

Existence Melts

A dalliance in metaphysical mischief

On the first 21st birthday of his life, Oliver Soonbox still had the feeling that the entire universe and all its multifarious attractions were, well, a little bit of a disappointment. Everything – from the grandest galaxy to the humblest hiccup – seemed to him like a joke without a punch line. His reason for thinking this was surely not because he was the possessor of an exceptional intellect which catapulted him to a higher echelon of understanding, from where the complete contents of the universe appeared like a tiresome, dribbling old comedian – oh no! – but you don't need to be wise or clever to appreciate either a good bit of wit¹ or slapstick. No, the reason why Oliver Soonbox was perpetually feeling like he was missing *something* (occasionally misinterpreted as the feeling he had left the oven on) was that he *was*. What he was missing was the fact that existence melts²; a fact which may have eluded you. Your problem is that this fact will probably always elude you, whereas Oliver Soonbox stumbled on it after two weeks of being a full-time unemployed student.

Oliver Soonbox was a thoroughly marvel-less man: he had problems tying his shoelaces in public; he had the self-motivation of a cow; and his IQ only reached 100 if he stood on his tiptoes. But all he had to do to discover the simple fact that existence melts was to clumsily construct a simple chain of reasoning. Firstly, that most humans follow these two directives in life:

-- Eat more! Sex more! --

Secondly, that people actually prize something more than eating and sexing: the rather prosaic past-time of existing. As Oliver Soonbox thought Shakespeare would have said if he had been one ounce blunter: "To be is... well it's a *start*, isn't it?" And so Soonbox continued, unguided by nary an existentialist, phenomenologist or even a web tutorial, to exist *about* existence (which, at first, was rather uncomfortable). He took up a singular hobby which to this day and to the last day of the universe (including deleted scenes) only he practiced. This hobby had a memorable motto:

-- Exist more! --

A word on quantifying existence: all creatures, from amoeba to astrophysicists, cretins to cognoscenti, have been following this simple maxim all their life (whether they know it and/or like it or not). For what is survival but more existence³? Yet, as Oliver Soonbox decided at that early age, mere continued survival is as dull and unambitious as adding a clap to an applause or waking only to fall asleep again. It is the easy option. Survival is to existence as slow simmering is to cooking⁴.

*** *Exist More!* ***

¹ Even a half-wit can of course appreciate half of it.

² The term 'existence melts' is used here under permission by Cadburys-Schweppes PLC, who in 1998 launched an unsuccessful chocolate hexagon that 'Brought Taste Into Being'.

³ For those of you who wish to 'beat the system' through suicide, please consider that death is but a different kind of existence, in some social circles.

⁴ Curious anthropological note: culinary metaphors are understood by all the earth's races as being profoundly poetic.

The first thing Oliver Soonbox existed as (other than the original Oliver Soonbox) was a pair of chequered pyjamas. Please put this story on the floor, walk to a window, look yonder, and seriously ponder – ideally with a ruffled brow - this ostensibly simple proposition. He existed as pyjamas. Now, you may be thinking that *anyone* can put themselves in the position of a pair of chequered pyjamas – they must feel rather soft, chequered, and functional at sleepy-time. This is not the perspective of the pyjamas. You have *no* idea how it feels to be pyjamas. You are hopefully innately gifted with some powers of human empathy: to be able to tell, for example, that your girlfriend is not best pleased when globules of salty water are falling from her eyes and she is shrieking and pounding at you. The bottom line is this: empathy for another human is easy; empathy for a pair of pyjamas is much more impressive.

So how did existence feel, for the pyjamas? Thomas Nagel famously tackled the vexing question: “what is it like to be a bat?” Presumably it’s like being a rat who just sold his eyes to buy wings. As for pyjamas, Oliver Soonbox found out that what it is like to be a pair of chequered pyjamas is, in a word: chanaffally (his own word, which literally means ‘existing like a pair of chequered pyjamas’). It’s something like drinking cold soup on a warm day.

