

Of Owls and Richard the Third: Part 1

by Theodore Dalrymple (May 2013)

Not long ago at a conference I was asked whether I thought that boredom was an important cause of bad, and worse than bad, behaviour. I said that I thought that it probably was, though I could not positively prove it. At any rate, those who behave badly often claim to do so because they are bored, and no one claims to behave well because he is bored.

But even if it is accepted that boredom causes, or rather explains, bad behaviour, it cannot be the final explanation: for why are people bored? Is not the world interesting enough for them? What would a world be like that they found sufficiently interesting to keep them on the straight and narrow path that leads to good behaviour? It is a terrible fate for a creature endowed with consciousness and self-consciousness to find the world uninteresting.

My problem is the opposite: I find the world *too* interesting. This means that I am all too easily distracted, like a child confronted with too many good things to eat. I pursue things that interest me until something else distracts me, which means that I master nothing. But at least I am not bored.

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