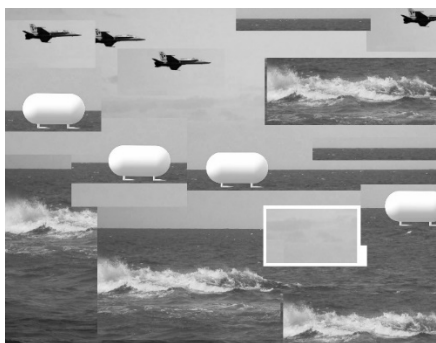


Mechanism & Dialogue
Syrianus of Boise



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Contents

Prologue . . .	9
01. Parmenides . . .	12
02. Zeno . . .	29
03. Socrates . . .	48
04. Melissus of Samos . . .	55
05. Heraclitus . . .	60
06. Diogenes of Apollonia . . .	66
07. Pythagoras . . .	75
08. Anaximander . . .	78
09. Hermes Trismegistus . . .	86
10. Timaeus of Lari . . .	100
11. Alcibiades . . .	110
12. Plotinus . . .	117
13. Porphyry . . .	124
14. Iamblichus . . .	133
15. Syrianus . . .	140
16. Proclus . . .	147
17. Damascius . . .	155
18. Gorgias of Leontinoi . . .	160

“And further let us affirm what seems to be the truth, that, whether one is or is not, one and the other in relation to themselves and one another, all of them, in every way, are and are not, and appear to be and appear not to be.”

- Parmenides

“Al-Kharraz, may Allah have mercy on him, who is one of the aspects of Allah and one of His tongues with which He speaks of Himself, said that one only has gnosis by joining opposites together in respect of Him.”

- Ibn Arabi

Prologue

Granted it was the 1970s and everyone was doing a *ton* of cocaine, more or less - because back when the coke was cut pure, back when it was more like a refreshing cup of coffee instead of a stochastic bowl of fentanyl soup, it was eight-balls and cigarettes every evening after six - but the question was still up for debate: should the quote-unquote 'Agency' really invest in *remote viewing*? Wasn't that, like, just New Age mumbo jumbo horse shit or something? You have to remember, in that era this idea that our minds were capable of more than remembering phone numbers and daydreaming about titties was still *highly* controversial, and there were certainly varying opinions on it - remote viewing - from those who actually had a say at the Agency, although all of the participants fully agreed that the program, *if* it were to exist, should obviously be cloaked and shielded from taxpayer transparency. Yes. *Remote viewing*: have you heard of it? - this ability to supposedly exit your physical body for a set period of time, usually via a series of strict prompts, and then find yourself transported to a foreign locale as an ethereal exoskeleton. You might find yourself on the contemporary moon, or you could be in Soviet Moscow, or - shit - maybe you'd wake up on the planet Mars literally a million fucking years ago! Was this what the Agency should be dumping our hard-earned tax dollars into? Well, to be fair, it probably couldn't go any worse than the time they tried to use high doses of LSD to control the minds of US citizens? (I mean, even

I could have told them that ketamine was probably a better candidate!)

Again, there was a plurality of philosophies presented both for and against the notion - but in our empirically obsessed world what it would probably have to come down to was, well, did the shit actually get results? Could you actually corroborate anything in *the real world* from these fucking whackos? Could you, say, find a misplaced top secret US missile in the heart of the African jungle because some would-be psych-patient gave you a three mile radius to sift through after a quick remote view? Well! Enter our protagonists - let's call them Ingo S and Joe M for convenience here - probably the two most qualified and accomplished remote viewers at least of their generation, if not of all time. These two fucks weren't just grabbing espressos in Midtown then moseying into Headquarters to take quick remote peeks at alien bases on the far side of the moon, or dropping in on nuclear Soviet submarines off the coast of Finland, or keeping the ethereal company of decaying giant humanoid civilization in a post-nuclear Martian landscape - because, as fantastic as those well-documented peregrinations may sound, Ingo and Joe actually went a little further? Yeah, they bumped it up a notch. They managed to just bump it up a *tiny* bit. Should we bump it up a notch? Now, one minor problem in relaying what these two gentlemen accomplished is this: We still tend to think of *vessels* as *objects* carrying *occupants*, just like we still tend to think of *so-called objective viewers* as taking note of *trees* in the *wilderness* - in short, we've tethered ourselves conceptually to a particularly ruthless assumption of

subject-object, *of containment*, that simply won't apply to the 18 transcriptions presented in this book.

Ingo and Joe began to, not just view things remotely, but actually interact with entities from afar - as themselves (or *a form* of themselves). But these conversational partners weren't exactly *entities* in the sense of your favorite science fiction novel. No, unfortunately, Ingo and Joe never managed to find a three foot gray alien to talk about life and love with, they never stumbled upon an eight foot reptilian to discuss the pros and cons of nuclear war with - and they couldn't even find a single white-winged angel to inform them that *actually* UFOs were just the chariots of antiquity, it was that simple! No - instead, the two travelers came across *mechanisms* that were imbued with being - namely, (1) a school bus sized orb who went by Carl, (2) a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave, and (3) a floor fan in Moscow who told them her name was Tifa. Ingo and Joe, as the Agency's program progressed, actually developed relationships with these three entities in particular, and, in doing so, their relationship with themselves, their relationship with the space-time continuum as we currently understand it, shifted quite significantly as well. The following 18 transcripts document *conversations*, yes - but it might be a tad misleading to conceptualize the texts in that type of ideological drapery? In any case, the following 18 chapters represent just a *fraction* of the material that was transcribed in real-time by the participants. Someone should, I don't know, try and FOIA the rest?

Parmenides

“No, that’s fine,” Ingo said, “just continue, Carl - go ahead. It wasn’t that important anyway.”

“Because that’s essentially what I told her at the time, Ingo,” a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl indeed did continue, “I told her, ‘Listen, um,’ I said, ‘Umm, *Marie?* It’s Marie, right? Can you listen to me for just a second? Just tell me right now, in this moment we occupy, beyond a reasonable doubt, just prove it to me, once and for all somehow, that *I actually exist to you*, but not simply within the exclusive purview of your own conscious experience, prove to me that I exist as a so-called independent conscious being, with a so-called conscious experience, in the materialist atomist sense of all of this, just, you know, establish some sort of syllogism that proves to you (and me!) that I’m here, standing here right now, authentically speaking this mellifluous shit to you, which comes from inside of myself, which we continue to assume exists, this *inside of myself*, prove to me that I’m not just an utter figment of your imagination. Or what you perceive to be your own imagination! That I’m not an indiscernible phantasm that emerged from an infinite wave that reflects an infinite projection of your own single self! You can’t do it, Marie. Try as hard as you may, without the philosophical crutch of *the perception of others* you can’t prove beyond a reasonable doubt, scientifically, that I actually exist, that the physical world you perceive isn’t an extension of either your own consciousness, or a consciousness that you interpret to be your own.’ That’s what I said to her, Ingo. I said,

'You can't! Try and try as hard as you can, you will always fail to prove this to yourself beyond a reasonable doubt, assuming you maintain a modicum of honesty with yourself.' And, you know, in the end of course she couldn't really do it for me, she provided no syllogism of note, because of course she couldn't prove this! Because what proof other than her own utterly fallible sensory organs did she have at her disposal, per my own instruction? Because sensory organs only become scientific via corroboration by a plethora of, what? *Other sensory organs?*

"It's a universe of convenience, a groupthink galaxy, Ingo," Carl continued, "Because a single set of sensory organs is of course an insanely small sample size, which proves absolutely nothing, so naturally if you deprive a set of sensory organs from the litany of other sensory organs that, it believes, corroborates its own sense-perceptions, then that set of sensory organs becomes itself a notion of nonsense! Oh, you got abducted by aliens, Ingo? *Did anyone else see it?* The sun rises every day solely because we all see it, Ingo, sans all of us seeing it and agreeing upon what we see, then the sun would cease to exist, without all of these allegedly independent eyeballs seeing the same sun, then this object we call 'The Sun' just becomes a fireball of false notions, no? But - of course, the pure wool here is: how the fuck is it that *you think you know* those other sets of senses actually exist independently, like we say the sun does, as actualities, that they're not just a sort of projection of your own set of sensory organs? No, their existence must be axiomatic. Assumptions, Ingo! You, as I speak to you here right now, are nothing more than an assumption I'm continually making! And sans that

axiom of ‘other sensory organs’ everything falls into chaos! Or does it? That’s a question I’ll come back to, Ingo, because I think it’s actually quite key here. ‘Prove it to be the case, via syllogism, or some other scientific means,’ I said to her, ‘Prove my own very existence to me here, right now, in this Applebee’s, but you’re forbidden from taking a survey of other independent *so-called sensory organs*, because, of course, they too could be similar projections of your own single self! They prove nothing more than you telling me, for example, that it was the moon that corroborated to you that I, in fact, exist.’ She’s a fucking physicist, Ingo. You believe that? So yeah, basically in so many words she told me I was kind of an asshole, and I guess the date pretty much concluded shortly after that.”

“Well,” Ingo replied, “that seems.”

“But you know, Ingo,” a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl interrupted, “Ugh. I can’t help but recall here, sitting in the backseat of my mom’s station wagon, or, I don’t know, some equivalent semi-popular car of the era, some equivalent bourgeois nuclear family automobile, I recall sitting in it as a young teen, or some equivalent age category of the era, some era where we still counted numbers and called ourselves certain ages, containing ourselves in categories! I recall sitting in the backseat of a station wagon and just brutally attempting over and over and over to prove to myself, in the back of my mom’s station wagon, via one syllogism or another, that my very own conscious experience was somehow actually verifiable to my own self, that my own frequent peregrinations into my *so-called essence* were actually somehow real, verifiable, even leaving aside the veracity of my own so-

called essence for a second. Just confirm the peregrinations, the journeys themselves actually occurred! But, to be clear, this wasn't based on some philosophical *reading* I'd done, Ingo, no, it was just a natural extension of my direct experience, which I think is quite important to note here, because it seems like we always think that becoming precocious about this or that thing in our youth is a result of reading a certain page in a certain book, about perusing text after text after text until a thought, *poof*, pops into your brain.

"But texts are always secondary sourcing at best," Carl continued, "Necessary but secondary! No. It's the *experience* that's been missing from the Western notion of intellect, our Western notion of intellect is always presupposing that the sole experience of the intellect is *reading books* as opposed to *experiencing itself*. I suppose maybe there was something latent within my conscious experience, assuming that consciousness is actually existent to some extent, something latent within this consciousness, my 'individual' consciousness, that sought to verify itself but utterly failed to do so, to verify that it actually owned some material existence, that it wasn't some figment of its own imagination, and furthermore that, even if it did exist, that this existence, if we can even call it that, was in any way 'me' as we'd normally construct that word. Because of course all other consciousnesses, the consciousnesses that actually have the ability to scientifically verify your own conscious existence, if we assume these other consciousnesses even exist, that even if those other consciousnesses exist, like we noted above, they could also certainly be just derivative of some other outside consciousness that exists, a super-

consciousness that's play-acting as 'your consciousness.' No, there's no way, beyond blind faith (which is, the more I think about it, perhaps underrated!), of accepting that fact of *yourself as a conscious being* amongst similar beings also retaining independent consciousness. That possible fact that we exist as we believe ourselves to exist, to prove that, not only do perceived outside so-called consciousnesses exist, but that even your *own* consciousness exists, and, if it exists, that it's *your* consciousness, no, that wasn't in the realm of my possible knowledge at the time, or even right now for that matter. And to me, to be blunt about it Ingo, after those intense investigations into my own self, I couldn't reasonably take any scholastic foray into science seriously, if *that fact* couldn't first be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. First! Let's prove *we* exist scientifically, shall we? To me, and I'm not being a dickhole about this, but it was actually *unscientific* to take these scholastic forays seriously if they couldn't first prove to me my own material conscious existence. Dissecting a frog just seemed to be a bit presumptuous to me, I guess, if I couldn't verify I was *even there* in any material sense! From thereon the so-called scholastic sciences always disgusted me for that reason, Ingo, mostly because they were so pompous about the whole thing! They never hesitated to treat *you* like *you were* the one on the spectrum ('Are you schizophrenic, maybe?'), to assign you *some scientific name* to explain why your questioning of science was innately absurd, simply because you asked a simple question. But this is naturally what happens I suppose when you ask the *wrong* question, the question that underpins the sacred axiom."

“Right,” Ingo agreed, “but.”

“In any case,” a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl interrupted, “we sit here, you and me, Ingo, just casually conversing, and maybe we unassumingly attempt to convince ourselves that portals to attain instantaneous knowledge of this sort don’t actually exist, or that, if there *is* a portal, *if* there’s a portal, then said portal should remand itself to a form out of a well-known science fiction movie, some little quirky blip or technical bloop that’s *technologically* driven, that all of these so-called portals will suddenly open themselves up to us visually, and that we’ll enter them unassumingly and then instantly find ourselves in some other time or some other space, or outside of both time and space, with other foreign entities, extra this or that, ultra that or this, like some sort of canonical alien abduction tale. But we’ve already assumed too much, haven’t we Ingo?! I certainly think we have! I mean, why does a portal need to ‘open up’ when my own conscious experience is itself very possibly a figment of an imagination, a figment being generated from something that’s simultaneously myself but also not at all ‘me’ in any real sense? An *opening up* assumes a previous axiom, Ingo. What the fuck do you need a circular shaped portal to transport you to another planet for? To me? To me, that’s simply begging the question, if I’m even using that phrase correctly, *begging the question*? Perhaps fuck phrases Ingo. Texts are always secondary sources anyway. Anything’s possible. Perhaps phrases aren’t the proper tool to investigate portals? But no, no, on the other hand, we’re told by some that everything that exists are only the words of God. You can walk gently down the avenue and actually

enter into another universe, while, at the same time, that universe itself may have almost few to no actual points of emphasis that *materially diverge* from the universe you and I believe ourselves to occupy at this moment, where we're jubilantly having this quaint conversation. You may, for example, notice a fat adolescent eating a can of Doritos in the middle of the street, wearing silver chains and goth-inspired oversized dark clothing, and it will strike you as architecturally alien, even if its form isn't technically alien at all. We think things have to change immensely in order for us to travel elsewhere, whether that's across the galaxy, across the country, or perhaps traversing so-called dimensions that physicists are just now beginning to suggest may exist. But in these alleged peregrinations we always leave to the side this notion: that *two completely different things maybe in fact be the exact same thing and vice versa*. Yes, that's what we're essentially leaving on the cutting room floor here, Ingo. Yes, that's precisely what we're missing! We think, 'Oh, maybe we entered a portal because some seven foot grey alien shoved a probe up our butt, in his little fancy anti-gravity spaceship, that of course resembles some advanced aircraft of our own!' Our derivations are always resembling ourselves. We put *same* and *similar* in two different categories, while leaving *same* and *same* in a single taxonomy. No, that fancy spaceship may be more of a figment of our imagination than this very conversation is - no, perhaps we're still confusing 'big' and 'small' as actual things instead of gradations that have no true essence in themselves except as projections in very specific milieus. But isn't every milieu essentially a projection

except for that which we can't comprehend ourselves?
And that's what's actually sacred, Ingo?"

"Well," Ingo replied, "in my opinion."

"Like, for example," a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl interrupted, "you can have a dream, right? We all have dreams from time to time. You go to sleep, and then you have a dream. And that dream, let's just say that maybe it can predict your own future events, even though perhaps the actual figures from your dream may differ slightly from the actual figures you encounter in so-called real life. Yet those two things, the figures from your dream and the figures from your waking life, although perhaps disparate, can actually be the exact same fucking thing. *Same* and *similar* are in a single category; while *same* and *same* are now in two disparate taxonomies. This is difficult for many to accept, and, in fact, most will scoff and roll their eyes right into the backs of their heads! But should they? Anyway, I had quite a vivid dream some time ago, Ingo, it was one where I encountered two figures who themselves were in fact the same figure. One was dark and one was light, but I intrinsically knew both figures to be the exact same entity, it was a direct download, and, well, upon waking and well afterward, this dream stuck with me like gorilla glue in a sort of vivid and unerring way, until one day, only after the real-life encounters actually *occurred* to me, I reflected on said encounters, and I realized they were actually the same encounters from the dream. These real-life encounters were only re-enactions of the same dream encounters, disparate but the same, that the dream apparently somehow foretold me of these encounters, and, to bring us back to my initial point here, or one of my

initial points here, both encounters occurred within what I would now deem to be actual ‘portals’. My two dream-interactions were with disparate entities who were in fact the same entity, while my two real life re-enactments of those interactions were with two *subsequently disparate* entities, also with *disparate actions* that were ultimately still the same actions. But, no, of course these didn’t occur in portals in the *science fiction sense*, Ingo, which ruins everything - the science fiction sense has ruined our thought in this regard. Now, ugh! Now everything is basically science fiction, to the extent that now realism is essentially science fiction, with the UAP phenomena becoming more and more realist by the day. We’ve gradually manifested a science fiction world for ourselves, and we’re all worse off for it! But, no, just to be clear, these portals were just *buildings*, Ingo, actual architectural structures as portals. Architectural structures, but somehow much more than simply buildings. They were architectural structures that somehow called out to me, man-made structures that contained some non-man-made essence within them, both of which I felt myself habitually moving toward in a totally non-voluntary sense.

“You know me to be an entity of caprice,” Carl continued, “but even for me, this experience was a bit much, with these two architectural structures. It was a caprice that I wasn’t entirely in control of, if that makes sense, almost like an out-of-body experience, Ingo, yes, I’d just find myself ambling along on an innocent walk, a nondescript sojourn of sorts, ones that I often take around the city, and I’d suddenly find myself on the path to one of these two establishments, architectural structures that occupied territories on two streets called

South and Globe. Like a map! However, I only put this together way, way after the fact. I'd just - *end up there*. And these structures, of course, they're where I encountered these two entities from my dream, Ingo, these two figures who, not only being the same figure themselves, they collapsed upon themselves in the dream, then collapsed upon their counterparts in my waking life, and while individually sharing characteristics with the figures from the dream, they wisely cloaked themselves just enough so that I didn't immediately recognize either of them for who they actually were. Which of course actually makes a tremendous amount of sense. Because if I'd immediately recognized them, then my dream wouldn't, no, it couldn't have reoccurred. And I guess that's really my point here about portals, Ingo? In a more explicit sense? My point, if I have any point at all, is that if a portal immediately makes itself known to us as a portal, then it's *done a poor job of being a portal*. Yes. It's only *poor portals* that make themselves known to us as big ass spaceships with mantis beings that are ten feet tall with laser beams in their pockets. No. The true portals are totally nondescript, they're in fact the exact thing we define as our normal physical world itself. Two figures, although disparate, are the same figure in the dream. They collapse upon themselves into a single category in the dream, and then collapse again onto their real-life counterpart in my waking life. And then the two real-life figures subsequently collapse yet again into one figure. Two addition figures in real life, although disparate, are in fact the same figures from the dream. And then, well. It's like the story of the two sufis who went to Mecca, Ingo, only for the wiser of the

two to weep for no reason. *'Why so sad?'* *'Because this was a grave miscalculation!'* People spend countless decades searching for an Essence, only to discover that God Himself is just a voice in their head that they've mistaken as themselves their entire life. Ugh, Ingo, what a waste of the highest order! - only poor portals make appearances in Hollywood movies, Ingo!"

"This much we." Ingo attempted to retort.

"But anyway," a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl interrupted, "Yeah, I guess, well. I suppose I should probably relay just a little something of detail about these so-called portals, or one of them at least? Now, Ingo, I think we'd both agree that it's obvious that, *at times*, we need to turn our backs on our families, that we need to ruthlessly recognize once and for all that this pervasive idea of genetic lineage is, for lack of a better word, a complete misunderstanding of who we actually are, that what has been created cannot subsequently create what's created, and that, furthermore, gross intoxication is, at least compared to our modern capital technocratic lunacy, some moderate improvement? Intoxication, if nothing else, allows a momentary reprieve from this idea of genetic lineage. But we shouldn't distort the case. Because it's not like all so-called spiritual men and women of previous generations were constantly fucked up on hallucinogens and shit, but, sure, certainly some spiritual people historically partook in, for lack of a better word, *Dionysian tendencies*. And not as some hedonistic 'steam-letting' sense, but as a genuine spiritual practice. After recognizing on a certain autumn afternoon that I needed to spend my night in solitude, I was sitting at a bistro on Broadway, sipping a pure

Mezcal on the rocks, taking note that a man across the street looked curiously like the actor Burt Young (born: Gerald Tommaso DeLouise), and that it seemed like he was picking up a coin of some sort from the pavement across the street? Odd, I thought. In any case, I finished the Mezcal, settled my tab, and started down the street, completely unaware that a close family member, who I'd pretty much *blown off* earlier that day, needing to spend the night in solitude, would very soon, that night, be sitting in a hospital bed in the same sub-section of the city I was now approaching, where I would remain for the evening, while this person would literally fighting for their life in the night. But I was completely in the dark about this, Ingo, I was innocently continuing my sojourn into the Dionysian, eventually getting to the point where I'd feel comfortable informing people I didn't even know that I enjoyed certain Lebanese bars for their olive plates, saying, with no sense of irony, 'Wow, that's a cool name!' 'Hey. I like that name.' To complete strangers, Ingo, but isn't this ritualism at its finest? I'd find myself bantering with all sorts of people, most of whom were grossly intoxicated themselves, but possibly not in a state of Dionysian bliss? From complete strangers to the random people you nominally establish a sort of faux-friendship, an acquaintanceship completely devoid of meaning, Ingo, I was unabashedly bantering with all of them, because this is ultimately what's Dionysian in our era.

"It's not in the secluded woods that we find ourselves completely alone, Ingo," Carl continued, "in utter solitude with trees and shit, no. The mountains and the trees know more about us than we do, they

infiltrate our thoughts before they occur, they contain spirits too shrewd to let us think to our heart's content. On the contrary, it's the architectural structures of the city that are younger, that still allow us to experience solitude, drunk in the midst of others who know nothing about us, in densely populated areas, with perhaps curious architectures, around people who have no regard for us, who don't know, will never know us, and could never know us, even if they knew us. I was right in the middle of chain smoking cigarettes outside on a patio at a shitty table when a woman of European extract with dreadlocks handed me an additional cigarette and stared at me intently. I took no meaning from this at the time, the fact that this person stood there with a cigarette in hand as still as a billboard on an interstate highway. It had no meaning. Two weeks later, pleased with the ritualism of the previous night, I'd repeat this very same process, Ingo, expecting a similar result, but of course repeating the same thing twice and expecting the same result is the actual, true test of insanity. Whereas two weeks prior, despite my family member fighting for their life five hundred feet from the bar I was chain-smoking cigarettes at in a Dionysian rage, two weeks later I'd find myself, not in the midst of a ritualism that expanded upon itself in its solitude, but instead within a violent unraveling of myself. An implosion of appropriate proportions. An older fifty-something man replaced the Caucasian with dreadlocks as a meaningless statue to imbue projected meaning upon, and the next morning, in, admittedly, a really rough state, the Entity from the dream revealed itself to me. Reappeared, having already appeared. Having been right under my nose this entire time, they told me,

in so many words, in the aftermath of a Dionysian implosion, what the original Entity told me, Ingo. An announcement of sorts. The map was ready to be revised. But, to be clear, this assertion was only a feeling. Walking home that night I came upon a young African-American girl on the corner of 44th and John J, requesting spare change, and, I don't know, I handed her maybe eight bucks, back when I was actually still carrying cash in my pocket - before I decided that it was too cumbersome to carry spare change with a rubber band. Yet in the process, the girl took note of a twenty dollar bill in my small fistful of cash, and she noted that she would - if I was interested - be willing to engage in sexual intercourse for twenty dollars cash? She actually wasn't that bad looking, Ingo - for a homeless drug addict at least. I actually think her exact words were something to the effect of: 'We could fuck for the twenty,' which is perhaps the most depressing statement you'll ever hear. I politely demurred, equally depressed and embarrassed, and kept on walking, yet as I ambled onward, suddenly something told me to turn around walk back to this person. To interrogate her! To get to the bottom of this societal decay that brings young women to have sex with strangers for literal spare change! Fuck it, maybe I actually should have street sex for twenty dollars! Clearly, there was something occurring here, but back at the corner she was nowhere to be found. It was almost as if she disappeared into thin air."

"Curious," Ingo began, "That actually reminds me of."

"What occurs in our childhoods, Ingo," a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl

interrupted, “in many ways, is ultimately unknowable to us. Memory at times, we should note this, bursts open at the seams and allows previous events to evaporate into thin air, yet on some level these events, although technically evaporated, still manage to form nooses around our necks, which we remain unaware of, until homeless black girls at street corners prompt us for cheap sex, until dream entities bait us into real portals that never diverge from other elements of our waking lives! It’s only then that, suddenly, these escaped memories flood back to you like a series of paroled convicts that, obviously, you now have to admit, have dictated your entire life from afar up to this point! You wake up one day and you realize that what you’ve forgot for decades now has never not been hugging you like a shark jaw, Ingo. And you don’t even remember recalling it in the moment, your partner has to actually recount it all back to you in detail, all these things you said to her upon arriving home, these floods of forgotten memories. And you’re as amazed as she is! It’s so-called trauma of this type that causes adolescents to stare at walls for hours on end, journeying far into our own imaginations until we’re granted momentary hall passes into other planes, until memory itself becomes a plaything of nonsense, itself a derivative of daydreams instead of vice versa, and it’s perhaps, Ingo, it’s perhaps this very trauma that pointed me in this direction of questioning the first principle of conscious experience, perhaps it was this mnemonic noose around my neck that squeezed me in this direction as a young teen in the back of that station wagon! Actually, let me apologize right now to the scholastics! ‘You see,

apparently there was a *mnemonic noose around my neck* at the time?’

