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A PLAGUE FROM WITHIN

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Abstract

Current methods of investigation in cognitive psychology generally focus on stimuli that are visually or perceptibly immediate to the perceiver, and stimuli that usually are either physical in nature, or relating to physical objects, and their features. Mack and Rock's (1998) detailed account of inattention blindness (IB) reflects this tendency. Furthermore, IB and other related phenomena neglect the cognitive processes that become active in cases of incognizance, thereby overlooking the conflicts that arise in such cases. At present, I propose the notion of cognizance to reframe the question of perceptual awareness in terms of this notion to explore such conflicts.

I explore the phenomenological or experiential nature of the character of cognizant individuals through my short story. This helps to reveal the proper conceptualization and implications of cognizance, and make more explicit the cognitive shortcomings worse than IB. Finally, the story was written in the first-person perspective, as opposed to third-person in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (2007), and partly adopting the lyrical style of Deafheaven's frontman George Clarke. By combining these influences, my short story provides a thought experiment whose depiction of the cognizant individual helps to raise the issues and implications associated with incognizance, and to account for that which IB overlooked.

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Introduction

Thought. More precisely, the thought process is one of the most important issues to have been addressed in psychology, and literature. However, in some ways, this sort of thought process, presently understood in what follows, has not been addressed as it should, at least not in another more important direction thus far in research in psychology. There has been a tendency for research in cognitive psychology to study human behavior or cognition, and other related phenomena by relying on material objects, physical stimuli, or other persons as the object of perception. That is, these researchers tend to study, e.g., what objects or physical stimuli people can simply see (or observe), or not see (or not observe), and by extension overlook that which goes beyond what is only visually or perceptibly immediate. Rather than assess whether an individual can recognize or realize the significance of a given scenario or scene, which certainly involves material objects and the like, psychologists generally concentrate instead on the question of whether an individual noticed some mere stimulus situated before her.

Consider inattentional blindness (IB), a well-documented phenomenon studied and assessed by many cognitive psychologists in recent decades, most notably by Mack and Rock (1998). Put simply, IB amounts to the failure of an individual to notice or realize some stimulus, broadly construed, that is visually or perceptibly immediate within her visual field. In cases of IB, she fails to notice that stimulus even if it appears directly in front of her. Mack and Rock (1998) suggest that IB occurs because without first having paid due attention to some stimulus, any given individual generally will fail to consciously perceive that stimulus. But although their conclusion certainly contributes to the fact that humans fall ill, and are subject to many cognitive limitations, the

phenomenon of IB, as does its explanatory background, fails to capture a more serious shortcoming that extends the former limitation, and thus its implications.

Although this line of research certainly has demonstrated just how limited certain cognitive capacities can be, it fails to account for phenomena that occur outside or beyond our immediate fields of vision, and perception. Furthermore, what implicitly goes awry in the above means of investigation is its reliance on mere material objects, and their physical characteristics to infer what persons fail to see or perceive. And it is this over-reliance, however relevantly informative it may be, that, on my view, overshadows the more critical aspect of cognitive limitations that should be considered alongside the above. While IB, for instance, captures the conflict that arises when an individual fails to perceive something, it only accounts for precisely that, and usually nothing more.

The general distinction made here is that between the visually or perceptibly immediate, and that which is not, and it is this distinction that is imperative to appreciating the more critical aspect of our cognitive limitations. But what precisely is this critical aspect? It revolves around and lays its foundation upon the thought process. It also involves multiple cognitive capacities working in tandem with one another, collectively contributing to their integration into what can be called cognizance. That is, such general cognitive faculties as recognition, realization, reflective self-awareness, global and diffuse awareness, attention, and the like constitute this capacity called cognizance. But more importantly, what distinguishes cognizance from mere perception of visual or physical stimuli is its characteristic appreciation of the significance of said stimuli.

Cognizance ultimately amounts to an interplay between the above mentioned mental faculties, and one that manifests explicitly as a function of the cognizant individual's conscience. The cognizant individual goes beyond simple perception of objects, persons, and other stimuli, broadly construed, as well as simply handling or dealing with them. She appreciates the fact that these objects and the like relate to the world, i.e., her environment, and her surroundings, and the significance of such a relation. She lives her life through the lens of an observer whose resolve revolves around an appreciation of and considerateness toward others. In short, the cognizant individual does not merely perceive her environment and what constitutes it; she is perceptive in the cognizant sense of the term.

My short story, "A Plague from Within", presents to the reader the life of the protagonist through the lens of such an observer as the one described above, and in this way, presents to the reader also a picture in which the conflict that arises becomes salient and explicitly evident. The story's presentation demonstrates the role of thought process in cognizance, and how that relates to one's conscience, especially in the case of a cognizant individual. In this short story, the general aim is to explore questions and implications that follow from issues that arise when questioning this 'thought process' itself, as it applies across individuals. When we openly and explicitly question, say, the structure of and need for thought process, as it applies to any given individual, we may very well find ourselves beginning to ask, if not already, questions along the lines of, say: What on earth was that person thinking? True, a question such as this one has been used all too often. Even so, we still can ask more formal questions: To simply start, Did one think things through?

