Overanalytic Demeanour

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You're Not Me

"We're here now."

Now, what does that mean? You might be tempted to give a response like "we're here because we're here" - and that would be a good start. And, of course, that statement can take advantage of the loop it creates - "we're here because we're here because we're here" is still a valid statement, and you can keep adding clauses until your eyes dry up.

It's true that we're here. We're here because we were here the previous second. And the second before that. And because of the 'we' of "we're here now", the chain extends back further than you, the world existed before you were born, and we can keep going back, much further back until we recede into the Babylonians, or the mammalians, or the protozoans, or perhaps even the 'beginning of time'. But that doesn't matter. The chain is there, linking us back to the beginning. So, "we're here now" is a truism of sorts, right?

"We're here now." is a statement that could have an air of resignation about it. Something that would be said after taking a fork in the road and having it be the wrong one. But it could also be interpreted optimistically, we're looking at ourselves on the map, pointed towards the place where we want to go. We're here now, we're there later, one might say. There might also be triumph - 'we are finally here!' We have sought, and found. We have moved from A to B.

But we're always 'here' in the 'now'. Where else is there to be? If we move, then we just move to another 'here' and to another 'now'. The perpetual impermanency of both of those concepts is important to humans. We are centred beings, ones with a specific size and shape in the world. Specific, camera-like points of view, unable to fully grasp the

physical world for what it is at any given time. Think of a cube, and you likely imagine a cube shape, from a point perspective. Now, try and imagine the cube from two, conflicting angles at once. You might be able to achieve this in real life with some mirrors. But you're still seeing the cube from two single points. Imagine seeing the cube from every possible point, at once, seeing everything there is to see. What would it look like? Nothing? Everything? It is physically impossible to imagine this infinity of perspective.

So we can see we are 'here'. Even if you were able to graft on several thousands of pairs of eyes on long stalks, seeing the cube from every angle, it's still just several thousand 'here-s'. Nothing short of total omniscience can change that. And that's not achievable for us. As for the 'now', well, that's largely the same. We exist in a moment, and that is a consistent moment. Of course, moments don't always feel the same length: searing pain, love, sleep, heavy emotions, all have the capability to change our perception of time. But we still move through it.

So we are here, in the now, with our physical limitations. We are deeply, deeply 'here' in that we cannot see into the minds of others. You can gain clever insights, predict behaviours, but never fully understand the phenomenological experience of what someone else is going through. Infinitely separated from capital 'O' Others, you can talk about shared experiences, you can talk about the times you both remember, you can talk about the nature of the relationship in any amount of meta-levels. Talking about talking about your relationship. It's still subject to the same flimsy communication protocols we have, expression, body language, art, spoken and written language. They're the best things we have. And the fact that they're not perfect does not matter.

It might be annoying to not be able to convey your own feelings with mere words or the strokes of a brush on canvas. However, if you were able to find the exact set of words for the feelings that you were having, or the exact shapes and colours that just worked, then it would be a joy to create or paint - to have found something that expresses you exactly the way you want. But what happens when someone else walks up to it and sees it? It can be misinterpreted in an infinite number of ways. Even if they see it and immediately launch into an hour-long description of how you must be feeling, even if it's entirely correct, there will still be some separation between your mental state and what their idea of your mental state is. So all we can say is, "the closer, the better". It cannot be perfect. It cannot ever be perfect. In order for it to be perfect, you'd need to understand the thought process behind the creation of the work, which would (by cause and effect) necessarily mean the understanding of the entire world through the other person's perspective without being mediated by your own. To see a one-take film of someone else's life would not only take up the whole of your life, but also not represent their life accurately. You'd be watching it from an external perspective. The only way to truly understand other people is to be them. And then, you're not you. Just like the only way to be 'there' is to be 'there', but when you get there, it's 'here'.

   Immutable things like this are part of the human condition in the same way that single-camera'd-ness is part of the human condition. So, the not-being-one turns into a split, which turns into a rift that can't be crossed. The sides get so far apart that the signs are misinterpreted, and the relationship/group/society falls apart. This is not to say that every interpersonal group is bound to end in misunderstanding and fear, but it gives us a psychological insight into why they so often do. To put yourself in someone else's shoes

is only half the battle. You'd just be you, wearing some different shoes.

So how do we combat this separation? Well, of course, the primary solution is to communicate. Through the things we make, through the actions we commit to. Because merely thinking about doing things isn't enough, no one else can tell what you intend to do unless you show them. And you show them by doing. Even if it's just talking about making something, it's talking. It's a physical thing. To make is to transform a part of the physical world into yourself, to have it represent a part of you and then have that representation interpreted by someone else. Some people find their way into theatre, others into writing, or painting, or kind gestures, or meaningful work, or just in the way we act. It sounds like a corporate poster, but a used coffee cup left on the table for someone else to pick up and throw away is a negative action that reflects only on you.