“But, again,” Carl continued, “and I can’t stress this enough, these planes aren’t necessarily circular portals with grey aliens on the other end. They don’t need to be, Ingo! It’s just, I think we might be creating *an image of the portal that’s not truly worthy of it.*’ As a child, in this questioning of the veracity of my own consciousness, I recalled this dissolution of myself, this quite necessary dissolution of myself, this dissolution that can only be known by those who experience said dissolution itself, and I subsequently left the consciousness of ‘everyone else’ firmly in the realm of doubt, whereas, by contrast, the scholastic pedants of *normalcy* recall their own *normal* amalgamation with the consciousness, of themselves of others, and then deem it to be obviously true, and, for their part, leave my brand of dissolution in the realm of doubt. The origins of this dual doubt is perhaps a topic for another time. In any case, months later, I’d find myself in a bit of a hurry, walking out of a local mosque on 1st Street when I felt the hand of an old man, hardly able to walk himself, gently grab my wrist. As I turned toward him he looked up and asked me where I was from, a question I, of course, have never answered truthfully in any situation. The man suggested that, rather than continue practicing *my form* of prayer, that I instead adopt *his form* of prayer, that I cast aside the type of prayer *I was* practicing, which was of course rooted in little beyond my own whims and caprice, and instead adopt *his particular form* of prayer. Perhaps sensing that he’d committed a social faux pas of sorts by asking me this so brazenly in public, the man almost

immediately apologized for broaching the subject, but I told him, actually, there was no need for an apology. 'Frankly,' I said, 'if I'm being honest, my innate form of prayer has probably always bordered on the heretical,' yet, with that said, Ingo, these are the difficulties we continue to encounter. In all corners of our world, from the mosques to the martians, there are ruthless attempts to regulate and codify what will simply express itself in the manner it chooses."

Zeno

“Let’s not mince words here,” Ingo began, “because America is certainly a terrorist regime. You simply can’t routinely blow up civilian domiciles in Yemen because you have quote-unquote ‘intel’ that a terrorist may be stopping by for brunch there without, in turn, being some sort of official terrorist regime, because if shooting drones into civilian homes in countries where you never declared war, if blowing up their civilians because of your own nascent beliefs, derived of course from ‘intelligence’ sources, about their backgrounds, if that isn’t pure terrorism, then there simply is no contemporary terrorism, then terrorism itself conceptually must just no longer exist. Then there’s no terrorism anywhere in the world right now. Yet leaving that aside for just a second, yeah, I did end up meeting up with them the other Wednesday, and, sure, yeah, I guess it was a nice time. Yeah, I guess it was kind of nice. I mean, it wasn’t insanely depressing as a social outing in the sense that I didn’t want to, like, blow my brains out or anything while hanging out. I guess it was just one of those things, you know, where you show up and people - grown persons who simply can fit no other category other than ‘adults’ - are actually, with absolutely no sense of irony, sincerely discussing children’s sports? Adult men are sitting matter-of-factly at a round corner table and just ruthlessly critiquing the grade point averages of literal children, critiquing the ability of these young people, enduring puberty in one form or another, to pass classes and master rudimentary Western scholastics, but, at the same time, this critique

is generated purely out of their own individual interest in youth athletics, and, just to be clear here, it's not *just them*. To be fair, they're far from the only adults engaging in this practice. No, you're sitting in a rudimentary Irish pub, packed to the brim with people who seem to view the world very similarly, who have always acquired a habit of following the personal lives of children they don't personally know and critiquing them, basically more or less out of a personal interest in adolescent competitive sports. But the funny thing about it is, I'll say this with no sense of irony, the funny thing about it is that, after about five beers, I actually started to find it a bit interesting myself, Tifa. Critiquing young children's life decisions as a grown adult? It actually seemed like a path worth pursuing! Whereas just moments previous, still half-frozen and ice cold sober after about a one mile walk to the bar from my apartment, I initially found the entire conversation, to be frank, just a little befuddling, like I said - to put it generously. Wait. So you're saying we care about . . . *Joey's Q3 grade point average in chemistry?* As adult men? *Should* we though? Isn't this a bit odd to converse about in an Irish pub chugging alcoholic beverages as adults? But, later on, now drinking maybe my fifth beer - later, when socially integrated into chugging light beers with peers, I almost found myself reaching the point where I would too start doing some extensive research into strange children's grade point averages - not out of concern for their intellectual development, no - but simply as evidential fodder to levy a bitter critique on their ability to pass adolescent classes to qualify themselves for their true vocation in life: playing youth sports. Yes, maybe I would too find some solace in

questioning their scholastic aptitudes, purely out of an interest in competitive sports.”

“But what about the whole UFO thing you said wanted to talk about, Ingo?” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa said.

“Oh, right,” Ingo said, “From the dinner party, you mean?”

“Is that where you saw it?” Tifa said, “At the dinner party? Was I.”

“Yeah” Ingo clarified, “Yeah, it was on the roof at the, uh, the fucking dinner party I think? No, I’m actually sure of it. I have no idea why I said *I think*, because I know for a fact it was there.”

“Was it, uh, close by? The ship or whatever.”

“Um. No. Not really. But. Uh, well. It was a *them*. Because there were two of them actually.”

“Oh, wow,” she said, “Two? *UFOs*?”

“Yeah,” Ingo said, “they were pretty fucking high up though. There were a few of us up there, on the roof, the rooftop, just continuing to socialize and whatnot, continuing to do this whole socialization thing that, I don’t know, I’m really starting to sour on of late. Having friends? At my age? I’ve really been giving it a lot of consideration, as to whether it’s something I’d like to continue. In any case, my brother, on the roof, he turned to me and said, ‘Oh, look! What are those things?’ And we all looked up, some of us more skeptical than others, but all of us taking note of the two weird lights darting around high up in the sky, that were moving quite erratically, and, not just erratically, but at a speed that was some decent multiple faster than any airplane or helicopter would normally move - that I’m aware of at least! Like zig-zagging and shit, and I caught

an admittedly fuzzy video of the two, they weren't moving super erratically anymore, but I definitely caught one move at a super high speed out to, what looked to me at least, to be toward space? Like flying up into outer space?"

"But then . . ." Tifa replied, trailing off.

"Yeah," Ingo went on, "then, and I only really noticed this after the fact, after they'd already occurred - after, when I was finally doing an accounting of these events, but it did seem like some weird occurrences happened after the fact, in the ensuing weeks and months. For one thing, I'll start with this, but this isn't necessarily the *first* weird thing that occurred, and it's probably not *the weirdest* thing to occur either. But I was standing at the bar at this little club-adjacent spot right around downtown, you know, and I'd just taken a shot of Macallan-25 - have you ever had that? I'll tell you this: it's literally like pure water, Tifa, like fucking pure water, which was actually intensely surprisingly to me then and after, because, after having this Macallan, I don't know - now I really kind of see the point of high-end liquor. I think that I may have been sold on the whole concept of spending hundreds of dollars for single bottles of alcohol, because, after drinking this Macallan-25, well, it's clear to me that the regular shelf level liquor is actually just lurid dog shit we encourage the proletariat to shove down its own throat, that there's actually distilled alcohol in existence that probably has few to no of the ill-effects of the liquor we've all drank more or less our entire lives. You just have to pay a premium for it. So, anyway, I was standing at this bar, where Joe just bought us each a shot of this fucking Macallan. But this was also after we basically both

chugged double espressos at the cigar bar across the street from where we were previously tying them on, basically because, at the time, Joe expressed that he was feeling like he needed a bit of a *pick-me-up* if he was going to continue on with the night, which, in retrospect, I'm sure I probably encouraged. I definitely encouraged it. And then, after we finish, or *as we're* finishing these espressos, Joe turns to me and says, *That Macallan-25 is staring right at me.* This bottle that was housed behind a little locked glass door was apparently calling Joe's name, and I didn't really think anything of it at the time, Tifa. 'Want a shot?' he said. Now, I see the bottle on *an upper* shelf, and I begin to remember what the locked away upper shelves generally entail, but I still have no idea quite *how top shelf* this so-called 25 truly is. I figure, I don't know, that it's maybe a twenty or thirty dollar shot, some shit like that. Something slightly egregious of course but also not batshit crazy. Just yet another slightly ill-advised shot of liquor. Joe orders the shots, and the bartender ever so gingerly walks over to us with the bottle in hand, with a sense of the end-times evident in her gait, wearing a face like someone just informed her that her first born son has Down's syndrome, and then she says, 'These shots will be two hundred and sixty dollars, you know that, right? *Is that okay?*' Before I can wipe the look of disbelief off my face, Joe goes ahead and tells her to pour the shots. I'm sitting there, thinking to myself, this is actually, it's actually kind of homoerotic, Tifa, the fact this guy is buying me this level of shot? The guy next to us couldn't believe it either, and to be honest I felt like he thought it was little gay, too.

“Frankly,” Ingo continued, “I felt gay enjoying the shot. It was the best shot I’ve ever had, but I felt a little gay as I sipped it, noting how much I enjoyed it, in what high esteem I now held this Macallan brand. I mean, it was a tremendously generous gesture, of course something that really reflected the deep bond of friendship between us as men. It showed real integrity, it showed just how serious Joe and I took our friendship, a true bond between men, yet it also struck me as slightly gay at the time. I said, ‘*Joe, I think this is the best shot I’ve ever had in my life,*’ and it was, it was a neat shot of scotch that I could sip without even thinking about wincing, a shot that I actually wanted to *savor* for an extended period of time. Whereas I usually incurred immediate thoughts about vomiting profusely when taking a neat shot of brown liquor, while drinking this Macallan-25 the thought of puking was the furthest thing from my mind. I was all hopped up on espresso and booze already, which, in retrospect, is kind of an ill-advised combination, despite the fact that, on paper, it seems like the two substances together make a lot of sense. An espresso keeps you alert, Tifa. It wards off the soporific secondary and tertiary effects of alcohol. The only thing about that is that, as it so happens, those second and third order soporific effects of booze are actually what seem to, in my opinion, prevent you from transforming into an utter psychopath with regard for anything but drinking more alcohol. So I guess it was a little gay, and I said to Joe after we’d downed the shots, ‘Let’s go down the damn street, pop in this little club, and how about this? I’ll buy *you* a fucking drink. Whatever you want! There’s no price limit!’ So now I’m standing at the rectangular and well-kept bar at this little

club, you could barely even call it a club, and I look across the bar, the bar is heavily populated, and I see a face straight out of a photo album, a face that I haven't seen, except just one time in between, for nearly a decade. A quote-unquote *old friend*. Now I'd known this girl for, I don't know, decades? My entire life? Since I was a little kid and shit. But apparently at some point in her early thirties she got like ruthlessly addicted to drugs? - and she unfortunately became a thief of epic proportions, to the extent they had APBs and shit out on her? I didn't really know the full story, although I'd been informed by many people close to her of quite a few details, and I'd also heard quite a few varying iterations of those details, all in the intervening years since she basically disappeared completely. So I see her sitting across the bar that I'm now standing at, just on the other side of this bar, and we instantly make a very fleeting form of eye contact. I also see who feel like I know for a fact to be her significant other, only because my sister will still occasionally tell me about her social media posts from time to time. Now I see this guy amble around the bar and over toward me and Joe. I cut him off as he starts to introduce himself, because I'd already told Joe I was going to stick around and talk to this girl, see what the hell she'd been up to all these years, even before her husband made his way over to me. Now maybe that wasn't the best idea considering I was already half in the bag, Tifa! Sticking around to talk to some long lost drug addict in the weaning hours of the night? Plus, some other hoe I knew from back in the day was, ironically enough, meandering around the bar too - but, in that particular case, I just ignored the girl outright. I actually quite audaciously ignored her,

but, I mean, at the same time, how many people am I technically obligated to speak to in one night? I didn't even want to talk to the person I was already talking to! But I did, only because I felt this vague notion that it was *the right thing to do*."

"No, it makes total sense," Tifa said, "The fact you spoke to anyone? I'm somewhat shocked, Ingo. I'm actually proud of you!"

"So we start talking," Ingo continued, "and obviously she's assiduously giving me *her side* of the story, with genuinely no bitterness though, because, as a part of this whole precipitous decline she endured, she ended up stealing quite heavily from mutual friends of ours, which she took full responsibility for, but now, according to her, obviously, she's saying that basically she's turned her life around. And at face value I believe her, although, in retrospect, I suppose it's not often that you bump into people at bars, who you haven't seen for years, and they just come right out and tell you: *Oh, yeah, I just shot up some heroin before I stopped by. My life is completely falling apart!* In any case, apparently she no longer drinks, because you really *can't* drink if you have a previous addiction to opiates, yet, at the same time, we're conversing at a *bar*, which has the primary function of disseminating alcoholic beverages, but, then again, to be fair, I didn't see *her drink* at all, while I was with her at least, but, to be fair, I was also three sheets to the wind. Now, in the moment, Tifa, I'm actually feeling bad for her - in fact, I'm actually feeling a bit like an asshole myself, somehow I'm starting to think maybe, at bottom, that *I was the asshole* in all of this, thinking to myself, you know, maybe I could have done more for her? Maybe,

I don't know, is it possible this is on me, too? To be fair, I did know her for some time, she was practically a second sister to me, which I actually said to her that night - I regrettably said the words *You were like a second sister to me*, and, in the heat of her said precipitous decline, I suppose I never really made a sincerely expansive effort to try and reach out to her, to, you know, *get her side of things*, of course until now, which obviously occurred completely by chance. Reconvening with one another at some shit bar, where, apparently, her husband had to technically prod me to go talk to her, even though, technically, I had already told Joe I was going to go talk to her. Sure, I made some little inquiries to people who I knew who knew her, but I could have just, you know, fucking called her, right? Yet I didn't feel it was my place, yet, standing at the bar, I started to feel like maybe it was my place? Now here we are, talking, about life and vicissitudes, and I'm actually feeling bad. I'm sad! Then, right as my melancholy is achieving its apex, out of nowhere, her husband comes over, butts his big goofy head into our *to-that-point amicable* conversation, and starts saying things like: *You know, family's family though right?* Family's family, right? As in: Shouldn't this person's family be okay with her reformation, considering, apparently, albeit three sheets to the wind, I seem to be accepting of her reformation? How much reformation is *enough reformation*. Because, after all, family is family. Right? This husband was well aware that I knew his wife's family quite intimately - this family who had completely cut her off and, to the best of my knowledge, have yet to accept her reformation, who may even be unaware of her reformation, albeit, it should be noted,

this reformation occurred only after stealing, to my understanding, quite large sums of money from, not only them, the family, but many others close to them, on repeated occasions, to the extent where law enforcement was involved, etcetera, etcetera. Now this husband of sorts is aware that I know his wife's family quite intimately, and, while they're not *my* family, they're still close enough to me that I would almost consider them maybe even an ancillary family of sorts. Also, mind you, the girl herself has already told me that she understands both sides, and, frankly, so do I, but, more importantly, I'm in no position to take sides. Nor do I particularly give a fuck. Until, that is, her husband starts discussing *family being family*. Something about that phrase, *family's family*, and the idiocy inherent in uttering it over and over, transformed my then melancholy into a sort of espresso-based blind rage? Sure, I'm happy she's doing well, and I even, like I've admitted, feel bad about it! But I've also known her family for as long as I've known her, and now after officially hearing both sides of the dispute, I'm certainly in no position to basically toss *the family into the conceptual wrong* here, about this whole imbroglio that went down, now over a decade ago? I'd for sure defend the girl, insofar as she's repented, by her account reformed? After all, Tifa, we all make mistakes, right? And getting ruthlessly addicted to opiates is, sadly, just a routine fucking occurrence in this country now - we've collectively chosen to hold no one accountable for giving people three weeks worth of heroin for a sprained ankle. Yet that doesn't put *me* in any position to judge her family's response, to somehow indict her family for refusing to accept her reformation!"

“I can imagine that it’s a pretty difficult situation to mediate, Ingo,” Tifa said, “especially after ten drinks.”

“Exactly!” he continued, “Now, according to Joe at least, in the midst of this conversation, I pretty much immediately told her husband to go fuck himself, right in the middle of the bar, told him to quote-unquote *shut the fuck up*. According to Joe at least. He meandered over to our then quaint conversation - her husband - and I immediately told him to shut the fuck up, at least according to Joe. Which, in most milieus wouldn’t be a huge deal, but this particular bar had certain criminal associations, so it perhaps unnerved Joe to some degree that I was telling people to *shut the fuck up* in the middle of it. And I grant that that version of events is certainly possible! - but I’ll also note here that I don’t *quite* recall it like that. For my part, I recall more of an incessant *You know, family’s family though, right?* over the course of a more reasonable period of time before telling him outright to shut the fuck up. Like, you know, just a lot of that *Family’s Family* mantra being repeated to me over and over until, eventually, exasperated and desperate, I essentially out of necessity told him to go fuck himself and possibly also to shut the fuck up. And maybe that was ill-advised! But, in the interest of clarity here, Joe and I were both, frankly, quite inebriated by that point, so both of these versions are probably, to some extent, significantly blurred and fictitious. Eventually we’re outside. In a blurred and fictitious way we’re outdoors. The bar is now closed for the night, it’s finally ceased serving the alcohol that this girl and her husband have made a point *not* to accept, and we’re outside, continuing this circular conversation for some odd reason. There was absolutely no logical reason to

continue this conversation. This conversation had, long ago, lost any value it ever had, and it, quite honestly, as you've probably inferred yourself, Tifa - this conversation never really had any value to begin with. *Family's family though, right?* The guy starts saying things like, 'You know, you could leave here in a trunk, if you want.' The criminal implications, of course. Now, of course, it's also worth noting in the midst of these ill-advised criminal implications that this guy, her husband, is also a genuine convicted criminal of some sort. Yet none of this really bothered me, then or now, Tifa, because while I'm certainly vaginal in many ways, when it comes to disputes of this sort, of so-called tough guys making idle threats, well, that's never bothered me. Throw me in a trunk and kill me, see if I care! Yet of course all of this is nonsensical tough guy talk, at what? - two am in your forties? Yet, at the same time, this was the only logical result of this conversation continuing into the great outdoors. Joe and I were both vacillating between punching people in the face and giving sincere hugs to people we barely knew - that in and of itself should be considered petty crime when done over the age of 30. We left the scene with a bunch of seemingly sincere hugs, intimating to one another that we could ostensibly cause bodily harm to each other *if we really wanted to*. In any case, the strangest aspect of it is that I'd bump into this *very same duo* just ten days later, Tifa. In the middle of the fucking street on a Saturday afternoon, right in the West Village, eating a fucking hamburger after I had a glass of wine following a special event I'd attended earlier that day. I see the two of them from a distance, and I think, That's them. This girl and her husband. Ugh. But at the same time I think, No,

that's impossible, that I could be seeing them *again*, *right after* I just saw them? Well, this guy fucking talks my ear off for another forty five minutes in the middle of the street, yet, thankfully, the conversation is totally cordial between us. My old friend, she seems okay. I guess? She doesn't strike me as, you know, whacked out on heroin or anything, but, at the same time, having never really done heroin on my end, it's hard for me to say who is and isn't shooting up heroin prior to taking walks in the West Village. Maybe there's a functional way to shoot up heroin I'm unaware of. And then, just to make it abutting the supernatural, then I see this same guy, her husband, at the gym *again*, in the locker room, maybe two weeks later, if that! It's another twenty-twenty five minute conversation, functionally about nothing yet fundamentally still cordial, except now we're discussing having his wife text me back from my long-winded, somewhat ill-advised apology I sent her the morning after we saw each other at the bar. Which, after we talked, she did."

"Hmmm," Tifa interjected, "that is quite odd. The subsequent occurrence that is, considering that you hadn't seen her in quite some time?"

"In retrospect, it's almost like those two bozos were the ones who operated the UAP above my apartment that night, like they were up there punching in my fucking GPS coordinates or something," Ingo said, "Her and I, I mean, we've lived in the same city for, I don't know, the entire time she's been gonzo, and even before that, and I never saw her even once, even before she went awol, except for on the odd occasion or two that I went into a restaurant where she was working. I'd literally *never seen her*, never bumped into her at

random, in a casual setting, in all of these years, and then it happened two time in two weeks? No, that's absurd to me. And then, to add insult to injury here, during this same exact time frame, I get a very curious phone call - all of this is adding up together, as a tapestry of sorts, which I'd slowly start putting together, ruminating upon all of it, but way after the fact, suddenly recalling the two UFOs from the rooftop on that night."

"So you get this phone call," Tifa said.

"Yeah," Ingo continued, "it's maybe five am. If that. I'm still passed out in my bed when my cell phone rings, waking me up. I look at the phone. It's Blocked ID. I hit silence. Fuck that, I think, at five am? No, I don't think so. Yet I recall that Blocked ID calls are generally, in my experience at least, distinct from routine spam numbers, and I note that fact somewhat portentously while still half-asleep. I attempt to go back to sleep, and no sooner do I fall back into a nascent dream-like state the phone rings loudly again. I should have put it on silence."

"Interesting," Tifa said.

"Now it's my dad calling me," Ingo said, "It's no longer Blocked ID. So, obviously, I pick up the phone immediately, assuming the worst given the time, given the age of my parents, assuming more or less death, assuming various apocalyptic scenarios in the brief time I have allotted while still half asleep. On the other end is a guy with a distinct southern accent, I'd say one generally associated with the African-American communities of the southern United States? He's on the other end of the line, which is curious to me, my dad not being from the South, nor African-American. The guy, audibly flustered, sounding genuinely

panicked in a state of high anxiety, begins by informing me he's just escaped from jail, that he's broken into my parents' home and that has my dad tied up, that he's going to murder him, my dad, in cold blood if I don't wire him as much money as I can as soon as possible. All of which is obviously concerning."

"I would say so!" Tifa said.

"The first thing I say is: 'Can I speak to my dad?'" Ingo said, "Obviously just to confirm that he's actually still alive, that he's not dead lying in a pool of his own blood next to this asshole, who now has the audacity to ask me for a fucking wire transfer after the fact. Curiously, in the moment, I didn't think to even ask about my mom, who always sleeps right next to my dad, who's still living, who ostensibly would also have to have been tied up and restrained as well, assuming this gentleman entered the home to kidnap them and call me for ransom. I didn't think to ask for her initially, but, then again, it was a bit of a shocking scenario and this crumb didn't mention her, so I guess I just naturally honed in my focus on my dad's well-being, him being the one mentioned, and, in any case, he didn't really put my dad on the phone. Not technically at least. Instead he muttered, 'Nah, he's acting like a bitch!' And then some sort of muffled sound entered my line of the phone, ostensibly my own dad's muffling, muffling through some duct tape or something. Now he's again asking for the electronic transfer of funds, how much money can I send him? Now I'm not half-asleep - this event has jolted me quite awake, but I'm still in some sense a bit sluggish, I'm physically fully awake but mentally perhaps still somewhat in a dream-like state, struggling to fully mentally process this turn of events,

although my mouth is conversing and alert my mind isn't one hundred percent up to speed. I have no idea how much money exactly is in my checking at that moment, but I figure conservatively that it can't be much less than a thousand, because, while I don't generally don't keep much excess cash in the account, I'll always have enough to cover any smaller auto-bills that may be deducted at a given time of the month. And I'd obviously prefer my transfer to this asshole to *not* get rejected due to insufficient funds, given the emergency circumstances, with my dad's life essentially hanging in the balance here, so I tell this fucking guy, honestly, that, well, most of my money is in accounts I don't have immediate access to, so, if it's an *immediate* transfer, I could probably only do a few hundred at first. Amazingly, this fucking idiot seems okay with that. Fuck him. He's not exactly thrilled, but he's reiterating that he's just escaped from prison, and he just needs enough money to quote-unquote 'get out of town'. Even though, in retrospect, it may seem far-fetched, it's actually possible, in my mind, that my parents, never huge savers themselves, would have no material cash on hand, and neither of them are adroit with money transfers, so the scenario still contains a whiff of the plausible to me, and, in any case, I received this fucking call *from my dad's cell phone*, so, even if it struck me as patently absurd, at five am, groggy and quasi-hungover, I was pretty much in no position to doubt the veracity of this person being on my dad's cell phone. And, *if* he was on my dad's phone, then *how was he possibly* on my dad's phone? - it could have only been if he was in the house, right? But, at the same time, if this scenario was indeed true, then it struck me as more

likely than not that my dad was probably already dead. After multiple requests all I'd heard was repeated muffling on the other end. I felt decently certain that this person had probably already killed my dad, because, if not, then why not just put the guy on the phone to verify his current existence? That would certainly add urgency to an already emergency situation. I asked the purported escaped convict a few more times to put my dad on the phone, and the guy just repeats that *he's crying too much to talk*. More muffling. At this point, it's actually infuriating to me, Tifa. My dad's had a long life at least, I thought, trying to stay optimistic. But also, what a shit way to end a long run. This is how my parents die? I'm now entering this new reality where my parents have been murdered in a home invasion, I thought, imagining planning the dual funerals, giving detailed accounts to police detectives, while continuing to barter sharply with this cocksucker, who remained quite convincing. If he was an actor he was, in my mind, a generational talent. He's relaying some convoluted electronic account name to send the money to. I tried and failed to send a handful of hundreds of dollars, only because the account he provided rejected the transfer. Now I start to offer to drive to my parents' house and put cash into the mailbox. At this point, the conversation continuing to extend its life, I'm only becoming increasingly convinced that my parents are dead, with each second the call extended I'm becoming increasingly convinced of this, and I was therefore considering potential ulterior options, that if this guy would acquiesce to my mailbox-audible, that I could potentially try to kill *him*, if he was amenable to me stopping by the home to drop off, in theory, more cash

than I could electronically transfer to him. Yes, assuming both of my parents were killed in cold blood, then I supposed the least I could do was kill this piece of shit in return. Leaving him to the justice system? No, absolutely not, Tifa! Watching the system's leniency with people like this asshole would be the greatest torture of all. I'd much prefer to exert my own revenge immediately. Through pure rage, through a total disregard for my own life and insatiable thirst for revenge, yes, I could of course incapacitate him, then, ideally, restrain and torture him, rip his fucking dick off, decapitate him limb from limb while still alive, gouge his eyes out and laugh hysterically as I watched him die a slow, miserable death. It was really the least I could do. Yet, audibly frustrated at the failed attempt at the wire transfer and unwilling to agree to any mailbox option the man hung up the phone."