Others include the following. Did one realize what one is, or was doing? Did one recognize the errors, if any, in one's behavior for instance? Does one acknowledge that one is at fault, partly or entirely, for the accident or incident, whatever it may turn out to be, that occurred? Did one reflect on one's errors, mistakes, and so forth? Was one spatially aware of oneself, and of oneself in relation to others, and the rest of one's world or more immediate environment? Did it ever occur to one that one's behavioral conduct was inappropriate given the current circumstances in each scenario? Did it ever occur to one, that is, that one's conduct poses a threat to, endangers, or otherwise compromises the lives or daily activities of others?

At this point, one should have already begun to realize where these questions have led. Hopefully, what has transpired within the last two paragraphs is that questions regarding thought led to questions regarding realization, recognition, acknowledgement, reflection, and awareness—all of which involve or result from some thought process. In other words, the original question that was raised about thought process in general brought to our attention more specific concepts or phenomena among a family of interrelated cognitive capacities, the most significant of which can be called cognizance.

Thus, the aim of my short story is to explore what it takes to be cognizant, and to cognize in the relevant sense. It explores the kind of thought process, and kinds of thought pattern that may be characteristic of any given cognizant individual. What does it mean to be cognizant? How would cognizance manifest in the individual who is cognizant? Might there be various degrees to this manifestation? Perhaps various kinds of manifestation as well? What are the consequences? Implications? In sum, the way in which the story is told provides a detailed account of the experiential nature and structure

of the manifestation of cognizance. The short story chronicles the life of such a cognizant individual, and thus describes the events that take place during the time frame available in its storyline consistent with the perspective of that cognizant individual. Through this short story, I raise questions and make clear the practical (and ethical) value of doing so, as the issues that arise from our cognitive shortcomings certainly impinge on our daily lives.

Provided the notion of cognizance as it is described above, I assess its costs, benefits, and implications by exploring how cognizance may manifest across various scenarios. In addition, I approach this by means of a narrative told in the first-person perspective—as opposed to third-person, as in *Crime and Punishment* by Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky (2007) provides an account of human behavior by means of visual imagery, of both character and environment, and description particularly of the character's behavior and thought process. Moreover, Dostoevsky's (2007) narrative of human character, i.e., Raskolnikov's, utilizes a blend of third-person perspective, and dialogue, which together presents to the reader a sense of what goes on in his psyche, as it were. But despite this approach to exploring the psyche of a tormented individual, throughout the novel, we find Raskolnikov's behavior and thought process to be relatively subtler than they are explicit.

The distancing between Raskolnikov and the reader that results from Dostoevsky's approach thus taints the transparency with which the reader otherwise may have achieved a certain intimacy. The content that one finds in the text does not quite present to the reader the implications of human behavior as explicitly as required. The story depicts the vulnerability of Raskolnikov's psyche; however, based on how his

behaviors, mannerisms, and thought patterns are described, how precisely it would feel experientially to be Raskolnikov remains subtle and unclear, despite the vivid details. But this content which is found within the text, and in some sense, is indeed the text itself, informs my approach nonetheless. My approach extends Dostoevsky's by rendering the phenomenological experience much more explicit. So, in response to Dostoevsky, the text of the story is written in such a way that the reader more easily grasps just what kind of thought process is characteristic of a cognizant individual. By way of first-person perspective, it makes clear to the reader just what would come to mind if she were to cognize in the relevant sense, i.e., what precisely would be constitutive of the thought process or thought patterns evident in cognizant individuals. Further, presenting a case of cognizance more explicitly illustrates more effectively the issues that arise from a lack thereof.

Another source of motivation comes from the band Deafheaven (2011, 2013, 2015), and their frontman and lyricist George Clarke. Clarke's approach to writing lyrics for their songs stems mainly from the use of phrases, and incomplete sentences or thoughts as well as visual imagery, and emotion. One thing to note is that the lyrics and the music complement each other and together create in the listener of their songs an emotional experience that can be heard as much as it can be felt, or understood. Another aim of the short story is to provide for the reader a similar experience that can be felt and understood as if the reader were the main character himself. As with complete sentences, these phrases and incomplete sentences are meant to provide for the reader something not so much to read, but more so something to ponder about after having first read it.

In addition, Clarke's lyric writing informs my use of footnotes as figurative of the subconscious, as the content of his lyrics provide in the reader (or listener to the music) a sense of having tapped into her subconscious. While these lyrics impress upon the reader an idea of her emotions, the actual lyrical content captures the subconscious out of which her emotions may spill. Similarly, the text impresses upon the reader how the main character feels, or how it may feel to be cognizant, while the actual content making up that text captures implicitly how his thought process may manifest. Moreover, Clarke's approach to lyric writing influenced my writing of this short story, particularly how the thought process may manifest in a cognizant individual. Finally, by appealing to emotion here, I complete the hypothetical duality of the affective and logical counterparts of human character in cognizant individuals.

A Plague from Within

A vibration. Another vibration. And another. Beep beep beep beep. Sounds were emanating from my phone and alarm clock, but went unnoticed. For the first few seconds, I only registered the sounds. I hadn't quite made sense of them just yet. Only sounds in the far distance, but I somewhat felt as though I knew what they meant. Then, suddenly, it occurred to me. Slowly coming to senses and finally waking up, I took a deep breath as my brows furrowed in frustration. I'd finally woken up, and that meant to me, and quite inevitably, another day. That is, another day to get through. I suppose I must get out of bed to turn off the alarm, I thought. And I did.

