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Chair | CBA Young Lawyers Section

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# The Theory of Nothingness

Young lawyers have all been there. It's lunch. You're dining with a few contemporaries. Somewhere between salad and the entree, conversation inevitably turns to the often relentless demands of the law. One person serves up a healthy portion of woe, while the others chew quickly so they can volley back in one-upmanship fashion. Chew-swallow-volley. Chew-swallow-volley. It's like somebody gave John McEnroe and Chris Evert patty melts and told them to go play a set at Wimbledon.

Regardless of the twists the conversation takes, it always ends up the same: Somebody comments about how life was better when they didn't have anything close to the workload they have now. After a few tales of days spent doing anything from backpacking across Europe to sleeping for 22 hours straight, the group pauses to contemplate fondly the endless days of nothingness. The daydream ends abruptly when the waiter slaps a check on the table, oblivious to his cruelty.

On the heels of one such conversation, I decided to test the *Theory of Nothingness* for the benefit of young lawyers everywhere. The hypothesis: Life is better in the absence of work. So, I wrapped up all the deadlines at the office and capitalized on some unused vacation time. For three straight days I would do nothing. Nada. Zilch.

The following chronicles my experiment and findings.

## Day One: In the Name of Science

**5:30 a.m.** Pathetic. Despite best efforts, I couldn't sleep past 5:30 a.m. The dogs snoozed on the floor as I sat bedside contemplating my day. Then it hit me: What's better than some early morning television? The

warm glow of my old friend T.V. chaperoned me into the first day of nothingness.

**Somewhere around six hours later.** "Are you going to move from that couch?"

I met my wife's (fair) question with an equally fair answer: "No." Before she could inquire further, I explained my experiment to her.

"You're an idiot," she quipped in near disbelief.

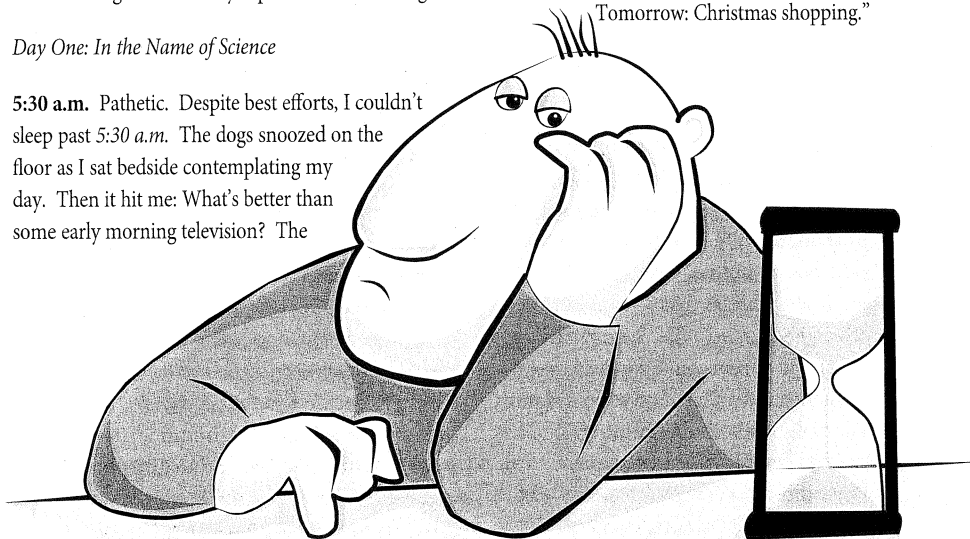
"Some people thought Albert Einstein was an idiot, and he invented gravity." *Checkmate.* How could anybody argue with my brother in science, Albert Einstein?

"That was [Sir Isaac] Newton. And he didn't invent gravity, he theorized it."

**Damn.** The Court of Domestic Opinion was ready to enjoin this experiment before it even got off the ground. I knew then what it must feel like to be a stem-cell researcher. I dug in.

"Whatever. The point is I'm acting in the name of science; for the greater good of young lawyers everywhere. I don't *want* to sit on the couch and watch T.V. all day. I *have* to." Her right eyebrow cocked skeptically as she prepared to rule. I held my breath, just like many times before in court.

"Today. You can do your experiment today. Tomorrow: Christmas shopping."



*Victorious.* Behind me: an oral argument bordering on virtuoso. Ahead: a 12-hour *Saved by the Bell* marathon. I had my work cut out for me.

