THE TENSION FROM INCONGRUENCE

The Incongruence of Worlds II

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1. Introduction

In a previous paper ("The Mind as Architect") I argued that the mind actively constructs the inner reality, and that the process can be divided into perception, concept creation and meaning construction. Each of those stages already involves an active participation of the mind in what the resulting experience and inner reality will look like.

Since the two worlds (the external and the internal)[1] seem to operate on different architectures, and since the mind does not perfectly replicate the external world, there is the possibility of an incongruence between these worlds – a mismatch. These errors or variations can be seen in illusions, false intuitions and in conditions such as colour-blindness. However, not all mismatches are consciously felt. This leads to some of them being hidden, yet producing real effects in the mind and our lives – e.g., we may not consciously be aware of having a false belief, yet it influences how we act and behave.

The claim of this paper is, that such mismatches – especially when noticed – create a tension in the mind. This tension is an accompanying mental phenomenon, which arises due to the incongruence between the two worlds and which needn't be consciously felt to exist. For example, we may not be fully aware that a loved person's nature diverges from our mental image of them, yet in manifold little inconsistencies the difference begins to feel unsettling and distressing.

In the following sections we will explore the concept of tension in more detail, first by looking at the nature of this tension, then by examining the manifestations, then by investigating the attempts at resolution and their consequences, and finally we will conclude the paper in a concluding section.

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[1] The term "external world" here is used as a placeholder for whatever it is that gives rise to our experiences, whether such an "external world" were to be fully accessible or not.

2. The Nature of Tension

We've introduced the concept of the *tension* in the previous section and would now like to establish its properties and characteristics more. It is important to clarify what it is not, first: This tension is not mere contradiction or psychological stress, and it is not a momentary conflict. Instead, it appears to be more fundamental and persistent, akin to a gap, pressure or dizziness, due to the incongruent worlds. It might be especially felt in moments when we encounter a fact that surprises us, and where a certain degree of disbelief emerges as a response to this dissonance[2].

Another important claim has to be made: the mind appears to be a completion-seeking entity, yet the real world presents itself in (often) incomplete, vague or mysterious ways. While our minds seek stability, absolutes and congruence, the world seems to meet us with a dynamic, open-ended and undefined nature. We take for example a flowing river's surface: In some sense, we would like to clearly define and partition the ripples and other sub-structures of the surface into mathematical units for us to find stability in. However, it would appear that these parts and divisions disappear in the next moment, as the river flows and washes away its features, giving rise to new ripples and appearances.

The above example should illustrate a frustration that is felt by those minds that seek stability and clarity – a tension. Importantly, this phenomenon is not to be understood as an occasional anomaly in our lived experience, but seems to constitute a more fundamental characteristic of how our minds experience themselves in the real world's presence.

It may be significant to differentiate between the "is-is" mismatch and the "is-ought" mismatch: The former is when the description of the external world is not matching the world it aims to describe. That is, when our ideas do not correspond to reality. The latter is when the external world does not match our desires. That is, when we wish the world to be a certain way, yet that world resists our wish. The former creates confusion and error, the latter creates suffering and discontent.

This tension is, however, not only a negative, but a driving factor in our minds' doings: Because things are (or appear) incomplete, unfinished and imperfect, because they resist our ideals and wishes, and because we sometimes err in how we represent the world in our minds, the resulting tension is a kind of motivator that has the mind do things. For example, we may feel this dissonance at the sight of an unidentifiable outline in the distance. The desire to know the entity motivates us to look more clearly, to think and to analyse. If

[2] Though it should be noted that the tension is not shock. Rather, it operates as a tensing up of the mind at a difference between expected and resulting images, more likely.

everything perfectly aligned, there would be no tension; and if there were no tension, many of our behaviours would cease[3]. We can even argue that many of our most creative endeavours are due to this tension: (some) art may be seen as a way of processing tension, the sciences and philosophy aim at resolving the mismatch and narrative structures may help us stabilise our identity in an incongruent existence (e.g., myths).

That is to say that this tension is not only the thing that causes us dizziness, but also forces us to act and make decisions, be creative and intelligent about life. If this tension is so pervasive as we claim here, then it should be that we find its effects in many human activities and expressions. This will be the topic of the following section.

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3. Manifestations of Tension

If the concept of tension is real and persistent, it should appear in our experience and in human life. The claim is that this tension – while abstract in some sense – is a phenomenon that we can observe and experience in daily life. It may manifest in thought, emotion, behaviour and other aspects.

A first manifestation of tension is that of *anxiety*. Unlike object-specific fears, anxiety here is a more diffuse, general and unspecified unease that accompanies us. It may be that we feel slightly agitated, restless or even mentally dizzy. There is something that feels off about our experience, something that feels dissatisfactory and frustrating. If it gets stronger and we contemplate the mismatch enough, it might result in a sense of "light horror", even. Another claim is that this anxiety can often be a background condition and isn't necessarily something we are consciously aware of.

