

THE ZOMBIE TIMER

PHILOSOPHY

A central question in philosophy of mind concerns what consciousness is. A wellknown though experiment asks if one could imagine a philosophical zombie that was just like a person, but without self-awareness. This experiment opens up a lot of philosophical questions about metaphysics (Would it make that someone could act as a normal person (from the outside) without consciousness?) and epistemology (Would there be a way to know whether someone else was a philosophical zombie?). A host of existential and moral questions also readily present themselves (such as Would the philosophical zombie be a person? Or Could it be better to live like a zombie?).

STIMULUS

Cheung was really looking forward to going to the amusement park with his gran in the afternoon and time just went too slowly. In fact, time went so slowly it was unbearable. There was nothing to do but wait and wait and he felt like he was being bored to death. He was so bored that he just shouted out loud: “I’m bored! Someone do something!”.

Then the doorbell rang. Outside was an elf with a small parcel. “Take this”, the elf said, “inside you’ll find an ancient zombie timer. It can help you. Just set the timer to the point in time just before your gran picks you up. Then you’ll behave just as you would normally do, but you won’t experience anything – in that way time will pass, but you won’t have to experience boredom. When the time is up, you’ll come back slowly, and all will be normal again.” Cheung was amazed. “Why are you giving this to me?”, he asked the elf. “Oh,” the elf said “you asked for it, and you obviously need it. Besides, I’ve got several of them.”

The elf left, and Cheung open the parcel. The zombie timer looked like a normal kitchen timer except it was black with a gold and blood red drawing of an hourglass. But the shortest setting was 5 minutes while the longest was 60 days. It looked really easy to use.

QUESTIONS & AVENUES

- ✓ Should Cheung use the zombie timer?
- ✓ Would it be ok to use the zombie timer to avoid boredom?
- ✓ If you used the zombie timer in school, could you still learn stuff?

THE STIMULUS CONTINUED

Many years later when Cheung is grown up and has forgotten all about the zombie timer. He is sentenced to two months of prison for tax evasion. As he packs to leave for prison, he comes across the zombie timer again.

QUESTIONS & AVENUES

- ✓ Should Cheung use the zombie timer?

NESTED QUESTIONS

- ✓ Is boredom bad?
- ✓ Is using the zombie timer the same as being in a coma or sleeping?
- ✓ Should Cheung redo his time in prison if it turns out that he has used the zombie timer while? Is it dangerous to use the zombie timer?
- ✓ Are zombies creepy?