We have to realise that we are constantly bombarded with the things that other people make, from roads to TV shows, conversations to propaganda. Each thing is mediated by other people. A bypass road radiates its designers through its design, and its creators in the way that the workers physically made it. A lot of the objects in our world don't really have that much of that feeling to them. The feeling that something was made with the intent of representing some inner thing is noticeably lacking. Many will argue that this is fine, that things like roads serve a purely practical purpose, and that there is no need for 'flair' in their creation. But that would be a misrepresentation of the idea of art. Art does not necessarily have to contain 'flair' - it is a recent idea that this is the case. Things do not need to be either practical or meaningful, the best things are both. A road that represents the way in which is was created does not need to be bright and colourful, or full of intricacy. To represent the people who made

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it, first, the people who are making it need to feel that this road represents them in some abstract sense.

This is obviously quite an extreme example - how would one derive meaning from a road? You might consider how in places where roads are nearly impassable. The creation of a new road might revitalise a village with passer-by trade, or some other tangible benefit to the people who made it. With construction workers who live miles away from the roads they make, it is hard to see any sort of significance in the roads they are building. The idea of alienation from work shows up here. However - the meaning could be justified in some sort of utilitarian way, the workers might understand that the roads that they are making are getting people to and from where they wish to travel easier. And, I suppose, if they see themselves as a part of that system of travel, then they might see themselves as doing it for some sort of personal gain. However, by and large, it's quite hard to insert meaning in these things. A road is also given meaning by the places it connects, and vice versa. Its context, if you will.

Because

So, everything that people make is mediated by people. A simple tautology. But it's a facet of the modern world which is utterly inescapable. We have altered our planet so that it is impossible to go anywhere and be completely free from the effects of humanity. It is not desirable, we should not continue in this manner, but it is not terrible. It just means we should change the way in which we alter the physical world to be more meaningful. But how do we discern what is, and is not meaningful?

A good measure of meaningfulness comes from mind-distance. A thing, made by one person in their own way, unmediated by the needs of money or fame, is very meaningful. This covers personal

conversation and some works of art. We can see how these things represent the people behind them. When we observe them, we can get a good sense of the way in which they were created, their purpose and meaning, whether it be out of frustration or 'because not doing so would be torture'. If humans are supposed to be utilitarian beasts, then why do we keep making things, even when the expectation of material goods is not present? Because the utilitarian calculus fails to look inwardly.

When we see a person, deep in the throes of an emotion, paint or act, or write something down, we can see that there is a link between them and the finished product. When a film is made by committee, with the intention of making money, when the vision behind the artist is changed by the desires of marketers, then that is when the distance increases. It becomes harder to make out the people in something like a big-budget superhero movie. Sure, there are people on the screen, but they're not there solely out of passion. There might be a single man who made the stories up, but he didn't have a say in how the film was edited or marketed.

Of course, things like this are difficult to quantify, the distance might not be obvious at first, but there is always distance. When we talk face to face, we have the benefit of being in real life - the physicality of it sets it apart from any other method of communication. You can argue that video-conferencing is 'good enough' and yes, for a lot of things it is, but imagine trying to properly understand someone over that sort of platform. The resolution might be pristine, no frames may be dropped, but there is just more mind-distance. Phone calls, texting, anonymous imageboard reply threads, there's always a distance to them, and the greater the distance, the greater the chance for misinterpretation.

When it comes to mind-distance, proximity isn't everything. Understanding of the distance also helps. Think of the relation between the person who buys their meat from the supermarket, versus someone who buys their meat from a local butcher who sources their product locally. On the surface, it is easy to say that the person who goes to the butcher is more 'connected' to the meat, but the connection can be superficial. They might not understand the intricacies of the processing that goes into the meat they buy. Compared to the supermarket purchaser, they might be physically closer in terms of personal connections. In fact, their butcher knows the farmer, who understands meat processing. But it is possible to still not know. It is possible to remain ignorant. Whereas, the supermarket purchaser might understand the relations that the meat they buy has to the farmer, they might understand the links all the way back to the cow itself. In this sense, the supermarket purchaser has a much closer link with the expression of the original farmer than the local butcher purchaser.