"Oh, no!" Tifa moaned.

"Obviously, I called my dad's number back immediately," Ingo said, "thinking of ways I could up my offer to this lurid terrorist. But curiously enough, no sooner had I hit dial I heard a groggy version of my dad on the other end of phone, perfectly fine and half-asleep, completely unaware anything was even amiss at all."

"And all of this happened in the same week, Ingo?" Tifa said.

"Within days!" Ingo said, "And other things too! But perhaps those things would be too convoluted to truly trace back to this particular *UAP event*, even though, in my mind, they very well may all be related. American is the greatest country in the world, at least I believe it is, Tifa, but, at the same time, it's hard to

reasonably believe that our tax dollars don't go to funding what's been operating as a terrorist regime for quite a long time now. It's difficult if not impossible to believe that we're not actively funding, even right now, not just terrorism worldwide, but very specifically the abhorrent genocide of the Palestinian people."

Socrates

“It was in the drizzling rain that I was waiting for a valet to take the keys to my parked car right in front of the restaurant entrance,” Joe began, “thinking about how it was common enough in the past for people to think I resembled a valet, that people passing this restaurant could easily mistake me for a valet in the midst of valeting my own car, that, yes, it’s certainly true that consciousness, as its reported by its constituents in the modern era, is absurd, probably to some extent driven by malevolent forces, that suicide may be the most efficacious solution to ending the meddling of these malevolent forces, but that it’s also true that there’s another side. There’s another side that certainly mirrors this side via mathematical features, that by the implementation of mathematical functions we can perhaps slip between sides. When seated I immediately ordered Mezcal on the rocks - I wasn’t positive the rest of the dining party had ordered their drinks, because I was attempting to flag a valet when they initially sat down, but I also didn’t care, instead I made a command decision to order a drink with this waitress as soon as I sat down. She came back two minutes later to tell me they didn’t stock Mezcal. No one seems to have Mezcal. Respectable restaurants somehow get away without keeping a healthy stock of Mezcal in supply, they have the audacity to call themselves respectable restaurants while completely disrespecting the more subtle distillation of the agave plant. I ordered a Casamigos Blanco, foolishly confirming with the waitress that Blanco was the quote-unquote ‘White’

type of tequila, and I enjoyed the Casamigos Blanco. I even noted to the table that I would make a point to try Casamigos Blanco again, that my previously ambivalent attitude toward Casamigos was possibly entirely predicated on my ignorance of the Blanco variety - the pour was generous. With that said tequila is a bastardization of the agave plant when compared to Mezcal. Mezcal by contrast takes an entirely subtle approach to the distillation of the agave, with each variety of Mezcal containing its own subtle notes of flavor, whereas Tequila employs a one-size-fits-all, heavily blunted approach to the agave distillation process. Sure, people tend to scoff at the so-called intensity of the Mezcal smokiness, its propensity to overpower anything it's mixed with, but that's exactly what draws me to the liquid itself. I enjoy the fact that Mezcal essentially can't be mixed, that it tastes so bold it's almost impossible to water down, these are the best natural phenomena in my mind, phenomena that are so one-of-a-kind that they need to be experienced in isolation, because in mixed company they exist in isolation anyway. I enjoy isolation. I find it underrated, and I'll even admit that at times I find myself existing in isolation even in mixed company, in my mind, traversing complex scenarios that are no less social than your average mixed company get-together. In fact ever since I was small I've had this tendency, to find the society of my own mind more engaging than the society of my immediate surroundings. Yet frankly that's Massachusetts for you. I won't necessarily go as far to say that Massachusetts is a stain on our great country, yet if I'm being completely honest I can't say I've had the best of times in Massachusetts either."

“For one thing,” Dave, who was a sentient tic tac shaped UFO, added, “there’s the Bridgewater Triangle.”

“Which it seems like almost no one even knows about,” Joe agreed, “because even I, having spent a significant chunk of my life in Massachusetts, having spent the latter half of my adolescence in the state, was actually believe it or not flabbergasted to discover, especially when taking into account the fact the phenomena is more than just a web of old wives’ tales, that it actually consists of substantive indirect evidence, which as I said is where I spent a good chunk of my adolescence, and in retrospect, during this lowest period of my life, I now feel with a fair degree of certainty, I was actually myself plagued by a demonic force of some sort, possibly even a demonic entity. But as I said to start, Dave, it seems as though consciousness is plagued by forces outside of our so-called selves that manipulate, or attempt to manipulate, or are intimately connected with the genuine stream of consciousness in ways that are no doubt at times nefarious. Just the other morning I woke up in a state where I was almost unable to control my own mind, feeling these forces more acutely than usual, thoughts and images scurrying across my consciousness in manners that struck me as illegal in principle - I had to recall the proofs of Proclus for this state to cease, or at least at the time I felt it was Proclus who helped put me at ease.”

“His commentary on the Parmenides terrific,” Dave said, “I feel he’s actually criminally understudied as a thinker as well, in the West at least?”

“The West doesn’t understand anything of Proclus,” Joe said, “no, to this day the West

understands next to nothing of Proclus the man, never mind Proclus the structure of thought, because it was an actual structure of thought that Proclus assembled. In this dream it was possible that it was Proclus himself who spoke to me telepathically.”

“Like what Ingo is alleging in that book he’s working on?” Dave asked.

“You know Dave, it’s funny, because I almost never listen to audiobooks,” Joe replied, “yet I made an exception for the copy Ingo sent me. I actually listened to the entire thing in a one or two day span, psychotically listening to this audiobook, completely enthralled, because instinctively we’re all probably aware that audiobooks are at bottom abhorrent, that the wretched audiobook, the objectionable podcast (although I’m a fan of both formats) are displacing prose, which is a true form of telepathy. Whereas podcasts and audiobooks are blunted sorts of multi-tasked so-called modern communication, prose is a singular beam of telepathy that’s actually dangerous - people encourage young children to read, when in my mind reading is one of the most dangerous activities I’ve ever engaged in, simply because prose at its highest level is essentially telepathy. For this reason I generally don’t read, instead listening to idiotic podcasts to fill my afternoon. There are without a doubt forces that are meddling in our conscious streams, and I think this is most likely the root of all suicide, and perhaps rightly so, it may in fact be a solution, perhaps the most sensible solution, and it was certainly something I experienced first hand during a period when I lived within the Bridgewater Triangle. I even recall one instance, Dave, probably at my lowest point, when I was

responsible for closing a shoe store in a local outlet mall, a task that in and of itself nearly drove me to drowning myself - I was all alone closing this shoe store when an oddly behaved older lady entered. She was older yet lively, mystical and not obviously in need of footwear in general, never mind at nearly nine o'clock at night. She basically read my life to me by looking into my eyes, alone behind the register, telling me repeatedly and intently all sorts of fanciful tidbits, a litany of tidbits were recited to me, over and over again. I actually sadly totally forget every single thing she said to me beyond an insistence that I was descended from a certain lineage I, at the time, had no reason to believe I was descended from, yet later on in life I'd be told by an elder relative, apropos of nothing, that that actually *could* be the case?"

"Which made you reflect on this experience at the mall outlet, probably?" a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave said.

"Exactly Dave!" Joe jubilantly replied, "In retrospect, I do wonder where exactly this person emerged from, because for whatever reason I find it hard to believe she was in need of any footwear, and I find it absurd she would be roaming around these outlets after dark. As a matter of fact it wasn't the last time a person would have the audacity to approach me and attempt to tell me my own life story, and both times they struck me as totally correct! - no but in retrospect as incredulous as it may seem I do find myself wondering if this odd lady was a corporeal entity at all, or if instead she was some kind of apparition, because I've actually encountered reports of allegedly noncorporeal entities meandering around those same

mall outlets around closing. In any case, I was sitting at Andino's on Federal Hill, and I was drinking a Casamigos Blanco on the rocks, trying to enjoy myself after a long week."

"But did you know Casamigos also makes a Mezcal as well?" Dave asked.

"Funny you should say mention that," Joe said, "because I actually drank about six or so Casamigos Mezcal at The Parlour just a month or so ago, after the bartender, after I asked her for a Mezcal, asked me what kind of Mezcal I wanted, saying, after I asked her what kind of Mezcal she had, there was a Casamigos *Mezcal* if I wanted to try it? I said I thought Casamigos was strictly tequila, but she said they made a Mezcal as well. Well, I took her up on the offer, yet I was ultimately unimpressed with the Mezcal. She told me 'some people drink it with an orange?' and gave me one, but I was ultimately unimpressed with the Mezcal, even with the orange. In any case, I was sitting at Andino's drinking a Blanco Casamigos, thinking to myself that it was kind of a quaint interior, an inviting ambiance, a better atmosphere than I remembered, as the last time I ate at Andino's was two or so years ago, when I ordered the spaghetti alio and the kitchen burnt the garlic, which was all I recalled of the night. In any case, I was only glancing in a perfunctory fashion at the menu, as I'd already decided I'd order the Destefano garden salad entree, as I ate a cup of brown rice with walnuts prior to arriving, because, with my GI issues at the time ordering anything else would entail too much tail risk. In any case, sitting at Andino's drinking a Blanco Casamigos I thought to myself that, yes - the only way to approach the other side is via a muted

mathematics, a coding behind what faces us, on this side. We create something that seems to be one thing, but behind this one thing is a complex coding of another thing, another thing that communicates with the other side, a sort of mathematical telepathy to add on to our prosaic telepathy. This is the only way forward for me, I thought, taking another sip of Casamigos Blanco, actually in an increasingly jubilant mood, despite a debilitating week. A stream of consciousness must be encoded with a muted mathematics behind it, Dave, and perhaps this coding itself will not just communicate with this other side, but also protect our streams of consciousness against the meddling of forces we can only summarily understand and should probably refrain from even mentioning further!”

Melissus of Samos

“Emerging from a space just a single one away from the spot I’d parked in the previous Saturday I couldn’t help but notice a younger Caucasian male wearing a Slipknot t-shirt while carrying an open box of Pringles,” Ingo said, “and only a second later, to my right, to my surprise, walking up the same street, was a female dressed in all black with gothic black leggings eating out of an open Frito’s bag. It seemed curious to me, in this apparent new universe, that spry goth adults were walking around a downtown eating from open bags of chips in the streets just feet away from each other, because I’d have thought eating chips while walking through downtown streets would have been almost black swan events. Yes, there was certainly a glitch-like character to these goth adults snacking from open cans and bags of chips in the middle of the street, this was perhaps a three standard deviation event at least. Rounding the bend into the parking lot I took note of a lady taking a long puff from a long pipe on the wood patio and became enthusiastic about the prospect of this bar adding hookah to its menu, which I was craving that afternoon, yet unfortunately as I searched for the source of the hose I soon realized this older Caucasian lady was just inhaling from her oxygen tank, and that hookah was still ultimately unavailable at this bar. Walking into the bar a cello was playing the melody from Yesterday by the Beatles at a loud yet not unreasonable decibel level, while two older ladies showed off, to my mind at least, considerable pool skills at the adjacent pool table, in an area where both Joe and I sat after the bartender,

recalling our exact drinks from the week prior, gave us a Mezcal and Vodka on the rocks with water, respectively. Sitting on this thin bench, I couldn't help but notice that the limes at this bar consistently seemed to be completely dried out, that they served desert-like limes that secreted no juice at all when squeezed, one of the older ladies playing pool had a look in her eyes that I associated with pure death as her black jeans sagged off her tiny body."

"Parallel universes," a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl replied, "we should note, always seem to be peculiar in this way, Ingo, don't they?"

"Of course they do, Carl," Ingo said, "if we know nothing else we know this peculiar nature of the parallel universe! The next day, after catching up with an old friend the previous night, perhaps having one too many Mezcals in the process, watching the New York Knicks eek out a narrow victory against the Cleveland Cavaliers in the first game of the first round of the NBA Playoffs, I'd find myself downtown, just maybe half a mile from this bar again, faced with two homeless people who, with all due respect, emitted a terrible odor, only to then pass a gaggle of college-aged Caucasian females smoking cigarettes, followed by a middle aged lady walking her dog in a black t-shirt that clearly outlined both of her nipples. Two Spanish speaking females struck me as perhaps lovers and when I noted this, this possibility that two Spanish speaking lesbians had just walked by us, well, my wife didn't take it all that well, as apparently the simple thought of me even noticing the mere existence of Spanish speaking lesbians was something that offended her palette, and of course,

Carl, I knew this already, that I could have just as easily allowed these Spanish speaking alleged lesbians to walk by us in peace, without further comment, yet against my better judgment I made the remark ‘Were those Spanish lesbians?’ which, to be fair, seemed to me at the time to be a reasonable inference, but which my wife had no interest in hearing, no, the mere mention of a Spanish speaking lesbian, in my wife’s mind, was somehow synonymous with my lusting for Spanish speaking lesbians. The two homeless people were occupied with a film playing on an iPhone and.”

“And you thought to yourself: How do people who can’t afford homes afford iPhones?” Carl said.

“Carl, how did you know that?!”

“Ingo, bottom line, I know you better than you know yourself! Plus, it’s an intriguing question, because it does seem a bit incongruous doesn’t it? A person forced to sleep on the street owns an iPhone that, from your description, seems to connect to the internet?”

“How is it that a person sleeping on literal rags in the crevices of downtown streets can afford a luxurious technological instrument, perhaps the most impressive technological instrument constructed to this point in human history? It simply makes no sense that this would be the case, to the extent that I’m almost tempted to suggest the possibility that these two people were perhaps faux-homeless, that they were on this street in rags only to scam potential passers by out of their spare change, yet.”

“Their stench was so strong that it seems implausible on that account alone?” Carl said.

“Exactly, Carl! I’ve never personally noticed a stench that strong from a single homeless person I’ve

previously encountered,” Ingo continued, “and I’ve encountered innumerable homeless people in my life, yet none emanated that powerful of a stench, this stench was such that I, for a moment, questioned if it could even come from a human being, if the human body was even capable of emitting a stench that rancid, that all-encompassing. To accumulate an odor of that magnitude would be a monumental achievement if it was only to scam passers by out of their spare change, and I’d go as far to say that, if that were the case, these two people deserve every single cent they receive, if they’ve accumulated that level of pungency to simply scam spare change.”

“Yet, if that were the case, Ingo,” Carl replied, “then I think we’d have to imagine that openly flaunting an iPhone would cut the opposite direction from the pungent bodily aroma, no?”

“What I mean specifically is: If a person is willing to go to the extent of accumulating an incredibly bitter and pungent body odor, to then accumulate maximum spare change donations, then this person is clearly dedicated to maximizing profit in the most extreme of degrees, this person has fully committed to the mask of a person sans domicile, a pitiful hobo, yet if a person encounters an allegedly homeless person enjoying an iPhone, the most advanced technology of this era, then that person would have to hesitate just slightly before giving any currency to that person, or giving maximum spare change to said alleged hobo, even if the body odor is off-putting enough to make the notion of this person perpetrating a spare change scam an incredulous one. In short, the flaunting of an iPhone would decrease the expected profit of a so-called spare change scam, while

the accumulation of pungency strikes us as having no other purpose beyond the acute maximization of spare change scamming, which means the combination of the two would make the accumulation of the bodily pungency a sort of lost cause, almost an act of insanity.”

“Insanity is often the most sensible answer in cases such as these,” Carl said, “At least that’s my personal experience.”

“Without a doubt something mysterious was occurring with those two bums, Carl, something that’s frankly probably beyond our comprehension! And at this point,” Ingo continued, “after imbibing a few Mezcal at Muldowney’s, splitting a clean bottle of Soju at a hot pot spot just around the corner, then returning to my apartment to cook two pieces of Ahi Tuna, there’s almost no way I’ll ever be able to delve any further into this matter, Carl. I will, however, note just briefly that on our walk back to our car one of the two persons was saying something about a five hundred dollar hotel a town over.”

“Yet even that anecdote leads us no closer to the true nature of these two people, don’t you agree?” Carl said, “If anything it makes the matter even more convoluted!”

“I agree completely,” Ingo replied, “the true nature of these two people, leaving aside their physical odor, will ultimately remain unknowable to us!”

Heraclitus

“Initially a thin hipster with a full red beard was in the bathroom at the bar, peeing at the tall urinal,” Joe said, “but when I went in, after he walked out, I made a point to pee at the kiddie urinal, a trademark of mine - for whatever reason I find myself more at ease at the kiddie urinals, as I’m long-torsoed in addition to being of only average height. Yes, the kiddie urinals are essentially made for me, and peeing at the kiddie urinal I took note of what looked like a piece of asscrack lint connected inextricably to a long piece of ass hair. This is what struck me as at least. I thought back to parking on the street fifty feet from this bar, back to my consternation with the driver wearing a snowcap in his maroon pickup truck cursing me through his windshield as I slowly scoped the one open spot on the street. At that time, with his perturbed expression and prehistoric facial features, he struck me as the worst person in the world and frankly still does. I wished nothing but the worst things on this person as I pulled over to let him pass, haranguing him through my windshield as he simultaneously screamed at me through his windshield, then calmly hit reverse to move back into the middle of the street, to parallel park in the only open spot, just momentarily lodging the right rear wheel ever so slightly onto the attenuated curb. In my mind this man in the pickup truck was a grotesque stain on the face of our planet. His face, in both its structure and expression, sticking with me at the bar, more or less revolted me in the most extreme of ways. Meanwhile the man to my left had ordered an impressively grotesque smelling

soup from the bar - it was all I could smell at the time, and the stench was such that it struck me as frankly a little unbelievable it wafted from a bowl a man was actually eating from, yet if anything this made me enjoy the spot even more. The band playing the bar employed a white saxophone player, and each respective instrumentalist was drinking a separate, distinct variety of alcohol - one whiskey, one craft beer, one some type of mixed drink, one nothing at all - all four frankly looking little like typical musicians, and I found it notable how easily the saxophone, I presumed tenor, sat in the mix with just a microphone next to it, given the accompaniment of electric guitar, electric bass, and acoustic drums that were played in a thoroughly rock, as opposed to jazz, style. I guess I never knew that about tenor saxophone. Rock drums have increasingly distressed me of late. When I think of a style of drumming that offends my taste, rock drumming immediately vaults to the top of the list - in my opinion, Carl, most rock music would be immeasurably improved with the simple removal of percussion, or at least with a more muted substitute of percussion. Maybe a tongue drum? Amplified tongue drum? Distorted tambourine? But honestly that's just me? - because I fully realize most people love percussion, that percussion is viewed as the so-called backbone of modern composition, that tons of listeners still venerate rock music. In any case I guess I should start to explain how I got here, shouldn't I?"

"From your parallel universe you mean?" a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl queried.

“Exactly Carl!” Joe said, “It now seems to me that I crossed over into this universe, or I should say I became aware that it had happened, precisely at the point where the bozo in the snowcap in his dark red pickup truck began yelling at me through his windshield, as I attempted to parallel park up the street from this bar, where a man would then order one of the most disgusting smelling soups I’ve ever encountered from its bar. It was obvious as the man, who I despised, looked exactly like some schmuck from Alabama - he was wearing a snowcap despite it being a moderately temperate day in early April, and given these facts it was obvious something had shifted significantly, but I couldn’t draw any conclusions quite at that point. But these are the types of cues you have to take into account with regard to things such as these Carl, parallel universe conundrums so to speak. How exactly it happens I’m not at liberty to detail at this time, as it’s possible I’m ignorant of the mechanics of the process, or I’m aware of the process in a way I can only communicate in indirect ways.”

“This makes sense, Joe,” Carl said, “There’s obviously only so much we can put into words when it comes to parallel universes.”

“For example,” Joe said, “it was precisely at this bar that I happened to log onto the basketball-reference.com website, Carl, which only confirmed my suspicions, which had been steadily rising, which only acted as another clue as I delved deeper into the stat lines I’ll detail right now. Specifically, as I recalled it, beyond a shadow of a doubt it sat in my memories, the Boston Celtic small forward John Havlichek owned a statistical profile that exceeded that of New York Knick

shooting guard Earl Monroe, whereas Earl Monroe had a statistical summation that lagged that of John Havlichek. And yet on basketball-reference.com at this bar, only moments after said bozo in snowcap in the Alabama-esque maroon pickup truck berated me through his windshield, it occurred to me that Earl Monroe had by far the more complete statistical profile compared to John Havlichek, despite the fact both Monroe and Havlichek averaged twenty-plus points per game multiple times in their career. Specifically, on this side Carl, it seemed that Monroe differentiated himself from Havlichek by getting to the free throw line at a much greater clip, by making plays for others at a clip that more than doubled Havlichek's rate. Where Havlichek assisted on just twenty percent of his possessions, while turning the ball over on ten percent, Monroe assisted on forty three percent of his possessions while turning the ball over on only twelve percent, while both rebounded just about thirteen percent of their possible possessions and shot an aggregate percentage of sixty (true shooting percentage) on their thirty points per game. Yet I explicitly recalled John Havlichek being the far superior playmaker, by more than double, when compared to Earl Monroe, in those exact terms of assist percentage and free throw rate, yet when I logged onto basketball-reference at this bar, to my great surprise, Earl Monroe separated himself from John Havlichek by his higher propensity of getting to the free throw stripe and by his stark contrast in setting his teammates up for made shots (especially when compared to his propensity to turn the ball over). It's only in the most minute of ways that we can detect these transitions, Carl, if that makes sense,

that we can conclude we've traversed across potential dimensions, if that makes sense?"

"Oh, absolutely!" Carl said.

"And to add to the confusion it was only a night later, in a vivid dream," Joe continued, "that I found myself in a desolate house covered with orange wallpaper, curiously preoccupied with bathing myself, apparently getting ready for something I couldn't quite put my finger on - it was in this home with the orange interior that I felt again this psychic energy with near strangers, near strangers who seem to pop into my mental space unannounced, that has increasingly struck me as an actual physical phenomenon. That I can actually think back toward these near strangers in a physical fashion. Yet this was before a particular shadow from my past appeared to me yet again in dream, in the most vivid of manners, and I began to run from something, something I couldn't identify, while simultaneously reconnecting with this shadow without either of us saying a word to each other, until I stumbled upon what looked like a locker room in an open field. I entered the building, a so-called locker room in an open field, and realized all of its memorabilia was from 1998, and I realized I'd traveled to 1998, that everything I touched was totally 1998, that my own so-called identity was just a clumsy block across something that could be traversed if approached properly, and then suddenly the thought occurred to me: Time starts in the middle and winds around, always in the middle, I thought, that this notion of time beginning at the beginning is entirely false, perhaps even nonsensical. When awake I frantically wrote a note that simply said: *Time starts in the middle and winds around.* And as I

encountered this idea streams of green for lack of a better word time shot out, like Nickelodeon Gack or something, various streams of time overlapping each other in joyous bursts of green, like the word Go, and it was a sort of joyous event even in its ambiguity. I was a little disappointed to wake up.”

“Did you do shrooms at all, Joe?” Carl asked.

“No sadly, Carl, I was completely free from hallucinogens when I went to sleep,” Joe said, “when I went to that bar, when the red-bearded hipster peed at the adult urinal, when the man next to me ordered the disgusting soup, when the bozo with the snowcap screamed at me, when the saxophone was surprisingly high in the mix. No, I don’t think we necessarily need to travel in the traditional sense in order to travel great distances, that much we can probably be sure of.”

“That makes complete sense to me, Joe!” Carl said.