By day, Oliver Soonbox would be a full-time unemployed student, and at night he would remain: Oliver *Soonbox*. He’d try his hand at existing as whatever he found lying around the house: a nightclub flyer, a used orange highlighter pen, a mottled pebble. He didn’t *do* anything as these items – people forget that in the great dinner party of the universe it is existence that is served before anything else (almost like bread rolls). Before doing, before experiencing, before liking, before anything is before anything else⁵.

He experimented with taller and fatter things: lamp-posts, hills and even humans. In fact, existing as his mother was a bit of a non-event. It wasn’t as if he *took hold of her* and acted inside her body – nothing of the sort – he simply was her. Oliver concluded that she existed well, but probably not as well as something like a kite.

By these proceedings Oliver Soonbox was enlightened by the fact that existence melts: existence flows from one object to the other, from that other to another, and so on, allowing the whole universe to flow together like a great compulsory barn dance.

That existence was solid, inert and unchangeable was just a common misconception that all other humans would fail to correct.

*** *Exist More!* ***

On social occasions, when people asked Oliver Soonbox what he was doing with his time, now that he was a full-time unemployed student, he would say without a whiff of pride, grandeur or exaggeration: “Just existing as things... last night, for instance, I existed as Canary Wharf.”

One of his father’s friends asked him if that was ‘A Buddhist Thing’, to which Oliver Soonbox replied, “I’m afraid I don’t know, I wouldn’t know where I’d look to find out.”

⁵ This is clumsy philosophy, but Oliver Soonbox was achieving far more experience of existence than any Professor of Metaphysics, so there. And who’s to say the answers to the great philosophical questions of the world aren’t clumsy, poorly worded and even misspelt?

Not a single person enquired about the precise sensation of existing as Canary Wharf, or a fire alarm, or a lump of dust. They would typically ask, “Well how does it pay?”

*** *Exist More!* ***

I have somewhat sidestepped the question of what it was actually like for Oliver Soonbox to exist as all these things, so I will say more about one thing: death. Death. No event has been so extensively previewed, yet it has not received a single respectable review, or even a reliable release-date. Actually, existing as death was very much like existing as a poached egg, if you must know.

Oliver Soonbox was able to approximate a large number of these inter-existential equivalences. Love existed like jelly. Green like tax forms. Porridge like sofas.

*** *Exist More!* ***

These last examples of existences give a hint at what was the next stage of Oliver Soonbox’s favourite way of passing the time between CV edits and job fairs. He would exist as increasingly abstract concepts that occupied lower and lower rungs on the inevitable ladder of existence. He was hardly exhilarated by these sojourns to abstractions. Yes, he discovered that a good pair of wobbly knees existed far more than The Category of Farmacyard Animals (actually this fact is, once known, embarrassingly obvious). He even arrived at a few throwaway solutions to major world problems. When he existed as World Overpopulation he was ushered to the insight that most people’s solution is to reduce world population, but an equally valid answer would be to make people smaller. More dwarves could happily co-exist on the world: a brute fact really.

*** *Exist More!* ***

When Oliver Soonbox realised just how many things he could potentially exist as he felt more and more like you probably do when you are at an all-you-can-eat-buffet and know for certain that the buffet table offers an infinity-you-*can*’t-eat. It’s rather frustrating, that tête-à-tête with infinity. Oh he could be Time, definitely, but he couldn’t *do* anything as Time (well, what would *you* do as Time? Nothing much comes to mind).

Following that valuable maxim, ‘Exist more!’ Oliver Soonbox tried to be more than one thing at once (think ‘Mrs. Doubtfire’ but more ‘a person being a mobile phone being a crouton being Plagiarism’).

Our 21-year-old Soonbox continued in this manner, existing as more and more things at a time, until he had quite the knack of it. In fact, he went on by that most exalted mode of mathematical transport: *ad infinitum*, until, one lacklustre dusk on some unmemorable date, Oliver Soonbox managed to exist as the entire universe and all its multifarious attractions.

“Oh,” he said, existing as the whole universe, “*now* I get it!”

And then he quietly opined, “I’ve heard better.”