#### Day Two: Stranger in a Strange Land

**9:30 a.m.** Much better. I even managed to out-sleep the dogs. They observed me stumble from my slumber with quizzical, "Did-he-get-fired?" expressions. I patted them in passing. "All in the name of science, guys. All in the name of science . . ."

I spent the morning considering the finer points of *Jerry Springer: Why Did You Cheat?* Then it was time to continue my experiment remotely, arriving at the mall around noon. Starbucks in hand, I did my best to blend in among the natives. My wife navigated from store to store with fighter-pilot precision. We bought little but saw plenty. It was my kind of trip.

But something wasn't right. I soon became agitated and uncomfortable, yet couldn't pinpoint why. Just before Macy's, I stopped dead in my tracks, causing a sugar-charged kid on a leash to slam into me from behind. I dusted him off and diffused the situation with an apology before Mama Grizzly could attack.

"What's wrong?" my wife asked. I stared blankly as droves of seemingly carefree people passed before me. "Hello?" She snapped her fingers.

Redirecting my stare to her, I abruptly belted: "Don't these people have jobs?" Now she was confused. I continued: "What do they *do* all day long? Just shop? Talk? Lounge?" I spotted the tethered battering ram pass in the opposite direction, now with corndog in hand. "Eat corndogs?" Mama Grizzly glared protectively.

Diagnosing the source of my pending meltdown, my wife paused before explaining the situation to me with the gentleness of a kindergarten teacher. "The world doesn't revolve around working long hours in an office and a courtroom. It goes on like this every day." In seconds my understanding of the universe was shattered by this modern-day Galileo Galilei. She took me by the arm. "Let's get you a corndog. You'll feel better." I nodded, but something told me the horrors were just beginning.

#### Day Three: I Need a Mission

**Noon.** *Why is Galileo licking my face?* I cracked my eyes. "Oh, it's you." The dogs exchanged peculiar glances. I think they thought I was dead.

A note by the bed indicated my wife had an appointment and instructed me to enjoy the rest of the "experiment." But there was no joy in that room. Noticing movement, the walls instantly pounced, strangling me. I didn't know what to do. I needed something, *anything*, to give me purpose. The scene

was remarkably similar to the opening of *Apocalypse Now*, less the broken glass and Martin Sheen's skivvy-clad karate routine.<sup>1</sup> I peered into the world through parted blinds.

#### I needed a mission.

Before matters could worsen, I grabbed my laptop and fled. My purpose—*my mission*—was to write this article. I had to save everybody from the *Theory of Nothingness*.

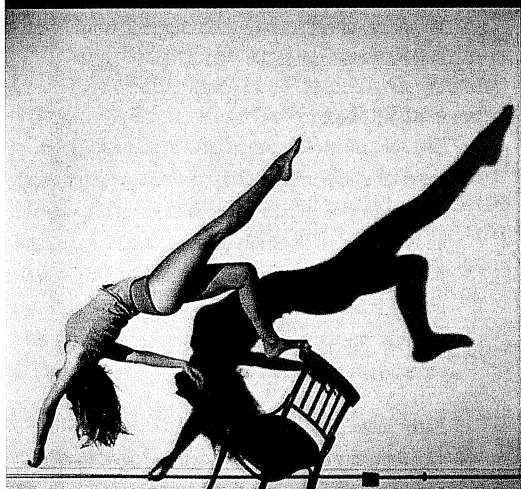
#### Conclusion: Hypothesis Disproved

As you can see, life is *not* better in the absence of work. Why this is, I'm not exactly certain. Perhaps it's due to some sort of reprogramming that occurs in law school. Nevertheless, that's another experiment, for another day and another scientist altogether.

So the next time lunch buddies try to bait you into dreaming about work-free days, just hand them a copy of this article and leave quietly—preferably ditching them with the tab. They'll think twice before trying to plant seeds of nonsense in your garden ever again, and will probably even thank you later. ■

<sup>1</sup>Okay, so maybe I did a little karate. For those of you curious, the opening scene of *Apocalypse Now* is available at <http://youtube.com/watch?v=XOxVjtZujcU> (last visited December 18, 2007). Careful, some content will tarnish virgin ears.

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*Bram Stoker's Chair II*, 2005, C-prints 48 x 38 inches (121.9 x 96.5).  
Courtesy of the artist and Jay Jopling/White Cube.