Editor's Notebook: To My Visitor in 6,470 A.D.

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I can strike you at the strangest moments: that need to "figure things out," to "put them in perspective," to "decide what it means." If the existentialist never feels the need to evaluate the meaning of events, I am the opposite. I compulsively try to put things in scale. I am turning 40. For some of us, including me, this last event raises a very big question, the one about the evaluation of our lives. I cannot claim to have finished thinking about this, but I can report that a large part of my answer came out of recent conversations with two statues.

A larger-than-life stone sculpture of the ancient Egyptian King Mycinerus stands in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. His face and body are stylized, impossibly powerful and blank. Looking up at Mycinerus (one has to look up) I felt small and anonymous. What could there be in common between them in perspective, the opposite. I compulsively try to put things in scale. I am turning 40. For some of us, including me, this last event raises a very big question, the one about the evaluation of our lives. I cannot claim to have finished thinking about this, but I can report that a large part of my answer came out of recent conversations with two statues.

If the sum of my life can be set equal to some physical volume of space then the events from it might be represented as follows:

For the fact that I made a living as a chauffeur in Manhattan (a quail's egg), twice nearly killed in accidents (the root system of a rhododendron), six times a guest on local radio or television talk shows (another quail's egg), and countless times lost in imagining the details of complex plans of action or objects to be constructed (a walk-in closet).

Because I intend to continue living, I will not attempt a complete catalog of events to this moment. Instead, let's assume that the volumes accounted above cumulate to the equivalent of the space inside a suburban bedroom, then multiply that amount by a factor of seven for what I have been unwilling (or unable) to recall. This, then, can be labeled one unit of "Levin Life-Volume" (LLV). But I am not quite finished.

I feel a kinship with the person who carved the tiny servant sculpture, not only because I know how that ancient artisan used his blade to carve ribs in a block of wood, but because we have both lived ordinary lives in our times. I have visited his work several times now, and will continue to do so with that private feeling of knowing him. He is my link across 4,500 years into the future, I claim more LLVs and so on. And for imagining you and your children and the events of your everyday life, another 4,500 years into the future, I claim more LLVs and so on. And however bizarre the method of my measures, they are of some comfort to the owner of an ordinary life.

William Levin