

Twitter and the Real World

I've never noticed as great a disconnect between Twitter and the real world as I do now.

I'm not sure if the divergence has grown over time, or if I'm just more plugged in to Twitter than I used to be so I notice it more. But the real world and the Twitter world are now two entirely different places. So different that they hold mutually exclusive descriptions and assumptions about the state of the world at any given time.

I joked yesterday that my neighbors are much more sane right now than Twitter people, and wondered if any of them are also Twitter people when I'm not looking.

So great is the disconnect between every social surface in real life and Twitter that I can't help but wonder who the Twitter people are when they're not on Twitter. Do they morph back into the normal people I experience out in the world? Or am I just experiencing two completely different sets of people, and they'd be the same online or off? Am I a different person on Twitter than in real life? I hope not.

My Twitter feed is fairly broad and generous. I follow quite a few people (over 1,500), I've never muted or blocked anyone, and I've only ever unfollowed maybe half a dozen or so. I like having a snapshot of a pretty broad set of people. The bulk of the feed are people either interested in startups, education, careers, personal freedom, entrepreneurship, cryptocurrency, the NBA, human liberty, or parodies of the same. There are other random accounts, but most would be strongly identified with one of those buckets.

Until about the last 6-12 months, I'd say on average my Twitter feed was pretty consistently more reasonable, logical, commonsensical, and intelligent than the real world people I interact with. On average, it's a more technical, autodidact, curious, and dynamic group than most of the flesh and blood people in my neighborhood, at the grocery store, etc. So the Twitter people tended to have what I thought was a more reasonable take on most things.

That has completely flipped.

My normie neighbors are now quite reasonable compared to the more intellectual Twitter people in my feed. By a long shot. Something weird has happened on Twitter. It used to be that there were very unreasonable corners of Twitter, but the bulk of my feed was people poking fun at them for this. Now I'm hard pressed to find any reasonable quarters of Twitter at all. And anyone poking fun is in danger of some serious social censure. It's disconcerting.

Twitter people seem like the most frightened, panicky, unreasonable brewd imaginable,

capable of tolerating or advocating almost anything, no matter how inhumane and dark, if it allays their pet fears. And it seems to be re-enforced by the very intelligence that once made them more reasonable than the common folk.

Maybe when times are good, intelligent people are better. Maybe when times are bad, intelligent people are worse.

I don't know, but for the first time in my life, I am somewhat troubled about most of the people I enjoy reading and following. They seem to me to be becoming the monsters they decry, while my neighbors, who mostly remain blissfully unaware of monster potential at all, aren't becoming any worse.

Maybe it's a return from two weeks unplugged that makes it more stark. Either way, my relationship to Twitter has changed. It's not nearly as fun and full of open curiosity and play as it was. I still like it. I'm still using it (at least for now), but I have a more hardened, distanced experience than I did.