This 'understanding of mind-distance' can help us to consider the rise of arguing on social media platforms. People seem to not understand the increase in distance between minds that the internet brings. Thus, people talk like they would in real life, without the subtleties that real life offers. The option for misinterpretation grows, and with the option of disappearing at any minute, the threat of not finishing a discussion properly looms even larger. You might realise that the person on the other end of the screen link is a human being, but they're not there with you. Our behaviour online needs to be changed to better reflect how we are in real life. In real life, you can't disappear out of an argument, you can't call on hordes to help you or look things up in an infinite array of information. None of those things

make arguing any easier. They make understanding harder, in fact.

We must realise that everything that we see is mediated by people. But when we realise this, we must also look inward to realise that the things that we think are mediated by us. Every thought that we have, everything that we make, is not a true reflection of the world, but instead a reflection of how we have interpreted the world. It is useful to prefix every statement with the words 'I believe'. We live in post-Descartes times, we all have the capability to understand the mismatch between the senses and the real world, so why don't we act like it more often? Because in a lot of cases, it's inefficient. Imagine a person who has to check the ground they take before they take their next step. It's impossible to imagine living as a true sceptic. It's easier to just fall back on the human tendency to recognise patterns. But we must realise that it is a human tendency, not an innate feature of the world. The world has no pattern. To realise that we believe we recognise patterns is infinitely more valuable than believing we see patterns.

Thus, "I believe this is the case." rather than a meaningless "This is the case."

But Neither Am I

To think is to be. That much is known. To make decisions, to understand the physical world, it is a very easy thing for us to do. But that is also a very easy thing for an ape or a hamster to do. Simple cognition is simple. To think about thought, to take a step back from your own thoughts and realise the reasons behind the way you think is extremely important. To be meta-cognisant. This is why psychology is important in the modern world. But not the kind of psychology that reduces the brain to a swirl of chemicals, our own experience of the world (by virtue of it being an experience) is much more than that. To understand the ways that we think gives us power over what we respond to, and gives us much more interesting avenues to explore when it comes to personal expression. To just say 'I'm emotional' and express that emotion on canvas is one thing, but to understand the emotion and transform it into something more than just a blunt expression is what true art is created from. But this is not everything.

To think about thinking is a good thing. It gives you an understanding of your own psychology, which lets you mediate your responses to others in a much more meaningful way, and also understand the meanings behind the things that other people do. But in order to more truly reach the meaningful things, we have to foray into thinking about thinking about thinking. Earlier on, when I said that most statements are better when prefixed with 'I believe', that was thinking about thinking about thinking. Meta-meta-cognisance. Each and every statement, when prefixed with something like that, turns it from a statement about the world (which we can never know truly) to a psychologically important statement about ourselves. To say "This film is meaningless" is

not a statement that say anything about the truth of the world. If, instead, we are to say "I think that this film is meaningless", then that shows an awareness of mind-distance, and understanding that you could potentially be incorrect. Other people can then grab hold of that statement and understand you as a result. They might try and point you in the direction of other people who could resolve this belief. Perhaps if you were to talk to the person who made the film, then you might understand the meaning. Of course, you can never fully understand the meaning - but we've been over that discussion already.

The idea that every statement is not an 'a priori' description of the world, but a statement about ourselves is an extremely important one. It's when people go around claiming that they describe the physical world and its 'facts', the possibility for conflict arises. As humans, we should realise the fact that we are not perfect, we can only see and understand so much. This is not to give everyone the ability to shout as loud as anyone else. It should not be that any moron can write whatever they like and have it be held in equal regard to those who have more understanding of the topic in question. People who have lots of understanding about the world know that they know nothing. This is simultaneously in relation to the breadth of knowledge possible to us (an infinite amount of possible physical experiences) and also an absolute statement - nothing that we claim to understand is fully known. But it is a useless truism to go around shouting "No one knows anything at all!"

That is not the point. The point is that the source of the factuality of the claim lies in the person's experience of the world, not the world itself.

This is something that modern society does not enjoy in the slightest. We are very used to the things that we say being projected outwardly as if they were immutable and true. In fact, all of our

institutions rely on the common acceptance of that fact. Governments, legal systems, financial systems, all rely on the fact that most of the time, we ignore the fact that the things that we do are arbitrated by us. Understanding this, however, is not enough. It is very easy for a lazy person to correctly say "I think I am very lazy". The real difficulty lies in changing the behaviour that drives the thought.

A lot of interpersonal problems are caused by this same concept. We understand, in our modern neoliberal/neoconservative societies that things are relative. Because of course they are! Humans make up the rules based on our physical facticity. But humans are not perfect. And still, we act like they are. We act like the people in charge are anything more than just humans. They understand nothing that you lack the capability to understand.

