THE PERSISTENCE OF INCONGRUENCE

The Incongruence of Worlds III

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1. Introduction

In previous papers[1] I've argued that the mind seeks stability, completion, coherence and meaning. The external world, however, appears to be dynamic, uncertain, incomplete and (maybe) continuous. This incongruence between the inner and outer worlds may produce a tension in the mind, which can manifest as anxiety, isolation and longing, to name a few mechanisms. This tension is structural, persistent and as much negative as constructive (e.g., it may motivate).

Because of the incongruence and the resulting tension, experience appears to be always incomplete, imperfect and lacking. There seems to be a gap between the "is" and the "ought". Conventionally, we see this as a problem to be solved for; we wish to eliminate the imperfection and arrive at perfection. But the claim of this paper is that imperfection may be unavoidable and functional, not only detrimental. It may be that this signals a condition rather than an error to be erased.

The main question of this paper is therefore: How does the mind operate with this imperfection? I will not be asking whether this is avoidable, possible to eliminate or solve for, but what the consequences might be for a mind facing imperfection, lack and the gap. A central object of study is therefore *thought*: Assumed to be truth-seeking and representing reality primarily, this paper will challenge that notion and propose alternative mechanisms and functions of thought, beyond truth-seeking. Thought may be also stability-seeking, tension managing and "world-building", rather than merely truth-seeking. The underlying evolutionary background may hint at a phenomenon that evolved for the well-being of an organism, more than for truth-seeking, and shouldn't surprise us.

[1] Cf. "The Mind as Architect" and "The Tension from Incongruence".

This paper will thus examine the mind, thought, their functions, especially in light of imperfection, incongruence and tension, and argue that this imperfection may even be necessary for certain phenomena such as movement, motivation and meaning.

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2. Necessity of Imperfection

The aforementioned incongruence between external and internal worlds and its following tension are the reason for the felt imperfection, lack or gap. For example, we may experience an "is-is" gap, where an inner representation of the external world doesn't match the reality it aims to portray. We may also experience an "is-ought" gap, where a desire, wish, want is not met with a positive response from reality.

The claim is that firstly, this imperfection or gap *generates desire*, striving, wanting. Given an incomplete state, the mind will desire to complete it, which requires a motivation (thus *desire*). There is therefore a striving towards a hypothetical state and a movement that gets initiated by means of a triggering by such a gap. We may consider again how an inner "ought" state of "There should be tea." conflicting with an external "is" state of "There is no tea." will result in the motivation within the mind to acquire such tea, and turn the "is" into the former "ought" by means of such desires. This desire therefore turns a still mind into a moving mind by means of creating the necessary motivation for movement to occur. Expressions thereof may be found in any doing, but also in e.g. inquiry, creativity and expressivity. For example, thinking and philosophy can be seen as phenomena which may (partially or entirely) result from a desire to complete patterns, e.g. to know what formerly was not known.

The subsequent claim is now that *without lack there is no movement*. This may sound strong, but an explanation will follow: Movement and action seem to stem from a motivation. Motivations seem to stem from (or are synonymous with) a want, a willing or desire. Without a better state to arrive at, how could there be desire? If there is no bettering, no improvement, no increase in "good", no desire to attain such a second state could emerge. Therefore, there has to be a second state S_2, and a first state S_1, such that the difference Δ between S_2 and S_1 is not zero. But any such non-zero Δ means imperfection, lack, a gap, because it signifies that two states (S_1 and S_2) are incongruent, do not match, are disharmonious towards each other. – Therefore, the strong claim can be substantiated by saying that only when there is imperfection can there be movement, for

movement requires (ultimately) desire, and desire requires an improvement from a worse to a better state, thus imperfection.

If a state is complete, perfect, whole, it means that there is nothing to add, do or improve on. Thus, the state will not change and remain still. There is nothing to gain, add, learn, discover, fix. This means that such perfect states would mean the end of movement, change or novelty. Complete states lead to stillness and stasis. On the other hand, an imperfect state motivates towards change, doing and improvement – something new can be added.