10:03 AM, the clock read. I stood there by my desk, though comfortable in my usual sweats, cognitively drained and mentally absent. My eyes still closed shut, and quite intentionally, and brows still furrowed, I stood there with the palm of my right hand placed against the edge of the tabletop, taking a chance to have a little bit more snooze time. Amidst the dark space in my room, I stood there, barely processing anything except the mere fact that I was still tired and exhausted from the day before. And even then, it was sort of implicit how I processed it. It had become so routinized, but not in the sort of way regular schedules normally operate, that it had become so ingrained in my daily functioning and activity. Much like a temporal mechanism enmeshed deep within my human flesh.

But it does not stop there; my pain, that is. There was a minor headache flashing and pulsating underneath that skull of mine. Minor, but a headache nonetheless. I thought to myself, it couldn't get any worse, could it? One could only indulge oneself in the positive but untrustworthy mindset of wishful thinking. And I knew very well that

engaging in wishful thinking would not resolve almost any given conflict. So, I opened my eyes, brows still furrowed, in the same standing position, and exhaled. Exhaled, as I grappled onto the fact of life that is the horrid stench of dealing with life's activities. I sighed, heartbroken, but feeling flat and empty at the same time. Then I looked to the red digits on my alarm clock. 10:05 AM, the clock read.

And so, with a little beep from a little alarm clock a new day began. But of course, one knows quite well that it really isn't new at all. Just another day is what it means. And as usual, that's how every day begins for me. Quite unfortunate, I know.

I tidied myself up as usual. After first getting out of bed, and then turning off all alarms, I proceeded to change from my sweats to the usual general outfit of thick sweater and dark blue jeans. A few minutes devoted to brushing my teeth, and another minute dedicated to cleansing the face, and drying the skin with a soft towel. Also, since my hair would always get messy overnight, especially after a long, good night's rest, I had to devote yet another few minutes to quickly wash my hair and dry it up with another towel. That may have been the most important part of this morning routine. I couldn't just walk out into the world with messy hair. It wouldn't do to present to the world your appearance as being that of a slob. One must tidy oneself up, at the very least anyway. It preserves one's dignity. Not pride, no. Dignity. Pride is much too outdated a value.

Anyhow, before heading out of my room, I read off my first mental checklist. Backpack. Course materials. Phone, earphones. Keys. Wallet. "Okay, I have everything," I nodded away, tapping my fingers in the air in successive repetition. A moment of hesitation followed with pondering eyes. Then a moment of doubt and uncertainty spilled in. "Yea, I have everything," I reassured myself, stating the fact repeatedly, as if the truth

wasn't enough to satiate my epistemic thirst—part of the time reiterating it to myself silently, and the other spent mentalizing my confidence and trust. After about a minute of solid reassurance, I made my way toward the door to my room, turned around and proceeded to the second checklist. Alarm turned off. All wires unplugged. Alarm turned off, all wires unplugged. And as I continued to tap my fingers in the air, “Alarm turned off, and all wires unplugged. Yea, I'm good to go.” Another round of solid reassurance preoccupied my morning routine before I finally turned the light off, and ultimately locked the door. And with that, I dashed out of the apartment, past the hallway to the left, down the three flights of stairs at the end, and through the exit into the lobby, where I left the apartment complex through the next exit.

Next destination. The computer lab. Well, the one I frequent anyway. It has been established that this computer lab was the ideal one for printing resources, course materials, what have you. Up the flight of stairs. Overwhelming step by overwhelming step. The impatience that was in me stiffened my body with frustration. As I made it onto the second floor, I immediately noticed the line leading into the computer lab. I stepped into the line, and claimed my spot in it. Still a bit drowsy from earlier this morning, I closed my eyes, and waited there in solemnity. A bit of proxy snooze time. Suddenly, something pushed down hard on my right foot. But I realized at once without hesitation that that feeling against my foot was indeed that of the person in front me. His foot, that is. I said, next destination: the computer lab. Not next destination: counterfeit foot massage.

At once I burst into a fit of sardonic laughter. Why was I laughing? Why did I laugh? Perhaps there was no reason to ask such a question, I thought at first. But perhaps

there was. Perhaps there *was* reason. I mean, spatial awareness is integral to daily functioning, central to personal control of one's bodily movement, navigation, and occupancy of space. Also, on the level of morality, wouldn't he be in a position to be reprimanded for violating another person's personal space? It is, I take it, certainly proper etiquette to maintain a good sense of where one stands. I mean, how could he not see where he's headed? Did he not see me? At any rate, this is ridiculous. So much so that I couldn't comprehend why it is that he just had to have stepped on my shoes, and bumped into me, even if accidentally. Perhaps this incomprehensibility was the reason for my laughing the way I did?