But to use this and say "So we should throw everything away and begin anew!" would be wrong as well. The answer is not one of casting off our shackles, because, given our propensity for invention, we will always find new ones. Throwing away the idea of an omniscient/omnipotent/omnibenevolent physical God gave us the tyranny of post-religious society. To constantly throw away the ideas from the past won't get us anywhere. Our nature always catches up with us. To start anew every time would be like the sceptic and his floor-checking. Nothing would ever yield certainty. So it's clear we don't need a solution that builds up from the ground, or even something that understands the nature of building up from the ground. We need to be aware of the fact we are aware.

To say, "society is broken" is meaningless. To say, "I believe that society is broken" is useful in determining how to change it. To say, "I understand that I believe society is broken" shows both internal and external understanding, and offers the possibility of synthesis. As I've said before, it's not enough to

believe that you're lazy, you have to act upon the laziness, and in order to act upon that laziness, you have to understand what the laziness is. So we can move forward, no longer lazy.

I'd like to relate this all to a personal experience that I had recently. From november 2021 to january 2022, I had a series of realisations that were quite crippling when taken seriously. I was writing 'Standing On The Sidelines, Looking In' at the time, a book which condensed three and a half years of extreme experiences into a single weekend. One of the main points of the book is that you can't know other people. And yes, the point has been reiterated here, but that should just tell you that I found that thought significant, just like how back in 2019 I thought that pattern recognition was significant. (I still do, just in a different way.)

So, the thought that you can't know other people was horrible. I looked at people and thought, 'I can't ever know you fully'. It was paralysing and just awful. The phrases 'the worst' and 'horrifying' entered common usage for me so often I mentioned it to other people and they said they'd noticed. It was a horrible time. The worst moments were when I was having a conversation with someone else, and all of a sudden, I thought 'you might not be real' and it felt like taking the glasses off in a crap remake of They Live. I couldn't live like that. I had to forget what I had learned. Thus, the alcohol, the drugs, the attempting to rid my mind of the thought that other people cannot be known fully. Taking acid twice during this period was definitely an ill-fated decision, especially when the first was nearly twice anything I'd done before and also the first solo trip. It was alright, but it just cemented feelings of isolation. And I supposed that whenever I get lonely, I write things. So I wrote a book in a month and a half. And my diary as well. And now, I've been alone in my room for most

of the day, so I write this thing. I mean, I have been meaning to write something like this for quite some time, but the point still stands. I suppose it's because I now realise that separating out writing and doing is very important. Writing as you do, thinking about a moment as it happens causes it to stop being a moment. Many people can attest to this.

So, then, the thought was 'how do I get rid of these thoughts'. Backing out of them was not a choice. It is real. You are not other people. The chasm that I described earlier is unable to be crossed. But you can shout at each other very loudly from the sides. And if you walk along, you might be able to get closer and closer. But there's always some distance.

Imagine two infinitely small points on a grid, and they get closer and closer, but there's just some infinitesimally small distance between them. As soon as they overlap, there is no way of telling them apart.

Being a person is being apart from other people. That is a fact I have had to come to terms with. But then moving past that is another thing entirely. How do we know anything about other people? And the argument of the sceptic comes back. To check if they're real is fruitless. You can be pretty sure, but they'd be indistinguishable from the 'real thing'. Of course, this is still a horrifying thought, and doesn't get rid of the nagging cry of 'other people aren't real'. But then you realise that you can experience other people through the words they say, their movements, the things they make, and if you can find meaning in the things you make, or things you see, then you can find meaning in the people around you. It was so easy to debate the existence of the people around me that I forgot that I quite liked South Park. I never questioned that, but the fact I thought that showed me that it was just nerves, it was just an over-analytic demeanour that caused me to think that way. And then, realising that I wanted to make things with the people around me, I changed my life like

every time I've changed my life before. Slowly. Very, very slowly.

Writing this has been psychologically important for me. Unsure of what I'm doing with my life, unable to process the future, looking at other people and simultaneously dismissing them as automata yet being so infatuated with the way they live their lives tore me apart. Yet, one could imagine both at the same time. Every argument that I had with someone else about politics always ended with me sputtering for words, saying random-sounding nonsense but still feeling dissatisfied nonetheless. It was then that I decided to employ the 'I believe' caveat in use, and figure out what it was that I actually meant. To be sincere, to be close to other humans, to be true to oneself.

A Map Of The Stars

With the idea of meta-meta-cognisance hopefully understood, we can begin to look for solutions to our problems; the meaninglessness of society, the death of God, the 'something missing' thought of many people today, the crisis of mental health, the division of people into groups. Meta-meta-cognisance, with all its power that it brings us, is useless unless applied downwards. To think about thinking about thinking all day will get you nowhere. In fact, meta-meta-cognisance cannot exist without the existence of the lower levels. There is no cognisance without physical existence, and there is no meta-cognisance without cognisance.