When we imagine having found all the answers, there would be no questioning, no striving, seeking, thinking or inquiring – only stillness. Therefore, answers mean a standstill, whereas questions mean a development of thought. There may not be any curiosity, wonder or interest if there is either (a) nothing that could be gained, (b) everything has already been gained.

Seeing imperfection in this way – i.e., in a way that gives rise to many of the desirable things in life, e.g., inquiry, thinking and any doing –, we can consider reversing our original intuition that imperfection is a negative, and arrive at the view that it is rather a positive, something to approve of or welcome.

There is also a deeper layer to imperfection than it arising from merely a mental reality: The external world itself is structured in time, which (often) means change, impermanence and variability. An analysis of change will tell us that for something to change, it has to be different at moment t_2 from t_1. This means that whatever "is" at t_1, will no longer be at t_2. Therefore, there is a gap, an incongruence and a difference between the moments t_1 and t_2. Because the mind has to keep up with the external reality, it will (likely) be in an incongruent state relative to the external world for at least a moment. The mind is forced to change, as the outer reality changes.

If we assume that imperfection generates tension and movement, then the question will be how the mind responds to this and what phenomena result from it. This will be discussed in the following section.

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3. Thought as Stability-Seeking

We have previously encountered the claim that imperfection leads to movement. This was because the inner and outer worlds can mismatch (due to the creative and "imperfect" nature of the mind), creating imperfection and tension, which, when paired with a desire, creates the motivation for any movement or doing. Here we will briefly explore what the mind's reaction might be to this

tension and underlying phenomenon. The claim will be that thought itself may function as a stability-seeking process.

The standard view of thought seems to be one that favours truth-seeking, knowledge and an accurate representation of reality through correspondence. This, however, might be an incomplete view on what thought is and does. The mind, as argued earlier, seems to act out of a pressure to act, under instability and incompleteness.

There may thus be several functions of thought, not all of which are the classic truth-seeking one: there may be the (a) stabilising, (b) defensive, (c) aesthetic, (d) instrumental functions of thought in addition to truth-seeking. I will briefly explain each of these in the following.

The first such function is that of *stabilising*. We can imagine thought to aim at creating internal stability of the mind, through identities, narratives, worlds and abstract structures. This function creates coherence and certainty, or "order out of chaos".

The second function is that of *defending*. Thought may also resist destabilisation, incoherence and disorder actively by defending its own structures and objects. It will resist contradiction, preserve beliefs and avoid destabilising ideas. We may imagine a distressing or frightening thought, which the mind might respond to by rejecting or avoiding it altogether, thus defending its own stability. Some truths may therefore be diagnosed as destabilising and denied or defended against. There may thus be a certain conservational element in the mind that resists revision.

The third function is that of the *aesthetic*. It appears that thought tends towards certain aesthetic criteria, such as simplicity, elegance, harmony, order, symmetry and so on. We may observe such moments when a thought should "make sense" to us in order for us to accept it, or that we experience the thought to be coherent and "satisfying"[2]. This may also reveal biases in terms of certain aesthetic patterns and forms that the mind tends to naturally gravitate towards, feeling unease about their alternatives and maybe missing other, helpful and/or true consequences. Some ideas might therefore be believed not because they are true, but *because they are beautiful*.

The fourth function is that of the *instrumental*. Thought appears to be also a social tool, serving groups to connect, communicate and share in identity and so on. Without the notion of "country", would ties amongst citizens still be similarly strong, or exist at all? Thought can therefore persuade, coordinate and construct mental objects that get exchanged within a group, e.g. the idea of a

[2] Mathematics may be one of the most obvious candidates for observing this function. It would appear that most (at least elementary level) mathematical truths "feel right" when we contemplate them.

country, family, culture, etc. This again is another domain where truth is not the primary goal of thought.

