

Humans, by our nature, are naturally narcissistic. I've had this thought for a while, constantly swimming in the deep water of my mind, creating ripples cascading off into beliefs about who we truly are as the human race.

It was in an ethics class when I was younger that a teacher asked us what the purpose of human life is. My answer was quick and simple - to be happy. After all, what action is ever undertaken by a human that is not naturally in pursuit of one's own happiness?

Thus my point - humans are born narcissistic. And do we ever truly grow out of it? We are physically incapable of peering behind the blinds of another human's mind, incapable of sensing their thoughts or experiencing their emotions. It is natural for us to prioritise ourselves over others when we cannot ever truly experience their lives.

This narcissism is heightened by the rise of social media. A place where everything is about *me, me, me!* *Look where I am, look what I'm doing!* All we can think of as we scroll endlessly to the soundtrack of our insecurities is how *we* compare to those we see on our screen. We think not about what our friends are actually doing, but why they didn't invite us out for ice cream. Why they are going out every day when we can barely get out of our own beds. The fact that seeing a harmless post on social media makes us look inward even further, isolating us even more. Though our focus is entirely on ourselves, as is the nature of narcissism, the only thing we can think constantly is how we are not good enough.

This is where narrative comes in. Narrative allows one person to step into the mind of another and experience what they have experienced for themselves. Narrative transcends time and place, and it is so much more realistic than the highlight reels of somebody's Instagram feed. Some of my favourite stories are also some of the oldest, like those from Greek mythology or the Bible. I think of Moses's conversation with God, his fear of inadequacy in the face of this great being, his fear that he would not be able to lead his people to the chosen land. I think of Achilles and Patroclus, their love against all the odds, Achilles's pain when he lost his beloved. There is a reason these stories are still so culturally significant today. Modern humans may not have experienced slavery to the Egyptians or the horrors of the Trojan war, but these narratives give voice to the abstract feelings of pressuring expectations and the harrowing experience of grief. They connect peoples across worlds and times by uniting them through their emotions.

Art is so important to humans because it defines what human nature is and should be. Things like paintings and poetry are just human emotion stripped back to its rawest expressible form, and we are able to feel as a community through it. There is a reason why dictatorships have to control and

censor art, because art reveals the experiences of others. Art makes us less narcissistic. Art changes the definition of human nature from a cruel, self-serving machine to a community that sees and understands the experiences of others. Think of classic dystopian novels like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *The Giver*, or *The Hunger Games*. Not only are those books in themselves that have inspired immense change and served as cautionary tales for present generations, but the art within them is revealing of human nature. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss singing 'The Hanging Tree', Peeta's paintings of his time in the games, and her emotional speech are all key factors to the decline of the Capitol. In *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, Winston reads a philosophical book by Emmanuel Goldstein, the leader of the resistance, and it's a pivotal moment to know that his ideas are shared by others. His ability to write down his thoughts in the hope that other people might hear him is a key step in his rebellion against the Party, whose entire goal is to repress human nature in itself.

There is a reason repression of art is such a key concept in totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. Just as they are used as propaganda to control the masses, they are censored for the same reason. After all, dangerous things happen when people push past the fear of being an individual in the face of a collective, and start to form real, human connections.

I've wanted to be a singer for a long time, or a writer, and I've always asked myself *why*. Why would I want to create something pretty to listen to or look at or read when people are dying and I could help them by becoming a doctor or a lawyer?

I'm sure you've heard the quote from Dead Poet's Society that goes like this: "We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. *And the human race is filled with passion*. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are *what we stay alive for*." This encapsulates everything I've been trying to say in this article, and represents the formulation of my ideas over the past few years. We create art and music and poetry and stories because they define human nature and improve us for the better. They give us incredible experiences, make us feel complex emotions and are one of the longest standing forms of entertainment, but it goes so much deeper than that, and I think that it is time for us as a society to start recognising that.

Above all, the purpose of human life really is to be happy. Even if sacrificing our own wellbeing for others, and for the definition of human nature, we are still pursuing it because it comes from other people and empathising with them.