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## ENTROPY AT WORK

*Malcolm Butler*

Another day I wake up, another day removed from the OG me. The me that was untainted by the world. Well, maybe not “untainted;” too many negative connotations associated with that word. More like uninfluenced. Even if I can’t remember the thoughts I had, the people I met, and everything I did yesterday, they all contributed to the person I am now. Even just typing that sentence changed who I am. I’m a changed man with every action and every thought.

This isn’t true for only me. It applies to everyone. You, reading this attempt at documenting the unstoppable train of thought, are changed by every word you read. These changes may be imperceptible, but they’ll probably influence your psyche in the subtlest of ways. Your subconscious mind will never forget how you felt reading these words long after the words themselves have faded from memory.

With each passing day we become more scrambled up versions of ourselves. We’re constantly being updated, but not necessarily improved, kind of like the new iOS 10 update. Things change more for the sake of changing than to progress or destroy. The natural order of things is disorder and there’s little we can do to stop it.

From my perch high atop the top bunk I see the natural order of things manifested in our room. It’s a hodgepodge of our belongings with a little rhyme and a bit of reason to it. On move-in day everything was clean, but just a few weeks in, our room is unrecognizable compared to the pictures from day one on my phone. It’s like babies, who come out looking more like little lumps of humanity than developed humans. You can see traces of that infant in a grown person’s face years later but it will never be the same.

We are the room. With every new piece of furniture, each article of clothing, every person that enters, each particle of dust, the room is changed. Those who lived here before left behind almost unnoticeable evidence that they existed. I’m sure some particularly observant individual will see our “contributions” to the room months after we’re long gone. Each contribution is a wrinkle in the grey matter, uncountable and individually small but still the foundation of who we are.

Heading down the hall to showers, there’s more evidence of increasing disorder. The carpet is a quilt of patterns in stark contrast to the dull grays of original design. The flooding has left its mark on Ross in the form of mismatched carpet squares. Oh, and the smell. Almost forgot about it but it hits you hard on the way to the showers. A putrid mix of mold, sewer water, and the old scent of Ross. That smell is definitely evidence of entropy at work.

This disorder doesn't just apply to us. It applies to everything. Every cracked tile of the shower floor, every drop from the stream of water from the shower head, every particle of anything that exists changes from second to second, no, from moment to moment. A moment so small that we can't even detect or measure its length in time. The only thing constant is change.

Every fiber of the carpet bends under my feet, never to return to the same state twice. My key and the inner mechanisms of the lock on the dorm room door become slightly more worn with every use. My shirt's condition deteriorates every time I wear it and with every wash. It'll never be that brand-new shirt I got from a basketball camp years ago. It will never be the same shirt that was rolled up in my drawer a few moments ago. The wrinkles will fade as the day progresses and a completely different set will form as soon as I ball it up and put it in my hamper later tonight.

Walking outside, on the way to my 8:25 a.m. class, the disorder of nature is apparent. I can see other's attempts at organization, the paved roads, the buildings of campus, the trimmed hedges, the cut grass. I can also see entropy at work on each one of these things. Uneven pavement, cracks and stains and plants on the buildings, hedges growing out of their freshly trimmed shapes, grass growing high again.

Others are heading to class, too. They talk about various forms of nothing: "How was your weekend?", "Last night was weird...", "I gotta show you this..." All conversations that will be forgotten as soon as a few moments from now, but still every word changes us. There is no stopping change. It comes and goes in so many forms that even the most attentive person can't see all these influences.

And it doesn't just determine who we are. Entropy is the defining rule of the universe. Disorder is the natural state of things. We usually frown upon disorder. Our notes need to be orderly, our thoughts need to be focused, our actions need to be deliberate and purposeful. No whims allowed! This might as well be plastered all over schools across the nation, right up there with the "hang in there" cat and the "impossible? No, I'm possible" posters. They're teaching us how to think about the world, how to be organized, how to systematically think through everything.

It's funny how all this learning helps us realize how lost we are. Every new discovery raises more questions. The disorder of the universe is so highly organized that we can only hope to understand all its laws. We have guesses, but we've always had guesses. All it takes is a few new findings for everything we thought we knew to be proven wrong.

The goal to organize the universe into a set of laws is a noble one, but it might not ever be attainable. New discoveries raise new questions. There will always be discoveries out there. We'll never discover it all. Entropy will always outdo us.

The only thing that's constant is change. Sade almost had it right in her song "It's never as good as the first time". It's never the same as the first time is a little closer to the truth. Disorder isn't bad. It's natural. Many find beauty in the symmetry and patterns in nature, but these patterns didn't exist some time ago. They are evidence of entropy at work. The flora and fauna of today don't even remotely resemble their primordial ancestors. They are the result of random mutations and chance encounters.

Just like us. Our primate ancestors developed into *Homo sapiens* through random chance. I wouldn't be here going to class, typing this write now if my parents hadn't met by some chance encounter at the University of Florida years ago.

Coming to grips with this randomness, with the fact that entropy is always at work, is what many philosophies preach. Christianity says that this randomness is all a part of God's plan and that every action has a purpose. We must accept His plan and trust that He will work it out. Stoicism says that acceptance is the only way to deal with it. Buddhism says that life is suffering for those with attachments and that the only way to overcome this suffering is to let go and accept that everything changes.

They all contain the truth. Entropy is always, always, always at work. The sooner we can accept that, the sooner we can choose how to live our lives.

A reminder just went off on my phone. Time for calculus; time to study the rates of change of everything. Sure, there are some constant equations with undefined rates of change, but these functions only serve as limits for real world functions. The laws and functions that govern our lives can only approach, but never reach, these constants. The same is true for all of us. We can only strive to be consistent, but the fact of the matter is that perfect consistency is unattainable. As humans, we are full of changes, and it's not just due to human nature. It is the most fundamental property of the nature of the universe itself.