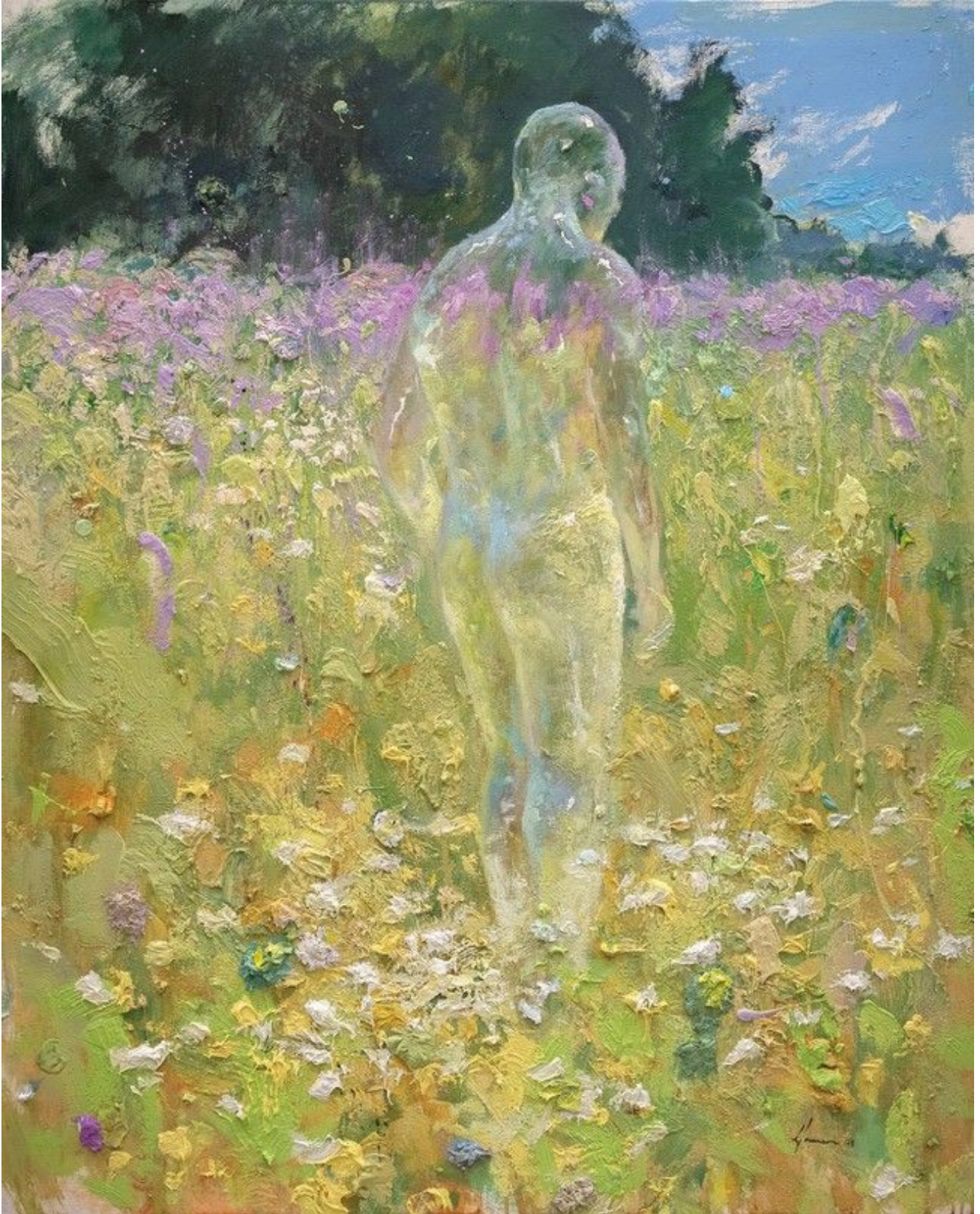


What Does it Mean to be Human?



A/N: I don't really like this piece, it's more a word vomit of everything I've perceived rather than experienced. Written in last minute panic, the original cover has wings but is unfortunately not retrievable. Enjoy. :)

one day, i am gonna grow wings.



Who are We?

I ventured upon this topic with a certain sense of dread and anxious excitement. On a deeper reflection, I was scared to disappoint but eager to discover. I, too, was a victim of perception and feared my thought process to be far too mediocre to address such a question that I had ambitiously put out to answer.

And here, I deal with one of the complex emotions we consider innately human. A social behaviour in a hierarchical society of embarrassment. Yet one who has worked closely with other social creatures, apes, dogs, dolphins realises they too are not so different for lack of medium.

