

# Dark, Not Colorless

16 NOVEMBER 2015

The last arc of posts has been about how to handle a dour universe. Become unable to despair, learn to see the darkness rather than flinching from it, learn to choose between bad and worse without suffering. Learn to live in a grim world without becoming grim yourself, learn to hear bad news without suffering, and stop needing to know your actions were acceptable. Come to terms with the fact you may lose, use the darkness as a source of fuel, and let go of dreams of total victory. These are the tools I use to tap into intrinsic motivation, in a precarious world where the problems are larger than I am.

Where others see a hurting world and feel guilty for not doing enough to help it, I see a hurting world and feed my own resolve. Instead of feeling guilty for not working until I drop, I recognize the psychological impossibility and resolve to do everything I can *within* my mortal constraints. For me, at least, this internal drive is more robust and reliable than guilt motivation.

This brings us to the end of the penultimate arc of the "replacing guilt" series of posts, which I began many months ago, and takes us into the final arc. The first arc was about addressing the listless guilt that comes from ignoring a part of yourself that wants to be doing something more. The second arc was about eliminating the feeling of obligation, and fighting for something you care about *only because you care*

*about it*. The third arc was about coming to terms with your limitations and learning to optimize *within* them, rather than feeling guilty because of them. This post concludes the fourth arc, about living in a dark universe and tapping into resolve instead of guilt.

The fifth and final arc is about what you do next. Once you've removed guilt and replaced it with intrinsic drive — both cold resolve and hot desire to *make the future bright* — what do you do next? What thought patterns allow one to turn these feelings into *actions*, rather than feelings of frustration and impotence?

I'll explore some of my answers to those questions in the coming handful of posts. But before then, I have one reminder I'd like to pass along.

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Among all this talk of coming to terms with a dark and dour world, I ask you to remember that the world is *dark*, but it is not *colorless*.

I have seen many a friend attempt to see the dark world and then despair (for they are too small and the problems too large), and then confuse their sense of hopelessness with a sense of *meaninglessness*.

(The reasoning goes: "If the universe is so large, how can I matter? If the world is in such deep trouble, how can I make a difference? If all this were true, nothing would matter.")

So consider this a gentle reminder that a dark world is not a *lost* world. It is not a grey world, where everything is dead and there is nothing we can do. It is not a cold empty universe, from which nothing can be built. It is simply a *damaged* world, a *hurting* world, that is intolerable precisely because it could be so much better.

If you gazed upon a worthless universe, all cold and dead, the sight would likely not fill you with despair — because while there is no light, while there are no happy sapient beings living full lives, there is also no darkness: that universe is empty and dull. If you gaze upon our universe and despair, then, then that can only be because there is so much that is not right, but *could be*.

While our world is dark, it is still filled with color, and indeed many spots of light and even brilliance. Children laugh. Lovers meet. Right now, someone is just understanding one of the deep secrets of how the universe works for the first time, and their mind is filling with awe. Right now, someone is building a close friendship for the first time in a decade. Every day bears witness to a billion acts of love and kindness. This world is dark, yes — 150,000 people die every day — but it is not *lost*.

So don't let despair or hopelessness weigh you down. Instead, let them be a reminder: those are feelings you can only get from something worth saving. There are things here that are worth fighting for. If you begin to despair, then let that feeling be a reminder of what could be, and let everything that this world *isn't* be your fuel.

The world may be dark, but it's not colorless.