I couldn't stop thinking about it until I better understood the reason he failed to do something so simple. All he had to do was look around, see if anyone is there. Could it get any harder to check for anything within a few feet in one's path? Spatial awareness is imperative. How could the guy be so careless? Seriously. This guy standing in line before me was probably preoccupied with something - he probably had something to attend to on his mind, I thought. That has got to be a reasonable excuse for having bumped into me. It was an accident after all. Right? But then again, he ought to be more aware of his surroundings, should he not? I mean, how could he be so careless as to bump into someone? Is that behavior of his not demonstrative of lack of consideration for others - persons other than himself? Oh, and! How could he be so careless as to allow preoccupation to distract him from his own surroundings?! Imagine what would have happened if this had occurred while he drove in the streets! What a threat he would pose to others!

It became a mystery to me. Both spatial unawareness, and my reaction to instances thereof. Incomprehensibility resulted in further incomprehensibility. One just couldn't figure the incomprehensible.

With my eyes closed, I took a deep breath, all the way into to my gut, and locked my jaws. I stood here in my place in the line, and as I got increasingly ticked off by the long wait - and let it be known here and now that it was one *incredibly* long wait - thoughts began to flood with excess. With every thought, I increasingly appreciated the fact that I would have to stand here for another duration of time. It did not matter to me necessarily just how many minutes I had to wait. One could say, the mere fact that I had to wait was primary. Certainly, having to wait many minutes is a horrible event to endure. Unbearable. Unsettling. There is no doubt about that. No doubt. What I guess I am saying here is this: waiting *altogether* is horrible. I opened my eyes, and only to find myself in the same. Exact. Spot.

I just stood here, thinking to myself:

I am just *standing* here. As if I'm stuck in traffic. No, human traffic is even worse. People couldn't even budge. You know, what's going wrong here is with some of those individuals *in there*. In the computer lab. Seriously! I'm telling you. *Look* at what some of them are doing. *I mean it*. Seriously, *look*. Yes, with *both* of your naked eyes. *Stop and stare* if you must. They're literally spending their precious time surfing the internet, or fooling around and wasting precious time. *Our* precious time! You have got to be kidding me! Students like me, this guy in front me, those behind us - we're all standing here *waiting to* print out our course materials. To work on an essay or project that's due the coming week. To *actually*

prepare for a class. To get some work *done*. And you? You're sitting there watching comedy!?! You're not the only one on campus, you know!?! Look around! Don't you have eyes?!

Too frustrated and disgusted, I closed my eyes again and took another breath. "Horrible, horrible. Just horrible. Just despicable." Quite frankly, this is not an uncommon event. I mean waiting in line while some students just waste away their time using public computers. Essentially, they're commandeering computers for their own comfort, for their own need of comedic relief. *While* other students who *actually* have to use them have to wait for *them* to finish *their* silly nonsense. Think about it. If just for a moment. Really think hard. It may be trivial to some, but heck is it just as significant to others - to us real *students*. Oh, how this makes my blood boil!

Finally, someone from inside the computer lab finished their business and left. It was too bad for me that there was still another person before me. You know what that means? Yes, correct! That just means more waiting! Wonderful! Fantastic! I couldn't ask for more! I proceeded to take the few steps forward that I could. It felt, in one word, amazing. Almost miraculous. But it was only momentary, that feeling of having at all moved forward.¹ It was only for a fleeting moment in time, for the wait would have to resume, naturally, soon thereafter. I suppose one could say it goes along our natural

¹ Here in this paragraph is the scene that symbolizes our progress in achieving full cognizance and insight. It depicts then where we stand in the line of progress. And as the scene suggests, we're nowhere close. We are one step away from achieving this. But some people stand in our way, and thus establish themselves as obstacles in our course of action. Also, the three lines following the one that is footnoted along with the latter altogether symbolize exactly that we are currently at a standstill. We have not yet come to realize what's really going on here. We pay only attention to, if at all, as it were to the surface. We dare not enter unexplored territory. We fail to realize that others around us have important things to do, errands to run, chores to complete, children to feed, assignments and projects to turn in, classes to prepare for, good grades to secure, and the list goes on. Of course, this is not to discriminate. Here, the example was given in the context of student life, or more broadly, (the beginning stages of) academic life, or at least one possible pathway along which many students potentially live through.

course of action. Quite predictable, you see. And it was at that point when I finally stepped forward that I peeked into the computer lab. Just to investigate for myself and on behalf of other students. To locate the individuals who were only there to browse. To surf the internet. Stream videos. Not just one, but significantly many more. Not academic in nature, but purely for play. For fun, for giggles. And that's where it gets worse. Much worse.

This is what the person did, and I kid you not. He was staring intently at the screen. Or more precisely, the video which he was streaming. With sparks that lit those eyes of his, and a grin noticeable even to the inattentive. Every few seconds, his mouth would burst with laughter. His face glimmering with joy. Full of good cheer. Then there would be a pause. A moment of hesitation. Only to be followed by another burst of laughter. Ah, I almost forgot to mention. There would also be a few giggles here and there. One could say that pattern was very much akin to wavelengths on a graph or something. In any case, I just couldn't take it anymore. But still, I held it in. I kept it stored inside me. My blood began to boil yet again.² I looked around the room to find a few individuals also eyeing the guy beside me. Some looked fierce in the eyes. Others looked exhausted and ticked off with a dead stare in their eyes; it seemed almost like they were trying to work off 4 hours of sleep, only to be disturbed by that one individual. It's sad, really. It's something that I just couldn't comprehend, even to this day.

