

Melancholia - The Existentialist's big blue planet

I observed what I thought was a rather strange encounter not too long ago.

I was sitting in a waiting room, waiting for an insanely delayed dental appointment, when I overheard what I thought was a very strange conversation between two men. And if my memory serves me rightly, I think I recall it going something like this...

"Who are you?"

The words caught my ear. I turned to my side to eavesdrop over the man's shoulder.

"Why I'm John Smith. I'm 35 years old. I..."

The man was rather prematurely and rudely cut off. He then went on to ask again...

"But who are you?"

The man looked completely bewildered at that point, if I remember rightly; I think even a little freaked out.

I thought to myself, "What a strange question."

I also considered the possibility that maybe these two men knew each other and had just decided to play a little game.

A very odd and uncanny game, but just a game nonetheless.

It turned out I was wrong.

The recipient of the 'conversation' was being entirely genuine, and it seemed he was getting very annoyed. He just replied, sharply...

"I'm an engineer. I work for..."

"No, but who are you?"

I heard a very loud sigh from the poor man.

The question it seemed was too much for him.

He proceeded to just stare the other man down. Clearly he'd had enough.

And at that point I remember thinking, "Oh god. Please stop asking him."

Thankfully, God was kind enough to offer a mercy.

The man just got up, despite having waited over an hour for his appointment, and briskly evacuated the room.

For me, the rest of the day was a bit of a blur. I spent the remainder of that day immersed in deep thought, thinking about the meaning behind the man's rather peculiar question.

And to this day, little over a year later, the man's words haunt me still.

But why would they? Why would such a simple question stir up so much conflict within me? How could such a common element of casual conversation cause me to question my very existence even?

Well, I found the answer in the end. And I think I finally discovered the reason why the man left the room.

You see, it was only upon watching Lars Von Trier's 2011 film, *Melancholia*, that I finally found the answer.

It's about a mysterious blue planet that's hurtling towards the Earth, bringing with it a great looming sadness.

Now I will say this: As an art film, *Melancholia* is a triumph.

It's abstract. It's brittle. It's meaningful.

And it deals with something that many people, including myself, have suffered from... Depression.

Specifically, the film deals with melancholic depression;

The type of depression that triggers all sorts of existential questions to come up within a person regarding the meaning of life.

Chiefly among them is this one...

Who are you?

Who are you really, beneath the flesh?