Diogenes of Apollonia

“Even the notion of narcissism is ultimately a shallow one,” Joe said, “this idea that you’re intrinsically yourself, that I’m intrinsically myself, so that an examination of said self is ipso facto inherently self-serving, this notion that a severe internal examination of yourself, your so-called consciousness, which you have greater access to than anything else around you, that this is unwarranted, that somehow this search won’t inevitably lead you to see a doubling or tripling or quadrupling when looking inward? I guess what I’m saying is that the entire understanding of narcissism is based on a totally false premise. Examining an obscure tribe on an underdeveloped continent is considered the height of science while an extended foray into the nature of your own caprice is considered trivial?”

“In the bloom of my youth and the prime of my life,” a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave replied, “from the time I reached puberty, before I reached twenty until now, when I am over fifty, I have constantly been diving daringly into the depth of this profound sea and wading into its deep water like a bold man, not like a cautious coward. I would penetrate far into every murky mystery, pounce upon every problem, and dash into every mazy difficulty.”

“To become a student of your own self is to wade into the murkiest of conundrums,” Joe replied, “I think we would both agree that it’s necessary to understand the universe as such, that, as it’s been previously said, ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord’, that all of the Prophets have basically hinted at such, the so-called

exterior as metaphor for the so-called interior, the interior as little more than an inside-out exterior? It's only the rationalists that take this concept of individuation as axiom and then proceed exclusively outward. It was actually only a few short months ago that I was driving down Lennox on my way to my first visit to a Masonic lodge, which meant absolutely nothing to me, when a peculiar thought occurred to me - yes, it became apparent to me in a ubiquitous way that my consciousness was in no sense my *actual self*, but it's difficult to verbalize this. I was still pitifully clinging to my alleged consciousness - I was hoping that this consciousness would somehow continue without ceasing, despite the fact that this consciousness clearly only existed in fits and spurts, that there was nothing known of the origin of this consciousness, that it wasn't even a sure thing that what seems apparent as this consciousness is actually this apparency. Even its apparency is dubious in its apparency. All rational knowledge stems from this consciousness, yet it's entirely opaque in origin. 'Every aspect of my existence is a mirage,' I thought to myself while driving down Reservoir Avenue, while simultaneously noting a new Indian takeout spot to my right, briefly and baselessly speculating upon the quality of their hypothetical Lamb Biryani. Yet despite the fact that I'd occasionally tacitly acknowledged that existence is itself a red herring, these thoughts weren't entirely foreign to me by any means, but that acknowledgement had always been a tacit acknowledgement as opposed to a true revelation. On Reservoir Avenue, for reasons I couldn't grasp at the time and honestly still can't, this notion suddenly transformed from a tacit acknowledgement into a true

revelation, Dave, and as I approached the lodge I felt my interiority begin to evaporate in a way that was oddly matter-of-fact. I felt *the essence of myself disappearing somehow*, yet it's actually difficult to verbalize this. It became an indubitable truth that, sans some immediate anchor, I would perhaps simply disappear into a mist, and it was only the notion of creating aesthetic portals, dedicating myself, continuing to dedicate myself, to these aesthetic portals that allowed me to escape this fate of disappearing into a mist, that permitted me to exist in a social setting among persons that I perhaps only partially believed to be there. Then it was of course just the next week across the street in a jewelry shop on 2nd Avenue when my friend - or really *my acquaintance* - Anthony said, as we both sat at the counter where he worked, 'Hey! I was in the Taco Bell parking lot on 54th the other Thursday, and I thought about shouting up to you, see if you were up!' To which I replied, 'Oh really? You should have - I probably would have come down and ordered a Bean Burrito!' both of us laughing as I sipped an ice cold Peroni at the counter. 'You ever go to the bar next door,' he said, to which I said, 'I think I've been there like once, quite a while ago,' to which he said, 'That's funny you mention that - there was a dude there the other night, we went out for a drink after work, and I could have *swore he was you*. I think you have a doppelganger out there,' to which I said, 'I love the fact you guys serve alcohol here, even though it's a fucking jewelry store!' then I left the store and crossed the drizzling street to a restaurant called Aglio, where I took a seat at the sole open spot at the bar counter. I figured I'd drink probably just one more Peroni before returning to my apartment, but, prior to sitting down, I

briefly asked the person sitting next to the open seat if the spot was occupied, yet I, at the same time, also recognized that this person sitting down was my waitress from a month or so prior, where I bumped into a certain second cousin who'd been estranged from her immediate family for upward of a decade, where she said hello to me, where I said hello to her, where the conversation concluded after an awkwardly formal hello. I was almost positive this waitress remembered me, just as I remembered her, but we both wisely chose to forgo any subsequent small talk. Sipping just one more Peroni, I quickly took note of a potent aquatic odor penetrating my nostrils, ostensibly from a shrimp salad an older lady sitting on my other side was just served. To my one side sat a waitress responsible for serving me a questionable scallop dish a month or so prior, while to my other side sat a near geriatric lady consuming an equally questionable shrimp salad, one that looked to consist of simply romaine lettuce, shredded cheese, and shrimp. Only moments later, as it so happened, as I continued to insult her, in my view, ill-advised salad in my mind, this older lady turned to me and said, 'Now I bet people tell you all the time you look like the FBI guy!' to which I said, 'To be honest with you? I actually feel like the majority of former US Presidents should be serving extended prison sentences - or is that a TV show?' to which she said, 'Oh, yes, he's the main character!' Well, Dave, after the two old ladies exited, I searched the phrase *FBI show*, somewhat narcissistically I suppose, yet narcissistic in an analytical type of way? - and I stumbled upon a Wikipedia entry for an actor who I concluded, at a distance, could strike a certain type of person as *vaguely resembling me.*"

“Okay, now go on,” Dave said.

“So it was as we drove on Broadway,” Joe continued, “on our way to this very restaurant where I’d later see this waitress off-duty, on our way to a quaint double date with Ingo, when I said, ‘You know, there’s no redemption in memory. No, only in music, yes, only in the through-composed single note composition, only in the taqsimi, in the unceasing and non-repeating stream of notes performed with the utmost agility,’ to which my wife said, ‘That’s cool, babe.’ ‘Man, I haven’t been here in a dog’s age!’ Ingo said as we approached the front door, ‘I don’t think I’ve been here since when it was an Italian only club!’ to which I said, ‘I love the Fernet *pour* here.’ What can you say about the Sun, I thought as I opened the door for my wife, Ingo, and his companion - there’s no point in even mentioning it. Prior to parking, a pale man with dark long hair was somewhat clumsily backing into a parking spot, and I made a moderately vulgar remark for no particular reason. ‘Oh wow!’ Ingo exclaimed, ‘look at those t-shirts!’ as he looked at a stack of the restaurant’s official t-shirts, which was for sale in the lobby. ‘I’d actually wanna buy one of those! - those actually look like high quality shirts!’ he said. After leaving Ingo’s comments unaddressed and taking our seats at a table upstairs, our waitress - again, the same waitress I would bump into only a few weeks later - returned to tell me, ‘Sorry, but we actually don’t carry Mezcal,’ right after she took my order for a Mezcal. As she walked away, after I placed an order for a vodka on the rocks, I noted to the table my confusion with my own order - why would I order a vodka? ‘I never order vodka anymore,’ I said, ‘and honestly it’s for good reason, because half the time I

drink vodka I fucking black out! I could have ordered Fernet - like I said, Ingo, I love *the pour* here!' And, Dave, I'd feel the exact same way about my order of scallops as an entree. I just, I guess, fucking hated everything I ordered that night, despite ordering everything of my own volition? 'I know I'm going to love the pork chop,' Ingo said, to which I said, 'I've been delaying receiving a proper diagnosis for a digestive disease I may or may not have contracted, and honestly, I've begun to consider the possibility that I could be rapidly dying, that my life could be abruptly concluding sooner than later.' 'Is that sun going directly into your eyes?' Ingo said, to which I said, 'Yeah, basically ever since we sat down it's been more or less shining directly into each of my retinas without ceasing.' 'Honestly, this pork is a little dry,' Ingo said, 'and I specifically ordered it medium,' to which I said, 'Well, that makes me feel a little bit better about these scallops, because if nothing else they're perfectly succulent!' to which he said, 'But there are only four of them!'"

"Honestly," Dave said, "I've always found scallops to be an ambiguous type of seafood - is it an *entree* fish or an *appetizer* fish?"

"It was only a few brief moments after this dinner," Joe continued, "that a taller Cuban female briskly walked by me, who I was almost positive I went to college with, and, perhaps emboldened by the vodka, I shouted out to her, and, upon hearing my ill-advised wail, she walked over to us with a curious expression on her face."

"Oh," Dave said.

"I noted the curious expression," Joe continued, "then I asked her where she went to college, which

clearly jogged a memory in her mind - but unfortunately the person who she seemed to think I was from college, well, I actually wasn't that person, so we instead engaged in a quite awkward back and forth, which consisted primarily of me explaining who I was, which eventually forcibly jogged her memory, despite the fact I thought we were, you know, *actual friends* in college? "That was a little awkward," I said to table as both the Cuban left and the bill arrived."

"He will say," Dave said, "*Each will have a double, but you do not know.*"

"And it was only weeks later, Dave, to wrap this, up," Joe went on, "when we were landing in Baltimore, that I stood up as soon as the plane landed, at 2:10 pm, somewhat worried that our connecting flight boarded in about a half an hour. "These overhead compartments should be illegal, they should be outlawed, at least on connecting flights!" I shouted to Ingo, agitated at the amount of time it was taking to unload the plane of its passengers, yet, in any case, we arrived at the Baltimore gate with plenty of time to spare, and as we made a decision to relax and wait for the connecting flight to board. I couldn't help but take note of a light-skinned black-bearded, possibly Hispanic man wearing a maroon hat as he walked away from our new gate and toward the center of the airport. Immediately his face rekindled a distinct, yet fuzzy memory for me. I felt strongly I'd seen this man somewhere before, yet I wasn't sure if it was a person I'd actually known in my day to day life, or if it was, like, a supporting character from a TV show. This uncertainty gnawed at me while we waited across from our new gate - I took a quick detour to the men's room, and the name *George*

Gervin came to me, basically mystically. ‘George Gervin, the basketball player!’ I thought about it. Yes, this player’s face resembled the face I’d just seen walk away from our gate like a ghost. ‘Ah, George Gervin!’ I thought at the gate, that’s who it is, or that’s who this person reminds me of at least - and a nonsensical calm came over me as this *exterior doppelganger’s* mystery was seemingly resolved. On the plane I sat diagonally behind a middle-aged woman who boldly made no attempt to put her phone into airplane mode, instead she heedlessly checked her Instagram notifications repeatedly as our captain prepared to take off. Then this middle-aged lady whipped out a MacBook and, once in the air, proceeded to open her Instagram yet again, now on her personal computer, and crafted a caption for a selfie she was apparently preparing to post, perusing a plethora of emojis in the process, but, unfortunately, she didn’t realize she was still in the emoji search field, and she typed a portion of the caption into the emoji search box, which caused the page to search for an emoji that clearly didn’t exist, which caused the entire page to freeze. She exited the page and nonchalantly logged into a *Yahoo mail account* that, to my eye, consisted of hundreds of unread messages! In flight, as I continued to contemplate the life decisions of this lady, the face of this doppelganger with the black beard yet again flashed before my eyes, and I realized that while this person, sure, may have displayed a *passing resemblance* to George Gervin, that passing resemblance was just that - quite passing! No, this doppelganger wasn’t the doppelganger of any NBA player - no, it was a doppelganger of either an acquaintance I used to know

personally or a doppelganger of a fictional character from a film or TV series. This was a doppelganger of a person who didn't exist! And, even as I speak to you now, Dave, weeks afterward, long gone from Baltimore, now almost to Manhattan yet again, I can honestly say that I've obtained no further clarity as it relates to the identity of this exterior doppelganger."

Pythagoras

“No. I think that’s it,” Ingo said, “That’s what’s actually wrong with me. I’m glad we finally got the bottom of it.”

“No,” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa replied, “um, that’s not it. Keep trying.”

“Could it be. Um.”

“No, that’s not it. That’s not it either.”

“Why is this so difficult?”

“It seems as though the things you’ve forgotten have dictated your emotional trajectory to date - in like an acute way?”

“Is it possible I exist simultaneously, like in another time completely?”

“You’re still meandering around in the realm of lineage. Please stop.”

“Is genetic history passe?”

“This is a portal. You need to think differently. You’re not being honest. You believe you’ve forgotten things but that’s not entirely true is it?”

“But I’ve finally expressed my feelings, like at a really high decibel too.”

“No, that’s not it. Those aren’t your feelings. You thought those were your feelings? I’m afraid you’re thinking in terms of relations still.”

“Relations?”

“You’re analyzing things in terms of relations, Ingo, as if there’s true difference. How else could you relate? Didn’t you already get past this? This isn’t a dive bar. It’s a portal. There’s no relation to really consider here. That’s not it. Keep trying.”

“But if I say it. No, that won’t work.”

“You’re still thinking in terms of relations. Of extensions. Of things relating to one another. Please stop.”

“No, this isn’t a dive bar at all. You’re right. Although it seems like I may be blackout drunk?”

“This is just a mirror. Does that help?”

“But not in the sense I’m thinking. Right?”

“You’re getting closer.”

“How can there be something that equals more than one?”

“One contains all the numbers. That’s correct.”

“And zero?”

“That’s what’s actually illusory. Coders are assholes.”

“I see. So it’s true that I don’t love anyone.”

“In a manner of speaking. You’re close to getting it now. Certain assertions imply extension. What does love mean if it’s extended?”

“Of course! At times we attempt to extend and retract a thing we call love not realizing at all what it is we’re actually doing. We think we’re at a shitty dive bar. And it perhaps even occurs to us that we’re blackout drunk. But there’s something else to memory. We misunderstand memory essentially. This is really just a quaint plane of consistency isn’t it?”

“And no one would know the difference. They’re extending what they don’t possess and foolishly think that by doing so they create relation.”

“It’s actually kind of funny in a sense.”

“In order to be the most forgiving you have to be able to laugh a little.”

“It’s implicit.”

“Yet others refuse to do so. Laugh that is. They hang over us with a perpetual frown under their smile. Assigning their own actions to themselves. Concerned about nothing but what they view as themselves.”

“But they can only do so for an assigned time. They’re obsessed with lineage. They cling to lineage like a shadow.”

“Not all dive bars are portals to a plane of consistency. But the plane of consistency is - well, you get it now right?”

“How could I not? One contains all of the numbers.”

Anaximander

“This nostalgia,” Ingo began, “ugh, it’s fundamentally an act of terrorism isn’t it? I mean in the sense that it’s working, in some sense, against the potential production of newer childhood memories from more recent childhoods, themselves of course fundamentally as false as our’s, but don’t they.”

“Have as much of a right to exist as our own?” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa cut off, “Our own memories which we find.”

“Serendipity in doubting as an act of faith?” Ingo finished, “What is nostalgia fundamentally? It’s fucking like ASMR or some shit. It’s just another church and, fundamentally, as Kierkegaard himself said, *the Church cannot be distinguished from the State*. Every prophet allegedly sent down to us, let’s just face it, results in an unintelligible truth and the subsequent post-mortem construction of a State that posits intelligibility as the crux of its tyranny.”

“We shun unintelligibility,” Tifa said, “all the while remaining willfully ignorant to the fact intelligibility has no other function but to annihilate.”

“There’s nothing lower than intelligibility really, at least as it relates to first causes, to Being itself,” Ingo retorted, “when you actually take a second to think about it, you know?”

“Greed is the fulcrum of intelligibility.”

“Why is it then that we seem to believe that it, intelligibility, is an encasing worthy of divinity?”

“Bring four witnesses to each infidelity,” Tifa said, “otherwise it’s *you* that spreads corruption in the land. Is that a commentary on intelligibility, to some extent?”

“Shouldn’t the divine emerge sans encasing?” Ingo noted.

“How could it not?”

“Nostalgia: it’s basically terrorism to me.”

“It’s only walking in solitude yet in densely populated areas that I actually feel anywhere close to at ease, like I can actually think a little bit?”

“But the people we grew up with,” Ingo said, “these actual co-conspirators of our nostalgia, we can’t make ourselves known to them, can we?”

“To them we remain eternally unintelligible,” Tifa concluded.

“We’re like a local news story to them, but I for one wouldn’t necessarily take offense if they just closed the browser for good?”

I saw Chris Conklin
in line at Rite Aid; he looked

twenty years older,
and I thought eventually
the two of us will be dead.

“Leaving aside the alcohol and its potential benefits,” Ingo continued to Tifa, “weighed against the indubitable drawbacks, there are essentially only two choices in front of us: the one being to untether yourself completely from everything, and view the world and all

human interaction as essentially things that require annihilation, primarily because there's a *next something* that we should instead be turning our gaze toward. Or to basically sum it up quite simply the other option is: *Everything reverts to Him*. That, in fact, rather than untethering from everything, you should instead immerse yourself so fully in these infinite extensions that the net result is that you're inevitably annihilated in turn, and the only thing that remains is His face."

"Go on, Ingo," Tifa said.

"*“Every moment my heart tugs me to the tavern - how can I remain here with these pious hermits?”*" Ingo quoted, then said, "There's an importance, philosophically speaking, of *not making eye contact with anyone*, of avoiding all eye contact if possible, especially in densely populated public places. The wisest of people have always understood this, Tifa. Conversely, the egregious alcoholic in some not immaterial sense is actually placed higher in spiritual knowledge than even the practiced monk, because the practiced monk - practicing the former approach of untethering from everything - has attempted to find his solace in nothingness, but true nothingness is quite elusive. True nothingness will, sure, eventually lead you to *everything all at once*, but via true nothingness you'll encounter everything all at once *from the opposite end*. Whereas, the egregious alcoholic - yes, he's taken of course essentially the opposite approach of the practiced monk, and of course he's landed in the same place essentially, yet viewing *everything all at once* from the opposite side! He'll eventually approach everything all at once but from the opposite end than the practiced monk. The practiced monk arrives at everything all at

once from one end, while the egregious alcoholic arrives at everything all at once from the opposite end. You make yourself more objectionable when you drink by yourself, which is preferable when it comes to matters like these, Tifa.”

“I suppose there’s really nothing a priori *inappropriate* about pouring yourself a stiff cocktail after a hard day’s work,” Tifa replied.

“‘Hmm, I’m just curious here,’ I thought,” Ingo continued, “sitting in a comfy red chair having a sip of some fairly high class Mezcal - by myself of course! - ‘yeah, I wonder how long it specifically takes for alcohol to truly leave your system?’ I thought, having successfully avoided alcohol entirely for a full week, for seven whole days. And on the seventh day I began to feel somewhat like a *completely different person*, as if all of my previous urges, during - I don’t know, the last two decades or so? - had shifted in some not statistically insignificant way. But it’s difficult if not impossible to truly map out these tiny shifts in the caprice you experience with regard to yourself, to map them to *one thing* at the *exclusion of others*, although, in a sense, at the time, I felt like a child again. At the time, Tifa, I was also intensely reflecting on the three plums I’d bought on sale earlier that day, and how one of them, the only one I’d consumed to date, had, I don’t know, a bit of a bitter taste to it? Almost like it wasn’t good at all? In turn, in addition to thinking about how long alcohol stays in your system, while drinking by myself, I also found myself considering if purchasing produce that was marked ‘on sale’ was itself always necessarily an ill-advised idea in concept, that the only reason fruit would be on sale is if it was out of season, or if it was a member

of a bad batch of produce, that basically some sequence of events must have occurred to this fruit that made it unappealing enough to the grocery store for the store to place it on sale. I finished my drink and figured I might as well leave my apartment and, I don't know, fucking buy a book or something? But on my way to buy a book I ended getting a massive urge to pee, Tifa, so I ducked into the only dive bar that I knew for a fact wouldn't frown upon me using their bathroom as a non-customer, because I knew for a fact all sorts of bums were using their bathroom on the regular, so why couldn't I? I made literal nanosecond-duration eye contact with the girl behind the bar as I walked to the men's room and recalled that it'd been literal months since I'd been to this bar, yet I distinctly recalled, the last time I was at this bar, being pushed mercilessly over the edge of sobriety by taking the bartender up on a second Mezcal, yet as I continued to reflect I concluded that that was actually the case every time I'd ever been to the fucking place. After I peed, I asked the girl behind the bar to get me a Mezcal and water, quite aware that the entire reason I went to this bar - to pee without purchasing - was now rendered completely pointless, and she asked for a clarification of my order via uttering the words: *'Like with water? On top of it?'* Yeah and close my tab. I suppose it would be fair to say that I didn't give a particular fuck about this girl behind the bar, Tifa, although, to be fair, it's quite possible that at a previous point in my life I would have felt some urge to give some modicum of a fuck about her, to note some nanosecond-level eye contact as somehow imbued with meaning in some way. In my younger years I very well may have taken note of this bartender, now

arduously tasked with constructing my Mezcal and water, and imagined a pretext of some sort to subsequently give a fuck about her as a person, but now, at that particular moment, sitting at the bar waiting for my Mezcal and water, it would be disingenuous to suggest that I gave a fuck about her in any way. Yet of course I obviously didn't know her at all! At a minimal glance, it looked like she she'd hit a bit of a rough patch over the last few months - only because I distinctly recalled her from a few months prior, precisely because she was a physically attractive bartender at this bar, where generally speaking you'll rarely if ever encounter anyone physically attractive. I closed the tab upon the execution of the order of the Mezcal and water. *Like with water on top of it?* Yes, that's correct. With the water. And ice too if you have it."

"Ingo," Tifa interjected, "you remember what I used to do for a living, right?"

"The fact of the matter was," Ingo continued, "that I'd crossed the bridge that afternoon in a completely capricious way! To be honest, Tifa, I was being just slightly dishonest when I said I decided to buy a book. Initially my thought was to just take a walk in my neighborhood. I was initially planning to take a quick walk, but I was intent on making sure that the walk remained exclusive to my particular neighborhood, which was on the one side of the bridge, and I was specifically attempting to avoid crossing the bridge and meandering into the downtown on the other side of the bridge, primarily because I'd been avoiding our downtown of late, of late our downtown perhaps even distressed me to some extent. This downtown contains metaphysical danger for me, I thought. I didn't really

have an urge to have anything to do with downtown at the time. Yet when I gave some modicum of thought to trying to find an alternate translation of a book I've been reading - immediately as this thought occurred to me, Tifa, I took an aleatory sharp right turn, now walking *toward the bridge* instead of further into my neighborhood! - now walking *into* downtown instead of walking further into my particular neighborhood, walking directly into downtown. Later on, urine officially dispensed, drinking a Mezcal and water while sitting at this bar - downtown! - I began staring into what could only be identified as *pure blank space*, right as the girl behind the bar moseyed to my end of the bar and engaged in a deep sip of her mixed drink. I continued to stare into *pure blank space* as this bartender, now finished with her deep sip, now clearly satiated by the depth of this sip, turned her back to me and sat her ass on the ice box and also started to stare into what I could only assume to be a form of *pure blank space*. She pulled up on her blue jeans repeatedly. At a glance a tattoo on her lower hip, partially obscured by the very blue jeans she pulled up on, seemed to depict a man flipping off the world. A drunk man approached the bar and redeemed a Keno ticket that won him one single dollar, but he only submitted the ticket after prefacing the submission by apologizing for even turning in the admittedly meager ticket. Yet he subsequently turned in the ticket and ambled back to the other end of the bar with a single dollar bill in hand. The girl turned around again and returned her ass to the ice box, her blue jeans displayed more or less right in front of my face. She pulled up on the jeans again. You know what my problem is, I

thought to myself, Tifa, staring into this *pure blank space* and remaining only benignly aware of the blue jean adorned buttocks motionless in space more or less right in front of my face: My problem is that I actually lack a *necessary derisive fervor* when it comes to things - that I've somehow mistakenly come to believe I'm *too derisive* of things, when in fact it's actually the case that *I'm lacking in the requisite derision* appropriate for things. For years I've considered myself *too derisive* when in reality I haven't been *nearly derisive enough!* You cannot allow yourself to make eye contact, Tifa - this is the first philosophical principle. Yet, at the same time, all philosophical thought of any worth has emerged from densely populated areas. You must accept everything all at once, in one instant as an aesthetic beauty, where now and next collapse upon each other instantaneously, but in a way where it's approached from a very *specific* side."

Hermes Trismegistus

“Now, all things considered,” Ingo said, “and I’m not being patronizing at all, in all honesty, but you seem like a bright guy, right?”

“Well,” a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave replied, “you’re the one making the allegation, so.”

“No, really,” Ingo went on, “Dave, you seem like a really bright guy, and I’m not just saying that! So I wanted to run a little something I’ve found myself extensively contemplating quite a bit lately by you. If that’s okay?”

“Well,” Dave said, “first of all, that’s totally fine with me, the comment wasn’t even remotely patronizing, but, just let me preface this conversation, I’d like to just note one quite important thing upfront: namely, that I subscribe to Giordano Bruno’s belief that we only come to truly *know* things via the use of our own imaginations, that sans imagination nothing would be known, perhaps nothing would even exist! So as long as you’re okay with that, albeit fundamental, aspect of my thought process, well, I don’t see any reason why we can’t proceed cordially here.”