When we think of a solution to a problem, it is no use waxing lyrical with philosophical abstracts all day. It's also useless to try and use solutions found without the insights that philosophy gives us. So we have to use philosophy to look for solutions, but the solutions have to be real. What good is the idea of spirituality for a couple whose lives feel separated? What good is 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy' either? Both, without proper grounding in meta-meta-cognisance, merely paper over the cracks at best, and force them further open at worst. Of course, you could stumble across a solution that meta-meta-cognisance would have led you to, but it would require a long time, and a good dose of luck as well. Think of it as trying to find a clearing in a forest. If you rise above the forest, the clearings are obvious.

But you're not in the forest if you're above it. So we must rise up, and then return to the ground with newfound ideas. And hopefully, we're here now. We live in a world where things are how they are. We stand in the forest, the divisions of political parties and labels nestle themselves between the trees, obscuring the light. We can't change how we got

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here, we can't go back and change our route so we never took the wrong turning on the path. All we can do right now is understand what we see and make decisions. But understanding is both paralysing and freeing. A person who knows very little is free in the way in which they envision the world, but also restricted as a result of it. The more you understand, the more grey things become, the more uncertain you are. You could know that you're making the wrong decision, but still make it. So, then the camera moves up. We rise above the forest floor, and what do we see there? A clearing, off in the distance. To get there, we have to walk, though, it's no use just seeing it. So if we look down, we can analyse where we are now, and its relation to where we want to go.

Our society at large is dominated by governments, and also the movement of capital. Our lives are largely mediated not by the resources which we have, but the representations of those resources as defined by capital. Of course, silver is worth something, there is only so much of it, but worth what, and to who? To the person who buys it at a price, and then sells it at a higher one, it was clearly worth nothing. They did not imprint any of their value on it when it passed through them. They had no physical use for it. They just briefly exchanged money for it, and the value of money at either end of the transaction was different. In this exchange, no productivity was generated. No material goods were refined or processed. It seems as if the stock market acts almost counter-entropic, always heading upwards. But their idea of growth is a strange one. To not change the amount of goods, but to change the value of the goods should show you how arbitrary this system is. And arbitrary systems aren't necessarily bad. It's just that the people who do this spend their working hours not imprinting themselves on anything. They are merely facilitators of abstract goals like 'economic growth' and 'GDP'. To say that

these factors are a measure of what is meaningful and good for humans would be extremely misguided. GDP is merely a measure of world-destruction. It has nothing to do with the things that actually matter, which is living a meaningful life. Sure, some people might argue that the money these traders make will facilitate the creation of their own meaning, for example, letting them start their own punk rock band. But for people who want to make things, money is no object. Sure, it would be nice to be able to have a new mixing deck, or perhaps some more high quality microphones, but the idea of creating new things doesn't necessarily have to stem from the gaining of money.

But we live in the here and now. Here and now, we like to imagine either that Capital is the natural order of things, or Capital is the perversion of the natural order, something that humans have made up. And that's where another fundamental problem of humanity arises. Yes, the idea of 'the economy' is deeply, deeply arbitrary, but yet, could it be anything but? Could anything that humans make be truly fundamental? I don't believe that this could be the case. Because we like to see ourselves (even post-Darwin, post-Dawkins) as separate from the rest of the world, special in some way and untouchable. We accept that we are descended from apes, and rightly so. But we don't act like it. We act as if somewhere along the line, there was some event which set us apart from those apes.

And there was. But it's not the use of tools, no, any ape can use a tool, any monkey can drive a race car given enough training. Nor is the act of language special for us. The ecosystem is rife with animal calls that seem to have some sort of language-based movement. No, given enough time, all of these animals could develop the things that we have. What truly sets us apart from them is the ability to think about thinking. In fact, what sets us apart from the

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drunkard, or the infant, is the ability to think about thinking. The ability to realise that one's thoughts are subject to oneself. But yet, we share a lot of characteristics with those animals which can't do this sort of thing. They can feel pain, sure, but the pain comes from something external. The pain is never properly understood. There might be pattern recognition going on in there - the animal understand that the frog will make it sick, and acts accordingly.

So the ability to think about one's thoughts, and the ability to think about that in turn, is what really sets us apart from animals. The process of evolution is a remarkable one, and one that continues today, but is nothing compared to the genesis of the ability of meta-cognition. The ability to see oneself as an individual, distinct from the world in some unquantifiable way, the fact that we can see from a 'camera' rather than just being a complex set of chemical inputs and outputs. The fact we are 'here' and 'now' rather than not.