

Keeping "my shit" together

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By chance, I met someone on Saturday whom I did not know. Out of the blue, he told me that he was a fan of my YouTube channel. He strongly recommended it to another person I was talking to, who was unaware of it, and then he asked me an unexpected question, which was, and I quote him pretty precisely:

How do you hold your shit together in the face of all the challenges of this moment and all the topics that you try to address, in depth, and consistently well?

My honest response at the time, and we did go on to have a conversation, was that doing so is based on three things.

The first is practice. I am now totally used to reacting to events by writing about them and by making YouTube videos. In fact, the best way I know to sort the “shit” out is to respond in this way. Some people might do this with a journal or diary. Others might use yoga or meditation to create calm. Conversation works for others. I have always been honest about the fact that the words I write are, very often, the way in which I am trying to work out my own reaction to the events I see going on around me in the world. Producing them is not, in that case, a burden or even a task; it is just part of my existence and the way in which I think.

Second, I do this because I have a conviction that something better is possible in this world. In that sense, writing is just a way of expressing that hope. Publishing then becomes a way to find others who share that view, which in turn makes me feel better. If it happens to make others feel better along the way, so much the better. Creating a positive feedback loop is, then, a way to handle the “shit”.

Third, and I think this is important, underpinning all this is an ethic that focuses upon justice being for everyone, and not just a few, and my belief that if justice is denied, then everyone hurts as a consequence. I explored that idea in my book *The Courageous State*, although I suspect I could do so now with greater clarity. The point is that I am not just convinced we are living in a world where there are obvious victims of neoliberal actions, whose identities are usually fairly easy to spot; I also think those actions are

harming the people who might believe they benefit from neoliberal wealth accumulation. And let's be candid: the evidence is that there are remarkably few happy, well-off people, despite all they have. There is, then, a collective hurt that needs to be addressed, and I feel an urgency to say that.

There is then a fourth point, which I think is important but which did not occur to me at the time of the conversation, and that is that sometimes "holding the shit together" is hard. Given the massive adversity we know we are facing in this world from the far right, as well as from those governing this country, who are, quite candidly, not very far from being far-right adjacent, holding anything together is difficult, most especially when it appears that those governing are now more interested in imposing harm than they are in doing anything to benefit society.

There is, finally, one other thing that helps me do so, which is my anger at the injustice of what is going on.

Anger is a sentiment that is now very out of fashion. We are told we are not meant to be angry. We are also told that to display anger is a form of aggression. The implication is that telling someone their actions make you angry is itself a form of prejudice. I have one answer to that: this is nonsense. My suggestion is that such ideas are put forward by those who, in practice, are very keen on maintaining the status quo rather than creating change, because if you do not get angry, you never want to change anything.

If there ever was a moment to be angry, this is it. I am unapologetically angry, not at any person, but at what some people are doing. That distinction is important, but let us be clear: anger at the gross injustice we are now seeing in the world is not only justified but also necessary, because it is the precursor to the change we must see.

So, that's how and why I "keep my shit together."