



Substantial

Epistemic Attention

Sample — Opening and the first four chapters

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A companion to Contemplation: The Interior Forms of Epistemic Failure

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Opening

This draft is not a solution to *Contemplation*.

It is not the good version of fifteen failures. It does not promise that attention repairs what knowledge could not carry, and it does not decide for the reader what deserves to become substantive.

It begins with a smaller claim, and the claim has three parts that are easy to run together.

Something can be present without bearing weight.

Something can bear weight without being true.

Something can be true and still fail to arrive when the moment asks for it.

Those are three different failures, and the differences between them are the subject of this book.

Three distinctions

*The first is a question of **awareness** — whether a distinction is available at all.*

*The third is a question of **attention** — whether what is available actually arrives, with enough of itself intact to participate.*

*The second is neither, and it is the one without a common name. Call it **significance**: the differential weight among what is available before anyone has established that the weight is deserved. Significance is not truth. It is not importance. It is not correctness.*

Two things can be equally available and still receive unequal room.

Significance is relational here, not another object to be carried beside awareness and attention.

Attention lives among those differences.

Not attention as concentration. Not attention as virtue. Not attention as a command to notice more. The concern here is epistemic: how a distinction becomes present enough to participate in what follows, what happens to what is not selected, and whether the standing of what we carry survives the crossing.

Contemplation began with a question that looked backward: you already knew, so why did the knowledge stop working?

This book begins from the other side of the crossing.

What lets anything arrive with enough of itself intact to matter now?

The answer, if there is one, does not belong to this page in advance.

The page can only hold the door open.

“Here and Now!”

Chapter 1 — The Weight That Arrives

There is a difference between remembering something and having it with you.

You can recite the lesson. You can tell the story of how you learned it. You can name the year, the person, the loss, the promise, the sentence you wrote down afterward so that you would never forget.

And then a new moment arrives wearing different clothes.

The lesson is still yours. It simply does not enter the room.

That is one side of the problem.

The other side is quieter. Sometimes something does enter.

A phrase comes back before the old pattern completes itself. A hesitation appears where there used to be momentum. You remember not merely the event, but the distinction the event cost you to learn. The present situation is not identical to the old one. You do not force the analogy. You simply find that what was learned is available enough to participate.

Nothing magical happened.

The knowledge arrived.

That arrival is easy to romanticize. It should not be. A carried distinction can be obsolete. A warning can overfire. A lesson learned under one set of conditions can become a rule that injures another. Carrying is not correctness.

But without arrival there is no opportunity even to ask whether the carried thing still fits.

This is the first burden of epistemic attention: not to make knowledge true, but to let what is already available become present enough to be examined where it matters.

A calendar can do that. So can a scar, a friend, a ritual, a receipt, a sentence left where you will encounter it later. None of these guarantees wisdom. They are carrying structures only in the modest sense that they can make a distinction available again.

The important thing is not the object.

It is the relation between what was learned and the moment that now has use for it.

Sometimes the relation holds.

Sometimes it does not.

Sometimes the relation itself needs to be re-examined because the world changed while the lesson remained perfectly preserved.

So the first question of this book is not, *What should you remember?*

It is narrower.

The Question

What in your life is genuinely available to you when the moment arrives — not merely stored somewhere you can later prove existed?

And when it does arrive, does its standing arrive with it?

Chapter 2 — The Model That Can Be Surprised

A model earns trust by working.

That is not a flaw.

The map that gets you home in the rain should become more trusted than the map that repeatedly sends you into a closed road. The friend whose judgment has held through difficult years should carry more weight than the stranger who has offered none. A theory that survives serious examination deserves a different standing from one that has only been proposed.

The trouble begins when earned trust changes what attention is allowed to receive.

A model can become so substantial that the world must squeeze itself through the model before the model will acknowledge that anything happened.

Then surprise becomes difficult.

Not because the model is necessarily wrong. Because the model has begun deciding in advance what counts as evidence against itself.

There is another possibility.

A model can remain substantial and still be permeable.

That does not mean permanent doubt. It does not mean treating every anomaly as a revolution. It means the model retains a relationship to what it does not yet contain.

Surprise is one sign of that relationship.

