

Disgusting

To smash a cockroach has become instinctual for humans. It's so funny how, in a split second, such a small creature can un-civilize a man.

On the ground, the cockroach's six mechanical legs are capable of immense microcosmic speeds. One scientist—in a National Geographic magazine I read—claimed that roaches can sprint up to eleven inches per second, fast enough to ensure a safe getaway from most humans. A creature this size sees a human as a giant threat. The swing of an incoming arm wafts a torrent of breeze that is picked up by the roach's sensitive 'cercus' or tail which triggers the cockroach's nervous system.

It may seem that it is their destiny to be despised but cockroaches are obviously well adapted to survive in our human world. While most of us consider them pests, cockroaches are an important member of the circle of life. They are our wakeup call for hygiene; they are the hygiene police. If they are present it is more than likely because we left something behind for them to eat or perhaps because another life form is decaying; they come to clean up. It is true that roaches are known to spread disease and bacteria but ironically they themselves practice good hygiene: they keep their antennae clean at all times, their most important tool for seeing the world.

When I was younger I was somehow instinctively afraid of touching them, so I chose to destroy them by any means possible, even awakening the evil inside me and torturing them after capture. There were various fun ways of going about this. My favorite way of disposing of a captured cockroach (I would hold them using a leaf, paper or tissue) was sacrificing it to ants. For this to be successful, the cockroach had to be crippled; I would remove at least three of its legs, preferably on the same side. I would then drop the roach on an ant trail. After discovering this nutritious snack, the ants would all crawl on top, each biting a leg or the abdomen. After a few minutes of this butchering of the slain beast they would carry it away to their queen. As a child, I was fond of the ant monarchy; I was their protector and their provider. I would bring any insect I could find to them so long as they didn't invade my home.

My sentiments were different for cockroaches. My second favorite method of dispatch required matches; I would light a match and burn them alive. Surely all the bacteria died along with it. I and my fellow humans were inherently evil.

Lowly status notwithstanding, cockroaches should not be pitied. Cockroaches have no emotions; they hardly have a brain, Cockroaches act purely on instinct. Their body's nervous system has adapted so well to its urban natural environment. No matter how many of them we

kill, they will never stop popping up. According to National Geographic, cockroaches can give birth to fifteen younglings in each egg sack they lay. Moreover, they do this seven times within two month intervals. They have been around since the age of dinosaurs; they are surely not going anywhere anytime soon.

The cockroach is undoubtedly a resilient life form and maybe human beings tend to hate things that excel. If there's one spark of brilliance that cockroaches have been able to accomplish, it is gliding. A gliding cockroach will startle anyone. We already know that cockroaches run away from you—this gives you a level of comfort and dominance over them—but their clumsy gliding makes them completely unpredictable. The flap of their brown wings induces a cringe at the thought of it landing on your face. This prospect itself is enough to topple a giant human.

There are other cockroach activities we might find disgusting. Their mating rights, for example, might seem revolting and even immoral to human eyes. Throughout my life I've seen many insects mating abdomen to abdomen and this even includes butterflies. While there is no love experienced in the action, in my childish anthropocentric mind I would believe there was. Human beings tend to think that insects are immoral, the most immoral of the life forms upon earth. The sad irony of this is that it's nothing juxtaposed to humans. Humans tend to use themselves as an example as to how all other life forms must live. This is known as anthropocentricity and perhaps it is a synonym for 'evil' if other species had language to express this. If you think about it abstractly, there might not be that much of a difference between the cockroach's love rituals and ours. I've witnessed the cockroach mating once in my life, as a child, when I would inspect things from ten inches away, or as close as my entertainers would possibly allow. The male would raise its brown outer case and expose its wings, as if showing off, and with its antennae caress the females near him. In the human world this would translate to either income stability or attractive physical attributes (two things to which adult females are predominantly attracted).

Through research I know now a bit more about what I witnessed as a child. According to Patricia J. Moore and Allen J. Moore the ritual begins with the male cockroach raising his wings exposing his abdomen. Following this action he releases pheromones that the female cockroaches are attracted to. The female would then mount the male. As soon as the female's genital opening is within reach of the male's pygidium (an internal hook-like structure) the male then proceeds to hooking the female and rotating to a hundred and eighty degrees position. In humans, this might translate to the male's words attracting a woman, persuading her until she gives in to the act. The result is abdomen to abdomen sweet love. The female roach will only

do this once in her lifetime, and therefore with one male partner. As a child I wouldn't be aware of all of this subjective thought and would proceed to burn them or smash them just the same, perhaps believing that it was not even sex I was witnessing but instead a mutated roach, like the Siamese twins I saw on television once.

Human beings are perhaps even more disgusting than Cockroaches. We may dismiss the evil acts we commit against them convincing ourselves that we remain the dominant species. But humans fight amongst one another; we attempt to distort taxonomy and further divide our species artificially. Cockroaches will likely outlive us. They would survive any apocalypse to come, indeed, an apocalypse we likely will have brought upon ourselves.

The population of roaches is far greater than that of humans and they are a more ancient species. Maybe we can learn a lot more than we realise from them. The truth is, our morality is challenged and contradicted when tested by our relationship with insects. Morality only pertains to those with cognizance and intellect—humans and not insects. The cockroach is resilient because it does not think; its body is well adapted to survive purely on instincts. Perhaps our intellect is our own downfall. It is as if consciousness comes with a price, frailty of the biological make up. True, we find tools and other ways to protect ourselves. But medical and technological inventions do not guarantee our survival across the millennia. In fact, they potentially hasten or heighten the possibility of our demise. Cockroaches have none of our technological and moral superiority and they are still here, adapted to us; maybe they are a prototype that in some way outshines a later design.

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