We can also imagine that these conclusions and suggestions needn't be too surprising, if we consider the evolutionary argument here (roughly phrased): Thought evolved to serve the organism in its well-being, and well-being and truth needn't correlate strongly, therefore, thought needn't have evolved for truth. While truth seems to certainly be very helpful in order to survive, the suggestion here is that (1) it needn't have evolved perfectly, (2) it needn't be the only function that thought evolved for.

Because of the aforementioned functions, thought may serve not only to arrive at a perfect representation of reality or at truth, but also at other ends, such as beauty, social harmony, stability or a defence of existing structures and objects. If this hypothesis is true, then we may be in a position to expect distortions, biases and irregularities in thought that can also explain many of the errors we observe in daily life, philosophy and the sciences. The mismatch therefore becomes not only understandable, but is – to some extent – predicted and likely unavoidable.

Thus, the mind's response to tension and imperfection is neither to eliminate nor accept it, but to restructure, reorganise and transform it. There is therefore a creative and constructive aspect to the mind's reaction. In the next section we'll examine the way that the mind features internal fragmentation.

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4. Internal Incongruence

Previously, I have argued that the mind reacts to tension and imperfection in particular ways, and that thought itself may be further classified into multiple non-truth-seeking functions. This way of responding has consequences for the mind itself and its inner world, which we'll elaborate on in this section.

There is the incongruence between the external world and the internal world, which is the differential between what the external world really is and how the mind represents such a world internally. We can call this the "external-internal incongruence". But, and so I'll claim, there is also an "internal-internal incongruence" – a mismatch between the mind and itself, an inner fragmentation and "disharmony".

An important claim here is that *the mind is not internally unified*. This means that within the mind there are at least different tendencies, drives and desires, not all of which seem to aim for the same end, thus standing in conflict

with one another. We may see this in a situation where we face a dilemma, not quite sure which way to decide. Some of these mechanisms show themselves in the conflict between short- and long-term desires, wanting vs resting or calm vs excitement.

There may also be different layers to the mind, e.g., more biological and embodied structures, followed by abstract and conceptual ones and ultimately also social and conventional structures. These, too, may mismatch and create internal conflict as they point in different directions.

Another example of internal incongruence is the dimension of body and mind: The mind abstracts, idealises and conceptualises, whereas the body is finite, constrained and limited. We can observe this in such situations as certain artistic, philosophical and religious ideas, where the mind is seen as "bound" by this body and aims at being freed, liberated, abstracted. What the mind ideally wants and imagines may not match the bodily reality, and this may be a cause for tension, as well.

Since thought itself is part of the fragmented system of the mind, it may not be able to unify everything and harmonise these internal conflicts completely and entirely. The resulting coherence, stability and identity is often only temporary, undergoes change, is constructed and not intrinsic, and dissolves eventually to make space for new structures (or also the lack thereof).

As we've laid out the claim that thought itself is not unified and perfect, and that thought is part of a mind with internal incongruence, the resulting view is one where we can say that thought might be a stability-seeking mechanism, which, however, is in itself not unified and thus cannot entirely resolve the mismatch or avoid conflicts within the mind.

We might therefore say that thought, trying to stabilise and structure the mind, finds itself in a cycle of instability and tension, and therefore never truly accomplishes a completion and perfection, but always restructures, reforms and reorganises the imperfection that resides in the mind. This engine and the internal conflict are, however, not only a negative that produces anxiety, stress and suffering, but also a creative mechanism by which any movement, creativity and construction emerges as an endeavour by which the mind attempts at overcoming gaps and lack.

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5. Persistent Movement from Imperfection

If the imperfections give rise to tension and that one isn't resolved but only restructured, then we may ask ourselves what it is that follows therefrom and what might be produced by that mechanism.

Intuitively, we may think that tension ought to be resolved, eliminated and relieved. Imperfection is a problem that should lead to perfection, incompletion to completion and a lack to fullness. But this assumption might not be productive nor helpful, after all. The ideal of coherence, perfection and wholeness might be something to question at its root.