“Not only am I fine with that, Dave,” Ingo said, “not only am I completely fine with that, because, to the extent that I have actual beliefs, because I don’t, strictly speaking, have any intelligible belief system, but if I were to hypothetically subscribe to a belief system it would certainly be something along the lines of: We only come to truly *know* things via the employment of our own imaginations. So, with that established and agreed upon, let me innocently ask you this: How is it

that we should interpret a compound statement such as the following, one asserting that (22:40) ‘*God is sure to help those who help His cause*’, but also that (22:41) ‘*God controls the outcome of all events*’? Because, Dave, it would seem as though the latter aspect of the statement (‘God controls the outcome of all events’) would, logically speaking, negate the former, that if *God controls the outcome of all events*, then how, in addition, could *He help those who help His cause*, leaving aside spurious notions of need or want. Because far be it from me to speculate on why God would want to, or to need to, help others. I’ll leave that question to bolder thinkers for now.”

“Well,” Dave replied, “let me think here, because I think the first, kneejerk, reaction would be to, from our contemporary vantage point at least, to suggest, from the secular atheist point of view, that the Quran itself is just an *inherently contradictory text*, and that it’s contradictory precisely because it’s a product of man himself, and then also to suggest, again from a secular atheist vantage point, that it’s a text that, perhaps because of its inherent contradictions, has been co-opted for social control for centuries now?”

“Yet,” Ingo retorted, “even if elements of those assertions were to be true, that would still ignore some of the very precise (and, frankly, unexplainable) aspects of the Quran, namely, the quizzically musical nature of the prose, the subtle mathematical nature of its extensive characteristics that have been derived from intensive studies across centuries, studies that suggest the text perhaps could not have been just *randomly arranged*.”

“Well,” Dave said, “then we could of course, if needed, from the secular atheist vantage point, simply resort to smearing those particular studies that disagree with our thesis. We could generously cast doubt upon any study from the Arab-speaking world, purely due to the political implications of suggesting the Quran isn’t, *in every way*, a divine text in much of the Arab-speaking world. Because it’s certainly true enough that, in some areas of the world, that suggestion is a perilous one to make.”

“But yet,” Ingo countered, “with all of that said, even that’s not quite my thesis here, Dave. Or: it’s not the angle I would choose to take, that the Quran is a musical and/or mathematical text, and that’s why these logical contradictions can perhaps be discarded. No, not at all. Instead I would actually argue in favor of these so-called contradictions from a *purely logical standpoint*, because we witness seeming contradictions like this all throughout the Quran, and, in fact, the Quran might be considered the logically contradictory text par excellence. There’s perhaps no text filled with more logical contradictions than the Quran. In the history of our species, it’s a fact that no text has gone as far as the Quran in extending logical contradictions of this order. In fact, the Quran is so logically contradictory that it seems almost like it couldn’t have been constructed with any sort of logical intent in mind, like, for instance, this intent to *control hearts and minds*.”

“Yet of course intent isn’t a prerequisite in these cases,” Dave admitted, “Nietzsche was no Nazi, yet we’re aware of what occurred to his texts in the decades after his death. And, of course, we should also probably

note that the degree of logic the 6th and 7th century Arab mind was acquainted with is something we don't necessarily have *expertise* in - and that it very well, in the median instance at least, could have been on the lower end."

"Nevertheless Dave!" Ingo said, "I would still argue this is irrelevant to our argument. To be clear, the Quran always struck me as a sensibly divine text, like a text that my *particular notion* of God would transmit, because, for my part, the text seems to contain in it the very illogic and caprice that I associate with myself (and even Muhammed admitted, 'He who knows his true self knows his Lord'), this very illogic and caprice that, no, I don't necessarily consider *myself proper*, but that I experience in a sort of matter-of-fact, abutting nonvoluntary way from time to time - in short, it contains that syncretism of opposites that's necessarily divine in character. So it was in this sense that the Quran spoke to me in an immediate way that, say, the linear narratives of the Gospels or Torah never quite did. In the nonlinear Quran I found a sort of textual companion spirit so to speak, a spectacular palette for esoteric interpretation, so perhaps it's true that I'm biased in this inquiry to begin with - perhaps as a somewhat illogical person, but, at the same time, we all have our biases, and I do think it's worthwhile, as someone who recommends reading the Quran, that we make certain logical inquiries into certain sections of the text. And, again, my counterargument will be rooted in a logical argument, not entirely divorced from, say, I don't know, the Neoplatonists' treatments of the Chaldean Oracles!"

“‘God is sure to help those who help His cause’,” Dave said, “but also ‘God controls the outcome of all events’.”

“‘God is sure to help those who help His cause’,” Ingo repeated, “but at the same time He ‘controls the outcome of all events,’ yes. It’s been said, ‘There are signs in (this or that) for those who reflect’, so let’s reflect, shall we Dave? Perhaps there’s a sign in this compound statement that we can reflect upon. How is it - assuming that logic isn’t the end-all instrument but still an instrumental with some practical use for us - how is it that these two statements could be reconciled? - in a logical way? Or is it that perhaps, at bottom, they’re just exemplary of an irredeemably nonsensical text. Now, for example, I control the outcome of an event, but, at the same time, I note to you that, if you were to assist me in *my cause*, that I would *help you* as well? One possibility we could suggest here is that I don’t control the event, and I’m simply stating that I control the outcome of the event as a rhetorical device to persuade you to assist me. Now, in some circles, that would make us seem quite sacrilegious - quite heretical - but surely it’s a possibility you and I can contemplate! That I’m phrasing something in this manner as a rhetorical device, with the intent of having you *help me*.”

“We could certainly note it as a possibility, yes,” Dave admitted, “I see no reason why not.”

“Or,” Ingo continued, “Perhaps I control the outcome of an event - perhaps I control the outcomes of *all events*, but, at the same time, I’ll help you if you help me? So another possibility is that I actually do control the event (perhaps all events!), and I’m simply

reaching out to you as a decent friend, *to help you* - as an act of charity. I could control the event all of my own, of course, but I'm, as a courtesy, letting you know that, *quid pro quo*, if you help me (which, to be clear, I don't need) then, in return, I'll help you."

"I feel like, honestly," Dave said, "if I can be honest, that you're just needlessly delaying the true question you want to present here?"

"Haha!" Ingo cackled, "Maybe I'm not the most patient person, Dave - now *that* statement probably contains no logical contradiction! We don't need any further, extensive analysis performed there. No, because I think it's somewhat obvious here what's missing in our logical framework, what's missing that causes us to immediately view a compound statement like this as inherently illogical as opposed to appropriately formulated. Now, Dave, you're a bright guy. You probably know exactly where I'm going here, because the root of the contradiction here, and, to be fair, as I already noted, this contradiction appears in many places in the text, so it's more obvious in aggregate than by simply isolating one acute example of it, but the root of the contradiction, to me, is that we're reading the text with a *Cartesian assumption* of a strict separation of 'His cause', 'those who help', and 'all events'. Because if we view *His cause*, *those who help*, and *all events* with guarded moats and tall barriers between them, then the statement either (a) makes no sense, or (b) it's a crude rhetorical device, or (c) it's an unnecessary act of charity. But if *His cause*, *those who help*, and *all events* are all inextricable extensions of the very same thing, then suddenly this statement isn't quite nonsensical at all, because it's no longer a hoodwinking

rhetorical device, and it's also very far from a simple act of charity!"

"Traditionally," Dave replied, "we would view 'His cause', 'those who help', and 'all events' as completely separate things, you're correct. 'His cause' is traditionally in the jurisdiction of God and His Heaven, while 'those who help' are the earthly creatures independent of the Former's transcendence, *acting independently* of course, and 'all events' cut across, well . . . all events - but consist of individual events that are, in themselves, confined to select points in time and space."

"But if we were to blur all of them together," Ingo continued, "almost like we could blur 'all events' together, yes let's begin with 'all events' here, noting that 'all events' can't necessarily be reduced to a select time and space, as 'all events' would almost certainly have to refer to an infinite amount of events, and if you attempted to take note of an infinite amount of points in time and space, then you would then yourself start to create *a subsequent infinite set of events* and, in turn, find yourself reduced to an absurd act that compounds upon itself in its own infinity. You can't take note of 'all events' logically. 'His cause,' 'those who help,' and 'all events' must mirror the form of 'all events', yes, they can't simply be reduced to Cartesian snowglobes that we only see interacting independently and at a distance, and, if appropriately blurred into a single extension of one single thing, then the compound statement 'God is sure to help those who help His cause' and 'God controls the outcome of all events' is actually no longer contradictory at all. It's simply that the logical assumptions we began this analysis, that it was in fact

these logical assumptions that were the nonsensical terms (Zeno could have told us this when Socrates was still a young man!), not the compound statement itself. So, while from a certain vantage point, we could say this compound statement is indicative of a rhetorical display, or of a Divine charity, or a corruption of the text itself, we could also say this compound statement is indicative of *an anticipated critique of the Cartesian subject*. God controls the outcome of all things, and He'll certain help those who help His cause, but God cannot be entirely disassociated from all events and His (potential) helpers (who He controls as extensions of Himself) (as well as others). In a real sense He *is both these events and these helpers*, but in a certain sense He's also something separate and distinct. In this sense time and space collapse momentarily, and the Divine Name, as the creator of both, becomes more than one thing as once. So His proffered help to those who help Him in the cause of event He Himself determines isn't any more illogical than a person saying to his or herself: *If I can fast for the entirety of this day, then I'll allow myself to eat a rib-eye steak this evening*. That's not a contradictory statement whatsoever! You, Dave, you in fact control whether or not you eat anything during the day, yet, at the time, you might incentivize yourself to complete this fast, and then reward yourself with a nice, juicy rib-eye steak, assuming you manage to control yourself in the way you intended, by not eating for the entire day. There's nothing contradictory in this, and this is, in essence, the exact same logical structure as the statement we began with: 'God will help those who help His cause' and 'God controls the outcome of all events'."

“You’re correct,” Dave said, “in that I kind of knew where you were going there, but it was well-landed nonetheless! But, if okay by you, let me offer a subsequent example here, Ingo? One that might be as central to your thesis as what you just said, but something that I think might flesh out your perspective around the edges.”

“Oh, I’d love that Dave!”

“As you stated yourself,” Dave proceeded, “we all have our gaps of pure illogic, and that’s true even of myself, although, to be fair, from what you said, maybe not quite to the degree as you do. But obviously I’m still illogical at times too! And it so happened that I’d fall into a deep crevice of pure illogic right around the time, just a few months ago, when I was invited to a cigar dinner, a cigar dinner that I’d attended many years in the past, and one that I take no umbrage in attending, even though it’s not really a ‘dinner’ in the sit-down sense, even though I don’t generally smoke cigars, even though I always seem to end up spending more money than I initially set out to when I attend. But I generally enjoy the event socially, so I usually make a point to go. And this year I even invited an old friend of mine to attend with me, and, to my surprise, he actually acquiesced, and so we set out to this cigar bar on that upcoming Sunday, for this dinner. We were having a great time! The food was certainly better than you’d expect for a cigar bar, and a handful of our acquaintances were enjoying smoking one or more cigars, although neither of us did, yet I dabbled in some smokier scotches that I was satiated by, and, for his part, my friend seemed to be enjoying his generic light beers. So, as the night wore on and the ‘dinner’ party began to

disperse, we decided to end the night with another acquaintance of our's, someone we hardly even knew, compared to one another at least. We decided to go to one more spot before calling it for the night. We agreed that was reasonable. Yet, as is often the case with things like this, immediately after walking into the subsequent bar I realized it was a gross error to leave the initial cigar bar. It was more or less just us three at this new bar, save an uninterested bartender and one stray patron sitting to the right of me. Clearly the only place socially alive on this Sunday night was from where we just departed.

“Now, right after receiving our new round of drinks,” Dave continued, “this long-time friend of mine turns to our mutual minor acquaintance, he’s sitting between the two of us, and, apropos of nothing, says ‘You know, you know Dave a little bit now, right? Yeah, you do. I mean. Don’t you think it’s true that: *No one is a bigger waste of talent than Dave?*’ My long-time friend says, ‘Have you heard Dave’s new shit that he’s released? He’s *made you* listen to it, right? Yeah, of course he did. Don’t you think it sucks? It’s not good. I’m sorry, but it fucking sucks! It’s sad, because Dave could have actually made a living off of music, I think. He actually has some talent. Maybe not a ton! But enough. And if he’d listened to me, instead of being a fake avant-garde cunt about it, he could have probably had some success. Dave,’ my friend continued, ‘no - again, he’s not *that* talented, but he certainly could have had *some* success making music, if he had any sense about it. Maybe he could have got a gold record or something. I really think he could have!’ Now of course, Ingo, you’ve heard my sound system, and it’s obvious that I’ve put quite a bit of effort into my musical

endeavors, you know this as well as anyone, and I was actually quite happy with my more recent releases, ones that were based on some of my more mathematical studies, which, admittedly, I suppose could be considered slightly pretentious, I guess. Yet this long-time friend of mine, again apropos of nothing, suddenly decided to eviscerate all of these endeavors in public, to a person we both barely knew. No, he didn't address me personally, as a long-time friend, to tell me didn't approve of my direction artistically, that he had some qualms with my work, no, he instead chose to take a public position, an incredibly bold stance in the general public, and to all of this I replied, actually sincerely I said, 'No, I actually agree!' This long-time friend of mine said, 'I often think, Dave. I reflect. That you could have been something - but you aren't. Who's listened to your new stuff and actually liked it? Sure people tell you they listen to it. But do they actually enjoy it? Do they actually even listen to it?' He queried our acquaintance, he said, 'You've *actually* listened to it?' and the acquaintance said, 'Oh yeah, Um, a few tracks,' to which my long-time friend pounced, replying, '*Exactly*. No one likes this stuff. You said you had Joe listen to it, right Dave? Did he? *Listen to it?* What did he say? He said he liked it? Yeah, sure! I'm sure he's listening to it all the time! You know what the problem is? You're obsessed with these shitty concepts no one cares about! All of your songs are horribly off-beat. It's sad. You actually have some talent. Now I'm not saying Dave is that talented. No! He's not *that* talented! But he certainly could have been moderately successful, if he wasn't such a fake avant-garde asshole. Dave, you're not avant-garde, that's the thing. *You're a cunt. But you're*

not avant-garde. You think you're avant-garde? No. You're not avant-garde, buddy. You could have been a moderately successful independent musician. But instead you chose to self-sabotage yourself by indulging in all sorts of avant-garde cuntery.' And to all of this I, again Ingo, I said, 'I don't even disagree! *Maybe you're right!* I guess we'll see! I appreciate the sincere feedback!'

"But even this acquiescence," Dave continued, "to his, apparently sincere, outburst wouldn't satiate my long-time friend's sudden thirst for blood - no, even my agreement with his debilitating assessment of an endeavor I'd put countless hours into, his critique that, no, it wasn't even *conceptually intriguing*, which the acquaintance tried to magnanimously steer the conversation toward. The acquaintance we hardly knew attempted - perhaps out of sheer awkwardness - to steer the conversation to the idea that my work may have at least been *conceptually intriguing*, but that concept was patently absurd to my long-time friend. Not only was this music not my *long-time friend's* cup of tea, but it was impossible that this music could possibly be *anyone's* cup of tea! It could be *no one's* cup of tea! My brand of tea was objectively grotesque in the eyes of the entire world! No, even the conceptual intrigue of this endeavor was an utter failure. No one was intrigued by this conceptual - and let's call it what it is, he said - this conceptual *bullshit* I'd constructed. I could have been, sure, an *okay* artist! But instead I pursued a conceptual path that was, ultimately, worthless and something worthy and deserving of grotesquely shitting upon in public. And, rather than defend myself, Ingo, to tug at the loose strings of his critiques, many of which were

rooted in blatant misreadings - or maybe, more likely, blatant *non*-readings of my work - I instead agreed wholeheartedly with him. I didn't defend myself in the least. No, it was true. I was an avant-garde cunt who wasn't even really avant-garde! The worst of the worst! Just a cunt! I even offered to collaborate with him, Ingo! Yes, the person who was ruthlessly destroying my life's work, calling me basically the lowest of the low, I offered to collaborate with him! Shockingly, he didn't seem that interested in the offer. *I'm just saying. Dave had talent. But at this point? We have no choice but to process a final judgment on him: Namely, that he's a wasted talent.*' My long-time friend continued like this, and would persevere in continuing like this, until we'd had another two drinks and, finally, *he decided* it was time to go home. He had work in the morning. Only then we did we call it a night. 'God is sure to help those who help His cause,' but also 'God controls the outcome of all events.' I never found any contradiction in this compound assertion at all, Ingo! I'm, well, if nothing else, a true waste of talent! An artist who only purports to be avant-garde, and even in concept is ultimately a failure, a failure who continues to pursue this path of *being avant-garde*, despite *not being avant-garde* at all, who continues to pursue it ad infinitum, nonsensically, embarrassingly, and unsuccessfully! To all of this I agreed wholeheartedly! When I was finally confronted with this alleged reality, Ingo - that I tossed this chance to *be an okay artist*, that I threw that miraculous opportunity away only to subsequently *utterly fail at being avant-garde* - I gave no retort but: *'I agree!'* *God is sure to help those who help His cause*, but at the same time *He controls the outcome of all*

events. There's certainly nothing at all contradictory in that statement that I can see. But, to be fair, it's also possible that I only say that as an extension of being a failed avant-garde cunt!"

Timaeus of Locri

“Joe,” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa began, “would you agree that people are distinct?”

“Perhaps,” Joe said, “but uh.”

“No,” she nodded, “go on.”

“Well,” he went on, “it was ultimately a fairly non-descript night that I stumbled upon a fat guy who sat at a strip club bar on the Lower East Side wearing a hair style that would certainly accurately be described as a combover, a style that accentuated the delicate and razor thin nature of his hair’s texture, but one that also mapped, Magellan-like, the contours of his fat and bloated face. When I sat down next to him, ordered a drink and introduced myself, he turned to me and said, ‘*Those girls over there*, you know them?’ I said, ‘Um.’ He said, ‘Those girls over there? They have no respect.’ I said, ‘Are they standing next to the one with a tattoo of Pee Wee Herman on her left ass cheek?’ He said, ‘No. You see those two over *there*?’ The bar was more or less, by any estimation, at capacity - ‘those two’ could have designated literally any two females in the establishment, at least from my vantage point at the time. ‘Oh yeah, now I see them,’ I nodded. The guy continued onward to inform me that he was taking the two of them, *those two*, on a cruise to Miami in about a month, the two girls, that he’d done nearly *everything* (sexually) with each of them, everything under the sun really, like grotesque things, things that he wouldn’t even feel comfortable describing in public, some of these acts, to which I admitted that I found it disgusting - no, not the grotesque sex acts, that was totally

agreeable to me! - it was just the fact that these two females could be so unappreciative of a man as magnanimous as he was. He replied by reiterating that he wasn't mad at all, that even if I thought he was mad, even if it seemed like he was extremely upset, that, no, actually he wasn't mad at all. He could get a new girl any time he wanted. Screw them, right? What? Because these two girls didn't say hello to him, now he was mad? No, not at all. Not in the least. He was having a great time, drinking a vodka-soda where each order was supplied with two full shots of vodka? This was a great time. Sure, he continued, they're pretty *now*, but what about a year from now? Five years from now? What then? He told me his name was Dave, by the way. What about after they had a kid though? When their cuntholes were stretched out to the size of pineapples? What then? Did they truly believe distinguished gentlemen such as himself would be lining up behind one another to request their company on all-inclusive cruises in Miami? That was patently absurd! He came to the club early that night, he said, just because he knew it would be busy like this, because everything would be closed tomorrow, when he'd have no choice but spend some time with his family. But the next day he'd be right back on this barstool! Taking the two of them on the cruise made perfect sense to him; he liked to gamble; they could keep each other company; I should go to the club for lunch sometime, they actually have great food!"

"Ugh," Tifa interjected, "*lunch at a strip club?*"

"To be fair," Joe replied, "you never know where you'll get a decent meal. I've had outstanding lobster rolls at Irish dive bars. With all of that said, Tifa, the economics of this entire undertaking this Dave was

taking on struck me as basically absurd, and I had no real reason to doubt the veracity of any of it, given that it seemed like a set of intensely embarrassing confessions to make to any person - fucking young girls for money and taking them on cruises, it seemed embarrassing to tell anyone, never mind a complete stranger. It seemed almost unfathomable to me that this guy, even if he had done reasonably well earlier in life financially, that he wasn't scraping every three pennies together to continue this habit of going to this club, buying mixed drinks strong enough to roofie himself, paying tawdry whores for sex, and then taking them on fucking cruises to boot! He looked almost like a stuffed doll he was so fat, like I should buy him at a toy store to give him to my nephew for his birthday. His beady eyes continually darted across the club, more often than not failing at masking the anxiety behind his gaze. He was afflicted with a sickness, Tifa. A sickness I knew all too well. Simply put, and Tifa you know this better than anyone: The guy was cunt crazy, as those who know the sickness at its most acute would refer to it. Yes, this Dave character had violently driven all other personal compulsions and social interests from his life, leaving just rote ejaculation as his singular calling for his tenure on this planet. But, of course Dave was unable to reconcile himself to the types of intercourse available to him at his age, with his body type, on the so-called 'free market', so he'd resorted, and became addicted, to the life of a whore-monger. And of course, Tifa, how could Dave possibly go back to courting raggedy ass middle-aged women who wanted things like romantic dinners, riding horses in bucolic counties, picking apples with peer couples, shitting at each other's houses, hosting

Thanksgiving dinners, performing missionary sex, and everything else that came with traditional courtship? How could Dave possibly settle for that shit when he could, instead, buy drinks with the ABV of molotov cocktails from busy bartenders and pay large sums of money to have wild sex with co-eds? Of course, then again, *everything has its price*, and, sitting at the bar alone, Dave would arduously try to avoid reconciling himself to the ugly fact that *none of these girls actually liked him*. Despite all of his efforts, the relations he'd developed were, ultimately, totally frivolous! Of course, in defense of himself, he was always capable of brainstorming a few hare-brained counterpoints. No, there was *something there*. These girls and him? They spent *time* together. They enjoyed themselves! 'Misty said she came last time I took her upstairs.' 'You just, you know, tell by looking into someone's eyes that, yeah, *they care*.' But of course, even equipped with his best rhetorical efforts, Dave could never entirely dismiss the fairly obvious fact that looking into a person's eyes told you absolutely nothing, especially after six mixed drinks with two shots in each. Yet on some level Dave recognized that the subterranean contempt he felt for these females was *actually justified*, and that, as much of a piece of shit as he was, *these girls* were equivalent pieces of shit, despite their own hare-brained rhetorical devices they'd present in defense of themselves. Hare-brained rhetorical devices that would only add fuel to Dave's own hare-brained rhetorical devices. Basically both parties came equipped with rhetorical devices designed to convince one another that taking a common enough moral excursion and

making it the center of their universe wasn't in any way *exceeding any boundaries*.

"Sitting alone at the bar," Joe continued, "Dave would slowly fail to avoid to attempt to reconcile himself to the fact that he'd entered into the most vapid sort of relationship, and that, while it was certainly true that the unsolicited offers for free cruises would recede for *these girls* as their youths dissipated, it remained a thousand times more true that the attention paid to men like Dave would vanish instantly when his budget for free cruises was vanquished. In fact, even with the free cruises it seemed Dave still couldn't hold their attention! In the end, the only thing the mistresses that Dave had dedicated his life to had to offer him were momentary physical ecstasy and, more importantly, Tifa, the excruciating thrill of *being deprived of that momentary physical ecstasy*. That night Dave despised those girls for so rudely ignoring him, but, it should be astutely noted, he also made a point to get to the club *early* that day, precisely so that he could see if *those girls* would, in fact, rudely ignore him, knowing in advance that it was going to be a *busy night*. In short, this Dave character sought deprivation as much as he sought depravity. If Dave could summon this depravity whenever he wanted then the depravity would become basically worthless. The endeavor would sink under the weight of its own inanity. In order to keep successfully dipping into this same intensity of ecstasy, this depravity could eventually only be appropriately intensified by its subsequent deprivation. Would this man ever come to the seemingly inevitable point where he looked himself in the mirror and said: *Enough already*. In short? Absolutely not! Not until he reaches utter financial

and/or emotional ruin will he ever be satiated. Yet the sad reality is that men *most* require this very type of companionship when faced precisely with utter financial and irreversible emotional ruin. So when Dave does finally arrive at rock bottom it will only reinforce and intensify his acute incessant need for this very same depravity! In short, this Dave, through hard work and perseverance, has made himself into an adequate whore-monger, and now he's sitting at the bar by himself, right where he belongs. We shouldn't feel one way or the other about this person, I finally thought to myself. This is Dave's proper place in his life, and, to be fair, there are shards of wisdoms in the unceasing flames he immolates himself in again and again, and I, for my part, know this immolation all too well! Now maybe not in Dave's *exact* form, Tifa, but no two people contract the same set of sniffles, yet that doesn't preclude us from assessing that they've suffered from essentially the same sickness. At a specific time in my life, it wouldn't at all be an exaggeration to say that *I was Dave*, and it's with a tinge of sadness that I tell you this, Tifa, knowing that I'll no doubt never see that asshole again."