As I stared at him - and I mean the guy beside me - he just continued to laugh away, almost completely absorbed in the video. As if fully immersed. No. Might I correct

² Yes, I do realize that the certain phrase within this sentence can be considered a cliché, or perhaps *is* a cliché, but nevertheless I also find this to capture precisely how I felt at that moment. How did it feel then, you ask? Well, there was a certain rage. A peculiar and momentous fit of rage. To the contrary, it was not acted out. Rather, it was visceral. Bodily. All throughout, in fact!

myself. It would be more accurate to assert that he really was fully immersed. Reminding myself that others were waiting for someone to finish so that they would have their much-needed spot, I quickly went through the ten to fifteen files that I had to print for class, and I had them printed straight away. Immediately after, I made my way straight to the student staff's counter where the stapler, among other office supplies, was located. Without hesitation, I proceeded to straighten the several journal articles that I had printed, and stapled them cleanly. Soon thereafter, I quickly left the lab and dashed straight out of the complex, headed for class. "Horrible, horrible. Just horrible," I scoffed.

As I sped walked to class, I looked around me and observed the environment before me. For every given moment, I watched the other students in the current area conduct their usual business. Students of various sorts, I should add. Pedestrians. Bicyclists. Skateboarders. Even those who stood still, regardless of posture or position. I watched roughly half of the total population of pedestrians walking on campus take their time with their every step. As if they had plenty of time to waste. Plenty. But with the large population of students, I had to maneuver my way through those students who would walk so slowly. There is a basic tactic in avoiding, and, ideally, preventing altogether, pedestrian traffic - and that of active vehicles. It is of staying one's course, keeping one's position in one's lane of choice. In other words, one ought to remain in one's chosen pathway for the duration of one's travel. One ought to keep it smooth, constant, seamless. But whatever the case might have been, in a hurry to make it to class on time, I sped past all students alike.

When I finally arrived at and entered the building where my classroom was located, the situation worsened. Inevitably so. As I made my way toward the stairs, I

figured I had to slow down a bit. What a dramatic halt it was. As if a large stop sign slapped me across the face. It was the usual but unpleasant sight. Before me was a handful of students taking their sweet time up the stairs while other students behind me and I were given no choice but to adjust our speed, just for the sake of the slower individuals in front of us. Quite irritated midway, I clenched my fists, tighter than rubber bands wrapped around a given object multiple times. Inhaled deeply. Exhaled deeply. Brows furrowed yet again, I stared, with much discontent, toward the large name brand backpack that occupied the space before the immediate surface of my face. Not until I finally stepped onto the second floor of the building following the stairway did I feast my eyes on something other than that backpack.

Finally, I entered my classroom to see most of my classmates already seated in their usual spots, engaging in conversation. A few had rested their heads on the top of their tables, burying their face in their arms. Then I looked to my professor whom I greeted with a genuine smile and the usual head nod and upper body bow. Immediately after, I seated myself in my own usual spot. And since today there was another seat before me, as with every other opportunity, I cautiously placed my backpack in that additional seat.

But as the usual, and almost necessary procedure would play out, I bent down toward each seat to check if any hair or other strange or foreign substance was waiting to be found. It was quite critical to examine the chairs and tables before me. One may never know what substances occupied these spaces. It was imperative to follow protocol. Lo and behold, there was a single strand of long and dark brown hair lying against the seat itself. Consequently, I proceeded, as usual, to blow the substance off onto the flooring of

the classroom, where it would meet the rest. It was as if I was blowing out the flame of a thousand wax candles. When I finally seated myself after the thorough inspection, I took a moment to sigh with temporary satisfaction. A heavy sigh at that. Comfort overtook my body. Then I looked to the classroom floor where my eyes met the hair, dirt, sand, and dust that lived on the floor. The classroom floor. In this room. I had seen them in my past years of university. Same classroom. I did not miss them. These bits and grains. They were like seeds of disease to me. No. They *are*.

That night. Well past 10:00 PM. I had finally found the noise that surrounded me and the space around me subside. Finally finding it quiet enough to at least get started in some fashion, I took out my copy of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and proceeded to turn to the page on which I had last left off. I remembered the page number. True, I couldn't recite poetry on command, but I could at least remember very well page numbers, among other things. There was no need to jot it down somewhere.

Not too much time had yet passed when the next round of noise entered the scene. To be precise, it was only four minutes. There is no arguing against this proposition. I had checked the time at which the first round began and ended exactly, and the same for the ones that followed. It was very much a daily round-up at this point. Not weekly. Not even every few days. Daily. The predictable echo. Oh, so predictable. Gibberish discourse unnecessarily filled the room. Yappity yap yap, I mouthed, filled with disgust. Blah blah blah, I barked, a bit slowly, but surely enough. There just could never be a barricade to this constant barrage.

Fists of rage began to shake as my core erupted. Soon this entire body of mine was prepared to shake the earth. But with a single instance of inhalation deep down into

that very core, I slowly released my clenched fists from the built-up tension. I felt the stiffened muscles in my palms slowly loosen up. And with sealed lips and closed eyes, and a slight frown at the corners of my lips, I proceeded to exhale with a heavy sigh, much like an elder coming to terms with bad news, but willingly taking it calmly. With that I calmed down. Invoked the common phrase: Inner peace. Didn't quite work, but did a decent job nonetheless, I suppose. Either way, the back-and-forth blabbering affected me enough. There was no good reason to further immerse myself in this way. But as with every other situation like this one, I was left to do one thing, or variations of the same general activity, one might say: Contemplate. Ponder. Reflect.