A second manifestation is that of *isolation*. Given that the conscious world seems to be separate from the external world – and certainly from other people's conscious worlds –, we consequently arrive at the view that we are isolated, kept and secluded in our own minds. There is no one who can enter our inner world, truly see us nor directly aid us[4] if the mind's interior is unwell. – This

[3] The claim can go as far as to say that it is because of tension, a differential, that we do anything at all. If anything we did were to result in the same state as we are already in, we'd not do anything – nothing could improve. It is the overcoming of a difference that motivates us to act. But this claim requires more investigative effort in the future.

[4] There are certainly means of assisting others in e.g. psychotherapy. The point here is more that there is no direct access for others to our mind, similar to how a surgeon may directly access our bodies.

isolation culminates in the isolation twice-removed: much like beings on different islands, they may indirectly know of each other, but never meet directly; such is the condition of our internal world being doubly separated from others' internal worlds – with the external world in-between two internal worlds, presumably. Not only do we not directly touch each other's worlds, but we do everything across a gap, with two mediums (i.e. our bodies etc.) interacting within it. The other is thus no more than a "ghost", of whom we can at the very best see a shadow, flickering in the distance. The other turns into a bundle of categories, concepts, properties and associations, instead of simply being themselves. We can only know of the other through interpretation, since direct experience gives us at best their façade, and it is the imagined "behind-the-façade" that we want access to. A reality which is constructed through concepts and meaning, imposing something infinite into a finite being, creating further mismatch.

A third manifestation is that of *longing*. As we are behind reality in our minds, twice separated from others' minds, the desire to be in touch, contact and in union with the real and with others, is therefore magnified to a strong longing. This again, might be due to a (possibly) completion-seeking mind: separation implies incompletion, which the mind aims to overcome. This longing can be seen in our desire to be united with the ones we love, to immerse ourselves in the real world and in mystical experiences and behaviours, such as the aimed unity with a god or some other higher entity[5]. The longing itself is structured by tension – had we no mismatch, we'd have no tension, and we'd have no longing arising. It might therefore also be possible to claim that "passion itself is a product of longing"[6], and therefore indirectly of tension and of mismatch. – There is also an "epistemic longing": We may see a shadowy silhouette in the distance and fail to map this onto any known concept or idea. This is a mismatch, which creates a tension and anxiety, but also a kind of longing for completion: we desire to know what we have seen and thus get motivated to engage in arts that let us know (e.g., philosophy and the sciences).

It is also maybe helpful to note more explicitly that – especially for *longing* – these manifestations may not be ultimately overcome. They appear to be structural at their foundation and are therefore a tragic aspect of our being. We desire completion and unity, yet the mind and the external world (incl. other minds) are always beyond a filter, possibly using a different architecture and permit us no access, only mediation. It could be fair to say that we eventually

[5] In how far such a unity with a god amounts to really "go above ourselves", "go out there", as opposed to "go inward" and "go within oneself", is another question.

[6] We may imagine great poets and artists and ask ourselves if they had had the same success, if they had felt no failure and success in dealing with mismatch. To be isolated from loved ones creates strong emotion, which fuels our art; to be finally united with loved ones creates strong emotion, which fuels our art, as well. While not to be understood as an universal claim, the idea of linking passion with longing should be mentioned.

learn to "ignore" this tension and live with it, or so it seems to be for most people. Yet, there is always this lingering dissatisfaction that we can never rid ourselves of.

Finally, we may hint at a future research topic: It would appear that not only is the relation between "inner-outer worlds" fragmented and causes incongruence, but even within one's own mind, there might be multiple competing sources of will and want, or other instabilities, which cause an internal mismatch within the mind. For example, it would appear that there's an ideal of having one perfect relationship to a person, such that the ideal person is embodied in one being. However, there are multiple conflicting functions in persons, which cannot be overcome, e.g., it would not be possible to have both the motherly aspects and the lover's aspects in one and the same person, due to a conflict in our instinctual attitudes towards such hybrids. This means that on one side, we desire the perfect person, yet we also need multiple, separate persons; a possible internal conflict in the mind, i.e. conflicting desires.

This is to show that tension manifests in various ways, some of which I have aimed to illustrate and provide examples for. If the theory is correct, further consequences will follow, which we will examine briefly in the next section.

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4. Resolutions and Consequences

We have previously established that the mismatch between the inner and outer worlds creates a tension. This tension then manifests in various observable ways, such as in anxiety, isolation and longing. Now, we would like to examine briefly what the mind *does* in the face of these manifestations. That is, what is a natural response to this tension and what are these responses' consequences?

One claim is that these responses are not random, but aim-driven, even if not necessarily conscious. They are here to manage, resolve or reduce tension and its manifestations.