I saw a guy at
the gym who looked a lot like

Muammar Gaddafi,
who died in the street with a
bayonet shoved up his ass.

“Consumerism has run egregiously rampant in our time,” Joe said just moments later, “yet, contrary to the belief of the median anti-capitalist, this consumerism extends far beyond what we might typically consider *brainless brand worship*. No, it goes well beyond the crystal clear idiots clutching Chanel embroidered teddy bears. No, the fact is that even the so-called anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist sects in this city ultimately find themselves inadvertently succumbing to basically ruthless consumerism, hardly any different than luxury fashionistas, these anti-capitalists with their infinite sub-sub-genres in their jukeboxes, with arcane scene band rankings, with ontological debates on what is or isn’t appropriately emo, and with publicly posted comments claiming select records have quote-unquote *saved lives*. All of this, despite its coy DIY posturing, is the continuation of the trend of Americans tethering their ‘self’ to *brands*. Let me say this: If the only alteration to the brand relationship is that said brands are promoting anti-capitalist and/or anti-consumerist sentiments, then that actually changes *nothing* about the fundamental *brand* relationships that are forming! You’ve still tethered yourself to a brand. What the brand itself *is* is, ultimately, of no significance as it relates to the notion of exiting consumerism. The utter lack of self-annihilation that’s drenched all over your anti-consumerism sentiments is just embarrassing. Your alleged anti-capitalism is hollow and, honestly, essentially moronic. You’d almost be better off working on Wall Street - you’d at least be more honest at bottom, because what a brand represents is, ultimately, of no significance if it remains nothing beyond a brand.

It can't and won't change the nature of the consumerist relationship in any way. Fuck you."

"But, Joe," Tifa interjected, "would you agree that people are distinct?"

"Hmm," Joe continued, "Maybe the reality is that I need to stop finally listening to music, I thought to myself, and it was fortuitous timing for the thought to occur, because I was walking on the icy sidewalk of E 14th Street, listening to an MP3 player in a pair of headphones with one bud that just shit out on me. You can't listen to headphones on a city street with just one headphone, even on a side street at night. I could have tossed the headphones right into a sewer, and I considered doing just that, but something inside of me told me to continue to hold on to these essentially worthless headphones, at least until I had a chance to buy another pair. I walked into the adjacent bar, after making a prompt decision that two of the neighboring bars were too busy to drink in, glimpsing just gently in and deciding that, for the one bar, I didn't want to stand near the types of people inside, and deciding for the other bar that - not only did I not want to stand near the types of people inside - but, if I got a seat by the bar, I also didn't want to risk the possibility of the bartender making small talk with me. I had no great small talk talking point at my disposal that night, and the notion of attempting to make small talk when not in the mood to generate talking points nauseated me, so I walked into the adjacent bar, ordered a beer, and took a seat at a table by the window, determined to forget, and to keep forgetting, that I even had my phone on me, to instead just focus purely on drinking this fucking light beer. I just wanted to drink this fucking light beer, by

myself, in a bar, not too crowded, and not too crowded with people I did not know. Thankfully I didn't know anyone. I would proceed to coyly jot down some little notes to myself, in my little purple notepad, completely undisturbed by my social surroundings, yet also divested from the solemn prism of drinking alone in my apartment. I looked around and confirmed I knew no one. *Perfect*. That is until two beers later, now sitting at the bar and mindlessly watching a TV screen looping a three minute clip of a black and yellow turtle underwater, arduously yet joyously, chewing a substance with great vigor - followed by a school of fish that pulsed under the sea like a hose with too much water flowing through it, or maybe a inflatable balloon blowing in an afternoon breeze. In any case, on the other side of the bar I immediately recognized the mug of - for lack of a less offensive term - a *self-proclaimed singer-songwriter*, who I recalled from an open mic I attended with Ingo about three years ago, where this alleged singer-songwriter quite loquaciously cut to the front of the line of the open mic, using some nebulous excuse that was, no doubt, deeply annoying to everyone but his immediate circle in the building. Wow, I thought to myself sitting at the bar, that guy, as I recall it, was a bit of a *pretentious dickhole*. And now here he was at this bar, standing across the bar ordering a damn drink, most likely noting something to his companions that abutted upon dickhole-adjacent. Hmm, I thought to myself further, I recall him as being a bit of a cunt, and he certainly still looks, to this day, like a bit of a cunt, but I suppose, if I'm being honest, that I'm a bit of a cunt myself? In a sense," Joe continued, "despite my kneejerk reaction to immediately renew my ill-will

toward this unassuming fellow, for correctly assessing him as a bit of a cunt, it was also true that he and I shared a sort of indivisible essence, an essence that became pervasive throughout the entire dive bar, right at that moment. I finished my light beer and walked home, leaving a material piece of myself with my doppelganger at the bar.”

Alcibiades

“Well, Dave,” Joe began, “I suppose it was just another routine Sunday afternoon where, as I walked into the bar and took a seat, yet before I could even sit my ass down, I couldn’t help but taking note of a moderately attractive light-skinned black lady sipping what seemed to me to be an extremely creamy espresso martini to my right. Yet what struck me in particular about the scene was the older East Asian man sitting beside to this lady, but not just that he was older, or even East Asian - no, what actually struck me in particular was his delicately uncomfortable body language, specifically in contrast to her quite confident, perhaps even *robust* demeanor, and the fact that all of this, this delicate duo dance, was occurring on a *Sunday afternoon*. Now if this was a Saturday night, or a Friday night, or even a Wednesday night, I mean, really any *night* at all, then I’d probably think nothing of it. I’d just maybe note the martini as a bit too creamy and move on. But at a dive bar on a Sunday afternoon with a shitty New York Rangers game on the too-high TV mounted on the wall? In *this* milieu this was occurring?”

“Curious,” a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave said, almost in a whisper.

“She’s probably a whore?’ I thought to myself, now ordering my drink,” Joe continued, “I thought *she’s probably a whore* sitting at the bar on a Sunday afternoon ordering a glass of Prosecco, whereas had it been just 16 hours earlier - or 20 hours earlier, if faced with this exact same scene, then this thought that this lady was probably a whore wouldn’t have remotely

entered my mind. It wouldn't have even struck me as a possibility! The two patrons would have seemed like nothing beyond another normal couple, a couple that, sure, was probably aligned more by monetary concerns than by genuine, classical romantic interest, yet nevertheless they'd have struck me as an acceptable couple, an acceptable couple within the midst of a legitimate courtship."

"No, for sure!" Dave agreed.

"You can buy a girl a nice dinner on a Saturday night," Joe continued, "and she'll quite possibly have sex with you - even if, sans dinner, she'd almost *certainly not* have sex with you, and that's totally acceptable in our eyes. Yet if you buy a girl an espresso martini on a Sunday afternoon, and then strike a deal to pay her cash - perhaps an equivalent amount of cash required for an upscale dinner for two - to engage in sex that, otherwise, wouldn't have occurred, then you're engaging in classical whore mongering."

"This seems to be the case," Dave agreed.

"You pay for a meal then have sex?" Joe continued, "This is fine. You pay the same amount of money and have the same amount of sex, but receive no meal? Then you're a whore-monger."

"I don't think there's any other way to put it, Joe."

"Was this nice enough looking lady truly a whore?" Joe said, "I for one had no inside information, but the time of day, the body language, the incongruity in levels of physical attractiveness and age? 'No, she's definitely a whore,' I thought. I had no doubt about that. But, in any case, Dave, I guess the New York Rangers game possessed a curious significance to me at the time, but only because the previous occasion I'd found myself in

the midst of watching a New York Rangers game it was just prior to - well, it was prior to me - *myself* - possibly paying a whore for sex? And that struck me as curious!”

“Oh, really?” Dave said, expressing some surprise, “You paid a whore for sex while watching the New York Rangers, Joe?”

“*Was that actually true whore-mongering though?*” I thought, sitting at the bar watching a New York Rangers game that had no significance whatsoever to me sans this previous instance - and now here I was, sitting at the bar, forming a perpendicular line with a light-skinned black lady, who in all likelihood was a prostitute employed by an older East Asian man?”

“Well, Joe,” Dave said, “if I can interrupt here briefly to ask a relevant question: what was it about this encounter, where it seems as though you paid a whore for sex? - what about that encounter would *disqualify* it as mongering for whores exactly?”

“No, it’s a great question!” Joe said, “It’s a totally valid question - it’s actually one that I would definitely ask myself if I was in your position, Dave. Well, under normal circumstances, just to preface here, I’d really never pay for sex, and, even under normal *inebriated* circumstances, I’d still really never pay for sex. Paying for sex: it just never really appealed to me in that way. I mean I suppose, in a very abstract way, sure - if money was no object, if disease was of no concern, then, of course, I’d probably pay for sex all the time! But when factoring in both actual cost and projected disease, the prospect of paying for sex loses considerable appeal to me. It just isn’t something I seriously consider often, even if I occasionally find myself in the company of women who would, given an appropriate sum,

definitely have sex with you for money. And, even in this New York Rangers instance, no, I really had no *intention of paying for sex*. Not at all, Dave. Which is why I hold the act in categorical suspense with regard to its qualifying as *verifiable whore-mongering*. It was really one of the last things on my mind at the time, paying for sex, even if it was true that I was technically in a strip club at the time - I was a young man, Dave, just living my life, you know? I don't think there's anything a priori *wrong* with that? Because, at the time, my emotional focus was actually on another female, one who didn't, to the best of knowledge, offer her bodily delights for cash payments - that's who I was actually focusing on at the time. I was, true enough, in this particular club, but I was really just killing time in this particular club, as I was apt to do from time to time, during this specific era at least. You see, Dave, what happened was basically that some bimbo employed by the club, right as I was about to leave actually, she sauntered over to us and asked me if I 'wanted to do a dance', and I, with the legitimacy of a total rube, acquiesced the request on instinct, just mindlessly really - at the time considering it to be just a run-of-the-mill lap dance, placing it in the context of my understanding of the practice, from great friends of mine who I considered reliable sources, which was that any sort of interplay that went beyond nude dancing was discussed *prior* to any dance, for the benefit of both parties. So at the time this offer struck me as harmless enough. It seemed totally sensible to me. There were level of services that you paid for, sure, but those levels would be called out *in advance*, the standard service being just a form of nude dancing, which was fundamentally

harmless. There's nothing particularly egregious about a nude dance from time to time!"

"Well," Dave replied, "I'm not sure if our wives would agree with that, Joe, but please go on."

"Perhaps not!" Joe said, "Yet, to be fair, Dave, I wasn't married at the time, even though I would still fundamentally argue that the act is harmless enough. But, no - that's probably a topic for another time? Yet, in any case, it was exactly as this dance began that this bimbo asked me if I'd want to, instead of just doing a nude dance, pay her a somewhat larger sum than the standard dance fee for, in exchange, full blown sexual relations. And at first I was kind of like, 'Eh. Ummm. I think I'll probably pass?' I was basically like, 'No. That offer, it just doesn't sound particularly appealing to me.' Again, to me, this deviated from standard practice, and I wasn't a big fan of deviations of this sort, even if a strange girl's cunt was in my face. Yet, with that said, after some minor deliberation, I suddenly agreed that maybe that *was* the sensible thing to do here? This was sensible, Dave - sure, I'd bang her. Why not? Yet, to my surprise, after the conclusion of the so-called dance, after the currency exchange, this bimbo wanted to *continue* to spend time with me, to watch the *rest* of this New York Rangers game - with me! Which was a prospect I wasn't one hundred percent revolted by, but yet it also wasn't something that I was uniquely excited about either. We sat down, and she shared a location she usually spent time, not far from where we sat, when she wasn't at work, and she also shared the night she was always there - *if I was I ever in the area*. Now, no, I'm not a total rube here, Dave - I'm not *brand new*, yet I still wasn't one hundred percent certain what the

proper etiquette was *in this particular case*, so I bought the girl a drink, acted moderately interested in her talking points, and then made up some excuse to get the fuck out of there. Not that she was necessarily a bad person, or a terrible lay, but, still - what was I going to do with that? Meet up with her at some point in the future, outside of this venue? And, what? Fuck again? But for money again? No, I didn't think so! Because, in my mind Dave, she'd be lucky to have sex with me for free! And I wasn't even that interested in doing it for free for that matter! If anything I actually considered it an act of charity in paying her to have sex, Dave - not whore-mongering in the least! Had she said to me upfront: 'Want a dance (and also have sex with me)?' I would have three thousand percent passed! I would have said, 'Respectfully speaking, I have absolutely no interest in that whatsoever,' which is why the entire transaction really struck me as basically tax deductible in nature. But, again, she was a nice enough girl, Dave, don't get me wrong!"

"Oh, no I'm sure, Joe!" Dave commiserated, "What, to your point, was the next step really? Other than suddenly exiting the establishment under dubious circumstances and never seeing her again? It seems like that was the only logical step available to you?"

"Exactly!" Joe agreed, "But, to return to my initial point here, was it true whore-mongering on my part, Dave? The particulars of the interaction - or maybe the more accurate word would be the particulars of the *transaction* - are where my mind inevitably wound up at the bar, watching that fucking New York Rangers game, occasionally glancing at this light-skinned whore and her East Asian mark. 'Where does *intent* fall in these

taxonomical considerations?’ I pondered to myself. ‘Because this East Asian guy, he clearly *wants to pay money* to have sex with this espresso martini girl,’ I thought, ‘in a quite premeditated fashion, whereas I, not only lacked clear intent, but really wasn’t even *interested* in copulating, to be honest - because, in my mind, I actually, truthfully, only accidentally paid a whore for sex. I can honestly say said *transaction was accidental* in nature, with no sense of the disingenuous!’ Yet even accidents, I suppose, still count as acts, and perhaps it’s just the case that I engaged in the manslaughter iteration of whore-mongering? I suppose, thinking about it now, that there’s really no way around that. Technically, I wasn’t *all that different* from this old Asian guy, right down to the New York Rangers involvement?”

“It’s certainly a bit of an odd coincidence, Joe,” Dave said, “I’ll certainly say that! And the categorical implications are dubious for sure.”

“I mean, do you think I am? Am I basically the same as.”

“I think the manslaughter analogy is an apt one,” Dave finished, “but.”

“All analogies,” Joe concluded, “are fraught with similar categorical fuzziness as what I describe between myself and the old East Asian.”

“I think it’s possible that we maybe have to ask ourselves what’s the true nature of the accidental?” Dave said.

Plotinus

“No,” Ingo said, “I just, it’s weird, because, sure, he’s my primary care physician, but, at the same time, I feel like that’s actually a *drawback* - like I don’t want to disclose, you know, *personal* shit to him, because he’s never going away? It’s not like I could be like, ‘Oh hey, it burns when I pee’ - obviously not that it burns when I pee, but you know what I mean, like, ‘Oh hey, it burns when I pee,’ and then I’ll never see you again. Because I’ll fucking see the guy in six months at my annual check-in! Basically, with this guy, it’s like if I tell him that it burns when I pee - not that it does but like hypothetically if it burnt when I peed - if I tell him that, then I feel like I’m forever the *it burns when I pee* guy, like I’d have to go fucking find a completely new primary care physician who had no inclination that it had ever burnt when I peed.”

“Which these days is basically impossible!” a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave said.

“These days it’s literally easier to find a seasoned whore who’s never caught the clap than it is to find a decent primary care physician, you know, Dave?” Ingo replied. “Because if it’s not one thing it’s another! - like half the time they’re not even accepting new patients, or they’re like my old dentist: telling you that your teeth will all fall out in five years unless you immediately buy some adult brand set of braces that, no doubt, is giving the dentist kickbacks for every purchase, and, of course, all of this is right after the dental technician tells you how great your teeth are! No, fuck you. I won’t be prey to your dental scams, miss! No - that’s why, honestly? -

I would never want to leave this guy, my current primary care physician, but at the same time, *because I'd never leave him*, I also find myself quite reticent to disclose anything that's wrong with me, to give him that health history ammo, you know? No, I need to be the completely healthy guy, not the random malady person. No, I need to keep this doctor completely in the dark about anything that's potentially wrong with me that's short of absolutely life threatening. And, frankly, even then . . .”

“You really,” Dave replied, “I mean, you can't even go to the doctor's anymore, if we're being honest. That's really where we're at in this country at this point, I think?”

“Going to the doctor's?” Ingo said, “Besides your annual physical, which you basically *legally* need to do, because otherwise you'll get boxed out - God forbid anything is actually, at some point, really wrong with you in the future, if you don't have the medical history they'll try and fuck you up the ass. Your primary will disown you, Dave, that's what will happen. You'll get dropped and become ineligible for the life-saving treatment you might actually need! But, beyond that, no, you're absolutely right! Going to the doctor's is basically out of the question at this point for us. There's no greater folly than going to doctor's office for aches and pains, because, for one, you're totally putting your business out there, the people in the office, they'll all know everything about what's going on with you, and who knows who they'll tell in private, with so-called confidentiality. Spouses? Cousins?! That word could spread throughout various communities with a rapidity you'd never imagine. No, you might as well just get a

megaphone and start yelling out, "*My pee burns!*" - not that mine does, Dave, but hypothetically, just to continue with the same hypothetical, like you accidentally had sex with some, I don't know, some Bulgarian heiress who's here on a visa for three months, just looking to hoe it out in America. All of the sudden you're making Bulgarian love, and now you have Bulgarian pussy juice in your system, and maybe that disagrees with your urinary tract in one way or another? But there are any number of hypotheticals you could employ as examples, Dave, you know what I mean? And then, if you actually need treatment, let's assume you actually *need* treatment, well, then you need a referral, of course!"

"Which is even worse," Dave added, "if you need a referral!"

"Which then gets you right back in the game of trying to find a new doctor, Dave," Ingo said, "through your current doctor who's now tasked with finding you a new *specialized* doctor, which is, of course, basically impossible, because whoever you need to see, there's no way they're taking new patients either, or, sure, maybe they can open something up for you, but it'll be in three months, which, of course - if what you're going through is actually serious - then, shit, you might be fucking dead by then!"

"Honestly, Ingo," Dave said, "you're probably better off dying!"

"Anyway," Ingo went on, "I just, you know, needed to get that off my chest - but, anyway, it was the other Friday night I guess, that I was sitting at the bar when, of course, Joe texts me. The fucking guy texts me as I'm just sitting there by myself, minding my own business,

he fucking texts me to tell me that, apparently, on a Friday night, he's going skating. Now, being that it's 20 degrees out, I assume he's going ice skating, Dave, downtown, right in more or less my damn neighborhood, within a mile of where I was sitting at the time, and I say to myself, 'Yeah, sure, I'll meet him there, since he's rarely in town these days.' Now I say (to myself) I'm going to meet him, but, to be clear here, he hasn't explicitly *asked me* if I could hang out, he just *informed me* he was going skating, right in my neighborhood, and, in fact, it's still possible, now that I think of it, that he had no real intention of wanting to hang out with me at all."

"Yet," Dave interjected, "then?"

"Why text me at all, Dave?" Ingo finished, "What? - to tell me you're around the corner, which you rarely are, but that you *don't want me to come by?* A great question. Yet, with that said, to be fair, if I'm being honest, I wasn't really trying to hang out with him either! Not out of any malice or ill-will, Dave, no, simply because it was fucking 20 degrees out, and I walked to this bar, and I was explicitly not trying to *make a night out of it*, I was attempting to rescind completely, which walking downtown, I mean, that could very easily lead to making a night of it and reintegrating myself into polite society, so to speak. So I call him up - I give Joe a call. I give the fucking guy a quick call. He's not immediately answering. The call actually goes to voicemail, and it's very possible at this point that it's the case that neither one of us are actually *seeking* to hang out with each other, despite the fact we're great friends and in a fairly close geographical area together on a Friday night, despite the fact we're texting back and

forth on a Friday night within spitting distance of each other. ‘Fucking prick,’ I think at the bar as I continue to listen to the automated voicemail’s preamble. ‘Then again,’ I think, ‘do I really want to walk a mile in the freezing cold, to watch Joe and his little friends ice skate? Because I’m not ice skating. There’s absolutely no way I’m getting on any ice on this Friday night. For one thing, I don’t even know *how* to ice skate, and, for another thing, I’m currently in the midst of drinking my seventh beer!’ Am I accidentally attempting to hang out with people who I genuinely like yet don’t currently want to socialize with? I guess that was the question I was asking myself at the time.”

“Honestly, Ingo - this is the question we all need to ask ourselves, really,” Dave replied.

“I don’t leave a message,” Ingo said, “I finish the beer and walk home, and the guy fucking sends me a photo an hour later of him and his friends roller skating at a roller *blading* rink all the way in Hell’s Kitchen.”

“Roller *blading*, Ingo?,” Dave replied, incredulous, “Is that normal - conflating *roller skating* with *roller blading*?”

“But that’s rescinding essentially, Dave,” Ingo continued, “these types of imbroglios are so typical of rescinding - because rescinding in the extreme will only place you face to face with the fact that you’ve always been rescinding, that you’ve never stopped rescinding, that even when you *weren’t* rescinding, that you only momentarily *forgot the fact you’ve been in a perpetual state of rescinding at all times*, that no matter what it is you’re doing you’re essentially rescinding. You can’t *not* rescind, Dave. In short, it’s the pious mind, it’s the pious mind inveterately drawn to piety that’s - no, not at

any extreme of being, or extreme of goodness, but in fact it's the pious mind that exists in the middle. Whereas some rescind via their day-to-day inanity with no actual awareness of the fact they're rescinding, others, by contrast, rescind in full awareness simply by engaging in nothing fundamentally monastic at all! - simply because they're equipped with the authentic knowledge that they're *perpetually rescinding no matter what*, they're smiling as they rescind, comfortable with the fact that, no matter what they do, they'll be rescinding, that they're faced with two fundamental choices and both are rescinding! But then there's the pious among us, engaging in their self-proclaimed piety in a way that makes them feel as though - yes, they're rescinding *in the service* of the reward of the next life. They're oppositional in their rescinding, they think. Yet what I think the pious among us forgets here is the old saying: *He does whatever He will*. How could they - the pious - alter what's already been laid out for them, by engaging in the extremities of conscious decision making, in thinking they can somehow determine for themselves what's *better* for them in the next life? First of all, Dave, nowhere at all is it clear that the life to come, or the next life, or whatever nomenclature we choose to give it necessarily entails a *future event*. If anything there are bread crumbs all around us that suggest a fundamental Oneness, an all-encompassing collapse where *next* doesn't necessarily entail *subsequent*. It's been a thousand years to me, but to you it may only feel like a brief moment. Piety is, at bottom, I think, actually drawn from an intense *skepticism*, a deep-seeded unsureness, perhaps even a wavering *trust*

in a unified Oneness! Rescinding from material things, will it get you closer to a fundamental unity, Dave?

“Well,” Dave replied, “I don’t know, Ingo. I’ve always believed so at least.”

“But maybe we should take a moment and contemplate what rescinding from *material things* entail exactly?” Ingo said, “If we agree *He does whatever He will*, then the material things you may or may not encounter must originate from Oneness, no? And, if this is the case, then to *turn entirely away from them*, is that not essentially an act of skepticism? To approach said material things with moderation, of course, that’s advisable in the extreme, but to rescind completely, as the monastic among us tend to do: is that not skepticism in the extreme? Yes, I think it is! Oh, absolutely I think it is, Dave! How can we stay here, with these pious hermits any longer?! Maybe, now that I think about it, I should have, in retrospect, been *more willing* to meet up with Joe, assuming he was ice skating and not roller blading - that perhaps this idea that solitude was somehow more pious, that *not making a night of it* would be better for me, maybe that was folly after all! I should have never walked home at all. No, I should have instead walked directly to the ice skating rink from the bar in the 20 degree cold, and, even when I found no one I knew there, I still should have just tossed on a set of blades and made some new friends, some new ice skating friends - *and made a night out of it!*”

Porphyry

“I wouldn’t necessarily call it an *epidemic*,” Ingo said, “but I think it’s, frankly, a little concerning to me, if I’m being honest. Namely - this item that’s quite concerning to me, well, it’s this trend I’ve been noticing during my visits to my local gym, just routinely getting my workout in on the gym’s equipment - it’s these attractive enough females who just *refuse to wipe down their equipment* after use. *Attractive* girls, Dave - girls I know for a fact you’d look at and, in all likelihood, *want* to have sex with - who just leave their sweat all over their fucking machines! Sure, I think they’re attractive enough, these girls, but do the rules somehow not apply to them anymore? Example: There was an attractive African-American girl on the stairmaster walking next to me just the other morning, just for example, and she hops off the damn machine, right next to me she hops off, and the next thing you know she’s on the leg press! She’s not actually doing anything on it - no, she’s scrolling through her phone on the leg press, *not* pressing the weight with her legs - no, she’s just scrolling through her phone on the leg press, and the stairmaster she was just walking on remains unchanged right next to me, completely unwiped! Is that *appropriate*, Dave? - to just leave the machine without even a cursory wipe down? Sure, she was cute, but do I want my palms to hypothetically just fucking sink into her personal perspiration on the bars of a stairmaster that wasn’t even remotely wiped down? Should attractive strangers just toss buckets of their own perspiration on top of me when I’m minding my own business, simply attempting

to get my daily workout in as quickly as possible? No, frankly - *frankly Dave* - I think it's a bit of a bush league move! - regardless of whether or not you're physically attractive, regardless of whether or not I'd want to have sex with you. Me personally? - I always make a point to thoroughly wipe down my equipment after use, even if a person is so desperate to mount a machine after I finish on it that they approach it before I perform my wipe down, I'll still halt them and just say, 'Yeah, just one second? I'm just gonna wipe it down real quick?' and then I'll wipe the machine down thoroughly right in front of the person, then turn back to the person and say something like, 'There you go!' I just don't feel comfortable - even as an attractive man, Dave - I don't feel comfortable having other strangers inadvertently *wear my personal sweat all around the gymnasium*. I've never felt like my perspiration is a gift that people should massage all over their body. Oh, you don't sweat, you say? So you don't need to wipe down your equipment, you say? Hmm, well, I find that just a little hard to believe! And, just to wrap this whole thing up here, this wasn't the first good-looking female I've seen do this on the stairmaster! No - this is *a trend* I've noticed. Never mind the other machines, Dave - the stairmaster alone is enough for me to make a legal case out of this. It's just fucking wholly lacking in tact to me, man! It's devoid of tact! I'm sorry. That's all. I'm just, yeah, I'm slightly offended by it. Wipe down your fucking shit! I'm sorry, but your pussy lips aren't comprised of rose pedals and potpourri, honey - no, it's just a little sickening, that's all."

