

The Blue Jay

Part One: Death has no Victors

Just be bro. On one hand, the brain is responsible for lots of neurocognition, yet it seems to be meaningless in the grand scheme of things, as presence seems to take more priority in initiative. Let me explain what I mean by this: my dog has an entirely different brain than me, but we can still feel each other's presence during day to day life. For instance, he likes going in the water at Mountain Lakes nature reserve, and I enjoy looking at him doing so. On one hand, I know I'm at mountain lakes nature preserve, I know I'm going to take the dog to the coffee shop afterward, and I know I'm going to put "Something Real" by the Guest List on my speakers after my hike. However, while I am thinking this, I am also entirely in the present moment feeling the creek water move on my ankles at the same time as the dog is, *something absurd*. The mind is both extremely powerful and not powerful at all at the same time. Because well, *do those plans really matter?*

One can notice a spectrum of consciousness and attention while a family drives a car. When I drove to the airport with my parents, I was looking at the wonders of the clouds as my Mom griped about blue lagoon tickets in Iceland. Meanwhile, my Dad focused on the road. All three consciousnesses are absorbing different essences while being in the same machine. My mother is dealing with the blue lagoon website, in a rather harsh tone, my father is focusing on the road and trying to calm down Mom, and I am focused on the cloud. Another end to this, if the cloud was not in that exact position, I would not have been looking at it. If my Mom wasn't in a harsh mood and looking to get her frustration out on something, she wouldn't have been so obsessive over the ticket. Also, if there was no such thing as an online ticket, it wouldn't even be possible for her to obsess over it. Consciousness is not more important, but it is closer to you than your executive functioning.

With my friends nowadays, we talk about sports and sports games, the plans when we are going to see certain sports games, and you know the usual talks when you're drinking, like you know, stuff about A.I, corporate companies, all of that. Needless to say, the executive functioning patterns of young adults surround a lot of trip planning, communicating on the phone, and using your brain to sports bet, watch sports, etc. However, close your eyes, and bring yourself back to your four year old self. A key memory I have as a four year old was sitting at my dining room table. During this era in our lives, we were unable to process large events of the world. Most of us didn't know Italy was a thing, we couldn't comprehend Greece, and I was just sitting in the God damn chair.

Fast forward to this summer, where I am sitting at my dining room table, and I look outside at a Blue-Jay. For the first time in many years, my brain was completely quiet. *I wasn't thinking about sports, I wasn't thinking about whether my grade was going to get an A or a B, and I wasn't thinking about whether some random girl was going to text me back or not.* My brain was so quiet that I returned to a quasi-version of my four year old self just looking out at the window staring at the God damn blue jay.

I looked at the blue jays wings and the patterns, the bird seemed so beautiful to me, the fresh blue wings with the silver markings by its neck. I felt this euphoric rush of just divine beauty that waved over me: the same feeling that I felt when I looked at a dove outside of my window on a trip in Pisa when I was a little boy, and the same feeling I felt when I saw the Eiffel tower in Paris after longing to see it for years on end. We all know what it is, this magical moment where your brain goes completely silent and you just simply watch.

During my junior year into my senior year, it was do bull-shit for your resumé time, and I had a nice little shadow-job with my family friend, a neuroscientist. I probably need to be as broad about this as possible for patient privacy, but let's just say I saw a man with Alzheimer's disease. The man was a perfect case study of the dilemma I am describing in this essay. On one end, the man was completely present; he was his four year old self. He looked at me with a smile I remember to this day, however; the man couldn't remember the weather outside to save his life.

Following up with scary auto-immune diseases that leaves us all shaking in our boots, I sat in my car driving home from upstate New York manually breathing the entire time. I recently learned about ALS, a disease that slowly but surely starts in your toes and fingers and goes through your entire body weakening everything until you die. The disease shook me to my core. *Racing thoughts all over, I can already feel the ALS inside me! I'm going to die!* For years, I was terrified of ALS, when someone even said the word it made me flinch.

Until it dawned on me, these diseases aren't really relevant in the grand scheme of things. They are only relevant because we take ourselves too seriously. I know this is a sad and grim thing to say, but I advocate for not taking your flesh too seriously, as well, *death is undefeated, check the statistics.*

A person with ALS, a person with Alzheimer's can still be present, just like my dog, my dog isn't planning out his next trip to Las Vegas in his head, my dog isn't thinking of a game that he wants to bet on; he is simply in the moment. The person I saw with Alzheimer's was indeed in the present moment, and actually, all the people I have met with Alzheimer's in my life are pretty cool people and you can feel their energy; however, they can't remember whether it's June or July. Maybe, instead of being terrified about Alzheimer's, we can realize that June or July may not be that important in the grand scheme of things.

