

# KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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## ***Invasion of the***

# **Mind Parasites**

By GLENN CAMPBELL

They come into our brain because we invite them, but once they arrive, they don't want to leave. They take up residence in our neurons and eat up precious cognitive resources. They delude our thinking and make us believe we can't live without them then they slowly drain our life force and give us nothing in return.

Mind parasites.

We may not know what consciousness is, but it's clearly a finite resource. There is a limit to the number of thoughts you can think in a day. Mulling things over in your head takes time, so the more things you try to think about, the less time you have for each.

"High quality" consciousness is when you have plenty of time to think about the things you have done and are considering doing. It tends to result in wise decisions and positive outcomes. "Low quality" consciousness is when you process the world only superficially—a few seconds here and there. This results in ritualized answers and many stupid mistakes because you haven't thought things through.

If you subdivide your consciousness by thinking about more and more things during the course of a day, the quality of your thinking is going to degrade and, by extension, so will the quality of your life.

Think of the driver you encounter at an intersection, cell phone glued to his ear. What can you expect from his driving? His reaction times will be slowed, and clumsy errors are likely—the penalty of divided consciousness.

Some studies have shown that

drivers on cell phones are worse than drunk ones. Some jurisdictions have responded by banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving, but speaker phones aren't any better! The problem isn't the use of the hand but the division of consciousness, which distracts from the business of driving.

Likewise, when you experience too much mental stimulation during the day, the quality of your inner life will deteriorate. Today, unfortunately, we receive far more stimulation than is healthy, and it is actively marketed to us as a positive thing. Who would choose five TV channels when they could have five hundred? The trouble is, with so many options available, you're naturally going to watch more, and the quality of your non-video life is going to suffer.

The mind parasites are objects and activities that we voluntarily take into our lives but that drain our mental resources thereafter. Big screen TVs are going to be watched, and video games will probably be played—over and over. Even buying a book can be a parasitic drain because it creates a pressure to read it, to the detriment of, say, just sitting and thinking.

All sorts of seemingly "good" things are mind parasites in disguise. Every new activity or obligation is a tax on your cognitive resources, leaving less for all your other activities. People tend to rationalize the loss by believing that they can simply become more efficient in their existing activities, but it's a delusion. Why volunteer for one good cause when you can join ten? Well, with ten projects going on at once, you can't possibly to generate the same creativity and wisdom you could for one.

Once upon a time, stimulation, like food, was hard to get. If you lived in a remote village in the pre-electronic era, you had plenty of time to think things through. What you longed for, however, was new ideas. Now, however, there are too many ideas, and we tend to get fat on the easiest ones and ignore the rest.

Overstimulation breeds passivity, the most destructive disease of modern life. When you don't have time to think things through, you tend to let others make decisions for you. Overstimulated people won't venture far from their comfort zone, because they understand, rightly, that their driving skills are horrible. If something upsets them, they don't despair for long; they simply change the channel.

It's really sad. The mind parasites have created a society of zombies. They aren't bad zombies out to suck your blood or anything, but you can't expect much initiative from them. They may respond honorably to the stimulation in front of them, but don't expect them to act preemptively or understand the long-term implications of what they do.

How do you control the mind parasites? You lock them out. Instead of 200 channels, you opt for zero: no TV, no radio, low noise and limited obligations. Your resting point should be a place without stimulation, from which you can make occasional selective forays into the modern world.

The mind parasites may seem attractive in the store, but you don't want to invite them into your home.

—G.C.

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