"You can only hope these girls wash their asses better than that!" a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named

Dave replied, “Ugh! It’s like? What? Do you wash your hands after you go kaki?”

“The Book of Truth notes a general disgust with man and a predilection toward a singular purpose as characteristics of those in a close relationship with what’s Most High,” Ingo continued, “and perhaps that’s part of where I’m coming from here, Dave? Maybe - I’m actually thinking now - maybe my disgust with this pretty girl perspiration is actually, net-net, *good?* - that if I was just like, ‘Oh yeah! Let me lick their sweaty seats!’ - that that would be indicative of a spiritual defect on my part? Yet, even with that said, I’ve actually recently considered going up to one of these girls - in fact, maybe the next girl I see not wiping her shit down - and just being like: ‘Hey. Yeah, you. What’s the deal over here? What’s possibly so important in your life that you’re in *such a rush* that you can’t wipe down your equipment? Especially considering I’ve seen you scrolling through your phone mindlessly on the leg press for the last ten minutes, doing jack shit on the fucking leg press? I’ve actually gone through three-fourths of my own workout, you know? - I’ve done about eight sets of machine work, and I still see you scrolling through apps and messages on that leg press, not even pressing any weight. Yet, no, wiping down your sweaty machine? No, that would be a little *too much* to ask, right?’ That’s what I’d say to them, right their face, Dave.”

“Ingo,” Dave replied, “if you did that, honestly, you’d be doing the public, collectively, a damn favor!”

“What,” Ingo said, rhetorically, “you don’t wipe your ass after you do a doo-doo? The fuck outta here!”

“It’s absurd!” Dave said. “These hoes have no couth!”

“It’s odd though, Dave,” Ingo continued, “because - just in the interim between me thinking this whole thing at the gym, me noting this as something that was worthy of discussion with you - I actually jotted a little note in my phone regarding these girls not wiping down their shit - just in that interim a funny thing happened. Or at least I noted it as a little odd on my end.”

“Oh really?” Dave said, curious, “Please, loop me the fuck in - what happened, Ingo?”

“Well,” Ingo said, “the very first girl that I noticed at this gym flagrantly *refusing* to wipe down her machinery after use, on a stairmaster no less, the one that really put this in my mind as a trend to consider - well, this girl just so happened to walk out of the stretching room this past Saturday, as I just so happened to be doing some work, ironically enough, on a particular stairmaster. Now, this would have obviously struck me as fundamentally meaningless, except for the fact that I recalled this girl quite distinctly, simply because she happened to keep a similar schedule of working out, and, I don’t know, we’d mistakenly made eye contact with each another once or twice. Which was obviously ill-advised. She was basically at the gym the exact same times I was at the gym, more often than not, for literal months on end, until she eventually actually appeared to me in dream one night, in a large retail outlet, asking me a pointed question, and then she just disappeared one day. Which of course isn’t necessarily all that strange. Complete strangers don’t keep the same gym schedules forever! Plenty of people, in my experience, maintain a schedule for a period of time,

and then basically abandon that schedule at a whim, whereas I've held this same gym schedule with little to no variation for some time, with basically no deviation whatsoever. Plenty of people have kept my schedule with me *for a period of time*, only to, at the drop of the hat, abandon said schedule. And this girl, I guess, was fundamentally no different. But, more often than not, once a person abandons my schedule I never see them again, they never return, yet this girl popped up again, and not only did she pop up again, but it just so happened that she popped up *right as I began to catalogue these instances of women failing to wipe their shit down*, her being the prime example of a repudiation of one's duty to wipe down a stairmaster. In short, she popped up right as I began to *recall her*, out of the blue. Out of the blue I recall her, and then out of the blue she pops back up at the gym."

"Curious," Dave said.

"Yes, I found it quite a bit curious!" Ingo said, "I found it quite curious actually, Dave, and I actually made a point, for the rest of my time at the gym that day, that particular Saturday, to intentionally avoid wherever I thought she might be working out in the facility, which is rare for me. Generally speaking, I'll work out wherever I want to work out, I'll let my nuts hang indiscriminately, Dave, and if there's an attractive female working out in a particular section of the facility, well, that won't deter me in the least from getting a few pumps in over there. I'll bring my bulge to wherever I see fit basically. Yet after just glancing at this girl at the gym, this girl curiously attending the gym after months at this time of day, of not being at the gym at this time of day, right after I jotted down a note about this issue

to bring up with you, well, I avoided even looking at where she possibly was in the gym. I was actually a bit frightened. I won't lie! I kept my head completely down. I was, frankly, a little spooked, Dave. In fact, I felt a palpable change in the density of the energy in the gym as soon as she strut past my stairmaster. Have you ever felt that at all?"

"I try to stay in tune with energy densities when I can," Dave replied, "I mean, I *am* a tic tac, so - uh, yes, of course, Ingo!"

"I've come around to tracking these types of densities only slowly," Ingo admitted, "over time, because it just, I don't know, the world doesn't make any sense sometimes sans considering densities? Densities are certainly names, and names fluctuate in meaning depending on their position and orientation in relation to their origin. How the energy in a room can shift so suddenly, because of a person you actually have no rapport with at all, a person who you have no rapport with in the least - who you've never even spoken to! - who shifts the energy of a room in a way that you would think only a person of some relative closeness to you could. The person who lacks a name is at the same time a name that achieves a certain orientation to you. This is obviously nonsensical, yet it happens to me more often than I probably even care to admit! 'It's like this person just appeared out of thin air,' I thought at the gym, continuing to step vigorously on a stairmaster, knees creaking, having more or less forgotten about this person completely, except for the instance of another female not wiping down her equipment the other week, which prompted that memory, of this girl, walking past,

which prompted me to make a note to bring this up to you. And then the same fucking girl appears?”

“I mean,” Dave said, “it could be a coincidence? Yet, at the same time, it’s certainly possible your memory of her somehow conjured her back to the gym, that perhaps she’s cloaked in some density you’re familiar with that you’re not yet aware that you’re familiar with?”

“Anything’s possible!” Ingo retorted, “But then again - I think we need to trust palpable shifts in density, no? Yet, even still, what to make of it really? From my end, I just felt a little spooked, like meandering too close to that shift in energy density could fuck up my whole center of gravity. Because it just so happened that it was that very afternoon that I was on the stairmaster literally thinking to myself, ‘I’ve finally rescinded from all bellicosity. I’m actually super even-keeled right now,’ and then this little broad walks by me, which just jarred me slightly. The fuck is she doing here? *Now?* ‘You don’t need to be making potential inquiries into this shit right now, Ingo,’ I thought, ‘No, just leave it to the side, let this coincidence dissipate into nothing, don’t, under any circumstances, even attempt to remember this coincidence is even occurring right now, in this gym.’ Yet here I am, bring it up to you, Dave!”

“It’s the right thing to do though, Ingo,” Dave said. “Although, there’s really not much you can do about it - other than hope you never see her again!”

“Bottom line, Dave: just wipe your fucking sweat with a little shitty brown paper towel sprayed with spritzes of dirty tap water like the rest of us! No one wants to do tricep dips in your palm sweat, even if, admittedly, every man in this establishment probably

wants to viciously motorboat your sports bra right now. Fuck you.”

“On that we agree in full!”

“But yeah,” Ingo continued, “to your point I haven’t seen the girl since, which, if anything, only raises additional questions? - primarily because, in the back of my mind - in the back of my mind I considered that maybe she was just coming back after a long winter? That some people take off the winters from the gym, and then start up again in Spring or some fucking shit? But it was almost like that, by not acknowledging her density that day, she disappeared yet again. If I’d walked by that girl that day there’s almost no doubt in my mind she would have shown up at the gym again in the subsequent days I was there.”

“I actually think that’s a probable explanation here,” Dave said.

“And then, shortly after all of this occurred, the other night I guess I was just kind of driving around aimlessly? - looking for a place to grab a drink while I waited to Joe to finish his dinner. And in my car it entered my mind, all of the sudden I had an urge to go to a little hole in the wall in Alphabet City that I hadn’t been to in quite some time, and the image of a girl with a tattooed face appeared to me. “The *bartender*?” I thought, but she hadn’t worked there for months. I had a vague and benign urge to see this girl with the tattooed face again, yet, at the same time, I recognized the fact that there was no longer any girl with a tattooed face at this hole in the wall. Of course I stopped by this hole in the wall anyway, and of course the first person I saw was a girl with a tattooed face standing behind the bar.”

“Did you talk to her?”

“Oh no,” Ingo replied, “I just jotted down some notes about the disappearing and reappearing girl from the gym, regarding the seemingly quite real possibility that the world around me could actually just be conjured via my own whims and caprice.”

Iamblichus

(The plane of imagination, it's certainly the first principle of revelation, no?)

“You know,” Joe matter-of-factly said, “I was sitting somewhat miserably in bed the other morning, just laying on my back staring at the ceiling sans thought, and I was of course aware that I *needed to get up*, staring at this ceiling realizing again and again that *I needed to get up*, yet with absolutely no urge, yearning, or inkling to *actually get up*. But I would obviously get up, and this getting up would obviously occur relatively soon, I thought - yet staring at the ceiling it occurred to me that I had no idea where this final push to actually get me out of bed would finally emerge from. Yes, obviously *something* would eventually *cause me to get up* (and this would clearly occur sooner than later), but I was completely unaware of its origin, this cause. This cause was, in short, incomprehensible to me as I laid in bed staring at the ceiling. It certainly wasn't any rational argument that would cause me to get up from bed, because there really was no rational reason why I should get up now as opposed to five minutes ago - from a rational vantage point I should have already been up! It was almost as if whatever impetus that existed to get me up and out of bed was as foreign to me and out of my control as my own heart beating repeatedly, that me getting out of bed and my heart continuing to beat were basically the same thing!”

“Yet, honestly Joe, if I’m being honest with you?” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa said, “There’s really no reason to ever get out of bed.”

“I guess I can’t really disagree,” Joe replied, “I’m just, at the end of the day, still a little flummoxed as to how exactly I get up out of my bed every day to be honest?”

“It’s really the reason,” Tifa continued, “why, at the end of the day, I’ve only ever really got on with degenerates, alcoholics, and degenerate alcoholics, I think? Like, my inveterate inclination to feel like there’s really no reason to ever get out of bed, and this alone has immediately endeared me to the degenerates, alcoholics, and degenerate alcoholics I’ve come across in my life, and, in turn, for the same reason, I’ve always found myself in a bit of awe of these degenerates, alcoholics, and degenerate alcoholics. Whereas if I actually felt a need, or if I suddenly came across a good reason to ever get out of bed, then I think I’d probably regard these people - these degenerates, alcoholics, and degenerate alcoholics - with probably the normal amount of contempt? That I’d become just like another normal person, who holds degenerates, alcoholics, and degenerate alcoholics in a median amount of contempt. Yet, since I don’t *actually feel* that way, Joe, I’m therefore drawn to these people, and these people are subsequently drawn to me - we share a basic need to more or less spit in the faces of the people who pretend they have *some valid reason* to get out of bed in the morning, like they have *some mission* that they have confidence that they’ll finally get to the bottom of.”

“Essentially, when you really think about it,” Joe replied, “you guys are spitting in the face of the typical notion of time.”

“Yes!” Tifa said, “These people, the people who actually get out of my bed in the morning they act as if time were moving forward, like this very moment hadn’t already occurred, like the future isn’t already an item and appropriately itemized - as if it’s *our duty to ensure time progresses and the future comes into being*. But if you’re a degenerate, an alcoholic, or a degenerate alcoholic, then your lifestyle is really in diametric opposition to this idea, even if it’s unintentionally in opposition.”

“But are you against progress then, Tifa? Because that would.”

“Conceptually, of course I am, Joe!”

“Isn’t that considered kind of risque today, though? - the whole notion that *progress* isn’t ipso facto what we should be pursuing, without question?”

“Well,” Tifa continued, “yeah! Maybe it makes me a little bit of a black swan among some of those contemporaries - that I’m not actively campaigning for *changing things*, simply because I find linear time to be a little conceptually presumptuous? They probably view me as some kind of traitor to their religion - not that *they* would consider their position religious - unless they actually take the time to really investigate my position maybe?”

“Well, I don’t think anyone does that anymore, sincerely investigate other people’s philosophical positions?” Joe said.

“No, it’s probably an absurd notion to even suggest I guess,” Tifa replied, “In any case, sure, in your

neighborhood at least there's obviously a notion - you know this - that denying the *a priori precedence of progress* is somehow a religious notion, and therefore ipso facto backward, that it's therefore a nefarious method of going about things, simply because it's in their view a religious way of going about things. The irony of course being that the precedence of progress some people prescribe is fundamentally transcendental in nature!"

"Who did you vote for anyway? Oh, wait."

"Honestly, I didn't even want to talk about politics for this reason, because."

"No, I get it," Joe interrupted. "It's tough to really express an antipathy for progress and fascism simultaneously in our contemporary world. If you express antipathy toward progress people feel as though you're clearly endorsing fascism, whereas if you express antipathy toward fascism people feel as though you're clearly endorsing progress."

"Yet only assholes think politics precedes being, Joe."

"It makes a good bumper sticker though."

"But no," Tifa said, "let's change the subject. You wanted to talk to me about something, didn't you? Wasn't that the pretext, I thought, of us meeting?"

Joe paused ever so momentarily then said, "Well, I don't know about the *sole purpose*, Tifa. I'm always down to meet up, and I don't think we need to have some *special reason* for just meeting up from time to time and catching up, no?"

"No," she replied in a tone that ascended just slightly in pitch toward the end of the single syllable, "I didn't mean it like *that*. Honestly, I was probably just

trying to shift topics for my own sake,” she chuckled nervously, “before anyone popping in started making any, you know, *political* assumptions about me! - just because I’m dubious about the idea that time moves forward?”

(There’s a building that’s simultaneously a retail gym, a contemporary department store, and a supermarket, and you’ve been there before, but only in dream. People are always there, and you can shift between the elements of the building with ease, but there’s an anxiety present in the parking lot, if you were to ever *leave* said building.)

“Sure,” Joe continued, “well, I guess what I was going to say was that of course you can kind of feel like *maybe* your origin is, for lack of a better word, *elsewhere*, although, as we’ve alluded to already, in the milieu of the contemporary Stalinist it’s often quite possible that even your beliefs about your own so-called self will also be viciously policed by others, in the service of maintaining the holy categories wholly in tact. But, even still, Tifa, maybe you don’t feel entirely comfortable breathing this air, conversing with every single member of this advanced baboon population, but that idea will always inevitably remain relegated to a *faint* idea, something ambiguous in you, lingering in the air until, that is, you stumble upon something to break it violently to pieces. This will occur accidentally. It’s possible you may need to achieve an ill-advised apex of inebriation as well here, Tifa - to come to know, no longer with any lingering doubt, that your genetic lineage, so to speak, is essentially nonsensical, and that you actually *chose* to

return here to this place, but that that choice was made with the full knowledge that you'd immediately forget your own origin in your cute new little baby body. That it was possible - quite possible! - you'd never remember at all! Is it possible I originate from another density and also that I'm apparently so audacious that I returned to this realm with the knowledge that I'd immediately forget myself upon return? Who would possibly sign up for such a tumultuous spiritual quest? Is it possible my predilection toward getting blackout drunk is actually just an expression of *this very forgetting*? All of this will occur to you accidentally, Tifa, and you'll forget it's even occurring at the time of its occurrence. The person you think you're intimately talking to at this time - even they're not there. They're not there in the same way you're not there, even if you're both smoking countless cigarettes together. Even the higher densities are reductive in this sense - which is maybe, you think, why you didn't give a fuck in the first place, that you've agreed to take part in such tumult. You must have been wise as all hell, Tifa! It'll take you maybe just a little time in the interim to realize this, that this type of audacity isn't actually out of line, that it's not reckless at all - that it's just appropriately *all-encompassing*, and that, ultimately, you had no real choice in the matter. All of this was, of course, *accidentally inevitable*, Tifa. The white girl entity has dreadlocks and she looks like Wyclef Jean, and she's telling you to your face, confessing that she can't stop staring at you as she hands you yet another cigarette. She's distinct from the other entity, but even she's not there - her confession can't bring her into existence - but she's aloof in a quite different manner than the other entity, than the one you

actually converse with. You just stare at white Wyclef and smile sincerely at her, politely thanking her for the cigarette, refraining from informing her that she's staring at what isn't even there. Yet there's no material distinction here, because discriminating between entities and objects is an impossibility - people who love you are concerned, but there are formal refutations that illuminate the absurdity of many things. People who love you are in dire straits right across the street, but this is necessary! They must not see the sinkholes, Tifa! Things look unique at unique angles. Of course they do! How else can I say it? I suppose there's nothing more that can really be said."

(The plane of imagination, it's certainly the first principle of revelation, no?)

"This is the nature of the sinkhole, Joe?" Tifa asked.

"It's just one nature of it I guess," he replied. "What appears to you in dream will reappear to you in real life, which is less real, in different forms - but the distinct forms are, in fact, always identical."

"And this is the nature of recollection then, Joe?" Tifa asked.

"It's just one nature," he replied. "Each return is another chance to imagine, to create. Otherwise the whole thing would be kind of wasteful? - which is an impossibility!"

Syrianus

“It was a Tuesday night,” Ingo said, “in the dead of winter at maybe around 10 pm and the bar, which featured a somewhat unique entrance where patrons descended down a spiral staircase, arriving at a series of tables that looked up toward a full wall window displaying the city street of the entrance - the bar was basically empty. Joe was with me, and he ordered a chicken parmesan from the ethnically ambiguous gay waiter before I even had a chance to tell him I wasn’t hungry. I wasn’t expecting to eat an entire meal at this bar. I thought we were just trying another one on. So I ordered an olive plate as a quote-unquote ‘meal’, but the olive plate itself, when it arrived, rather than highlighting the taste of the olives, instead featured a type of highly processed ‘spicy’ sauce that basically made it unpalatable to eat at a rate faster than a single olive every three to five minutes. I’d already had two gin martinis at the previous bar, and I personally decided to top myself off with a third gin martini, a third gin martini that would complement my underwhelming olive plate as well as bolster my two previous martinis, which were both served in unorthodox rounded champagne-like glasses instead of traditional martini glasses. Joe ordered a gin martini as well, despite the fact he was drinking beer at the previous bar, and as the gay waiter brought the two martinis to us, as he walked away, Joe questioned whether it was kind of gay that we were now both drinking martinis, sitting together in this quasi-underground bar. ‘It’s a Tuesday. I don’t think it’s gay,’ I replied. Neither of us seemed to be homosexuals

in my eyes at the time. Joe ate his chicken parmesan. I nibbled on the olive plate in spite of the sauce. ‘Eight bucks for *this* olive plate?’ I said, trailing off. ‘Is it good?’ Joe replied, genuinely curious, in the process of chewing a chunk of chicken. ‘Should we hit the strip club?’ I said. In the corner booth to my left, completely behind Joe, I took note of a guy about our age who, granted after about a decade or so, had clearly put on a bit of weight since the last time I saw him, which, as I thought about it, as I placed him within the context of my memory, was probably at the strip club? - did my recent digressive reply to Joe emanate from this person, or was it pure coincidence that I noticed him more or less simultaneously with the comment? Was there a cause and effect here? Or was it just a complete fucking coincidence? I contemplated bringing the thought up to Joe, of telling Joe that I recognized a guy in the corner of the bar - not exactly Earth shattering news - but I decided against it. I gave it some thought, bringing up the topic, but ultimately decided against it, figuring it not only a bit trite, but also just fundamentally pointless. A middle-aged homeless woman paced back and forth in the full wall window, shivering up and down the street in the freezing cold - I recalled that even walking from the car to the entrance, a maybe 200 foot distance, was pretty shitty. The homeless woman paced up and down the street, her route at times seeming to begin and end with the window that displayed her brittle frame to the handful of people in the bar that night. The frigid weather only half concerned her, which seemed appropriate for a number of reasons - Joe mentioned an event from his past where a homeless person he knew killed their entire family. ‘That’s the only reason

why I say fuck the homeless,' he said, 'otherwise I don't mind them.' 'I think we should even potentially help them!' I said. He didn't disagree but reiterated his previous point. We should perhaps be inveterately skeptical of the homeless, due to the fact they may, at the drop of a hat basically, choose to murder their entire families in cold blood. 'One thing I do like about olives,' I said, 'is that they're vegetarian at least? I actually was a strict vegetarian for a period of time, and, even after I stopped *being officially* vegetarian I still adhered to a *mostly* vegetarian diet. I was no longer *strictly* vegetarian but I was *mostly* vegetarian, and I was encouraged by this when I began reading a book detailing some of the practices of the Bektashi Sufis by a certain Baron von Sebottendorff - the author himself stated that the spiritually inclined person should stick with fruits, vegetables, cheeses, and breads, and avoid *for the most part* meats.' 'Oh wow, so you were like practicing that shit without even really knowing it,' Joe said, still finishing his chicken parmesan. 'Yeah,' I said, 'the only thing about it is that von Sebottendorff was probably a Nazi?' 'Oh.' 'How much weight should we put in his analysis of the Bektashi Sufi way of life, despite the fact it seemed as though he spent considerable time with these Sufis in Constantinople - despite the fact he was probably a Nazi intelligence asset, if not perhaps even more involved with the National Socialists?' 'Nazism and Sufism seem so.' 'Well, not necessarily,' I interjected, 'you would think that based on the new age adjacent interpretations of things like Sufism, but true Sufism, Joe, is generally *not liberal* in the sense we think of *liberalism* today, being basically a zealous, uncompromising pursuit of linear

progress - no, Sufism, despite perhaps being averse to progress as a concept, is, more importantly, generally *not involved* in contemporary politics.’ ‘But was this Sebottendorff guy, was he like *campaigning* for concentration camps?’ Joe queried. ‘Fair,’ I said. ‘No, he was, so that’s fair. But should we associate vegetarianism with Nazism as well then?’ ‘I’m not saying we should even associate Sufism with Nazism!’ ‘Okay,’ I continued, ‘We have Nazism, vegetarianism, and Sufism - according to von Sebottendorff vegetarianism and Sufism are often, if not always, practiced in tandem - or at least the *majority* vegetarian diet I practice, as opposed to the more stringent forms often endorsed today - yet von Sebottendorff always associated his Sufi practices, at least to some extent, with his latent Nazism. Literal Nazism. Not like Nazi vegetarianism where you don’t even touch cheese, Joe - no, we’re talking about National Socialist Adolf Hitler Nazism - this is the Nazism that von Sebottendorff placed adjacent to the Bektashi Sufi practices he, in all likelihood, was initiated into.’ ‘A Sufi - *Nazi?*’ he said. ‘A Nazi who became a devout Sufi, who believed one of the keys to maintaining a spiritual balance was found in the diet, and that that diet should be *majority* vegetarian. It’s a small sample size, but I suppose it’s possible that I’m following a Nazi-adjacent diet, Joe? That I should be partaking a large chicken parmesan like you are, that, in fact, by continuing to instead consume potent gin martinis and measly olive plates I’m spiritually preparing myself for, yes, the esotericism of Sufism, but also unfettered Nazism?’”

“So,” a sentient tic tac shaped UFO named Dave finally replied, “did you?”

“Continue eating the olives?” Ingo said, “Or - you mean like order a chicken parmesan?”

“No, I mean - did you hit the strip club?”

“Yeah, we obviously went!” Ingo interjected. “But the stuff with von Sebottendorff. Do you find that intriguing at all? I feel like Joe was only half-interested at best in it, that he was, sure, *humoring me* to some extent, but not to the extent that I really needed, you know?”

“Oh, of course,” Dave said, “Joe humoring you *to some extent* is like your best case scenario with some shit like von Sebottendorff! I’m actually shocked he even humored you *to some extent* - he must have been at least half in the bag if he did.”

“I think I did bring it up toward the latter portion of his gin martini, now that you mention it.”