All that was said.... All that was spoken - *with intent*.... That which came from a *rational agent!* How could such things be uttered at all? It was so drastically nonsensical that not even the typical head- or scalp-scratching of confusion could suffice to express such confusion. Not even the brow-lifting of bewilderment would do. It just could not do the job. It just couldn't. This was plainly so. Plainly evident to me at least. This sort of puzzlement was much too grand. Of course, I needn't have immersed myself as such. But I *had to*. You see, I just had to *comprehend* what had occurred before me. It had to be explained. *Explicated*. But within reason. Or reasonable reason, whatever that may mean. A thorough explication was *needed*. Otherwise, I'd be left with yet another *speck of skepticism*. Certainly, a skepticism toward one's capacity for discourse. *A certain kind of incertitude*.

Anyhow, the next morning spelled another day. After a night of failing to get neither enough sleep nor enough reading done, I initiated the daily morning routine. I completed it flawlessly. Took the usual route to class. Nothing special about that. It was

as obvious as it could be. One could definitely notice, though, provided that they paid enough attention in the first place. Not certain anyone noticed, though. In any case, I knew for a fact that I've noticed such a thing. It was plain to see. Having been taking the same route on a daily or regular basis, I could not help but notice that a number of other persons took their respective usual routes just as I did. There's that usual skateboarder who boards, probably using his skateboard as a practical means of transportation. He could skate, no doubt. But what he couldn't do was look around and see what was before him. He skated past me from behind on my left; he was only about an inch away from my arm. My peripheral suggests that likely to be the case. Where does the problem lie? And when does it arise? Is there even a problem to begin with?! Some say this reaction of mine is an overreaction. I beg your pardon. No, I shouldn't have to beg. But that's the saying. At any rate, that is irrelevant at this moment. That skateboarder was no more than an inch away, as I said before. But here's the catch: He had more than ten whole feet to the left of him to occupy. To use. To claim for himself for the time being. Out of all ten to thirteen feet to the left of me, he just had to choose the closest bit to me. Either it hasn't occurred to him that he's just a bit too close, or he deliberately did it shamelessly.

And there's that gentleman who always seemed to be wandering about on campus, or at least heading in and out of his office every ten to fifteen minutes, or however long it may have been. One couldn't argue against this proposition or suggest an alternative, because I've witnessed it all too often for it to be dismissible. I was practically an on-site prosecutor of sorts. An undercover detective on a stakeout. I'd always eat lunch at that bench under the tree just over there by the Statistics building. And whenever I ate lunch then, I'd see that same man, and that same person at that, walk

down the steps *away* from the hallway between the Statistics building and Psychology building. And who then walked *toward* that same hallway about ten minutes later. And then, much to my confusion, walked down those steps, *away again*, just about another ten minutes later. Back and forth. To and fro. I was stumped. Still am.

Along the way, I eventually stumbled upon yet another group of persons walking slowly, as if they had all the time in the world, as the saying goes, and occupying all the space within the sidewalk.³ Annoying, but not as surprising anymore. What was surprising, and indeed odd, was something entirely different. It was never-before-seen. The person immediately in front of me was, and I kid you not, throwing tree branches at the person beside her, who happened to be her friend. Yes, that's right. Tree branches. Small, short, thin ones, but nonetheless branches of a tree. But not only that. She threw them at her friend. Yes, you got that right. Her friend. Now that I found utterly strange. Bizarre. Unusual. Imagine yourself throwing tree branches at your friend, your own friend. Tree branches! I repeat: *tree branches!* Baffling. Isn't it?

A long day. A long day it has been. Along the broken lines of daydreaming I found myself back home. Only not *quite* home. More precisely, not quite *home*. Twenty-four hours of mindless, zombie madness. Disarray of thinking, re-thinking, and overthinking. But would zombies really be mindless? No, that is beside the point. That doesn't quite matter. Does it? No, no. Not at present. Perhaps for further thought at

³ Every bit of an inch. Or centimeter. To be frank, I'm not certain I prefer either over the other. I suppose I've grown accustomed to feet and inches. Whether I preferred one over the other, I couldn't give a reliable response, let alone assessment. As Psychologist Jonathan Haidt proposed (and I think his proposal is correct), that assessment that I would provide would very well be what can be called a post-hoc justification or explanation. Whatever response I gave would be a response I came up with, and most importantly, came up with *after the fact*. I had to think things through and reflect on whether I did or not, and came up with evidence that supported either one (or not). This takes me to the next point. Confirmation bias. If make-believe exists, then all this made-up mumbo jumbo should be an instance of make-believe.

another time. Sigh. As I made my way toward my room, I heard the main apartment door entrance closing in, and finally close shut. And as the door close shut, I heard also the sudden quickness of the door's closing shut. Though in the phenomenal background, heard it nonetheless. Though heard within limited cognitive capacities, much less auditory capacity, heard it - heard it *nonetheless*. Eyes barely open.⁴ In fact, about half closed. With my poor eyes in their current state, I simply was too tired to care. To care enough anyway. After I flipped the switch with my pinkie - my right-hand pinkie, specifically, I lumbered toward my seat much like a creature slower than sloths. Much too slow to meet the conditions of an animate human-being. Lumbered with strength far from that of a well-built lumberjack. Eyes still half closed at this point. But dungeon slumber awaits me in the next room down the corridor. I welcome its entry. *Certain zombie madness*, indeed.

