

Is Nature Delicate or Resilient?

If you contemplate nature you start to see a massive web of complex connections and causal chains. This organism feeds on that, which fertilizes this, which feeds that, which fertilizes this, which produces oxygen for that, etc. etc. It's mind boggling.

It can begin to feel like every single detail in nature is finely tuned to every other. Nature can start to seem very fragile. It makes you feel like preserving every single element precisely as they are at the moment of contemplation for fear the entire thing will collapse with the introduction or subtraction of a single element. As if a sneeze could destroy the world.

On the other hand, if you contemplate nature through time – the greater the epochs the moreso – a different feeling emerges. Changes in weather are adapted to with uncanny speed and ability. New elements are constantly coming and going, and not on predictable seasonal cycles. Freak earthquakes, volcanoes, weather fluctuations, meteors, solar activity, and interruption by other species (including exploratory humans) are the norm. There is no such thing as an “invasive species”. If you look long enough, no species is really native to its current place of prominence and no ecosystem looks like it did in ages past.

Even on a smaller scale, if you've marveled at the way a tree will absorb a barbed-wire fence, you get the feeling that nature is the most resilient, adaptable, powerful, anti-fragile force imaginable.

The same goes for the human body. If you've suffered ongoing ills, undoubtedly the path to understand has led you to food allergies, posture problems, and other stressors compounding to gum up the works. It feels like your body is so preciously balanced that the slightest disruption will break it. Then you observe humans flourishing in every environment, adapting to everything from pure plant to pure meat diets, healing from broken bones, living after amputations, and bouncing back from the harshest conditions imaginable.

I think time is the trick-player here.

At any one snapshot of time, the balance is complex and apparently precarious. Big change can result from small changes. But when you unpause the scene and observe through time, the self-correcting and adaptive nature of the systems turns out to be a more powerful force than any insurgence at any single moment.

Both points of view are instructive. Yes, it's a vast, complex, interconnected causal chain. Yes, everything that happens has the potential to alter everything else. But yes, it also has

more ability to adapt and thrive than you do ability to imagine how. Yes, it is anti-fragile and harder to break or tune than you think.

Let the intricacy and the strength give you pause and induce a sense of wonder and joy. Don't let either cause you fear or panic.