



The End of the World

This is the piece that will never be published. Haven't you heard? The world's going to end on December 21.

End-of-the-world hysteria is rather interesting. The Argentine government has restricted access to a mountain over a mass "spiritual suicide" [threat](#) associated with it, and the Chinese regime has responded to a doomsday cult by staying true to form: It [arrested people](#). And all this based upon an interpretation of the Mayan calendar that predicts a Winter Solstice apocalypse.



Of course, every age has its end-times expectations. Martin of Tours predicted that the end would come by 400 A.D.; many believed, not surprisingly, it would happen on January 1, 1000; perhaps a tad more scientific, mathematician Michael Stifel predicted that at 8:00 am on October 19, 1533 Judgment Day would begin; and, more recently, radio personality Harold Camping prophesied a 2011 demise, which turned out to be as accurate as a 2012 Dick Morris election prediction.

For my part, I don't make end-of-the-world prognostications (just [end-of-the-republic ones](#)), nor do I trouble over them. One reason is that I'm secure in the knowledge that "no one knows the day or the hour." Yet there is another factor, one that seems to elude people who become frantic awaiting that supposed last day, pore over the Good Book trying to divine its date, or believe that such knowledge is somehow significant in their lives. It is this: Whenever the end times are, our own personal end time will come soon enough.

That is, we're all going to die. And from a personal standpoint, does it matter if you breathe your last during an Earth-rending and ending cataclysmic event or a coronary?

After all, if you're an atheist and believe we all end up worm food, the only difference is that there'll be no worms around to enjoy you. And if you're a Christian, you ought to know that you'll stand before God's judgment either way — and there are no absolution points for a really cool and unique demise.

It's ironic, too, because while it's possible (anything is) that you'll die in a Friday apocalyptic event, it's far more likely that on that day you'll succumb to a heart attack, aneurysm, or stroke, or be killed in a car accident. Or it could happen the next day, next week, or next month. Should you worry about it? Better than focusing on when you'll die is straightening how you live. Live right — the dying takes care of itself.

But this doesn't mean we shouldn't be mindful of death in a general sense. In fact, it's clear that what drives much of this end-times hysteria is a failure to have come to terms with death. Some people have, quite understandably, shunted thoughts of their final repose into their minds' recesses; then, upon hearing that a certain day may be their last, it's all the more difficult to handle because it has seldom been contemplated. Again, though, it's always the case that a certain day could be your last. And, again, unless you end up under ObamaCare care, it's doubtful your demise will be all that interesting.

As for me, I've gone through periods in which I'd quite naturally contemplate death every day, and even



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during other times I'm generally mindful of it. It sounds morbid, I know, but I don't mean that I'd ponder it in a brooding or suicidal way; it's in a relaxing and sobering way.

In fact, I've always considered such thoughts, which come to me quite spontaneously, a gift. Literally. Why? Well, it's as with a child who behaved as if he'd never grow up and didn't study, learn, and prepare for adulthood versus one who was mindful of his adult "destination" and consequently understood his job at the moment: to prepare to stand on his own two feet. Being mindful of our final destination places our lives in perspective. It makes it far less likely that we'll get gratuitously wrapped up in the things of this world than when we live as if this world is all there is.

Yet it makes a big difference whether or not people believe in an afterlife, as this determines their conception of their destination. When they have such belief, they have something to prepare for, something to live for beyond a tomorrow that may never come; when they don't, they won't believe they'll have an "adulthood" for which to prepare. And then, as with the secular New Yorkers whose [response](#) to the predicted apocalypse is to seek one last sexual romp, it's "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." Of course, a lot of what the people in question are saying is tongue-in-cheek; they're largely just seizing upon the Mayan moment as another excuse to party. In reality, it's difficult for atheists to be merry when they're mindful of death, assuming they can be merry at all. This is why they're so unlikely to ponder death.

As for those taking the Friday prediction more seriously, it turns out that many of them are contacting NASA, which reports inundation with phone calls. The questions asked are things such as, [writes](#) the *Los Angeles Times*, "Will a rogue planet crash into Earth? Is the sun going to explode? Will there be three days of darkness?" My, my, did they forget about wandering black holes and gamma-ray bursts?

I don't know about you, but the mischievous part of me might like to be a NASA representative and say to one of these folks, "Well, sir, since the end is nigh, I guess I can tell you. We've been in contact with the aliens and they're going to take us off the Earth. They're all booked up with the elite few, though. But I can give you the number of a good church."

Of course, I wouldn't actually do it. Not only might the person do something rash, but I wouldn't want such a mean thing to be my last act before meeting my maker on the 21st.

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