Twenty. Four. Full. Hours. Skin like tattered cloth? Ready for rest. Prepared for perpetual slumber. To be absolutely hidden away from the surface of everyday dealings with the world. Far underneath this city of reptilian thirst. Far from the dry plaster of this lackluster lagoon. A wax museum given life only to animate those that should have been left alone and untouched. Never to be discovered, uncovered, or revealed. To never see the light of day, as it were. But this is humankind's handiwork. This *has become* humankind's handiwork.

⁴ Could one really open one's eyes? Could one's eyes be opened? Could *eyes* be opened? Upon some reflection, I would suppose that eyes couldn't be opened. At least not in the sense in which one says to another: "Open your eyes". It'd be more accurate to say something like, "Lift your eyelids", wouldn't it? But I admit it does sound rather ludicrous. Even too ridiculous as it is too hilarious to suggest. Even then I think that there's something odd happening here. Perhaps the only motivation left to say something as strange as this is its use as figurative speech. In any case, I suppose this issue is quite *eye-opening*.

Even so, I'm back at home. Home, but *not quite home*. Is this even home? Not too sure anymore. Could one be sure about this? Perhaps in what W. Bracken once brought to my attention: *dogmatic slumber*. But that's not the slumber I want. Not *that* kind. *Especially* not that kind. That is not what I meant by *perpetual* slumber. I only and simply want to rest. Not an eternal rest. Also, not quite 'nap'. Or 'sleep'. But *rest*. To be well-rested. Anyway, to return to this idea of 'home' - there is little that I know about it provided its ambiguity. But there certainly is one thing I do know, if anything at all: Home is much too outdated a term.

Finally. Soft breath after soft breath. The smoothness of this thick blanket made for Winter coldness. Its soft surrender remains uncontested. I embrace its glory that is its memorable quiescence. Lying quietly and peacefully in this bed. In this room. Now. My body is aligned. Back straightened and legs crossed - right over left. Pitch-black darkness filled the void. This pitch-blackness brought home the brightest lit wax candle. This is it. Under cover of darkness. And under such cover, I stared at the ceiling with my palms interlocked underneath my rested head. Soft breaths and slow exhalations dissipated outward. I listened to the inhalation as I inhaled. The exhalation as I exhaled. The course and progression that resulted. Thoughtful blink after thoughtful blink. I stared intently far into the distance, past the space in between and beyond what was perceptibly available to the retinas. Retinas? The physiology of the eye? Homunculus problem? Infinite regress problem?

I immediately sat up, eyes glowing anew. Renewed interest broke in. As I pondered amidst the pitch-black, I ran my right hand through my hair. Brows furrowed once again, and with an inquisitive and dumbfounded look on my face, I inhaled lightly,

and exhaled quite heavily. These wrinkles between the brows were evident. I had noticed just a moment ago, but still I notice it now as well. I notice that I did and am doing all this. I notice at this very precise moment. *This moment, now.* Inquiry had led to insight. I swallowed, and inhaled lightly as I ran my right hand across my dry lips and stubble. Dumbfounded yet again. There I sat. And there I thought. Here I sit. And here I think. Ponder. Gaze. This unsettling mood. Plus, global and diffuse anxiety.

Something interrupts my thought pattern. It is the cold wind whistling by the window to my right.⁵ The sound of the wind blowing? Ghastly. Tormenting. Excruciating. Lifeless. There are no bones in that skeleton. And there is no backbone to life itself, I thought to myself. Abruptly, I return to my senses after a momentary drift away from the present. And as I return, I blink a few times, inhale, and reposition my body to sit upright. And sitting upright, I place the inside of my palms atop my thighs. As I do all this, I realize that I *am doing* all this. I am doing it all, while realizing it. It is as if I am watching myself, yet I cannot see myself. And I realize this also. That I am even contemplating about such realization at all. In other words, I realized that I came to some realization. Then the wind interrupts my thoughts once again. I hear the trees and bushes outside rustling this time. Well, what I assume to be the sound of trees and bushes anyway. The blinds are closed, but I hear it alright. I hear it. I listen to it with the utmost intent. Although I use my ears to locate and identify the sound of the cold wind blowing, and of the trees and bushes rustling about, I used my bare-naked eyes to stare into the

⁵ But of course, wind cannot whistle. Wind cannot and does not reflect upon itself. It has no such cognitive capacity. It couldn't. Could it? Sometimes I wonder about something like this. I ponder a great deal. But the answer does not reveal itself so readily. Perhaps it is wrong even to posit something like this. I'd have to assume that there is such an answer to be found. What if there is no such answer to be found? But to ask whether wind can be conscious - that must be a serious question. What to do about it then? It's not like we can blow it off, and do away with it just like that.

pitch-black void before me, as if the cold wind is occupying the space precisely in front of me, around me, surrounding me.

