stream," he says. "Me too," I say. "And I am your son."

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The Last Supper is renamed The Only Supper.

On the third day, he rises again. And again.

No one remembers now when that day was.

Except that it is today. Like everything else.

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I am sitting on a folding chair at my junior prom. My girlfriend is screaming. I am forty-seven years old and have three children. "This is not how I planned it!" she shrieks.

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Once upon a now, I ran into Van Gogh at MOMA, looking grimly at his *Starry Night*. He was much smaller than his reputation, a slight figure who smelled like a million French armpits. He was staring at the painting, being careful not to touch it, as a guard was eyeing him suspiciously. "What do you think?" I asked. "My problem is that I peaked too early," he says, not even turning his head to meet my eyes. "Everything I do now is but a mere imitation of myself." "But don't you know how much your work is worth? This one here would probably go for two-hundred million." He finally looked at me, his eyes the gray of bank vault doors. "Do you think I cut my ear off for money?"

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I held her hand. I couldn't believe how thin she looked. Her white t-shirt had ridden-up to her armpits while she was sleeping and I could see her rib cage, yes, but what was even more shocking was the roadmap of blue veins so close to the surface of her flesh. And the flesh, the flesh looked like plastic wrap the color of milk—a see-through pale. She had two months to live. She had forever to live. She had no time to die.

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Of course there was the problem of Hitler. Wasn't there always? We found a way to relegate him to the noosphere, where he for eternity existed as a blog.

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If everything is eternally now, then there is no need for Heaven, right? That was Wittgenstein's main point, dude. And let me tell you, a lot of people had trouble wrapping their minds around that concept.

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There's a great picture of my wife and me dancing at our wedding. It's probably the best picture of me ever taken. Just a quick snapshot, nothing fancy. Courtesy of the Wittgenstein, I can relive that moment any time I want. Yet I find the memory of the dance is much better than the actual thing. Every time.

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I am the Barber of Seville. I cut the hair of all and only the men of Seville who do not cut their own hair. How do I cut my hair? I can't. If I cut my own hair, then I violate my rule about cutting only the hair of men who do not cut their own hair. If I get someone else to do it, then I have to cut it myself. This is the paradox. This is *the* paradox. It's a variation of the set of all sets that do not contain themselves cannot contain itself. Modern set theory destroyed. They built the Wittgenstein Time Machine around a paradox, and like all paradoxes, we are now trapped in its logic.

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We already have witnessed the end of the world. Want to know how it happens? Sunspots. Yep. On February 14th, 4034, a blast of gamma rays, followed by an tsunami of subatomic particles, wipes out all entities on the planet that use some form of electronic energy. No heat. No communication. No microwave mac and cheese. Within months, ninety-eight percent of the human population dies. My last words to myself: "I've never see the sun look that black before."

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"Wittgenstein may be right," my wife told me after she died. "But life goes on. We still have to have something to talk about."

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Of course, my life ended long before the world did. Even now, when I look into my wife's eyes, I cannot help but see her in her coffin, our children all gathered around, my hand on the youngest one's head. We all know what endings mean, and this is certainly an ending, even if technology will be able to fool us in a few years.

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The noosphere is the name for the collective hive mind that exists in the cloud. Even I don't know what the hell that means. Take comfort, though, in knowing that it too bit the dust when the sunspots did their step dance all over the face of the planet.

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And so, eternity does come to an end. Now is not a double negative, canceling itself out with a Zen-like nothing that is not and a nothing that is. Just because language cannot read itself doesn't mean we are necessary.

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You look so beautiful tonight.

I am so happy.

I wish I could hold you forever.

Me too.

Kevin Griffith