

I am here — and that's enough: on the feeling that “everything around is unreal,” fear, and connection

*My experience, theory, why this happens, and a perspective from psychology and
philosophy*

Adrian Prots

Medium article — formatted copy

Original source: <https://medium.com/@podnistru/i-am-here-and-thats-enough-on-the-feeling-that-everything-around-is-unreal-fear-and-2ecddefb7399>

Have you ever, at some point in your life, had thoughts like: “What if I’m the only real person? Maybe I’m asleep and this is all a dream?” If so—welcome, you are not alone! This is not just a psychological phenomenon; it has a cultural and philosophical background and is known as “solipsism.” Solipsism (from Latin solus—“alone,” ipse—“self”) is a philosophical concept that asserts the reality of only one’s own consciousness, while questioning the existence of the external world and other people. In its pure metaphysical form—“only I exist”—it means that there is no reality other than the reality of one’s own mental states.



Photo: [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

Among notable figures who criticized or adhered to the basic idea of solipsism were:

The sophist Gorgias. He claimed: *“Nothing exists; if anything does exist, it cannot be known; and if it can be known, knowledge cannot be communicated to another person.”* Gorgias aimed to show that “objective” knowledge is generally unattainable.

In the works of **René Descartes**—through the method of radical doubt—the famous phrase *cogito ergo sum* (“*I think, therefore I am*”) appeared.

An important representative of such views was **George Berkeley**. He radically denied the existence of the material world as an independent substance: for Berkeley, everything exists only in the perception of the mind, and any “*external*” objects are ideas in God’s mind. In this way Berkeley reinforced solipsistic radicalism (at least in his critique of materialism), although he retained faith in a transcendent God who sustains sensory perception for all of us.

I did not intend for this article to be devoted to particular cultural figures or philosophical schools, so I will immediately start analyzing the phenomenon of solipsism as I see it, and then move on to the psychological point of view.

My observations

My mother suffered from anxiety and panic attacks when she was young, so for as long as I can remember I grew up as an anxious child. For a long time my mother and I were just the two of us, and the financial situation in our small family was not the best, which affected me and intensified my anxiety, because I wanted many of the material things that my peers at school had, for example. My mother noticed my anxiety and decided to fight it by persuading me to take part in various activities. That is how I ended up in the so-called “city camp” (in brief: everything like a camp, but the child does not need to travel anywhere—you just bring the child in the morning and pick them up in the evening. Like a kindergarten. I don’t know if this was practiced elsewhere in Ukraine, but it was in my town). They gave us lectures there on Christian ethics or something like that, and I became so fascinated that I wanted to listen to the lecturer with enthusiasm every day. One morning, while attending one of those lectures, I was overcome by a strange fog, but this fog was not before my eyes—it enveloped my consciousness: my ears were buzzing, and the number of frames per second seemed to increase, everything became smoother. Yes, it was probably derealization. I remember that when I came home, I began to ponder the authenticity of everything around me. Eventually, after weeks of such reflections, I concluded that I was probably the only real one, and everything else was merely a product of my imagination.



Family photo with mother (2006)

After some time I forgot about it, but when I entered university I became interested in Western philosophy, and later the term found me and I realized that I was not the only one to come to such conclusions.

I don't want to drag this out, so I'll immediately put forward my theory of why this happens. So: a person is born and over time acquires the wonderful thing called

consciousness—from that very moment, in my opinion, everything begins. I'll explain why: remember films you've watched in which the main role is played by one person. What exactly do you see on the screen? Right, you watch the entire movie from the first-person perspective; you see it as the protagonist does; the substrate of the whole footage consists of their subjective experiences projected onto you. Life is the same: an individual lives every day from the first person, watches the sunset with their own eyes, tastes food with their tongue, listens to music with their ears, strokes a cat with their hands—in short, all their experience is based solely on their senses. It is fair to say that sooner or later (or perhaps never) they may doubt whether their hypothetical friend also sees the sunset, or whether she is simply a programmed bio-robot or a hologram.

Psychological aspects and existential experiences

There is a so-called “solipsism syndrome”—the phenomenon I described above when a philosophical idea turns into very strong subjective experiences. Patients describe it like this: the appearance of events and people seems fake or alien, and their conscious “self” perceives impressions from a distance. Typical accompanying symptoms are feelings of loneliness, detachment, and indifference toward the real world. This state resembles experiences of depersonalization and derealization—dissociative phenomena when a person feels a split between the sense of “I” and the body or external reality (symptoms occur in trauma, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other disorders). It should be noted that the “solipsism syndrome” is not part of official disorder classifications, but psychiatrists note its similarity to the depersonalization-derealization spectrum.

Solipsistic experiences often arise under the influence of prolonged social isolation and stress. The experience of astronauts, submariners, or researchers on remote stations shows that lack of live communication and being in an “artificial” environment can blur the boundary between one’s “self” and the outside world.

Psychological factors also include existential anxiety (awareness of mortality, freedom of choice, and loneliness), excessive self-reflection, and a tendency toward introspection. This can reinforce the feeling that reality collapses to personal experience alone.

So, the main triggers are:

- prolonged isolation and loneliness;
- chronic stress and traumatic events (risk of depersonalization);
- deep internal reflection;
- social detachment and lack of support.

Under such conditions, a person may begin to doubt the objectivity of the external world and perceive it as a product of their own consciousness.

Conclusion

For me, solipsism is not just an abstract philosophical mind game, but something that can quietly and imperceptibly creep into life when you spend too long alone with your thoughts. It's like a moment when you suddenly start doubting every movement around you, and the world that yesterday seemed familiar and solid begins to melt away like a stage set in an old theater. But the deeper I think about it, the more I understand: these experiences are not about proving that "I am the only one real," but about a cry from a consciousness that lacks connection with others—simple touches of something living beyond my internal screen.

Perhaps the point is not even in answering the question of whether the world "outside me" exists. I find the idea closer that it is more important to learn to maintain balance: allow yourself inner journeys, but also find an anchor in shared experiences—in laughter, conversations, random glances. Because even if reality is only a complex creation of my or your consciousness, it is precisely moments that make it most convincing and, more importantly, warmest.

Sources:

1. **René Descartes**—*"Meditations on First Philosophy"* (1641)
2. **Jean-Paul Sartre**—*"Nausea"* (1938)
3. **Peter Weir's film**—*"The Truman Show"* starring **Jim Carrey** (1998)
4. **Adversus dogmaticos: Libros quinque** (Adv. mathem. VII–XI)—available on Internet Archive

5. *"A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge"* (1710)
6. *"Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous"* (1713)