As I have aimed at illustrating previously, if imperfection leads to motivation, which leads to movement, which is thought and any action, then it is not in spite of but because of this imperfection and tension that generative production and creation emerges. It is therefore not that imperfection is an obstacle to overcome, but the very source of movement and productivity within the mind.

Since the external-internal incongruence creates a temporary imperfection that can be overcome through movement (e.g., we may not have what we want, therefore we undergo steps to attain what we want), the internal-internal incongruence creates a structural – therefore possibly permanent, persistent – imperfection, which may only be restructured, never fully eliminated or solved for. Since the system needs some movement to function, and imperfection leads to movement, it is this internal incongruence that essentially is the (or one of the) perpetual motor which fuels the system.

It might therefore be that thought is a response to imperfection, which creates certain stability, then creates a new tension[3] and leads to a cycle of construction and dissolution[4].

The very movement of the mind is therefore an active living, doing, becoming, whereas the state of perfection is a temporary stillness, being, but also lack of living. In a more speculative way of seeing this, we could even say that thought – insofar as it aims at stability, stillness and perfection – aims at eliminating itself; for thought is movement, stability is the opposite, and thought might aim at stability, therefore aiming at its own dissolution[5][6].

It is of course important not to romanticise tension either. As I have previously tried to illustrate, tension can give rise to anxiety, stress and suffering, as well as destabilise and dissolve important, helpful and true structures and

[3] This may be because of the inherent instability of any structure, and/or the competing, alternate functions of thought and desires of the mind, e.g., to keep inventing and therefore never being fully satisfied with stillness.

[4] This echoes my earlier thesis in the paper "The Cycle of Inner Worlds".

[5] The claim shouldn't be understood as a strong claim in the sense of "thought definitively aims at A" and "A is thought's dissolution".

[6] The theory here is, of course, that thought itself is a perpetually moving phenomenon, and therefore has an inner drive that cannot be satisfied with perfection anyways – this mirrors the "instability of perfection" again, from another vector.

objects within the mind. There might therefore be a certain wisdom and balance to be achieved here, which is, however, outside of the scope of this paper.

The mind is therefore an ongoing processual entity which is (at least partially) sustained by means of internal incongruence, imperfection, resulting thought's movements, which are multi-faceted, and which lead to and restructure imperfection continuously. Therefore, the way that the system moves seems to not be by means of resolving tension, but by turning it into movement and repeated restructuring.

We should therefore not expect a simple, straightforward endpoint or ultimate culmination of the mind into a perfect state or a final resolution. If these assumptions are true, then the mind may be closer to a persistent, moving imperfection, than to a process with a clear end or goal. In face of a changing world, only a changing mind could prevail; therefore, it seems that incongruence and imperfection are the means by which the mind can be a "becoming mind" in a "becoming world", adapting, matching and mirroring the latter in order to survive. The system may not aim at completion, but at continuation.

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6. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to show the following mechanism: The incongruence between the worlds (and within the mind, too) leads to tension, which leads to movement (largely by means of thought), which eventually doesn't lead to a perfect, whole, complete state, but to a new imperfect state, repeating the movement.

Motivations require imperfection, for without a better state to arrive at, no motivation would emerge. The mind seems to be internally incongruent due to e.g., multiple desires, creating internal imperfection from which motivation may emerge. Thought itself may be multi-functional, not always aiming at truth or direct correspondence between the external and internal world. Therefore, if thought is the movement by which the mind attempts to overcome such imperfection, but thought itself is suitable for fragmentation and not perfection, then thought itself will further maintain the imperfection in the mind.

The main claim here is then that imperfection and tension are not errors to be eliminated and the mind is not a system that ought to arrive at completion, but that it is exactly this imperfection, gap and tension which lead to a continuity in the mind and amount to creative activity. The instability of the system is

therefore not a flaw, but a fundamental structural part that keeps the system intact.

If there is truth in these claims, then what would follow seems to be that we could understand the mind and thought in new ways. Not as neutral truth-seeking process and entity, but as stability-seeking phenomena.

It is therefore within imperfection and tension that thought, meaning, and even life, persist.

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