Troy Barnes

Bro. Harrel

Writing and Reasoning Foundations

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The Beauty Between

Lawrence Ferlinghetti was born in 1919 in Yonkers, New York, under difficult circumstances. His father died before he was born, and shortly after his birth, his mother was placed in a mental hospital. Despite these early hardships, Ferlinghetti went on to lead a remarkable life. As a young man, he served in the Navy during World War II, rising to the rank of submarine captain. Although he faced numerous challenges, he was able to find beauty in life, channeling his experiences into his art. In addition to being a poet, Ferlinghetti was also a painter and jazz artist, creating works that reflected his ability to find meaning in both the joy and suffering of life. His art demonstrates how, even in the face of adversity, it is possible to appreciate the beauty that exists in the world. In Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s poem *“The World is a Beautiful Place,”* the coexistence of beauty and suffering reveals a world where fleeting moments of joy and wonder are interwoven with profound injustice and inequality, suggesting that life’s worth lies in the juxtaposition between its beauty and its flaws.

In Ferlinghetti’s poem, the speaker lists various dark aspects of the world, mentioning 'people dying,' 'a bomb or two,' and ending with a haunting image of a 'smiling mortician.' The first half of the poem focuses on these grim realities, emphasizing life’s harsher, more unsettling moments. However, the tone shifts in the second half to a more optimistic view, celebrating simple pleasures like 'smelling flowers,' 'kissing people,' and 'going swimming in rivers.' By juxtaposing these contrasting images, Ferlinghetti illustrates that life is neither purely good nor entirely bad; finding a balance between these extremes is essential to living a meaningful life.

A life filled only with positive experiences can dull the impact of happiness, while moments of hardship can actually enhance our appreciation for the good times. The speaker remarks, 'The world is a beautiful place to be born into if you don’t mind happiness not always being so very much fun,' suggesting that life’s beauty is amplified by the fact that we aren’t happy all the time. The speaker may be implying that the world’s charm lies in the contrast between joy and hardship, making happiness feel even more meaningful.

Seeing the hardships others face can sometimes put our own problems into perspective, making our lives feel more fortunate by comparison. The speaker notes, “only starving some of the time which isn’t half so bad if it isn’t you,” suggesting that while we may sympathize with others’ suffering, we also tend to find relief in knowing it’s not our own burden. Ferlinghetti isn’t likely encouraging us to look down on those in need, but rather to recognize how an awareness of others’ struggles can highlight the positive aspects in our own lives.

Another example of the duality of happiness and suffering in the poem appears in the line, 'but right in the middle of it comes the smiling mortician.' Here, the speaker introduces the image of a mortician—a figure associated with the somber realities of death and grief—yet this mortician wears a smile. This contrast could suggest that even in the darkest circumstances, moments of levity or resilience can still be found. The smiling mortician serves as a powerful symbol of the coexistence of joy and sorrow, capturing the theme of happiness and suffering intertwined.

The speaker in the poem states, 'Yes the world is the best place of all for a lot of such things as making the fun scene and making the love scene and making the sad scene.' This line suggests that the speaker views the world as a place for both joyful and painful experiences, embracing life’s full emotional range. By placing 'making the fun scene' and 'making the sad scene' side by side, the speaker implies that joy and sorrow are equally essential aspects of life. This balance between happiness and sadness deepens our appreciation of the good moments, as each experience enriches the other.

Ferlinghetti’s personal life also reflects his perspective on happiness and resilience. While working as a painter, he had one of his pieces displayed in an exhibit, but on the opening night, a janitor accidentally vandalized and damaged the painting. Rather than mourning its destruction, Ferlinghetti responded with humor, painting over the damaged areas with a playful twist and leaving it on display. This incident illustrates his ability to find positivity in a disappointing situation, embodying his outlook on life as one that embraces both joy and hardship with grace and humor.

Although we often see happiness as ‘good’ and sadness as ‘bad,’ the reality is more complex. A study conducted at Berkeley University found that sadness can actually motivate self-improvement. According to the article *'Four Ways Sadness May Be Good For You,'* researchers observed that 'people who are happier will sometimes be less motivated to push themselves toward action compared to someone in a negative mood, who will be more motivated to exert effort to change their unpleasant state.' This suggests that constant happiness can lead to complacency, whereas moments of sadness can inspire growth and ultimately increase happiness over time. This idea aligns with Ferlinghetti’s theme that there is beauty and value to be found in both positive and negative experiences.

While serving a mission in Los Angeles, California, I experienced this philosophy firsthand. One particular day, I faced a string of challenges—communication struggles with my companion, doors slammed in my face, and hours of walking under the hot California sun. By evening, I felt worn down. Then, unexpectedly, the other missionaries we were staying with invited us to join them for a casual dinner with some local members. We shared a simple meal and played board games, and though it wasn’t a particularly special event, it became one of the happiest nights of my mission. After a tough day, the warmth and camaraderie made me realize how much more joyful the good moments feel when they follow hardship.

In *"The World is a Beautiful Place,"* Lawrence Ferlinghetti suggests that life is not a simple dichotomy of good versus bad, but rather a complex blend of beauty and hardship. By highlighting both the joyful and painful aspects of existence, he emphasizes the importance of finding beauty even in the midst of life’s struggles. It is through this recognition of contrast—between happiness and suffering, pleasure and pain—that we can fully appreciate the fleeting, yet meaningful, moments of joy that life offers. Rather than seeking a life free of hardship, Ferlinghetti encourages us to embrace both the highs and lows as integral parts of the human experience. In doing so, we gain a deeper understanding of the world’s inherent beauty. This balance, where both light and dark coexist, allows us to recognize that, despite the injustice, suffering, and tragedy that permeate society, the world remains a profoundly beautiful place, full of moments worth cherishing. By accepting and appreciating this duality, we can live more authentically and find value in every experience, both joyful and sorrowful.