We might follow the logical course of thought: An altruist or a philosopher might remark, Ah, of course! It is our empathy which drives humanity and a scientist might simply answer that it is our 23 pairs of chromosomes which set us apart. At a glance, it seems a silly, fleeting question. You can see it!

The Mirrors We Share

So what makes us different, that we search for a higher purpose, away from 'reality' as we know it. Did some quiet spark of awareness shift ever so slightly, to not only survive but to interrogate the purpose of survival?

After all, we are the ones who learned invention and ran away with it.

In this quest to find something worthwhile, something which truly answered a question which plagues, from what we *know* only, the human mind, I wondered perhaps if this curiosity is what it means to be human.

But on further thought, I think of the raven, the ape, the ant which recognises itself in a mirror but knows another animal to be not I. Surely they must know and perhaps think, What makes us different?

“The whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano-key!”

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground

The Question of Consciousness

Yet far beyond the physical implications, my question lies in what serves our purpose in being so viscerally sentient and if our daily routines and fancies are clouded perception of a mind unwilling to take into account the vast expanse of reality itself. Philosophers have wondered for ages. Religions have formed and vanished over this very question that answers our purpose beyond.

SOCRATES: Imagine human beings living in an underground cave-like residence. They have been there since their childhood, their ankles and necks chained, unable to move or turn their heads, forced to look ahead.

GLAUCON: You paint a strange picture and describe strange prisoners.

SOCRATES: They are like ourselves. Such prisoners would think that the truth is nothing but the shadows cast by the artifacts from outside.

-The Allegory of the Cave (Republic, Book Seven), Plato

Our consciousness receives flashes of perception of a universe beyond, yet unable to comprehend the vastness of it, rejects them. Dreams, Hallucinations, Sensory deprivation tanks, Extra perceptory and near death experiences are described as a simulation.

“Question” or (the questions of questions, quite literally and metaphorically) drove extreme geniuses, people with unsurpassable intellect. It cannot be a coincidence that club outstanding humans is a strange cult, Isaac Newton, Kurt Goedel, Ludwig Boltzmann, Florence Nightingale, all attained prominence and succumbing to some type of psychopathology, including depression, delusions, and religious mysticism of the sort engendered by psychosis.

What, indeed, of our consciousness? Who is to say a rock does not have one? If its inability to move or speak indicates such, it is not enough evidence. Our perception, after all, is only and ironically limited to our humanity.

And it would beg the question, what entails civilisation, a society built on our 'self-actualised' mind, where hate is systematically taught. It is an almost unnatural rejection of community, and empathy.

Neanderthals, primitive humans, could find it in themselves to take care of "anomalies", to accept and love and push themselves beyond their limits to form a community of caregiving, even though they would have struggled to provide care while simultaneously keeping up with the daily challenges of a foraging lifestyle in the Paleolithic era.

It makes me conclude that thus altruism must be an unreliable marker to set us apart.

To draw parallels from Paul Klee's work, *Angelus Novus*, the 'new angel' casts its eyes in an horrified grimace as it watches history as a compendium, as a continuous and ever growing rubble.

What does it mean to embody consciousness fully? The reality we refuse to look into the eye, for fear of realising that our current lives, built around proving ourselves to other sapiens, has been fruitless all along.

At this point, my reader might feel frustrated and tangled in a web of questions and unfounded answers which make no sense at all. I argue, that *is* the "horror" humans yearn to escape, to shy away from the realisation of a world we cannot fully understand, to remain safe in one where *we* are the apex. Our defining trait is desperately needing to believe we're defined by something special and when it rings slightly hollow, one questions sanity.

My conscious has gone mad, It searches for its home

-Kabir Das

Perhaps human consciousness—with all its capacity for existential questioning, its susceptibility to mystical experience, its ability to conceive of infinity and divinity—exists as an instrument for perceiving dimensions of reality.

What it really means, I think, to be human is the way we can step outside ourselves, our physical being and wonder who we are in the first place. We don't just live—we question, second-guess, dream, overthink, and keep searching for meaning even when we're not sure it exists. We imagine futures that haven't happened, replay pasts that can't be changed, and still push forward hoping to become something better.

It is a difficult question, my son, each one must discover for himself.

-Nachiketa's Guru, Katha Upanishad

a/n: if you [somehow] made it this far, here's a lil web page for you:

<https://humanorigins.si.edu/about/become-involved/submit-your-response-what-does-it-mean-be-human>

peace,

philia xx