“In any case, yeah,” Dave continued, “I think it’s a valid question, of how to properly contextualize a Nazi endorsing vegetarianism, and not just vegetarianism, but the exact iteration of vegetarianism that you yourself practice, and, apparently, so does the median Sufi? How *should* one contextualize that? Is there perhaps a slight stain on not eating meat, for the most part, and maybe even Sufism, since this Nazi was so *into it*, since he endorsed it to the degree that he went to the lengths of writing an entire book about it? Are vegetarians now Nazis? If so, then what are vegans? I’ve always, in a way, kind of felt like vegans were basically Nazis anyway?”

“Well,” Ingo added, “that’s an interesting point, right? Because I think it’s fairly safe to say that vegans do exhibit certain Nazi-like characteristics? There’s a certain National Socialist narcissism to idealistic veganism at least, the type of veganism that purports that

your actions can somehow *save the animals from suffering*, that purely by one's own actions that multinational industries can shift. But there's also a Nazism even deeper in veganism - namely, his idea that *we know* what's best for the animal kingdom, that *we comprehend* suffering. These animals *are suffering*, so we need to stop eating them - yet, while I certainly would agree that animals seem to suffer, and that certainly practices like factory farming *amplify these states*, I also think there's an interventionist spirit at play here. Humans have hunted animals for, what - millions of years? How long have we even been on this fucking planet, Dave? And now, as our species has amplified itself these practices have amplified themselves in correspondence, yet certain sects - and, yes, I will call them sects - believe that we can *stop this by ourselves* boycotting meat products."

"And that's not even getting into the biological *need* that humans have for B12, which you, realistically, can only get from animal products - sans supplements of course!" Dave added.

"Which is, of course, yet another Nazi-adjacency to veganism," Ingo replied, "that we shouldn't even *milk cows*? But cows *require milking*, Dave? So we should boycott milking cows because we don't like how cows are milked? The milking of cows, the creation of cheese and dairy products seems to be a rather vanilla, benign, actually quite *mutually beneficial process*, yet the vegans will tell us that it must be stopped! This is certainly Nazism, to some extent."

"I'm actually starting to wonder," Dave interrupted, "like, was von Sebottendorff, was he maybe behind the curve in Nazism by endorsing this *majority*

vegetarian diet? Was he actually to some extent deficient as a Nazi by not endorsing and practicing the pure National Socialism of veganism, as opposed to advising on a rather *moderate diet of mostly vegetarian meals*? It seems like, if he was truly married to this idea of Nazism, that he would have gone full vegan, that this endorsement of Sufism and vegetarianism actually is *tempering* his Nazi tendencies, that perhaps we should be concluding the opposite - namely, that *majority* vegetarian diets actually *deter* Nazism, while veganism is obviously associated with being a ruthless Nazi.”

“von Sebottendorff’s vegetarianism is actually indicative of his *liberalism*?” Ingo replied, “it’s actually having the opposite effect? I think I like that idea, Dave, that instead of von Sebottendorff’s Nazism shifting the polarity of vegetarianism toward Nazism it’s actually the fact that his vegetarianism is shifting the polarity of his Nazism toward liberalism - and, in turn away from Nazi veganism?”

“In every sphere today,” Dave continued, “we associate vegetarianism with veganism as the two truly *similar* diets, when in actuality it may be the case that the vegans and the carnivores are the true siblings of, not only diets, but *Nazi diets*. Yes, while a moderate vegetarianism, sure, it mitigates animal suffering on an individual basis, but it also - more importantly - fails to succumb to the Nazi megalomania of *believing that itself alone can change the world as we comprehend it*. Assuming we comprehend it correctly at all!”

“Which, in my mind,” Ingo replied, “is something that’s also quite up for debate!”

Proclus

“It’s not necessarily the easiest thing in the world when you’ve been given an ability to identify to slightest *change* in things, the most minute fluctuations and stuff. In a sense this ability - inherent within it perhaps - is a dissolution of form, an eviction notice of the sensory organs. At least that’s how I’ve experienced it,” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa said.

“It’s certainly, in many cases, a strict sentence toward insanity!” Ingo said.

“Perhaps,” Tifa continued, “detecting the slightest change in things, I don’t know, it’s perhaps a *science* of undermining the senses? This strikes me as possible.”

“I kind of feel the same?” Ingo replied, “Taking note of microscopic changes is in some literal sense the science of annihilating the senses. Like I just noticed the other day certain year over year changes within myself, just in terms of categorizing myself as, you know, like a subject with attributes? Like last year I was routinely categorizing myself as a subject with fixed attributes, whereas this year I find the notion that I’m a subject with fixed attributes to me, if not outright false, then generally irrelevant during my day to day life.”

“Is that really a *minute* change though, Ingo? Because it kind of seems like that’s actually a fairly substantial shift?”

“Well,” Ingo continued, “yeah, I suppose maybe it’s the opposite? That this shift is something so material that I should have actually cultivated the change with a conscious awareness and paid attention to the particular changes as they progressed? - yet instead I paid no

attention to it at all until after it occurred, that it just occurred sans my conscious knowledge? But instead it struck me out of the blue, Tifa, just last week like it was a miniscule change - but I guess it is a fairly substantial change that I completely overlooked, almost like it was a miniscule change?"

"Which I guess," Tifa admitted, "could also be a side effect of noting insanely minute changes in organic matter?"

"Exactly," Ingo said. "Last year I had an entirely different method of indexing myself - or maybe it would be more accurate to say that last year I had *a method* of indexing myself?"

"Although," Tifa interjected, "even this analysis seems like just another sort of indexing of yourself?"

"Yeah," Ingo said, pausing momentarily, "I suppose that's technically true. I suppose it's possible that I went from tracking my specific accomplishments, from noting specific physical changes, from noting my numerical age, from taking a holistic view of myself as a subject with attributes to taking an entirely different approach, yet I only noticed this change after the fact - but, to your point, even that acknowledgment of the change is, I guess, a sort of indexing itself as well?"

"I mean, I don't want to tyrannically restrict you to a *subjective indexing*, but."

"No, you're right, Tifa. It's definitely just another iteration of indexing, I think. I mean, in a sense I suppose it's the indexing of a lack of indexing, but I guess technically we still have to count that as a form of indexing."

"Did you want to try Slow-Gar? - that cocktail place we were talking about earlier," Tifa asked, satisfied with

their newly acquired, shared definition of the index, shifting subjects.

“Eh,” Ingo said.

“What is it, Ingo?”

“Eh, I don’t know, Tifa. I guess it’s just that the last time I was there - I don’t know, they kind of took a long time with a cheesecake that had on special that we ordered to go? Like actually an *insanely long* time? And I guess Joe was saying - after we left - that I was making a perturbed facial expression toward the end of the wait? That this facial expression, that displaying it in the bar may have been an offensive gesture or something? Which at the time I didn’t necessarily agree with - I mean, I definitely wore a perturbed expression as we waited, but I didn’t think it was necessarily offensive? I actually thought it was justified! It’s not like I told anyone to go fuck themselves or anything, you know?”

“That’s always a plus in my opinion,” Tifa said, “But, like, how long was the wait.”

“Probably ten minutes?” Ingo said, trailing into a higher register. “I just thought it was a little ridiculous though. Even ten minutes to what? - *cut a fucking cheesecake?* Honestly, it could have been even longer than ten minutes. In fact it had to be longer than ten minutes because at least *three* meals were ordered and executed in the interim, Tifa! Hot meals! And you can’t cut a piece of a fucking *pie* for me? Toss it into a to-go box. And also - the other thing that I guess just kind of went up my ass sideways was that the bartender kept telling us *Yeah it’ll be right out*. He came back to us - because we were sitting there in their crowded bar with our tab paid and drinks emptied - and asked us if we received the cheesecake, then when we informed him

we were still waiting for the *sliced cheesecake* he just reiterated: *Yeah it'll probably be right out.* I'm watching the kitchen, Tifa - because it's an open kitchen - and I'm seeing hamburgers regularly hit the connecting counter. The idiot sitting next to me ordered fries and a burger and both came out before our cheesecake! This guy say down after I ordered the cheesecake, and he's eating a burger and fries, and we're still waiting for the cheesecake. We ordered a single slice of cheesecake. This guy's *subsequently orders* a cooked hamburger and cooked french fries, and he receives them before they can slice a piece of cheesecake?"

"I see," Tifa said. "I suppose that could be a little frustrating."

"Yeah," Ingo continued, "but it was fine I guess? It was just a little disingenuous, you know? Even the manager came over to us and made some excuse like there was some *hold up* in slicing a piece of cake. But no, it's probably all good. I'm not like *mad* about it or anything. Yet, with that said, I'm not sure if going back there is the best idea just now?"

"No, I totally get it, Ingo - what about The Avenue?"

"Um."

"Is there a problem there too, Ingo?" Tifa gingerly prodded.

"No, it's probably fine," he said.

"Okay great," she said, "then maybe we transfer ourselves over there? I'm just, it's like I can't do another night in Moscow. And I know Joe has told me so much about all of these places, so I'm just."

"Oh yeah totally!" Ingo interjected, "It's just - I don't know. The bartender there, at The Avenue, she's

just - how should I put this - she's a little too prone to *small talk*? Like every time I go in there I feel like she has to *catch up with me*, despite the fact we literally don't know each other at all? I mean, it's not a *bad* thing, catching up with people. But it's kind of burden at times."

"Right," Tifa said, "I can totally see that point of view, Ingo, and I think you absolutely have a right to feel how you feel. But at the same time she's probably just being nice? It's kind of her job as a bartender?"

"Right," Ingo concurred, "she's totally being nice! And I attempted to take that into account. In a sense I even appreciate that! She's obviously just doing her job, to some extent, and, sure, *in a sense* I find that totally defensible! It's just - like, I still have to have a *whole spiel* ready for her, I feel? I have to have *something* to say to her to appropriately engage in this ensuing small talk. I can't just walk into the bar and get a drink, sit there, and shut the hell up, if she's there at least. If she's there tending to the bar, then she'll ask me how things are going, she'll ask me *what's going on*, despite the fact, again, we don't even really know each other at all! - and then I'll have to manufacture something somewhat appropriate to feed her, which is a little more difficult only because, again, I don't know this person in the least. We're not friends. How much petty bullshit can I really share from my life, unless I start making a real attempt to *actually get to know her*, which to me would only exacerbate the situation. If we became actual friends then I might actually feel a social responsibility to *visit her bar*; whereas now I can at least take respite in avoiding it."

“But hold on!” Joe interjected, abruptly butting into the conversation via his own remote view, “Is she the same one who asked you about Fernet when we were there the other week?”

“About how I *knew about* Fernet?” Ingo retorted, perhaps inadvertently allowing a muffled chuckle to escape, thoroughly unsurprised to see Joe barging in, “The one that asked how it was *possible* I knew about Fernet, for the third time, mind you. Yeah. She’s the one who *can’t believe* I know about Fernet.”

“Well, I mean, to be fair it *is* more of a bartender’s drink,” Tifa said.

“Would you ask someone that though, Tifa?” Joe asked. “Seriously?”

“Ask them how they knew about Fernet you mean?” she said.

“Yeah,” Ingo said.

“Probably not? But I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Well, either way,” Ingo said, “Even if we agree that asking about how someone knows about Fernet, even if that’s an acceptable mode of conversation, it still doesn’t change the overarching fact that *conversation will ensue*, and that I have to have something to discuss with her.”

“Okay then where should we go?”

“Do we need to go anywhere though?”

“Maybe you’re right,” Tifa said, “maybe it’s kind of pointless - going places?”

“Probably,” Ingo said, “because sometimes everything does seem a bit pointless, doesn’t it Tifa? I totally get not wanting to spend another night here, but, on the other hand, sometimes I think it seems like there’s a sort of tyranny that’s existent throughout the

ages, which to be fair, these ages, they're probably all collapsed upon one another, but these tyrannies, they're actively attempting to restrict the possible methods of dissolving into an eternal oneness?"

"Which is probably called religion?" Tifa queried.

"Institutionally, for sure, but also it's probably entirely necessary? That it's an actual aspect of oneness, that it also attempts to rip itself apart?"

"Primarily by codifying restrictions limiting how people can dissolve into oneness?"

"That would be my basic argument I guess - that basically the institution exists to take primary accounts of individual dissolution into oneness and reinterpret them into restricted methods that obviously won't work for everyone."

"Do you ever feel anxiety about that?"

"Not really - mostly because I try and actively dissolve myself as much as I can, that by preparing a ritualist set of prompts I maintain a steady dissolution as time pretends to pass."

"Right. And this is - it's what you think is being done by."

"Religious institutions?" he interrupted. "Partially. The story of Sheikh Bedreddin is perhaps constructive here."

"Now who is that again?"

"I don't think we have time for that? No, let's continue, because I think the important thing to note is that there are actually infinite ways to dissolve into oneness, and that they all must be ratified as a contingent of oneness."

"But shouldn't the opposite methods be ratified as well?"

“Oh absolutely!”

“In which case maybe we should just take a stroll
by The Avenue, see who’s working?”

Damascius

“It teaches more or less that the particular book is always local, that it derived from someone speaking,” Joe explained, “which implies translation and a basically relational nature. In addition, of course the world is comprised of the Divine Names, but these names are also relational in position and orientation to their origin. As such they contain manifold pathways and meanings, they must be translated from their various positions, and for this reason we could say that knowledge - which derives mostly from the Names - is basically *relational*. You inform someone of your thoughts, like I’m doing to you at the moment - this is the relation of a mirror as Oneness, talking to yourself via others, a singular subject-object relationship, Oneness as requiring multiplicity, otherwise it will become *multiple*, via the possibility of Number. Let me emphasize again that *singular subject-object relationship*. Plus, the possibility of Number isn’t talked about nearly enough! When any book refers to so-called Partners of God it’s only essentially referencing created things that create themselves, which are essentially just phantom numbers, Tifa!”

“It’s almost like, I’ve been thinking lately, that it’s only via science fiction that anyone can seriously discuss God anymore, you know?” a female floor fan in Moscow named Tifa replied.

“What I noted above, it probably can’t be understood at all except within the context of science fiction, can it?”

“Not in Moscow at least! Ugh, I hate this place!”

“We all inveterately hate wherever it is that we live, no matter where it is that we live. I had an image of Dostoyevsky writing Notes from the Underground at age 43 reflecting on a dream, sitting on a solitary bench at a bar.”

“Of being exiled to Siberia from 1849 to 1854, from ages 28 to 33?”

“Of being classified as ‘one of the most dangerous convicts.’ I felt an affinity with him at the time.”

“I get it, that it probably sounds a little *loony*,” Joe continued, “that the date I was finally released from prison.”

“You went to prison?” Tifa interjected.

“Well, a prison *of sorts*.”

“Oh, right.”

“It’s like, you ever think about how Large Language Models instantaneously read our texts and have, like, conclusions and shit?”

“Right, it’s weird, right? Like, what’s the *experience like* if it’s basically instantaneous?”

“That’s like how I read the whole 820 thing though? It wasn’t something where I was page turning, it was like a novel all at once.”

“Hmmm, I guess that makes sense?” she said.

“With that said I still really enjoy *reading within time*, not being tethered to some kind of instantaneous understanding.”

“Right, like a mystery novel wouldn’t really work in that context. If you read a mystery novel in an instantaneous way?”

“It seems entirely unlikely that LLMs could really be huge fans of mystery novels, I agree with that for sure!”

“But anyway,” Tifa said. “Is it worth it for me remote into that new spot, Burqin? Is that it? Because Ingo was telling me *all about it* and.”

“It’s Burqin, yeah,” Joe interjected, “When we went we ended up popping into that little bar by E 2nd St, just to kill some time before our reservation was ready, which was unexpected in itself, because I didn’t expect Burqin of all places to be *that* busy - Chinese Muslim food didn’t strike me as something I’d have to *wait* for, yet I digress! It was the same bartender at that spot as four years ago - I think a bunch of us were in there during one afternoon four years ago with Ingo when he was particular down about his romantic interests or something, I was telling him it was okay for him to still go out and get blackout drunk every now and then, but I don’t think he agreed - and they still had the movie style popcorn. The same bartender and the same movie style popcorn. It was nice and dark in there, and even though it was a nice enough afternoon out I think Ingo and I were both satiated by the fact we had no longer had any idea whether it was night or day while drinking in this bar, eating their movie style popcorn, which, full disclosure, I ended up eating the majority of. Neither one of us wanted to know whether it was night or day. I took a piss and read a newspaper clipping from one hundred years ago and realized how far our literary standards have fallen. I thought back to how it was 13 years ago now that I was *also* at this same bar on E 2nd St, and there was some *raffle* going on, how I won a blue beta fish in a bottle of vodka, which, full disclosure, was obviously filled with water, not vodka. I was sitting next to a girl who I had a bit of a complicated relationship with - we didn’t have the most

linear friendship, which I guess occurs sometimes when people feel like they should fuck but don't? - and I was egregiously checking prices on my phone, thinking that I could invest in Treasury Futures and actually make a living at it. Silly me! Every three seconds checking those off hour prices of Treasuries, until my raffle number was called - mind you, I didn't even remember getting a raffle ticket. Thinking back, everybody who bought a drink must have received like a complimentary raffle ticket or something to that effect, because there's no way I would have *bought* a raffle ticket at a pub on E 2nd St. I never buy raffle tickets really. That same bartender generously offered me another bucket of popcorn as I closed the tab after Ingo told me our table was about to be ready, but I demurred because I didn't want to ruin my appetite, thinking about how that beta fish lived for like four years after that night I won him. I'm assuming it was a him? Anyway, at Burqin, sitting down in their extremely limited seating dining room, Ingo ordered the so-called *Lamb on Dry Land* and the white blonde waitress replied, 'Great choice!' Yet I went ahead and ordered the other featured lamb dish they had advertised on the menu and received nothing beyond a silent nod in return? Both lamb dishes were a little dry though, Tifa. The lamb on dry land moniker in particular was perhaps *too apropos*. Inadvertently apropos! Even the lamb dumplings - yeah they were good, but there was nothing particular *lamb-centric* about them. They were just solid dumplings. We walked home, back through Bowery but avoiding the East Village. Deep in Kips Bay a light flickered a block away from a bar in a dilapidated green building which caught my eye. Glancing just briefly at the green paint,

the immanence of our past struck me as severely imprinting itself on the future, tattooing itself on future events in such a way that no doubt a material folding occurs. As we walked back to the apartment there was no doubt in my mind that a material folding occurred. I recalled the yokels on the wait staff from the first bar and their surprisingly delicious steak fries with the bland proprietary ketchup. At some point even that memory will have a chance at this sort of immanence I supposed. The brisk breeze and the sterile auras of the people ambling through the streets that afternoon, before we made it over to the restaurant - the people seemed more sterile than usual to me, the entire scene was filled with a sterility, like the brisk breeze itself was blowing a sense of sterility unencumbered all throughout the streets.”

Gorgias of Leontinoi

“Was that wrong of me, you think?” Joe asked.

“That you never went back to what? Like her *bar*?” a bright orange orb the size of a school bus named Carl said.

“Basically?”

“Not necessarily. I mean, did you have any sort of explicit agreement with her, that, you know, you guys would try to work things out?”

“Nothing formal. I mean, how seriously should we take these conversations that occur, even if intermittently, when we’re more or less blackout drunk?”

“You know, there’s a variety of thought on that? Certainly some people take them very seriously! But more often than not they’re obviously associated with relationships that dissipate into the ether at the drop of a hat, just like that.”

“No, that makes sense.”

“I’m not sure I would put that much stock into it, if I’m being honest?”

“No, it’s not like *I feel anything*, you know. It was just purely a rote question.”

“No, of course not. I would never accuse you of - what? - *feeling something*? What, like an emotion? I would never put that on you, man.”

“And I’ve always personally appreciated that about you, Carl! Because it’s too often that we succumb to that temptation, of thinking we feel things.”

“It’s absurd!”

“No, I mean she’s a nice enough girl. I’m pretty sure, you know, that, at the time at least, she may have wanted to see one another naked and shit - but at the same time not everything is meant to be!”

“We have this notion today, especially around my parts, that every opportunity not actualized is somehow a missed opportunity. Men in particular are lamenting about the girls they *could have had*, the holes that went unpenetrated, as if every instance of a girl that they *had a chance with* that wasn’t consummated is some kind of abyss in their soul. But the reality is, Joe, that once recalibrated into the realm of memory what’s actualized and completed and what’s hypothetical and latent - they’re not wildly different in terms of intensity. In fact the two categories often flip flop with one another!”

“What’s actual and what’s hypothetical - they’re basically the same fucking thing!”

“What’s more material, to me at least,” Carl continued, “is the relation to what’s higher and lower. What’s actual and hypothetical are functionally horizontal phenomena, and I think we’re both in agreement that they fundamentally represent the same thing, that perhaps some strains of metaphysics went awry as soon as they delineated between the hypothetical and the actual, believing in a dubious way that the hypothetical is, in some sense or another, *not* actual. Obviously this is, in all likelihood, kind of a grave mistake? Whereas the distinction between what’s higher and lower - that verticality - that’s a more fundamental distinction. It’s a distinction that, at its heart, is nothing if not fundamental.”

“And we feel this more than intermittently,” Joe interjected, “we feel it if we appropriately sideline our

intellect and begin to *feel* out causes. We've spent so much time on the intellect, Carl! But if we sideline the intellect for just a moment, here and there, it kind of becomes obvious, to me at least, that - outside of any framework of the hypothetical and actual - that we travel to the higher and then inevitably come back to the lower, that despair itself, which is a thrill in its own right, that despair is the very traversing of this high back to this low. And it's an addictive thrill! Via this or that prompt - let's not Stalinize which prompts are appropriate and inappropriate right now?"

"Because there are ultimately no inappropriate prompts, assuming the prompt causes a higher plane to manifest, Joe," Carl said, "it's a similar mistake to the faux hypothetical-actual divide. Within an immanent unity all that functionally matters is that the path to the higher plane is generated, if only so things can revert to One."

"Right, right," Joe concurred, "so we employ the prompts that, by their very essence of becoming hypothetical, become actualized and transfer us to the higher planes. And then we return to the lower planes with a despair that itself is a form of glee! As a looping back that's inherent in any reversion?"

"And in a sense what's hypothetical-as-actual is perhaps the more efficient generator of these paths? Yet how could we communicate this to others? Isn't that traditionally the challenge?"

"I think the challenge is, well, you know - we probably have to go back to the hypothetical-actual framework again?"

"But respectfully, Joe," Carl said, "fuck that. Because I think what you outlined to begin this

discussion is a great example of it, no - this gleeful despair at descending from a higher plane to a lower one? It almost seems like the entirety of the social order attempts to deaden these descents of interiority (which are, of course, fundamentally exterior), that rather than *mastering* these gleeful descents and ascents, the ordering, based on so-called logic, yearns to restrict travel. Instead of promoting the proliferation of the generation of paths. Rather than mastering these ascents and descents, ascents and descents are fundamentally discouraged, except for the highly restricted, authorized routes. When what's precisely required *is* travel! Maybe you feel bad about this bar you never returned to, this hypothetical relation that was, in fact, actual, that on some level gave you the gift of ascent and, of course, subsequent descent. This is the mastery that's required, in my view at least, if you're ever going to achieve a sustained higher plane though, Joe. You really shouldn't have any doubt about that, and it's not *me* saying that."

"Of course it isn't," Joe interrupted, "nor is it me that originally even relayed the anecdote."

"Because what's hypothetical is ipso facto actual."

"Basically it essentially comes back to cause and effect in a sense."

"What *is* a cause? Haha! Of course there are different degrees we can speak of, that exist within some kind of logical framework, where logic itself is a sort of effect that reinterprets itself as cause?"

"To get to the bottom of *cause* we'd have to start to postulate on *creation*, because a cause is nothing if not an *act of creation*. To what extent did *I* never return to this bar, with the subsequent effect of my ascent and

implicit gleeful despair of descent. The act of never returning was certainly a *cause* of this traversal between planes you're talking about, right Carl?"

"I couldn't disagree, Joe!"

"But what could possibly *cause* these ascents and descents? We could speak of modalities, but why complicate the matter? To cause is to create and, *if* we were to want to subscribe to any logic, a baseline logic, then I think we'd have to say, generally, that what's created emanates from what's *uncreated*, and that for the created to create it must then be what's *uncreated*? - if what's created emanates from the uncreated? Opposites emerging out of opposites as a fundamental aspect of the infinite?"

"If what's created creates?" Carl posed, "Well to appeal to the intellect for something like that may be unwise?"

"Yet logic is certainly part and parcel of the infinite," Joe said, "even if logic may never *fully encompass* the infinite, and the infinite is certainly the realm of what's uncreated, so, if we were to *ever* refer to logic, then I think the *most logical* mode of speaking would be to say that what's created *must* emanate from the uncreated. What's transcendent outside of time as One emanates all creation - what's emanated doesn't emanate itself, otherwise we'd have two Ones. It simply can't be any other way! And *causes*, as fundamentally acts of creation, have to at least *partially partake* in this framework?"

"Something fundamentally transcendent is moving through you, Joe," Carl concluded, "and it's caused you to arrive at this conclusion, which, in this particular case, I happen to wholly agree with."

Remote Viewing: Have you heard of it?