Getting tired, and feeling some sort of neck pain and pangs somewhere in the vicinity of my shoulders, I lay back down on my bed and tuck myself back in. Tightly, with my thick blanket so soft. Without feeling the coldness of the air on my skin and follicles, I shuddered underneath this blanket. But there was no fear involved. I had grown tired and weary. Not from the long duration of contemplation from earlier. But from the daily busyness that drained me. I shuddered. This time, I felt the coldness of the air pierce through every possible layer of my skin, and reach past the physical. There I was. Encased in this membrane. Ultimately encapsulated in this cocoon. Embedded in a dysfunctional time capsule.

Abrupt minimal wakefulness. Background noise⁶ from the outside world could be heard. Brows furrowed but eyes closed, body still situated underneath the blanket and in this bed. Minimal wakefulness; minor felt experience of some sort of unidentifiable headache. I swallowed the saliva inside my mouth, opened my mouth, and took a breath. A moderately long yawn broke the cold silence. Body facing to the right, and toward my desk, where the alarm clock beeped and beeped and beeped and beeped and beeped. Body still very much exhausted, and mind still severely drained, I gathered what was left of my strength to lift the blanket, sit upright, and finally place my feet into my slippers. I actually made it out of my bed. I made my way toward my alarm clock. Although the red

⁶ If there is background noise, then is there *foreground* noise? What would foreground noise look like? Sound like? What would be *meant* by foreground noise at that? And if the latter could not be clearly and definitively conceived of, then might we want to reassess the meaning of background noise? If we could not conceptualize it properly, and make reasonably intelligible such a notion, then we may very well need to rethink background noise.

digits on it looked blurry at first - since I did not have my glasses on, I soon made out the numbers. 10:01 AM. I woke up on time. Well, a minute after, but that isn't much of a difference I wouldn't think. But as I had already said: This body of mine is still very much exhausted. The mind? A bit wakeful now. Much like routine, and perhaps even ritual, I leaned against the edge of my table, shifted the alarm button to its off state, turned around, and found my way back into this warm, comfortable bed of mine. The warmth is incomparable. The comfort uncontested. The safety and reassurance it provided for me was indispensable. I'll wake up in the next half hour or so; class doesn't until afternoon anyway, I thought to myself. Implicitly, of course. I needed that little bit more of snooze time. No, I *need* that snooze time. I need it. My body demands it. My mind requires it. Now.

In the near future. The date and time unknown. Definite destination also unbeknownst to me. But there I was. Sitting there on the bench by the beach. Just sitting. Some beach. Not too far from the shoreline, where a sidewalk would usually be located, and where people would commonly take walks or ride their bikes. Bits and grains of sand filled the cracks and crevices of the sidewalk beneath me. And further onto the cold concrete floor underneath and around my feet. The heavy sound of waves crashing against the not too distant shoreline could be heard. Loud, but far into the background. The bubbling foam amidst the familiar waves also could be heard, though ever so slightly. And if one took the time or made the effort to notice it, there also was the sound of a single seagull calling time and again into the night. But only I heard it. I took a deep breath and felt the chill travel down my back. Down every single bit of that feeble spine of mine. Taking another breath—this time deeper into my bowels—I bent my stiffened

body down toward the solid concrete, my elbows resting atop the edge of my thighs, and ran my hands—in an up and down motion—against my face, and then well into my hair, down toward the neck. A second time I did just that. And a second time I did it by myself. Sighs sounded off like the din of ancient trumpets.

Staring at the ground, at the bits and grains of sand so golden, I felt the coldness of the air around me pierce my eyes. There on the bench I looked toward the expansive darkness that stood so still before me. Pitch-black. A black screen. It was only at some point that my naked eyes met the glimmering whiteness of the moon which was silently floating far into the deafening distance⁷. And as I stared into the bright glow of the moon so solitary, I embraced the still cold air that surrounded my cracking skin. It was bright and magnificent. And there on the bench, I sat silently well into the night.

⁷ The term “deafening distance” as seen here alludes or refers to the instrumental song “A Deafening Distance,” written and performed by the post-rock band God is an Astronaut. This band, and their work, especially the album from which the song comes, have influenced my thoughts about the world and the many events that occur within it—particularly within the context of my personal life experience. This album - *All is Violent, All is Bright* - has time and again provided for me a place of comfort and solace when no single person could at a given time. The album, as in the entirety of its musical content, has always been a curiously expansive space as a soundscape to which I could escape in hard times. Its very *music* - in the strict sense - has always been curiously another plane of existence, so to speak, in which I could find myself in a position where everything just felt alright, for lack of a better word. Everything would be alright again, even if momentarily. It felt as though I’d entered another realm, one in which I could exist and leave behind the pain and suffering. To further elucidate the point here, immersing myself into this album *made* it so that I didn’t have to tear up or cry in times of distress or at moments of sadness. A short way to put this is that doing so was *liberating*. I wouldn’t feel distressed or sad anymore; heartache that was once there would predictably fade. And if I would, feelings of heartache were accompanied with feelings of healing and comfort. In short, this album in its musical entirety time and again made my life just that much better, my pain that much more tolerable—clear that things will be okay.

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