Not proof. Noise surprises us. Ignorance surprises us. Bad calibration surprises us. But if nothing has surprised a model in years, the absence itself may deserve attention.

There is a subtle difference between confidence and insulation.

Confidence says: this has earned weight.

Insulation says: because this has earned weight, contrary information now carries less weight before it is examined.

The first is standing.

The second may be a change in the conditions of attention.

A living model does not need to distrust itself constantly. It needs to remain reachable by the world.

That reachability has a cost. It requires enough room for the unexpected to arrive before being classified as inconvenience, exception, ignorance, disloyalty, statistical noise, or somebody else's problem.

There is no formula here for how much surprise is healthy.

Too little may indicate closure.

Too much may indicate that nothing has been learned.

The point is not to maximize surprise. It is to notice whether surprise is still possible.

Think of the person, institution, method, or belief you trust most because it has been right for a long time.

The Question

When was it last changed by something it did not already know how to explain?

Chapter 3 — The Instrument in Hand

Competence is comforting.

When you know how to do something, the world becomes easier to enter. You have an instrument. You have a language. You know what to measure, where to look, what counts as evidence, and what usually follows from what.

That is real capacity.

It is also a source of weight.

A familiar instrument becomes substantial before the unfamiliar problem has had much chance to describe itself.

The engineer sees a system. The lawyer sees a claim. The clinician sees a presentation. The manager sees a process. The parent sees a pattern. The person who has survived something once sees the shape of the thing survived.

Often they are right.

Sometimes the instrument is excellent and the class of knowing is wrong.

The mistake is easy to miss because competence still produces coherent output. The analysis can be intelligent, disciplined, and internally complete while answering a different kind of question from the one the situation actually posed.

Epistemic attention therefore includes attention to the instrument doing the attending.

Not endless self-consciousness. Not the impossible demand that we stand outside every frame we use.

Just enough visibility to ask: what kind of knowing am I bringing here?

And what kind is being asked for?

A person may be able to explain another person's behavior and still be unable to receive what the person is saying. A model may classify a pattern correctly and still miss the condition that makes the classification relevant. A metric may describe performance and remain silent about purpose.

The instrument did not fail merely because it was insufficient.

Insufficiency is a relation.

The wrench is not defective because the work calls for a voltmeter.

The interesting moment is when the familiar tool becomes so substantial that the hand stops noticing it is holding anything at all.

Then expertise can become invisible even to the expert.

A question worth carrying is not, *What am I good at?*

It is this:

The Question

Where are you supplying the kind of knowing you trust most in a place that may be asking for another kind entirely?

Chapter 4 — The Thing Beside Its Measure

A measure begins as an act of care.

You count because something matters enough not to leave vague. You track because memory is unreliable. You create a proxy because the thing itself is too large, too distant, too slow, too private, or too complicated to hold directly.

The measure gives the object a way to travel.

That is useful.

Then one day the measure becomes easier to see than the thing.

The number updates cleanly. The dashboard turns green. The ritual is completed. The score improves. The proxy is available at a glance while the object it was designed to represent remains messy, ambiguous, slow to disclose itself.

Attention follows availability.

Soon the measure is not beside the thing.

It is standing in front of it.

There is another possibility here that is not simple rejection of measurement.

The measure can remain substantial without becoming the object.

The relation between them can stay visible.

A good proxy can be trusted and still be asked to produce its receipts. A ritual can be maintained and still be questioned about what it is carrying. A score can improve while someone asks whether the thing the score stands for improved with it.

This is not suspicion for its own sake.

It is a refusal to let ease of observation become identity.

The object and its measure do not need equal attention at every moment. That would defeat much of the purpose of measurement. The point is that the object must remain available enough to interrupt the proxy when the proxy begins succeeding on its own terms.

That is a strange kind of success.

A perfect score can become evidence of nothing if the relationship it once represented has quietly changed.

What protects against that is not a better number by itself.

It is retained relation.

Choose one measure, ritual, score, title, credential, or routine that has become important in your life.

The Question

If it remained perfect while the thing it stands for quietly changed, how would the thing get your attention back?

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*This sample contains the Opening and Chapters 1 through 4. The complete book continues through Chapter 15, the widening **Putting Aces in Their Places**, the Closing, and the Epilogue.*

“Here and Now!”

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