We get so caught up in our American culture to not realize that we are just a speck in existence— the Mayans and Incas didn't even know what a corporate job was and they didn't even know the essence of June or July. Millions of beings in the past have been in the present moment without the fleeting worries of American consumerism.

Now, back to the ALS example. A person with ALS can't move, they can't go to the park, and they can't drink a beer with their buddies, they are a slave to their dying body. But, perhaps, there is beauty in this. To paraphrase Boethius in his consolation of philosophy, a successful monk and ancient Roman author, the body is so ephemeral it can be wiped out in a three day fever. We like to think our precious body is important, we like to think that going to work everyday in the month of July is important. But if you get Alzheimer's, you won't even remember what July is, and if you get ALS, you won't even be able to move to get to work. I

suggest we shouldn't put value in our bodies and minds, rather put our value in the golden clouds above the skyline, put our value in the silent moment with *the Blue Jay*. Because, ultimately, these still moments of consciousness prove to be more satiating and lasting than a job or a cool body you can post on Instagram.

Part Two: the Search of the Rose

I am a spoiled child. I have gotten to see beautiful stained glass in churches in Paris, I've gone to the Eiffel tower, and I've seen the glorious and breathtaking mountains of the dolomites. However, I am still a slave to the confines of my own neuroscience, and it all comes back eventually. Now, as I mentioned in the last video, I somehow have a quieter mind, I give credit to God for this. When I look out at the valleys and trees when I drive in Montgomery, NJ I feel the same peace and tranquility I used to need to spend thousands of dollars to feel on an over the sea trip to Italy. *How could this be?* In the gym, the morning before I saw the *blue jay*, I was romantically thinking about a trip to Portugal. A trip, where maybe I was with a few of my buddies, we were sipping on refreshing wheat beers then spending the hot summer afternoons in the Portugal valley hiking, biking, and swimming all day and drinking wine. *Doesn't sound that bad does it.* I turned to my workout partner Michael, and I told him about this fantasy. To which he responded to me, *why don't you just enjoy the same beautiful nature here, in Princeton.*

A few days later, I was playing basketball in my driveway. For whatever reason, my driveway is where the most fantasy in my psyche lives, as after elementary school that's where I just would ride my scooter around and around and fantasize I was in a variety of different made up situations in my head.

Nowadays, I still feel a similar presence when I shoot hoops in my driveway. I've been to Italy three times, Italy is a rose in my imagination, it is what I think of as the quintessential epitome of beauty. However, when I played basketball on my hoop in New Jersey— one of the “stinkiest” states in the U.S, I felt this wave of bliss of being present in nature.

That's when it hit me, all of these fantasies of other places, the romanization of Americans do of Europe, longing for a quiet stroll in Japan, *It's all fake, no, be present!* Look at Anthony Bourdain, the man who spent his entire career romanticizing other places while drinking beers and smoking cigarettes in the Taiwanese valley and circum-navigating the world with a film crew; meanwhile, my dog and a bunch of locals in my town are cool and content with chilling in the local park. These trip plans, this fantasization of vacation, it's not necessarily bogus, but the presence seems to be more important, *as Anthony Bourdain's hunger for the rose grew, his soul decayed.*

In fact, if you are one of the lucky customers who the grim reaper deals Alzheimer's to, you're not even going to be able to plan a grand trip to Switzerland. In fact, all you will be left with is your point of view in the world sitting in a chair borderline demented. However, I don't look at this as dreary or upsetting, I view it as a means of beauty and acceptance of how beautiful the world is compared to my small disgusting self. Back to the car example, when I was looking at the golden cloud while my parents were arguing, I was thinking about how I'm going to need

to bring the car back, I was psycho-analyzing both of my parents on their little disagreement, and I was figuring out if there was going to be enough juice in my phone to make it back. However, as my little head thought about all of its little stupid thoughts, I looked at the damn golden cloud just looking at how marvelous it was. I guess, if I am in a little robot chair with ALS, or borderline demented, the magic of the *Blue Jay* will live on. Thanks.