Amongst the possible candidates for resolution attempts/responses are the *arts*: These seem naturally apt at transforming tension into form and aesthetically work with our anxiety, frustration and desires. Out of the unpleasant comes the pleasant, out of a lack of meaning comes the meaningful, and so on. Art can temporarily suspend tension by engaging the mind in a creative endeavour that aims at equilibrating the environments. In some situations this might be more of a short-lived reduction of suffering (e.g., to engage in dances every

once in a while, maybe), in other situations it might provide a real strategy that can attempt at dissolving tension in continuous effort (e.g., to have a habit of playing an instrument daily, maybe).

Another important category is that of *myth* and *religion*: By weaving narrative complexes of meaning, we seem to be able to (a) stabilise ourselves and the mind, (b) provide comfort where stability and congruence seem impossible. We can think of such concepts as "God", which may be the ideal representation of a friend in the external world[7] – a light in darkness, order within chaos, a lion amongst wolves[8]. We are also reminded of the similarity here to social stabilisers: Much like a tower can coordinate people in the external world around a shared, third-party object, so too can e.g. a deity stabilise the individual mind and orient it towards an external reality.

There is yet another category that arises as a response to tension: *philosophy*. Here, I would like to claim that philosophy – as well as any intellectual effort for structuring knowledge, thoughts and beliefs – may (also) serve as a means to not only relieve tension but also fulfil the completion of the mind's inner world. It might be that the mind experiences a dissatisfaction in having not only an incongruent representation of the external world, but also an "aesthetically" displeasing one at that[9]. In that, the mind seeks to map the external world, but not in any arbitrary manner – it follows "aesthetic" criteria (e.g., things have "to make sense", "feel right", "convince us", etc.). Thus, the position of philosophy (and other fields of knowledge-acquisition) may be one of resolving the tension by improving on the congruence between the worlds and by analytically deconstructing assumptions that the mind natively builds. – It may also be that there is an element of "compensation" in our drive for knowledge. Even in a seemingly functional inner world, which seems to be more or less congruent with the outer world, additional knowledge structures may improve a sense of stability and reliability in a mind that is already under tension.

An important phenomenon to mention here is also that of *avoidance*. Given the tension from mismatch, a mind can quickly border on fear and terror once it realises that this mismatch can even further destabilise the mind. We can imagine scenarios in which we could question a proposition (e.g., "Do I really exist?"), only to strongly oppose any further such inquiry due to an overwhelming sense of fear. Tension, therefore, may turn into true fear and directly associate any inquiry with an existential threat, maybe through a destabilising of one's

[7] This is to be understood as the archetype or ontological category of the "friend". This paper is not engaged in discussions on the reality of God, for that matter.

[8] In how far the own Self is a similar such structure as God (or a similar concept), but for the inner world, is another question worth exploring. It might be that God emerged from the Self, the Self from God, or both from a third source.

[9] The details of this hypothesis are not important to the discussion at hand, which is why I'll simplify the explanation here.

own mind[10]. There can thus be tension in seeing the mismatch, and tension in trying not to see it, both. One such possible direction such a mind might take is to create rigid and dogmatic belief systems, which stifle any inquiry or doubt.

Other phenomena – which we'll only very briefly establish – are: (a) *distorted resolutions*, and (b) the *breakdown*. In (a), we may arrive at errors and illusions due to a premature closure that promised to alleviate the tension, resulting in unreliable ideas, oversimplified categories or misinterpretation. For (b), this occurs when tension cannot be resolved, in the sense that we become entirely frustrated, blocked, disillusioned and when we suffer and experience an almost existential dizziness from our condition.

Another key conclusion from this analysis seems to be that no such strategy can ever be final and complete. The tension from incongruence appears to be a structural phenomenon, not a temporary illness to be overcome and then forgotten about. Furthermore, any solution we come up with, must stem from the mind and seems to construct even more mental objects, e.g., explanations, justifications or comforting beliefs.

If tension is real and if it cannot be ultimately overcome, and if the responses we come up with often (if not always) seem lacking or can even become dangerous (e.g., rigid belief systems, avoidance, etc.), then the next question will be: "How could an ethics around incongruence and tension look like?"

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5. Conclusion

We have seen that, according to this paper, the mind authors experience and the inner reality, which often is incongruent with the reality it aims at depicting, which causes an inner tension. This tension then manifests in ways such as anxiety, isolation or longing, and in an attempt at resolving the undesirable results, both productive and destructive consequences alike may emerge, such as the arts or avoidant behaviour.

This tension is not accidental or temporary, but appears to be a structural aspect of human existence, similar to happiness, suffering and hunger. It is not merely a negative phenomenon which is to be overcome and solved for, but also a generative and creative force, which may aid us in accomplishing tasks, such as in the sciences or in religious traditions. It seems to be driving our quest for

[10] Some of the dangers of philosophical inquiry are not to be understated, as it can be argued that there be unwelcomed mental states that arise from inquiry, incl. maybe depressive states or states of panic and so on.

meaning, thought and cultural objects as much as it can stifle happiness and flourishing. Human life, in some sense, is deeply interwoven with this tension and the motions of our minds might be thought of as arising as a response to it. Maybe all of philosophy is a reflex, which tries to answer to this tension?

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